

**POSSIBLE ALLUSIONS TO ANCIENT NEAR
EASTERN SOLAR MYTHOLOGY IN QOHELET**

A COMPREHENSIVE ENQUIRY

BY

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ABC	Anchor Bible Commentary
ABD	Anchor Bible Dictionary
AEL	Ancient Egyptian Literature
ANE	Ancient Near East.
ANET	Ancient Near Eastern Texts, Pritchard (ed) [1955]
ANRW	Aufstieg und Niedergang des römischen Welt
AOAT	Alter Orient und Altes Testament
ATANT	Abhandlungen zur Theologie des Alten und Neuen Testaments
AV	Authorised Version
BA	Biblical Aramaic
BA	Biblical Archaeologist
BARev	Biblical Archaeology Review
BASOR	Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research
BBCOT	Bible Background Commentary of the Old Testament
BHS	Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia 1978
BH	Biblical Hebrew
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
CBQ	Catholic Biblical Quarterly
DDDOT	Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Old Testament
DG	Dictionary of the Gods
DM	Dictionary of Mythology
EA	EI - Amarna (followed by tablet number)
EAEHL	Encyclopedica of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land; M Avi Yonah and E Stern (ed)
ER	Encyclopedia of Religion. M Eliade (ed)
GKC	Genesis Hebrew Grammar
HBD	Harper's Bible Dictionary
HTR	Harvard Theological Review
HUCA	Hebrew Union College Annual
IB	Interpreter's Bible
ICC	International Critical Commentary
IDB	International Dictionary of the Bible GA Butrick (ed)
IDBSup	IDB Supplementary volume
ISBE	International Standard Bible Encyclopedia
JAOS	Journal of the American Oriental Society
JARCE	Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt
JBL	Journal of Biblical Literature
JEA	Journal of Egyptian Archaeology
JETS	Journal of Evangelical Theological Society
JNES	Journal of Near Eastern Studies
JNSL	Journal of North West Semitic Languages
JPSV	Jewish Publication Society Version
JSOT	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament
JSOTSSup	JSOT Supplementary volume
JSS	Journal of Semitic Studies
KAR	Keilschrifttexte aus Assurs religiösen Inhalts
KTU	Die keilalphabetischen Texte aus Ugarit. M Dietrich, O Loretz and J Sammartin (eds)

LA	Lexicon der Agyptologie
LXX	Septuaginta
MT	Masoretic Text
M	Mishna
NAB	New American Bible
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NAV	Nuwe Afrikaanse Vertaling (1983)
NCB	New Bible Dictionary
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
NIV	New International Version
OLA	Orientalia lovaniensia analecta
OLP	Orientalia lovaniensia periodica
OTE	Old Testament Essays
OTL	Old Testament Library
RH	Rabbinical Hebrew
RSV	Revised Standard Version
SOTSMS	Society for Old Testament Study Monograph Series
Tg.	Targum
THAT	Theologisches Handbuch zum Alten Testament
TDOT	Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament
UF	Ugaritic Forschungen
VT	Vetus Testamentum
VTSup	VT Supplements
WBC	World Biblical Commentary
ZA	Zeitschrift fur Assyriologie
ZAW	Zeitschrift fur die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
ZDPV	Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palastina – Vereins

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 IDENTIFICATION OF THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

1.1.1 The repetition and significance of the sun imagery in Qohelet

In the book of Qohelet, the word **שמש(ה)** appears no less than *thirty five* times. These references to the sun - i.e. the "sun imagery" - occur mostly in the oft-repeated phrase "תחת השמש" (i.e. "under the sun"). This phrase is the most recurrent of all Qohelet's phrases and is repeated almost *thirty* times in the book's twelve chapters. Since the book only contains 222 verses, this implies an average occurrence of once for every seven verses written!

For some mysterious reason, Qohelet seems obsessed with reminding the reader that all his observations pertain to what happens in a domain he designates as "תחת השמש". A concordance of the texts with reference to the explicit sun imagery in Qohelet will demonstrate its pervasiveness and significance in the author's discourse:

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)¹

וזרח השמש ובא השמש ואל מקמו שואף זורח הוא שם

"THE SUN rises and THE SUN sets; to its place it pants, there to rise." (1:5)

מה שהיה הוא שיהיה ... ואין כל חדש תחת השמש

"What has been is what will be... there is nothing new 'UNDER THE SUN'." (1:9)

ונתתי את לבי לדרוש ולתור בחכמה כל אשר נעשה תחת השמים

"I gave my heart to seek out and probe in wisdom all that is done under the heavens / (SUN?)"² (1:13).

ראיתי את כל המעשים שנעשו תחת השמש והנה הכל הבל

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

עוד אשר אראה אי זה טוב לבני האדם אשר יעשו תחת השמים

¹ Emphasis mine.

² All the textual witnesses (i.e. the Septuagint, the Peshitta, the Vulgate, etc.) contain the phrase "under the sun" as opposed to the MT's "under the heavens". That this is not merely an attempt at harmonisation can be seen with regard to translations of the text in 3:1 where, following the MT, all the other textual witnesses attest the variant phrase "under the heavens".

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

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

"Then I turned to all my handiwork...I had so actively toiled for...there is no profit 'UNDER THE SUN'..." (2:11)

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

"So I hated life, because whatever happens 'UNDER THE SUN' was evil for me." (2:17)

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 with which I had toiled 'UNDER THE SUN'." (2:20)

כי מה הוא 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)

לכל זמן ועת לכל חפץ תחת השמים

"For everything there is a moment and there is a time for every affair under the heavens / SUN?" (3:1)

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

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

ושכתי אני וראיתי את כל העשקים אשר נעשם תחת השמש והנה דמעת העשקים ואין להם מגנחם ומיד עשקיהם כת ואין להם מגנחם

"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 עדן 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'..." (4:7)

...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)

יש רעה חולה ראיתי תחת השמש עשר שמור לבעליו לרעתו

"There is a grievous evil, which I have seen 'UNDER THE SUN': wealth kept by the owner to his own hurt..." (5:12)

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)

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

"There is an evil I have seen 'UNDER THE SUN' and it is grievous for humans..." (6:1)

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

"...though it sees not SUN nor knows anything, it has more rest than he..." (6:5)

...אשר מי יגיד לאדם מה יהיה אחריו תחת השמש

"...for who can tell them what will come after them 'UNDER THE SUN'?" (6:12)

...תובה חכמה עם נחלה ויותר לראי השמש

"...wisdom is as good with an inheritance and profitable for those who see THE SUN..." (7:11)

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 heart to every deed that is done 'UNDER THE SUN' when one person has power over another so as to harm him..." (8:9).

יש הבל אשר נעשה על הערץ אשר יש צדקים אשר מגיע כמעשה הרשעם ויש רשעם שמגיע
אלהם כמעשה הצדקים

"There is a vapour that is done on the earth / 'UNDER THE SUN': there are just who are treated as

if they acted wickedly and wicked who are treated as if they acted justly..." (8:14)

...אשר אין טוב לאדם תחת השמש כי אם לאכל ולשתות ולשמוח...

"...there is nothing better for a human 'UNDER THE SUN' than to eat and drink and be happy..." (8:15)

...והוא ילוננו בעמלו ימי חייו אשר נתן לו האלהים תחת השמש

"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 שמש
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)

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..." (9:3)

גם אהבתם גם שנאתם גם קנאתם כבר אבדה וחלק אין להם עוד לעולם בכל אשר נעשה תחת
השמש

"Their love, their hate, their jealousy are long gone, and they have no portion ever again in all that is done 'UNDER THE SUN'..." (9:6)

ראה חיים אם אשה אשר אהבת כל ימי חייה הבלך אשר נתן לך תחת השמש...

"Enjoy life with a wife whom you love all the days of the vain life that you are given 'UNDER THE SUN'..." (9:9)

...כי הוא חלקך בחיים ובעמלך אשר אתה עמל תחת השמש...

"... for that is your portion in life, and for the toil with which you toil 'UNDER THE SUN'..." (9:9)

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:..." (9:13)

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

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

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

Sweet is the light and pleasant it is for the eyes to see THE SUN...but remember that the days of darkness will be many... (11:7)

...עד אשר לא תחשך השמש...

“...before the darkening of THE SUN...” (12:2)

All these texts are, furthermore, only examples of the *explicit* occurrence of sun imagery (S.I.) in Qohelet. There appear to be many other instances where the imagery appears to feature *implicitly*. For instance, in 2:1 – 10, king Qohelet describes all his efforts to attain wisdom via pleasure and he does not once employ the phrase “תחת השמש”. However, closer scrutiny reveals that the sun imagery was *implicit* all along. Afterwards, in a summary of this section in 2:11, Qohelet refers to all these endeavours as his “עמל תחת השמש”. To be sure, virtually the entire book consists of a reflection or discussion of what Qohelet observes “תחת השמש”.

The phrase “תחת השמש”, as traditionally interpreted, provides an answer to the question: “WHERE?”. Qohelet seems to feel the need to constantly remind his readers of *where* he observed certain phenomena and scenarios. If we asked *what* it was that concerned Qohelet in the sub solar domain, certain specific issues seem to feature on his agenda: justice, knowledge, wisdom, toil, times, the king, evil, life, death, God, order, etc. In addition, the domain designated as “תחת השמש” is littered with scenarios that promote negativity with regard to these issues. This negativity can be expressed in the following manner:

WHAT?.....	WHERE?
• Injustice.....	Under the sun
• Ignorance.....	Under the sun
• Impotent wisdom.....	Under the sun
• Miserable toil.....	Under the sun
• Unpredictable appointed times.....	Under the sun
• Unsatisfied, pitiful kings.....	Under the sun
• Lamentable evil.....	Under the sun
• Ephemeral and unfair life.....	Under the sun
• Certainty and finality of death.....	Under the sun
• A distant, inscrutable and judging God.....	Under the sun
• A mysterious lamentable and unchangeable order.....	Under the sun

In addition, the following question may be asked:

What, from the broad perspective of all Ancient Near Eastern religious discourse, is the significance of the combined answers to the aforementioned “WHAT?” and “WHERE?” questions?

1.1.2 The problem of ambiguity

Prima facie, the phrase “תחת השמש” appears straightforward and clear in terms of its supposed meaning. “תחת” means “under” and “השמש” means “the sun”. “Under” + “the sun” = “under the sun.” How simple can it be? Unfortunately, matters are not quite *that* simple. According to all the Hebrew dictionaries of the OT, the word “תחת” is *polysemous* and can exhibit any of the following meanings depending on the context in which it occurs:

- 1) **Instead of** (cf. Gen. 4:25; 22:13; Lev. 14:42)
- 2) **Under** [spatially] (cf. Gen. 1:7; 6:17; 7:19; Deut. 4:18)
- 3) **Under** [rank, status, authority, rule] (cf. 1 Chron. 29:24)
- 4) **In the possession of** (cf. Ezek. 23:5)
- 5) **In exchange for** (cf. Gen. 30:15)
- 6) **In the place of** [as substitute for] (cf. Lev. 14:42)
- 7) **As / like** (cf. Job 34:26)
- 8) **In the place of** [location] (cf. 2 Sam. 2:23; 19:13)

Traditionally, it has always been assumed that the word “תחת” means “under” in the sense of having no more than spatial reference (cf. no. 2 above). But is this correct? With regard to the context in which the word occurs in Qohelet, are any of the other meanings applicable? Have anyone ever bothered with this basic preliminary exegetical question?

While the word “השמש” usually denotes the physical sun, it is also *ambiguous* in the sense that, in ANE religious discourse, it exhibits multiple **associative references**. In other words, the word “השמש” can theoretically refer to one or more of the following:

- 1) **The sun as star** (*natural* associative reference)
- 2) **The sun as icon or representation of a solar deity** (*mythological* associative reference)
- 3) **The sun as symbol** (*symbolical* associative reference)

Hitherto, only the first of the three possible associative references exhibited by the word “השמש” have been considered as *ipso facto* applicable to Qohelet’s solar imagery. To be sure, *prima facie*, this interpretation of the sun imagery does seem to be correct. However, has anyone ever wondered whether it is possible that Qohelet could have been using the word “השמש” *ambiguously*? Is it possible that the *mythological* or *symbolical associative reference(s)* exhibited by “השמש” might be alluded to in some of Qohelet’s numerous references to the sun? Could experimentation with the hitherto unconsidered associative referential possibilities of the word “השמש” perhaps account for Qohelet’s obsession with the sun imagery – sun imagery that is used in combination with certain particular themes and a rather peculiar theology?

1.2 TRADITIONAL PERSPECTIVES ON THE FUNCTION OF THE PHRASE "תחת השמש" IN QOHELET

1.2.1 Introduction

From the earliest known history of exegesis - which unfortunately only dates back to the beginning of the Christian era - the peculiarity and possible significance of the phrase "תחת השמש" were certainly recognised by many interpreters (cf. Murphy 1992:liv). In both Jewish and Christian interpretations, the phrase "תחת השמש" came to be seen as a means of justifying a *geographical-apologetical* interpretation of the sun imagery in the book. It seems to have been popular amongst the early Rabbis and Church Fathers to claim that the function of the phrase "תחת השמש" was to communicate the idea that, "under the sun" everything is הבל, but elsewhere - in heaven / in the spiritual realm / in the afterlife / in the new creation - all is not הבל³ (cf. Holm-Nielsen 1974:168-177).

For example, consider the following statements:

Rab. Judah, son of R. Sameul b. Shilath said in Rab's name: "The sages wish to hide the Book of Ecclesiastes, because its words are self contradictory, yet why did they not hide it? Because its beginning is religious teaching and its end is religious teaching, as it is written, *What profit hath man for all his labour wherein he laboreth 'UNDER THE SUN'?* And the School of R. Jannai commented: *'UNDER THE SUN' he has none, but he has it (sc. profit) "before" the sun.*

and:

R. Huna and R. Aha said in the name of R. Hifai: A man's labour is 'UNDER THE SUN' but his reward is above the sun.⁴ R. Judah said: 'UNDER THE SUN' he has no profit but he has it above the sun.⁵

Any student of the history of interpretation will know that there has always been a need to recreate Qohelet's message in the image of contemporary orthodox theology. This has been the case throughout the history of interpretation (cf. Murphy 1992:xlvi-iv). However, a paradigm shift in the interpretation of the OT - and also Qohelet - was initiated as a result of several developments:

- The rise of the historical criticism in the eighteenth century;⁶
- The enormous amount of new data becoming available, following the discovery of Ancient Near Eastern texts during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries;

From these developments two mutually exclusive views emerged as far as the

³ "Vapour" is the root meaning of the word "הבל" which Qohelet employs 38 times in the book (cf. Fox 1999:27). While this word is notorious for its elusive semantic qualities and has been rendered in a variety of ways by scholars, my choice for the retention of the root meaning shall be justified later on in this study. In the meantime I shall continue to translate הבל as "vapour" except in those cases where I shall be quoting other interpreters who chose a different rendering.

⁴ I.e. his reward is in heaven, in the afterlife.

⁵ I.e. "under the sun" - i.e. for worldly striving - he has no profit vs. "above the sun" - i.e. for religious striving - he has profit.

⁶ Though the history of research traces the roots of historical criticism back to the Reformation and sometimes even to earlier interpreters, it was only after the Enlightenment that it really started to gain momentum (cf. Teeple 1992:passim).

interpretation of the meaning and function of the “sun imagery” in Qohelet was concerned (cf. Fox 1999:165).

1.2.2 The conservative interpretation: restrictive and apologetical

The **conservative interpretation** falls back on Qohelet’s repetitive use of the phrase “תחת השמש” to argue that the book’s message is not unorthodox at all. Rather, it is actually *apologetical* in essence. It was purportedly written by Solomon himself in order to show how life *without* God (i.e. “under the sun”) is meaningless. This reading is motivated by the conservative presumption that, as part of inspired scripture, Qohelet’s message must be consistent with evangelical Christian theology or orthodox Jewish teaching. The “sun imagery” in the book is believed to be indicative of a spiritual / geographical⁷ dualism. Its function is seen as designative of a deliberate restriction of perspective by the author to show the vanity of a *secular* worldview. The phrase “תחת השמש” is thus interpreted as having a **restrictive** function: “*under the sun*” all is **הבל** - but *above the sun*, with God, it is not such (cf. Archer 1968:22; Ogden 1987:17).

1.2.3 The critical interpretation: inclusive and geographical / existential

In general, **critical interpretations** refrain from trying to harmonise Qohelet’s unorthodox claims with popular Christian theology. Here one finds attempts to read the author’s words against the background of its supposed original historical context. In this regard, the phrase “תחת השמש” is usually interpreted as being little more than a geographical locative.⁸ The phrase is not interpreted as having any *polemical* function. It certainly does not imply a spiritual-existential dichotomy between the extremes of theistic faith and atheistic secularism. Rather, in critical readings, “תחת השמש” is perceived to be a typical spatio-temporal designator depicting a universal state of affairs. Its function is thus **inclusive**: “under the sun” - i.e. everywhere on earth - all is **הבל** (cf. Fox 1989:177, 1999; Gordis 1968:27; Scott 1965:88).

1.3 PROBLEMS RELATED TO CONTEMPORARY INTERPRETATIONS OF THE PHRASE “תחת השמש” IN QOHELET

1.3.1 The conservative interpretation

This reading is untenable for several reasons. In viewing Qohelet as an unsung hero of evangelical theology, it completely misses the point of author’s dilemma. The idea that Qohelet plays the role of a hypothetical atheist seems to be a distortion of the author’s message to the point of saying the exact opposite that he intended to say. To be sure, Qohelet’s problem is not that life *without* God is **הבל**. His whole consternation results from the fact that everything seems to be **הבל** *in spite of* - or *because of* - God’s sovereignty and inscrutability. The conservative interpretation is marked by a great deal

⁷ By the term “geographical” (in terms of reference) I mean to indicate that these interpretations take the word “sun” in Qohelet as having reference only to the “sun” as a heavenly body / astrophysical phenomenon. The phrase “under the sun” is thus understood to be little more than a spatio - temporal designator.

⁸ Some critical interpreters do consider the reference of “under the sun” to include an existential element (cf. Scott 1965; Murphy 1992; and cf. Chapter 3 in this study for a more elaborated discussion of contemporary interpretations of the phrase “under the sun”).

of dogmatic eisegesis and forced reinterpretation. This exegetical fallacy ensues as a result of an underlying assumption about what the book, as part of the canon of Holy Scripture, is supposed to say. The phrase “תחת השמש”, if it does have a polemical function, certainly cannot be said to have the evangelistic apologetical function that these interpreters anachronistically read back into it. This form of distinction between the sacred and the secular which guides the conservative reading is a modern phenomenon which is worlds apart from the religio-cultural realities of Qohelet’s time when no such distinctions were operative.

1.3.2 The critical interpretation

While this line of interpretation has the merit that it does not intentionally attempt to force a dogmatic theology on the text, it nonetheless exhibits several characteristics that can be criticised. Firstly, it fails to recognise the significance of the “sun imagery” in the book. The repetition of the sun imagery is seen as involving a rather unnecessary reiteration of a supposedly marginal and trivial thought - that what happens is located “תחת השמש”. Secondly, it fails to explain why the author should feel the need to mention *thirty* times that what he saw was “תחת השמש”. If the phrase “תחת השמש” is *merely* an indicator of a spatio-temporal location - and thus simply has a geographical reference completely synonymous with the phrase “in this world” - its occurrence in the book does seem rather excessive. In fact, on this account the same message could have been communicated even without the phrase “תחת השמש”. There would have been no need whatsoever for Qohelet to mention “*where*” he saw all the “הבל”.

1.3.3 Summary of the research problem

In the book of Qohelet the reader encounters a mysterious and incessant repetition of the phrase “תחת השמש”. To be sure, solar imagery pervades the book. The word “השמש” sun” occurs *thirty five* times in the book’s twelve chapters. The phrase “תחת השמש” is implicitly omnipresent. In addition, the significance from an ANE perspective of the combination sun imagery + issues of concern + theology in the book seems to be a neglected and often distorted issue in scholarship. To be sure, most interpreters sever what is an inextricable unity of rhetorical elements in the book – i.e. the unity between *what* Qohelet saw and *where* he saw it. Moreover, little recognition exists of the possible ambiguity exhibited by the words “תחת” and “השמש”. With regard to the solar reference in particular, the possibility of mythological or symbolical associative references has, as of yet, not received any attention whatsoever from scholars. This despite the important implications such considerations might have for our understanding of the meaning and significance of Qohelet’s sun imagery in general.

In evaluation, critical metacommentary has indicated that the various popular explanations of the sun imagery have failed to account for Qohelet’s repeated use of the phrase “תחת השמש”. The conservative interpretation misinterprets the sun imagery by assigning it with an apologetical restrictive function implying a cosmic dualism and an anachronistic polemical rhetorical strategy. The critical reading is also inadequate. By interpreting the sun imagery as inclusive, and equating the solar reference with apparently parallel locative references devoid of solar imagery, it fails to explain why the author needed to refer to the domain “under the sun” at all.

1.4 THE HYPOTHESIS

The peculiarities of the sun imagery in Qohelet may be accounted for once the interpreter considers the possibility that the sun imagery in the book might contain implicit allusions to ANE solar mythology. This hitherto unheard of suggestion is motivated by observing the way in which Qohelet combines his excessively repeated references to the domain “under the sun” with an intense interest in particular issues such as justice, knowledge, life, death, time, God, the king, etc. These allusions, if real, seem to be characterised by ambiguity, polemic, irony, deconstruction and syncretism.

1.5 METHODOLOGY

The heuristic format of this study is manifested via a **comprehensive approach** that can be labelled as being **historical – cultural** in terms of its methodological scope. In **Part 1** of this study, the textual perspectives from which the hypothesis emerged will be explored in detail. This justification of its assumptions and claims will be presented in the form of **metatextual, intertextual and intratextual** arguments:

- In **Chapter 2**, a short **metatextual introduction** to the larger context within which the research problem features will be given. This will consist of demonstrating the disagreement on - and the problematic nature of – many of the basic exegetical questions regarding the book of Qohelet. A short list of hermeneutical explanations accounting for this phenomenon will also be included in this chapter.
- In **Chapter 3**, an **intratextual description** of the “sun imagery” in the book of Qohelet will follow. Included here will be further in depth analysis of the nature, significance, meaning and purpose of the “sun imagery” in Qohelet.
- In **Chapter 4**, **metatextual issues** pertaining to the justification of my novel interpretation of Qohelet’s “sun imagery” will be discussed. It concerns mainly the recognition of the distance between the world behind the text and the world of the modern reader that often makes the interpretation of an ancient religious discourse a complex and difficult endeavour.
- In **Chapter 5**, provision will be made for the consideration of important **intertextual data** that could be utilised as part of the comprehensive justification of the hypothesis. This will involve an overview of relevant aspects of the solar mythology and symbolism of a variety of Ancient Near Eastern cultural contexts.
- In **Chapter 6**, further **intertextual justification** for the new perspective on Qohelet’s “sun imagery” will be given. Some examples of solar elements in the Old Testament itself will be considered witnessing to the biblical authors’ familiarity with solar mythology.

Thereafter a short **summary** will be provided of what was discussed in **Part 1** of this study.

Then, in **Part 2**, further substantiation and synthesis will follow. Attention will also be

paid to the possible implications of the theory for the understanding of basic interpretative issues.

- In **Chapter 7**, a selective thematic commentary on Qohelet's "sun imagery" will be provided. What this involves is basically an attempt to give further and more detailed substantiation to the hypothesis on the **intratextual** level. The possible functions of the alleged allusions in the "sun imagery" will also be considered.
- In **Chapter 8**, speculation will follow regarding some of the possible implications of these findings as they pertain to the general interpretative questions identified in Chapter 2. In addition, the heuristic merits of the hypothesis will be considered and criticism of it will be anticipated.

Finally, a **summary** of what has been discussed in **Part 2** will conclude this study.

1.6 OBJECTIVES

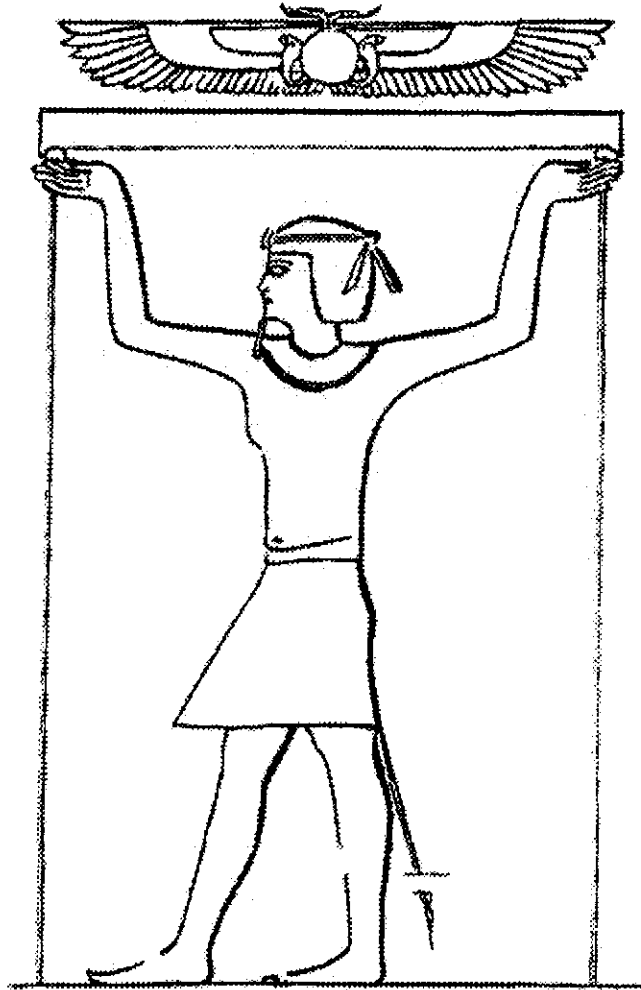
Throughout the evaluation, it is vital that readers should remember the following preliminary remarks with regard to the purpose of this study:

- Negatively, the aim of this study is neither to claim that the hypothesis of this dissertation is completely irrefutable nor that it is to be seen as the only possible solution to the research problem. It is neither an attempt to solve all the problems related to every detail of the book nor a call for the abandonment of insights as expressed in many popular commentaries.
- Positively, this study asks whether ANE solar mythology could provide a hitherto unrecognised - albeit legitimate - possible perspective on the recurring sun imagery in Qohelet. It is an admittedly tentative *experiment* aimed at reconstructing a hypothetical albeit heuristically functional hermeneutical frame of reference in order to account for the existence and function of sun imagery in the book.

1.7 SOME FINAL INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

The hypothesis, as well as much of the contents of this study, is completely novel. *Ergo*, much of what follows may be correctly considered as being rather controversial. To be sure, when a novice researcher proposes a reading of a complex piece of ancient literature that flies in the face of two millennia of known interpretative history, it might even seem a bit presumptuous. Therefore, it would be preferred that the reader approaches this study with an open mind. This does not mean to imply one should believe everything written here. What is required is not uncritical acceptance but critical (and self – critical) evaluation. Such evaluation must justify its critique of the arguments presented in this study on other grounds than the fact that it is novel or that it might discredit some cherished readings by venerated scholars of the past.

PART I



CHAPTER 2

METATEXTUAL JUSTIFICATION I

2.1 SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE LACK OF CONSENSUS AMONG SCHOLARS CONCERNING BASIC INTERPRETATIVE ISSUES IN QOHELET

The "sun imagery" in the book of Qohelet is of such a prevalent nature that any assessment of it might well influence how the general questions regarding the interpretation of the book are approached. It is therefore not beside the point to provide a short introduction to the general disagreement among scholars regarding such basic issues as the identity of the author, the date of composition, the language of the text, the genre, the structure, the message, etc. (cf. also Crenshaw 1995:520-529; Murphy 1992:xix-lvi).

Of course, it would be a fallacy to deduce from the phenomenon of inconsensus amongst scholars that one can know absolutely nothing about Qohelet at all. Inconsensus is indicative of differences in opinion and not of universal errancy and ignorance. In addition, it would surely involve the constitution of a false dichotomy to assume that either all should be correct or otherwise everyone must be equally wrong. Some theories may be more plausible than others. However, such inconsensus may be indicative of the fact that knowing who is right and who isn't cannot be decided by simply listening to each other's arguments.

There are many hermeneutical variables and factors playing a decisive role in the maintenance of the inconsensus. Rather than using this pluralism to argue for relativism in order to justify acceptance of my own point of view, I merely wish to demonstrate the prudence of an open-minded attitude to a novel proposal. Sometimes a new idea is dismissed, ignored or criticized just because it is different. This is the case especially if the scholar is not recognised as an authority on the subject but is still, like myself, a novice researcher toiling in obscurity. Be that as it may, the solar imagery in Qohelet is so pervasive that a rethinking of its meaning and significance may very well have serious implications for a host of other more fundamental issues. It would therefore not be inappropriate to commence this study with an excursion to assess what scholars have been saying regarding the basic interpretative issues encountered in the reading of the book.

2.1.1 Authorship

In both Jewish and Christian traditions, the work is known by the epithet of its putative author who, in Hebrew, is called קהלת "Qohelet". It is the Septuagint rendering which yielded the familiar name "Ecclesiastes".⁹ All that can be said about the person so

⁹ According to Crenshaw (1988:32), the Hebrew word קהלת from which the name Ecclesiastes derives has been variously explained as constituting a personal name, *nom de plume*, an acronym, and a function. The difficulty of comprehending the meaning of the word קהלת is compounded by the fact that it seems to be understood differently within the book itself, where קהלת has the article at least once (in 12:8), although nearly the same sentence occurs in 1:2, where קהלת lacks the article. In all likelihood the

designated must be inferred, somewhat precariously, from the book itself (cf. Murphy 1992:xx). In the editorial postscript, we are informed that Qohelet was a **חכם** (sage), who occupied himself diligently with the study of proverbial materials (**משלים**) and taught knowledge (**דעת**) to the people (12:9). We are ignorant, though, of any specific circumstances of his academic work and teaching. Some scholars feel that the first-person style in which he wrote is not to be confused with the modern “autobiographical” narrative, as though one could derive from it personal data concerning the life or psychological history of the author (see Loretz 1963:46-59).

The editorial superscription in 1:1 entitles the book “**דברי הקהלת**” and further describes the author as “**בן דוד מלך בירושלים**”. The author introduces his own work in 1:12, describing himself in somewhat more cryptically as Israel’s king in Jerusalem, i.e. “**מלך על ישראל בירושלים**”. The peculiar epithet “**קהלת**”¹⁰ and the identification with David’s son have fascinated and baffled generations of interpreters. The precise meaning of the word “**קהלת**” has thus far eluded scholarly research (cf. Crenshaw 1988:30-31).

Murphy (1992:xx) notes that the word is constructed semantically as masculine, but it is the *qal* feminine singular active participle of the root “**קהל**”. Verbal usage is well attested for both the *niphal*, in the sense “gather together, congregate”, and the *hiphil*, meaning, “to convoke an assembly”. Apart from the form “**קהלת**”, however, the *qal* is unattested.¹¹ The definite article “**ה**” appears with “**קהלת**” in two of its seven occurrences (7:27, emended text, and 12:8), which would suggest that it is a professional title or designation of office rather than a proper name.

The broadest meaning of the term “**קהלת**” indicates one who has something to do with a **קהל**, “assembly or congregation”. Hence, various interpretations have been proposed, such as “collector” (of sayings), “convoker” (of an assembly), “speaker” (to an assembly). The last suggestion underlies the common English rendering “preacher”, which goes back to Luther’s “*Prediger*” and Jerome’s “*Concionator*”. However, this rendering is overspecific; “**קהל**” does not mean, “preach”. Perhaps the best explanation recognises that the feminine participle “**קהלת**” indicates an office associated with an assembly and that the term is used secondarily as a proper name. Analogies can be found in the ancestral names “**הספרת**” (one who prepares leather) and “**פכרת הזבים**” (one who tends gazelles) in Ezra 2:55-57. Such proper names were apparently derived from specific and professional titles (cf. Murphy 1992:xx).

בן דוד, (“David’s son”) in the superscription (1:1) is the basis for the long-standing

article also appears in 7:27 where Qohelet mysteriously takes a feminine verbal form (**אמרה קהלת**), although the word **קהלת** otherwise always governs masculine verbs. The LXX supports a redivision of the consonants of the MT in 7:27 yielding, **אמר הקהלת** (“...” says the qohelet”).

¹⁰ Crenshaw (1988:32) notes that the name **קהלת** occurs 7 times in the book (cf. 1:1; 1:2; 1:12; 7:27; 12:8; 12:9a-b; 12:10).

¹¹ Elsewhere in the Old Testament the verb **קהל** always appears in connection with an assembly of people. If it could also imply the gathering of objects, as Crenshaw (1988:34) wonders, then Qohelet might be seen as a “collector of proverbs”, as the epilogist remembers the teacher (cf. 12:9 - 11).

tradition of the book's Solomonic authorship.¹² The identification is more specific than the statement in 1:12, in which the author tells us merely that the implied author is someone who can claim "הייתי מלך על ישראל בירושלים". The claim in both forms seems to stem primarily from the Solomonic aura of chapter 2 where Qohelet describes his experiment with riches.¹³ The real question is: why did he adopt the identity of a king?

Since wisdom is usually associated with royalty, and שלמה had a great reputation for wisdom (1 Kgs. 5:9-12 [4:29-34]), the adoption of the king fiction is intelligible (as in the case of the Greek *Wisdom of Solomon*). According to some interpreters, the king fiction is not the self-understanding of קהלת throughout the book. They feel his attitude to kingship is distant, if not critical, as in the observations about injustice in 3:16; 4:1-2; and 5:7. The comments about royalty in 8:2-4 and 10:4-7, 16-17, 20 seem to stem from one who appears to know more about how to deal with a king than how to rule.

According to scholars who favour a late dating, these passages lend some credibility to the claim that he is talking about situations in a foreign court, and hence about scenarios from the postexilic period.¹⁴ In short, these scholars feel that both the tenor of the book and the language in which it is written, which is considered to be very late Hebrew, render impossible the identification with Solomon or any Hebrew king. Ultimately, one may distinguish between conservative scholars who believe that the tradition is correct and that Solomon was the author and others who feel that this is implausible and that the author was an unknown sage writing at a later date (cf. Murphy 1992:xxi).

2.1.2 Location

Scholarly opinion has even attempted to determine the *place* where קהלת was written. Again, this has to be a matter of inference from the text. Thus, Humbert (1929:115) analysed the natural phenomena described in 1:5-7 and concluded that they pointed to Egypt as the locale of the author. For example, the idea of "השמש" going back to its place of origin (1:5) is an Egyptian concept. Hertzberg (1957:113-114) responded that even if this is correct, it says nothing about where the book was composed. He went on to argue that the writing took place in Palestine, and probably in Jerusalem.

His arguments are respectable. Reservoirs [ברכות מים] (2:6), leaky roofs [ידלק הבית] (10:18), wells [הבור] (12:6), the farmer's attention to the wind (11:4) - all these are matters easily understood in Palestine. Moreover, the Temple seems to be referred to in 4:17 [בית אלהים] and 8:10 [מקום קדוש]. However, when these and other arguments are

¹² Although the Hebrew title בן, "son" does not need to be interpreted as signifying immediate descent (cf. Deist 2000:33), in this case, the rest of the context seems to imply reference to Solomon (e.g. the further description: מלך על ישראל בירושלים - implying the political context prior to the split of Israel into two kingdoms).

¹³ Crenshaw (1988:33) asks whether קהלת might have been a nickname for Solomon who occupied the throne after his father's health failed. Thus the link between קהלת and Solomon could lie in the language of 1 Kgs. 8:1-12 where the king assembles (יקל) representatives of the people in Jerusalem.

¹⁴ Usually believed to be either the Persian period or the Hellenistic period with the latter being the most popular. Many scholars feel that the third century B.C. is the most probable historical context for the book.

assessed, one is left with the wisdom of Hertzberg's own reply to Humbert: such references do not really prove where the book was written. Nor can one conclude with Dahood (1952:30-52) that the nature of the language leads to the conclusion that Qohelet lived in Northern Palestine as a "resident of a Phoenician city".

All things considered, there seems to be no way to verify the location of the author with absolute certainty. All we have is the text and it can only imply possibilities based on inference and conjecture. Unfortunately the contents of the book referring to spatial localities are too general and too vague to be sure.

2.1.3 Date

Neither can a certain and precise date be assigned to the book of קהלת. There is general consensus among critical scholars that the language and thought of the book point to the post-exilic period. A *terminus ante quem* in the mid second century is provided by textual fragments of the book found in Cave IV at Qumran (Muilenburg 1954:20-28). If one were to allow with Hertzberg and many others that Ben Sira (writing about 180 B.C.) made use of קהלת, that date can be pushed back further to about 200 B.C. Some scholars argue that the absence of any reference related to the Maccabean troubles seems to be another sign that 220 B.C. is a suitable date for the *terminus ante quem* (cf. Murphy 1992:xxi).

Arguments in favour of the Persian or the Greek period compete with each other, and current scholarship is inclined to favour the Hellenistic era, around 250 B.C. However, there are no compelling reasons. Efforts have been made based on certain passages (e.g. 4:13-16; cf. also 8:2-4; 9:13-15; 10:16-17) to discover references to the contemporary scene (Schunck 1959:192-201). However, these rather typical happenings, and probably not contemporary events are described. The text is simply too vague to support demonstrable historical reference. At the most, one may grant that there is Hellenistic colouring to the types of courtly characters mentioned in the book.

Lohfink (1981:535-543) points out that קהלת uses different vocabulary for those in power - for a king (המלך) and for Hellenistic kings in general (גבה; שלטון; שרף) - and takes this as a sign that one should distinguish the royal court from other courts that offered career possibilities to members of the Jewish upper middle class. Of course, if one grants the thesis that there is definite Hellenistic influence upon the book, a date in the middle of the third century would be appropriate. This date is accepted by most scholars (cf. Perdue 1994:193).

The main methods employed in attempting to establish a date have involved an assessment of the contents of the book on the one hand but also of linguistic criteria on the other. Thus, many scholars believe that the late dating of the book can be confirmed as certain based on the discovery of Aramaisms, Persianisms and Graecisms (cf. Gordis 1952:395-410; Whitley 1979:611-624; contra Dahood 1952; Davilah 1990:69-87). Still, even these arguments are far from conclusive with regard to determining a date solely on linguistic criteria. This is partly due to the fact that the identification of supposed foreign vocabulary is not an exact science and based largely on guesswork (cf. Fredericks 1988:267).

Furthermore, the problem with the use of linguistic methods in establishing a date of composition is compounded by the fact that it is based on the assumption that the book was never translated and that the book as now represented in the MT contains the same text as that which left the author's hands. To be sure, there have also been counter arguments which try to prove that the book is pre-exilic. This is done by pointing out archaisms or parallels from foreign vocabulary which seems more at home in a pre-exilic context (cf. Dahood 1952; Archer 1968; Fredericks 1988). There have also been theories that tried to explain the peculiarity of the language of the book by claiming that the book as we now have it is indeed a translation from a previous document (Ginsberg 1950; Zimmermann 1945 / 46).

Whatever the case may be, an overview of scholarship concerned with the dating of the book based on linguistic analysis reveals a community of interpreters just as divided as those who have attempted to establish the date based on supposed references to historical events in the book (cf. Crenshaw 1995:539-541). In addition, those that take the general atmosphere of the ideas in the book as representative of a certain *Zeitgeist* have also become separated into two mutually exclusive schools of thought. On the one hand, there are those who feel that the thought of קהלת is representative of the sceptical tradition of Egyptian and Babylonian wisdom and because of this, the book may be early (cf. Archer 1968). On the other hand, many scholars have found in the text what they consider to be parallels to Greek philosophical thinking. If this is the case it might imply a date of origin in the post-exilic period (cf. Braun 1973; Ranston 1925).

2.1.4 Language

The statement of F. Delitzsch (1891) remains a popular one regarding the linguistic argument for a late dating of the text in its present form: "If the book of Qohelet were of Solomonic origin, then there is no history of the Hebrew language". According to Crenshaw (1988:31), there is general agreement that the language is late. It is usually characterised as pre-Mishnaic, representing the state of language before it developed into the Mishnaic Hebrew of the Talmud.¹⁵

Fredericks (1988) has challenged this view. He maintained that Qohelet's language "should not be dated any later than the exilic period, and that no accumulation of linguistic evidence speaks against a pre-exilic date" (1988:267). The statistical nature of his argument has, however, failed to convince the majority of scholars who believe that the language is definitely post-exilic (cf. Murphy 1992:xxviii). Still, the peculiarities of the language are far from resolved.

¹⁵ There are 27 *hapax legomena* occur in the book, together with 26 words or combinations of words that appear in the Hebrew Bible only in Qohelet, although Mishnaic texts also have most of them. There are 40 grammatical *hapax legomena* and 42 Aramaisms, which comprise 3.1% of Qohelet's vocabulary. Qohelet conjugates III א verbs like III ה verbs and fails to assimilate the article (ה) in 3 instances (6; 10; 8:1; 10:3). The demonstrative זיה takes the place of זיה; אנה occurs (30 times) rather than אנכי; אשר (89 times) alternates with ש (68 times); and a decided preference for feminine nouns over masculine forms exists. קהלת also uses numerous words ending in ת; ון; and ות and he joins particles together the way they appear in the Mishnah. He employs 3 rare adverbs (כבר; עדן; עדנה); others he uses repeatedly גם (32 times), הרבה (14 times), יותר (7 times). Unusual prepositions also appear, particularly those ending in ת, as well as the conjunction אל (6:6) and the interjections אי (10:16) and אילו (4:10).

The majority of scholars think that Qohelet wrote his work originally in Hebrew (Murphy 1992:xxviii). At one time, however, this was an issue of vigorous debate when Zimmerman (1945) and Ginsberg (1950) argued that the present text was a translation from an Aramaic original. They were effectively answered and, according to most other scholars, rebutted by Gordis (1952:93-109). The whole controversy has practically died out, especially since the discovery of Hebrew fragments at Qumran. This leaves little room, assuming a late dating for the book and reckoning backward from the second century, for an alleged Aramaic original and its translation.

Probably the most telling argument, however, is the weakness of the grammatical reasoning put forth in favour of an Aramaic original. There is no clear case of a text in Qohelet being an example of a mistranslation of the Aramaic. Moreover, the paronomasia and other tricks of style in the Hebrew text are more easily understood as resulting from the hand of someone writing in his native language than from a creative translator. The entire episode, however, is symbolic of the mystery of the language of the book, which still remains puzzling in many ways (cf. Gordis 1952:93 -109).

In 1952 M. Dahood suggested a new approach to the language, arguing that it was originally written in Phoenician orthography (*scriptio defectiva*). He also claimed that, in terms of morphology, syntax, and vocabulary, it showed a strong Canaanite - Phoenician influence. Although Dahood kept adding to the examples of evidence that he had amassed, the theory has not been accepted. But it has been supported in part by Davilah (1990:69-87) who argued that Qohelet's Hebrew was influenced by a northern dialect of Hebrew. Archer (1968:167-181) has accepted Dahood's arguments. He postulated that a "gifted tenth century Hebrew author" must have written the book. It seems obvious that, ultimately, the dispute concerning the nature and date of Qohelet's language will continue to remain unresolved between those who feel the peculiarities best reflect an early date and those who believe the opposite.

While judgement about the peculiar characteristics of the language is still out (cf. du Plessis 1971:164-181; Isaksson 1987), there can be no doubt about the distinctiveness of Qohelet's literary style.¹⁶ The poem on the repetition of events in 1:4-11 is as it were a symbol of his style; repetition is its trademark. This repetition is manifest in vocabulary and also in a phraseology that is almost formulaic, as the following statistics by Loretz (1964:167-180) and Murphy (1992:xxix) illustrate. The favourite words in Eccl. 1:4-12:7, whether occurring as verbs or in related forms (30 times or more), are the following:

עשה	-	do (62)
חכם	-	wise (51)
טוב	-	good (51)
ראה	-	see (47)
עת	-	time (37)
שמש	-	sun (35)

¹⁶ A list of *hapax legomena* and late words is found in the commentaries of Delitzsch (1891:190 - 196) and Wright (1883:488 - 500). A grammatical analysis of forms and syntax, followed by basic observations is given in the commentary of Siegfried (1898:13 - 23). Vocabulary, literary characteristics, and wisdom topoi are discussed by Loretz (1964:135 - 217). Vocabulary and idiomatic peculiarities are studied by Whitley (1979:4 - 105). See also the studies of Fredericks, Isaksson, Delsman and Du Plessis mentioned in the text above.

- עמל - trouble (33)
רע - evil (30)
הבל - "vapour" (29 / 38)

And 10 times or more:

- כסיל - fool (18)
שמחה - joy (17)
אכל - eat (15)
יש - there is (15)
יתרון - profit (15)
סכל - fool (13)
רוח - wind (13)
מות - die (13)
רשע - wrongdoing (12)
צדק - just (11)
ענה - trouble, affliction (10)
רעות - chase (10)

Furthermore,¹⁷ besides the use of individual words, there is the phenomenon of repetition of set phrases:

- הבל - in various formulae, e.g., this is also vapour (37)
תחת השמש - "under the sun" (29)¹⁸

and somewhat less frequent:

- כל המעשה אשר נעשה - all deeds that are done (9)
עמל - toil (8)
שתה / אכל - eat / drink (5)
מי יודע - who knows? (4)

Several recurring terms have been subjected to careful analysis by Michel (1989:24-38). The verb ראה, "see" occurs 46 times and 21 of these are in the first person (ראיתי). In many passages, the verb denotes not merely seeing but a critical evaluation of what is being perceived "תחת השמש". Another favourite word of Qohelet is יש, "there is" occurring 15 times. Michel points out that this word is used in proverbs especially to introduce paradoxes (Prov. 11:24; 13:7; 14:22 etc.) or in the case of Qohelet, what Michel (1989:184-199) calls "limit situations" (*Grenzfalle*). This especially occurs when Qohelet wants to draw the reader's attention to something that seems out of sorts,

¹⁷ As Murphy (1992:xxix) notes, these statistics are quite striking: Out of the words appearing in chapters 2 - 11 there is a variation of between 29.1 % (chapter 2) and 14.1% (chapter 11) for the favourite words. Among the 2643 words in 1:4 - 12:7, 562 different words (21.2%) have been counted thus showing the amount of repetition in the text.

¹⁸ This number may rise to thirty (or even more) based on a couple of text critical emendations involving a possible confusion with the phrase "under the heavens" (cf. 1:12; 2:3; 3:1).

especially cases of injustice or unfairness when the opposite is expected.

2.1.5 Genre

Apparently, there is also no consensus regarding the literary form of the book. The reduction of the entire text to a "Royal testament" (cf. von Rad 1972:226) will not do for most scholars, who believe that the king fiction ends after chapter 2. Ellermeier (1967:49) seriously proposed "*mashaf*" as the genre, but admitted at once that it is not very helpful. Braun (1973:36) and Ausejo (1948:394-406) both proposed the Hellenistic "diatribe" as the proper form of the book.¹⁹

According to some commentators, typical of Qohelet is the genre called "reflection" by Ellermeier and Braun (cf. also Fox 1999:155; Murphy 1992:xxx). This designates the particular form in which Qohelet develops his thought. Ellermeier (1967:89-92) distinguishes between a critical reflection that is unified and a critical "broken" reflection. The first begins with a negative observation in order to criticise an optimistic view (3:16-22); the second starts from a neutral point and goes on to make its critique (1:4-11). He also describes a third type, which begins with the negative observation and arrives at establishing a relative value (4:4-6).

These subtle distinctions are not as important as the term itself; reflection is what Qohelet is clearly doing (cf. Murphy 1992:xxx). The terminology of R. Braun (1973:153-159) is different. He distinguishes amongst the considered reflection, in which a theme is stated; the consideration in which empirical points are indicated; instruction with warning and challenge; considered teaching, consisting of consideration, reason and challenge.²⁰ Again, the differences between one kind of reflection and another seem subtle and even unnecessary but Braun analyses the entire 12 chapters in this fashion.

However, as Murphy (1992:xxxii) notes, the "reflection" is easier to recognise than to describe. It has a loose structure; it begins with some kind of observation, which is then considered from one or more point of view, leading to a conclusion. Within it, one may find sayings or proverbs employed to develop or round out the thought. In the end one has to concede that the book of Qohelet cannot be forced into any stereotypical mold as far as its genre is concerned. Also on this issue, there is little consensus.

2.1.6 Composition / Unity

As far as the question regarding the unity of the book is concerned, there seems to be a general consensus that the epilogue (12:9-14) was the work of a later hand (cf. Murphy

¹⁹ A "diatribe" is a literary form cultivated among the Cynics and adopted by the Stoics. Its contents are ethical philosophy, the daily human existence with which the authors were preoccupied. The notable characteristic of the diatribe is the dialogue that the writer holds with an interlocutor, real or fictitious. This feature seems to be the main argument for describing קהלת as a "dialogue". However, one may well question if this is adequate to the complexities of the book. Ultimately the book is not a dialogue, even if קהלת inevitably had in mind certain thinkers and their views (cf. Murphy 1992:xxx).

²⁰ As Crenshaw (1988:passim) notes, Qohelet's contents are so varied and diverse that no single genre can be assigned to the book. As will be discussed in chapter 8, I personally favour not to try and label the book with one supposed overarching and underlying genre but feel that we may be able to discern which genres influenced Qohelet.

1992:xxxiii).²¹ But the real issue regarding the integrity of Qohelet is not confined to these verses. Rather, it concerns the possibility of the presence of glosses and interpolations in the text (cf. Fox 1999:14-16). The postulation of these supposed alterations is one way of explaining what appear to be contradictions in the text which appear like the insertions of a pious redactor who couldn't quite endorse all that he found in the text (cf. Barton 1908). Thus a text like 2:16 where Qohelet says that he hates life is pointed out as contradicting his other claims such as in 9:4 where he asserts that life is better than death (contra also 4:1-3).

Such contradictions gave rise to a number of theories claiming that the book contains traces of a plurality of "voices" or "hands". The history of the interpretation of the book shows that early on interpreters who accepted Solomonic authorship explained such passages as Solomon in dialogue with himself and with others (cf. Leanza 1988:267-282). In more recent times, however, this yielded to the view that the dissonance was created by glosses or interpolations from later hands (Podechard 1912; McNeile 1904).

A typical example of the extreme form of this view is that of C.G. Siegfried. In 1898, Siegfried (1898:2-12) proposed an influential and far-reaching interpretation by postulating several glossators: a Sadducean who favoured Epicureanism (Q-II); a wise man or chakam (Q-III), and a pious person or chasid (Q-IV). In addition, there was a group of glossators that he thought was responsible for further insertions (Q-V). This approach concentrated on the apparent inconsistencies in the author's line of reasoning and eliminated these in favour of a "pure" and very sceptical Qohelet. However, difficulties with such a methodology remain. First, it was later pointed out that some of the contradictions found in the text owed more to the interpretation of that text than to the text itself. Secondly, these contradictions also manifested themselves especially after imposing an a-priori judgment on what constitutes Qohelet's thought (cf. Murphy 1992:xxxiii).

At the beginning of the 20th century, the approach of Siegfried was espoused in various forms in the leading commentaries (e.g. G Barton [1908], E Podechard [1912], and A McNeile [1904]). Recently the trend has been away from this tendency, but many commentators (K. Galling [1969], H. Hertzberg [1963], A. Lauha [1978], et al.) frequently have recourse to glosses. There is no unanimity in the determination of specific glosses. The most troublesome texts seem to be those that suggest judgment (3:17; 8:12b-13 and 11:9 for example) but other texts are also singled out for elimination (3:17; 5:18; 7:18b) by various scholars. It is hard to escape the impression that the interpreter's subjectivism is at work. Thus many other scholars have felt it preferable to explain the book as generally of one piece (R. Gordis [1970], J. Loader [1986], W. Zimmerli [1962]; [except 11:9b] among others), with the obvious exception of the epilogue.

Those who defend the integrity of the book have recourse to certain stylistic features and exegetical moves as a reply to the division to various glossators (Murphy 1992:xxxiv). A good example in this case would be that of M. Fox (1989) who simply recognised, and accepted the presence of contradictions within the book. H. Hertzberg (1963) proposed an exegetical solution: the recognition of the "yes, but" saying (zwar-

²¹ Although some scholars have challenged this notion arguing that the writer of 12:9-14 is the actual author's assessment of his fictional persona he created in 1:3-12:8 to clothe his arguments indirectly via the character Qohelet (cf. Longmann 1998).

aber Tatsache). This indicates a qualification, if not denial, of a point that has just been made, as in Eccl. 2:13-14a, which speaks of the superiority of wisdom. These verses are followed by v 14b-15, which question the advantage of wisdom. Hertzberg (1963) listed several such passages.²²

W. Zimmerli (1962) acknowledged such shifts in the thought of Qohelet. On the other hand, F. Ellermeier (1967) stoutly refused to recognise the *zwar-aber* mentality. Whether or not one uses this terminology, most interpreters of Qohelet acknowledge that the complex nature of Qohelet's thought does appear to embrace certain contradictions.²³ The settlement of this question must be left to the exegesis of a concrete text as well as to the general construal of Qohelet's thought (cf. Murphy 1992:xxxiv).

Another solution akin to the "yes, but" saying is the recognition of quotations in the book (Gordis 1968; N. Whybray 1989) Gordis (1968:95-108) described quotations as "passages that cite the speech or thought of a subject, actual or hypothetical, past or present, which is distinct from the context in which it is embodied". A clear example of this is Ecclesiastes 4:8 in which the description of the solitary toiler concludes with "עמל אני ולמי אני". Whether this is the question he asks himself (so NEB) or fails to ask himself (so Gordis), it is certainly a quotation, pointedly employed by Qohelet to heighten the futile situation of the solitary person.

Whybray (1981:435-451) has continued the study of quotations attempting to determine whether or not Qohelet is citing a traditional wisdom saying. If so, how is the citation used, how does it function? The proof that a quotation is present is not easy to provide. M Fox (1980:416-431) has called for stricter criteria in identifying quotations in Biblical literature; they must be marked in some way: e.g. by a verb of speaking, or implicitly, such as by a change in grammatical number and person. No matter the issue of proof, some lines simply have the ring of proverbial sayings that are quoted, such as 4:5-6, or vv. 15 and 18 in the complex of 1:12-18.

Whybray (1981:435-451) also examined some forty examples from the point of view of form, theme and language. His rigid criteria led to the conclusion that there were eight clear examples (2:14a; 4:5; 4:5; 7:5; 7:6a; 9:17; 10:2; 10:12). One might be inclined to be less strict than Whybray in the establishing of criteria. In any case, he claimed that when Qohelet has used traditional wisdom material (such as in these eight instances), "His purpose in quoting these sayings was not to demonstrate their falsity. He quoted them because he accepted their truth." (1981:450). At the same time, Qohelet modified them in the direction of pessimism. The general point made by Whybray fits well the dialogical character of the book (Murphy 1992:xxxiv).²⁴

²² Cf. 1:16-18; 2:3-11; 2:13 - 15; 3:11; 3:17-18; 4:13-16; etc.

²³ The complex issue of contradictions within the thought of Qohelet itself is not discussed in this study nor is the possible implications which my hypothesis might imply with regard to this issue considered. Personally, I adhere largely to the ideas of Fox (1989; 1999) in this regard but do not think that the issue in any way threatens the credibility of the hypothesis of this study but can be used to refine it. Such a discussion, however, is beyond the scope of this study.

²⁴ Crenshaw (1988:37ff) also notes the efforts to fix criteria for the identification of quotations such as those by Gordis (1981). Gordis (1981) identified four main categories: (1) the verbalisations of a speaker or writer's unexpressed ideas or sentiments; (2) the sentiment of a subject other than the writer or speaker; (3) use in argument and debate; and (4) indirect quotations without a *verbum dicendi*. Fox

2.1.7 Structure

If one accepts the basic integrity of the book of Qohelet, it might be expected that some general agreement about its structure could be reached (Murphy 1992:xxxv). However, there is hardly one commentator who agrees with another on the structure; some simply adopt or modify the structure proposed by others. Almost all have recourse to a conceptual or logical analysis. The variation of opinion can be quickly gauged by perusing the surveys of A. Wright (1968:315-316) and F. Ellermeier (1967:129-141) to which the following later examples from Murphy (1992:xxxv-xli) can be added:

- A. Barucq (1968:16-18) does not attempt a logical division of the work, but he recognises thirteen divisions within 1:4-12:8;
- R. Braun (1973:165) divides the book into 1:2-11, introductory considerations; 1:12-2:12, the king fiction; 2:12 - 4:16, reflection; 4:17-11:10, teaching; 12:1 - 8, concluding considerations.
- J. Coppens (1979:288 - 292) bases his structure on supposed logical development in two parts: 1:12-2:16, the personal experiences of king Solomon. 3:9-10:7 contains his view on life, but it has been interrupted by several insertions of "logia" from classical wisdom (over 80 verses!). The rest of the book is shaped by redactional additions (e.g. 1:4-11) and appendices (e.g. 12:9-14).
- L. di Fonzo (1967:9-10) distinguishes a prologue (1:1-3) and five parts: vanity of nature and history (1:4-11); the general vanity of life and its values (1:12-2:26); the enigmas of human life (3:1-6:12); practical conduct for life (7:1-6:11); youth and old age (11:7-12:8). These are followed by in the epilogue (12:9-14).
- A. Wright (1968:313-334) approached the problem of structure from the point of view of the repetition of key phrases at first, seeking a norm more objective than logical connection. In later studies (1980:38-51; 1983:32-43), he confirmed his original outline of the work by the discovery of a numerological pattern in the structure. The value of his analysis is that it follows the lead of clear repetitions of phrases within the book. Moreover, the subsections are strictly limited by these repetitions; they are not the result of overall conceptual or logical analysis, but neither do they sin against logic; as conceptual divisions, they are at least adequate. The confirmation of this general outline was achieved by the recognition of numerical patterns controlling the book, as the following observations indicate:
 - The book has 222 verses and the midpoint occurs at 6:9 / 6:10, as the Masoretes also noted. This observation is not simply dismissed by the statement that verse division did not exist in Qohelet's day. There can be a sense of verse division without stichometry.

(1980) represents a more cautious approach, proposing three criteria: (1) the presence of another speaker in the immediate context; (2) a virtual *verbal dicendi* (for example mouth or speech) and (3) a shift in grammatical number and person. As mentioned, one alternative to quotations is, of course, to recognise redactional glosses. Because editorial glosses touch up many books of the Bible, in all likelihood Qohelet also has such redactional comments, for the radical nature of Qohelet's thoughts invite editorial softening (cf. Barton 1908:passim; Crenshaw 1988:37ff).

- The numerical values of the Hebrew letters in **הבל הכל הבל** in the inclusion 1:2; 12:8 is 216. In addition, there are 216 verses in 1:1-12:8;
 - In 1:2 **הבל** 5 + 2 + 30 = 37 is repeated 3 times yielding a numerical value of 3 times 37 which is 111 which is exactly the number of verses at midpoint (6:9);
 - The numerical significance of **הבל** (= 37) is underscored by the fact that it occurs 37 times if one eliminates the very doubtful second "vapour" in 9:9 as many scholars have done, independently;
 - The numerical equivalent of **דברי** in the title (1:1) is 216. This would be the title of a book of 216 verses 1:1-12:8, exclusive of the epilogue.
 - In the epilogue, 6 additional verses have been added to reach the number 222. A hint of this can be seen in **ויתר** in 12:9, 12, which can be understood to say "six additional" (ו = 6, and **יתר** = additional). Wright has added other details to strengthen his case, but the above considerations constitute the main basis supporting his outline. While numerical patterns are usually associated with flights of fancy, it should be noted that the above observations are relatively sober and are not concerned with individual letters or words such as can be disposed of in text critical emendations. In addition, the likelihood that these numerical patterns are merely coincidental is minimal, since the observations reinforce each other. Thirdly, the numerical patterns are in a different line of reasoning altogether from the literary analysis indicated by the repetition of key phrases in many instances and yet they lend confirmation to it. Finally, this formal structural analysis, whatever imperfections it may have, is in general harmony with many logical analyses of the book.²⁵
- K. Gallig (1969:76-77), in his revised commentary, recognises an introduction (1:1-3) and two epilogues (12:9-14) between which are arranged 27 statements of Qohelet. A. Lauha (1978:4-17) takes a similar position and believes that while the book manifests conceptual and stylistic unity, it is basically a collection composed of thirty-six units.
 - N. Lohfink (1981:10-11) feels that the book is "almost a philosophical treatise" and divides it into a cosmology (1:4-11), anthropology (1:12-3:15); social criticism (3:16-6:10) with a critique of religion (4:17 - 5:6), a critique of ideology (6:11-9:6), and ethics (9:7-12:7), plus two additions by way of epilogue.
 - F. Rousseau (1981:200-217) analyses 1:4-11 in almost mathematical detail on the

²⁵ Fox (1999:148 - 149), raises some plausible objections to Wright's methodology which he considers to be common to other proposals of "literary structure" in Qohelet: (1) The criteria for unit division (particularly in part II) are not well defined phrases but word groups of dubious cohesiveness; (2) The words and phrases chosen as unit markers are not always the prominent ones and other choices, equally justifiable produces very different designs; (3) The key phrases are frequently not where we would expect them to be according to Wright's schema and; (4) The plan does not match the thought as can be seen when Wright frequently gathers a variety of topics under an inappropriate or vague rubric. For Fox (1999:149), perhaps the most pressing problem with Wright's structural delineation is its failure to have any noticeable effect on the exegesis of the book. Furthermore Fox (1999:149f) does not believe that Qohelet had the intention to divulge in the numerological niceties Wright suggests.

basis of the pairing or “*jumelage*” of stichs. The same principle along with the sevenfold refrain to enjoy life, is applied to structure the rest of the book which divides into seven parts, apart from the prologue and epilogue: Solomon’s “confession” (1:12-2:26); the sage’s ignorance of God’s plan in general (3:1-13); the sage’s ignorance of what is after death (3:14 - 22); various deceptions and exhortations (4:1 - 5:19); various deceptions and exhortations (6:1-8:15); weakness of the sage (8:15 - 9:10); deceptions and exhortations (9:11-11:10).

- A. Schoors (1982:91-116) reviews the structures proposed by several authors and remarks that they are all based on content. He allows that the structure worked out by A Wright “seems to be the best one can find”, but ultimately it does not satisfy the logical progression of ideas, nor the set expressions and formulae that keep reappearing. He proposes his own outline that is based on logical progression and the constant repetitions (catch words, inclusions, etc.) that are scattered through the book. However, his structural outline rests as much upon content as upon literary characteristics.
- J. Crenshaw (1988:47-49) characterises his analysis as “tentative” and resembling “in many respects that of Schoors”. He ends up with twenty-five units and several glosses.
- G. Ogden (1987:11-13) holds that both the profit question (1:3); its answer (negative), and the response that flows from that forms the framework for chaps. 1-8. The final discourse (9-12) appraises the value of wisdom in light of life’s enigmas.
- R. Whybray (1989:46-47) makes no claim for one outline of the structure more than another. He simply presents thirty-one thematic units, based on content.
- M. Fox (1977:83-106) expresses his general agreement with the views of W. Zimmerli and A. Schoors (with whom his unit division is in general agreement). He points out that there is considerable agreement about the segmentation of various units but there is no hierarchical organization of the whole. Instead, he proposes to analyse the book in terms of two time-frame perspectives, which provide a certain structure. The first frame is that of the narrator, the true author of the book (1:2-12:14), who transmits the teachings of Qohelet: as reporter (the narrating “I”), and as observer (the experiencing “I”). The narrator is the epilogist who praises Qohelet (12:9-10) who’s teaching he agrees with and which in effect he has composed. Qohelet is a persona, a mask through which the author’s voice is heard. In support of this view, Fox adduces several examples from Egyptian wisdom literature, such as Ptah-hotep, Ankhsheshonq, and others.
- D. Michel (1989:9-45) provides a survey of various proposals about structure and basically agrees with the view of N. Lohfink. Michel’s view of the structure is, however, unusual. In 1:3-3:15 Qohelet lays down his philosophy concerning human attempts to gain any profit from life. In the rest of the book, he deals with individual cases that illustrate his philosophy. Sometimes Qohelet will quote the opinions of others in order to provide his own comment on them (e.g., 7:1-10,11-14). Even if one agrees to the presence of quotations in Qohelet, Michel’s overall total in an extensive list seems too much for most other commentators.

- W. Zimmerli (1974:221-230) laid down the extreme choices for the structure of Qohelet: is it a treatise, or a collection of sayings? His answer was that the truth is somewhere between these two: "the book of Qohelet is not a treatise with clearly recognizable structure and with one definable theme. At the same time, it is more than the loose collection of sayings, although in some places, indication of a collection is not to be overlooked". It follows that the interpreter must work on more than one level by first of all discovering the primary form critical units and then enquire about the possible combination of two or more of these primary units. Furthermore, he must also ask how the contents determine the sequence of the complex form critical units. Yet, despite the value of form critical analysis, it also tends to atomise the text and Zimmerli recognises that one must go beyond them to consider sequence and unity.
- J. Loader (1979:4-9) interprets the structure in the book in terms of thought patterns, which he calls "polar structures" (i.e. patterns of tensions created by the counterposition of two elements to one another). In doing so, Loader recognises, apart from the epilogue, twelve structural units. At this point logical analysis takes over, as it must, with the result that some dubious structural claims are made. While most commentators would admit that there are polar structures within the book, they find rather implausible the idea that there is such an overarching structure of polarities which holds the entire book together.
- J. Mulder (1982:341-65) adopted Wright's division except for minor changes. He argues that 3:11 and 8:7 demand more attention because they link 7:1-8:17 with 2:17-6:9, and with 9:1-11:6. He concludes with the claim that 3:1-4:6 and 8:1-17 constitute the heart of all Qohelet" which is that no one can understand God. R Murphy follows in the main the structural pattern suggested by Wright.²⁶

2.1.8 Prose / Poetry?

Did Qohelet write in prose or poetry? The answer to this question lies in the definition of poetry in Biblical Hebrew. There is widespread agreement that the psalms are written in poetic lines and that the sayings in Proverbs should be set off as poetry. However, in the case of Qohelet there is a striking difference of opinion. E. Pöschel (1912:137) thought that in the main Qohelet was written in prose, indeed in "une prose assez mauvaise". Before him, no less a figure than R. Lowth (1815:342-43) had issued a similar judgment: "The style of this work is, however, singular; the language is generally low, I might almost call it mean or vulgar; it is frequently loose, unconnected, approaching the incorrectness of conversation; and possesses very little of the poetical character, even in the composition and structure of the periods: which peculiarity may be possibly accounted for from the nature of the subject".

Many translators set the book up almost entirely in prose paragraphs (NEB) or a kind of free verse (cf. Michel 1989:127-168). But most recognise the mixture of prose and poetry (the latter being present especially in chaps. 7 and 10). The problem remains because it is not easy to set up criteria for the distinction (cf. Murphy 1992:xxix). J.

²⁶ These various proposals regarding the structure hardly exhaust the diversity of opinion among scholars but they are representative of the popular disarray which characterises the academic community in general when it comes to the interpretation of this complex piece of literature.

Kugel (1981) has raised serious questions about the definition of Biblical poetry, and especially the role of parallelism. Yet, whatever the answer is on a theoretical level, one can hardly deny the existence of some poetic lines in the book (not only 3:8, but 11:1-4).

2.1.9 Message

In attempting to enquire about the message of the book, a look at the various messages 'discovered' in Qohelet during the history of interpretation provides a sobering experience. What has hitherto constituted "the message" of the book seems to be inextricably bound up with what the commentators would have liked to find therein. Rather than discussing the message of Qohelet, for the present purposes, it might be better to discuss the interpretation of that supposed message by interpreters throughout the history of research. In the end, what seems to be available to us is not the undistorted original and complete message itself. We only have access to our own fallible and incomplete interpretation of that message. This simple hermeneutical observation seems to relativise all our readings and claims regarding whatever it is that the book actually intends to communicate.

In 1861 C.D. Ginsburg concluded a monumental survey of the history of exegesis of Qohelet with the following words: "What a solemn lesson...to abstain from dogmatism and what an admonition to urge one's own pious emotions and religious conceits as the meaning of the word of God" (Ginsburg 1970). Despite having recognised this lesson taught by the history of interpretation it seems, from a latter perspective Ginsburg's own commentary amply illustrated his own warning. The history of interpretation ever since has provided yet more examples of what in the end turn out to be theological eisegesis. Davidson (1997:184) has summed up his assessment of the diversity in the history of the interpretation of the book with the remark that: "it is not difficult to imagine the ghost of Qohelet flitting around Sheol thinking, with a wry smile on his face, that the way commentators have handled his book is a beautiful example of his central conviction: 'הבל הבלים הכל הבל' (1:2)".

According to Murphy (1992:xlix) a sketch of the history of interpretation of Qohelet is more rewarding than the corresponding history for most other Biblical books. There appears to be a remarkable homogeneity in the way the book was interpreted over the centuries because of some clearly defined presuppositions or directions of exegesis. The term presuppositions is not meant pejoratively; it is just that certain factors emerged as primary in the interpretation of the book by the majority of both Jewish and Christian writers.

From the perspective of reconstructing a brief overview representative of Jewish interpretations of Qohelet, one can say the following. The earliest explicit reference to the book and its message in the Jewish history of interpretation is attested in the debate concerning whether Qohelet is worthy of canonical status or whether, along with the Song of Songs it "defiled the hands" (i.e. should be left out). This debate is related in the Mishnah in Yadayim 3.5. The subsequent history of the interpretation of the book shows that, while difficulties were indeed recognised, they were also to be resolved at all costs. The principle of Solomonic authorship was an important factor in Jewish

understanding.²⁷

Thus, the Targum claims that Solomon foresaw Israel's later history, the division of the kingdom and the exile. The labour of Solomon had indeed been in vain, in light of the work of descendants such as Rehobeam and Jerobeam (Tar. Qoh 1:2). In 1:12-13 of the Targum is reflected the deposing of Solomon from the throne (cf. Eccl. 1:12 - "I was king...") as a result of his sins. Legend has it that Solomon was deposed by Asmodeus, the king of demons - a story also related in the Talmud (b. Git 68a, 68b) and elsewhere.

More important was the influence of the Torah upon the interpretation of Qohelet. Flescher (1990:390) has spoken correctly about the "rabbinical rewriting" of the book. He points out the difference, with the sage of the Hebrew Bible open to experience and chance, and the sage of rabbinic Judaism open to the Torah. It is a striking fact that no Midrashim were written about the Biblical wisdom books in the rabbinic period (roughly 70 AD to 640 AD). Qohelet was made into a rabbinic sage governed by Torah. Contra Qohelet's radical claim in 1:3, there is profit for a man under the sun; and that is to study Torah for which he will be rewarded in the world to come. For Judaism the primacy of the Torah and the belief in the world to come constituted two basic premises of the faith which provided the essential hermeneutical "filters" through which the book was read to make it more "orthodox".

In addition, the epilogue of the book Qohelet seemed to agree with the primacy of Torah over all (cf. 12:9-14) and assisted in retaining the aura of canonicity which at times became controversial as the two Rabbinic texts quoted earlier demonstrated:

...And the School of R. Jannai commented: 'UNDER THE SUN' he has none, but he has it (sc. profit) before the sun.

R. Huna and R Aha said in the name of R Hilfai: A man's labour is 'UNDER THE SUN' but his reward is above the sun. R Judan said: 'UNDER THE SUN' he has no profit but he he has it above the sun.

According to Ginsburg (1970:46) the interpretation of the book as polemical or apologetical is also attested in the readings of Ibn Ezra who interprets the message as follows: "the Lord inspired Solomon to explain these things, and to teach the right way and to show that all the devices of man are vanity, that the fear of God can alone make him happy, and that this fear can only be obtained by the study of wisdom".

According to Vajda (1971:1-2), Saadia Gaon never wrote a commentary on Ecclesiastes but did quote from him on occasion. He never doubted the orthodoxy of this "Solomon", but he does interpret the book in a benign way. Thus, an old device appears: certain opinions in the book were not held by Solomon himself but were those of fools whom he quoted in order to refute.²⁸

At the end of Saadia's *Book of Beliefs and Opinions* there appears a remarkably full view of Ecclesiastes to elucidate Gaon's view of proper conduct. Gaon also interpreted the many unorthodox statements in the book like this: "these utterances did not represent his own [i.e. Solomon's] point of view but were a recounting quotation by him

²⁷ This is clear from the way the arguments are constructed in the Targum.

²⁸ Such as in 9:3-6 where Qohelet apparently denies belief in immortality.

of the speech of the foolish and of the insane thoughts entertained by them in their hearts" (419; cf. also 275).

What once passed as a commentary of Saadia on Qohelet has been shown to be a summary of a commentary by Salmon b. Jeruhim. Vajda has published a translation of the commentary by Salmon and also one by another Karaite, Yefet b. Eli (both from the tenth century). Salmon's views can be summarised under five points: the vanity of this world; the emphasis on life beyond death; the pursuit of wisdom over folly, the importance of good works and the punishment and reward of the next world (cf. Vajda 1971:12-13). Yefet shares many of the concerns of Salmon such as the concern with the law and the victory of justice in the world to come. Also, there is a wide diversity amongst modern Jewish commentators, from Moses Mendlesohn (1786) to Sameul Luzatto (1865) as can be seen in the summary of the later history of interpretation given by Ginsberg (1970:78-98).

As for the Christian interpretation of the book, the following may be noted. The works of Hippolytus of Rome and of Origen on Qohelet have been preserved in only a few fragments (see Leanza 1988:35). The earliest²⁹ extant work is by Gregory Thaumaturgus (cf. Jarick 1990:309-316). His *Metaphrasis* is an extremely free paraphrase of Ecclesiastes, and he speaks in the first person, like Qohelet. He readily brings out many of the difficulties of the human condition underscored in the work. However, he generally gives a twist to the more refractory reflections that do not sit well with Christian orthodoxy. Thus, commenting on 2:16, he remarks, "There is nothing common to the wise and the fool, whether it be human memory or God's reward. The end comes upon human things even when they seem to be just beginning. The wise person never participates in the same end as the fool" (cf. Jarick 1990:48-54).

Thus, the sting is once again generally taken out of Qohelet's statements, and at one point (on Eccl. 9:1-3), Gregory asserts, "Now I think these are the thoughts of and deceits and pretences of fools" (Jarick 1990:226-228). And as Murphy (1992:1) notes, this distinction between the thought of Qohelet and the views of other he is refuting is continued in Gregory of Nyssa, and Gregory the Great, right onto modern times. The principle of several opinions being represented in Qohelet has also received classical expression in the Dialogues of Gregory the Great (1959:193-194): "This book, then is called "the preacher" because in it Solomon makes the feelings of the disorganised people his own in order to search into and give expression to the thoughts that come to their untutored minds perhaps by way of temptation".³⁰

The next interesting Christian interpreter was the Latin father of the Church better known for his translation of the Bible into Latin. Jerome wrote in a preface to his commentary on Qohelet that five years before, in Rome, he had read and explained Ecclesiastes to a certain Blesilla, "to provoke her to contempt of the world". Her request

²⁹ This excludes the New Testament which, though apparently not containing any quotations from Qohelet, possibly alludes to it at times (cf. Rom 8).

³⁰ Gregory continues in this manner and finally justifies his claim by referring to the epilogue of the book which he somewhat distorts as amounting to being the words of a preacher to a congregation of "disorganised" fools whom he (i.e. Qohelet) impersonated in the main body of the book but now calls to repentance as he reminds them about the end of the matter which is the fear of God and the keeping of his commandments. All this he does to remind the people of and to coax their souls into the denial of earthly pleasures.

for a “little commentary” was never honoured, one reason being her sudden death. Now Jerome writes his commentary in Jerusalem, addressing Paula and Eustochium. He distinguishes assiduously between the literal (*haec juxta litteram*) and spiritual meaning (*secundum intelligentiam spiritalem*) as he proceeds with a verse-by-verse commentary (cf. Murphy 1992:li).

Many of his comments show him coming to grips with the literal meaning of the text. Of Eccl. 1:12 he asks, “If God made everything very good, how is it vanity?” He answers that everything is good per se, but vanity when compared to God. Jerome replies to the difficulty of 3:18-21³¹ by denying that Ecclesiastes said that the soul perishes with the body, but in fact, “before the coming of Christ all things were brought *ad inferos*”. In commenting on 9:7-8, he recognises a “personification” at work: “...in style of orators and poets” the author says certain things (that are unacceptable from Jerome’s point of view). Then, “as it were not from the person of another but from his own person”, Qohelet is reinterpreted from an orthodox point of view.

While noting the influence of Origen and the allegorical approach on Jerome, Leanza (1988:269 - 281) correctly insists upon the fairly liberal interpretation found in Jerome’s commentary: erudite philology, command of the ancient Greek versions, lessons from his Jewish tutor, Bar-Aqiba, etc.³² Leanza also remarks that a certain eclecticism exists in Jerome. Thus, he borrows from Gregory Thaumaturgus the idea of a fictitious dialogue that Solomon is supposedly having with atheists and Epicureans. While Jerome has recourse to allegory to get out of the difficulty (e.g. Eccl. 8:15), he does not avoid the problems provided by other texts such as 2:24-26 and 3:12-13. Leanza also points to the comment on 12:1 and 12:6-8 to indicate that Jerome’s general position is that Qohelet maintains that all is vanity, but it is right to have licit enjoyment, even if this is ultimately also in vain (1988:261).³³

The influence of Jerome’s commentary was dominant in the rest of the patristic and medieval period (Murphy 1992:li). However, Smalley (1986:42-43) has called attention to the significance of the commentary by Bonaventure (d. 1274). This book gave Bonaventure “an opportunity to enlarge on his favourite theme: wisdom as a means to sanctification. As usual, the “contempt of the world” is discussed and Bonaventure raises the problem of how the world can be despised as mere vanity. He has recourse to a simile where he uses the analogy of how a woman can hardly love her ring more than the lover who gave it to her to explain how one can disdain the world if one also loves God. Vanity, for Bonaventure, is thus vanity in a relative but not absolute sense of the word. According to Bonaventure the message of Qohelet is that “If a person wishes to be happy, he must love future goods and despise those of the present” (Monti 1979:58).³⁴

³¹ When Qohelet claims that humans are like animals and neither has immortality (cf. 3:16 - 20).

³² The statement of Jerome in his comment on Eccl. 1:14 is meaningful: “necessity compels us to discuss the Hebrew terms more frequently than we wish. But we cannot know the meaning unless we learn it from the words”.

³³ According to Murphy (1992:li) the fact remains that Jerome did not properly reckon with the Old Testament’s understanding of Sheol.

³⁴ This view reflects the traditional *contemptus mundi*, which, however, is relativised by the eschatological perspective. Furthermore, according to Murphy (1992:lii), Bonaventure was particularly influenced by Jerome and the homilies of Hugh of St Victor which governed (i.e. Jerome’s) interpretation of Qohelet.

The last of the medieval commentators was also one of the first moderns: the Franciscan Nicholas of Lyra (circa 1349), whose *Postillae Perpetuae* was the first printed Biblical commentary on Ecclesiastes (Rome, 1471-1472). He concludes that the fear of God is the true source of happiness, in contrast to wealth and other topics treated by Qohelet. The beginning of the Reformation was marked by no less than three commentaries on Qohelet authored by Brenz (1528), Luther (1532) and Melancton (1550) (cf. Kallas 1979). These three reformers united in rejecting the influence of Jerome and particularly the monastic interpretation of Qohelet in the spirit of *contemptus mundi*. For Luther, what is condemned in the book is "the depraved affection and desire of us men." He writes, the summary and aim of the book, then, is as follows: "Solomon wants to put us at peace and to give us a quiet mind in the everyday affairs and business of this life so that we may live contentedly in the present without care and yearning about the future." (Luther 1972:15:7-8). Primarily, however, Luther sees and uses Qohelet as an argument against free will.³⁵

Many passages of Qohelet were deprived of their bite, such as 3:19-20, where the similarity of man and beast is said to be only "in appearance". Of course, the theological concerns of the Reformation are frequently to the fore, as when Luther hails 9:6 as proof against "the invocation of the saints and the fiction of purgatory". Melancton, although he never mentions Luther's commentary nor joins the controversy over free will likewise opposed his interpretation to "the ravings of the monks" (1847:100). He somehow found a Christian doctrine of providence in the book: God cares for his creation (1847:95). Brenz comments on Luther's German translation (completed 1524), he too is against the monastic interpretation and, with Luther, manage to use Qohelet in their arguments against free will.³⁶ According to Brenz, Qohelet serves as an addition to the Mosaic Law to teach us that humans cannot do anything virtuous on their own and that, as Paul said regarding righteousness, that circumcision avails nothing. Once again, the theological concerns of the reformation dominated the reading (cf. also Murphy 1992:liii).

J. de Pineda (1637), wrote what Ginsburg (1970:130) characterised as a "gigantic commentary" without equal on Qohelet. It is a mine for patristic and medieval sources and reflects the pious interpretation of the vanity of the earthly compared with the heavenly, the theme in imitation of Christ (Book 1; Chapter 1) attributed to T. a Kempis (1471). The commentary of C. a Lapide (1639), a contemporary of Pineda, was in the same direction. After them, it was the polymath H. Grotius (1645) who was acclaimed as the first of the moderns to deny Solomonic authorship to Qohelet. In his *Annotationes in Vetus Testamentum* (1875-76:434) he claims that the book "was written in the name of the king as one who was penitent." The motif of Solomon's "conversion" in the production of Qohelet appeared early on, especially in Jewish interpretation (Targum, Rashi, et al.).

Ginsburg's summary of the interpretation of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries indicates a relatively conservative and even traditional interpretation of Qohelet, especially among English commentators. The same trend is illustrated in the work of Calmet (1752). The remarks of Bishop R. Lowth (1815:342) about Qohelet are particularly true and appropriate today: "scarcely any two commentators have agreed

³⁵ Which thus served him in his dispute with Erasmus.

³⁶ The favourite passage was 3:1 - 5 which includes Qohelet's famous poem on appointed times.

concerning the plan of the work, and accurate division of it into parts or sections". On the basis of this selective overview of the history of the interpretation of Qohelet and his message Murphy (1992:lv) comes to the following conclusions:if there is one feature that was common to all periods in the history of the interpretation of the message of Qohelet it is that of selective emphasis. In *Scepticisme Israelite*, J. Pedersen (1931:317-370) concludes on the history of the interpretation of Qohelet that "very different types have found their own image in Ecclesiastes..."

Murphy (1992:lv) also notes that two things especially characterised virtually all the interpretations: a selective emphasis on that part of the book relevant to the interpreter's religious context and a reinterpretation of those passages which seemed to clash with what is dogmatically believed to be true. As can be imagined, the selective emphasis in the interpretation of the message usually focused on the epilogue which endorses the fear of God and the keeping of his commandments. This, with the main uncomfortable interpretative challenges being the assertion of vanity, the same fate for the righteous and the wicked as well as those passages that denied post mortem existence in any meaningful sense.

Murphy (1992:lv) also notes that these observations enable us to understand many of the contemporary exegetical trends and that there is hardly anything new "under the sun". Thus, the theories of composite authorship, dialogues, pious redactions, pseudonymity, have all been heard before and many people have exhausted their creative genius to try to understand the book and, more urgently, make it support what they wish it to say. Moreover, while one may laugh and wonder at the preposterous interpretations of others, any astute and self-critical student of this history of (mis?) interpretation who dares to engage in its ongoing dialogue may well wonder whether the popular and "indisputable" theories of our own day will share the same fate.

2.2 POSSIBLE EXPLANATIONS FOR THE LACK OF CONSENSUS

The following variables which exists as part of every interpreter's cognitive constitution can be mentioned as a strong form of influence when attempting to analyse the book of Qohelet:

2.2.1 Theology

Jewish or Christian interpreters, who believe that the tradition about scripture is infallible, will not consider the possibility of non-Solomonic authorship. Interpreters who are more critical will have no preference on this matter and will try to discover information of such matters via a close reading of the text. Readers who believe that the Bible is literally the "word of God" in the sense of implying an internally completely harmonious and orthodox system of propositions will read Qohelet different from those who recognise Biblical diversity and have a non-fundamentalist view of the Bible. If there is no prior demand to read Qohelet as being in line with other Biblical theologies, it makes a big difference as to how one reads the text.

2.2.2 Methodology

Different exegetical methods might assess the book in different ways and ask different questions regarding its contents. An allegorical or christological interpretation will

obviously yield different results than a historical or ideological-critical reading of the book. While some concerns and conclusions may overlap the questions one asks and the tools of interpretation one utilises often play a definite role in determining what is, in the end, the results of the particular interpretation. Certain or most exegetical methods, however, are very selective and reductionist in their focus and can blind the reader to the riches and other dimensions also part of the text.

2.2.3 Tradition

Both the spiritual tradition of the interpreter and the tradition of the contemporary academic community's consensus will influence to a very large extent how the book is read, what questions are considered relevant and what methods and conclusions are judged to be legitimate and orthodox. Most critiques of individual deviations from the consensus often have more to do with the fact that it deviates from popular interpretation or sacred tradition than with the quality and logic of the arguments put forward in that research.

2.2.4 Knowledge

The interpreter's knowledge on the subjects of language, hermeneutics, the history of interpretation, exegetical methods, scholarly opinions, Israelite history, the Near Eastern literature and its cultural world of discourse, the contents of the book itself, other related academic disciplines and sciences, etc. plays a determinative role in how the interpreter will read the book and what he or she can actually "see" written there. Before the discoveries of Near Eastern texts, much of the Bible and especially the Old Testament appeared to be saying something other than what interpreters taking the ANE background of the text into account have discovered. In all interpretive communities, the text sooner or later becomes domesticated. When people began to compare the Bible with other texts from that period, a whole new world of interpretative possibilities emerged not previously available.

2.2.5 Psychology

To a greater or lesser extent, the way we feel about ourselves, the world, other people, as well as the problems and joys which intrude on our consciousness during our reading of the text, all influence our interpretation. Also, the human need for self justification, self-assertion and self-preservation are not psychological needs which cease to function when one reads a text and try to convince oneself and others regarding what the case in point may be. One does not need the hermeneutics of suspicion of Marx, Nietzsche and Freud or the theories of ideological criticism to know that interpreters are not innocent, wholly objective and consistently rational people. Often, what we find in a text depends on what we expect to find or what we would like to find. No man is an island and no interpreter is free of psychological variables impinging on his or her quests of discovery.

2.2.6 Textuality

As a result of the hiatic nature of textuality, there are bound to be different perspectives and interpretations of what the author may have intended to communicate to his original audience. Furthermore, we can verify virtually nothing of what we think we know in

terms of even the most basic exegetical issues. As a result, we are left to speculate on many issues as responsibly, objectively and scientifically as we possibly can. However, since final absolute verification is impossible and since interpretations are always hypothetical, tentative and issuing from imperfect human beings with different ideas, assumptions, beliefs, agendas and experiences, there is bound to be some disagreement. A text means nothing for us until we interpret it. However, the hermeneutical variables that play role in the interpretative process are complex enough to ensure pluralism in the academic community as long as research continues.

2.3 CONCLUSION

In this chapter I have tried to indicate that there appears to be disagreement and problems associated with virtually every type of question that interpreters have attempted to answer regarding even the most basic features of the book Qohelet. Regarding the matters of authorship, date, setting, language, translation, meaning, structure, etc., there seem to be as many diverse opinions as there are “authoritative” interpreters. This being the case, the purpose of this chapter was not to claim that there cannot be any sure facts or that this study will provide irrefutable solutions to all these problems. Rather, it was intended, on the one hand, to locate the research problem with which this study is concerned within a broader context. Although my purpose with this study is not the provision of answers to any of these general questions, it would be an understatement to say that, if my hypothesis is correct, some popular opinions on these issues might be overdue for revisioning.

CHAPTER 3

INTRATEXTUAL JUSTIFICATION I

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I wish to provide an introductory discussion on the "sun imagery" in the book of Qohelet. Through intratextual analysis I aim to justify my claim regarding the significance of the sun imagery within the overall contents of Qohelet's discourse. The identification of alleged allusions to ANE solar mythology and symbolism in Qohelet's "sun imagery" will be presented later on (chapter 7) after the possible intertextual parallels has been identified (chapter 5) and an excursion to solar mythology in the OT have been dealt with (chapter 6).

3.2 THE FREQUENCY OF S.I.³⁷ IN QOHELET

3.2.1 Introduction

Many commentaries on Qohelet do, in fact, provide some information regarding the S.I. in the book. At best, however, this is usually confined to a marginal note on the constant recurrence of the phrase "תחת השמש" in the book. Reading commentaries in a synopsis and comparing the information given in this regard shows a remarkable disagreement regarding a supposedly simple matter such as the number of times the aforementioned phrase occurs throughout the book. Thus, the reader will discover the following conflicting data concerning the number of occasions the phrase "תחת השמש" features in Qohelet:

- 25 times - Barton (1908:70)
- 27 times - Loretz (1964:180)
- 29 times³⁸ - Murphy (1992:06)

This is an observation limited to those scholars who do actually consider it insightful to dispense with such data. The differences in opinion on this issue may be less due to an inability to count than as a result of accepting or rejecting the possibility of several text critical emendations. On a number of occasions, the phrase "תחת השמש" is either seen as an unnecessary extra (cf. 2:18-22) or otherwise, as having been supposedly and deliberately modified by a later hand (as in 1:12, 2:3, 3:1, 8:14, 16).

As noted earlier, "תחת השמש" is indeed one of the key phrases in Qohelet. That it occurs about thirty times in twelve chapters is no small matter. Indeed, no other "phrase" is attested nearly as frequently.³⁹ Another interesting observation is that there are references to "שמש" in every one of the 12 chapters. Thus, the S.I. is not limited to

³⁷ S.I. = "sun imagery", i.e. implicit and explicit references to the "sun" in the book (on which, see below).

³⁸ This is the number preferred by most scholars.

³⁹ To be sure, there are individual words and particles which occur more than the word "sun". However, as far as fixed phraseology is concerned, not even the phrases featuring the popular word "vapour" outnumber the frequency of occurrence of "under the sun".

one section of the book but occurs throughout.

3.2.1 The distribution of Q.S.I.⁴⁰

Another way of appreciating the pervasiveness of the explicit sun imagery in Qohelet is via a compact albeit elaborated form of statistical quantification:

CHAPTER	NO. OF TIMES E.S.I. ⁴¹ OCCURS		LOCATION	
NO.	תחת השמש	/ השמש	תחת השמש	/ השמש
1	3 times (4?)	2 times	1:3, 9, 14 (13?)	1:5 (2)
2	6 times (7?)	-	2: (3?) 11, 17, 18, 19, 20, 22	-
3	1 time (2?)	-	3:16 (?)	-
4	4 times	-	4:1, 3, 7, 15	-
5	2 times	-	5:13,18	-
6	2 times	1 time	6:1,12	6:5
7	-	1 time	-	7:11
8	4 times	-	8:9, 14 (?), 15 (2), 16? 17	-
9	6 times	-	9:3, 6, 9 (2), 11, 13	-
10	1 time	-	10:5	-
11	-	1 time	-	11:7
12	-	1 time	-	12:2

From this data, it is interesting to note that:

- S.I. features in every chapter (1 > 6 times);
- There are two types of S.I.: The phrase "תחת השמש" and the noun "השמש";
- In those chapters where the phrase "תחת השמש" fails to appear, there are still references to "השמש" (chapters. 7, 11, 12);
- The phrase "תחת השמש" occurs 6 times in some chapters (chapters. 2, 9);
- The phrase "תחת השמש" sometimes occurs twice in the same verse! (8:15, 9:9);
- There are cases where text-critical emendation might increase the occurrence frequency of the phrase "תחת השמש" (1:13; 2:3; 3:1; 8:14,16).⁴²

3.2.2 A concordance of Q.S.I.

Apart from the aforementioned manner of perceiving the significance of Qohelet's sun imagery, it is also possible to demonstrate its significance by way of a concordance featuring the verses in which the imagery occurs. A concordance of the texts was already provided in chapter 1 in the identification of the research problem. The listing of particular verses is repeated here for practical purposes, as the reader will be referred back to these texts on several occasions throughout this chapter.

⁴⁰ Q.S.I.= Qohelet's "sun imagery".

⁴¹ E.S.I.= explicit "sun imagery".

⁴² Whether or not the emendations are accepted makes little overall difference as far as the frequency of the S.I. is concerned.

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)

זרחה השמש ובא השמש ואל מקמו שואף זרחה הוא שם

"THE SUN rises and THE SUN sets; to its place it pants, there to rise." (1:5)

מה שהיה הוא שיהיה ... ואין כל חדש תחת השמש

"What has been is what will be... there is nothing new 'UNDER THE SUN'." (1:9)

ונתתי את לבי לדרוש ולתור בחכמה כל אשר געשה תחת השמים

"I applied my mind to investigating...all that is done under the heavens / (SUN?)" (1:13)

ראיתי את כל המעשים שנעשו תחת השמש והנה הכל הכל

"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)

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

"Then I turned to all my handiwork...I had so actively toiled for...there is no profit 'UNDER THE SUN'..." (2:11)

ושנאתי את חיים כי רע עלי המעשה שנעשה תחת השמש

"So I hated life, because whatever happens 'UNDER THE SUN' was evil for me." (2:17)

שנאתי אני את כל עמלי שאני עמל תחת השמש

"I hated the fruit of the toil for which I had toiled 'UNDER THE SUN' (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 with which I had toiled 'UNDER THE SUN'." (2:20)

כי מה הוה 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)

לכל זמן ועת לכל חפץ תחת השמים

"For everything there is a moment and there is a time for every affair under the heavens / SUN?" (3:1)

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 נעשם 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 עדן 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'..." (4:7)

...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)

יש רעה חולה ראיתי תחת השמש עשר שמור לבעליו לרעתו

"There is a grievous evil, which I have seen 'UNDER THE SUN': wealth kept by the owner to his own hurt..." (5:12)

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)

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

"There is an evil I have seen 'UNDER THE SUN' and it is grievous for humans..." (6:1)

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

"...though it sees not SUN nor knows anything, it has more rest than he..." (6:5)

...אשר מי יגיד לאדם מה יהיה אחריו תחת השמש

"...for who can tell them what will come after them 'UNDER THE SUN'?" (6:12)

...תובה חכמה עם נחלה ויותר לראי השמש

"...wisdom is as good with an inheritance and profitable for those who see THE SUN..." (7:11).

**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).

**יש הבל אשר נעשה על הערץ אשר יש צדקים אשר מגיע כמעשה הרשעם ויש רשעם שמגיע
אלהם כמעשה הצדקים**

"There is a vapour that is done on the earth / 'UNDER THE SUN'?: there are just who are treated as if they acted wickedly and wicked who are treated as if they acted justly..." (8:14)

...אשר אין טוב לאדם תחת השמש כי אם לאכל ולשתות ולשמוח...

"...there is nothing better for a human 'UNDER THE SUN' than to eat and drink and be happy..." (8:15)

...והוא ילונן בעמלו ימי חייו אשר נתן לו האלהים תחת השמש

"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 שמש
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)

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..." (9:3)

**גם אהבתם גם שנאתם גם קנאתם כבר אבדה וחלק אין להם עוד לעלם בכל אשר נעשה תחת
השמש**

"Their love, their hate, their jealousy are long gone, and they have no portion ever again in all that is done 'UNDER THE SUN'..." (9:6)

ראה חיים אם אשה אשר אהבת כל ימי חיי הבלך אשר נתן לך תחת השמש...

"Enjoy life with a wife whom you love all the days of the vain life that you are given 'UNDER THE SUN'..." (9:9)

...כי הוא חלקך בחיים ובעמלך אשר אתה עמל תחת השמש...

"... for that is your portion in life, and for the toil with which you toil 'UNDER THE SUN'..." (9:9)

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:..." (9:13)

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

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

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

Sweet is the light and pleasant it is for the eyes to see THE SUN...but remember that the days of darkness will be many... (11:7)

...עד אשר לא תחשך השמש...

"...before the darkening of THE SUN..." (12:2)

At least two important observations can be made upon reading through these examples of E.S.I.:

- The phrase "תחת השמש" is inextricably linked with the book's main themes e.g., the cosmic order, life, work, justice, retribution, toil, the social order, time, knowledge, happiness, wealth, death, etc.
- The restrictive and inclusive geographical interpretations are untenable: The inclusive geographical interpretation which claims that the phrase "תחת השמש" is reducible to "everywhere" / "on earth" is discredited on a number of occasions where such a rendering is nonsensical (cf. 2:11, 18; 9:11). The evangelical interpretation which claims that Qohelet implies with this phrase an alternative mode of existence (life with God), or a realm where all is not "vapour", is demonstrated as erroneous by the meaning of the S.I. in 1:14, 3:1, 8:15; 9:11.

Other texts which demonstrate that the inclusive and restrictive interpretations fail include:

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

"Then I turned to all my handiwork...I had so actively toiled for...there is no profit 'UNDER THE SUN'..." (2:11).

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)

ושבתי אני וראיתי את כל העשקים אשר נעשם 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)

...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)

...כי הוא חלקך בחיים ובעמלך אשר אתה עמל תחת השמש...

"...for that is your portion in life, and for the toil with which you toil 'UNDER THE SUN'..." (9:9)

In all these texts, the domain designated by the phrase "תחת השמש" can hardly be seen as synonymous with either "everywhere" or a domain of secularism.

3.3 IMPLICIT SUN IMAGERY (I.S.I.)

All the given instances above are only examples of the *explicit* occurrences of S.I. in Qohelet. There appear to be many other instances where its presence seems to be *implicit*. I.S.I. occurs, like E.S.I., in two categories:

Category 1: where the phrase "תחת השמש" is implicit.

Category 2: other direct or indirect allusions to "השמש".

For example, category 1 is exemplified in all those instances where Qohelet undertakes an action identical to that which is otherwise described in terms of what he saw / found "תחת השמש". These include those occasions when:

- He remarks on something he saw (ראיתי)⁴³
- He gives an example of something that is הבל⁴⁴
- He thinks to himself (אמרתי אני בלבי)⁴⁵

⁴³ Cf. 1:14; 2:13; 3:10; 4:1; 6:1; 7:15; 8:17; 9:11 and *passim*.

⁴⁴ Cf. 1:2; 2:23; 2:26; 5:9; 7:6 and *passim*.

⁴⁵ Cf. 1:12; 1:16; 2:1; 8:9; 9:1 and *passim*.

For instance, as noted earlier, in 2:1-10 where king Qohelet describes all his efforts and activities to attain wisdom and pleasure the S.I. is implied in each and every verse as the summary in 2:11 confirms. Moreover, many of the texts featuring E.S.I. are introduced with the phrase "...**ושבתי וראיתי תחת השמש**". This use of the word "ושבתי" seems to imply that the reader should automatically assume that what the author saw was phenomena "תחת השמש". Or when Qohelet says, for instance, "את הכל ריאתי בימי הבלי" or "כל עמל האדם לפיו", these words are simply synonymous with, "את הכל ריאתי בימי הבלי (תחת השמש)" or "כל עמל האדם לפיו (תחת השמש)".

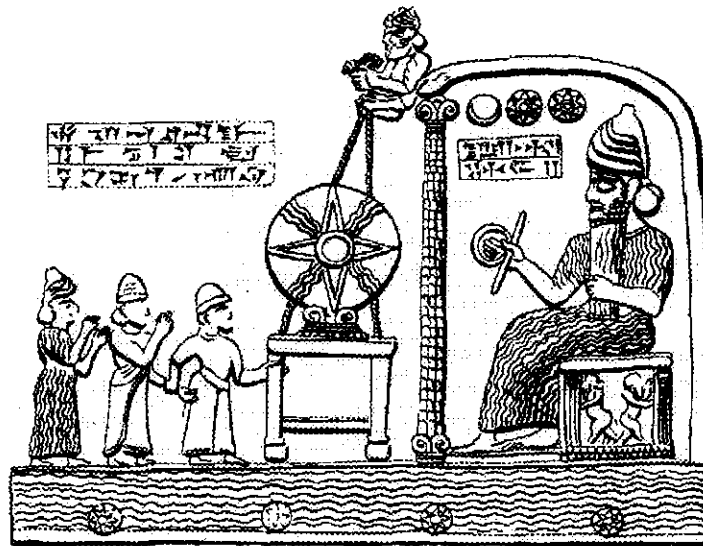


Fig 3.1 King Qohelet judging under the sun? No, this illustration depicts the Mesopotamian god Shamash (right) looking at his icon - the sun. On the left are his faithful worshippers (cf. Pritchard 1954:178)

To be sure, virtually the entire book consists of a reflection or discussion of what Qohelet observes "תחת השמש". This can be deduced from his occasional summaries Qohelet provides where he tells the reader about what he was engaged in (cf. 1:2-3; 1:12-14; 6:12).⁴⁶ Thus, the existence of I.S.I. seems to be implied via the presence of E.S.I. in summary statements, recapitulations or conclusions in the text. Therefore, texts like the following, for example, imply that everything Qohelet had to say pertains to what happens "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)

ונתתי את לבי לדרוש ולתור בחכמה כל אשר נעשה תחת השמים

"I applied my mind to investigating...all that is done under the heavens / SUN?" (1:13)

⁴⁶ These are instances where Qohelet seems to give a summary of his thoughts and activities. Contra Eaton (1983:45) who wrote that when Qohelet speaks of God, "under the sun" references disappear into the background. That this is not the case can be seen both in terms of the E.S.I. (1:12 - 14; 8:16 - 17; 9:9; etc.) and the I.S.I. (on which, see the discussion of I.S.I. 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)

כי מה הוה 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).

...אשר אין טוב לאדם תחת השמש כי אם לאכל ולשתות ולשמות...

"...there is nothing better for a human 'UNDER THE SUN' than to eat and drink and be happy..." (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)

These examples of some of the E.S.I. also demonstrate the *implicit* omnipresence of the phrase "תחת השמש" in Qohelet. It implies that all he saw and thought and talked about, all his wisdom and advice and all the phenomena that vexed and baffled and amazed him are all things which he associated with the realm he designates as "תחת השמש" (cf. also Crenshaw 1988:89; Murphy 1992:07). Therefore, the constant repetition of the phrase "תחת השמש" is but "tip of the iceberg", so to speak. Below the entire surface lies the I.S.I. which, in turn, implies the omnipresent pervasiveness of S.I. in the text.

While the entire book and its message is not reducible to E.S.I. and I.S.I., and while I agree that the main message concerns the "הבל" nature of life and the world, it would be just as reductionist and incomplete to divorce this claim of Qohelet from the S.I. which qualifies it (see below). Thus, the message of Qohelet is not simply reducible to "הכל הבל". In order to do justice to the role and function and nature of the E.S.I. and I.S.I. in the book, the bare minimum would have to be, "הכל הבל ... תחת השמש".

3.4 POSSIBLE FUNCTIONS OF REPETITION AS MANIFESTED IN Q.S.I.

The literary phenomenon of repetitive phraseology is more often associated with poetry rather than with prose (cf. Watson 1986:274-275). While the book Qohelet certainly contains sections of poetry, the phrase "תחת השמש" always occurs in the context of prosaic accounts of what Qohelet saw or descriptions of what he was doing (cf. Murphy 1992:xxviii). As a literary technique, repetition can have a variety of functions, yet not all

of these functions may be operative on every occasion. As far as the repetition of the “sun imagery” in the book of Qohelet is concerned, the following functions can be identified:

3.4.1 To remind

When Qohelet says repeatedly that what he saw were phenomena and activities “תחת השמש”, he is reminding the audience of “where” he observed certain scenarios. By thus constantly reminding the audience that all his descriptions relate to phenomena “תחת השמש”, they are reminded to interpret all of *what* Qohelet was concerned with in the context of *where* he saw it. This influences the interpretation of *what* he says he saw.

3.4.2 To emphasise

Repetition of the S.I. also has the obvious effect of *emphasising* what the repeated phrase wishes to communicate (cf. Watson 1986:277). By constantly emphasising *where* he saw what he did, Qohelet makes it clear that his use of the phrase “תחת השמש” is not just window dressing. If he never used the phrase or if he used it only once or twice as in a summary of his activities, it would have been taken for granted that what he observed related to what he saw *in the world*. However, when he employs the phrase “תחת השמש” *thirty* times, he is clearly emphasising the significance of the particular expression, including the *solar* elements.

3.4.3 To include

By repeatedly telling us that he saw things “תחת השמש”, Qohelet makes sure that his audience understands that everything he saw was located or included in the domain “תחת השמש”. By implicitly or explicitly including the phrase in all his descriptions of his observations, he is simultaneously including also the issues with which the S.I. is combined in the scenarios featured in the realm “תחת השמש” (cf. Fox 1999:165).

3.4.4 To focus attention

By emphasising not once, but many times, that what he saw was what was observable “תחת השמש”, Qohelet assists the audience in grasping his message by focussing their attention not only on *what* he saw but *also where* he saw it. By doing this, the focus of attention shifts from where the reader merely takes cognisance of *what* it was that Qohelet saw to the point where he or she is forced to reconsider the significance of this in light of the incessant repetition of *where* Qohelet saw it.

3.4.5 To indicate significance

When someone repeats a phrase constantly it usually denotes the significance of the particular phrase as a hermeneutical aid through which to interpret correctly the meaning of the message that is being communicated in combination with it (Watson 1986:75). Through repetition of the phrase “תחת השמש” as the denotation of *where* he saw what he did, Qohelet also indicates the added significance of *what* he saw. In other

words, what makes that which he had seen so significant is largely due to the fact and recognition of *where* he saw it. He did not just see injustice, oppression, ignorance, etc. The fact that he saw injustice, oppression, ignorance, etc. "תחת השמש" - that is what he believes makes his observations somehow significant.



Fig 3.2 Repetition of sun imagery indicates its significance (cf. Keel 1978:214)

3.4.6 To establish themes / motifs

By repeating the phrase "תחת השמש" and using it as a descriptive qualifier of *where* he saw what he did, Qohelet establishes the themes and motifs that constitute the heart of his message. When he tells us *what* it was that he had seen and also, *where* he had observed this, it is the juxtapositioning / combining of the answers to the questions of "what?" and "where?" that establishes the themes of the book and also what they mean in their particular contexts. A failure of readers to take note of Qohelet's qualification pertaining to *what* he saw, and by subsequently interpreting Qohelet's observations abstracted into isolated themes, might ultimately be distortion and misinterpretation of his message.

3.4.7 To designate ambiguity

Sometimes, when an author keeps repeating a phrase he may be hinting at the fact that he is using the phrase ambiguously. More than the supposedly obvious meaning may be implied (cf. Watson 1986:77). Depending on the frame of reference from which the phrase is interpreted, the audience can, on their own their own religio-cultural background knowledge easily pick up traces of ambiguity, if indeed this was intended. This may occur when a particular phrase can be used in various contexts and in the description of a variety of phenomena. One subtle means of designating ambiguity on such occasions may be by utilising the particular words in such a manner that a literal or singular interpretation of the particular phrase and its related discourse is not able to make sense of what is being communicated and cannot account for the use of repetition. The failure to explain the significance of the words based on *prima facie* assumptions may imply that the author could be employing ambiguous language in his

discourse.⁴⁷

3.4.8 To imply allusion

By repeating the phrase “תחת השמש”, Qohelet allows the audience to wonder whether the phrase is used in the exact same way it usually features in everyday discourse or whether, by constant repetition and a particular intratextual context, the author might be hinting to the fact that he is utilising it in another sense. For those who do have the necessary background knowledge and familiarity with a variety of possible associative meanings that can be linked to the phrase that is being repeated, there is always the satisfying possibility of recognising an allusion to a world of discourse that is only accessible to those who are familiar with the relevant connotative referential possibilities (cf. Watson 1986:300-301).



Fig 3.3 Living under the sun: could the repetition of sun imagery in Qohelet be indicative of the possible presence of allusions to ANE solar mythology / symbolism? (cf. Keel 1978:194)

3.4.9 To signal wordplay

Sometimes, when a word or a phrase is repeated in such a way that its recurrence appears unnecessary, something more may be involved than the author’s amnesia, cultural idiom or, a lack of aesthetic sensitivity or writing skills. More often than not, instead of denoting incompetence on the part of the author, repetition can act as a subtle means of coaxing the audience to explore the motive for and meaning of the

⁴⁷ Thus, I do not feel that the interpretation of “under the sun” as “on earth” is totally wrong in the denotative sense. But, with this rendering, many connotative referential possibilities of “sun” is eliminated thus resulting in a failure to recognise those connotations and allusions if the language was meant to be ambiguous. Thus, while the domain “under the sun” is indeed the same domain denoted by the phrase “on earth” there is a large area of meaning which is not the same and which is lost in the reinterpretation from sub solar to terrestrial reference. To use an analogy, if someone from the Orient tells me he sat under a Bo tree when he attained enlightenment, it would be only partly correct to say that he sat on the ground when he attained enlightenment. This re-rendering of “under the Bo tree” as “on the ground”, while correct in one sense, is a disastrous reduction of what he was saying in as much as it eliminates the allusion and parallel to the story of the enlightenment of Gautama Buddha.

repetitious language (cf. Watson 1986:78).

If utilised only once, the audience might not grasp the wordplay involved when a phrase is indeed intentionally ambiguous and where the obvious meaning of the words is not all that the author has in mind. The failure to recognise wordplay is exactly what would happen in the hermeneutical process unless interpreters are provided with some kind of hint that more might be involved than meets the eye. One way to provide such a hint is via repetition of the phrase involved in the wordplay.

3.4.10 To provide qualification

As many interpreters of the “sun imagery” in the book have recognised, the phrase “תחת השמש” also serves to act as a qualifier to limit scope of the author’s references (cf. Murphy 1992:07). That there is not simply injustice and ignorance, but that these lamentable realities are to be found “תחת השמש”, is a way of qualifying the statements regarding injustice and ignorance. On the other hand, contrary to traditional interpretations, the reiteration of *where* Qohelet saw *what* he saw was not done in order to establish a kind of dualism where, “תחת השמש” everything is “הבל”, but elsewhere it is not (cf. Fox 1999:65). Rather, it is an inclusive qualification linking the “הבל” with the domain “under the sun” in order to focus on what reality in that domain actually consists of. In other words, the qualification provided by the repetition does not intend to convey the idea that “תחת השמש” all is “הבל” but that elsewhere this is not the case. The repetition seems not to have been intended as a qualification with the purpose of implying a limitation of space. Rather the function of repetition in this instance appears to be that of inferring *associative properties*. In other words, what Qohelet observes is thus *associated* with the domain “under the sun” but not necessarily limited to that particular domain.

3.4.11 To assist in contextualisation

By continuously juxtapositioning *what* he saw with *where* he saw it, Qohelet establishes a context which in turn implies a certain frame of reference from which the reader is to make sense of the text. Meaning is always contextual and, without context, there is no way of telling what particular meaning or nuance or frame of reference a statement might imply (cf. Barr 1963). By classifying the injustice and ignorance that he saw as applicable to phenomena “תחת השמש”, Qohelet’s observations are to be understood in the context of ANE religio – cultural discourse of which his text, like all OT texts, is a prime example. As a result of contextualisation, there may be quite a difference when someone from contemporary westernised secular culture today claims to have observed injustice as opposed to when a person from the first millennium B.C. claims to have observed the same problem in a domain he constantly identifies as being “תחת השמש”.

3.4.12 To elucidate other related literary devices

Anyone who reads Qohelet will note that he used many keywords (Michel 1964:167-180; Murphy 1992:xxix). One of these is the image of הבל / “vapour”. Everyone also understands this concept to be a metaphor. The understanding of the meaning, function and significance of this particular metaphor is crucial since it constitutes the heart of the message that the author is trying to communicate (cf. Fox 1999:27-42). As I hope to be

demonstrate later on, an understanding of the meaning and significance of the “sun imagery” of the book, which always qualifies and contextualizes the “הבל” metaphor, may assist in providing an interesting and otherwise unrecognisable elucidation on what the meaning and function of the infamous “הבל” metaphor could possibly be. The understanding of the significance of the repetition of other words such as “see”, “heart”, “evil”, etc. in Qohelet may also be influenced by the manner in which the reader interprets the significance of the repetition of the phrase “תחת השמש”.

3.4.13 To link the main topics and disparate ideas

Because the “sun imagery” is so pervasive in Qohelet’s discourse, the way in which it is interpreted may influence how the issues of concern which the author deals with is understood. When one realises how the often the “sun imagery” is manifest with the arguments of the author concerning injustice, ignorance, etc., a certain cohesion in the discourse becomes manifested. In addition, it becomes easier to see how otherwise seemingly disparate ideas actually have a lot in common via its mutual relation to the book’s “sun imagery”.⁴⁸

3.4.14 To facilitate structural markers

Though the “sun imagery” can be found in every chapter, it does not seem to act throughout as a structural marker from which this feature of the book can be ascertained (cf. Wright 1983:32–43). There are some instances where the structure of certain parts of the book is indeed linked to introductory or concluding solar imagery but this is not always the case. To try to create a superficial structure of the book by ordering it around the repeated solar phraseology would be an illegitimate and forced attempt to make everything fit in a pan-solarist interpretation.

3.5 THE RELATION OF Q.S.I. TO IMPORTANT THEMES IN THE BOOK

3.5.1 Introduction

Several abstract concepts can be used to describe *what* Qohelet sees “תחת השמש”. In short he sees “vapour” – “תחת השמש” (1:2-3). However, he focuses on a variety of phenomena where it is not so much the phenomena which he observes that are הבל in as much as it is the particular way these phenomena are manifested in relation to certain assumptions about the cosmic and social orders (Fox 1999:35-42). Thus, while one can sum up Qohelet’s message by saying that “all is הבל”, there are other concepts which can be seen as constituting the basic issues referred to in the author’s discussion of what bothered him about the domain he designates as “תחת השמש”. Most interpreters would agree that one way to elaborate on the “all is הבל” summary is via the two concepts of “injustice” and “ignorance”.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Cf. the discussion by Fox (1999:150 - 151) on how the coherence and structure of the book Qohelet lies not so much in the formal structures assumed to be present by structural analysis but on a deeper, conceptual level.

⁴⁹ This is my own reduction and classification. It is not the only possible perspective on what the book is about. The justification for the choice of these two concepts (as well as the relevance it might have for the hypothesis of this study) will follow shortly.

Qohelet discusses many scenarios. These “topics” of Qohelet are abstracted differently by different interpreters.⁵⁰ Some prefer to speak of cosmology, anthropology, ethics and theology (cf. Lohfink 1981; Perdue 1994). Others prefer to speak about toil, happiness, wisdom, God, death, retribution, etc (Fox 1999; Murphy 1992). These are all *arbitrary* classifications of what the issues are which the author is concerned with. To be sure, there is virtually an infinite amount of different ways in which one may systematise / categorise / summarise / organise the implied concerns / themes / topics / issues in the book. To say that the themes can be summed up and reduced to concepts such as injustice, ignorance, etc. is not to claim that this is the only possible way of indicating what the book is about. But it is one possible way (and a legitimate one at that) to capture the essence of Qohelet’s vexation with what he observes “תחת השמש”.⁵¹

For the purpose of this study, the following topics / themes in Qohelet is of particular interest in terms of its possible significance for the hypothesis concerning the alleged presence of allusions to ANE solar mythology in Q.S.I.

Justice
Retribution
Knowledge
Wisdom
Toil
Evil
The king
God
Life
Death
Time
The cosmic order
The social order

Everyone of these issues feature in some way or another at various points in Qohelet’s discourse. What is of particular interest to this study is the relation of these themes to the sun imagery of the book and the relation of that combination (i.e. sun imagery + themes) to parallel concerns / motifs in ANE religious discourse.

3.5.2 The intratextual relation

In the book of Qohelet, one finds that the various themes as identified above occur in conjunction with the sun imagery. To be sure, the sun imagery is always either implicitly or explicitly part of the discourse about the various issues. Thus, one finds that the sun imagery qualifies and contextualizes the various themes in a certain particular way. In short, if the various topics provide the answer to *what* it is that Qohelet is concerned with, the sun imagery with which it is combined supplies the answer as to *where* Qohelet observes phenomena related to the same issues. One can summarise the

⁵⁰ That this is so is apparent in the different ways in which the structure of the book is conceptualised by scholars (cf. Wright 1968:315 - 316; Ellermeier 1967:129 - 141; Murphy 1992:xxv-xli).

⁵¹ While scholars differ greatly with regard to the topics they assign to the material in Qohelet, I doubt whether anyone would deny that, whatever Qohelet is up to and in whichever way it is categorised, concerns related to the issues of justice, knowledge, death, time, etc. are found in the book of Qohelet. Moreover, I do not think others would object if I claim that these issues pertain to the scenarios Qohelet observes in the domain repeatedly designated as “under the sun”.

intratextual relation between the main themes and the sun imagery in Qohelet as follows:

WHAT ? (...Qohelet is concerned with)	WHERE ? (...does he observe related phenomena)
<i>Justice</i>	<i>Under the sun</i>
<i>Retribution</i>	<i>Under the sun</i>
<i>Knowledge</i>	<i>Under the sun</i>
<i>Wisdom</i>	<i>Under the sun</i>
<i>Toil</i>	<i>Under the sun</i>
<i>Evil</i>	<i>Under the sun</i>
<i>The king</i>	<i>Under the sun</i>
<i>Life</i>	<i>Under the sun</i>
<i>Death</i>	<i>Under the sun</i>
<i>God</i>	<i>Under the sun</i>
<i>Time</i>	<i>Under the sun</i>
<i>The cosmic order</i>	<i>Under the sun</i>
<i>The social order</i>	<i>Under the sun</i>

Qohelet's pessimism leads him to criticise the domain "under the sun" for the absence, distortion, futility, mystery, or ephemerality of the phenomena which he observes and which have some or other relation to his concern with the issues mentioned above. In other words, *under the sun* he observes injustice, warped justice or ineffective justice. There he sees ignorance, useless wisdom and painful comprehension. There he finds an unfathomable cosmic order, a corrupt and oppressive social order, royal incompetence and dissatisfaction, etc. The relation between the sun imagery and some of the main themes in the book is, therefore, on the one hand, negative and asymmetrical. On the other hand, the same intratextual relation is determinative and inextricable.

3.5.3 The intertextual relation



Fig 3.3 There was certainly no shortage of solar imagery in the Ancient Near East. In this iconographic representation, the solar deity Shamash (centre) rises from the eastern mountains at dawn (cf. Pritchard 1954:220).

The "sun imagery" is related not only to the themes of the book with which it is combined. The associative meaning that the reader attributes to the sun and to the themes of justice, retribution, knowledge, life, time, etc. are also part of a larger body of

ANE religio-cultural discourse from which it is derived. Just as the meanings of words are dependent upon their place in the context of syntax, so the language of syntax is only meaningful in its relation to a specific implicit and assumed cultural world of discourse (and to all the associative meanings and connotations those utterances and statements have in relation to it).

Texts are often preserved in cultures that undergo certain changes over time. Due to the fact that people from cultures alien to the culture implied in the text may later wish to interpret that text, a complex hermeneutical process can ensue. To understand not only the sense of certain words and themes in the text, but also to grasp the alternative latent possibilities regarding its meaning, it is essential that the later readers familiarise themselves with the relevant socio-cultural frames of reference (cf. Deist 2000:33-38).

To reconstruct the intertextual relation of the sun imagery to the particular themes identified above, one needs to ask the following question: Does any particular form of ANE religio – cultural discourse attest the presence of the aforementioned themes combined with sun imagery? In other words, can one identify any body of discourse where, as in Qohelet, the sun is associated with topics like justice, retribution, knowledge, life, time, the king, God, etc. If this is the case, other questions are immediately prompted. For example, are these two discourses (i.e. Qohelet and discourse X) in any way related? If so, what sort of relation are we talking about? In the chapters that follow, I hope to argue that there may indeed be such a body of discourse to which Qohelet may be alluding to. A discourse that may aid us in contextualising Qohelet's own discourse on the level of intertextuality.

In addition, as will be demonstrated later on, scholars have attempted to identify various ANE forms of discourse which might have influenced Qohelet or to which his ideas may be alluding. However, the hypothesis of this thesis is that all attempts at identifying such an alleged body of related discourse may have been side tracked as a result of divorcing the themes in the book from the sun imagery when it came to the level of intertextual analysis. Because of this negligence, scholars have failed to detect the common thread between the various proposed intertextual parallels to Qohelet's thought. Whether Qohelet may be alluding to Greek philosophy or Egyptian and Mesopotamian sceptical wisdom literature, something very obvious may have been overlooked all the time; something which, as I hope to indicate, all these intertextual traditions have in common; something which links these seemingly diverse bodies of discourse at a higher level of common concerns; something which combines the issues which concerned Qohelet with a marked religious interest in sun imagery. This hitherto overlooked body of discourse, which might be seen as constituting a most significant intertextual relation between Qohelet (and his combination of certain themes with sun imagery) and a form of ANE religious discourse (which does the same thing) will be discussed in chapter 5 of this study.

3.6 THE RELATION OF Q.S.I. TO THE CLAIM THAT ALL IS “הבלי”

From the beginning, this description of what Qohelet saw as “הבלי” is qualified by the phrase “תחת השמש” (cf. 1:3,12-14; 6:10-12; 8:17). Things are thus “הבלי”...“תחת השמש”. Thus, the “sun imagery” is inextricably part of the thesis of the book itself. To extract it or to translate it in such a way that would render it devoid of

references to the domain designated as “under the sun” betrays a misunderstanding of the meaning of both “הבל” and the S.I. Divorcing the claim that everything is “הבל” from Qohelet’s association of this concept with the domain “תחת השמש” results from a failure to grasp the significance of Qohelet’s need to repeatedly mention that it is “תחת השמש” where he saw the “הבל”. The relation between the sun imagery and the main message of the book is thus one of inextricable qualification. Moreover, as noted repeatedly, the function of the sun imagery as qualification is not to provide the implication of a cosmic or conceptual dualism as conservative interpreters would have it. Rather, the qualification establishes *association* which is not the same as restriction.

3.7 THE RELATION OF Q.S.I. TO THE STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

As mentioned above, the “sun imagery” in the book, though found in all twelve chapters (and implicitly ever-present), is, in terms of its actual explicit occurrence, somewhat erratic. Sometimes it appears at the beginning of a section and at other times in the middle or at the end. There are occasions when it occurs explicitly more than once or twice in the same pericope or even twice in one verse. In other instances, there is no explicit sun imagery throughout the greater part of a whole chapter. The relation of the “sun imagery” to structure is thus not of the type which could facilitate delineation or aid those who wish to construct a structure based on the S.I. for the entire book (cf. Wright 1980:38-51).⁵²

Rather, along with the thesis of the judgment that all is “הבל”, the S.I. aids rhetorically in the provision of a larger and deeper unity on a *conceptual* level. This unity becomes apparent once one moves beyond surface structure to the depth structure of the discourse. On a conceptual level then, the “sun imagery” does assist in structuring the book in the sense of establishing an implicit or explicit relation between what might otherwise be seen as unrelated or haphazard reflections (cf. Galling 1932:281). This establishment of commonality at a deeper level is possible due to the constant recurrence of the E.S.I. and also the omnipresence of the I.S.I. Conversely, simply trying to formally structure the book in terms of delineated pericopes in their relation to the E.S.I. is impossible.

The following table shows, in a preliminary fashion, the presence of E.S.I. and I.S.I. in Qohelet in relation to a popular version of the structure of the book’s contents:

⁵² Thus no new structural analysis will be provided in this study nor shall I attempt to propose a new structure for the book. I do not wish to deny that there may be an ascertainable structure in Qohelet. However, since I agree with Fox (1989,1999) that the coherence of the book lies more on a conceptual level than on the level of representable formal structures, I do not feel that any view of the supposed structure affects my hypothesis one way or another.

Section	Type of "sun imagery" present	Location
1:1-2	I.S.I.	-
1:3-11	E.S.I.	[1:3,5,9]
1:12-18	E.S.I.	[1:13,14]
2:1-11	E.S.I.	[2:11]
2:12-17	E.S.I.	[2:17]
2:18-26	E.S.I.	[2:18,19,20,22]
3:1-15	I.S.I.	[cf. 3:1]
3:16-22	E.S.I.	[3:16]
4:1-16	E.S.I.	[4:1,3,7,15]
4:17-5:8	I.S.I.	-
5:9-6:9	E.S.I.	[5:12,17, 6:1,5]
6:10-12	E.S.I.	[6:12]
7:1-14	E.S.I.	[7:11]
7:15-22	I.S.I.	-
7:23-29	I.S.I.	-
8:1-9	E.S.I.	[8:9]
8:10-17	E.S.I.	[8:15,17]
9:1-10	E.S.I.	[9:3,6,9]
9:11-18	E.S.I.	[9:11,13]
10:1-20	E.S.I.	[10:5]
11:1-6	I.S.I.	-
11:7-12:7	E.S.I.	[11:7; 12:2]
12:8-14	I.S.I.	-

I.S.I. = implicit "sun imagery".
 E.S.I. = explicit "sun imagery".

Concerning the structure of Qohelet, the following can be deduced from the relation of the "sun imagery" in the book to that structure:

- While "sun imagery" is widespread there are several sections where only I.S.I. occurs;
- The occurrence of E.S.I. is found throughout the book but lies unevenly distributed in the various sections;
- Some sections contains a great deal of E.S.I. while others contain very little and this ratio is not proportionate to the length of the section with some shorter sections containing more than other longer sections where only I.S.I. is attested.

To sum up, while the "sun imagery" does seem to provide a conceptual coherence to the book it is not possible to use E.S.I. as structural markers.

3.8 THE REFERENCE AND MEANING OF THE PHRASE "תחת השמש"

3.8.1 ALLEGED PARALLELS TO THE PHRASE "תחת השמש"

3.8.1.1 Parallels to "תחת השמש" in Qohelet

One of the reasons why traditional interpretations of the phrase "תחת השמש" have understood the reference of the phrase as being merely geographical may be due to the assumption that "תחת השמש" is completely synonymous with other spatial designations

in the book. In this regard, one may note the occurrence of two apparently parallel phrases which, at first sight, indeed appear to be identical to the phrase “תחת השמש”:

Alleged parallel to “תחת השמש”	Number of occurrences	Location
“תחת השמים” / “under the heavens”	3 times (?)	1:13; 2:3; 3:1 ⁵³
“על הארץ” / “on the earth”	5 times	5:2; 7:20; 8:14, 16; 11:2

Based on the assumption that these phrases have the same function and reference as the phrase “תחת השמש”, it is often claimed that the phrase “תחת השמש” means nothing more than “על הארץ” (cf. Barton 1908:71). The latter rendering is indeed considered as being the legitimate dynamic equivalent of the phrase “תחת השמש” and it is employed in many modern day Bible translations. However, as this study hope to argue, such a reduction of the meaning and reference of the phrase “תחת השמש” to its supposed equivalent renderings may have been a big mistake. Not only is this tactic problematic given the disproportionate utilisation of the three phrases (30 vs. 5). In addition, its consequences may have been disastrous as it may have blinded interpreters to the possible significance of Qohelet’s choice of phraseology.

Qohelet’s obsession with solar elements remains unexplained from the perspective of this reductionism which has been typical of critical scholars’ assessment of the phrase “under the sun” in Qohelet. If “under the sun” is completely synonymous with these two parallel phrases in that their range of connotative and denotative meaning completely overlaps why bother using the phrase at all? While in some sense “under the sun” is synonymous with “under the heavens” and “on earth” the reference and associative meanings of the three phrases do not overlap completely. I hope to argue in this study that, by choosing this reductionist line of interpretation which utilises the phrase “on earth” to elucidate the associative meaning of the phrase “under the sun” (instead of vice-versa as implied by a quantitative representation comparison), interpreters may have greatly impoverished our understanding of Qohelet’s sun imagery in particular and also of the book as a whole.

3.8.1.2 Alleged parallels elsewhere in the Old Testament to the phrase “תחת השמש”

Apart from the alleged parallels in the book Qohelet itself, commentators sometimes also mention supposed parallels elsewhere in the Old Testament. These parallels are all phrases with the wording “תחת השמים” and occur in the following texts

- Gen. 6:17,⁵⁴

⁵³ As noted earlier, at least from a the perspective of textual criticism, it might be interesting to note that, in the texts of 1:13 and 2:3, but not in the case of 3:1, the LXX and the Peshitta reads “under the sun” for MT, “under the heavens”.

⁵⁴ It might be interesting to speculate whether Qohelet’s use of the phrase “under the sun” was motivated from familiarity with its use in this particular text. After all, there appear to be a number of allusions to Gen 1-11 in Qohelet as many scholars have noted (cf. Hertzberg 1963:230). If this is the case, the fact that Qohelet uses the phrase “under the heavens” only two or three times, as opposed to the 30 or so times “under the sun” occurs in Qohelet, might further imply a deliberate reformulation of the counterpart in his source material. Moreover, if this is the case, it is another indication that the phrase

- Ex. 17:14;
- Deut. 7:24, 9:14.

The exact phrase “תחת השמש”, however, is a hapax legomenon as far as the Old Testament texts are concerned.

3.8.1.3 Alleged extra-biblical parallels for the phrase “תחת השמש”



Fig 3.4 The Sumerian solar deity Utu from which the Babylonian Shamash evolved. According to the *Epic of Gilgamesh* – a Mesopotamian legend in which the phrase “under the sun” occurs – the sun god Utu / Shamash was the patron deity of the two characters Gilgamesh and Utnapishtim (cf. Pritchard 1954:132)

Some scholars who do pay attention to the phrase “תחת השמש” also feel it appropriate to mention that there exist Ancient Near Eastern parallels to this phrase (cf. Crenshaw 1988:89; Loretz 1964:46; Ranston 1925:25). At first, Greek parallels were noted to argue that this was a typical example of a “Graecism” which seemed to confirm the theory of the supposed Hellenistic background of the book. This view was, however, exploded when a host of other parallels was discovered. As Crenshaw (1988:89) noted, the following suggested extra-biblical parallels have been suggested in some commentaries:

- Babylonian / Assyrian parallels: The Gilgamesh epic;⁵⁵
- Phoenician parallels: Tabnit Inscriptions (6th century B.C.); Eshmunuzzar (5th century);
- Elamite parallels: Document (12th century B.C.);

“under the sun”, which occurs only in Qohelet, might be more than just synonymous with “under the heavens”. The substitution of “sun” for “heavens” may then be quite significant and could indicate a deliberate alteration of the reference for specific rhetorical purposes.

⁵⁵ Commentators such as Crenshaw (1988) do not give the exact location with regard to where in these texts the phrase “under the sun” occurs (as in the case of the Gilgamesh epic – although he does quote the passage in which it occurs) or in what particular source it can be found (as in the case with the inscriptions, parallels and Greek authors).

- Aramaic parallels: Ahiqar (7th century);
- Greek parallels: Homer, Theognis, Euripides.

The particular phrases in these texts are also rendered, "under the sun", and are therefore seen as parallels to Qohelet's phrase "under the sun". This seems to some a justification of using the supposed parallels to ascertain what Qohelet had in mind when he used this phrase (cf. Loretz 1964:46). The problem with this assumption is that it still does not explain why Qohelet felt the need to tell his audience, not once or twice (as in the alleged parallels), but 30 times that what he saw was "תחת השמש". In the parallel literature mentioned above, the phrase "תחת השמש" is not used as repetitively as is the case in Qohelet. Moreover, it constitutes a hermeneutical fallacy to argue that, because the phrase x had the meaning y in text 1 then, because text 2 uses the same phrase x its meaning must be synonymous with the meaning y it had in text 1. The phrase "under the sun" in those texts is but an illustrious and marginal optional extra and not encountered as recurrent throughout the writer's presentation as in the case of Qohelet.

Meaning, as I have mentioned earlier, is contextual. While it is not impossible that identical phrases in different texts can have the same meaning, it should not simply be assumed as being the case. If, however, Qohelet has used the phrase "תחת השמש" ambiguously (as I believe he did) then, even if the phrase had the same meaning as its equivalent in other texts, one still has to reckon with possible polysemantic wordplay if the context suggests it.

3.8.1.4 Alleged parallels to "תחת השמש" in contemporary speech

As a multilingual person, I myself know that the phrase "under the sun" is still employed in conversations today. When we use it in English, it usually has the meaning "everywhere" or "anywhere". Thus we sometimes say, like Qohelet, "there is nothing new under the sun" or, "there is no such thing under the sun" or, "...everywhere under the sun". In this regard, it is interesting to note how the phrase "תחת השמש" is translated by some of the prominent scholars and Bible translators. As can be seen, few of them have any use whatsoever for the solar reference:

- "In this world" (some dynamic equivalent Bible translations such as the NAV);
- "On Earth" (Barton 1912);⁵⁶
- "During human lifetime" (Scott 1965);⁵⁷
- "The realm of human activity" (Crenshaw 1988);
- "Troublesome existence" (Murphy 1992);⁵⁸
- "Secular life" (Eaton 1983)⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Barton's (1908) choice is based on the assumption that the intratextual parallels are all equivalent in denotation and connotation. Cf. also Lauha (1978) for a similar assessment.

⁵⁷ It is interesting to note that while many translations have mostly reference to *spatial* location the one chosen by Scott (1965) is largely *temporal* in denotation.

⁵⁸ Murphy (1992:07) is one of the scholars who argue that, contra Lauha (1978), "under the sun" means more than simply "on earth". Although Murphy doesn't consider solar mythology as a background perspective he mentions the opinions of Zimmerli (1962) and Galling (1969), both of whom find in it an associative reference to the troubled life of humanity (albeit in a demythologised sense).

⁵⁹ The choice of words by Eaton (1983) is representative of a trend in fundamentalist Christian interpretation of Qohelet which seem quite desperate to reinterpret the book to harmonise it with a more evangelical spirituality.

In many of our everyday expressions that we derived from discourse of the ancient world, the “mythological” allusions originally implied in those expressions have not been retained.⁶⁰ Thus, we say, “bless you”, when someone sneezes, without knowing that it might originally have been either a religious blessing or curse uttered in the belief that when someone sneezed a spirit departed from them. Or we say “good bye” unaware that it is a contracted form of an ancient English blessing which went, “God be with ye” (Cf. also Cupitt 1996; Haasbroek 1995; Harwood 1992).

What I am trying to demonstrate here is that, just because we today use the phrase “under the sun” with a geographical inclusive reference (and therefore read this geographical reference easily back into the book), it is not legitimate to assume that Qohelet also uses it in this manner or rather, *only* in this manner. He may or he may not be doing so, but a more contextually based analysis should determine whether in fact he does or not. Our assumption that he does use it in the same way and our ignorance of Ancient Near Eastern cultural frames of reference may have contributed to anachronistic misinterpretation of the phrase and a failure to appreciate the nuances it might have had for Qohelet in his own context.

3.8.2 UNCONSIDERED ALTERNATIVE REFERENTIAL POSSIBILITIES TO Q.S.I.

For some reason, no interpretation has hitherto considered the possibility of ambiguity and therefore, apart from the obvious geographical reference, also possible allusions to alternative types of ANE discourse in which the sun features (i.e. the mythological and the symbolical).⁶¹ The way to recognition of these alternatives is, however, not obvious but will become apparent as the discussion in this study progresses through its meta-; inter-; and intratextual perspectives on the issue.

3.8.2.1 The problem of possible ambiguity

As noted at the beginning of this study, the straightforward meaning of the phrase “תחת השמש”, as it is appropriated from the frame of reference of modern day English and western culture, could be described as follows:

“תחת” - below or beneath (in the spatial sense);

⁶⁰ The identification of the remains of mythological motifs in Biblical texts is an exciting albeit complex and controversial exegetical practice. However, if a text contains a mythological motif the recognition of it by a modern reader assists greatly in coming to terms with the richness and alien culture in which the text arose. Of course, the possibility of committing the genetic fallacy or becoming a victim of “parallelomania” is all too real and should be kept in mind.

⁶¹ In an analogical way, in later Biblical theological discourse, it became conventional to refer to heaven instead of directly referring to God. Even today, one can still hear the remains of the same idea in present discourse when someone says: “for Heaven’s sake” or “Heaven knows” or “Heaven help us”, which was originally, and sometimes still, another euphemistic way of saying “God help us”, “God knows”, etc. If one assumes “heaven” in these examples to have only one referential possibility, i.e. “the sky”, it becomes a misinterpretation of what is being said, even though in some modern contexts, the misinterpretation may still make some sense. This fosters the illusion of supposed understanding. When reading Jewish texts which refer to “Heaven” doing this or that, one has to be aware of the convention that such a reference assumes. Otherwise, there might be no way of knowing that God Himself is referred to in a masked manner. Is it possible that the reference to “the sun” in Qohelet might hide a similar convention of referring to the something else?

“הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ” - the star⁶² nearest to the earth around which the latter orbits.

I also noted that there may be other associative meanings linked to these two words:

- “תַּחַת” = 1) **Instead of** (Gen. 4:25; 22:13; Lev. 14:42)
 or
 2) **Under** [spatially] (Gen. 1:7; 6:17; 7:19; Deut. 4:18)
 or
 3) **Under** [rank, status, authority, rule] (1 Chron. 29:24)
 or
 4) **In the possession of** (Ezek. 23:5)
 or
 5) **In exchange for** (Gen. 30:15)
 or
 6) **In the place of** [as substitute for] (Lev. 14:42)
 or
 7) **As / like** (Job 34:26)
 or
 8) **In the place of** [location] (2 Sam. 2:23; 19:13)

- “שֶׁמֶשׁ” = 1) a **natural** phenomenon;
 or
 2) a **mythological** entity;
 or
 3) a **symbol**

As noted earlier, interpreters of Qohelet’s solar imagery have traditionally and unanimously assumed that the word “תַּחַת” means “under” (theoretical possibility no. 2 above) and “שֶׁמֶשׁ” simply has a natural reference (theoretical possibility no. 1 above). Prima facie, this assumption appears to be correct. However, if Qohelet was using these words ambiguously, what other possible meaning could Qohelet have had in mind?



Fig 3.5 An example of the mythological reference of solar imagery in the Ancient Near East. The solar deity Shamash (centre) is represented in this iconographic illustration. (cf. Pritchard 1954:178)

⁶² Though it may be anachronistic to say that the author of Qohelet thought of the sun as a “star”, I simply use this designation, not to refer to supposed astronomical beliefs, but merely to indicate, in terms of a concept familiar to today’s readers, a reference to the big bright “thing” one can see every day as opposed to the “sun-as-symbol” or abstract entity.

Could Qohelet have used the words “תחת” and “השמש” ambiguously so that one of the following scenarios could be the intended message of the sun imagery?:

SENSE

AMBIGUOUS REFERENTIAL POSSIBILITIES

- Under the sun.....i.e. under (spatial) the sun (mythical)
- Under the sun.....i.e. under (spatial) the sun (symbolical)
- Under the sun.....i.e. under (instead of) the sun (mythical)
- Under the sun.....i.e. under (instead of) the sun (symbolical)
- Under the sun.....i.e. under (rank, authority) the sun (mythical)
- Under the sun.....i.e. under (in the place of / substitute) the sun (mythical)
- Under the sun.....i.e. under (in the place of / substitute) the sun (symbolical)
- Under the sun.....i.e. under (in exchange for) the sun (symbolical)
- Under the sun.....i.e. under (as / like) the sun (mythical)
- Under the sun.....i.e. under (as / like) the sun (symbolical)
- Under the sun.....i.e. under (in exchange for) the sun (mythical)
- Under the sun.....i.e. under (in exchange for) the sun (symbolical)

Traditionally, interpreters have believed that Qohelet was simply concerned with injustice, ignorance, oppression, death, times, royal dissatisfaction, etc. under (beneath) the (physical) sun. Could it be that Qohelet was being ambiguous and was additionally concerned with the same issues in the context of one of the other alternative forms of rendering the words “תחת” and “השמש”? At least on the level of theoretical possibility, there is no *a-priori* reason why this could not have been the case. To be sure, once the interpreter becomes familiar with ANE solar mythology and solar symbolism, he may no longer be so sure that the traditional interpretation has succeeded in giving us the full picture of what Qohelet intended to communicate to his original audience.

3.9 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

- In the book of Qohelet one finds a mysterious and a repetitive utilisation of “sun imagery” (S.I.)
- This S.I. is manifested explicitly in the phrase “under the sun” and references to the sun (E.S.I.).
- The E.S.I. occurs repeatedly throughout the book and traditional interpretations have either accounted for the motive of for Qohelet in doing this in an anachronistic or neglected fashion, both of which are satisfactory from a heuristic perspective.
- The S.I. is also manifested implicitly since everything Qohelet observes can be labelled as phenomena “under the sun” (I.S.I.).
- The S.I. is characteristic of the literary technique of “repetition” which implies that it is significant and functional in a variety of possible ways.
- The S.I. in Qohelet is combined and inextricably linked with the main themes in Qohelet, which can be conceptualised as including “ignorance”, “injustice”,

“royalty”, “life”, “death”, “time”, etc.

- The S.I. answers to the question “where?” Qohelet finds scenarios of injustice, ignorance, royal folly, etc.
- Traditionally the “sun imagery” has been interpreted in a geographical manner to function either restrictively / apologetically or inclusively / geographically.
- From a theoretical perspective, the words of the phrase “under the sun” have other possible denotative and connotative references that have hitherto been unconsidered.
- There are many alleged parallels to this phrase but due to the contextual nature of meaning and the unique way Qohelet employs it, these parallels cannot be assumed as being synonymous with Qohelet’s use of the phrase.

In the end, one has to answer the question of “why” Qohelet should need or want to repeatedly (or at all) refer to certain things as being “under the sun”. Moreover, to answer that question one should attempt to ascertain the nuances embedded in the phrase “under the sun” from a perspective more contemporary with Qohelet himself. Could it be that the way in which we ourselves conventionally use the words “under” and “sun” might have blinded us to certain associative meanings which might originally have been present in Qohelet’s sun imagery?

CHAPTER 4

METATEXTUAL JUSTIFICATION II

4.1 PURPOSE OF THIS CHAPTER

The purpose of this chapter can be summarised as follows:

- The provision of a hermeneutical justification for the exploration of other possible references for the word "השמע" in Qohelet.
- The provision of a reminder of the fact that the Old Testament is and remains a piece of literature from an alien culture with a worldview very different from that of the modern exegete.
- To remind the reader that basic responsible exegesis demands that all referential possibilities of words be considered in order to make an enlightened judgment as to which of the possibilities yields the most plausible interpretation.
- To once again show how illuminating it can be to consider relevant Ancient Near Eastern literature in trying to ascertain the associative meaning of Old Testament words.
- To remind the reader of the importance of recognising the role that associative meaning can play in an author's attempt at communication.
- To illustrate how an awareness of the above mentioned elements of historical interpretation could help the interpreter to identify polemical intentions and mythological allusions otherwise obscured by the reader's frame of reference which often differs substantially from that of a person of 2-3 millennia ago.
- To come to a conclusion regarding the implications of these observations for the interpretation of the S.I. in Qohelet.

4.2 READING THE OT TODAY

Every interpreter of ancient texts who is familiar with the details and complexities of the hermeneutical process will know that it can be very misleading for a person unfamiliar with the ancient world to read the texts at face value in order to ascertain what the author was trying to communicate (cf. Deist 2000:24).⁶³ Reading a piece of literature

⁶³ Deist (2000:28) notes that, in real communication, people do not only follow the rules of language, but also certain pragmatic principles. This means recognising presuppositions and implications behind the actual words used. Understanding a text means comprehending more than the logical structure and the purely designative or defining meanings of the lexical and grammatical structures. A listener or reader is usually engaged in several operations almost simultaneously: (1) the literal prepositional content; (2) the relevance and impact of that content, (3) the aesthetic character of the rhetorical structures, (4) the motivations and background of the speaker or writer, (5) the intertextuality of the discourse, and (6) the frame of reference which provides coherence within the text and with the real or imagined world. All of

from long ago which belonged to a different culture from the reader's can easily hold the dangers of misunderstanding and the failure to grasp the original meaning of the text (cf. Simons 1975:83).

For example, an average person with no background knowledge of ANE culture whatsoever will, upon reading the Old Testament, very likely use his own cultural frame of reference to make sense of the text (cf. Craigie 1983b:3-5). In doing so, he or she might very well be perplexed at the ways the Old Testament speaks about, for example, "the sea". It is often described in negative terms and associated with hostility, chaos and the powers of death. A reader today who's only interpretative aid is a frame of reference where the "sea" is associated with swimming, surfing, holidays and scuba diving in beautiful surroundings might very well be baffled by the ways the Old Testament often speaks of the sea (cf. Smit 1987:15).

4.3 THE PROBLEM OF "COMMON KNOWLEDGE"

Some readers today might feel insulted when it is pointed out that they cannot simply use their common knowledge of the meaning and reference of words to read the Bible in a translation and hope to understand it. Since the reformation, not only can any person who wishes to do so read a translation of the Bible but, it is also a Protestant cliché that the Bible is clear and easy to understand (cf. Carroll 1997:1-17). However, after the discoveries of Ancient Near Eastern texts related to the Bible and the rise of historical critical scholarship, the fashionable belief that the Bible is easy to understand has become a matter of contention. Devoted laity may read their Bibles in translation and find everything relatively easy to understand. However, those who attempt to study the text critically and scientifically know that the idea of a plain text is endlessly problematical. Easy understanding is usually the result of readings which are selective, anachronistic, blinded by tradition, directed by dogma, filtered by assumptions and enabled by naiveté.

It is therefore no surprise to find many undergraduate students completely disoriented when they discover that the Bible texts often mean something very different from what they thought it did. It seems to be "unorthodox" when the Bible is read with the help of anthropological and models of comparative religion. Such historical readings make it seem that the Bible is full of myth, fiction, ideology and contradiction. There are marked differences between the way in which the Bible is read in the academy as opposed to its interpretation in the church or at home. The occupational hazard of being a biblical scholar also becomes manifest whenever new developments in biblical criticism are divested in the popular media. The amount of misunderstanding, ad hoc, ad hominem and other logical fallacies in the outraged arguments from sincere believers against critical scholarship shows that the last 200 years of scholarship have never been assimilated at ground level (cf. Harwood 1992:02; Cupitt 1989:36).

Thus, one can fully agree with Routledge (1995:43) that a major problem with an appeal to common knowledge is that, should the experience / knowledge of the reader not coincide with that of the writer and the original audience, there is no way the reader would be able to recognise all the possible ways in which misinterpretation might ensue. Simply because the text made sense when it was read naively, this does not imply that

these operations as they are related to the reading of Qohelet are attended to in this study.

it was actually understood. It could simply be that the eisegetical projections of the reader's own conceptual frame of reference onto the text just happen to yield no obvious interpretative difficulties (cf. Smit 1987:22).⁶⁴

4.4 REFERENTIAL POSSIBILITIES

In other words, the reason for the bafflement readers can experience upon encountering certain statements in the text has something to do with the heuristic inadequacy of the modern reader's frame of reference (cf. Craigie 1983b:04). For example, for the modern reader, there are several referential possibilities when he reads about the sea in the OT. But none of these can aid him in making sense of some of the Old Testament passages speaking of the sea in terms of a mythical entity. The referential possibilities available to a modern reader who reads about the sea might include:

- The sea as the main body of H₂O on the planet covering 75 percent of its surface;
- The sea as a popular destination for recreational purposes;
- The sea as a source of fascination in the context of oceanography or marine biology;
- The sea as an aesthetically pleasing phenomenon in the context of artistic representation;
- The sea as a potentially dangerous location where drowning, shark attacks and other unwanted incidents occur.

If these are examples of the only referential possibilities which the reader of the Old Testament has consciously available when attempting to make sense of the references to the sea in the OT, they might very well be perplexed on encountering some of the more mythical representations. Alternatively they might think they understand the reference when in fact they do not. The problem in this case is that the past and the text

⁶⁴ A theory of communication that has possible bearing on the issue at stake in this study is known as "relevance theory". This theory was formulated by Sperber and Wilson in the 1980's and was an attempt to improve on the unsatisfactory claims of the earlier "code theory" and aptly illustrates the wisdom of viewing the *author's intention* and *cultural information* as constituents of human communication, and therefore of interpretation. In short, the role assigned in relevance theory to the recovery of the semantic representation of utterances marks one of its major deviations from the code model. The semantic interpretation recovered by the hearer through the linguistic decoding system merely forms the *starting point* for interpretation. Communication is not achieved by coding and decoding messages but by constructing a hypothesis about the communicator's intentions. Relevance, the key concept in this theory, rests on two pillars. First, the relevance of an utterance's meaning depends on the hearer's *cognitive world*, that is, the cognitive frame of reference from which reality is interpreted. An effect may be achieved by effectively *affirming, challenging or broadening* the content and structure of the hearer's cognitive world. Where this does indeed happen, communication is said to have had an adequate *contextual effect*. A hearer's *cognitive world* exhibits a particular content and structure. Consequently, the criteria for deciding whether communication has had an adequate *contextual effect* differ from situation to situation and from *culture to culture*. Second, relevance involves the amount of effort the interpreter has to devote to process the information communicated. In the process of an interpreter's reading what is written he constantly formulates hypotheses regarding the speaker's intention. Also, she accepts as the speaker's intention that interpretation that achieves *maximal contextual effect in exchange for a minimum of processing effort*. This explains how communication can take place on the one hand and why, especially in the interpretation of ancient texts, misunderstanding is normal and understanding sometimes requires more effort and attention to contextuality. For further elaboration on this theory and justification for its validity and its not falling prey to the intentional fallacy or other legitimate post-modern hermeneutical concerns cf. Deist 2000:23-32).

cannot talk back, "it is exotic and dumb" (cf. Freedman 1978:87).

4.5 BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE

As Wagner (1996:52) notes, if this hypothetical reader were then somehow to come into contact with literature explaining the mythical ways in which the sea was viewed in the ancient world "a wholly new world of possible meaning might for the first time become visible". If this reader were to acquaint himself with, for instance, the Ugaritic mythology of the deity "Yam" (or the basic mythological and religious beliefs of the Ancient Near Eastern peoples, as far as their cosmologies and worldviews are concerned) it would not be surprising if he completely revised his earlier interpretations regarding the sea in the Old Testament (Craigie 1983b:05).⁶⁵ With this new frame of reference, a whole new world of meaning and significance have become available with which he or she can now make sense of the Bible's negative references to the sea as a personified entity.⁶⁶

4.6 ASSOCIATIVE MEANING⁶⁷

One reason our hypothetical interpreter can now make better sense of what he reads is due to the new associative meanings available to him. Before he became familiar with Ancient Near Eastern mythology his immediate associations that he projected onto the text and which made the negative view of the sea somewhat perplexing was associative concepts like recreation, holidays, and interesting oceanographic discoveries (cf. Craigie 1983b:22). These associations with the sea made an understanding of the Old Testament's references to the sea as mythical entity well nigh impossible (cf. Deist 2000:20-22).

But now, after becoming familiar with the mythologies of the Ancient Near East and the place of the sea in cosmographic constructions, our reader has a new list of associative concepts available. These would include associative meanings such as chaos, hostility, death, demons, etc. With these new (or actually old) associative meanings available to him, the reader can now make sense of the text's attitude towards the sea. In addition, the reader can also understand why he failed to appreciate the significance and intentions of what now seems to be clearly mythological depictions of the sea (cf. Deist 2000:23).

⁶⁵ From the perspective of the sociology of knowledge, acquaintance with the culture of which the text is part is indispensable for understanding it. Simmonds (1975:83) wrote that "adequate interpretation of a text requires us to look beyond the work in two different directions: first, to the specific intentional act by which meaning was conferred upon the work by the author, and second, to the larger (but still historically specific) *context of intersubjective meanings which that intentional act reflected and also presupposed.*" (emphasis mine).

⁶⁶ Or, as Deist (2000:33) notes, "successful communication therefore, implies the ability of the reader to select suitable intertext(s) that will sufficiently frame a text for the purpose of sensible interpretation in a particular situation."

⁶⁷ For an elaborated discussion on many variables involved in the theory behind the concept of "associative meaning", cf. A. Nida & J. de Waard (1986). This is actually a book on "translation" but it includes, as can be expected, a large quantity of hermeneutical theory. The model for communication presupposed by the authors is based on the socio - semiotic theory of meaning (which is also discussed in the work).

4.7 RECOGNISING ALLUSIONS⁶⁸

Of course, not all references to the sea in the Old Testament are negative or polemically intended (cf. Deist 2000:121). For instance, when the text refers to people living by the sea (or sailing on it), the sea in those OT texts is not always associated with mythological connotations. But there are times when certain "clues" appear as part of the depiction of the sea which allows the reader, if he or she has the necessary background knowledge of mythology, to recognise the presence of implicit allusions to ANE mythology. However, if the reader is not cognisant of the relevant ANE mythology, the texts will not be understood since the implicit allusions to mythological motifs will remain undetected (cf. Smit 1987:25).

When the texts speak of the sea as fleeing from Yahweh; as remaining behind a fixed border which it may not cross; as housing the big dragon; etc., a reader with the relevant mythological background will immediately recognise the allusions to popular ANE mythology (cf. Ex. 15; Ps. 74; etc. - Walton et al. 2000:90). When, for instance, the New Testament later talks about Jesus calming the storm; walking on the water; letting the demonised herd of swine drown in the sea; or when the book of Revelation says that the sea before God's throne was completely calm or that, in the new creation, there will be no sea, the knowledgeable reader can recognise the presence, meaning and significance of the allusions to the sea as a mythical chaos entity (Fawcett 1973:236).

However, without familiarity with the mythological meanings that the ancients associated with the sea, the reader would never grasp the significance of what the author is saying or appreciate the message implied in the allusions to mythological motifs. On the other hand, the fallacy of "creating" allusions where none exists may also occur. Be that as it may, if there is in fact an allusion present and it is not recognised, the entire socio-historical reconstruction of the context in which meaning is generated can become obscured and unwittingly distorted by the exegete (cf. Smit 1987:75).

4.8 RECOGNISING POLEMICS

By being familiar with the ancient world's mythology of the sea as a personified entity of chaos, the reader can now also recognise instances of implicit polemics in the text (cf. Walton et al. 2000:7-9). Thus, when in Gen. 1 the spirit / wind of God moves across the waters; when in Ex. 15 God is said to have parted the waters; when in the Psalms God has laid down a limit with regard to how far the sea may reach onto the land; when God is depicted as having defeated the chaos monster, Leviathan / Rahab that lives in the sea; etc., the reader familiar with ANE mythology will recognise polemical elements

⁶⁸ The recognition of allusions in the Old Testament today is largely derived from the possibility of the interpreter's familiarity with intertextual parallels to Biblical literature. On the one hand, there can be no doubt that the discipline of Ancient Near Eastern studies has created a much more profound historical awareness among exegetes and increased the sense of cultural alienation between contemporary interpreters and the ancient cognitive frame of reference to which the text alludes. A classic example of the paradigm shift that was required after the discoveries of ancient texts is the new perspective on the nature of Canaanite religion and its influence on Yahwism (on which cf. for example, Smith [1990a]; Albertz [1992]; De Moor [1990], Miller [1999]). On familiarising oneself with literature from the "umwelt" of the Biblical world, allusions in the text to the cosmologies, laws, wisdom, legends and myths of the surrounding peoples, of which Israel was part, becomes visible in a way not otherwise accessible (cf. also, for example, Keel [1978] for the contribution of iconography in recognising allusions and intertextual parallels).

which remains basically obscured from a modern audience (cf. Craigie 1983b:22).

From familiarity with Canaanite mythology where Baal defeats the dragon (Lotan), or clashes with Yam (sea), the reader will recognise the presence of polemical allusions to these myths in the Old Testament. The reader can also recognise the polemical intentions of the author who adopted and adapted those mythological motifs for Yahwistic purposes. Such recognition is simply not possible to a reader who does not have the same background knowledge. Furthermore, it might even be justified to claim that the reader who does not recognise these polemical allusions to mythological motifs has failed to appreciate what the author intended to communicate. As a result, an impoverished interpretation is inevitable. This type of misinterpretation is usually accompanied by an unwitting projection of anachronistic associative meanings onto the text and its discourse (cf. Deist 2000:passim).

4.9 RECOGNISING AMBIGUITY

Recall, if you will, what was said earlier about referential possibilities. Sometimes in the OT, a word like “sea” might refer to the ocean as a large body of water without any personal elements or mythological connotations. At other times, it might be used in poetry with predominantly mythical associative meanings. Sometimes, however, an author might be intentionally using the word “sea” in a way that is intentionally ambiguous. Thus, he might be referring to the sea in one sense but from the rest of the contents in the particular context the reader might get the impression that the author was being deliberately ambiguous. This would be the case especially if the author’s use of the word “sea” in relation to other words, themes, and motifs in the particular passage is such that it appears to be open to more than one way of understanding without distorting any of several referential possibilities. If this is the case then, although a superficial reading would not lead to a complete misinterpretation of the passage, the failure to recognise the ambiguity (and therefore to take note of other associative meanings alluded to) unquestionably impoverishes and distorts the interpretation.

4.10 POSSIBLE IMPLICATIONS OF THESE METATEXTUAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE INTERPRETATION OF Q.S.I.

The implications this analogy featuring the word “sea” might have with regard to the interpretation of the word “sun” in Qohelet is clear. The following points may be noted:

The Old Testament, including Qohelet, is an ancient piece of literature with an implied worldview and linguistic-cultural context that is very different from our own. Simply by reading the text at face value and by attributing the first and most commonsensical meaning and reference to words in the text might appear sensible. However, this hermeneutically illegitimate endeavour leads inevitably to misinterpretation. This occurs as a result of the projection of anachronistic associative meanings onto the words of the ancient text. As is the case with the word “sea”, when a modern reader encounters the word “שמש” in the Old Testament where it features in a context filled with mythological or symbolical associative references, he might be perplexed as to why “שמש” is depicted in such a manner.

Thus, it might be quite misleading for any interpreter today to try and ascertain the meaning of Qohelet’s “sun imagery” simply by using the **common knowledge** of his

own frame of reference. When this happens, though the text might make sense, it is virtually guaranteed that the subtle nuances of meaning that the author intended to communicate will not be appreciated by the reader. The modern interpreter who reads anachronistic and alien associative references into the word “sun” might think he understands the text while, in fact, he does not.

As far as the **referential possibilities** are concerned, the following might be examples of typical associations an average 20th century westerner consciously entertains when he thinks of the “sun”:

- The sun as star, much larger than the earth which revolves around it;
- The sun as an agent in photosynthesis and a generator of solar energy;
- The sun as a catalyst in the development of skin cancer;
- The sun as assisting those who wish to get a tan, etc.;
- The sun as source of vitamin D;
- The sun and summer and holidays;

If these associations are representative of the only referential possibilities of which the reader is consciously aware, he or she will no doubt be perplexed by the Old Testament’s reference to the “שמש” in a manner which is often pre-scientific, mythical and theological (cf. Deist 2000:45). When, however, this hypothetical reader for some reason becomes familiar with Ancient Near Eastern solar mythology, he or she will discover new referential possibilities that can be associated with “שמש” in the text. Now the “sun” becomes more than just an enormous star, 93 000 000 miles or 8 light minutes away, consisting mainly of hydrogen and helium, with a remaining lifespan of about 4-5 billion years, etc. Now, apart from noting the reference to the sun as heavenly body in the text, the reader becomes aware of another possibility. The reader will know that, when the text refers to the “שמש”, there might also be a reference to the mythological or symbolical “sun”.

If the reader has some knowledge of Egyptian, Mesopotamian, Canaanite, Persian and Greek solar mythology a whole new world of possible frames of references might become available. These frames of references need to be considered when attempting to ascertain what the ancient author was trying to communicate if he refers to the “sun”. A reader familiar with the relevant **Ancient Near Eastern background** of solar mythology and symbolism might soon discover that the text seems to say far more, and often something quite different, than what he originally thought was the case.

Now, a whole new world of **associative meaning** becomes available to the reader when encountering sun imagery in the text. To be sure, though many of the references to the sun in the OT may be purely of the naturalist type – associative meanings containing implicit allusions to ANE solar mythology might also be part of what the author intended to communicate. Whatever the case may be, in the ancient world the sun was always implicitly associated with certain specific symbolic concepts and qualities which the modern reader will never recognise unless familiar with the solar discourse of the ancient world.

When the reader has become familiar with solar mythology, it would be much easier for this reader, to **recognise allusions** to it in the Old Testament texts. He may wonder if

certain "sun imagery" might contain implicit allusions to popular Ancient Near Eastern solar mythology or symbolism if the OT context seems to contain clear parallels to it.



Fig 4.1 Allusions to solar mythology in ancient texts are not always familiar to modern readers. Without the adequate background knowledge, who among us would have guessed that this iconographic representation expresses essential motifs of ANE solar theology? (cf. Pritchard 1954:178)

Our reader would also now understand and **recognise implicit polemics** against alien solar mythologies when, for example, the OT people are forbidden to worship the "שמש" or criticised because they have succumbed to the temptation of solarism. Moreover, polemical allusions to solar mythology might be present in many of the theophanies which depict Yahweh in ways usually typical of solar mythology's depiction of the sun god(s). Other references to the "שמש" in contexts where it is associated with certain religious rites, concepts, scenarios, etc. can immediately be appreciated for the implicit polemics (or syncretism!) it might contain.

Moreover, if the reader is familiar with the various referential possibilities of the word "שמש" in all forms of religio-cultural discourse in the ANE 2-3 millennia ago then he or she may also be better equipped to **recognise ambiguity** in the text. In contrast to the average modern reader who will understand the reference to the "שמש" as being simply to the sun-as-star, the interpreter familiar with the mythological and symbolical forms of discourse which also made reference to the "שמש" might soon recognise ambiguity in an author's particular use of the word "שמש". If the author (Qohelet?) refers to "שמש" in a manner suggestive of the presence of implicit allusions to the discourse of solar mythology and symbolism the text's own discourse might be ambiguous. Because of the nature of ambiguity, this would not mean that, in addition to referring to the sun-as-star, the author might be alluding to the sun as mythical or symbolical entity.

Without the **background knowledge** of solar mythology, there is no way the average modern reader can appreciate everything that the author took for granted in his attempts to convey his message. The original readers would have been very familiar with solar mythology and could therefore recognise allusions and polemics. The author therefore doesn't need to spell out the fact that he is indeed alluding to solar mythology,

or that he is engaged in a polemical dialogue with it. He assumes that the audience would recognise the implicit allusions in his discourse. Such an assumption makes the task of interpreting an ancient text a very complex endeavour. The modern exegete who does not have the same background knowledge that a contemporary of the author would have may never recognise allusions to solar mythology in the discourse if the reference is ambiguous.

4.11 CONCLUSION: THE LEGITIMACY OF EXPLORING ALTERNATIVE REFERENTIAL POSSIBILITIES FOR Q.S.I.

When it comes to the sun imagery of Qohelet, the reader will immediately recognise the fact that Qohelet constantly refers to the fact that what he observes is phenomena “תחת השמש”. In fact, this phrase “תחת השמש” occurs so constantly that even a modern reader without hermeneutical awareness might wonder as to the reason for this apparently unnecessary repetition. If the message was simply that all is “הבל” (and all that this entails) why did the author need to qualify this claim with the reference to the domain “תחת השמש”? Why did he repeatedly refer to the fact that the injustice, ignorance, etc. he found was located “תחת השמש”? Surely the location would have been taken for granted if the word “sun” had a naturalist reference only. Based on a purely demythologised reading, even a single reference to the domain “under the sun” is superfluous, let alone 30 references! Could the fact of the author’s repetition of the sun imagery in combination with a concern with the issues of justice, knowledge, royalty, time, life, death, etc. be indicative of the presence of ambiguous allusions to solar mythology? Is the reference to the sun in Qohelet on par with some of the references to the “sea” in the OT. Do the intra-; and intertextual contexts suggest the presence of allusions to ANE solar mythology / symbolism? Do metatextual considerations imply that this is a theoretical possibility? Is this possibility obscured from modern interpreters who are to a large extent completely ignorant of ANE solar mythology? Would familiarity with solar mythology supply the modern reader with background knowledge assisting him to recognise, for the first time, alternative referential possibilities and the presence of allusions in the sun imagery of Qohelet?

As I shall demonstrate in the next chapter, becoming familiar with ANE solar mythology may completely change one’s perspective on the matter. Given what was said in this chapter about the possible hermeneutical value of a familiarity with relevant Ancient Near Eastern mythology when reading the OT, it is surely not hermeneutically illegitimate to at least experiment with alternative frames of reference pertaining to the sun imagery familiar to the people of the ANE in the 1st millennium B.C. To be sure, such experimentation may allow the exegete make better sense of the “sun imagery” that mysteriously permeates the book of Qohelet in a way that hitherto has neither been appreciated nor satisfactorily accounted for.

CHAPTER 5

INTERTEXTUAL JUSTIFICATION I

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, attention will be given to the extra-biblical intertextual discourse possibly relevant to the justification of the hypothesis. This will involve an excursion to the world of ANE solar mythology and solar symbolism. Since OT wisdom was such a cosmopolitan phenomenon and because there seems to be a lack of consensus with regard to exactly which ANE culture influenced Qohelet to the greatest degree, the solar mythology of all the neighbouring cultures in the first millennium B.C. will be discussed. After reading this chapter, any open-minded reader should be able to understand why I am suggesting that we rethink the meaning and significance of the sun imagery in Qohelet.

5.2 QOHELET AND THE ANE BACKGROUND: ANOTHER CONTROVERSIAL ISSUE

It goes without saying that Qohelet is a characteristically Jewish work (cf. Murphy 1992:xlii). Many interpreters have tried to show the variety of ways in which the book is dependent on traditions found within the Old Testament itself. However, exaggerations have to be avoided especially in the manner in which this influence is worked out. Thus, the claim of Hertzberg (1963:230) that there is no doubt that the author wrote with the text of Gen. 1-4 open before him (*"vor den Augen"*) is far too specific. It is, however, true that Qohelet draws on Biblical tradition and then specifically that of creation theology, which is, of course, a general characteristic of the sages' methodology (cf. Perdue 1994).

No firm consensus among scholars exists concerning the precise links that can be established with regard to the supposed ANE background of Qohelet (cf. Loretz 1964:passim).⁶⁹ None the less, the research has illustrated that the teaching of Qohelet is to be understood against the background of the ancient world in which he lived (cf. Scott 1965:135). Before presenting the supposed parallels between Qohelet's sun imagery, it seems more prudent to indicate in each case, the various supposed contacts between Qohelet and ANE literature which scholars have already identified. The prudence of such a cautious approach is suggested by two factors:

- The ambivalent nature of the arguments to prove literary or cultural dependence;⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Loretz (1964:196 - 212) has provided an instructive list of 71 *topoi* treated by Qohelet in common with other Biblical and non-Biblical works. It is interesting and relevant to this study that, among them, are such themes as joy, life and death, the problem of retribution, riches and poverty, royalty and the fear of the judging creator God. At the same time, the relationship of Qohelet to the thought of the Ancient Near East is also universally recognised. This relationship has been debated on three fronts especially: Mesopotamia, Egypt and Greece (Hellenism) (cf. Murphy 1992:xlii).

⁷⁰ As Crenshaw (1988:51) notes: "An intellectual development like that in Qohelet struck other cultures also, but not at the same time. One expects therefore to find some common themes throughout the Ancient Near East. This phenomenon has led to exaggerated claims of literary dependence (cf. also

- The existence of mutually contradictory claims for dependence that have been made in the past.

As for my own argument, this will not be of the sort where it is proposed that Qohelet copied from any foreign literature via a form of plagiarism. Rather, solar mythology in the various ANE texts is mentioned and referred to because, according to my theory, Qohelet may have alluded to ideas similar to those expressed in the particular literature rather than to the particular text itself. The type of rhetoric in which the allusions to ANE solar mythology appear in Qohelet is not simply, as I shall argue later, indicative of basic familiarity with the ideas of solarism. His allusions may also be seen as implying a type of dialogue which exhibits the characteristics of polemics, deconstruction, irony and syncretism. I am certain that those unfamiliar with solar mythology, albeit very much familiar with Qohelet, will not fail to recognise some very remarkable and significant elements in the data that will be discussed in the various sections dealing with the solar mythologies of the various ANE cultures and periods.

5.3 POSSIBLE MESOPOTAMIAN INFLUENCE

There is hardly a need to recall Israel's general indebtedness to ancient Sumer and Babylon. With reference to wisdom, the achievements of Mesopotamia are considerable (cf. Lambert 1960). Here also "problem" literature developed, in which the age-old enigma of human suffering appeared. In "*Ludlul bel nemeqi*" ("I shall praise the lord of wisdom") there is the complaint that the wicked and the just receive the same treatment and that the decrees of the gods cannot be understood (2.10-38; Pritchard 1949:434-435; cf. Qoh. 8:12-17). The pessimism of "*Ludlul*" appears also in what has been called the "Babylonian Qohelet" although it is also similar to Job: "A Dialogue about Human Misery" or "The Babylonian Theodicy". Another work, the "Pessimistic Dialogue between Master and Servant" also shares several themes with Qohelet: women as threatening (7.55-60; Pritchard 1949:438; cf. Qoh. 7:26) and the recommendation to eat (2.10-15; Pritchard 1949:438; cf. Qoh. 2:24). The dexterity the slave displays in affirming both the positive and negative aspects of a situation is reminiscent of Qohelet's own style (cf. 2:2 with his repeated statements about joy). Qohelet furthermore also has in common with the so-called "*Gilgamesh* epic" the theme of death and transient life, and the concern for one's name and memory.

5.3.1 Mesopotamian solar mythology

The solar deity - Shamash (Sun) - was the most popular deity from Accadian times onwards (cf. Rogers 1908:84). Even national deities such as Marduk, Bel and Asshur were all considered solar deities (i.e. sun gods) at certain periods in the history of their religions. Later deities such as Tammuz were also solar in character. This was the state of affairs throughout the whole of the first millennium B.C. (cf. Rogers 1908:85). The relation between co-existing solar deities was often expressed with reference to the various seasons. For example, Shamash was at the same time Tammuz (spring sun), Nergal (summer sun), Marduk (autumn sun) and Bel (winter sun).

Every morning the sun (god) emerged from the netherworld full of vigour and vitality to make his way effortlessly across the heavens. The representation of this journey was

Loretz [1964:45 - 134]).

often by way of depicting the sun as a winged disk or chariot. At sunset, Shamash made his nightly descent into the netherworld to traverse and extinguish some of its perpetual darkness. At dawn, he would emerge yet again as a conquering hero dispelling death and darkness and revealing secrets, mysteries and all things hidden (cf. Hooke 1953:27).

Along with the associations with vigour, vitality and courage, Shamash was primarily and foremost worshipped as the patron deity of justice and judgement (cf. Pinches 1906:65). Shamash was the deity responsible for maintaining the cosmic order (especially the principle of retribution) and seeing to it that the king and his government do the same in the sphere of social and moral order (cf. Mackenzie 1978:53-54). Shamash was praised for being the deity who saw to it that wickedness was punished and righteousness rewarded. In other words, thanks to Shamash, life was fair. Shamash was also known as the divine "shepherd" who delivered the oppressed from their oppressors whilst he personally saw to it that the oppressors were punished (cf. Hooke 1953:90-92).

The social order and justice within society was thus the special domain of this deity's interventions. As the universal judge, Shamash judged the actions of both heaven and earth thus ensuring the harmony and beneficence of the cosmic and social orders. His temple in Babylon was known as the "House of judgement" (cf. Handy 1994:105). Linked with this concern for justice and retribution was Shamash's association in mythology with the king and royal enterprise in general (cf. Mackenzie 1978:158). It was Shamash who established a covenant with the famous king Hammurabi and revealed to him all his laws and wisdom with which to govern society in a fair and just manner (cf. Rogers 1908:85).



Fig 5.1 In this example of Mesopotamian solar mythology the sun god Shamash is seen giving the divine laws for the social order to king Hammurabi. (cf. Pritchard 1954:175)

To be sure, not only Hammurabi but all subsequent kings and rulers had Shamash as a

patron who, it was believed, gave them the wisdom to create a social order where justice and retribution prevailed and oppression was eliminated (Jastrow 1898:193). Shamash also promised to accompany kings on their military campaigns and as their patron he would ensure their success in battle (cf. Langdon 1931:14). It was largely due to their favour with Shamash that the kings believed they had authority, wisdom, sovereignty and the power needed to ensure a stable moral order in society. Like Shamash, the king (as his representative) was considered to have divine wisdom regarding matters of government and the mysteries of the cosmic order (Hooke 1953:133).

The primary reason Shamash was a favourite patron deity to the kings of Mesopotamia was because, as the god of justice, he was ipso facto also considered to be omniscient. Shamash was the all-seeing and therefore the all-knowing one (cf. Mackenzie 1978:335). The light that he emanated and his transcendent vantage point in the heavens from where he surveyed all that happened under him (i.e. "under the sun") made this connection a logical one. By his light and vision he chased away the darkness and the shadows where injustice and disorder and death were rampant and where there was a diminished quality of life and happiness. As the swift "winged lord" of the heavens, he could even see into man's hearts and would judge and punish those who even dared to contemplate evil (cf. Mackenzie 1978:336).

More positively, Shamash also enlightened the hearts of the righteous with wisdom and understanding. It was Shamash who granted pious sages insight into life's mysteries (cf. Pinches 1906:68). Not surprisingly, Shamash was also known as the god of divination (cf. Pinches 1906:69). Being all-knowing and all seeing, he revealed to his benefactors (kings, sages and priests) the secrets of the cosmic order including the divine will for the hidden future. Shamash was invoked in divination rituals and through oracles he made known the future to the diviners on the condition that they serve him as patron and live righteously (cf. Jastrow 1898:211).

Along with being the god of justice and divination, Shamash was also worshipped as the controller of human fate and destiny (cf. Langdon 1931:14). As controller and revealer of the cosmic order, the concept of time and appointed times were also linked to Shamash. Whatever happened on earth was always first decreed in heaven by Shamash - the "appointer of times" (cf. Hooke 1953:92). In the story of Utnapishtim and the flood it was Shamash who controlled the time of execution. As noted earlier, in the same story - the Gilgamesh epic - where other parallels to Qohelet and to other parts of the OT (e.g. Gen 1-11) have also been identified, the patron deity of Gilgamesh was none other than Shamash himself (cf. Pritchard 1949:122).

In all this, Shamash, like most sun gods, was also associated with the concept of life and the gift of a happy and prosperous existence (cf. Graves et al. 1959:57-58). The length of one's lifespan as well as possible health, happiness, wealth and success were all believed to be the gracious gift of the solar judge in the heavens. As fair, benevolent and gracious judge, Shamash guaranteed that the righteous have a long, happy and prosperous life while the unrighteous either met with death or spent a miserable and meaningless existence in darkness and poverty. The vengeance for unjust acts was believed to be enacted swiftly by Shamash himself (cf. Mackenzie 1978:54).

In the cult and in society, Shamash was also the deity invoked in the ritual of oath

swearing. He would punish without exception all who dared to break a sworn oath (cf. Hooke 1953:133). As the “shepherd” of his people, Shamash therefore also embodied wholeness, truth and completeness. This role and function is once again linked to his primary and essential nature as the god of justice. He had a particular aversion to all who maltreated and abused the poor and downtrodden of society. In solar mythology, Shamash’s consort was Aya. They had two offspring namely Kittu (justice) and Misaru (law) (cf. Routledge et al. 1988:308).

On the one hand, anyone who knows the book of Qohelet cannot deny that what concerned Qohelet regarding the reality under the “sun” parallels to a great extent the issues Mesopotamian solar mythology also associates with the sub solar realm. On the other hand, it is clear that what Qohelet discovered under the sun is, for the most part, the exact opposite of what solar mythology claimed to be the case regarding the domain of the sun god’s rule. Is this simply a remarkable coincidence?

5.4 POSSIBLE EGYPTIAN INFLUENCE

The influence of Egypt upon Israel’s wisdom is an acknowledged fact (cf. Williams 1981:1-19). Among the Egyptian works, the “*Harper’s Songs*” (Pritchard 1949:467) have been compared to Qohelet because of the “*carpe diem*” motif they have in common. The dialogue between “*The Man Who Was Tired of Life*” and his soul shows a certain kinship to Qohelet in his preoccupation with death (Pritchard 1949:405-407).

These motifs, of course, are common to the Semitic as well as to the Egyptian world. A more fundamental similarity between Egyptian wisdom and Qohelet was advanced by Galling and seconded by von Rad and others: that the literary form of the book is the *Königstestament* or “Royal testament” such as is exemplified by the teaching of Merikare already in the twenty-second century B.C. (cf. Pritchard 1949:414-418). Other comparisons have been made between Qohelet and some late demotic Egyptian compositions, the *Papyrus Insinger* and the instruction of *Anksheshonq* (cf. AEL 3:184-217, 159-184).⁷¹

5.4.1 Egyptian Solar mythology

In Egypt, the sun god was known by many names: Re, Atum, Ammon, Ammon-Re, Chepri, Horus, Ptah, Osiris, etc. Similar to Mesopotamian solar mythology, other important deities were often also solar deities or eventually became such (cf. Ringgren 1979:12). The many solar deities were not so much representative of different sun gods but rather of mythical representations of various manifestations of the one sun (god). In the Old Testament, the Egyptian sun god was known as Ra, “רַע” as theophoric names such as פּוֹטִיפָרַע (Gen. 41:45) and הוֹפְרַע (Jer. 44:30) attest (cf. Frankfort 1948:11). In

⁷¹ The similarity here is quite general. Qohelet and *Papyrus Insinger* are both concerned with the mystery of God and the divine determination of human fate. However, these resemblances are far from proving dependence of one upon another. Similarly, *Anksheshonq* has been compared to Qohelet (cf. Gemser 1959:102 - 128), but Lichtheim has since shown that the comparison is rather with Sirach and even here the question of dependence seems to be the wrong one to ask. Lichtheim emphasises the international currents that influenced both Egypt and Palestine (Lichtheim 1980:184, 195). In this section, I shall not be arguing for Qohelet’s dependence on any *document* of Egyptian literature. Rather, I too feel that the idea of “international currents” has more merit when trying to read Qohelet against an international ANE background.

contrast to Mesopotamia where Shamash himself, although popular, never rose to become the head of the pantheon, the Egyptian sun god was, by the time of the first millennium B.C., the number one deity in terms of both hierarchy and popularity. In fact, most deities were considered as little more than alternative derivations from the sun god (cf. David 1982:50).

Having much the same attributes and functions as Shamash, רַע / Ra was also here recognised and worshiped as a creator god of justice, retribution, knowledge, life, time, etc. (cf. Ringgren 1979:30). In this regard, Re symbolised the cosmogenic energies and qualities that found their terrestrial embodiment in his son, the divine king or Pharaoh. רַע / Ra was considered to be the father of the king whom he guided and upon whom he bestowed divine wisdom, authority and power (Frankfort 1948:159). In Egypt, the sun was also depicted as making a daytime journey through the sky while at night dispelling the darkness of the underworld. According to Egyptian solar mythology, the day was divided into three periods which corresponded to the three phases of Re's journey. These three phases of the solar circuit are also expressed in a triad of the sun god's manifestations: i.e. Chepri (sunrise / Morning); רַע / Re / Ra (midday) and Atum (sunset / evening). But these three manifestations were all part of one and the same deity known as רַע / Re or Re Herakhte (cf. Taylor 1993:240).

In the solar mythology of heliopolitan wisdom traditions, the sun god Re was the father of Ma'at (justice, truth, order). In particular, Ra (רַע) was associated with the concepts of creation, kingship, retribution, time, executive power and omniscience. Ra's solar circuit was seen as the central life generating process in the universe. The heliopolitan concept of cosmogony does not know of closure in the creation process but conceives of creation as the beginning of an endless repetitive cycle of decay and regeneration where nothing new ever happens (cf. Assmann:1990:215). Ra's daily journey was viewed metaphorically as his combat with the cosmic enemy. This foe was the personification of darkness, chaos, dissolution and evil which manifested itself in the form of a huge serpent (cf. Keel 1992:18).

This enemy needed to be overthrown daily yet can never be completely annihilated. Chaos must be controlled to keep the world functioning. In all of this, it was the task of Ra's son - the king - to imitate the solar deity's struggle against chaos. Like Ra, the king as the solar deity's earthly incarnation acts as a judge of mankind. This divine son had to actualise *Ma'at* (truth, justice, retribution, order, etc.) and annihilate *Isfet* (chaos, injustice, oppression) (cf. Assmann 1969:302). The king, in his political struggle for social order thus imitates his father - the sun god - in his struggle in the heavens for cosmic order (cf. Frankfort 1949:160). On his nightly journey and in his activities in the underworld, Ra was also associated with the concepts of light, life after death, immortality and rebirth (cf. David 1982:51).

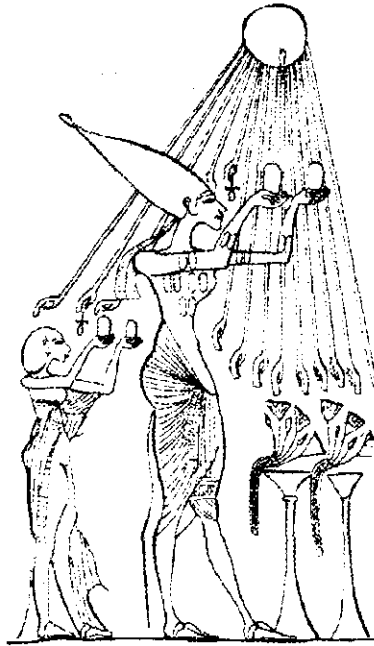


Fig 5.2 According to Egyptian solar mythology, the sun god gave light and life to the living and the dead. Everyone lives "under the sun" (cf. Keel 1978:220)

The conceptions of the sun god as executor of order, retribution and justice, and his bestowal of light, life and happiness, was interpreted in a way that reflected the fundamentals of human existence (cf. Breasted 1959:71-72). Thus, all social justice and harmony, all political order, all royal wisdom as well as the individual's hopes for health, happiness, and life after death were considered as being ultimately dependant on, and derived from, the generosity of Ra who bestowed these as gifts to humanity. It was this relationship of mutual illumination of the cosmic, socio-political and individual essentials of meaningful existence that conveys to this worldview the character of truth verified by natural evidence (cf. Knight 1915:105).

As noted as creator god of justice and order, Ra (and his wife, *Raf*) had a daughter who was known as *Ma'at* (cf. Ringgren 1979:110). This offspring was a further symbol and personification of the cosmic order that the sun god represented and actualised daily. Like Ra, his daughter was associated with the concepts of order, justice and truth (cf. Ringgren 1979:111). While it was initially *Ma'at* who was particularly associated with wisdom, it was Ra, the sun god himself, who rose to prominence whenever Egyptian wisdom traditions became disillusioned with a dogmatic outlook (cf. van der Toorn et al. 1997:1305). Dissatisfied with the falsified optimism of the earlier wisdom traditions with their mechanical ideas of retribution and the possibility of understanding the mysteries of the cosmic order and life itself, the Egyptian wisdom traditions had it's own upheaval in the production of more sceptical literature. In these texts, and in the so called "grave biographies", divine retribution, justice and human knowledge of life's mysteries were considered as being unfathomable, unattainable, and as basically overoptimistic and pious fictions that can easily be proved false by simply observing what actually happens in the world (cf. Perdue 1994:198-200).

In times like these, the popularity of *Ma'at* as the patron deity of wisdom waned considerably since she was the deity particularly associated with the more dogmatic and

optimistic trends in wisdom theology (cf. Ringgren 1979:107). Yet, despite the disillusionment with the earlier beliefs, the sceptical wisdom traditions, though they denied the veracity of the optimists' version of retribution and cosmic order, still paradoxically clung to their own affirmation and interpretation of these phenomena. They still believed in the reality of retribution, justice and the cosmic order. However, they believed that these phenomena were mysterious and incomprehensible so that humans can never really know the logic behind the divine mind's acts of judgement (cf. Breasted 1959:319-320).

When Ma'at began to lose her popularity with the sages it was her father Ra who rose to prominence. Ra came to be associated with the mysterious inscrutable cosmic order. The belief in retribution and justice was never completely abandoned but was perceived to be operative on a level beyond mortal comprehension. In other words, Ra became the deity *par excellence* of Egyptian sceptical wisdom (cf. van der Toorn et al. 1997:1306).

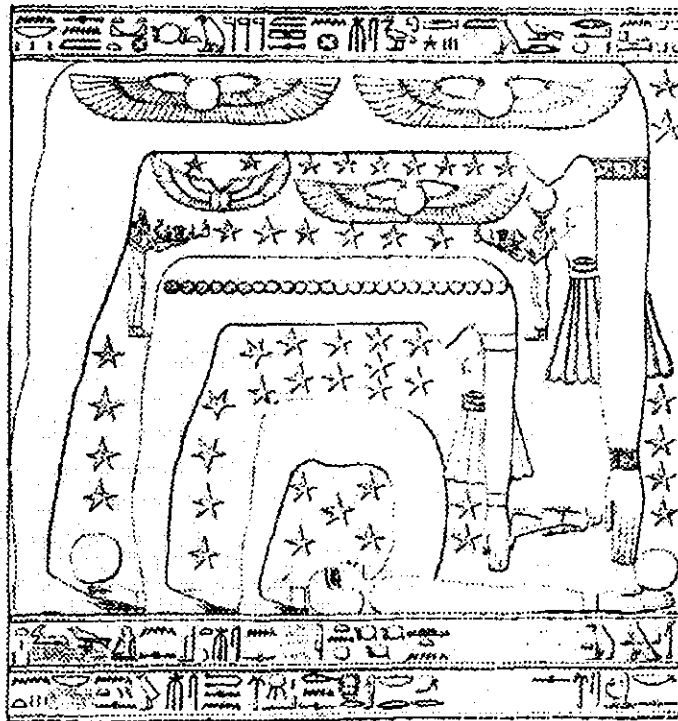


Fig 5.3 An iconographic representation containing expressions of Egyptian solar mythology (cf. Keel 1978:37)

With regard to the perceived relationship between the god and mere mortals, traditional optimistic beliefs were already coming under pressure from intellectual criticism from the time of the New Kingdom onwards (cf. Brunner 1952:90). While the sun god was formerly seen as mediating life and rejuvenation in his daily solar circuit, he later became depicted as a pitiful and lonely figure who strenuously completed his journey in total solitude. In later solar theology, the sun god came to be perceived as ever more distant and transcendent and was no longer seen as directly interacting with humans on earth. He still bestowed the gifts of light, life and happiness to whomever he pleased. But now he did so from afar and with intentions and logic that was incomprehensible.

Thus, the sun god and the world became removed from each other by an unbridgeable distance (cf. Otto 1952:148-152).

From the Amarna period to (and during) the first millennium B.C., Ra was not only seen as a generator of light but also of time. "Time" here refers to the double sense of divine cosmic energy as well as the lifetime and destiny of individuals of whom Ra was the creator. In this theology of appointed times, Ra was depicted as executing his divine will by controlling human's fate in ways that was unalterable and which overrode all human attempts at realising personal agendas and ambitions (cf. Routledge et al. 1988:308). Not only time as such but also the contents of time were perceived to be controlled and created by Ra to the extent that all destiny, fate, history and biography were sovereignly and unfathomably manipulated by the solar deity in heaven. Life with its entire political, social and individual vicissitudes emanated as the unalterable law and order of Ra (cf. Ringgren 1979:121-122). Ra was also not only perceived as one who actively preserved, controlled and ruled his eternal creation as divine king. He was also thought of as operative in passive roles such as that of a child who is born and raised; a king being crowned and adored; an old feeble man being guided and assisted; a dead man who is transformed, reborn and rejuvenated; etc. (cf. Breasted 1959:71).

As was the case with Mesopotamian solar mythology, Egyptian solar mythology (possibly even to a greater extent) seems to provide both synthetical and antithetical parallels to Qohelet's own "sun drenched" discourse. Especially the peculiar theology of Qohelet seems to find a "soulmate" in sceptical heliopolitan wisdom traditions. How all this data should be synthesized and what the significance of the alleged parallels might be will be discussed in detail in chapters 7 and 8.

5.5 POSSIBLE GREEK INFLUENCE

The question of Hellenistic influence upon Qohelet is still moot (cf. Murphy 1992:xlili). The early history of this debate need not be summarised here (cf. Ranston 1925). In more recent times Loretz (1964:45-134) weighed the arguments of Egyptian, Greek and Mesopotamian influence and came down decidedly on the Semitic background and hence Mesopotamian influence. He does not argue for direct dependence upon any Mesopotamian works, although he finds the similarity of Qohelet to certain parts of the Gilgamesh epic most striking. Rather, he is content to characterise Qohelet as a work that is to be understood against the background of the literature and worldview of the Semites of the Ancient Near East. To this end, he discusses the classical Mesopotamian counterparts (mentioned above) and focuses on the notable features that are held in common. His arguments however do not deal directly with the problem of Hellenism and the possibility of Qohelet's activity in a Hellenistic milieu (cf. Murphy 1992:xlili).

Loretz (1964:145) attempts to meet the charge by pointing out how uncertain the case is for the alleged Graecisms (such as the assumed correspondence between Qohelet's use of the idea of fate or "מקרה" and the Greek concept of "τύχη"). He also denies that there is any real evidence to justify linking Qohelet to any of the Greek philosophical schools of thought that he is often compared to (Epicures, Stoics, Theognis). Some scholars like Murphy (1992:xlili) feel that Loretz's arguments are, however, off the mark. Qohelet could have been influenced by those schools of thought without belonging to any of them or accepting all their ideas in their totality. *It is too easy to dismiss parallels*

by focusing on certain specifics that have nothing in common with the author under discussion"⁷² Pointing out parallels is not simply synonymous with claiming plagiarism or wholehearted endorsement of the whole body of foreign beliefs *en bloc*. Be that as it may, Loretz even denies the possibility of the influence of a Hellenistic *Zeitgeist* on Qohelet as Hengel (1974: 115-130) argued for.

As far as the development of the scholarly debate about the alleged Hellenistic influence on Qohelet is concerned, it was Braun (1973) who, in response to Loretz (1964), argued that the Hellenistic hypothesis couldn't easily be dismissed. This is due to the fact that he and most scholars believed that Qohelet lived and wrote in a Hellenistic world. Braun (1973) surveys the Greek literature, early and late, that is pertinent to the mood of Qohelet, especially the Sophists, Cynics, Stoics and Sceptics. Braun discusses the Graecisms that have featured in the debate (including "vapour" and "under the sun") and concludes that Qohelet, though not directly dependant on any single school of thought, was influenced by the Hellenistic culture in his choice of motifs and with regard to the topics that interested him. In the end, the theory of Hellenistic influence upon Qohelet came down to this: Qohelet lived in a Hellenistic culture and while no direct source of his thoughts can be pinpointed, there appear to be many parallels between his ideas and those that occupied the agendas of Greek philosophical schools and wisdom traditions (cf. Braun 1973:170).

Kaiser (1982: 69-73), in a critique of Braun, found only one third of Braun's parallels convincing and concluded that the question of Hellenistic influence is more complex than the listing of parallels. N. Lohfink (1981: 17-31) more or less takes for granted the Hellenistic nature of the book but doesn't argue for it. He believes that it was written as late as 190-180 B.C., just before Sirach and the Maccabean revolt. Third-century Judaism was very Hellenistic in character and the Greek literature, language and lifestyle necessitated the emergence of one such as Qohelet who acquired as much as possible of the Greek wisdom without giving up Israelite identity.

Lohfink (1980: 09) also claimed Qohelet taught the people in a way analogous to the Greek wandering philosophers and that, though the book was written in Hebrew, its syntax was Greek. Qohelet's ideas can furthermore be traced not only to the aforementioned philosophical schools but also to other popular Greek thinkers such as Menander, Euripides, Theognis, Pindar and Homer amongst others. Lohfink's historical reconstruction of the background to Qohelet is interesting but his arguments have not met with universal acceptance. His critics consider them to be somewhat thin and speculative. However, many who are not as optimistic about postulating a Hellenistic source for Qohelet still feel that the Hellenistic *Zeitgeist* caused the author to share the same concerns and ideas as many of the Greek philosophical schools of thought (cf. Fox 1989: 16).

⁷² This realisation by Murphy (1992: xlili) is especially noteworthy in the context of this study. Many scholars who are "allergic" to comparative studies seek to debunk the validity of those enquiries by pointing out the differences between the Biblical text under consideration and the alleged parallel literature. This sort of critique is based on the fallacy of assuming that a virtual proof of plagiarism should be supplied before any influence is to be admitted. Such scholars might find it difficult to relate to the present study which is based on claims about allusions which are often only implicit.

5.5.1 Greek solar mythology

In Greece, solar theology rose to prominence and popularity at a time which coincided with the emergence of the philosophical traditions of the second half of the first millennium B.C. As was the case elsewhere, *Helios* or the sun (either as a god or a demythologised symbol, as was the case with some philosophers) was associated with the concepts of life, truth, justice and omniscience. According to one source, Helios was the most prominent of all the gods.⁷³ In Homeric literature, Helios is indistinguishable from the solar disk in the sky and was described by epithets such as "radiant" and "tireless". Helios was seen as a tireless, persistent and omniscient observer of the human world. As all-seeing and all-knowing sun (god), Helios was the guarantor of cosmic and social order (cf. Graves 1959:142-143; Routledge 1988:147).

According to Homer,⁷⁴ Helios sees everything as he spies on both gods and mortals. This same view was also a popular theme in the Greek tragedies written by Aeschylus, Sophocles, and others as an aetiological narrative to show why Helios was also inextricably linked to the swearing of oaths. Apart from his role as the bestower of life, light, knowledge and wisdom, Helios was also believed to be responsible for the political and social order (cf. van der Toorn 1997:755). As elsewhere, Helios was worshipped as the god of justice, judgement and retribution. The solar deity was believed to mediate these realities to everyone experiencing the trials of life. As a god of judgement, Helios was also seen as an ideal, incorruptible witness of subjective and objective truths (cf. Jayne 1962:327). However, Helios was not the only deity associated with the sun. Other popular deities (such as Zeus and Apollo) were also, especially in later times and in international contexts, worshipped as sun gods.

The responsibilities of Helios with regard to the maintenance of the social order was supplemented with his responsibilities pertaining to the harmonisation of the cosmic orders of creation, justice, life and retribution (cf. Kerényi 1959:191-193). The regularity of his immutable course and his tirelessness as he flew daily through the heavens was emphasised as a source of admiration and wonder. As protector and symbol of life, Helios's threats in the Homeric myths (to descend into Hades, to dispel the darkness of the underworld and shine and judge among the dead) was the earliest in a long tradition of reversals represented in terms of solar aberration. In the later cosmologies of the philosophical traditions from the fifth century B.C. onwards, Helios, because he was associated with the abstract qualities of truth, knowledge and justice, became the most popular deity of the Greek philosophers who idealised (and idolised) these same qualities (cf. van der Toorn 1997:756).

In the ensuing complex of the cosmologies of Greek philosophers, Helios was not only associated with the concept of justice but also with the perceived mystery of the incomprehensible world order (cf. Grimal 1986:190). In Platonic and Stoic thought, Helios became an embodiment of the cosmic order or reason (*logos*). In addition, whereas this solar deity was not part of the divine pantheon of Olympus in earlier Greek theology, during the era of the philosophers, Helios became associated with the father of the gods, Zeus himself. Through the way of religious politics, Helios eventually became the most prominent and popular deity of the Greek philosophical and

⁷³ Cf. Sophocles *Oed. Rex* 660.

⁷⁴ Cf. Homer: *Hymn Den* 62; *Od.* 8:302

theological traditions (cf. van der Toorn 1997:757).

As far as attributes were concerned, the Helios of the philosophers was seen as an imperial deity who was the gracious bestower of life and the opposer of death (cf. Routledge et al. 1988:147). It was simply his sovereign and inscrutable whim that determined whether certain mortals would enjoy a life of happiness wealth and freedom and or whether they will not have such privileges. The philosophical concepts of goodness and truth were still considered to be embodied by Helios who, as a patron of justice and law in society, was thought to guarantee the social and moral order (Jayne 1962:327).

The sun(god)'s universal presence brought, along with his fair and sure judgement, also the promise of protection from all injustice, oppression and the abuse of power (cf. Leach et al. 1992:101). Helios was also concerned with individual health and, being the god of life and the dispeller of darkness, he also had the function of healing the disease of blindness. On the other hand, Helios would ensure that all those who broke their oaths or who oppressed others and thus perverted justice in society would be struck by blindness. The transgressors would be condemned to a lifetime of living in darkness, poverty and despair (cf. Pettazoni 1956:5-6).

Funerals, athletic games, sporting competitions and other celebrations of life were frequently held to honour the sun(god) (cf. van der Toorn 1997:753). Apart from his role in both celebratory cultic and funerary / mourning rites, Helios was also linked with the higher affairs of royalty and government. Helios himself is described by the philosophers (and even Jews like Philo, later on) as a "king" and a "shepherd" (cf. Grimal 1986:190). According to the sages, the sun god's role in the swearing of religious and political oaths and his responsibility to wreak vengeance on all who break them was but one of his perceived functions in human politics. It was his primary function in earlier times but, when he became the philosophers' deity of choice, his function as witness to the swearing of oaths receded into the background (cf. Kerényi 1959:193). Now, becoming more a symbol and guardian of knowledge, truth and justice, Helios was naturally a favourite deity of the philosophical schools and as such was worshipped by, amongst others, Socrates, the Stoics and the Cynics (cf. van der Toorn 1997:755-758). These traditions preferred sun worship simply because of all the sun symbolised and due to the fact that the qualities of truth, knowledge and order / justice were the ideals that obsessed them and dominated their thinking. Not only did philosophers like Socrates pray to the sun for enlightenment but also many outstanding sages were posthumously venerated as incarnations of the sun god or as his sons. For example, the philosopher Plato was believed to be the son of the sun god Apollo⁷⁵ (cf. Armstrong 1997:77).

As such, Helios soon also became the deity of choice among the Greek upper classes, the intellectuals and the aristocracy (probably not least on account of his being associated with life, health, wealth and the maintenance of the social order, i.e. of the status quo). For the philosophers, the lovers of "σοφία" (wisdom), the sun god's role as a universal deity embodied the highest cosmic principle to which all creation must submit in reverence. Those whose main pursuit was the practice of justice and wisdom

⁷⁵ As noted before, solar deities in ANE mythology were not simply those whose names were also the local words for the sun (i.e. Helios, Shemesh, Shamash, etc.). Many scholars of Biblical interpretation might be unaware of the fact that these deities were but one manifestation of the sun god who was not usually identified as (but was associated with) the physical sun.

needed not to fear this deity who, as their patron, granted them his favour (cf. Pettazzoni 1956:06).

In other words, here in the late first millennium Hellenistic philosophical context, a religio-mythological historical background can be constructed within which Qohelet's views of what happens "under the sun" can take on a whole new meaning and significance. While scholars have been busy discovering parallels to Qohelet's ideas in Greek philosophy, they have failed to notice the religious and theological background to which the Greek philosophical traditions owed their allegiance.

5.6 SUN WORSHIP IN PERSIA

Many scholars today believe that the book Qohelet was written during the Persian Period (cf. Murphy 1992:xxii). Although most commentators seem to favour the Hellenistic period, the popularity of a post-exilic dating allows for a space of about two centuries during which the Persian Empire held sway in the ANE. It seems that the hypothesis in favour of dating Qohelet to this period is based on arguments which point to the presence of Persianisms in the vocabulary as well as possible allusions to Persian socio-political scenarios in the contents. Whether or not Qohelet is to be dated to the Persian period is not the primary concern of this study. Here I wish to indicate that, should the theory of a Persian background become in vogue, there is still the matter of possible allusions to solar mythology which cannot be ignored. In other words, as elsewhere in this section, rather than claiming any direct Persian influence on his thought, I intend only to provide an introduction to Persian solar mythology which might have some bearing on the interpretation of Qohelet's sun imagery.

Suppose Qohelet was written during the Persian period, influenced by Persian ideas or in polemical dialogue with Persian religious mythology.⁷⁶ In what way can my hypothesis fulfil a heuristic function based on such conjectures? In this regard it should be remembered that sun worship and solar mythology was universal in ANE religion. In addition, the sun gods of the various cultures were, for the most part, the same as far as attributes and functions were concerned (cf. Bram 1987:109). In other words, it should be no surprise that the rise of the Persian Empire after the fall of Babylonia and Assyria brought with it a solar mythology not very different from its forerunners and contemporary foreign counterparts.

To be sure, in Persia the sun gods were identical to Assyria's solar deities, Asshur and Shamash in all but name. In fact, the most popular solar deity of Persia, Mithra, was often referred to in the religious texts as "Shamash" – the name of the sun god of the nation that Persia defeated (Bram 1987:112). In the beginning of the Persian period, Mithra was closely associated with the gods Asshur and Shamash and only later underwent syncretistic transformations which resulted in him becoming a hybrid and local deity (cf. Eliade 1958). Nonetheless, both Mithra and the primary deity in the Persian pantheon, Ahuru Mazda, were for the most part depicted as solar deities. Moreover, Mithra, first associated with Mesopotamian solar deity Shamash, later

⁷⁶ The notion of Persian mythology as influential in post – exilic Judaism is hardly a new idea. Most Old Testament scholars will be aware of the many theories which have been put forward to account for and explain the developments in the Old Testament's theology, cosmography, thanatology, angelology, demonology, etc.. In this regard, it is claimed that the developments in the OT can best be perceived as resultant of syncretism between Judaism and Persian mythology.

became more specifically associated with Shamash in spring, alias Tammuz (cf. Campbell 1964).

Like all solar deities, Mithra (alias Shamash, alias Tammuz, etc.) was believed to have been born on what is now called December 25. During the winter, Mithra (like Tammuz and Baal) could “die” on 22 December (which is the longest night and shortest day in the middle of winter in the northern hemisphere) and rise after three days (when the days became noticeably longer for the first time) (cf. Harwood 1992). Mithra was very popular during the Persian period and especially the aristocracy liked to include ‘mithra’ as a theophoric element in their own names (cf. Bram 1987). Mithraism itself went on to outlive the Persian period and developed in various ways through the Hellenistic period. Even during Roman times the Persian solar deity became equated with the Latin solar deity Sol Invictus. Christianity itself did not escape the influence of Mithraism and its attractive solar mythology (cf. Haasbroek 1995).

For the purpose of my study, however, the following part of Mithraic solar mythology is especially relevant: like Shamash, Mithra was a god of justice, knowledge, royalty, life, etc. Sometimes Mithra is simply referred to as Shamash (sun). Like the other solar deities, Mithra was not simply equated, but was associated with the physical sun. The sun was the icon or symbol which displayed the solar deity's glory *par excellence*. In iconographic representation, therefore, Mithra is also depicted as traversing the sky in a chariot drawn by panting horses which sped along the solar circuit on a daily basis (cf. Bram 1987).

From the heavens, Mithra sees all that happens under the sun. Because of his omnipresent gaze, Mithra knows everything and is therefore the bearer of knowledge, wisdom and many secrets of the cosmic order. From his heavenly vantage point, Mithra, as a god of justice, judges everyone on earth (cf. Bram 1987). Mithra is considered to be a fair and benevolent judge who punishes the wicked and ensures swift and fair retribution. Mithra delivers the oppressed and saves those who are treated unfairly. In addition, Mithra ensured that those who broke sworn oaths were punished severely (cf. Bram 1987). Being a just and judging god, Mithra, like his counterparts elsewhere, also bestowed life, health and wealth on those in his favour. Persian kings were considered to be either sons of the sun (god) or themselves little “sun gods” (cf. Harwood 1992). Herodotus relates how the Persian rulers often sacrificed to the sun and mentions Xerxes who, on his way to war with Greece, stopped numerous times to sacrifice some of his horses to the sun god in exchange for wisdom (cf. Bram 1987).

The worship of Mithra as a solar deity was not simply an offspring of earlier cultures' solar religions but also played a definitive role in the spread of solarism to other centres which later propagated solar mythology (cf. Bram 1987). Thus one finds that the solar religion of, for example, Baalbek, Palmyra, Syria, etc. all came about as a result of the spread of Persian solar mythology. Moreover, in religious texts from both Persia (Avesta) and India (Vedas) there are many solar elements which came from this period. Mithra was also the subject in many hymns and is often depicted as a “shepherd” providing life and wealth on his devotees (cf. Harwood 1992).

Like other solar deities, Mithra was also associated with light and the dispelling of evil, death and darkness. Archaeological and historical data all indicate that both Judaism and later Christianity was influenced by Mithraism in terms of its worldview, its cultic

rituals and its artistic expressions (cf. Harwood 1992; Haasbroek 1995). Was Qohelet, as the king who saw everything under the sun, especially injustice, oppression, ignorance, death, etc. attempting to discredit attractive Persian solar mythology which might have started to influence and endanger the Judaism and wisdom of his own day? Was this solar mythology of Mithra the victim of the deconstructive polemical irony of a Jewish sage who argued persuasively with his empirical demonstration that, under the sun, life is absurd, unfair, futile, incomprehensible, pointless, etc.?

5.7 SUN WORSHIP IN CANAAN

In the next chapter, I shall present a detailed study of sun worship and the influence of solar mythology in Israel as attested in the Old Testament and in archaeological discoveries. For the present, it must suffice to note several related facts about non-Israelite sun worship and solar mythology in the areas of Syria and Palestine in the Old Testament period.

As will be shown in the next chapter, many place names and personal names found both in the Old Testament and in other texts discovered by archaeological excavations attest to the presence of sun worship throughout the regions of Syria, Phoenicia and Palestine (cf. also Ferm 1945:123). In the area under consideration, the sun god was known by many names. Apart from the obvious example of the west Semitic solar deity Shemesh the divine sun was also worshiped under the names of Shapash, Baal Shamaim, Moloch, Chemosh, Helios, etc (cf. Routledge et al. 1988:308). As this region was the cross roads of the ancient world solar mythology from Egypt, Mesopotamia and later Greece contributed to the region's solar mythologies (cf. Gordon 1961:123).

Even before the Hebrew settlement in Canaan, there had been a long-standing tradition of sun worship in the Canaanite world as can be deduced from the solar mythology implicit in the Old Testament. Archaeological discoveries in the area and other historical texts from other cultures attest to this fact (cf. Gray 1969:59). Up north, since Ugaritic times, the sun god was worshiped as the female solar deity Shapash (cf. Vriezen 1963:53). The worship of this deity is also attested in the texts from Ebla in Syria. Elsewhere we find the worship of Shemesh, the male solar deity of the region who later became merged with the many Baal cults especially in the region of Phoenicia (cf. Jayne 1962:132). In Canaan, deities like Shemesh, Shapash, Baal Shamaim, Baal Hammon, Moloch (King) and Chemosh (Sun) all exhibited solar characteristics.

A female solar deity from Ugarit, Shapash, is considered by some scholars to be one of the most significant deities in the Ugaritic pantheon (cf. Gordon 1961:213). Shapash was considered a source of light and life and was known in mythology as the ruler of the dead who annually rescues Baal from Mot in the underworld. Shapash, as in the case with the sun gods in general in the Ancient Near East, reigns over the powers of chaos and it is only by the solar deity's intervention that the cosmic order can be in harmony. She was also believed to assist the newly dead on their journey to the land of death and darkness where she provided them with a source of light. She also, like other solar deities, embodied for her worshipers the ideals of health, knowledge, security and happiness in life. She was also invoked in incantations against snakebites (cf. Obermann 1948:17).

Whereas the goddess Shapash was most popular during the second half of the second

millennium B.C., the solar deity Shemesh rose to prominence in the area during the first millennium B.C. (cf. Oldenburg 1969:21). This was along with other deities such as both solar and non-solar Baals and Asheras. As elsewhere in the Ancient Near East Shemesh as the local solar deity was associated with and symbolised the ideals of justice, retribution, knowledge and a happy prosperous life (cf. Graves et al. 1959:58).

As the source of light and life, any darkening of the sun - whether by clouds or during an eclipse - was linked to omens of misfortune, failure and a miserable existence (cf. Ferm 1950:123). Shemesh also embodied the concepts of time and constancy, security and steadiness. Because he was a source of light and life, Shemesh also was attributed with the functions of revealing the secrets and hidden knowledge of life and of the cosmic order (cf. Jayne 1962:132). Due to these perceived functions, Shemesh, like Re and Shamash, was also linked with wisdom and then especially royal wisdom and the skills of proper and just government. As god of justice and retribution, Shemesh was also credited with the task of making sure the king himself ruled in a just manner and not by oppression. This ensured that the social order could be fair and just and the maltreated could be delivered from their oppressors (cf. Oldenburg 1959:20).

As I shall argue in the next chapter, the Israelites of the Old Testament period were not only familiar with this solar mythology but, during various periods of their history, abandoned Yahwism for the religion of their Canaanite neighbours. This included sun worship and even in periods when they weren't completely enthralled by it, there was still room from syncretism between Yahwism and solar theology.

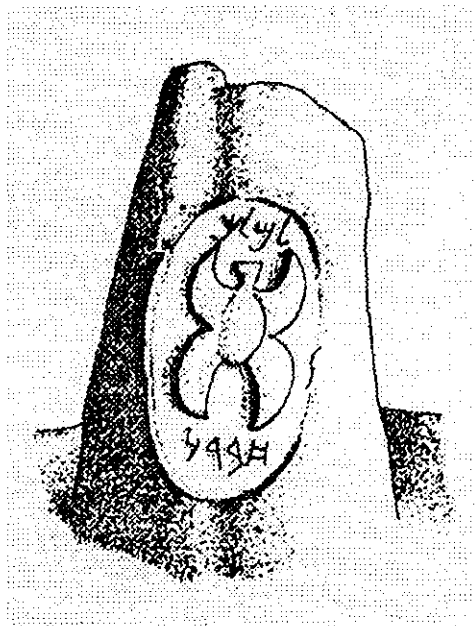


Fig 5.4 A royal Judean jar handle with two winged emblem with an inscription 'for the king' and "Hebron". Many such jar handles were excavated in Canaan, attesting to the people's familiarity with solar mythology (cf. Taylor 1993:243)

5.8 SOLAR MYTHOLOGY AND WISDOM – UNRECOGNISED COMMON INTERESTS

Certain deities in the Ancient Near East were closely associated with wisdom. Often, “wisdom” involved a profound knowledge and capacity for discerning hidden realities. In Mesopotamia, Shamash shared with several other deities the role of patron to the wise and is described as their “shepherd” and as “wise and mighty”. He was the one whose ways nobody knew even though he himself knew all the ways. In the Ancient Near East, wisdom was inextricably with religion and derived its authority from certain patron deities particularly associated with it.⁷⁷ Since the solar deities of the Ancient Near East were universally associated with the ideals of justice, retribution, knowledge of the cosmic order and the future, royal wisdom and fair government as well as life, happiness, prosperity, etc., it should be no surprise that many kings, wise men, folk heroes and philosophers considered Re / Shamash / Helios / etc. as their patron and deity of choice.

It also seems that all schools of wisdom experienced periods when their dogmatic assertions about the cosmic order, life and retribution came under pressure from socio-political events which discredited certain assumptions about the supposed nature of the cosmic and social orders.⁷⁸ During these times, the sun god still remained to be associated with justice, truth and retribution but, in their theodicy, the wise men simply pointed out how mysterious, incomprehensible and unfathomable the ways and will of the solar deity was. Usually, what set off these reversions to sceptical wisdom were periods of political instability and upheaval. The sun god was also universally, but especially in Egypt, considered to be the father of the king. As such, it was believed that the king was the earthly representative of the sun god and even his son. The wisdom of the solar deity enlightened the king as he upheld the social order and justice in society. This was an imitation of the solar deity's own actions on a much larger scale within the cosmic order.

What seem to have eluded scholars, and thus possibly inhibited them from recognising anti-solarist polemical irony in Qohelet, may be the interesting similarities between Near Eastern wisdom and solar mythology. Consider the following: it is common knowledge that wisdom in general is concerned with the concepts of life, happiness, the cosmic order, the social order, royalty, retribution, knowledge, discerning future possibilities, etc. (cf. Murphy 1990; Crenshaw 1995). But is it not remarkable, and probably not merely coincidental, *that these concepts parallel exactly the ideals, attributes and functions that solar mythology assigns to the sun god?*⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Including solar deities like Shamash (patron of Gilgamesh and Ahikar), Re (the most prominent and popular deity of Egyptian heliopolitan wisdom especially during periods of scepticism) and Helios (a popular deity among Greek sages / philosophers).

⁷⁸ I think that traditional theories, which attempt to interpret the wisdom traditions in the Ancient Near East on a rigid and chronological evolutionary scheme, where a primary phase is followed by a dogmatic phase which, in turn, precedes a crisis phase, has been thoroughly discredited. There may well be some truth to the distinction between dogmatic / optimistic and sceptical / pessimistic tendencies. However, these features often coexist in the same periods, repeat in sequences and can coexist within the writings of the same author (cf. also Murphy 1992, 1993).

⁷⁹ Most scholars would agree that Egyptian heliopolitan wisdom definitely influenced the Hebrew sages (cf. Würthwein 1975). What few keep in mind is that this phenomenon was essentially wisdom with allegiance to solar theology. Scholars speak a lot about the concept of “Ma’at” in the abstract without contextualising it in the heliopolitan solar mythology of which it was an inextricable part. Ma’at, as noted

If Re / Shamash / Helios and other solar deities were gods of justice, truth, knowledge, retribution, divination, life, health and cosmic / social order, doesn't that make them not only deities of choice for their sun cults but, also for the wisdom traditions. After all, the sages were obsessed with the very qualities that the solar deity was said to embody. Moreover, while the Biblical wisdom literature is often compared to that from Egypt, Mesopotamia and elsewhere, might it not be significant that the sages and philosophers to whom scholars have compared Qohelet worshipped the sun?

If Baal and Asherah should be tempting deities of choice to those who are concerned with fertility and harvests (cf. Smith 1990a:126-140), isn't it logical to think that wise men in Israel would be tempted to apostasy to a system of theology which concerns itself with the very ideals that they hold in such high esteem? Moreover, if the ideals and concerns of wisdom literature happen to be retribution, justice, the cosmic and social order, royalty, knowledge, life, prosperity, etc., doesn't solar mythology present itself as an attractive alternative to Yahwism? After all, as noted earlier, the solar deity was characteristically depicted as being a god concerned with and embodying these very same concepts. In addition, if apostasy to solarism was considered a non-option, wouldn't some form of syncretism, where Yahweh is depicted as concerned with justice, retribution, life, knowledge and order, be an attractive compromise for a solar-Yahwistic wisdom theology?

It seems, therefore, that ANE solar mythology and Israelite wisdom theology had quite a lot in common.⁸⁰ Certainly, this is the case as far as the two bodies of discourse show signs of being concerned with identical issues. This can be seen when the attributes and functions of the sun god are compared to the concepts which interested the sages of the Old Testament. If these parallels are indeed significant it might be yet another supplementary piece of evidence in the cumulative argument that aims at justifying the hypothesis of possible allusions to solar mythology in Qohelet.

As is the case with the view of Gese (1963:139-151) and others,⁸¹ it has often been thought that Qohelet stands over and against traditional wisdom. It is commonly held that whereas traditional wisdom affirms dogmatically the concepts of a knowable cosmic order, retribution and control over prosperity in life, Qohelet denies all this and falsifies it with his empirical observations of what happens "under the sun". "Under the SUN"! Nobody seems to realise that these concerns of traditional wisdom that Qohelet was supposedly polemising against were the very essence of solar theology! Surely, if this

elsewhere in this study, was after all the daughter of Re, the sun god. Scholars sometimes talk about the concept of Ma'at as a regulative factor even in Israelite wisdom, especially notable in the book of Proverbs. The lady wisdom of proverbs 8 - 9 stands in relation to Yahweh in a way analogical to the relation between Ma'at and Re. In addition, while scholars traditionally believed that in Qohelet we find a breakdown of the concept of order and have noticed that Qohelet constantly refers to the sun, they have failed to recognise the possible significance of these two elements in Qohelet.

⁸⁰ Cf. the discussion of E Würthwein (1958) in Crenshaw (1976:113-133). Würthwein discusses the concept of Ma'at and notes that, even in Qohelet, there is a strong belief in the cosmic order. This despite the general epistemological pessimism. Würthwein also mentions heliopolitan mythology as background to the concept of order. He even refers briefly to the theology of the solar deity. Incredibly, however, even he fails to see any significance in these facts when he discusses the worldview of Qohelet's.

⁸¹ See in this connection, the studies by H. H. Schmid (1968); H. D. Preuss (1987); and H.- J. Hermisson (1968), all of whom seem to recognise the affinities between Israelite wisdom's cosmology and heliopolitan solar mythology in Egypt. Yet, they too never recognise a link between solar mythology and wisdom.

account of the relation between Qohelet and certain earlier wisdom traditions contains any grain of truth whatsoever, it would seem that an even stronger case could be made in favour of viewing the supposed implicit polemical opponents as possibly including those involved with some form of, or offshoot from, solar theology. Qohelet denies not merely the reality, comprehensibility and credibility of these ideals and concepts. In addition, he goes to great lengths in an attempt to emphasise that things like retribution, justice, knowledge, royal wisdom, etc. are largely absent from that domain which he constantly keeps referring to, a domain designated as “under the **sun**”.

From the perspective of Ancient Near Eastern solar mythology, then, it might be the case that Qohelet may have more than his own Israelite wisdom tradition in view when he dishes out his deconstructive polemics (cf. also Whybray 1989; Fox 1999). Whether the Israelite wisdom traditions may have become enthralled by solar mythology - from which it was ultimately derived and with which it had much in common - still remains a matter of speculation. Be that as it may, what is not simply a conjecture is that, for Qohelet at least, all is not simply “vapour”, period. It is all “vapour...under the **sun**”.

Biblical wisdom literature has often been recognised as especially an “international” phenomenon and the part of Yahwism that was the least indigenous or unique element of the cult (cf. Scott 1965; Murphy 1990; Crenshaw 1995).⁸² Now what about the *gods* that were the fundamental patrons to the Egyptian and Mesopotamian wisdom traditions? Can the theology and mythology implicitly behind the heliopolitan wisdom texts be so easily divorced from the apparently secular proverbs and precepts? Is it just a coincidence that the patron deities of Gilgamesh, Ahikar, Amenemope and others were *solar* deities? Are wisdom’s distinctive concerns - not with salvation history, but with creation theology, time, the cosmic and social order, justice, retribution, knowledge and mystery, life and prosperity, royalty and politics, etc. - not an echo of the ANE solar mythology?

Surely, these parallel concerns, the solar mythology behind non-Israelite wisdom literature and the basic universal beliefs endorsed by solar mythology seem to be more closely and influentially related to Israelite wisdom traditions than scholars have hitherto recognised. Even though many of the ancient proverbs appeared rather secular in orientation, it has recently been recognised that they were, in fact, inextricable from the heliopolitan theology which they assume as implicit background (cf. Boström 1990: *passim*). The secular and the religious spheres were not separated as they are today.⁸³

In sum then, it seems somewhat surprising that specialists in wisdom literature have paid such little attention to the relation between wisdom and solar mythology.⁸⁴ In

⁸² As Perdue (1994:20 - 48) notes, the classic admissions to the international character of wisdom in a time when Old Testament theology could not cope with it can be found in the studies by Wright (1950); von Rad (1972), and Preuss (1974).

⁸³ Thus, in many Egyptian texts relevant to the Old Testament, it is not only the solar deity which is the patron and religious overseer of the wise, but this deity became completely universal and, as in Qohelet, is simply referred to in the texts as “the god” (Egyptian: “ntr”). These three developments, i.e. 1) the undeniable influence of Egyptian wisdom on that of Israel; 2) the receding of Ma’at and the prominence of Re; and 3) the universalist and neutral way of referring to the sun god seems particularly relevant to many questions regarding the peculiarities in Qohelet.

⁸⁴ And that heliopolitan wisdom, when compared with Israelite wisdom, is often demythologised and divorced from its origin in solar mythology.

Mesopotamia, and especially in Egypt, a major deity who shared the concerns of the sages was none other than the sun god. In light of all this, the function and significance of the sun imagery in relation to the main issues which Qohelet occupies himself with may need to be re-evaluated.

5.9 SOLAR MYTHOLOGY VS. SOLAR SYMBOLISM

Suppose that I am mistaken. Suppose it could be demonstrated that Qohelet could not possibly have alluded to the discourse of solar mythology. By solar mythology I mean solar theology, i.e. the ANE discourse involving solar deities. Suppose that Qohelet could not possibly be engaging in implicit polemics via deconstructive allusions to Re or Shamash or some other sun god and his theology. Would such an observation make my own observations on the sun imagery in Qohelet as completely useless? I don't think so. To be sure, there is still the discourse of solar "symbolism" which needs to be investigated as a possible reference to which Qohelet's sun imagery might allude (cf. chapter 3) In this case, the sun was not so much seen as the icon / symbol of a solar deity. Rather, as part of the Host of Heaven, the sun was often utilised as a symbol embodying certain values and ideals.

In this regard, a consideration of this alternative referential possibility possibly alluded to in Qohelet's constant references to the sun would seem to provide yet additional support for my basic hypothesis. For it should come as no surprise that, even in what appears to be secular solar symbolism in large parts of ANE literature - including the Old Testament itself - *those qualities that the sun symbolised parallel exactly the attributes and functions and qualities ascribed to the solar deities. Moreover, it would be somewhat hard to understand how, if Qohelet was intentionally hostile to such symbolism, it would not be on account of any other reason than the fact of its origin and parallels in solar mythology.*

However, for the sake of the argument, let's assume Qohelet did not know any solar mythology whatsoever. Let us imagine that he had no intention of polemically deconstructing the theology of solar deities. If this was the case, we are still left with a type of secular solar symbolism that seems to point us right back to solar mythology⁸⁵ as the data regarding the solar symbolism of the Old Testament itself demonstrates. According to "*The Dictionary of Biblical Symbolism*" the sun was associated with the concepts following concepts:

- **Royalty**.....Gen. 37:9; Ps. 72:17; 89:passim
- **Vitality, enduring strength and beauty**.....Judg. 5:31; Ps. 72:5; Ps. 89:36
- **Justice, righteousness and truth**.....Ps. 37:6; Song 6:10; Mal. 3:16
- **Judgement and retribution**.....Num. 25:4; 2 Sam. 6
- **Divine omniscience**.....1 Sam. 12:11-12
- **Life, health and well-being**.....Mal. 4:2
- **Divine protection**.....Ps. 84
- **Appointed times**.....Gen. 1; Isa 38

⁸⁵ For an elaborated rebuttal to the anticipated critique against the presentation of possible parallels from solar mythology in this chapter, see the discussions in chapter 8 of this study. These concern the possible critiques against use and selection of data; the related charges of selectiveness, stereotyping and reductionism; dependence on discredited theories; the negligence to take account of parallels in the theologies of deity's which were not solar; etc.



Fig 5.5 Solar symbolism: The sun rises from the underworld over the tree of life.

in other words, if Qohelet did not allude to solar "mythology" in his observations of what happens "under the sun" (and in his view of God), it seems hardly possible to argue against the view that, at least on the level of solar symbolism, some deconstruction or at least irony is operative in Qohelet's rhetoric. If this is granted then it would still amount to an identification of what is still an hitherto unrecognised element in his discourse: the deconstruction of the associative and connotative meanings of the word "sun" as it featured in the context of ANE and biblical symbolism. It should be admitted that, as far as the third alternative referential possibility of the word "sun" in Qohelet is concerned (i.e. sun-as-symbol), one finds yet again that, when viewed from the frame of reference of an ancient Israelite, there exists a striking correspondence between what was popularly associated with the "sun" and what Qohelet seems to find as mostly absent or distorted "under the sun". Is it possible that, if Qohelet was demonstrably not alluding to solar mythology, his sun imagery was still alluding deconstructively to popular solar symbolism?

5.10 THE QUESTION OF INTENTIONALITY⁸⁶

Allow me to play the devil's advocate still further. Suppose it was admitted that Qohelet seems to allude to solar mythology / symbolism on the basis of the following features in his discourse:

- The phrase "under the sun" is repeated over and over (30 times);
- The issues of concern in the book include those of justice, knowledge, royalty, time, life, etc.;
- Qohelet presents himself as a "king";
- God is depicted as a divine Judge, Creator, Appointer of times, Giver of life, etc.;
- ANE solar mythology of which these features are strikingly reminiscent.

⁸⁶ For a convincing argument on the importance of ascertaining "intentionality" in exegesis, when it is possible, cf. Deist (2000). On the intentional fallacy, cf. Wimsatt (1968). Also, keep in mind that I am discussing possible "allusions" to solar mythology in Qohelet. Allusions in themselves can be "intentional" or "unintentional". Even deconstruction can be "unintentional". However, if the allusions are too detailed and presented with apparent polemical motives, it becomes difficult, if not impossible, to deny intentionality on the part of the author.

Suppose, however, that the objection may be raised that, despite these amazing parallels, Qohelet demonstrably had no purpose of intentionally alluding to ANE solar mythology or symbolism. In other words, the similarities are not the result of planned polemical engagement. Instead, the supposed allusions are little more than fanciful eisegetical constructions in the mind of the interpreter. The supposed parallels are merely the result of a remarkable albeit completely coincidental outcome of textual elements that actually have nothing in common with each other or with the supposed intertextual body of solar discourse. In short, though Qohelet's rhetoric can be reconstructed as containing allusions to solar discourse, the author himself had no such intention and would not agree with the interpretation.

The fact is, whether Qohelet intentionally chose to present his thought in this manner or not, and whether he was familiar with solar mythology or not, the *result* of his writing, frozen in the text and let loose in an intertextual world of public meaning, is deconstructive and polemical from the perspective of solarism. The four elements of his rhetoric identified earlier i.e.:

- His implied social status;
- His repeated references to the sun;
- His choice of themes;
- His theology;

are all combined and construed in such a manner that from a comparative metaperspective on the religio-cultural discourse of his culture and period, Qohelet's rhetoric appears to contain elements of irony, deconstruction, polemics, syncretism and therefore probably intended allusion. If a scholar was to write about the way the sun featured in ANE religious discourse he or she would have to include the OT as part of that discourse. In addition, from the OT as witness he must surely take note of the way the sun features in the book of Qohelet. And from that metaperspective, whether Qohelet intended it or not, the sun imagery in his text appears ironic and deconstructive when compared to other ANE religious texts featuring the sun in the context of theology and symbolism.

Intentionality is therefore not a prerequisite for the presence of allusions in texts. To use another example. Some people in secularised cultures may speak about heaven and hell without knowing anything about the contents of the Bible. When a person says something like "What the hell?" or "I'm in heaven!" as a reaction to certain scenarios they are alluding to a certain mythology usually without any intention of doing so. But allusions do not require intentionality to exist as elements in discourse. Therefore, even if Qohelet only wanted to tell us that everything is absurd, so that his sun imagery, his issues of concern and his theology were all just coincidental window dressing never intended to take solar mythology to task, the text as it stands might still be perceived as containing allusions to solar discourse. This despite the fact that it was not part of a conscious rhetoric strategy.

What can be said about intentionality in relation to allusions can also be said of intentionality in relation to the phenomenon of deconstruction. Again, an analogy will be employed in order to illustrate this claim. An author may write a book on astronomy for the popular media. He may do this without ever talking about astrology. However, in writing with his own agenda in mind, he may be unwittingly deconstructing popular

astrological beliefs. This would be the case even if it is only implicit, unintentional and even if he or she has never even heard of astrology. By scientifically implying the fictional objectivity of the relation of the stars in what appears from earth to be a constellation, he deconstructs the fundamental assumptions on which astrology is based.

Could it be that Qohelet has unintentionally deconstructed popular connotations in solar discourse by associating the sun and its domain with injustice, oppression, unfairness, ignorance, etc? After all, his observations pertain to discoveries of scenarios which makes a mockery of the stereotypical connotations prevalent in solar mythology / symbolism. Is the rhetorical effect of Qohelet's repeated reiteration that, under the sun, he discovered the absence or distortion of all that was popularly believed to feature in that domain not clearly deconstructive?

To my mind, this certainly seems to be the case. Whether or not Qohelet intended to polemically deconstruct solar mythology, the intertextual rhetorical effect is deconstructive. Intentionality may be an important consideration when one attempts to ascertain the message the author wished to communicate with his text. However, intentionality is irrelevant when one enquires about the rhetorical effect that the author's discourse might have had given a comparison with the various forms of worlds religio-cultural mythology and symbolism familiar to his contemporaries. Thus, from this hypothetical perspective, one can postulate four different possible relations between Qohelet and solar discourse:

- Intentional deconstructive allusions to solar mythology;
or
- Intentional deconstructive allusions to solar symbolism;
or
- Unintentional deconstructive allusions to solar mythology;
or
- Unintentional deconstructive allusions to solar symbolism.

In the end, however, this is just an excursion to a devil's advocate argument. It was intended to salvage the hypothesis in a worst-case scenario where it could somehow be demonstrated that Qohelet never intended to allude to solar mythology. However, I shall not be arguing in favour of this minimalist perspective on the possibility of allusions to solar mythology in Qohelet. I still believe that the possible presence of allusions to solar mythology in Qohelet's sun imagery was quite intentionally orchestrated by the author.

5.11 CONCLUSIONS

- The sun god was worshipped in all the cultures which were thought to have had a possible influence on Qohelet (Mesopotamian, Egyptian, Greek, Canaanite, Persian);
- The sun god was worshipped throughout the first millennium B.C. - during every period in which the book Qohelet might have been written;
- The solar deities were associated with the concepts of justice retribution, judgement, the cosmic order, the social order, royal wisdom and authority,

knowledge of reality, knowledge of the future, life and death, creation, appointed times and destiny, happiness and prosperity in life; etc.

- Even if it cannot be said that Qohelet did allude to solar mythology there is still the possibility of that he was alluding to popular solar symbolism. The sun, in demythologised discourse, symbolised the very concepts which was associated with the sun gods. These concepts featured as themes in Qohelet where it is combined in Qohelet with his “sun imagery”;
- There seems to be a lot of hitherto unnoticed parallel concerns between the discourse of ANE solar mythology and Israelite wisdom. Many of the ANE sages and philosophers had the solar deities as patrons;
- Even if Qohelet was not *intentionally* engaged in anti-solarist polemics, his text, given its repetitive “sun imagery”, its combining the imagery with certain “solar” themes, his view of God and his own status as king has the effect of deconstructing popular ANE sun-talk;

CHAPTER 6

INTERTEXTUAL JUSTIFICATION II

6.1 INTRODUCTION

Now that it is established what popular beliefs were part of ANE solar mythology it remains to be shown that these ideas would have been familiar to Qohelet and his audience. A claim often made within the old *Myth and Ritual* School of Old Testament interpretation was that solar elements formed an integral part of ancient Israelite religion. Until recently, however, the influence of this claim has been confined largely to the School because of what many scholars consider to be a paucity of evidence in support of the notion (cf. Taylor 1993:19).

At least two studies in the 1980's kindled (or rekindled) the interests of mainline scholars of the Old Testament and ancient Israelite religion as the extent to which solar elements might have played a role in Hebrew religion: an article by M. Smith (1982:199-214) called "*Helios in Palestine*" and a short monograph by H. P. Stähli (1985) entitled, "*Solare Elemente im Jahweglauben des Alten Testaments*". When added to what has appeared so far afterwards and in the 1990's (cf. Smith 1990a:29-39, 1990:115-124; Taylor 1993) - and the critical reactions to these studies - it is safe to say that interest in the relationship between Yahwism and solarism has revived to a considerable extent.

According to both the specialists who study this subject (i.e. the relationship between Yahwism and solar mythology) and their critics, the issue is not whether sun worship was practised in ancient Israel (cf. Taylor 1993:19). Several Biblical passages leave little room for doubt that sun worship was a well-known phenomenon, practised even within the context of the temple. Rather the question has two aspects: the nature of Israel's sun worship in general, and the relationship (if any) between cults of the sun and Yahweh in particular (cf. Taylor 1993:19-20).

Beyond the general accord that sun worship took place in ancient Israel, there still remains a lack of consensus regarding its nature (cf. Taylor 1993:20). This lack of consensus centres on such issues as whether sun worship was early or late, tangential or sporadic or deeply entrenched and unremitting, autochthonous or foreign (cf. Spieckermann 1982; McKay 1973; Cogan 1974).⁸⁷ Probably, the most provocative issue related to the nature of sun worship in ancient Israel, however, is the specific claim that Yahweh was identified with the sun (cf. Morgenstern 1963; Ahlström 1959).⁸⁸

⁸⁷ The last issue is particularly interesting because of the questions it raises. For example, two decades ago Spieckermann (1982) has challenged the widely held view by J. McKay (1974) and M. Cogan (1974), that the "horses and the chariots" of the sun in the Jerusalem temple did not arise under the influence of Assyria. Moreover, whereas Spieckermann has led some scholars to believe again that the royal Jerusalem sun cult was Assyrian, other possibilities remain such as Syro - Palestinian or, a view argued for by Taylor (1993), Israelite.

⁸⁸ J. Morgenstern and G. Ahlström are among the more prominent earlier proponents of a direct association between Yahweh and the sun. Many of Morgenstern's ideas about Yahweh and the sun are drawn together in Morgenstern (1963). In the case of Ahlström, his arguments are mainly found in his study, Ahlström (1959).

For example, according to one proponent of this view, Stähli (1985:39-45), the following evidence supports such an association:

- Theophoric personal names with the verb “זרח” - to rise (normally used of השמש is predicated of Yahweh);
- Psalm 84:12, in which Yahweh is called “שמש”;
- The solar emblems on the royal Judean “למלך” jar handles (that is, a two winged sun disk and a four winged scarab);
- Correspondence between the Hebrew “צדק”; “righteousness” and concepts which in Egypt and Mesopotamia are linked with the sun god;⁸⁹
- References to both Heliopolis and Jerusalem as “city of righteousness”.⁹⁰

To be sure, no justice has been done to Stähli’s case for a link between Yahweh and the sun by offering a list so brief and partial (cf. Taylor 1993:20). Even on the basis of this partial list, however, there are many points one might wish to challenge. Moreover, it is fair to say that, on the whole, Stähli’s study falls short of offering a fully convincing case for the extensive overlapping of the cults of Yahweh and the sun. This is not to say however that several of the points raised by Stähli (along with other points which he does not include) do not merit serious consideration (cf. Taylor 1993:21).

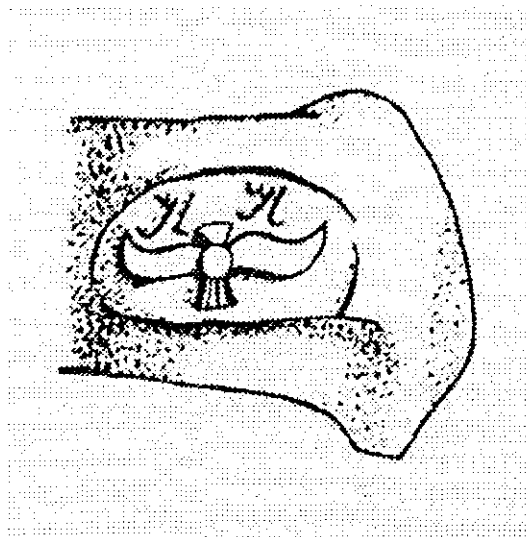


Fig 6.1 Another picture of a royal Judean jar handle indicative of the prominence of solar mythology in Israel's theo-political ideology (cf. Taylor 1993:243).

Prevailing uncertainty regarding the relationship between the worship of Yahweh and the sun in ancient Israel may be illustrated by noting the number of incongruities and interpretative and methodological problems. To cite a general example, studies prior to the 1980's that sought to establish the presence of a sun cult within Israelite religion are impressive by virtue of their sheer numbers as well as the great variety of arguments which each adduces. At the same time, many of these studies have often been judged unimpressive by virtue of the presence of what many have referred to as “fanciful”

⁸⁹ For example, the fact that righteousness precedes Yahweh in Ps. 85:13[14] is compared with Egyptian literature where Ma'at goes before the sun god, Re.

⁹⁰ Respectively, Isa. 19:8 and 1:26 (cf. Stähli [1984:39 – 45])

exegesis and conclusions that far exceed the evidence (cf. McKay 1973:114-115).

Similarly, whereas a considerable amount of archaeological evidence which is potentially relevant to the issue - for example horse figurines bearing sun "disks", the royal "למלך" jar handles, seals from the Achaemenid period depicting bulls with sun disks, eastward facing temples at Arad, Beer-Sheba and Lacish, etc. - this evidence has not always been considered or dealt with judiciously. Moreover, even among professional archaeologists of Syria and Palestine, there are differences of opinion of how to assess these and other archaeological data that possibly suggest the presence of solar elements within the cult of Yahweh (cf. Taylor 1993:22).

These factors are perhaps sufficient alone to justify a fresh study of the role of sun worship in ancient Israel. There is a definite lack of full-scale studies into the problem of sun worship in ancient Israel and thus far the study by Taylor (1993) stands alone in its scope of enquiry regarding this controversial subject. Moreover, even though scholars have used archaeological evidence in discussing possible points of interaction between a sun cult in ancient Israel and the cult of Yahweh, save for the attempt by Taylor (1993), this evidence has not yet been scrutinised as a whole with a view to addressing this problem in the history of Israelite religion. The same situation prevails in the case of Biblical evidence.

It is beyond the scope of this study (and would indeed be impractical) to discuss all the solar elements scholars have identified as present in the OT. There may well be a myriad of allusions to some or other idea originating from solar mythology. However, all these instances cannot be treated in detail in a study such as this where the excursion to the OT in justification of my hypothesis is more of a luxury rather than a necessity. To be sure, I am not under any obligation, from a hermeneutical point of view, to prove first the presence of allusions to solar mythology in the OT texts outside of Qohelet before I am justified to deal with the intratextual witness of the book Qohelet itself. Be that as it may, an excursus to solar elements in the OT, which proves that the people of the OT were familiar with ANE solar mythology, can hardly be considered as detrimental or harmful to the justification of my hypothesis. It just shows that I have approached the problem of possible allusions to solar mythology in Qohelet as thoroughly and comprehensively as practically possible.

6.2 ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE INDICATIVE OF THE OT PEOPLE'S FAMILIARITY WITH SOLAR MYTHOLOGY

Among the rich insights archaeology can provide is its own portrait of sun worship in ancient Israel (cf. Taylor 1993:24). This portrait, clear and bright in some places, faint and almost unintelligible in others must be weighed carefully for its contribution to the understanding of the perceived significance and symbolism that the sun had for the people back then. What needs to be considered under this heading is the variety of examples which scholars have presented and which appears to confirm the theory that sun worship was alive and well in the cult of Yahweh throughout the period in which the book of Qohelet could possibly have been written (1st millennium B.C.).

Examples of archaeological materials attesting the presence of sun worship/syncretism are of a great variety and include the following phenomena:

6.2.1 Physical artefacts

Taylor (1993:24-91) mentions several artefacts that have been discovered and which, in their religio-cultural context, seem to provide evidence of syncretism with solar mythology. These include:

- A tenth century Cult Stand from *Tell Taanach* which possibly exhibits a solar representation of Yahweh;⁹¹
- A tenth century Terracotta Equid from Hazor portraying a horse and chariot;⁹²
- A solar symbol for the Royal Israelite Seal;⁹³
- 8th century "לגלגל" Jar Handles and the Royal emblem of the kingdom of Judah.⁹⁴

6.2.2 The solar orientation of cultic structures

According to Taylor (1993:266-275) several cultic structures may have been built in such a way as to leave little doubt of the religious significance of their relation to the rising and setting sun:

- The temple of Solomon (10th century);
- The Iron Age temple at Arad;
- Two temples at Lachish;
- The temples at Beer Sheba;
- Temples from the Hellenistic period;
- Yahwistic temples outside Judah (Elephantine;⁹⁵ Leontopolis;⁹⁶ Mt Gerizim; etc.).

6.2.3 Yahwistic personal names with possible solar elements from epigraphic sources

Personal names attesting the possible syncretism between Yahwism and solar mythology have been listed as follows (cf. Tigay 1986:47-63).⁹⁷

- אוריִהוּ (7 / 6 Arad)⁹⁸
- אריִהוּ (7 / 6 Engedi)

⁹¹ Discussion of this cult stand can be found in the following sources: W. G. Dever (1984:33); Glock (1978:1147). Cf. also Taylor (1993:24ff) for a list of more recent discussions.

⁹² Scholars like Taylor (1993:37 ff) believe that this is another artefact that might imply the presence of solar elements in ancient Israelite religion. For a drawing and photo of the figurine see Y. Yadin et al.; (1960; 1970; 1975).

⁹³ Cf. A. D. Tushingham (1970:71- 78; 1971:23-35).

⁹⁴ The bibliography on these handles is enormous. For a bibliography citing more of the most recent articles see Nadab Na'aman (1986:19-21).

⁹⁵ The presence of a Yahwistic temple in the land of the sun god (Egypt) may have some bearing on the speculations in Chapter 8 of this study concerning the possible Egyptian influence on Qohelet.

⁹⁶ Cf. previous footnote.

⁹⁷ Tigay (1986) excludes names with the ambiguous element 'l, "god" (or perhaps, "El"). Tigay judges that there is virtually no evidence from either epigraphic onomastic data or non-onomastic inscriptional evidence to suggest that Shemesh was worshipped as a deity *independent* from Yahweh between the eighth and sixth centuries B.C. The syncretism between Yahwism and solar mythology in this period therefore seems to be extremely marked so that many scholars wonder whether Yahweh was worshipped as a solar deity during this period (cf. Taylor 1993:88 ff).

⁹⁸ Given here is the name, the date and the location in which it was attested.

- [א]וריה[ו] (7 Jerusalem)
- ריה[א] / [ג]ריהו (7 / 6 Lachish)
- אריהו (6 Arad)
- אריהו (8 Khirbet el Qom)
- אריהו (7)
- אריהו (8 Samaria)
- [יה]וזרח (8 / 7)
- יהוזרח (7 / 6)
- יואר (8)
- [ג]ריהו (6 Lachish)
- [ג]ריהו (6 Lachish)
- גריהו (7 / 6 Arad)
- גריהו (8 Beersheba)
- גריהו (7 Gibeon)
- גריהו (7 / 6 Jerusalem)⁹⁹

Most of the above mentioned archaeological data employed to justify the belief of Israelite familiarity and syncretism with solar mythology can be ambiguous and are insufficient in themselves in terms of constituting solid unequivocal proof for claim the Qohelet and his audience were familiar with solar mythology. However, I have included it for interest sake and as an introduction to a presentation of the Biblical witness. It is to a small selection of texts from the Old Testament itself to which I now turn.

6.3 BIBLICAL EVIDENCE INDICATIVE OF THE OT PEOPLE'S FAMILIARITY WITH SOLAR MYTHOLOGY

It remains now to be determined what the Biblical material indicate about sun worship in ancient Israel and what this data can do in assisting the enquiry into the possibility of allusions to solar mythology in the book of Qohelet. Because of the problem of determining whether the "sun imagery" in the Bible is merely figurative and conventional or whether it indeed implies the familiarity with solar mythology, the focus will be less on the poetic texts and more on the narrative and historical materials (cf. also Taylor 1993:93). This doesn't imply that poetic texts will be excluded, only that the more relevant and unambiguous among them will be utilised as the primary examples to be used in support of the main purpose of this chapter. The discussions which follow should prove the OT authors' familiarity with, and utilisation of several popular motifs attested in ANE solar mythology.

6.3.1 Personal names with solar elements

Already a scholar such as M. Noth has noted the implied presence of syncretism with solar mythology in his study of Israelite personal names. Noth (1928:223), as well as many scholars after him (cf. Taylor 1993:93), have interpreted the solar elements in

⁹⁹ What is particularly interesting is that both Biblical and archaeological personal names with possible solar elements can be date to the eight to the sixth century B.C. Along with the solar elements that this study argues is present in the book Qohelet, this data may be suggestive of a very different historical and polemical context of the book than that which is currently believed to be the case.

personal names as indicative of a familiarity with the popular religion of sun worship. In this regard the following examples of personal names can be given:

- שחריה - "Dawn is Yah" (1 Chron. 8:26)
- זרחיה - "Yah has shone forth" (1 Chron. 5:32; 6:36; Ezra 7:4)
- יזרחיה - "Yah will shine forth" (1 Chron. 7:3; Neh 12:42)
- זרח - "Shining One" (1 Chron. 6:6 cf. 6:26)¹⁰⁰

If current consensus on the historical references in the Chronicler is assumed to be correct then it may be interesting and relevant to this study that *all these names comes from the period between the eighth and sixth centuries B.C.*¹⁰¹ These names with their juxtaposed solar and theophoric elements can be interpreted as possibly implying familiarity with solar mythology (or pointing to a earlier period when such was the case). It may also be seen as possible evidence to syncretism between Yahwism and solar mythology (cf. Taylor 1993:93).

There are also other non-theophoric names which may reflect the presence or familiarity with solar mythology. The most famous of these is surely שמשון (Judg. 13-16). This name is also attested in extra-biblical sources (cf. Noth 1928:223). The name is apparently derived from the root "שמש" (= Sun) but there is a difference of opinion as to the "ן" ending which can be read as either a diminutive (cf. Crenshaw 1978:15), or an abstraction (cf. Moscati 1980:82).

6.3.2 Place names with solar connotations

Various place names with solar elements are also found in the Bible:

- "בית שמש" (house of Shemesh) (Josh. 21:16; 1 Kgs. 14:11) - In the Old Testament alone there are no less than four places which had this name. W.S. La Sor has convincingly argued that the anarthous genitive after the construct "בית" is suggestive of "שמש" here referring to the sun god rather than to simply the sun;
- "עיר שמש" (city of Shemesh - cf. Josh. 19:41);¹⁰²
- "the waters of "עין שמש" and "עין שמש" (fountain of Shemesh - cf. Josh. 15:7; 18:17);¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ Other possible names implying incorporated solar imagery includes: יהאור - "Yah is light" (Num. 32:41; Deut. 3:14; Josh. 13:30; Judg. 10:3; 1 Kgs. 4:13; 1 Chron. 2:22-23; Est 5:2); אורי - "my light" (Ex. 31:2; 35:30; 38:22; 1 Kgs. 4:19; 1 Chron. 2:20; 2 Chron. 1:5; Ezra 10:24); אורייה - "my light is Yah" (2 Sam. 11:3 - 4; 23:39; 2 Kgs. 16:10,11; Isa. 8:2; Ezra 8:33; Neh 3:4); אורייהו - "Yahu is my light" (Jer. 26:20);

¹⁰¹ Cf. the speculations in Chapter 8 of this study regarding a suggested background for Qohelet in the period 610 - 590 B.C.

¹⁰² This town is probably the Beth Shemesh referred to in the Egyptian execration texts, in which case the name of the town, suggestive of the presence of a temple to the Canaanite solar deity, dates at least to the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries B.C., long before Israelite occupation. On this see Pritchard (1949:328) n. 8. This observation comes from M.S. Smith (1982:514).

¹⁰³ On the unlikelihood of there being a distinction between the two see Z. Kallai (1986:121) and R. G.

- “תמנת חרס” (portion of the Sun - cf. Judg 2:9).¹⁰⁴ Also, the corrupt text in which this place name occurs and the differences between the various ancient translations (cf. also Josh. 19:50, 24:30) is usually regarded as a later variant caused by a theological rewriting of the text to sever any link between Joshua and solar mythology. This theological explanation is usually considered more plausible than speculating about a scribal error due to a transpositioning of more than one consonant. Furthermore, the theological sensitivity and embarrassment of later tradition with the perceived relationship between the name and Joshua is attested in rabbinic tradition.¹⁰⁵ This name with its solar element is not attested before Israelite occupation (cf. Taylor 1993:97).
- “הר חרס” (mountain of the Sun - cf. Judg. 1:35). Mentioned together with Aijalon and Shaalbim as a place where Israel failed to expel the Amorites. It is also identified with the best known of the “Beth Shemesh” settlements (cf. Aharoni 1987:227).¹⁰⁶
- “מעלה חרס” (ascent of the Sun - cf. Judg. 8:13).¹⁰⁷ This was the place from where the judge Gideon stopped pursuing the Midianites. This place was apparently familiar to the inhabitants of Succoth and Penuel (cf. Judg. 8:17) and indicative of a local tradition in which Yahweh is depicted in a way reminiscent of solar mythology.¹⁰⁸

6.3.3 A discussion of selected texts possibly indicative of allusions to solar mythology¹⁰⁹

6.3.3.1 Genesis 1:3-5, 14-18 The sun, creation and time

ויאמר אלהים יהי אור ויהי אור וירא אלהים את האור כי טוב ויבדל אלהים בין האור ובין החשך ויקרא אלהים לאור יום ולחשך קרא לילה ויהי ערב ויהי בקר יום אחד

And God said, “let there be light” and there was light. And God saw that the light was good and God parted the light and the darkness and God called the light “day” and the darkness he called “night”. And it was evening and it was morning. Day one.

Boling and G. E. Wright (1982:362 – 263).

¹⁰⁴ The English reading “serah” is attested in the Peshitta and the Vulgate. This is a town in the hill country of Ephraim and commonly identified with Khirbet Tibnah.

¹⁰⁵ Theological sensitivity to the perceived meaning of the name and its relationship to Joshua is attested in rabbinic tradition which explained the name of the town in light of the standing still of the sun in Josh. 10:13 and which claimed that there was an emblem of the sun on Joshua’s tomb. More likely than a scribal error is the suggestion of Boling and Wright (1982:469) that Timnath-serah has been altered to the popular etymology, “portion remaining”, but even so the original form is still Timnath-heres, “portion of the sun”.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. Aharoni (1979:236); Pritchard (1987:227). The mention of Ir-shemesh with Aijalon and Shaalabbin (cf. Shaalbim in Judg. 1:35) offers some support for the identification of Har-heres with Ir-shemesh / Beth-shemesh.

¹⁰⁷ Judg. 8:13. Aquila and Symmachus reflect a Hebrew text yielding “from up in the mountains”.

¹⁰⁸ See below, the discussion of Gen. 32:22 - 32; also Gray 1969:239. Cf. also later in this chapter the discussion of the autumnal solar festival where it will be noted that Succoth and Penuel also appear to reflect a tradition concerning (Yahweh and) the sun (cf. Gen. 32:23 – 33 [22 - 32]).

¹⁰⁹ The chronology of the presentation here follows the order of the Old Testament in its translated version rather than according to the actual historical chronology of its origins.

ויאמר אלהים יהי המארת ברקיע השמים להבדל ובין היום ובין הלילה והיו לאתת למועדים ולימים שנים והיו למארת ברקיע השמים להאיר על הארץ ויהי כן יעשה אלהים את שני המארת הגדלים את המאור הגדל לממשלת היום ואת המאור הקטן לממשלת הלילה ואת הכוכבים ויתן אתם אלהים ברקיע השמים להאיר על הארץ ולמשל ביום ובלילה להבדל בין האור ובין החשך וירא אלהים כי טוב

And God said, "let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide day and night and let them be as signs for occasions and for days, years and let them be lights in the firmament of heaven to shine on the earth, and it was so. God made the two great lights; the big light to rule by day and the small light to rule the night, and the stars. And God put them in the firmament of heaven to shine on the earth and to rule the day and the night and to divide the light and the darkness. And God saw that it was good.

One passage in the Bible which has been interpreted as containing implicit polemics¹¹⁰ against pagan solar mythology is the creation account in Genesis 1 (cf. Wenham 1964:21).¹¹¹ Because the chronology of creation here has God creating light on the first day and the sun only on the fourth day it seem that the sun is thoroughly stripped of divine honours:

- It is a created object instead of a creator itself;
- It is not the ultimate and primary source of light;¹¹²
- It is only created on the fourth day, after light and vegetation, etc.;
- It is merely a functional entity which exists primarily as a "timepiece";
- It is on par with the moon.

However, it has been pointed out that some of solar theology's ideas have been retained (cf. Taylor 1993:230):

- Like the sun god, אלהים is now the "solar" deity who is in the heavens and who can say "let there be light";
- Like the sun god, אלהים is now the creator deity who gives life;
- Like the sun god, אלהים separates light and darkness;
- Like the sun god, אלהים sets in motion and appoints the times;
- The sun, like אלהים, is connected with establishing "times" and "signs";
- The sun, like אלהים, is connected with light and its separation from darkness;
- The sun, like אלהים, has the office of a "ruler".

¹¹⁰ Note also that the alleged polemical object of the creation myth in Genesis, namely the theomachy between Marduk and Tiamat, was itself filled with solar elements. In that myth Marduk is depicted as a solar deity and as son of Ea (god of wisdom) was considered the most perfect of the gods (cf. Armstrong 1997:15). If Tiamat corresponds to the Hebrew "tehom" / "tohu" and Elohim with Marduk, does this imply that the author of the passage thought of Elohim as a solar deity as Marduk was?

¹¹¹ And, of course, polemics against solar mythology implies some familiarity with it.

¹¹² It is beyond the scope of this study to deal with the role of the moon in Israelite religion. The reference to the moon here occasions no difficulty, however, as will be demonstrated later, for it functioned as nocturnal counterpart to the sun in solar mythology. As for the "stars" these are mentioned in verse 16 almost as an afterthought. The reference is nonetheless appropriate in view of the association between God and the whole Host of Heaven (to use the Deuteronomistic expression) and in view of the writer's purpose to recount how all the various aspects of the created order came into being.

Thus there seem to be both a definite distinction and also a corresponding action between אלהים and the sun, as seen from both pagan solar mythology and also within the Genesis 1 creation account. If indeed there is implicit polemics present in these verses, then it must have been motivated not merely by a desire to argue with foreign mythologies that have different conceptions of how everything began. Rather, since the audience and implicit reader is one who is assumed to be able to understand Hebrew (in which the account of creation is written) the polemics concerning the demythologised sun may very likely be aimed at audiences familiar with solar myths and sun worship as a religion or cult within their midst (cf. Taylor 1993:231).¹¹³

Whether the text under discussion is attributed to Moses or the priestly source (P), both cultural contexts (i.e. Egyptian and Babylonian) had the sun (Re and Shamash) as major and often primary deities as objects of worship. Furthermore, as is clear from the law texts relating to the same periods, sun worship was strictly forbidden which implies both a familiarity with solar mythology and usually the danger of apostasy and syncretism which may already have gained a number of converts such as to warrant the necessity for these specific prohibitions (cf. Deut. 4:19 below).

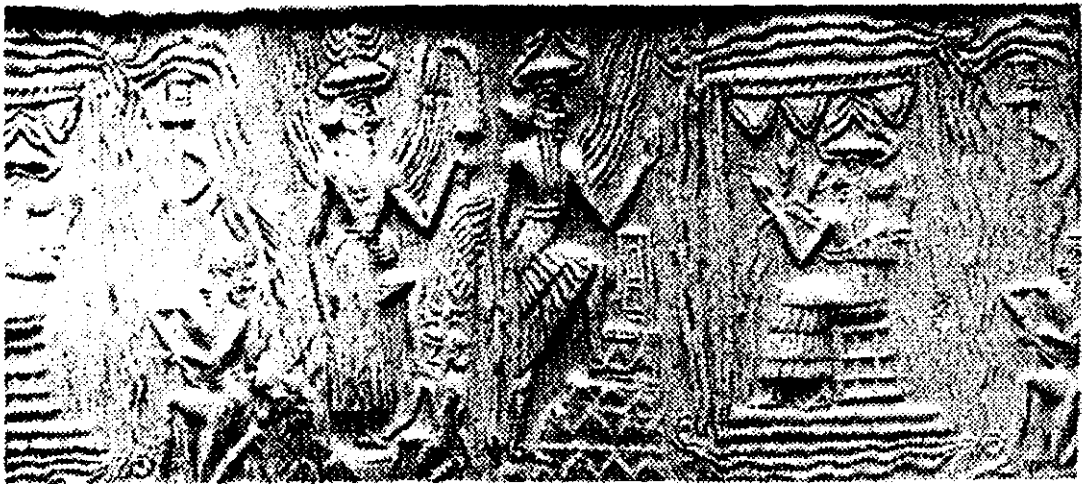


Fig. 6.2 The Mesopotamian deity Marduk stands in the midst of the vanquished goddess Tiamat and then steps forward to meet Ea, god of wisdom. What is interesting is not only the similarities between Enuma Elish and creation account in Gen 1 but also the fact that, in this cosmogenic myth, Marduk is depicted as a solar deity. (cf. Pritchard 1954:175)

6.3.3.2 Ex. 20:2 The first commandment and sun worship

אנכי יהוה אלהיך אשר הוצאתיך מארץ מצרים מבית עבדים לא יהיה לך אלהים אחרים על פני
 לא תעשה לך פסל וכל תמונה אשר בשמים ממעל ואשר בארץ מתחת ואשר במים מתחת לארץ

¹¹³ In a way analogous to how the familiarity with Ancient Near Eastern cosmogenetic mythology can bring a whole new perspective of the creation account in Gen. 1 I am claiming that so too familiarity with solar mythology as well as the contents of Qohelet can indeed produce a exegetical "big bang". And I suppose it will be just as controversial at first to read Qohelet in such a way as it was when for instance Gen. 1 was read for the first time in comparison with Enuma Elish.

I am Yahweh your God who made you go out from the land of Egypt from the house of slavery. There may not be other gods for you before me. You may not make for you an idol or any image of that which is in the heavens up above or what is on the earth below or what is in the waters below the earth.

The commandment that no other gods apart from Yahweh may be worshiped, as well as juxtaposing it with the specification that no graven image of anything in the heavens (amongst other things) may be made and honoured, implies both the knowledge and temptation of solar theology as well as a clear anti-solarist point of view. Many scholars also believe that the theological metaphysics assumed here was not monotheism but monolatry (cf. also Ex. 22:30) and that the prohibition against the images of heavenly phenomena was not motivated by a demythologised cosmology (cf. Barr 1999:274).

Several other details in the book of Exodus, such as the parallels between the civil law that was given by Shamash to Hammurabi; the role of the Lord as divine judge, protector of the oppressed and needy; as manifested by fire; as the one whose name is a secret which may not be known; as witness to oaths; and as "light" and too glorious to behold "face to face"; etc., all apparently contains the remains of the language typical of Ancient Near Eastern solar theology (cf. also Harwood 1992:72; Pritchard 1949 *passim*).

6.3.3.3 Deuteronomy 4:19 A prohibition against sun worship

I begin by citing this passage within the context of its unit, vv. 15-20:

ונשמרתם מאד לנפשתיכם כי לא ראיתם כל תמונה ביום דבר יהוה אליכם בחרב מתוך האש פן תשחתון ועשיתם לכם פסל תמונת כל סמל תבנית זכר או נקבה תבנית כל בהמה אשר בארץ תבנית כל צפור כנף אשר תעוף בשמים תבנית כל רמש באדמה תבנית כל דגה אשר במים מתחת לארץ ופן תשא עיניך השמימה וראית את השמש ואת הירח ואת הכוכבים כל צבא השמים ונדחת והשתחווית להם ועבדתם אשר חלק יהוה אלהיך אתם להעמים תחת כל השמים ואתכם לקח יהוה ויוצא אתכם מכור הברזל ממצרים להיות לו לעם נחלה כיום הזה

And beware yourselves much for your life, because you did not see any form in the day the word of Yahweh came to you on Horeb from the midst of the fire, so that you do not worship and make for yourselves an image in the likeness of any man or woman or of any of the beasts of the land that you see or of any winged bird that flies in the heavens or of the creeping things which you see on the earth or of the fish which are in the waters beneath the earth. And so that you do not lift your eyes towards heaven and see the sun and the moon and the stars and all the Host of Heaven and you worship them, which Yahweh gave to all the peoples under all the heavens. But you Yahweh took out of the iron furnace, out of Egypt to be his inheritance as it is this day.

This passage is central to the purpose of Deut. 4:1-40 which functions as an extended commentary on the second commandment.¹¹⁴ According to Taylor (1993:108), the point of the present passage is not only (or perhaps even primarily) to list those things that the Israelites must not worship (although such a list is provided), but rather to demonstrate that the worship of Yahweh alone - without the aid of any object - is incumbent upon Israel. Two primary reasons are offered in vv. 8-18: (1) by receiving the

¹¹⁴ The division made here follows JPSV. For other breakdowns, see for example R.D. Nelson, *The Double Redaction of Deuteronomistic History (JSOTS)* [1981:92]; A. D. H. Mayes, *Deuteronomy 4 and the Literary Criticism of Deuteronomy (JBL 100)* [1981:25].

law and enjoying a close relationship with Yahweh Israel has “favoured nation” status and (2) when Yahweh appeared at Mount Horeb, He took no visible form, but appeared from skyward reaching fire as a mere shapeless voice amidst darkness, cloud and gloom.

Taylor (1993:108-109) also states that a number of implications can be drawn which is relevant to the perceived relationship between Yahweh and the sun. First, the text presupposes a setting in which the sun was worshipped or at least provided a temptation to be worshipped which in turn implies familiarity with solar mythology.¹¹⁵ Secondly, the passage is perhaps surprisingly concessionary; the worship of the solar deity by other peoples was acceptable - albeit for them. Thirdly, if the opinion of scholars like Mayes (1981:32-35) and many others is correct that the passage is exilic,¹¹⁶ this would suggest that the closing of an important loophole in the second commandment to exclude the objects not made by people but by Yahweh himself (that is, the Host of Heaven, including the fiery sun) was the inspiration of an exilic editor. Fourthly, and perhaps most significantly, that the prohibitions are based on the rationale that Israel did not see Yahweh appear in any form at Horeb clearly implies that at least some of the images against which the passage preaches were understood to be images of Yahweh (cf. Mayes 1981:26).

Thus according to Taylor (1993:109), although the sun, moon, stars are distinct from the made items referred to in vv. 15-18 the fact that the writer mentions them in this context implies that they too were forms identified or associated with Yahweh. Thus, in offering a comprehensive¹¹⁷ ban on the worship by the Israelites of anything other than Yahweh in any “form”, the passage is concerned to omit all possible loopholes. One of which was clearly the worship of the sun, probably as Yahweh himself. We therefore have yet another example of implicit anti-solarist polemic which concerned the writer in the exilic period and may even refer back to a tradition of apostasy to solar theology from an earlier period.

6.3.3.4 Deuteronomy 17:3 The death penalty for sun worship

The Deuteronomistic phrase referring to the worship of the sun, moon and Host of Heaven¹¹⁸ occurs also in Deut. 17:3 which, in its context, is as follows (based on the MT):

...כי ימצא בקרבך באחד שעריך אשר יהוה אלהיך נתן לך איש או אשה אשר יעשה אתה רע
בעיני יהוה אלהיך לעבר בריתו וילך ויעבד אלהים אחרים וישתחו להם ולשמש או לירח או לכל
צבא השמים אשר לא צויתי ...

¹¹⁵ Presumably the further refinement of the prohibition of idolatry as applying to the sun, moon, stars and all the “Host of Heaven” would be given only if there was a need for it.

¹¹⁶ Although some have argued for another setting for vv. 28 - 31 (cf. Thompson 1974:107-108) scholars like Taylor (1993:109 ff) feel that the present passage forms a unity with vv. 28-31 and is therefore probably exilic at least in its setting.

¹¹⁷ As Mayes (1981:29) noted, the order is in fact the reverse of the list of all created objects assigned to realms in Genesis 1, except for the “things which creep upon the earth”, which is slightly out of order.

¹¹⁸ As Taylor (1993:110) notes, the form of expression differs slightly from that found in Deut. 4:19. The biggest difference lies in the omission in Deut. 17:3 of the reference to the stars nonetheless included in the comprehensive phrase, “any of the Host of Heaven”.

If it is found in the midst of one of your towns that Yahweh your God gave to you a man or woman that does evil for you in the eyes of Yahweh your God to transgress his covenant and he goes and serves other gods and worship them and the sun or the moon or all the Host of Heaven that I did not command...

This passage clearly associates the worship of the sun, moon and "Host of Heaven" with the worship of "other gods" (cf. Mayes 1981:266). The claim of the author that the worship of the sun might occur, even though it was never commanded by Yahweh, clearly implies the people's familiarity with, and even the possibility of apostasy to sun worship and the solar mythology to which it was inextricable linked (cf. Von Rad 1964:17).

6.3.3.5 Joshua 10:12-14 Joshua addressing the sun god?

Many scholars believe that Josh. 10:12-14 provides important testimony to the Deuteronomistic historian's understanding of the relationship between Yahweh and the sun at an early period. The passage in question is as follows.

...אז ידבר יהושע ליהוה¹²⁰ ביום תת יהוה את האמרי¹¹⁹ לפני בני ישראל ויאמר לעיני ישראל
שמש בגבעון דום וירח בעמק אילון וידם השמש וירח עמד לישראל עד יקם גוי איביו הלא
היא כתבה על ספר הישר ויעמד השמש בחצי השמים ולא אץ לבוא כיום תמים ולא היה כיום
ההוא לפניו ואחריו לשמע יהוה בקל איש ...

Then Joshua spoke to Yahweh in the day Yahweh gave the Amorites before the sons of Israel. And he said before the eyes of Israel: "Sun, in Gibeon, be silent! And: "Moon, in the valley of Ayalon!" And the sun was silent and the moon stood for Israel until he defeated the nations of his enemy. Is this not written in the book of the righteous: "and the sun stood in the middle of heaven and was in no hurry to set so that the day was lengthened and there was not a day like that day before or after when Yahweh listened to the voice of a man...

According to Taylor (1993:115) the general meaning of the passage has always been clear: the text cites a poem from a different context and understands it as the statement which gave rise to Yahweh's miraculous halting of the sun which allowed the Israelites extended daylight with which to defeat their foes. When examined in detail, however, the passage poses a number of problems. Among these difficulties, the best studied is the original setting of the poetic fragment (and here the original setting proposed by Dus (1960:353-374), Holladay (1968:166-178) and Miller (1973:125-127) are particularly noteworthy.

For the present purposes, however, it is important to focus on an additional difficulty over which virtually every commentator has also justifiably stumbled. The problem is this: whereas the Deuteronomistic narrative framework introduces what one clearly expects Joshua's speech to Yahweh, in its place is a poetic fragment in which the outcry is made to "Sun" (Shemesh) (cf. Taylor 1993:115). The apparent omission of the words of Yahweh is certainly problematic. For one thing, as Boling (1982:282) notes, the point of the whole story focuses on what Yahweh did in response to his being

¹¹⁹ Between "the Amorite", and "before the Israelites" the LXX reads, "into the hand of Israel, when he defeated them at Gibeon and they were defeated", Whether or not the reading is correct (which it probably is) is not relevant within the context of this study.

¹²⁰ Here and in the case of its first occurrence in v. 14, "Yahweh" should perhaps be read "God" following the LXX.

addressed by Joshua. For another, the substitution poses a religious problem, put in the following way by Holladay (1968:166-178): "it must be admitted that the phenomena portrayed in this fragment of poetry, when taken at face value, do not fit readily into what we have reconstructed...of the history of the religion of Israel (would the leader of the "Hosts of Israel" pray to "Shemesh"...?).

To be sure, there are ways around the problem apart from assuming that Joshua's address to the "Shemesh" in Gibeon was in fact his speech to Yahweh in Gibeon. But none of these alternatives are particularly compelling. For example, in his important work on the divine warrior in ancient Israel, Miller (1973:125-127) accounts for the difficulty by regarding the poem in its original context to have been the words of Yahweh to sun and moon that were members of his heavenly entourage. However, although this is a very plausible original setting for the poetic fragment, it is none the less highly unlikely that the poetic fragment can be taken within its present context still to denote the words of Yahweh to the sun as Miller maintains (cf. Taylor 1993:116). There are several reasons for this objection: First, in v 12 of the MT, the line introducing the poetic fragment clearly states, "then Joshua spoke to Yahweh".¹²¹ Secondly, in v14, the significance of the event according to the narrator is that, "there has not been a day like that neither before nor since when "Yahweh" listened to the voice of a man". Thirdly, the question must be asked: Why would the narrator frame the story around the hearkened to words of a man to Yahweh, but include instead, contrary to his own expressed purpose, the words of Yahweh to sun and moon?

In an attempt to solve the problem, Taylor's own opinion is that the Deuteronomistic framing of the poetic fragment must be taken to clearly imply a one-to-one correspondence between Yahweh and "Shemesh in Gibeon" (Taylor 1993:116). He considers that a number of considerations support this interpretation. First and most importantly, as Holladay (1968:166) has implied in part already, this is how the passage appears to be read when taken at face value. This is evident in v. 12 in which Joshua, who addresses only "sun" and "moon", is said to have spoken nonetheless to Yahweh and also in vv. 13b-14. In the latter case of verse 13b-14, equation between Yahweh and Shemesh is apparent because its assumption is the only means of resolving two difficulties otherwise posed by these verses (cf. Taylor 1993:116). First, only on the assumption that Yahweh in Gibeon is Shemesh can one take seriously the claim that it was unusual for Yahweh to listen to the voice of the man. Secondly, only on the assumption of Yahweh as Shemesh in Gibeon can one account for the way in which Yahweh's listening to the voice of a man is implied by its placement in v. 14b (that is after the halt of the sun) as a phenomenon equal to or even greater than the sun's miraculous arrest in mid heaven. In other words, only by equating the sun's halting with Yahweh's hearing the voice of a man can the latter be interpreted as a miracle on a par with stoppage of the sun in mid-heaven (cf. Taylor 1993:117).

As Taylor (1993:117ff) realises, it might though be argued that the reference to the moon as well as the sun is problematic for the thesis that Yahweh is identified with the sun. In response it might be argued that the reference to the moon appears only in the poetic fragment which might have come from a different setting. Secondly, regardless of

¹²¹ As noted, the LXX reads, "God" here and in the first instance in v. 14. According to the interpretation of Taylor (1993:116 ff) "God" is secondary and arose as a theological reaction in response to the MT's identification between "Yahweh", and the sun in vv. 12 and 14.

its origin, the fragment was chosen for its reference to both “sun” and “Gibeon” and not necessarily for its reference and perhaps incidental reference to the moon. Thirdly, “moon” is in poetic parallelism with “sun” and thus probably functions as a bi-form or close equivalent of “sun”. Fourthly, and perhaps most significantly, that no particular emphasis should be placed upon “moon” is supported by the context of vv. 13-14 in which significance is assigned exclusively to the activity of the sun in response to Joshua’s having addressed it (as Yahweh). Finally, even if one assumes significance to the reference to the moon for the story beyond its occurrence in the poetic fragment, this would still occasion little difficulty since the moon in Ancient Near Eastern mythology often functioned as a nocturnal counterpart to the sun as representative of the solar deity (as in the case of Horus of Edfu, for example) (cf. Taylor 1993:117ff).

If this interpretation of Josh. 10:12-14 is correct as some scholars claim, it has also, along with the supplementary cues in other texts regarding Gibeon, led some scholars to see it as evidence for a sun cult in Gibeon. This cult appears to have been both Yahwistic and Solar in character. In all this, the relevance of these arguments for solar elements in the cult of Yahweh is that should it be conceded that sun worship was in one form or another present in ancient Israel this admittance would be yet another piece of supporting evidence that the people of the Old Testament were at times very if not too familiar with sun cults and solar mythology.

6.3.3.6 Judges 1:33-35 Living amongst sun worshippers

נפתלי הוריש את יושבי בית שמש ואת יושבי בית ענת וישב בקרב הכנעני יושבי הארץ וישבי בית שמש ובית ענת היו להם למס וילחצו...

Naphtali drove out the inhabitants of the “House of Shemesh” and the inhabitants of the “House of Anat” and he lived in the midst of the Canaanites, the inhabitants of the land. And the inhabitants of “House of Shemesh” and “House of Anat” were to them a snare...

In this isolated text that features as part of a lengthy description of Israel’s conquest of Canaan, there is yet another recognition that Israel were exposed to sun cults and sun worship. The “House of Shemesh” was a well-known centre of solar religion as the name indicate (cf. Smith 1987:514). Just as significant is the repeated accusations in the next chapter of Judges that the Israelites didn’t destroy the pagan cults as they were commanded to do and therefore these cults became a snare to them. Surely this implies the inclusion of sun cults and solar mythology as part of the “snares” the Israelites encountered (cf. Stähli 1984 *passim*). And the text’s explicit witness to the Israelites living among these people also implies that a part of religio-cultural assimilation was inevitable.

6.3.3.7 2 Samuel 12:11-12 The all-seeing sun who demands justice

כה אמר יהוה הנני מקים עליך רעה מביתך ולקחתי את נשיך לעיניך ונתתי לרעיך ושכב עם נשיך לעיני השמש הזאת כי אתה עשית בסתר ואני אעשה את הדבר הזה נגד כל ישראל ונגד השמש

Thus says the Lord: ...I will take your wives before your eyes, and give them to your neighbour, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this very sun. For you did it secretly; but I will do this before all Israel, and before the sun.

According to Deist (2000:120) indications are that the sun meant more to the people of ancient Israel than a mere source of light and a marker of time and space. Consider, for example the presence of solar mythology / symbolism, in the text of 2 Sam. 12:1-12 recounting Nathan's rebuke of David after his extra-marital rendezvous with Bathsheba. According to Deist (2000:120), the expression "in the sight of this very sun" implies that Nathan is pointing to something *in the palace* (note that he entered a room in 12:10). The implication is clear that the author of the narrative, who lived and worked a few centuries after the time of David, accepted as a matter of fact that David's throne hall would have contained a sun disk. Moreover, there are many other indications in the Bible that not only the ordinary people but also the elite practised sun worship (cf. 2 Kgs. 17:16; 21:3; Jer. 7:18, 8:2, 44:17-25).

In this regard it is often thought that texts like these and others, such as Josh. 10:12 allude to the reality that syncretism with other mythologies (and solar mythologies) might have been far more prevalent than the final redaction of the historical texts in the Old Testament seem to imply when read at face value (cf. Davies 1994:28). As such there is often heard the warning that the Old Testament should not be read as straightforward history and that pre-exilic Yahwism may have been far more "unorthodox" (from the point of view of a later perspective) than later authors and redactors would have liked it to be (cf. Smith 1990a:07).

Possible traces of solar mythology, such as the example in 2 Sam. 12, which suggest that this unorthodox world of discourse was all too familiar to the royal court of king David seems to provide yet another possible piece of supplementary evidence that the authors of the Old Testament in general, and probably Qohelet and his audience in particular (whenever they lived), might have been thoroughly familiar with the meaning and significance of solar symbolism. Furthermore, the fact that the "sun" features here in the context of justice, judgement and retribution, as well as in a scenario having the connotation of secrets revealed, may be an allusion to solar mythology's most cherished theological beliefs regarding the sun god (cf. van der Toorn 1997:705). This being the case, it may not be as far fetched or unjustified after all to claim that the peoples of the Old Testament were familiar with solar mythology and that, from the perspective of any of them, if someone claimed that "under the sun" there is no justice and that knowledge remain hidden, it would have raised quite a few eyebrows.

6.3.3.8 1 Kings 8 Solomon and solar theology

That Solomon had founded the Jerusalem temple as a sun temple under Egyptian and Tyrian influence has always been upheld in recent times (cf. Taylor 1993:112). Solomon must have found it opportune that Gibeon, the city which in pre-monarchic times had been included into the tribe of Benjamin, and in reality passed for Israelite, had in his time worshipped Yahweh as a sun god. To be sure, the temple that Solomon proposed to build had to stand in Jerusalem. Nevertheless, in order to establish a connection with the sun tradition of the city near Jerusalem, Solomon went to Gibeon to receive the order to build the temple. It was the Yahweh worshipped at Gibeon who ordered Solomon to build him a temple and who wished, so Solomon thought, to be worshipped in Jerusalem as in Gibeon, namely as a solar deity named Shemesh.

Moreover, for Taylor (1993:113), that Yahweh was worshipped as "Shemesh" (as he was at Gibeon, gains further support from 2 Kgs. 23:11 which describes Josiah's

removal from the temple of horses and chariots dedicated to the sun, and from such passages as Ezek. 8:16 and Pss. 84:12 and 72:5 (cf. also Dus 1960:367). Now, according to Long (1984:97-98), the poetic fragment in 1 Kgs. 8:12 (8:53 LXX), almost certainly ancient and perhaps originally part or all of a dedicatory inscription of the Jerusalem temple, mentions both Yahweh and the sun (cf. LXX). The text as commonly reconstructed with reference to attestation in the LXX (1 Kgs. 8:53) is as follows

אז אמר שלמה שמש הכין בשמים יהוה אמר לשכון בערפל בנה בניתי בית זבל לך מכון לשבתך
עלמים הלא היא כתובה בספר הישר

Then Solomon said, "Sun He set in the heavens, but Yahweh has chosen to dwell in thick cloud. Surely I have built an exalted house for You, a place for You to dwell in forever". Is this not written in the book of the righteous?

As Taylor (1993:138) notes, this obscure passage has been interpreted variously. For example, Würthwein (1977:88-89) interprets the clear contrast in the first bicolon between Yahweh and the sun as a distinction between Yahweh and storm cloud imagery associated with Baal. A difficulty with this view, however, is that reference in the first stichos to the "sun" as placed in the heavens, is quite specific and thus seems not to refer to storm imagery in general. The same point may be made in the case of Jones (1984:196) who regards the contrast between Yahweh and the sun here to denote the distinction between Yahweh and creation (to which Yahweh is superior). Moreover, although "sun" might represent something more general as these commentators suggest, the role of the message within the context of the dedication of the temple remains a difficulty for these interpretations.

The challenge of relating the text to its context is indeed real, as may be illustrated from the view of O. Loretz. According to Loretz (1974:78-80) the location of the poetic fragment in two contexts - 8:12-13 in the MT and 8:53 in the LXX - suggests the poetic fragment in its present fragmentary form is virtually meaningless. It has no relationship to the context beyond its being a fragment of a Canaanite temple dedication speech.¹²² While possible, a view which regards the given contexts of a passage as merely accidental must be embraced only as a last resort.

Others like May (1937:269-270) believes that the MT reflects the original text which identifies Yahweh with a version of Baal as sun god (cf. Zebul - short for Baal Zebul) and that the LXX refers to a later attempt to dissociate Yahweh from the sun cult. To May (1937:270), the statement that Yahweh has purposed to dwell in thick darkness signal the autumnal equinox (on which occasion this dedication was allegedly made) that Yahweh as sun god was going below the equator.

According to Taylor (1993:139), it has seemed reasonable to assume with the vast majority of scholars that the LXX's reference to this poetic material as being written ἐν βιβλίῳ τῆς ὁδῆς, "in the Book of the Song" (Hebrew השיר) should be emended slightly to "in the book of Yashar" (Hebrew הישר). Only citations from the latter are elsewhere

¹²² Cf. O. Loretz (1974:478 – 480). A distinctive feature of Loretz's interpretation is his rejection on metric grounds of the originality of the stichos preserved in the LXX of 8:53. As will be seen, however, the problem posed by the metre in no way warrants the omission of the line preserved in the LXX. Moreover Loretz offers no explanation for how obscure the LXX citation of the source from which the poetic fragment came.

attested in the Deuteronomistic history (cf. Josh. 10:12-14.¹²³ In support of this slight adjustment on the alleged instance of haplography, it may be added that the other poetic fragment from the book of Yashar, in Josh. 10:12-14, makes equally specific reference to the sun. Moreover unlike the more obscure witness of LXX to 1 Kgs. 8:12, the poem in Joshua benefits from a Deuteronomistic interpretation according to which Yahweh is to be identified with Shemesh in the book of Jashar.

Taylor (1993:140) concludes that it is also justified to apply this Deuteronomistic interpretation in the case of the Yashar poem in 1 Kgs. 8. This can be supported on two additional counts. Firstly, Sun and Yahweh are placed in poetic parallelism within the poem itself, even though, in the Joshua text, the poem does not mention Yahweh except by reference to the sun. Moreover, in both the case of Josh. 10 and 1 Kgs. 8 (LXX) Shemesh occurs without the article i.e. as proper name. Secondly, the relationship between Yahweh and Sun suggested here seems to go a long way in recounting for the expungement of the first stichos mentioning "Sun" from MT. It also explains the placement of the fuller form of the poem in LXX in a different context. Moreover, on what grounds other than the religio-historical is it possible to account for the reference to "Shemesh" (Sun) here? Thus, the view that the poetic fragment alludes to the kind of religio-historical relationship between Yahweh and Shemesh that is implied in this argument makes it possible to understand the role of the poem in its context. It appears as a speech of Solomon commemorating the founding of the temple of Jerusalem against the background of the transference from the cult from Gibeon.

Before considering further aspects of the context of 1 Kgs. 8, however, it may be worth digressing to consider briefly what the poetic fragment implies about the nature of the relationship between Yahweh and the Sun. 1 Kgs. 8:53 (LXX) and other passages such as Ps. 19:5-6, Psalm 104 and Gen. 1:14-19 imply or state that Yahweh placed the sun in the heavens. Some scholars believe that statements like this may imply implicit polemics against solar mythology. Others believe that, far from being anti-solarist polemics, these assertions regarding the relationship between Yahweh and the Sun actually amount to a subtle form of syncretism between Yahwism and solar theology. Thus, while it is often interpreted that such texts deny any perceived relationship between Yahweh and the sun, others are not so sure (cf. Taylor 1993:140).

The reason for the latter point of view comes from comparative studies with Egyptian solar mythology. It is well known that the sun god, Re, was by no means identified or equated with the *physical* sun. The sun was only one way of *symbolically* denoting Re (as is the case with Yahweh in Ps. 84). Moreover, except during and just prior to the reign of Amenophis IV (at which time the sun was actually, heretically, equated with the physical form of the sun) a clear distinction was always made between Re and the sun (cf. Redford 1976:47-61). According to Redford (1976:170), the relationship between the sun and Re was such that the former was believed to be a *manifestation* of Re or the vehicle in which he rode. It was only in Atenism where the sun was directly equated with the solar deity. In most other cases it was the deity's symbol, possession, vehicle, icon, or representative (cf. also Redford 1984:48).

¹²³ The LXX's "...is it not written in the book of the song?" is nearly equivalent to "...is it not written in the book of the righteous" in the MT of Josh. 10:13. The difference can be accounted for by assuming that the initial *yod* in "Jashar" has been omitted, perhaps by haplography in view of the similarity in appearance between *he* and *yod* in the Hebrew script.

According to some interpreters like Taylor (1993:141), it follows from this (or at least is not a far step from it) that Biblical passages, such as 1 Kgs. 8:12, which distinguish between Yahweh and Sun, do not necessarily imply that there was no perceived relationship between Yahweh and the sun nor do they imply that Yahweh could not have been understood in solar terms. Moreover, in the particular case of 1 Kgs. 8:12 (LXX 8:53), some kind of relationship between Yahweh and the sun is virtually ensured because, without such a relationship, there would be no need to compose and preserve a poetic text in which Yahweh and Sun are juxtaposed (as compared to the possibility of using alternatives to the sun, i.e. stars or moon, etc. for example).

In short, specific references referring to Yahweh as distinct from (and creator of) the sun can be interpreted as implying anti-solar polemics as well as a syncretistic form of solar Yahwism. Accordingly, scholars such as Jones (1984:passim) and May (1937:269-81) have argued that texts such as 1 Kgs. 8 (and Pss. 19, 104 and Gen. 1) which presents the idea of Yahweh having placed the sun in the heavens implies:

- familiarity with solar mythology;
- the presence of banned / accepted sun cults in ancient Israel;
- a polemical reaction to solar mythology (or just as possibly);
- syncretism via a solar Yahwism.

Concerning the significance of 1 Kgs. 8:12 (in the context of 1 Kgs. 8 and further allusions to solar mythology in the Solomonic era), a better understanding of the Deuteronomistic historian's interpretation of the poetic fragment in 1 Kgs. 8 may be gained by considering the poetic piece in light of its narrative context. From this consideration of the context, two things are surmised by Taylor (1993:142). First, there is an apparent correspondence between the "glory of Yahweh" in the narrative and "Sun" in the poetic fragment (both of which are set in contrast to Yahweh's residency in cloud and darkness). Secondly, there seems to be a further correspondence between the double location of Yahweh (in heaven or in the temple?) in the narrative and in the poetic fragment. In this second case, the tension in the poetic fragment between "Sun" in heaven and Yahweh in the temple is played out in the prayer that surrounds it (through a concern about the direction one should properly face in prayer, whether in the direction of God in heaven (Yahweh in Gibeon, alias Shemesh) or in the direction of the temple (the Deuteronomistic alternative)).

Taylor (1993:143) believes that Solomon's prayer for God in heaven - to now hear prayers offered in the direction of the temple, then, is an attempt to redirect the focus away from the sun in the heavens toward his alternative manifestation in "glory" and "name" in the temple. Solomon's prayer is thus transitional. Praying with traditional posture towards the "God of Gibeon" (i.e. with hands extended skyward to the sun). Solomon asks Yahweh's blessing upon those who would henceforth redirect their prayers to the temple. The context relevant to the first case is the following:

The priests the bought the ark of the covenant of Yahweh to its place, to the inner sanctuary of the house, to the holy of holies, under the wings of the cherubim...And when the priests came out from the holy place, a cloud filled the house of Yahweh so that the priests were not able to stay ministering because of the cloud, for the glory of Yahweh filled the house of Yahweh. Then Solomon said:

"Sun He set in the heavens", but Yahweh has chosen to dwell in thick cloud"

Surely I have built an exalted house for You, a place for You to dwell in forever"

According to Taylor (1993:143), by restoring the full form of the poem to what was probably its original context, a clear motive can be discerned for the rearrangement of this passage in both the MT and the LXX, namely an apparent association between the "glory of Yahweh" of the narrative and the "Sun" of the poetic fragment in this context (cf. LXX) and through the contrast of "glory" and "Sun" alike with "cloud"/"thick cloud".¹²⁴ For the purposes of this chapter it would be important to note the link in this poetic passage between Sun and Yahweh (for there is no need to dissociate elements that are distinct), and suggests further that, as manifestation, the "glory" of Yahweh was perhaps the earthly counterpart of the radiance of the sun in heaven.¹²⁵

As Taylor (1993:144) notes, In the second case noted above, namely the residency of God both in heaven and in the temple (in poem and prayer alike), it is interesting to recall, for example, how the prayer of Solomon begins (while keeping in mind also the role of the altar as a piece of Gibeonite cultic apparatus):

Then Solomon stood before the altar of the Lord in the presence of all the assembly of Israel, and spread forth his hands toward heaven...¹²⁶

Possible consciousness of an almost literal residency in heaven of Yahweh to whom the prayer is directed is also evident in the conclusion to the prayer:

Now, as Solomon finished offering all of this prayer and supplication to Yahweh, he rose from before the altar of Yahweh, where he had knelt with hands outstretched towards heaven...

According to Gaster 1974:464), this gesture of stretching forth the hands toward heaven has a parallel in the portrayals at Tell el Amarna, of worshippers in the time of Akhenaten, either standing or kneeling and extending their hands upwards. The presence of the same tension in the narrative as was seen in the poetic fragment (that is, between the "sun in the heavens" and "Yahweh in the temple") is even more apparent in the following text:

But will God indeed dwell on earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain thee, how much less this house that I have built! Yet have regard for the prayer of thy servant and to his supplication, o Yahweh my God, hearkening to the cry and to the prayer which thy servant prays before thee this day, that thy eyes may be open night and day towards this house, the place of which thou hast said "My name shall be there", that thou mayest hearken to the prayer which thy servant offers toward this place. And hearken thou to the supplication of thy servant and of thy people Israel, when they pray towards this place. Yea hear thou in heaven thy dwelling place, and when thou hearest, forgive (RSV)

¹²⁴ The latter term, ערסל, is regularly used of the obscurity in which the deity chooses to dwell; cf. v. 11.

¹²⁵ A further point from the Egyptian material discussed by Redford (1976:47 - 61) may be relevant to 1 Kgs. 8, namely, the notion that although in a sense God resides in his temple, his true dwelling place is in heaven. According to Redford (1976:55) thus: "the use of *hry-ib*", "who resides in", an expression used in reference to a deity worshipped away from its home] in preference to *m* ["in"] or some other location suggests that the (sun) disk is not in any structure, nor in art is he depicted in a shrine; he is always above it, shining down upon it, in graphic illustration of the dictum, "heaven is thy temple".

¹²⁶ The gesture of stretching forth the hands toward heaven has a parallel in the portrayals at tell el-Amarna of worshippers in the time of Akhenaten either standing or kneeling and extending their hands upwards. See most conveniently the drawing in Gaster (1980:464), fig. 91.

For scholars such as Taylor (1993:145), a clear case can thus be made for seeing a correspondence between Yahweh, both in heaven and in the temple (narrative) and between Yahweh-as-“Sun” (in heaven, and yet resident in the temple (poem)).¹²⁷ Finally, the following points are important in light of the further claim by some that this correspondence reflects a historical tension between worshippers who are accustomed to praying to Yahweh in heaven (= Sun, from the perspective of the poetic fragment and of Gibeon) and worshippers who are now being asked to pray in the direction of the temple in which Yahweh has taken residency in glory.

- Solomon is clearly concerned with the direction in which the people pray, namely towards this place (i.e. the temple). This is a concern for which there must have been a historical reason.
- A similar concern for the direction of prayer may be seen in the case of Solomon himself, but his orientation during the course of the prayer appears transitional as if to signal a change from a posture of prayer towards (the sun in) heaven to a posture of prayer towards the temple. Thus, Solomon extends his hands “towards heaven” (that is to the God of heaven whom the Gibeonites and the poem call “Shemesh”) to pray that God might hearken to the prayers of those who henceforth are to direct their prayers toward the temple (that is, to Yahweh who now resides in “glory” within the darkness of the temple). This concern for orientation is real and may be seen not only in the passages cited earlier above, but in the curious statement of 8:14, “Then the king turned about face” which immediately follows the poem in 8:12-13.
- As others such as Kearny (1973:13-14)¹²⁸ have noted, there appears to be allusions to the Gibeonites in the poetic fragment. For example, there is a parallel between the hypothetical situation in which “heaven is shut up and there is no rain because they have sinned against thee” in vv. 35-36 and the situation of there being no rain due to Yahweh’s anger for Saul’s crime against the Gibeonites in 2 Sam. 21:1-14, a parallel which implies that the temple was to be regarded as a suitable focal point for prayer by the Gibeonites.

Indeed, that the prayer of Solomon in 1 Kgs. 8 is directed with reference to Gibeonite sympathies gains clear support from 1 Kgs. 9:1-3, which does not state simply that Yahweh appeared to Solomon in Jerusalem, but that Yahweh appeared to him a second time, as *he had appeared to him at Gibeon*.¹²⁹ Moreover, as if to confirm that the temple could indeed be a place of worship for the Gibeonites, the same Yahweh

¹²⁷ If correct, the correspondence appears to hold forth the promise for understanding the classic problem of the relationship between the residency of Yahweh in heaven and in the temple (a major problem of which has always been that, in spite of the apparent contradiction, little tension may be detected between the two understandings of Yahweh’s residency), but to pursue such would lie beyond the scope of the present study (On the issue, see for example W Eichrodt (1967:186 – 194).

¹²⁸ On Gibeonite allusions in 1 Kgs. 8, see further P. J. Kearney (1973:13 – 14), who is nonetheless inclined to overstate his case. For example, although there are similarities between 1 Kgs. 8:41 - 43 and the description of the Gibeonites, the latter are referred to as גֵּרִים “sojourners”, whereas 1 Kgs. 8:41 - 43 uses the term גֵּרִים, “foreigners”. Also containing possible allusions to the Gibeonites are vv. 37 - 39 [cf. 2 Sam. 24) and vv. 41 - 43 [cf. Josh. 9].

¹²⁹ Emphasis mine. Interestingly, as if to make the same point from the perspective more in sympathy with the new perspective of dissociation between Yahweh and the physical sun, the Chronicler notes that “The Lord appeared to Solomon at night” (2 Chron. 6:12 [emphasis mine])

who appeared to Solomon at Gibeon says to Solomon (who has thus far prayed only in the direction of heaven): "I have heard your prayer and your supplication which you have made before me"¹³⁰ (cf. Taylor 1993:146).

To summarise, Solomon's prayer in 1 Kgs. 8, together with its possible interrelatedness with other texts such as Josh. 10:12-14; 2 Sam. 21; Num. 25 and others which possibly allude to the presence of a solar cult at Gibeon, provides clear evidence of the association of Yahweh with the sun god Shemesh and of the importance of Gibeon in perpetuating this theology. In this prayer, however, Solomon is consciously moving away from a one to one correspondence between Yahweh and the sun. In the poetic section, this move is reflected in the statement that defines the sun as something which Yahweh (though still having solar characteristics) has set in the heavens, whereas in the prayer itself, this move is evident in the apparent "phasing out" of the practice of praying to Yahweh as the sun in the heavens. This appears to have been done in favour of the practice of orienteering prayers in the direction of Yahweh in his temple (cf. Taylor 1993:147).

Although it is still unclear as to what extent Solomon's theology was a move away or in keeping with Gibeonite solarism it does seem certain that it is still far from devoid of solar elements and does betray a historical context where sun worship and syncretism between Yahwism and solar mythology was apparently alive and flourishing in ancient Israel. Apart from the text of 1 Kgs. 8, there are several other instances that seem to confirm sun worship was a popular religious practice in Solomon's time. An additional discussion on several other related issues concerning solar elements in the Solomonic narratives will be presented in Chapter 8 of this study. There I shall speculate on possible additional reasons why the author of Qohelet chose Solomon as his pseudonym based on extrapolations from my theory of possible allusions to solar mythology in Qohelet.

6.3.3.9 2 Kings 23:12 Sun worship during the latter days of the Judean monarchy

The starting point for this line of evidence favouring solar elements in the Yahwism of Hezekiah is 2 Kgs. 21:3-5 which reads as follows:

וַיֵּשֶׁב וַיִּבֶן אֶת הַבַּמֹּת אֲשֶׁר אָבֵד חִזְקִיָּהוּ אָבִיו וַיִּקַּם מִזְבַּחַת לְבַעַל וַיַּעַשׂ אֲשֶׁרָה כַּאֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה אַחָאב מֶלֶךְ יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוּ לְכָל צַבָּא הַשָּׁמַיִם וַיַּעֲבֹד אֹתָם וּבָנָה מִזְבַּחַת בַּיִת יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר אָמַר יְהוָה בִּירוּשָׁלַם אֲשִׁים אֶת שְׁמִי וַיִּבֶן מִזְבַּחֹת לְכָל צַבָּא הַשָּׁמַיִם בְּשְׁתֵּי הַצְּרוֹת בַּיִת יְהוָה

And again, he (Manasseh) built the high places which Hezekiah his father destroyed; and he erected altars for Baal and he made an asherah, as Ahab king of Israel had done. He worshipped the Host of Heaven and served them and he built altars in the house of Yahweh where Yahweh had said, "In Jerusalem I will set my name". And he built altars for all the Host of Heaven in the two courts of the house of Yahweh.

Regardless of which critical assessment one follows in examining this passage (cf. Hoffmann 1980:157-167),¹³¹ an important point for the present argument remains

¹³⁰ Emphasis mine.

¹³¹ One can perhaps do no better at present than to follow the assessment of Hoffmann (1980:157 - 167), according to whom v. 3 contains four *Kultnotizen* and vv. 4 and 5 a fifth and sixth respectively.

unaffected. In reporting the negative cultic reforms of Manasseh nothing is held back; the account of the vices of Manasseh in the Deuteronomistic history is climactic and relatively comprehensive. Moreover, the report pays particular attention to Manasseh's role in erecting altars for the "Host of Heaven" (cf. Taylor 1993:168 ff).¹³²

Turning now to 2 Kgs. 23:12, part of the report of the reforms of Josiah, the passage reads as follows:

וְאֵת הַמִּזְבְּחוֹת עַל הַגֶּג עָלִית אַחֲז אֲשֶׁר עָשׂוּ מַלְכֵי יְהוּדָה וְאֵת מִזְבְּחוֹת עֲשָׂה אֲשֶׁר מִנְשֵׁה בָשַׁתִּי
חֲצֵרוֹת בַּיִת יְהוָה נָחַץ הַמֶּלֶךְ וַיִּרְץ מִשָּׁם הַשֵּׁלֶךְ אֶת עֲפָרָם אֶל נַחַל קִדְרוֹן

And the altars which were upon the roof of (the) upper chamber of Ahaz which the kings of Judah had made and the altars which Manasseh made in the two courts of the Temple, the king pulled them down and smashed them there and discarded their dust in the Kidron Valley.

According to Taylor (1993:169), a problem is posed by the reference to the altars which were upon the roof of (the) upper chamber of Ahaz which the kings of Judah had made. Still in the upper chamber of Ahaz in the time of Josiah, these altars were not put there by Manasseh (mentioned specifically by name in this verse, but with reference only to other altars), but rather by the "kings of Judah" (plural). Thus, by stating that altars on a structure attributed to Ahaz existed through the reign of several kings prior to Josiah, the passage implies at least tolerance on the part of Hezekiah for these "pagan" altars.

Taylor (1993:169) further believes that none of the traditional explanations for the awkwardness occasioned by the presence of these altars in the time of Hezekiah are particularly compelling. For example, many scholars imply that Hezekiah took down the altars and Manasseh re-erected them, but in view of the Deuteronomistic historian's concern to highlight the positive aspects of Hezekiah's reign and the negative aspects Manasseh's, this is an inference based on a most unlikely silence.

A few scholars¹³³ have attempted to resolve the problem of the presence of idolatrous altars in the time of Hezekiah's reign by arguing that the reference in 2 Kgs. 23:12 to the erection of the altars by the "kings of Judah" refers only to Manasseh and Ammon (cf. Cogan 1988:87). While some warrant for this conclusion might be adduced from an attempt to harmonise strictly 2 Kgs. 21:3 (which mentions the introduction of the Host of Heaven by Manasseh) with 2 Kgs. 23:5 (which implies that the Host of Heaven were worshipped by priests appointed by the "kings of Judah"), the suggestion is nonetheless highly unlikely according to Taylor (1993:170) for the following reasons. Firstly,

Moreover, it is possible to understand the references to the introduction of cultic elements into the temple itself in vv. 4 - 5 and 7, each containing the election formula, as climaxes in which the various abominable practices actually made their way into the temple. In both cases there is before these passages (that is vv. 3 and 7) a description without localisation of an implicating mass of negative cult elements. In light of its final position and link with Ahab [cf. v. 3 and 1 Kgs. 16:33], v. 7 is a crucial high point. In mentioning Ahab there is an intentional link made between him who for his vices was associated with the fall of the northern kingdom and him who for similar vices will be judged responsible for the fall of the southern kingdom. The report functions both as a negative foil for the reform report of Josiah and as the rationale for the form of the southern kingdom, in effect a counterpart to 2 Kgs. 17.

¹³² In vv. 3 - 5 there are mentioned altars (plural) for Baal, altars for either Baal or the Host of Heaven (v. 4; cf. 2 Kgs. 23:4) in the Temple and altars also for "all the Host of Heaven" in both the Temple courts.

¹³³ See, for example, M Cogan (1974) and others (by implication) who attribute to Manasseh this rite and that of the dedication of the horses of the sun (also an act of the "kings of Judah")

according to 2 Kgs. 21:21-22, the actions of Ammon were virtually identical to those of Manasseh; it is thus quite improbable that the distinction made in v. 12 between the actions of "Manasseh" and those of the "kings of Judah" included in the latter case only Manasseh and Ammon. Secondly, it would be surprising if so general an expression as the "kings of Judah" implicated only the last two of the sixteen kings of Judah. Surely the reference is at the very least to more than two, in which case, in referring to a structure built by Ahaz, Hezekiah is almost certainly included.

Finally, Taylor (1993:170-171) notes it is relevant to the point about the seemingly telling presence of these altars during the reign of Hezekiah to clarify that the altars were more likely for the Host of Heaven, including the sun, than for some other deity. Thus, although there is some precedent for El, Baal and Chemosh receiving offerings from on top of structures, the parallels cited in favour of such are quite general and there is no particular reason to believe that the passage in question alludes to any of these deities¹³⁴ (cf. McKay 1973:9-10, 31-32). Moreover, there is no deity more likely to have received offerings from a rooftop structure than a member of the starry host such as the sun. McKay (1973:9-10) makes this point as follows: it has often been thought that the structure (that is, the rooftop altar of Ahaz) was erected for the worship of astral deities. This suggestion is entirely possible, for the rooftop was particularly suited to worship in the presence of the stars in Mesopotamia and to the worship of the Host of Heaven in Palestine (Jer. 9:13; Zeph 1:5), while the chamber itself was the scene of an extraordinary solar event (2 Kgs. 20:8-11; Isa. 38:7-8). The Nabateans also appear to have used the rooftop as a place for erecting altars for the daily offering of libations and incense to the Sun.

According to Taylor (1993:171 ff), a few additional considerations in favour of the option that altars were for the Host of Heaven (i.e. including the sun and even Yahweh-as-sun). First, that Deuteronomistic history here implicates Hezekiah with respect to these altars, and nonetheless praises him elsewhere, suggest that there must have been some kind of ambiguity about the validity of the altars. This ambiguity of course corresponds very well with that noted elsewhere in this chapter concerning the validity of Yahwistic regard for the Host of Heaven and even for Yahweh as solar (probably as Lord of [the Heavenly] Hosts). Secondly, the reference to the altars on the roof comes between the reference to the removal of solar-cult apparatus from the temple and the reference to altars made by Manasseh in the two courts of the temple (presumably for the "Host of Heaven"). It is reasonable to assume from this context,¹³⁵ then, that the rooftop altars were for the Host of Heaven including presumably the sun as a manifestation of Yahweh. In short, for Taylor (1993:172) the textual evidence in favour of the notion that Hezekiah worshipped Yahweh-as-Sun is as follows:

- the solar nature of the sign from Yahweh to Hezekiah, intelligible to him, given on a built-in sun dial, on the roof of Ahaz's upper chamber;

¹³⁴ For parallels in each case, see McKay (1973:9 – 10) and on the option regarding the Host of Heaven (1973:31 – 32). The parallels cited by McKay in the case of El and Baal (to whom Keret in the Ugaritic texts offered sacrifices to El from the top of a tower) are indeed general. Moreover, despite possible parallels, it is doubtful that a subtle allusion to the worship of Baal or Chemosh stands behind the reference to the altars on the upper chamber of Ahaz, because explicit reference is made to Baal and Chemosh in a different context within the same reform report (respectively 2 Kgs. 23:5 and 13).

¹³⁵ Although suggestive, this last point should not be pressed because of the individualistic nature of the *Kultnotizen*.

- the presence, during the reign of Hezekiah, of altars to the Host of Heaven (or its chief member, the sun) on this same structure;

When the Biblical evidence is combined with the archaeological evidence for Hezekiah's choice of a solar symbol as the royal emblem of his kingdom, it may be judged as distinctly possible that Hezekiah had a solar understanding of Yahweh (along with a regard for the Host of Heaven). As supplement to the argument above, there also appear in the Biblical account of 2 Kings several tensions suggestive of a Yahwistic Host of Heaven. If the thesis of many scholars like Stähli (1984), Smith (1990b) and Taylor (1993) is correct - that the worship of the sun and the Host of Heaven was a Yahwistic phenomenon - it should be possible to detect points of tension within Deuteronomistic history between the worship of the Host of Heaven (including the sun) as Yahwistic on the one hand and as idolatrous on the other hand. According to Taylor (1993:172), several passages illustrate the clear presence of this tension which can best be resolved by regarding the worship of the Host of Heaven and, therefore, also the sun as a Yahwistic phenomenon that came to be viewed with contempt within Deuteronomistic circles.

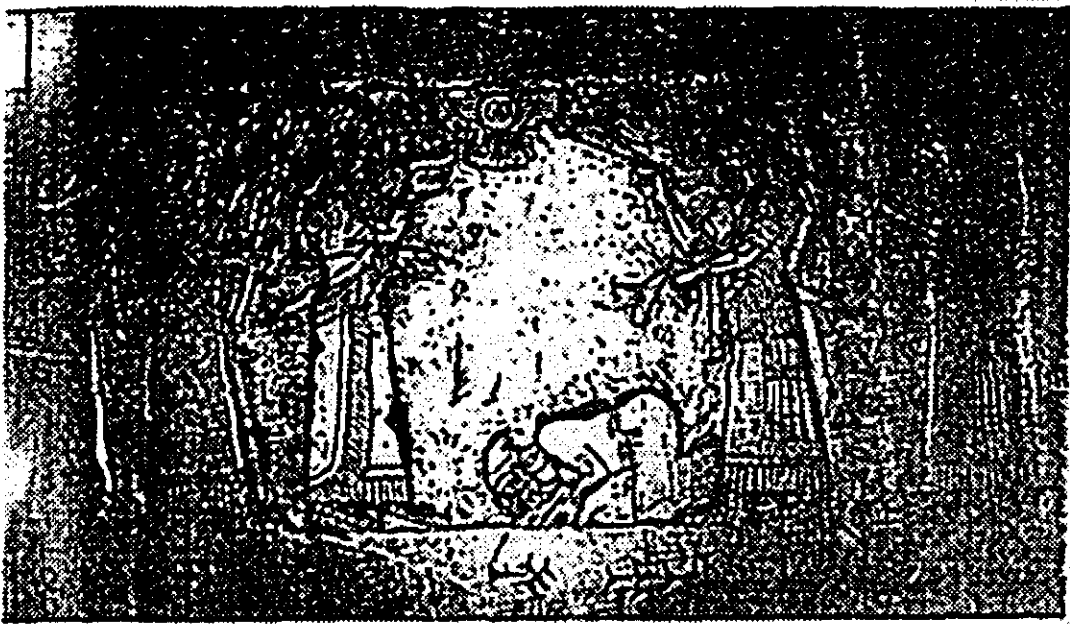


Fig 6.3 Jehu, king of Israel, pays tribute to the Assyrian king Shalmaneser III. Notice the winged icon of the solar deity (top centre) under which Jehu is bowing. (cf. Pritchard 1954:241)

The first passage in this regard is 2 Kgs 21:4. This verse has already been noted with vv. 3 and 5 for its comprehensive listing of the various altars built by Manasseh. Here, however, the focus is on the altars mentioned in v. 4:

And he [Manasseh] built altars in the house of Yahweh concerning which the Lord had said, "In Jerusalem I will pace my name".

Taylor (1993:172) notes that there is a tension here concerning the one for whom the

altars were made. On the one hand the altars seem clearly to have been erected for the Host of Heaven; both the immediately preceding context which refers to Manasseh's worship of the Host of Heaven (v. 3) and the following context which refers to "altars to the Host of Heaven in the two courts of Yahweh" (v. 5) leave virtually no room for doubt that the author wants to identify the altars with the Heavenly Host.¹³⁶

On the other hand, Taylor (1993:173) believes that the Deuteronomistic historian leaves a number of clues to the effect that the supposedly pagan altars were Yahwistic nonetheless. The clues, three in number and derived from consideration of the verse within its broader context, are as follows: Firstly, there is no specific mention in v. 4 of the one for whom the altars were built, quite uncharacteristic for these reform reports.¹³⁷ Secondly, no reference is made to the removal of these altars by Josiah (or anyone else). This is virtually inconceivable if they were non-Yahwistic altars within the temple of Yahweh. Thirdly, a point related to the previous one (but viewed from a literary rather than a historical perspective) is the lack of reference to Josiah's removal of these altars which runs counter to a pattern according to which specific cultic reforms normally have a counterpart in the reform of another king.¹³⁸

Thus, although some scholars like Hoffmann (1980:214) attempt to gloss over the exception here by including 21:4 in the clear reflex between the negative cult reform of Manasseh in 21:5 and the positive counter reform by Josiah in 23:12, neither 23:12 nor many interpreters in their discussion makes any allusion at all to the negative reform of Manasseh in 21:4. For some reason, then, what is traditionally regarded as a case of a "foreign" intrusion into the temple of Yahweh was ignored. The problem, of course, disappears if the altars are understood to have been Yahwistic but nonetheless "idolatrous" from the Deuteronomistic perspective. As in the case of the solar Yahwistic bronze altar in the time of Solomon, here too the Deuteronomistic historian uses kid gloves with reference to the erection of an altar in the area of the temple concerning which Yahweh had said, "In Jerusalem I will place my name" (cf. Taylor 1993:174).

The second passage implying the aforementioned tension between the worship of the sun and other members of the Host of Heaven as idolatrous on the one hand and as Yahwistic on the other is 2 Kgs. 23:5.

והשבית את הכמרים אשר נתנו מלכי יהודה ויקתר בכמות בערי יהודה ומסבי ירושלם ואת
המקדשים לבעל לשמש ולירח ולמזלות ולכל צבא השמים

¹³⁶ It should be noted that some wonder if 21:4 might refer to the implements of Baal. This judgement is made on the grounds that there is no reflex in the reign of Manasseh to the reference to implements belonging to Baal being removed from the temple. However, unless one insists on a clear counterpart specifically in the reign of Manasseh to that found in 23:4, there is no reason to expect this to be the case. Besides, can an altar be classified as a "vessel"? In any case it is clear that there is room for uncertainty about the one (s) for whom the altar was made, an ambiguity that Taylor (1993:173) was intentional.

¹³⁷ That failure to divulge the name of the deity is not an insignificant technicality is not only suggested by the practice of Deuteronomistic history elsewhere to specify the deity but perhaps also by the likelihood that, were the deity pagan, the same history would not pass up the opportunity to state such in the case of Manasseh, particularly in the highly offensive case of erecting altars in the temple itself.

¹³⁸ Since Hoffmann bases his understanding that the *kultnotizen* are a literary device devoid of historical reference on the fact that they have clear reflexes in the descriptions of the reform reports of other kings, the absence of a reflex in the case of 2 Kgs. 21:4 speaks for the historical veracity of at least this *Kultnotiz* (a criterion Hoffmann himself uses for the historical veracity of 2 Kgs. 23:11 for example).

And he [Josiah] retired the idolatrous priests whom the kings of Judah had dedicated to burn incense¹³⁹ at the high places in the towns of Judah and the environs of Jerusalem, those who burned incense to Baal, to the sun, and to the moon and to all the Host of Heaven.

Scholars are divided about whether the priests referred to here are Yahwistic as the Judean setting suggests or "idolatrous" as the force of the word **הַכַּמְרִים**, "idolatrous priests", suggests¹⁴⁰ (cf. Spieckermann 1982:85-86). For the present purposes, the ambiguity itself is as relevant as the debate,¹⁴¹ into which one further option may be added: the priests who were worshipping Baal, the sun, moon and stars were both Yahwistic and "idolatrous".

Taylor (1993:175) further discusses another text in tension, i.e. 2 Kgs. 23:12 (cf. 21:5). An element of the positive reform report of Josiah in 2 Kgs. 23:12 reveals a similar tension when compared with its negative reflex in the reform of Manasseh in 2 Kgs. 21:5. As Hoffmann (1980:164) has noted, that account in 23:12 of Josiah's removal of the altars from the two courts of Yahweh erected by Manasseh is the same as the original report in 21:5 of the erection of these altars, with one exception: 23:12 fails to specify that the altars were for the Host of Heaven (cf. Hoffmann 1980:164). According to Hoffmann (1980:164) the reason for the omission of the purpose of these altars from 23:12 is that their purpose was self evident in light of 21:5, but this applies only in the case of a very careful reader; this reflex of 21:5 in 23:12 occurs two chapters later and in a context in which no mention is made whatsoever of the Host of Heaven. Perhaps a more plausible explanation is that, as with the mention in the same immediate context of other items also being removed from the sensitive area of the temple complex itself, the writer is being intentionally ambiguous about the fact that they are Yahwistic (cf. Taylor 1993:175).¹⁴²

The tensions reflected in all three passages noted above point towards the conclusion that the Host of Heaven was a Yahwistic phenomenon which Deuteronomistic history considered none the less to be an idolatrous act. In seeking to understand why Deuteronomistic theology would interpret a Yahwistic practice as idol worship akin to that of the Amorites, it is important to emphasise that the mere notion of an association between the Host of Heaven and Yahweh appears to be condemned no more outrightly prior to the reign of Josiah than the notion of some kind of association between Yahweh and the sun. In the judgement of Taylor (1993:175), Deuteronomistic theology's quarrel is not with the notion of Yahweh's entourage as the Heavenly Host¹⁴³ or with Yahweh himself as the sun but with the practice of directing one's worship specifically towards

¹³⁹ The MT reads: "and he burned incense".

¹⁴⁰ Illustrative aspects of the debate are as follows. Many scholars regard it as doubtful that **הַכַּמְרִים** is likely a reference to Yahwistic priests. On the basis of his own examination of the meaning of the Akkadian "*kumru, kumritu*", Spieckermann (1982:85-86) argues that the word was a designation for priests collaborating with the Assyrians. In response, however, Würthwein (1984:456) wonders if these priests who were according to Spieckermann based in Jerusalem(?) would have been present in Jerusalem even during a period of Assyrian decline.

¹⁴¹ A similar ambiguity has been noted by Hoffmann (1980:214) with respect to the high places in v. 5: Are they Yahwistic or foreign?

¹⁴² Besides, by omitting the reference to the Host of Heaven with respect to the altars of Manasseh in v. 12b, Taylor (1993:175) suggests that the Deuteronomistic historian is covering tracks that lead straight to the Host of Heaven (or the chief member thereof) with reference to the altars on the roof of the upper chamber of Ahaz during the reign of Hezekiah in v. 12a.

¹⁴³ Cf. 1 Kgs. 22:19; Judg. 5:20.

these objects (at which time they become akin to “idols” of the nations whom Yahweh displaced from the land). The fact that these astral bodies were not made with human hands and thus fell outside the limits of the second commandment no doubt contributed to the widespread notion that the sun, moon and stars were legitimate symbols of Yahweh and his heavenly army.

The text of 2 Kgs. 23:11, however, is the verse that appears as the most explicit account in the Deuteronomistic history of the worship of the sun. The MT of 2 Kgs. 23:11 is as follows:

וישבת את הסוסים אשר נתנו מלכי יהודה לשמש מבא בית יהוה אל לשכת נתן מלך הסריס אשר
בפרורים ואת מרכבות השמש שרף בעש

And he removed¹⁴⁴ the horses which the kings of Judah had dedicated to the sun from the entrance¹⁴⁵ of the House of Yahweh by the chamber of Nathan-Melech the official, with the stoas, and the chariots of the sun he burned with fire.

According to Taylor (1993:177), most of the relevant discussions on this passage centre on two issues: First of all, there is the question regarding the origin of the cult associated with the horses and chariots of the sun. Secondly, there is the matter of topographic uncertainties arising from the use of the terms no longer understood. Concerning the first issue, there has arisen in the wake of the arguments of Spieckermann (1982:245-256) a revival of the view that the horses and chariots of the sun reflect the imposition by Assyria of her own cult practices.¹⁴⁶ According to Spieckermann (1982:245 ff), the cult involved here was the sun cult of either Shamash or Asshur - both sun gods. In evaluation, some of the aspects of official religion in Judah at the time of Assyrian domination might have been concessionary towards Assyrian practice. In light of evidence adduced thus far about a Yahwistic rite that involved the use of horses and chariots of the sun, the cultic practice reflected in 2 Kgs. 23:11 is far from a showcase example of the presence of Assyrian influence.¹⁴⁷

Spieckermann (1982:251) also mentions the growing importance in the seventh century

¹⁴⁴ The verb **שבת** in the hiphil is often rendered in contexts of idolatry “put an end to”, but in most of these cases that which is done away with bears the prefix **מ**. The present verse parallels closely Exod 12:15 and Isa. 30:11, both of which provide clear support for translating **השביט** here in the sense of “remove” (cf. also 2 Kgs. 23:5 where “put an end to” would be harsh action in the case of the priests).

¹⁴⁵ The vocalisation of the MT of **מבא**, “from entering” is virtually impossible in its present context. Taylor (1993:176) wonders whether this vocalisation may have arisen from a variant tradition in which the singular referent was the sun. This is pure speculation, but such is perhaps suggested by the common use of the verb **בא** in connection with the sun (cf. Qoh. 1:5). Perhaps a variant had Josiah keeping the sun from either “entering” the temple or from setting in the “temple” (locative adverbial accusative) in the area of the **לשכת בפרורים** which some evidence suggests was located at the western side of the temple (concerning which cf. Taylor [1993:176]).

¹⁴⁶ Note, for example, Würthwein (1984:459) who unequivocally states that the cult apparatus was for Shamash. See also Cogan and Tadmor (1988:288) for a similar assessment.

¹⁴⁷ Cf. Spieckermann (1982:107 - 109, 238, 245 - 256). Spieckermann draws particular attention to KAR 218, an oracle text occasioned by the giving over by a donor of a horse for the purpose of drawing the processional chariot of Marduk (1982:245 - 251). 2 Kgs. 23:11 can thus be accounted for on the grounds that the horse was similarly given over to Shamash, something which as noted above, Spieckermann regards as plausible on account of the growing importance in the seventh century B.C. of Shamash as an oracular deity and iconographic evidence (including perhaps the horse figurines found by Kenyon) which associates the horse with the solar deity (cf. Spieckermann 1982:251).

of Shamash as an oracular deity. In addition, there is much iconographic evidence which associates the horses with the solar deity. Other archaeological artefacts, such as the Taanach cult stand, provides warrant for the suggestion that a Yahwistic rite involving a horse and chariot was in vogue within the context of a temple from as early as the time of the founding of the temple by Solomon. In which case its introduction into the temple had nothing to do with the imposition of Assyrian cult practices upon Judah.

Moreover, as Taylor (1993:177) notes, although it might be that a considerable development in the understanding of these solar cultic features took place (to the extent that the cult as practised in the time of Josiah might have fallen under strong Assyrian influence), the similarity between the portraits of solar mythology in this regard (between the tenth and seventh centuries) appears, however, to offer little evidence for such a development. According to Gray (1970:736), the Taanach cult stand with horse and sun located at the entrance of the Yahwistic shrine (together with a griffin, known to draw the chariot of the sun god) and a Hazor horse figurine with a sun disk offer perfectly plausible native parallels to 2 Kgs. 23:11. These are more direct than the Assyrian counterparts proposed by Spieckermann.¹⁴⁸ Moreover, if it is a reference to Shamash, then the sun (shemesh) should be anarthous in 2 Kgs. 23:11. Of course, the article is easy to account for on the understanding that cultic practice was associated with "the sun" which, up to this time, had functioned in royal Jerusalemite circles as symbol of the deity for whom the temple was built, namely Yahweh (cf. also McKay 1973:32).

Taylor (1993:178) also argues that the problem of the reference to the sun horses and chariot(s) being erected by the "kings of Judah" (plural)¹⁴⁹ parallel the difficulty noted already in the discussion of altars. Unless the rite of the sun horses was introduced by Manasseh and Ammon (which is most unlikely, cf. Cogan 1988:87), the problem arises as to why Hezekiah did not do away with the practice. The difficulty is considerable for those who would see here a practice concessionary to the Assyrians, for the rebellious Hezekiah would almost certainly have done away with such an official sign of subservience to Assyria (cf. Sarna 1969:188). If, however, one assumes that the practice reflects a form of Yahwism that was in accordance with Royal Jerusalemite theology and at least tolerated by Deuteronomistic theology prior to the time of Josiah, then there is no reason to expect its removal prior to Josiah's reform, as indeed the text strongly implies (cf. Taylor 1993:178-179).¹⁵⁰

In conclusion, concerning the worship of the sun and Heavenly Host during the reigns of Hezekiah and Josiah, it can be said that there can be no doubt that the reforms of Josiah were far more extensive in their purging of solar and astral elements from the cult of Yahweh than those of any of his predecessors, including Hezekiah. But was his

¹⁴⁸ Some scholars have felt it relevant to discuss the often cited parallel between the chariots mentioned in this verse and the Assyrian title of the sun god, *rakib narkabti*, "rider of the chariot" (see for example Gray [1970:736]). Others, such as McKay (1973:32), have called the relevance of this reference into question on the grounds that this epithet was far from peculiar to the solar deity in Assyria.

¹⁴⁹ On the unlikelihood of the "kings of Judah" referring only to Manasseh and Ammon (so for example Cogan 1988:87) see the earlier discussion of the "kings of Judah" with reference to v.12. It is again surprising that, in spite of the reference to the dedication of the horses by the "kings" (plural, v. 11) as opposed to "Manasseh" (singular, v. 12b), many scholars attribute the dedication of the horses to Manasseh.

¹⁵⁰ As noted, the claim that Hezekiah might have eliminated the horses of the sun and Manasseh re-erected them is unlikely in light of Deuteronomistic history which lauds Hezekiah for all his worthy acts and which accuses Manasseh of a host of vices.

opposition to solar and astral Yahwism complete, or was it limited only to certain practices related to the notion of Yahweh as sun and his entourage as the Host of Heaven? According to Taylor (1993:183), the present evidence offers little support for the former option. Rather, the actions of Josiah are similar to those of Hezekiah; both defined apostasy primarily in terms of iconism, and the iconoclasm of both extended even to the ancient Yahwistic icons such as the bronze serpent and the asherah. However, whereas Josiah's aniconic bent included objection to the worship of objects which Yahweh himself had made (like the sun), Hezekiah evidently did not go this far, reaching its climax rather with the smashing of a Yahwistic icon made by a human (no less than Moses himself!).¹⁵¹ In the interests of writing both a credible history and a partisan theological document in which opposition to the worship of the Host of Heaven is made clear, the Deuteronomistic historian is content to live with a tension between points at which Hezekiah's worship of the Host of Heaven (and thus also the sun-[as-Yahweh?]) can be readily inferred¹⁵² on the one hand and its own positive assessment of Hezekiah on the other hand.¹⁵³ At the level of the final form of the text a relatively more consistent picture nonetheless emerges, one of opposition not so much to the sun or Host of Heaven as symbols of Yahweh and his entourage, but rather of opposition to the actual worship of these objects (cf. Taylor 1993:183).

As far as its relevance for this study is concerned, these observations affirm the familiarity with solar mythology both by way of subtle syncretism as well as via an iconoclastic type of polemics against solar theology (which seems to have been very popular during the time of the "kings of Judah"). Its presence in the Royal Jerusalemite cult in particular may be especially significant as will be argued later on in this study (cf. Chapter 8).

6.3.3.10 Jeremiah 8:1-3 More polemics against sun worship

According to Taylor (1993:197), specific mention of sun worship is limited to one passage in Jeremiah, i.e. 8:1-3.¹⁵⁴ The passage, a judgement oracle and one of several passages appended to the temple sermon in 7:1-5 reads as follows:

בעת ההיא נאם יהוה ויציא ואת עצמות מלכי יהודה ואת עצמות שריו ואת עצמות הכהנים ואת עצמות הנביאים ואת עצמות יושבי ירושלם מקבריהם ושתחום לשמש וירח מכל צבא השמים אשר אהבום ואשר עבדום ואשר הלכו אחריהם ואשר דרשום ואשר השתחוו להם לא יאספו ולא

¹⁵¹ Cf. 2 Kgs. 18:4.

¹⁵² The report of Hezekiah's reforms includes no mention of opposition to the Host of Heaven. In telling of reforms carried out by Josiah (cf. 2 Kgs. 23:5, 11-12) tell equally of reforms not carried out by Hezekiah.

¹⁵³ The problem arises as to why Hezekiah received a positive report despite his sympathy with the worship of Yahweh and his Host as sun and stars. The solution extends beyond the scope of this discussion but includes no doubt probability of an earlier form of the Deuteronomistic history dating to the time of Hezekiah and development in Deuteronomistic theology (cf. Taylor [1993:183]).

¹⁵⁴ There is an indirect reference to sun worship in 19:13 which mentions the worship of the Host of Heaven but which adds little new information to the discussion save for the supplementary confirmation that ancient Israel were no stranger to sun cults and solar mythology. Another possible reference to the sun deity in Jeremiah has been suggested by Dahood (1960:166-168). Dahood argues that the "queen of heaven", mentioned several times in Jeremiah (7:18; 44:17-19, 25), should be identified with the sun goddess "Shapash". Scholars, like Taylor (1993:197), however, considers this unlikely in view of the allegedly clear identification of Akkadian *sarrat same*, "queen of heaven", and Ishtar (cf. also Holladay [1984:254 - 255] and the bibliography cited there).

יקברו לדמן אל פני האדמה יהיו ונבחר מות מחיים לכל השארית הנשארים מן המשפחה הרעה
הזאת בכל המקומות הנשארים אשר הדחתים שם נאמיהוה צבאות

At that time, says Yahweh, they will bring out the bones of the kings of Judah and the bones of the princes and the bones of the priests and the bones of the prophets and the bones of the residents from their graves. And they shall spread them before the sun and the moon and all the Host of Heaven which they have loved and which they have served and which they have gone after and which they have pursued and which they have worshipped; they shall not be gathered or buried but as dung on the face of the ground. Death will be chosen over life from the remnant remaining from this evil family in all the places [remaining]¹⁵⁵ where I have cast them, says Yahweh of Hosts.

The first issue concerns the date of the passage. Though assigned to the exilic period by some scholars (cf. Holladay 1986:254-255), this passage is perhaps best dated to the end of the monarchy as others have argued (cf. Bright 1965:59; Wilson 1980:245). In favour of their claim, if Holladay's impressive case of support of Keunen's judgement that chapter 19 is a narrative rendition of 7:30-34 is correct (and that this narrative rendition is associated with Baruch), then 8:1-3 must have been appended to 7:30-34 at an early period, since its position after 7:30-34 is presupposed in 19:13 (cf. Holladay 1986:536-537). According to Taylor (1993:198), although Holladay's point that the reference here to the triad "sun, moon and stars" is found elsewhere only in passages suspected of being exilic insertions into their surrounding material is legitimate, passages like Ezekiel 8:16-18, which point to the presence of Solar Yahwism at a late date, suggest that the "hard line" prohibition of Jer. 8:1-3 is better dated to the late pre-exilic period when a particularly pungent Deuteronomistic theology was in vogue.¹⁵⁶

Secondly, Taylor (1993:198) argues that in light of the inference of some, that this passage refers to idolatrous elements that are foreign to Israel,¹⁵⁷ it is worth underscoring the clear presence of Deuteronomistic elements in these verses.¹⁵⁸ Jer. 8:1-3 thus does not offer an outlook on sun worship independent of Deuteronomistic theology and is an example of the abhorrence which this theology had for worship that is directed towards (even Yahwistic) heavenly objects. Thirdly, regarding the similarity between Jeremiah and Josiah with respect to solar Yahwism, the reconstruction of Wilson (1980:242-251) seems helpful, namely, that, perhaps subsequent to the re-introduction into the Jerusalem establishment of the Anathoth priesthood, Deuteronomistic theology mellowed to the point where it eventually came to differ significantly from the older orthodox Deuteronomistic theology of Josiah and Jeremiah who stood outside of the royal Jerusalemite establishment. Also relevant to Jer. 8:1-3 is the significance of the mention of disinterment in the passage.

More helpful for understanding the message to disinterment than either the recognition

¹⁵⁵ The word is lacking in LXX and Peshitta and should probably be regarded as a case of dittography.

¹⁵⁶ Taylor (1993:198) follows here the understanding of Wilson (1980:242-251) of the relationship between the prophetic ministry of Jeremiah and the reform of Josiah.

¹⁵⁷ There is no reason from the text to regard the idolatry as foreign (Taylor [1993:198]). Rather, that the worship of the sun, moon and stars and Host of Heaven was Yahwistic makes good sense in light of the claim that Judean royalty, priests, prophets and residents alike were involved in this form of worship.

¹⁵⁸ Although in light of the work of such scholars as Weippert and Nicholson, Deuteronomistic material (what Mowinckel in his classic construal called "C material") can no longer be arbitrarily or automatically assigned to Deuteronomistic editors without taking seriously also the relationship of this same material to other parts of Jeremiah, that a relationship between 8:1 - 3 and Deuteronomistic theology nonetheless is clear. On the issue of Deuteronomistic editing in Jeremiah, see Wilson (1980:231 - 233).

of irony in the exposure of the dead to the astral bodies once worshipped (as is probable) or the suggestion of grave robbery as motive for the disinterment (as seems unlikely) are Assyrian parallels noted by Cogan (1971:29-34). According to Cogan, "The prophet pictured Yahweh's punishment of Jerusalem in terms of an earthly overlord punishing his disloyal subjects, by carrying out, to the letter, the sanctions of their broken oaths". According to Taylor (1993:199), particularly noteworthy is the account of the desecration of the royal cemetery of Susa during the eighth campaign of Assurbanipal:

The tombs of their former and latter kings, (who had) not revered Asshur and Ishtar, my lords, (who had) harassed my royal ancestors, I (Assurbanipal) ravaged, tore down and laid open to the sun. Their bones I carried off to Assyria, thus imposing restlessness upon their spirits, and depriving them of food offerings and libations.¹⁵⁹

The reference to the sun in the Neo-Assyrian parallel reminds the reader that the prophet might have been adding an extra element of irony through his awareness of the role of Shamash as god of justice and the one before whom treaties were often made. Perhaps, too, irony laid in the fact that the sun was the chief means by which corpses left unburied underwent decay, thereby bringing on the horror of having one's bones scattered by devouring beasts and birds.¹⁶⁰

In any case, the extended elaboration, "which they have loved and which they have served and after which they have gone and which they have pursued and which they have worshipped", clearly underlines the disdain that Jeremiah had for the worship of the sun and other astral bodies, just as the further statement, "they shall not be gathered or buried, but be as dung on the face of the ground" emphasises the horror that befell the disinterred whose bones lay strewn about thereby preventing anyone from meeting their post-mortem needs (cf. Cogan 1971:30). On the basis of this passage, then, it appears as that Jeremiah shared the late Deuteronomistic outlook of disdain towards the worship of the "sun, moon and all the Host of Heaven" by followers of Yahweh. The worship of these objects was considered by the prophet as being tantamount to idolatry and was thus a breach of Israel's covenant obligations for which a suitable punishment was offered (cf. Taylor 1993:200).

6.3.3.11 Ezekiel 8:16-18 Mesopotamian solar mythology in the cult of Yahweh

Although the present section seeks to consider the solar rite described in Ezekiel 8:16-18, other relevant passages in Ezekiel will be considered at the end of the discussion of 8:16-18. Perhaps the most explicit reference to sun worship in the Old Testament is Ezek. 8:16 which reads as follows:

ויבא אתי אל חצר בית יהוה הפנימית והנה פתח היכל יהוה בין אולם ובין המזבח כעשרים
חמשה איש אחריהם אל היכל יהוה ופניהם קדמה והמה משתחויתם קדמה לשמש ויאמר אלי
הראית בן אדם הנקל לבית יהודה מעשות את התועבות אשר עשו פה כי מלאו את הארץ חמס
וישבו להכעיסני והנם שלחים את הזמורה אל אפם וגם אני אעשה בהמה לא תחוס עיני ולא

¹⁵⁹ The translation here follows Cogan (1971:30) who also provides a brief discussion. For the text, see Streck (1916:54).

¹⁶⁰ Cf. Jer. 7:33; 2 Sam. 21:10 - 14; although in this instance the disinterred were probably little more than bones.

אחמל וקראו באזני קל גדול ולא אשמע אותם

And he bought me into the inner court of the house of Yahweh and here, at the entrance of the temple of Yahweh, between the porch and the altar, were about twenty five¹⁶¹ men, their backs to the temple of Yahweh and their faces toward the east, and they were worshipping¹⁶² toward the east, the sun. And he said to me, "Have you seen, son of man? Is it no small matter for the house of Judah to be practising the abomination which they have committed here, that they should fill the land with violence and provoke further anger? And here they are extending a vine branch to my nose!"¹⁶³ But I will deal in wrath, my eye will not spare, nor will I have compassion; and though they shout in my ears with a loud voice, will not hear them".

To state the context briefly, this passage forms part of a literary unit that consists of 8:1-11:25, appropriately entitled by Greenberg "The defiled temple and its abandonment (cf. Zimmerli 1969:164)". There are at least two striking features of this passage that have often been noted by interpreters. First, the literal translation offered above shows the direction in which the worshippers face - with their backs to the temple of Yahweh and facing towards the East¹⁶⁴ - appears to be of greater concern than the worship of the sun (which follows the comment concerning direction. Note for example the comment offered by Zimmerli (1969:244):

He [Ezekiel] does not stress the fact that in such worship the sun appears as a second Lord besides Yahweh. Just as the first abomination consisted in the distance from the abode of Yahweh (v 6), so he sees here the particular abomination which offended Yahweh in the infringement of the ordained direction of prayer and the turning of men's backs to the Lord who dwelled in the temple.

Though dependent upon the unity of vv. 16 and 17-18, which I have yet to substantiate, a second striking feature can also be noted here namely a tension concerning the relationship between Yahweh and the sun which supports their association. For whereas the idolaters bow to the sun and with their backs turned to Yahweh in the temple, they are nonetheless said to be extending a branch to the nose of Yahweh.¹⁶⁵ Significantly, the same two peculiarities evident in Ezek. 8:16 - concern with the direction of prayer and confusion about the location of Yahweh in the temple or the sun - can be found in both 1 Kgs. 8:12 (v. 53 LXX) and 1 Kgs. 8:22-61. In the former of the Kings passages, the tension was seen to be between the relationship between Yahweh and the sun whereas, in the latter, the dominant preoccupation was with the direction of prayer, whether to God in heaven (that is, the sun) or to Yahweh in the temple (cf. also Taylor 1993:148-149).

Consideration of the contexts of both 1 Kgs. 8 and Ezek. 8:16 suggests that the similar preoccupation with the orientation reflected in these passages is not coincidental. Whereas the setting of 1 Kgs. 8:12, 22-61 was on the occasion of the dedication of the temple, at which time the glory of the Lord entered the temple (8:11), the setting of Ezek. 8:16 is the abomination that occasions the exact opposite of what happened in 1

¹⁶¹ Or, following some LXX manuscripts, "twenty" (on the possible significance of this number as the number of the sun god, Shamash, cf. later in this study).

¹⁶² The reading in the MT is generally regarded as a scribal error.

¹⁶³ The MT has, "their nose", but this is one of the Tiqqune Sopherim. The original reading was clearly אפי, "My (that is, God's) nose".

¹⁶⁴ A similar concern with the direction faced, namely with "eyes... turned toward the Lord", is reflected in the Mishnah (*m. Suk* 5.4, which cites Ezek. 8:16).

¹⁶⁵ On the unity of vv. 16 and 17 and the meaning of the latter, see later in this chapter.

Kgs. 8, namely the departure of the glory of the Lord from the temple. Moreover, in Ezek. 9:2¹⁶⁶ judgement for the abomination described in Ezek. 8, including the solar rite noted climactically in 8:16, begins at, "the bronze altar", the altar of burnt offering from of fame from Gibeon and 1 Kgs. 8.

Furthermore, according to Taylor (1993:149), Ezek. 8 describes a group of executioners whose duty of destroying Jerusalem is reminiscent of the role of the executioner of Jerusalem in 2 Sam. 24 / 1 Chron. 21-22. The executioner's grisly mission, in Ezekiel carried out in light of the abomination committed before the altar of burnt offering, was originally stayed through David's act of building an altar of burnt offering, the divinely ordained alternative to that at Gibeon.¹⁶⁷ In light of what appear to be clear correspondences between these passages, the following interpretation is offered by Taylor (1993:149 ff).

First, there is every reason to believe that Zimmerli (1969:244) was correct in his tentative judgement that the passage reflects "a solar understanding of Yahweh". Secondly, the practice reflected in Ezek. 8:16 which contributed greatly to the departure of the glory of the Lord, is effectively the reverse of that advocated in 1 Kgs. 8 which formed the theological basis for the entry of that glory. Moreover, that this alternative means of praying to Yahweh is attested at the time of the late pre-exilic period is an important witness to the apparent longevity of the tradition. And thirdly, the Deuteronomistic concern with the orientation away from the sun reflected in both 1 Kgs. 8 and Ezek. 8:16, like the Deuteronomistic concern with bowing to the Host of Heaven (of which bowing to the sun is a part), can be interpreted as a concern over syncretism or solar elements in Yahwism or on the other hand, simply with iconism. As for the latter, in other words, Deuteronomistic history and Ezek. 8:16-17 may not be so much opposed to the worship of Yahweh as the sun, but with the worship of the sun (that is, a physical object) as Yahweh (or to other members of the Host of Heaven as members of his entourage).

Also relevant to both Ezek. 8:16 (and possible solar rites associated with the temple of Solomon) is the question of the date of the rite described in Ezek. 8:16. Although the issue of date is complex, some evidence points in the direction of further continuity between this passage and 1 Kgs. 8 and in the direction also of a possible (but by no means certain) solar alignment of the temple. Some scholars such as Gaster (1941:289-310), Morgenstern (1949:34,53) and more recently Brownlee (1986:128) have argued that the solar rite described in Ezek. 8:16 took place during the autumnal equinox. Although some of the arguments adduced by these scholars in favour of this date are

¹⁶⁶ It is widely acknowledged and apparent from the text that chapter 9 is closely related to 8 and a continuation of it (cf. Zimmerli 1969:231).

¹⁶⁷ It is unlikely that the parallel is direct in the sense that the writer of the Ezekiel passage consciously alludes to the founding of the altar at the threshing floor of Arauna. Behind them both, however, there seems to be a tradition, not clear in details, of an association between the altar of burnt offering and the execution of Jerusalem through of an angelic messenger or messengers (cf. 1 Chron. 21:15 - 22 / 2 Sam. 24:16 - 25; Ezek. 9:1 - 2). If the parallel exists, the record of "seven" executioners in Ezek. 9:2 seems to be a development from the single messenger in Samuel / Chronicles. Furthermore, it is interesting, in view of the claim of Taylor (1993:150) that the altar of burnt offering / bronze altar had solar connotations, that many associate these seven executioners with the seven planetary deities, among who was perhaps the counterpart of Nebo, "he who holds then scribe's stylus" (regarding which, see Zimmerli [1979:246 - 247]).

not compelling,¹⁶⁸ three considerations possibly allude to a time roughly during the autumnal equinox.

The first is the date offered at the beginning of Ezek. 8, the fifth day of the sixth month of the sixth year according to MT (roughly 18 September 592 B.C.), exactly one month less according to LXX (that is 18 August). It is perhaps significant that the date of MT, favoured by most scholars,¹⁶⁹ is at the same time of the autumnal equinox, a time when unobstructed sunlight could have shone into the Holy of Holies if the temple was aligned at an angle of roughly 90 degrees. It is not clear however that the date given in Ezek. 8:1, the date for the vision in the chapter as a whole, applies specifically to the solar rite since it clearly does not apply to the preceding abomination involving women weeping for Tammuz (known to have taken place in July).

Secondly, as Morgenstern (1949:34) has noted, there is a tradition in the Mishnah that refers to this solar rite within the context of the Feast of Booths. Tractate Suk 5.4 describes a ceremony in which two priests at the time of cock crowing ceremoniously blast trumpets at appropriate places as they make their way from the upper gate to their final destination, the east gate. The text continues as follows:

Arrived there, they turned their faces toward the west and said, "Our fathers who were in this place had their backs toward the temple and their faces eastward, and they would prostrate themselves eastward towards the sun; but as for us, our eyes are towards Him (or "towards Yah")"

Especially in light of the judgement that Ezekiel 8 alludes to a solar Yahwistic rite, it must be asked what significance specific reference in this rite had within the context of the later celebration of the Feast of Booths unless the rite denounced here played some role within this same feast at an earlier period. Significantly, a setting at the Feast of Booths for the rite of Ezek. 8:16 corresponds perfectly with the time of the dedication of the temple of Solomon in 1 Kgs. 8 with which Ezek. 8:16 has been shown to have clear parallels:

So Solomon held the Feast at that time, and all Israel with Him, a great assembly, from the entrance to Hamath to the Brook of Egypt, before the Lord our God, seven days.¹⁷⁰ On the eighth day he sent the people away, and they blessed the king and went to their homes.¹⁷¹

For De Vaux (1965:498) and many others, there is no question here that the "feast",

¹⁶⁸ Taylor (1993:151) considers the arguments adduced by Gaster (1941) in favour of a date for this ritual during the autumnal equinox to be not particularly convincing. Gaster's case is based upon his interpretation of the Ugaritic myth of Shachar and Shalim, in which he finds parallels to all the rites described in Ezek. 8. Gaster confidently assigns a date of the autumnal equinox to the Ugaritic rite (the season of which is much debated) and uses this as a justification for finding subtle allusions to the autumnal equinox behind such words, for example as, "end", and "sefira" (the meaning of which is uncertain), in the preceding chapter, Ezek. 7 (vv. 2 and 7 respectively), which is in a different block of material from 8:1-11:25.

¹⁶⁹ On the varying dates given in Ezek. 8:1 with rationales given for favouring the MT, see, for example Zimmerli (1979:216).

¹⁷⁰ LXX, followed, for example, by the RSV. There is widespread agreement that the additional "and seven days, and fourteen days" of the MT was added in light of 2 Chron. 7:8-10 which assigns the ceremony of dedication to a period of seven days before the Feast of Tabernacles which in Chronicles, concluded with the eighth day of solemn assembly (cf. Lev. 23:34-43).

¹⁷¹ Cf. 1 Kgs. 8:65-66a.

though not named, was the Feast of Tabernacles¹⁷² which, of course, coincided with the time of the autumnal equinox.¹⁷³ That the Feast of Booths was perhaps significant to the occasion of the founding of the temple can be suggested from the observation that for some reason there was a delay of eleven months between the completion of the temple and its dedication (cf. 1 Kgs. 6:38; 8:32). Several factors, then, point to the Feast of Booths and autumnal equinox as the time of the rite described in Ezek. 8:16, including a Mishnaic tradition, the time given for the dedication of the temple in both Kings and Chronicles (though with minor variations) and, perhaps Ezek. 8:1. This much seems clear (cf. Taylor 1993:153).

Even if it were possible to establish the exact time¹⁷⁴ of the occasion when the direction one faced was evidently indicative of one's theology, uncertainties about the exact orientation of the temple and the question of the awkward presence of the Mount of Olives would still preclude the possibility of knowing whether or not, for example, the sun shone into the Holy of Holies at any given time during the year (a matter to which consideration was given earlier in this chapter in the section on the orientation of the temple) (cf. Morgenstern 1949:34-35). According to Taylor (1993:154), relevant both to a solar-Yahwistic interpretation of Ezek. 8:16 and to the question of a possible setting during the Feast of Booths is a final consideration from the context of Ezek. 8:1. I refer to v. 17b in which Yahweh says, "And here they are extending a vine branch to my nose!" Consideration here is given to two possible interpretations of this verse,¹⁷⁵ both of which are based on a common view that the practice should not be dissociated from the solar rite described in v. 16 (cf. Zimmerli 1969:244; contra Sama 1964:347-352).

Possibly relevant to the notion of Yahweh as the sun in Ezek. 8:16 is the view of Fohrer (1955:52-53) according to whom Ezek. 8:17 is a Canaanite counterpart to the well known Egyptian practice of extending a bouquet to the nose of the deity as a means of bestowing upon the deity the wish of eternal life. In stating this interpretation, however, Fohrer faces a tension between his understanding on the one hand that the worshippers are performing this gesture before the rising sun and his view on the other hand that they are performing this gesture before Yahweh. This tension leads Zimmerli (1969:244) to reject the interpretation with the question: "is it likely...that Yahweh, of whom we have just been told that the "men" turned their backs on Him, now suddenly takes the place of the rising sun and then says that 'they stretch out the branch to *my* nose!'"

Regardless of whether or not the details of Fohrer's interpretation are correct, if Zimmerli's own suggestion of a solar understanding of Yahweh is taken seriously, the

¹⁷² See 1 Kgs. 8:2 which, as De Vaux (1965:498) argues, there is no reason to doubt; cf. 2 Chron. 7:8 - 10; Lev. 23:34-43. On the Feast of Booths as a possible locus for solar Yahwism see the section earlier in this chapter.

¹⁷³ That the time of the Feast of Booths was perhaps significant to the occasion of the founding of the temple can be suggested by the observation that for some reason there was a delay of eleven months between the completion of the temple and its dedication (cf. 1 Kgs. 6:38; 8:32).

¹⁷⁴ Several factors prevent this. As Morgenstern (1949:34) admits, the Mishnah leaves it unclear whether the rite was practised each morning during Sukkoth or whether it took place on one day. Moreover, even according to Morgenstern's own unique understanding that the festival of Asif, the predecessor of Sukkoth, took place between the third and the ninth day of the seventh month, the festival still does not coincide exactly with the equinox. Morgenstern's suggestion that the problem with the timing can be attributed to the pro-Yahweh (that is, anti-sun) perspective from which the account in the Mishnah is written seems forced (Taylor 1993:155).

¹⁷⁵ For a summary of various interpretations, see already Stähli (1984:47 - 49).

answer to the question would appear to be, yes (cf. Taylor 1993:155). To be sure, the rite alluded to in Ezek. 8:17 is obscure and difficult to interpret. In my judgement, however, an explanation as plausible as any offered to date arises from consideration of the rite also as possibly Yahwistic in origin. Particularly on the assumption of the unity with 8:16, the setting of 8:17 corresponds remarkably well with a rite described in the Mishnah in association with the Feast of Booths.

In the tractate Sukkah, in which the solar rite of Ezek. 8:16 is mentioned, reference is made in the same context to a practice in which pilgrims are required to collect various sorts of branches, palm, willow, myrtle, some of which were to be made into a festal plume, a lulab, which was waved daily during the singing of the Hallel (Ps. 113-118).¹⁷⁶ More specifically, daily during the ceremony of water libation a procession of priests walked around the altar waving branches, while the pilgrims themselves watched, waving their lulabs and joining in the chorus of Ps. 118:25 in which the pilgrim address Yahweh by saying, "Save us, we beseech thee, O Lord!"¹⁷⁷

Taylor (1993:155-156) notes that the correspondence between this rite and Ezek. 8:16 - 17 are numerous: the presence in both contexts of priests;¹⁷⁸ reference to the extending of branches; location near the altar of burnt offering; and probably also a setting at the Feast of Booths. Moreover, further correspondences arise upon examination of the context in Ezek. 8:17. I refer to what can be judged from Ezek. 8:18 about the setting of the preceding verse in which people are said to have extended a branch to the "nose" of Yahweh.

But I will deal in my wrath; my eye will not spare, nor will I have compassion; and though they shout in my ears with a loud voice, I will not hear them.

According to Taylor (1993:157), although the reference to shouting in the "ears" of Yahweh could be hypothetical here, it could also be that the shouting was part of the same rite in which branches were held forth to the "nose" of Yahweh. If so, one can surmise farther that the shouting was done within the context specifically of an appeal for deliverance since, by refusing to hear the cries of the people, Yahweh hear denies them mercy. This corresponds then, remarkably well, then, with the setting for the Feast of Booths described in tractate Sukkah, namely a setting in which a group of people who extend branches at an altar shout for deliverance and in which, earlier, reference is made to the solar rite of Ezek. 8:16.

Moreover, although the Mishnaic tradition of branch waving is attested rather late, that in Lev. 23:40 branches of different kinds are referred to in the context of rejoicing before the Lord during the Feast of Booths, rather than for constructing the booths themselves, suggests a relatively early date for the celebrative waving of branches during the feast.¹⁷⁹ In light of these other possible correspondences¹⁸⁰ then, it is reasonable to

¹⁷⁶ M. Sukk. 3.1 - 4; 8 - 9; cf. for example Rylaarsdam (1980:456). Cf. also Jub. 16:31.

¹⁷⁷ M. Sukk. 3.9, 4.5; cf. Rylaarsdam (1971:48).

¹⁷⁸ This is not specifically stated but, most interpreters judge the "twenty" or "twenty-five" referred to in Ezek. 8:16 to be priests on the grounds of their number and / or, more importantly, on the basis of their location in the temple complex (that is, in an area in which only priests were likely to be found).

¹⁷⁹ That the book of Jubilees attributed the rite of branch waving to Abraham (Jub. 16:31) is also suggestive that the practice was considered to be early.

¹⁸⁰ First, that the rite of branch waving by the priests is done near the altar in both tractate Sukkah and Ezek. 8:17 helps to "bridge" the gap between the location of the eastward facing priesthood in Ezek. 8:16

suppose that the setting for Ezek. 8:17 is part of the Feast of Booths in which branches were held upwards (to the "nose" of Yahweh as it were) and this was part of the solar occasion during which priests worshipped Yahweh in the direction of the sun rather than in the direction of the temple.

Thus, according to Ezek. 8:16-17, solar Yahwism was alive and well within the context of the Jerusalem priesthood at the end of the monarchy. All this being said it might be worth to recapitulate on some of the things already said in this chapter relevant to the main thesis of this study. For now, it has been shown that Israel was exposed to sun worship, familiar with solar mythology and constantly, from the time of the exodus (and possibly even earlier) to the end of the monarchy (and the rest of the first millennium B.C. as well - cf. later on in this chapter), found themselves involved in apostasy to outright sun worship or, at other times, solar Yahwism (i.e. syncretism). In the end, the implication of 8:16-17 is clear: the people were all too familiar with solar mythology.

6.3.3.12 Malachi 3:20 The sun of righteousness with healing in its wings

The text of Mal. 3:20 [4:2] is as follows:

וְזָרְחָה לָכֶם יְרֵאֵי שְׁמִי שֶׁמֶשׁ צְדָקָה וּמְרַפָּא כֹנָפֶיהָ

But there will shine forth for you who fear my name the sun of righteousness, and healing will be in its wings.

These verses describes the fate of God-fearers¹⁸¹ on the great "Day of Yahweh" and stands in sharp contrast to the fate of the arrogant and the evil-doers who on this same day, a day "burning like an oven", will be burned like stubble. The passage is probably not without relevance for the understanding of the Day of the Lord, but here the focus will be on matters more clearly solar (cf. Hanson 1986:284-285). Also, the expression, "sun of righteousness", has generated much discussion (cf. Glazier-MacDonald 1987:238-239). According to Taylor (1993:212), there is little reason¹⁸² to doubt the virtually unanimous judgement of commentators that the common Near Eastern depiction of the winged sun disk contributed to the use of the expression here. In view of the iconography of the royal Judean *imlk* jar handles, however, Judah itself should be included among the suggestions about which cultural realm contributed to the image of

(near the altar) and the location for the reference to this rite in m. Sukk 5.4 (at the eastern gate). Secondly, underlying the interpretation offered here is the assumption that rites performed at the altar itself were performed for Yahweh as sun, a view which matches the understanding that the original altar of the first temple, perhaps originally at Gibeon, was a cult object of Yahweh as sun. In light of the possibility that the bronze altar was a solar cult apparatus which perhaps literally reflected the character of the cult, sense can perhaps be made of the very curious statement in m. Sukk 4.5, "Praise to you, O altar! Praise to you, O altar!" which directs praise to the altar as if perhaps to Yahweh himself and for which there is a variant expression attributed to Rabbi Eliezer, which makes the connection quite explicit: To Yah and to you, O altar. Thirdly, immediately after the climactic about at which time the branches was raised at the Feast of Booths, the popular passage of Ps. 118:26 - 27 in which altar and God as light are bought together are read (cf. Taylor 1993:157 ff).

¹⁸¹ On the meaning of "those who fear Yahweh" here, see Hanson (1986:284 - 285).

¹⁸² An exception is the view which takes כֹּנָפִים, "wings" to refer to the "folds" of a garment (cf. Verhoef 1987:331). If correct, this interpretation would make less likely the possible indirect parallel with the winged sun disk, but otherwise does not affect the present discussion, since solar imagery is still evident in the reference to Yahweh as Shemesh, "Sun".

Yahweh as winged sun.¹⁸³

In seeking to explain further the significance of the expression "sun of righteousness", interpreters often follow one of two approaches, neither of which necessarily excludes the other. The first understands the expression in a purely figurative sense by reference to two features that the sun and the righteousness of Yahweh share in common, such as their being bright and blessed, or their being associated with justice, or their affinity with the notion of God as judge (cf. Smith 1912:80; Baldwin 1972:250; Verhoef 1987:328).¹⁸⁴ The second approach understands the expression to associate Yahweh more directly (often in the sense of less figuratively) with the "sun of righteousness". A somewhat eclectic outlook which nevertheless emphasises the second approach is that of Glazier-McDonald (1987:236):

The wings symbolise Yahweh's protective presence, a presence which spreads over the earth ensuring its prosperity. The association of the wings (or rays) of the sun (=Yahweh) with healing is significant for it is precisely the sun generating light and warmth which guarantees fertility and thus, life. Further, there is a connection between the sun and the world order, cf. "sun of righteousness". In the Ancient Near East, the sun god was considered to be the author of the world order. According to Ps. 85:12, righteousness (in the sense of world order) goes before Yahweh. Ps. 19 suggests an association between the sun and world order (law) when it celebrates the sun (vv. 5-7) and then praises the law of Yahweh which enlightens the eyes (vv. 8-11). In Mal. 3:20, the rising of the sun (=Yahweh) ensures the restoration of right order, and thus of harmonious relations between heaven and earth, between Yahweh and man.

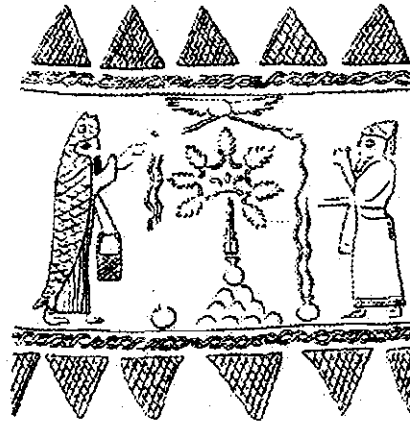


Fig 6.4 In this picture a winged sun broods over the tree of life (cf. Keel 1978:29)

According to Taylor (1993:213), without further information of what is regrettably "a little known period of Judean history", there is no way of verifying that more than mere poetic imagery gave rise to the expression "sun of righteousness" here. Moreover, as the

¹⁸³ For the various options, see, for example, Glazier-McDonald (1987:238 - 240). Some have also thought of the *Imlk* jar handles as background to the expression in Mal. 3:20 [4:2]. (cf. Smith [1912:80]; Tigay [1986:95]).

¹⁸⁴ Smith (1912:80) for example says, "The absolute impartiality of the sun's rays may easily have given rise to the association of justice with the sun. The phrase "sun of righteousness" does not indicate any personal agent, but is rather a figurative expression of righteousness itself".

citation of Glazier-McDonald illustrates, the extent to which one is inclined to see Yahweh as genuinely solar in Mal. 3:20 [4:2] is inevitably determined by the extent to which one sees a more or less concrete understanding of Yahweh as sun elsewhere. In view of these considerations, the passage cannot be used independently as evidence in support of a solar understanding of Yahweh (although the implicit familiarity with ANE solar symbolism - that which is the thesis of this chapter - is beyond dispute).

Nevertheless, in illustration of what has just been said with respect to the citing of Glazier-McDonald, Taylor's own opinion based on evidence adduced elsewhere in this study is that the expression "sun of righteousness" probably does reflect a solar understanding of Yahweh.¹⁸⁵ Although at this point it is merely an assumption on the part of Taylor that a solar understanding of Yahweh lies behind the reference to him as "sun of righteousness", it is worth observing nonetheless that some of the evidence for solar Yahwism examined elsewhere in this chapter may open a fresh avenue for understanding this expression for Yahweh.

For example, to judge from context in which this expression occurs in Malachi - a broad context which is clearly eschatological and a near context in which the ministry of "healing", is assigned to a solar figure - there seems to be an affinity between this expression and the eschatological understanding noted earlier of Yahweh as the sublime sun (cf. Taylor 1993:214). As may be recalled, one of the roles of Yahweh as eternal sun in the eschaton was healing, as illustrated by Isa. 30:26:

And the light of the moon shall become like the light of the sun, and the light of the sun shall become sevenfold, like the light of seven days, when the Lord binds up his people's wounds and heal the injuries it has suffered.

The portrait of the sun of righteousness with healing in its wings offered by Malachi is thus consistent with the notion found elsewhere of the coming of Yahweh as the sublime sun, bringing with him a superabundance of attributes associated with the former physical sun, among which are "righteousness" and "healing". If it is true that Malachi had a solar perception of Yahweh, several implications follow.

First, an eschatological understanding of Yahweh as sun on the part of the community which gave rise to the prophecy would be attested in the first half of the fifth century B.C. (the time of the prophecy - cf. Hanson 1986:753). Secondly, the presence of Deuteronomistic influence(s) in the book of Malachi (including probably Mal. 3:20 [4:2])¹⁸⁶ would accord reasonably well with what has been shown elsewhere to be an openness within Deuteronomistic literature to a solar understanding of Yahweh (though not to worship in the direction of the sun or to some cultic practices such as that reflected in 2 Kgs. 23:11) (cf. Coggins 1987:75-76). And thirdly, the general context in which the expression sun of righteousness occurs, a day of the epiphany of Yahweh,

¹⁸⁵ Several factors are at least consistent with such a view: (1) The prophet also uses the expression "Yahweh of Hosts", known to be a solar epithet in some contexts (but not all and by no means in itself a reliable indicator of solar elements). (2) It is perhaps not coincidental that a different metaphor used to describe the fate of the wicked on the same day of Yahweh, namely, "a day burning like a furnace" (3:19 [4:1]) is at least amenable to a solar understanding of Yahweh, an understanding which might even be taken to inform an understanding of the significance of the imagery of a calf being released from the stall (3:20c [4:2c], from darkness to sunlight as well as from captivity to freedom) (cf. Taylor 1993:213).

¹⁸⁶ On the Deuteronomistic language and themes in Malachi, see for example, Blenkinsopp (1983:242) and Coggins (1987:75 - 76).

would provide possible support for an association between a solar phenomenon (interpreted Yahwistically) and the expected day of the Lord.¹⁸⁷ Finally, since Mal. 3:20 [4:2] possibly offers insight into what notions were conveyed along with Yahweh as sun, a few comments on the meaning of “righteousness”, and “healing”, are in order. First, among the suggested meanings for “righteousness” here are the senses either of vindication and victory,¹⁸⁸ or of justice and salvation (cf. Verhoef 1987:328-329).

To evaluate, the latter seems preferable in light of the context in which there is concern for the restoration of right order involving deliverance for the God-fearers and for the destruction of the wicked (cf. Mal. 3:19, 21 [4:1,3]; contrast 3:14-15). According to Glazier McDonald (1987:237-238), the word “healing” denotes the restoration of the righteousness, but equally an effect of the coming of Yahweh as sublime sun. This healing could involve the healing of a strained relationship between God and his fearers, and perhaps even the return of fertility to the land,¹⁸⁹ which was again part of the result of the return of right order. Moreover, Mal 3:21 [4:3] emphasises that the coming of the “sun of righteousness” will clearly result in deliverance and joy, and perhaps also emergence from darkness to light and prosperity (cf. also Baldwin 1972:250).

To conclude, Taylor (1993:216) believes that although perhaps reflective of a concrete understanding of Yahweh as sun within the cult, the Yahweh epithet “sun of righteousness” could also simply be a case of the use of figurative language for God. Mal. 3:20 thus cannot be used independently as evidence for Yahweh as sun in ancient Israel, although it at least implies the people’s familiarity with the associative meanings of solar mythology (which is what this chapter is all about). However, if the “sun of righteousness” is a genuinely solar epithet (which is quite possible in view of the evidence adduced elsewhere in this chapter), then a number of implications would follow that are consistent with the overall assessment of many researchers who have studied the solar elements in Yahwism. The possible use here of mere poetic language for God (that is, language devoid of reference to a solar cult) nonetheless results in an impasse.

6.3.3.13 Psalm 19 The sun and the law

According to Taylor (1993:220), this well-known and unique psalm in which God’s handiwork extols him and in which the value of the law of the Lord is upheld has occasioned many difficulties for interpreters. Chief among these difficulties is its composition. Verses 2-7 [1-6] are often thought to be in part (or part of) a pre Israelite creation hymn to El in which, to judge from its present form, the sun played a major role.¹⁹⁰ To this hymn has been added a hymn in praise of the Torah of Yahweh (cf.

¹⁸⁷ Malachi’s description of the day of Yahweh’s epiphany is at points comparable to Amos 5:18, 20; cf. Amos 4:13; 5:8 - 9. Although the notion of Yahweh as sun perhaps accounts for the imagery of light and darkness often associated with the Day of the Lord, the imagery itself is too general to be of help to those who argue for a strong form of the phenomenon of solar Yahwism.

¹⁸⁸ Note, for example, the rendering of שמש צדקה in the JSPV as, “sun of victory”. For a list of cases in which צדקה has this meaning, see, for example, Smith (1912:80).

¹⁸⁹ Cf. Mal. 3:10 - 11.

¹⁹⁰ Mowinckel (1962:267) proposes that the extended discussion of the sun suggests that an earlier version of this poem elaborated on other heavenly bodies. On the other hand, note the role of the sun goddess Shapash in the Ugaritic texts in which this deity has a particular affinity with El, perhaps acting

Mowinckel 1962:267). Relevant to this problem of composition is the relationship between the two main sections of the psalm, the creation hymn and the Torah hymn. Although for a long time it was thought that the two hymns were juxtaposed fortuitously, Schroeder (1914:69-70) and Durr (1927:37-48) argued persuasively quite a while ago that a unifying theme for the Psalm as a whole is the sun, the cosmic role of which is articulated in vv. 5-7 [4-6] and the judicial role of which is the rationale for the elaboration upon the justice of the law of Yahweh in vv. 8-12 [7-11].

Moreover, to this general insight with respect to the role of the sun god as preserver of the law may Taylor (1993:221) now added the more specific observation of Sarna (1967:171-175) that the attributes applied to the law of Yahweh in Ps. 19B are remarkably similar to the attributes assigned to the sun god in Ancient Near Eastern sun god literature.¹⁹¹ This once again implies familiarity with ANE solar mythology albeit here in a post exilic setting. Furthermore, although the question of whether the two sections of the Psalm were a unit from the beginning must remain open, a strong case can be made along the lines suggested by these and other scholars for intentional unity at least at a redactional level (contra Mowinckel 1962:267).¹⁹²

Moreover, as Taylor (1993:221) notes, even if the sun does not hold the key to the psalm's unity, there can be no doubt that the sun plays an important role in both parts of the psalm, vis-à-vis creation in Psalm 19A and vis-à-vis the law of Yahweh in Ps. 19B. However, the question remains: what is the function or significance of the high profile given to the sun in Psalm 19? On this issue there is little agreement among scholars. For example, according to Aelen the sun and other created bodies referred to in Psalm 19A reflect the glory of God by obeying the "rules" (that is, the orderly set of principles by which God determined the heavenly bodies should live) referred to in Psalm 19B. But, as Mowinckel (1962:267) notes, that the "statutes" are not even mentioned in Ps. 19A renders this interpretation somewhat dubious. Or again, for example, according to Loretz (1974:187), there is a correspondence between the shining of the glory of God in nature (Psalm 19A) and the law which, like the rising sun, brings light to human kind (Ps. 19B). However, while this view may be closer to the mark, neither the shining forth of the sun (which by itself has little in common with the Torah) nor the radiance of the glory of God is mentioned specifically in Psalm 19A, and the law is nowhere compared with the rising sun in Ps. 19B.

Finally, according to Sarna (1967:175), Psalm 19 is an "anti-sungod polemic" which was used in the time of Josiah to respond to sun worship, prevalent at his time (cf. 2 Kgs. 23:11). To Sarna Ps. 19:5-7 [4-6] serves to show that the sun is not a deity rivalling God, but is created by God; the sun is not something to be praised, but is part of the created realm which lauds the Lord.¹⁹³ Moreover, in describing the Torah in language

as his spokeswomen (cf. KTU 1.2 III 15 - 18; 1.6 VI 22-29).

¹⁹¹ Cf. Sarna (1967:171-175). That the correspondences between the psalm and sun god literature are not likely to be coincidental seems clear in light of the prominence of the sun in Ps. 19A and the presence of adjectives applied to the law in Ps. 19B (such as "pure", "clean" and "admonish") which, in addition to their normal form of translation, can have sense tying them with the notion of light. For meanings associated with light in the case of the last two of the Hebrew originals of the aforementioned adjectives see, for example, Eaton (1968:603 - 609).

¹⁹² Against the notion of original unity, see especially the arguments of Mowinckel (1962:267).

¹⁹³ Sarna (1967:189) notes that although the sun is described in v. 5 [4] using mythological language, the poet distances himself from the Mesopotamian notion that the sun deity had a bridegroom by using the kaph of similarity. The sun is thus "like" a bridegroom which emerges from its pavilion.

familiar to sun worshippers, the poet, polemically emphasises the relative merits of the Torah. this interpretation of Psalm 19 as anti sun god polemic in language familiar to sun worshippers will not be far removed from my hypothesis concerning what Qohelet may be up to in his book filled with references to the sun and his allusions to the themes popular in solar mythology. Other scholars like Taylor (1993:222) believe, however, that an alternative means of reckoning with the "sun imagery" of the Psalm can be postulated, namely that both parts of the Psalm reflect a solar understanding of the Israelite deity to whom praise is offered. Although this alternative view is virtually the opposite of what Sarna believes the authors intention happens to be, it too can be taken as supplementary evidence in favour of the thesis of this chapter namely the Israelites familiarity with solar mythology.

Before considering aspects from both parts of the Psalm that suggest a solar character for the deity it is important to recall that the distinction made between the deity and the sun in v. 5 [4] no longer in no way necessitates a polemical interpretation, as is often assumed. As noted earlier, the distinction made here does not apply complete discontinuity between the deity and the disk which he is said to have placed in the heavens. Rather, according to Taylor (1993:222) to take as an example of the Egyptian material pertaining to Re and the sun which he is said to have generated from himself, God's placement of the sun in the heavens can as easily be judged to imply continuity (though obviously not identity) between God and the sun.¹⁹⁴

In short, Ps. 19:5 [4], according to this interpretation, does not provide unequivocal support for conflict between God / El and the sun or a polemic against the latter; rather, the verse can be understood as an articulation of a common Near Eastern concept that a deity, though solar, is nonetheless distinct from the sun disk which he sets in the heavens. When considered in light of this clarification and afresh, both Psalm 19A and 19B can be understood to assume an explicitly "solar" dimension of the character of God in ancient Israel. Beginning with Psalm 19A, the following points may be noted. First, as Sarna¹⁹⁵ and others have recognised, sun god language is used with reference to God (or El) the creator in Ps. 19A¹⁹⁶ (cf. Gerstenberger 1988:101; 1983:179-180; Kraus 1988:272-273). Secondly, v. 5c [4c], often taken to imply a conflict between El and the sun, appears clearly in this context to imply continuity between the two entities:

לשמש שם אהל בהם והוא כחתן יצא מחפתו ישיש כגבור לרוץ ארת מקצ השמים מוצא
ותקופתו על קצותם ואין נסתר מתמתו...

He placed in them¹⁹⁷ a tent for the sun who is like a bridegroom coming forth from his chamber, like a hero eager to run his course. His rising place is at one end of heaven, and his circuit reaches the other; nothing escapes his heat.

¹⁹⁴ See the discussion earlier in this chapter on the discussion of the significance of God setting the sun in the heavens in 1 Kgs. 8:12.

¹⁹⁵ Sarna (1967:189) refers, for example, to extracts from the Hymn from the Egyptian Book of the Dead in which it is written of Re that, "Thou art exalted by reason of thy wondrous works", and, "The stars which never give rest sing hymns of praise unto thee and the stars which are imperishable glorify thee".

¹⁹⁶ The role of the creator is of course not unknown for a sun-god in Ancient Near Eastern literature (cf. Sarna 1967:171). Examples relevant to this study include, for example, Re (at least according to some traditions), Ammon - Re and Aten.

¹⁹⁷ Presumably, "the heavens".

Taylor (1993:223) remarks interpreters invariably comment that the sun is singled out for its praise of God but, significantly, that praise never materialises; the sun does not praise God but receive praise expected of God. Thus, whereas other aspects of creation mentioned earlier in the psalm, such as the heavens, must speak or otherwise declare the praise of God, the sun's praise of God is undeclared and is thus somehow "self evident" through the praise which it itself receives. This, phenomenon of the sun receiving praise which is in continuity with the praise of God can be readily understood readily by judging that the sun, unlike the other aspects of creation mentioned, must be functioning here in continuity with God, as a kind of symbol of the power and presence of God. In short, according to this inversion of Taylor (1993:223) of the traditional perspective, to speak proudly of the sun is to speak in praise of God. Only in this way can proper sense be made of why this glowing description of the role of the sun (almost half of Psalm 19A and thus sometimes taken to be a "sun hymn fragment" rather ineptly inserted into the context) appears in the poem to be a natural extension of this hymn which clearly focuses on various ways in which the created realm extols the glory of God (cf. Kraus 1988:272).

A third observation offers support for the notion of continuity between God and the sun in Psalm 19A. The word rendered uniquely in v. 7c[6c] "heat", but translated everywhere else in the Old Testament as "sun", should perhaps be interpreted as it is elsewhere. Thus understood, Ps. 19:7c[6c] would conclude the first section of the Psalm as follows:

Nothing is hidden from His (that is, God's / El's) sun.

In sum, according to this perspective, no tension is found in Psalm 19A between el and the sun, but rather continuity which suggests that the sun is a unique expression of its maker, God. (cf. Taylor 1993:224)

Turning to Psalm 19B (vv 8-15 [7-14]) there is obviously some kind of correspondence between the description of the sun and that of the law of Yahweh, as Sarna and others have noted.¹⁹⁸ However, according to the alternative view mentioned above, that correspondence is one of continuity between Yahweh and the sun rather than one of discontinuity for polemical purposes can be supported by consideration of the following. First, for Ps. 19B to have been written in light of 19A (or appended to it), the poet (or redactor) was probably acquainted with the fact that the god of justice and law in neighbouring societies was often the sun god (cf., Sarna 1967:173-174). This being so is it not possible that the Hebrew poet understood his God of justice and law to be solar in character like other gods of justice and law? While certainty is impossible, this would account for the application of solar attributes to the law of Yahweh in Psalm 19B. Secondly, although Sarna claims that appellatives commonly used of a sun god are specifically applied to the law of Yahweh, Taylor (1993:224) feels that closer examination reveals that this is not quite correct.

Taylor (1993:225) argues that many of the parallels are in fact between the laws of sun gods and the laws of Yahweh. In other words, the correspondence between Yahweh and other Ancient Near Eastern solar deities is not only indirect vis-à-vis Yahweh's law,

¹⁹⁸ Even if one assumes the purely fortuitous placement of Ps. 19B after Ps. 19A, the sun god language applied to the Torah would probably still suggest the correspondence. Note also the epilogue in Qohelet with its reference to the Torah after the numerous references to the sun throughout the book. Is the latter observation in any way significant given the thesis of this study?

but is rather more direct, between Yahweh and the sun gods themselves. Thirdly, in addition to the thematic correspondences between Psalms 19A and B, there are clear resonances between the petition in vv. 13-15 [12-14] and the understanding of God as sun in vv. 2-7. Thus the answer to the question of who can discern errors in v. 13[12] is logically the god of justice whose circuit of travel extends from one end of the earth to the other (that is, sun, v 7[6]). Or again, the psalmist asks that Yahweh clear him of "hidden things" (cf. v 7c[6c] where it says that "no thing hidden" from the sun's glow).¹⁹⁹

To conclude, to Taylor (1993:225), Psalm 19 appears to have been written (or, in the case of Psalm 19A, perhaps adapted) by a devout Yahwist who had a solar understanding of Yahweh. The first part of the Psalm upholds what appears to have been a common tenet of solar Yahwism, namely, that the sun which God created was an expression of his character or "glory" (cf. v 2[1]). The second part of the Psalm builds upon the notion of continuity between God and the sun but explores this continuity with reference to the law of Yahweh. The laws of Yahweh are thus described with reference to the god of justice (traditionally solar in character). "Just", "enlightening", and "pure", the laws of Yahweh reflect the character of their giver.²⁰⁰

6.3.3.14 Scholars' recognition of allusions to solar mythology in Ecclesiastes

In the next chapter I shall focus on what appears to be allusions to solar mythology in the book of Qohelet that have hitherto gone unrecognised amongst scholars. There is, however, one passage in the book which has a reference to the sun and which also has been interpreted as possibly alluding to solar mythology. In Qoh. 1:5 we read:

זרח השמש ובא השמש ואל מקמו שואף זורח הוא שם

The sun rises and the sun sets, panting to his place to rise there.

According to Barton (1908:70-71), Qohelet here begins his description of absurdity in nature noting that the sun continually goes his wearisome round without accomplishing anything. Possibly, as Ginsburg (1961:25) suggests, Qohelet means to hint that the sun has little advantage over man, for though the sun goes, he comes again, while man passes away to return no more. The sun here is said to שואף, "pant". As Fox (1986:171) has recognised, even if שואף is derived etymologically from שוּף, "to walk, proceed", the reader would automatically connect שוּף(א) in this form with שואף to pant.²⁰¹

¹⁹⁹ Or, on another interpretation, El / God's sun. Finally, note the words of v 15 [14]: May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer". It is not unreasonable to suppose that this was perhaps the wish of one who was concerned that the words of his mouth and the meditation of his heart might indeed not be acceptable in Yahweh's eyes.

²⁰⁰ And, if the author of Qohelet and his first audience was anywhere near as familiar with solar mythology as the author of Psalm 19 seems to have been, Qohelet's continuing reference to injustice and ignorance "under the sun" seems have far to say than the last 2000 + years of unintended decontextualised "ventriloquism" by commentators have seemed to imply.

²⁰¹ While some scholars see here a "positive view" of the solar circuit in that they interpret the word translated as "pant" in the sense of "panting in eagerness" I side with the scholars who recognise that this is probably not the connotative meaning of "pant" in this particular context where such an enthusiastic scenario would be quite out of place. However, even if the panting could be justifiably interpreted in the sense of referring to the sun's eagerness, such an interpretation does no harm to the claim in this section and actually, from another point of view, confirms the author's familiarity with solar mythology.

This picture of the tired and panting sun is a striking contrast to the usual popular solar symbolism both in Israel and in the Ancient Near East where the solar circuit is more often connotative of eagerness, courage and vigour (cf. Murphy 1992:07; Barton 1908:71; contra Wright 1883:23). Cleric long ago perceived that Qohelet was thinking of the chariot of the sun as drawn by panting horses (cf. Barton 1908). Knobel and Wright (1883) objected that such an idea is entirely un-Hebraic and consequently impossible. Haupt (1905) has, however, pointed out that 2 Kgs. 23:11 shows that even before the exile, the Israelites were familiar with it (cf. Barton 1908:71).

If this is indeed the case, then, right at the start of Qohelet's arguments, after the beginning of the book in 1:3 with the question:

מה יתרון לאדם בכל עמלו שיעמל תחת השמש...

...what profit does one have for all the toil with which one toils "under the SUN"?

we find a reference to solar mythology that implies the author was familiar with it. This would imply that the idea of there being allusions to solar mythology in other references to the sun in the book could not be considered as being far fetched. In addition, besides this possible allusion to solar mythology, scholars have indeed noted the author's implied knowledge of solar symbolism as can be seen based on a surface reading of 6:5, 7:11, and 11:7 where "seeing the sun" is associative with the concept of life. As this study hopes to show, especially in the next chapter, these universally excepted examples may not have been the only allusions to solar mythology and symbolism in Qohelet.

6.3.3.15 Other solar elements in the Old Testament

The examples of solar elements discussed in this chapter, though sufficiently indicative of the OT's familiarity with this type of ANE religious discourse, are hardly exhaustive of all that could be written on this subject. There are many other texts which are discussed by those who do research in this field (cf. Stähli 1984; Smith 1990b; Taylor 1993). These include the identification of solar elements in texts including those in:

- Theophanies, i.e. Gen 32, Exod 1-19; Deut 33; Hab 3; etc.;
- Legends, i.e. Gen 37-50; Judg 13-16; 1 Sam 6; 2 Kgs 20 / Isa 38; Job 31; etc.
- Prophecies, i.e. Isa 2, 19, 60; Zeph 1, 3; Zech 14; etc.
- Psalms, i.e. Pss 24, 84, 104, 139, etc.

Finally, one could also mention the solar elements in other Old Testament passages such as those in the judgement oracles of the prophets (Isa. 13; Ezek. 32) and in the vivid imagery of the collapse of the cosmic order in the texts depicting the "Day of Yahweh" (i.e. Joel 2; Amos 5; Mal. 3). I could provide many more pages filled with arguments in favour of the Old Testament authors' and peoples' familiarity with solar mythology. This is, however, not what this study is primarily interested in. I hope that the texts that were discussed should suffice for present purposes and leave no doubt on the matter of the presence of solar elements in the OT.

6. 4 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Given this historical overview of the prevalence and presence of solar mythology in ancient Israel, it would thus not be far-fetched to conclude that the author of the book Qohelet, even apart from what he wrote, would have had some knowledge of solar mythology. If this was the case, then the solar mythologies as described in the previous chapter can be considered as having been familiar to Qohelet and his readers. The nature of the relation between the Old Testament and solar mythology can be summarised alternatively as follows:

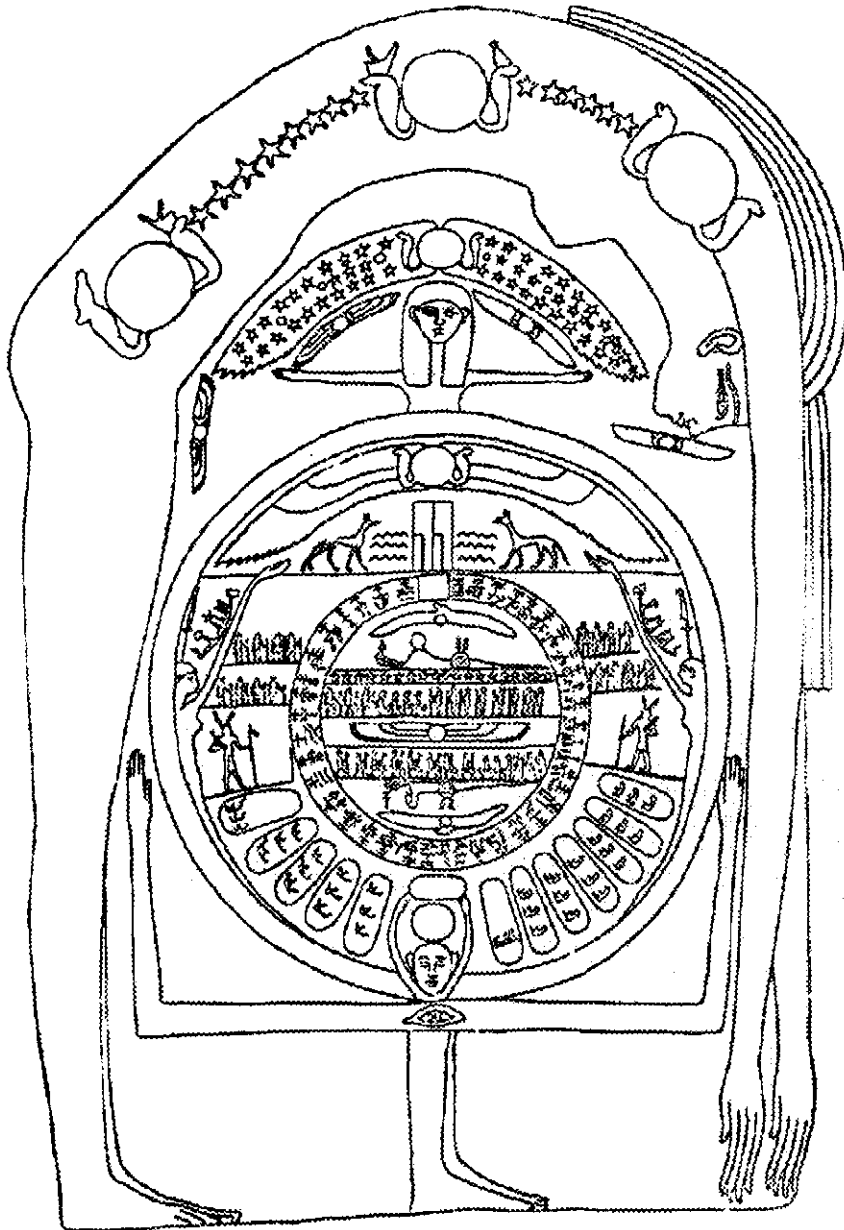
Relation to Solar Mythology	Examples of texts which features in the particular relation
Familiarity.....	Gen. 40 – 50; Judg. 1:33-35; Jer. 8:3; Ps. 19, 104, 139, etc
Apostasy.....	Deut. 17:3; 2 Kgs. 21-23; Jer. 8:3; Ezek. 8:16, etc.
Polemics.....	Gen. 1; Ex. 20:2; Deut. 4:19; Deut. 17:3; Ezek. 8, etc.
Syncretism.....	Gen. 32; Deut. 33; 2 Sam. 12; Isa. 60; Mal. 3:16, etc.

Finally, in this chapter it has been demonstrated how, in the Old Testament's allusions to solar mythology, solar Yahwism and solar symbolism, the authors and their audiences were familiar with the association of the sun with the concepts mentioned in chapter 5 and which I shall argue is also present in Qohelet's discourse. In other words, it was common knowledge that the sun was associated with:

- A sun god (Josh. 10:12-14; Ex. 20; Deut. 4; Ezek. 8);
- Justice (Num. 25; 2 Sam. 12; Ps. 19);
- Knowledge (2 Sam. 12; Ps. 19);
- Royalty (Ps. 72; 89; Zeph. 3);
- Time (Gen. 1; Ps. 72; 104; Isa. 38);
- Life (Ezek. 8; Mal. 3);
- Death (Num. 25; Ps. 121);
- The cosmic order (Gen. 1; Ps. 19; Ps. 104);
- The social order (Gen. 1; Ps. 19, 104);
- God (Deut. 33; Josh. 10; Ps. 84)
- Health (2 Kgs. 20; Isa. 38; Mal. 3)

In short, the various ideas expressed in ANE solar mythology as discussed in Chapter 5 of this study seems to have been a familiar world of discourse to the OT peoples and surely to the implied readers of the book of Qohelet. Finding allusions to these beliefs present the book of Qohelet, if they are indeed present, should therefore not be considered as something strange or reminiscent of the pan solarist parallelomania of an earlier era.

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).

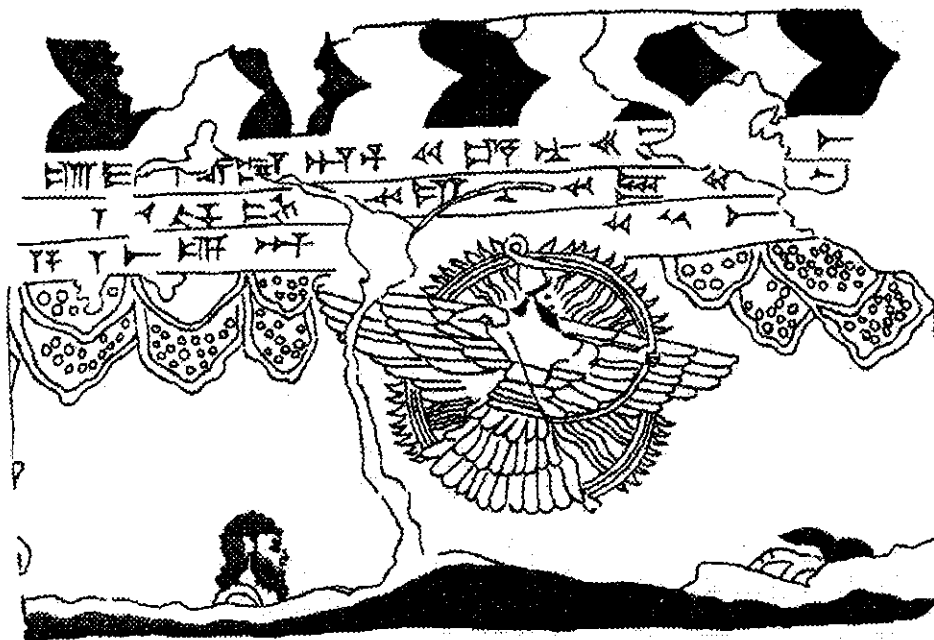


Fig 7.1 A vigorous sun god traversing his solar circuit (cf. Keel 1978:216)

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

וזכר 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 הרשעים ויש רשעים 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 איננו 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

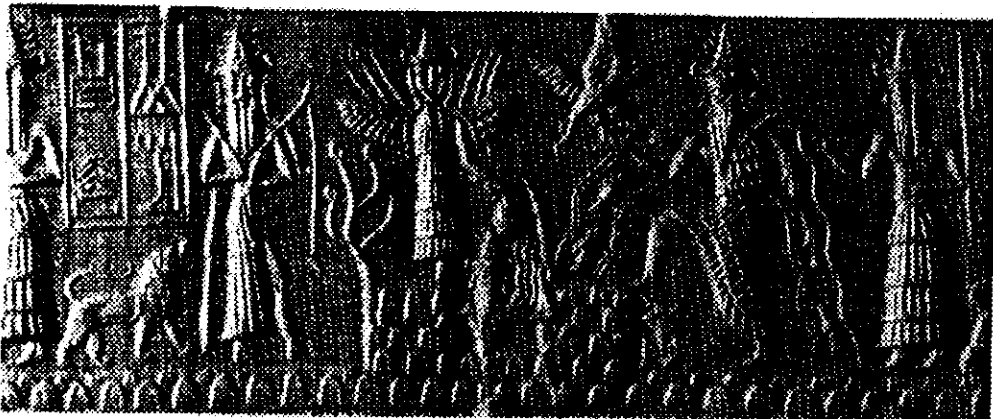


Fig 7.3 The sun god Shamash arises from the underworld in the company of, amongst others Ea, god of wisdom (cf. Pritchard 1954:220)

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 שאניחני 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.

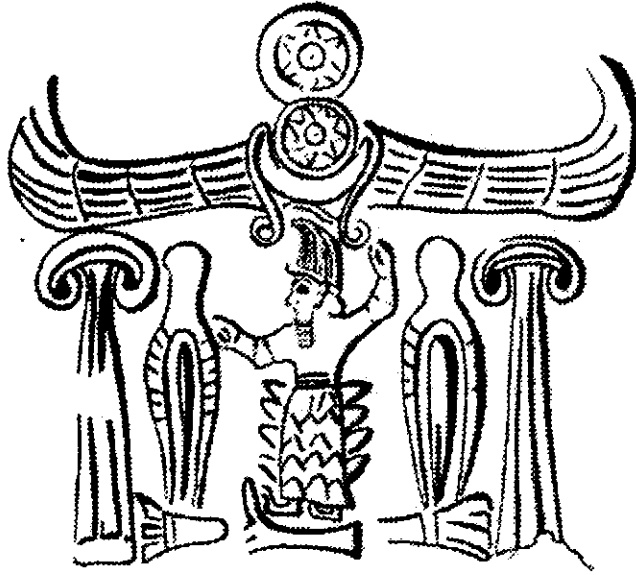


Fig 7.4 In this picture, an Ancient Near Eastern king is shown standing under the sun in close relation to the cosmic mountain (cf. Keel 1978:28)

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 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 לעלם 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);

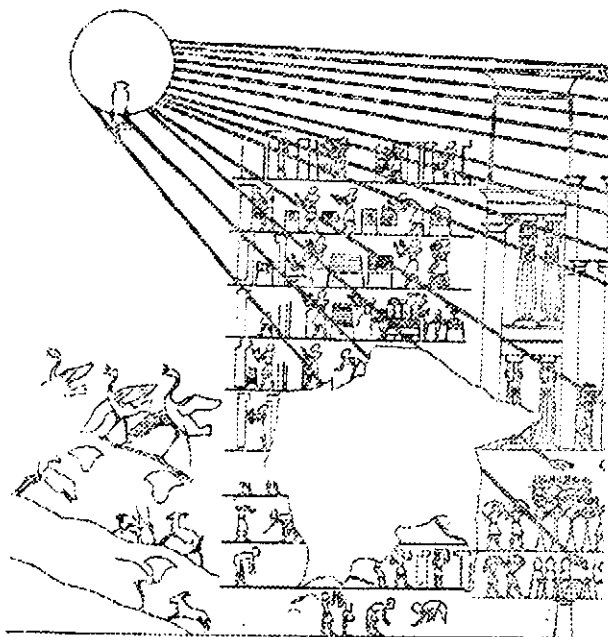


Fig 7.5 Another example of Egyptian solar mythology. This illustration depicts Re as creator and source of life – under the sun (cf. Keel 1978:211)

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 סביבתיו 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 בפח 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 justifies 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 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 Toorn 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.

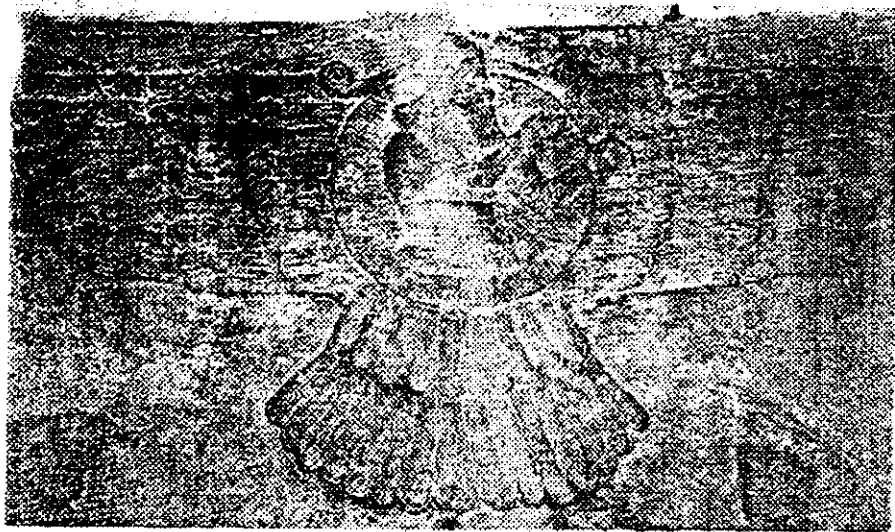


Fig 7. 6 The sun god, alias, “the lord of wings”(cf. Pritchard 1954:220)

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 חכם / חרטים, 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.

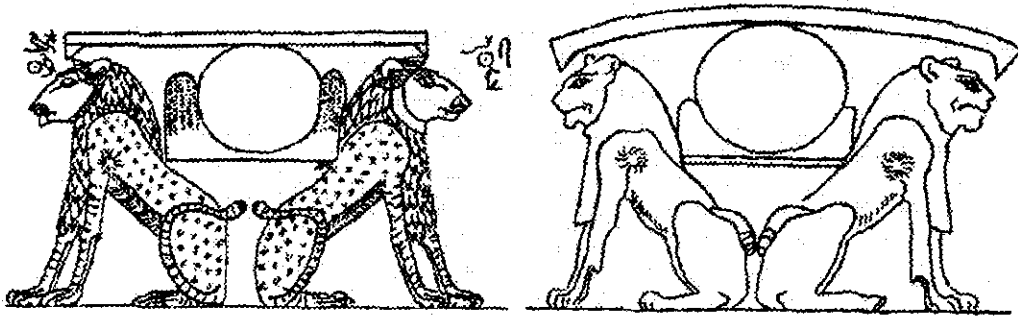


Fig 7.8 In terms of animal symbolism in ANE solar theology, both the sun god and the king were portrayed as lions (cf. Keel 1978:26)

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 **הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ** 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 who's 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.

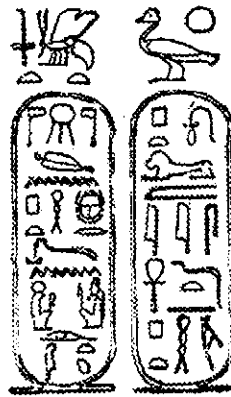


Fig 8.1 Examples of Egyptian solar mythology on the cartouches of Ptolemy VII.
 (Cf. Bevan 1968:172)

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.

PART 1

SUMMARY

Before I turn my attention to the more specific examples of possible allusions to solar mythology in the book of Qohelet itself, it might be useful to summarise the most important insights and findings based on the discussion in chapters 1-6:

CHAPTER 1

Here I identified the “sun imagery” in the book of Qohelet as a problem of research that has not yet been accounted for satisfactorily. The sun imagery occurs in the phrase “under the sun” which is repeated 30 times in throughout the book. There are also 5 individual references to the sun beside those in the aforementioned phrase. Secondly, the two popular interpretations currently available, i.e. the restrictive and inclusive interpretations were demonstrated to be inadequate. The restrictive interpretation comes from conservative interpreters. This perspective is invalid as it reinterprets the solar imagery in order to harmonise the book’s theology with either Jewish or Christian dogma. The inclusive interpretation, favoured by more critical scholars, is also unsatisfactory in that it cannot account for the author’s need to use the particular phrase at all. In addition, what has hitherto been overlooked by both interpretative traditions was shown to be the ANE context of religio-cultural discourse about the sun. This includes solar mythology and solar symbolism. Because of the discovery of this negligence, as well as the inadequacy of the two popular interpretations of the sun imagery in Qohelet, a hypothesis was formulated. According to the hypothesis, the sun imagery in Qohelet can be interpreted as possibly containing ambiguous allusions to ANE solar mythology and / or symbolism. The reasons for this being five fold:

1. The constant repetition of the phrase under the sun (thirty times);
2. The combination of this phrase with themes such as justice, knowledge, royalty, time, death, etc.
3. The author claiming to have been a king in the ANE;
4. The peculiar theology of the book;
5. The parallels to the aforementioned 4 features in ANE religio – cultural discourse.

The methodology proposed was one that featured a comprehensive historical cultural approach. This involves intra-; inter-; and metatextual analyses of the relevant issues pertaining to the justification of the hypothesis. The purpose or aim of this study was expressly stated to involve a tentative experiment with new interpretative possibilities. It should therefore, under no circumstances, be seen as an absolute claim to final truth. An open minded albeit critical reception was suggested.

CHAPTER 2

In this chapter, I introduced the basic problem issues of the book Qohelet that seem to have plagued interpreters for a long time. These issues involve the general questions regarding the book. These include the consideration of matters such as the date,

authorship, language, genre, message, etc. of the book Qohelet. It also pertains to the book's relation to the Ancient Near Eastern environment. It was argued that there appears to be no consensus regarding the answers to these fundamental questions. The possible reasons for the disagreement were also speculated about. It was argued to be due to hermeneutical variables of various sorts. These variables include the roles that theology, epistemology, psychology, textuality and other hermeneutical factors influencing the interpreters can play. Since the sun imagery in Qohelet is so pervasive and such an intricate and inextricable part of his discourse, a new theory on its function and significance may well have serious implications for what one considers to be the case regarding many of these basic interpretative issues.

CHAPTER 3

In the third chapter, I attempted to show first just how pervasive the "sun imagery" in Qohelet really is. The sun imagery was classified as being both explicit and implicit. From various points of view, I argued that both the explicit "sun imagery" and the implicit "sun imagery" permeate every chapter of the book. The specific contents of this language was foremost as exemplified in the phrase "under the sun" which occurs about 30 times and in the 5 references to the sun. Secondly, it was established that the sun imagery occurs in an inextricable combination with what can be demonstrated as certain central issues of concern to the author. It was argued that one way to classify these issues included formulating them to include the concepts of justice, knowledge, royalty, time, life, death, God, vapour, etc. The inextricable link between the sun imagery and the themes in the book were also described as being for the most part negative and complimentary. The sun imagery in general indicates the domain "where" Qohelet observed certain scenarios. The themes answer to the question "what" he was concerned with pertaining to this domain. The negativity is exemplified in various examples of "vapour" Qohelet identifies as manifested in the sub solar realm. Thus he finds injustice, ignorance, royal incompetence and dissatisfaction, unfair life, certain death, appointed times and lamentable characteristics of the cosmic and social orders in the domain under the sun. Finally, it was also suggested that in their various attempts at making sense of the sun imagery and its relation to both the contents of Qohelet and to supposed intertextual parallel types of discourse scholars have neglected to investigate the various associative meanings and connotations the sun had in the ANE 2-3 millennia ago. In doing so, they might have overlooked the very perspective that may indeed make sense of both the sun imagery and much of the rest of the contents in Qohelet. In short, an excursion to the possibility of mythological and symbolical references as part of the possibly ambiguous sun imagery was suggested. The motivation for this was not only the problems with traditional interpretations but also given the various overlooked alternative meanings the words translated as "under" and "the sun" had in biblical Hebrew.

CHAPTER 4

In this chapter, a short excursion to basic hermeneutical theory was made when the necessity for a historical – cultural way of interpretation was demonstrated. It was argued that the alien culture of the Biblical times often makes it well nigh impossible for those who have no background knowledge to recognise subtle allusions in the text to Ancient Near Eastern mythology. The example used was that of the way the sea features mythologically in some OT texts. Issues addressed included the problem of

common knowledge, the importance of background; recognising allusions, polemics, irony, ambiguity and being aware of referential possibilities. The motive for this hermeneutical excursion was the desire to provide an analogy indicating that it was hermeneutically justifiable to at least explore and experiment with other possible references and connotative possibilities for the “sun imagery” in Qohelet.

CHAPTER 5

Here I provided an overview of various Ancient Near Eastern cultures that have been identified by scholars as having possible influence on the author of the book Qohelet. I have in each instance provided an overview of the solar mythology of those cultures that appears relevant for this study in that it seems to have undeniable bearing on the “sun imagery” of Qohelet. In describing the solar mythology of Mesopotamian, Egyptian, Canaanite, Greek and other cultures which might have been familiar to Qohelet I have indicated that the solar deities were associated with the concepts / functions / attributes such as justice, retribution, divination, secret knowledge, appointed times, royalty, the cosmic and social orders, life and death, etc. The result of this discovery was a belief that the combination of

- 1) The universal popularity of solar mythology
- 2) The concepts associated with solar deities;

may have some bearing to

- 1) Qohelet’s pervasive sun imagery;
- 2) The specific issues of interest with which Q.S.I. is combined in the book (including the theology)

Furthermore, I also argued that there appears to be a hitherto unrecognised link between solar mythology and the wisdom traditions. I also asked about the possibility of symbolic associative reference and indicated that the same issues of interest in solar mythology can be found in various forms of ANE solar symbolism. Finally, the question regarding intentionality was addressed and the relation between this issue and the rhetorical devices of allusion and deconstruction were probed.

CHAPTER 6

In the last chapter of part 1 of this study I demonstrated that the authors and audiences of the Old Testament were definitely familiar with solar mythology and in many instances apparently too familiar from the viewpoint of later orthodoxy. This acquaintance resulted in a host of examples of:

- 1) allusions to solar mythology;
- 2) polemics against solarism;
- 3) adoption of solar symbolism,
- 4) syncretism with solar theology;
- 5) apostasy to sun worshipping, etc.

By citing archaeological and Biblical evidence for the Old Testament’s familiarity with solar mythology and sun worship, I intended to demonstrate that discovering allusions

to solar mythological motifs in the book Qohelet need hardly be as surprising as it might at first appear

PART 2

SUMMARY

In **Part 2** of this study I have provided, on the one hand, intratextual substantiation of my theory of the possible presence of allusions to ANE solar mythology in the book of Qohelet. On the other hand, I have *synthesized my findings; speculated on what the theory might entail with regard to basic interpretative issues; and finally, I have anticipated expected objections pertaining to the claims and arguments of this study on the significance and function of the sun imagery in Qohelet.*

Chapter 7

In this chapter, I performed an intratextual analysis on the significance and function of the sun imagery in Qohelet as it possibly relates to the tenets of solar mythology. The way this was done was by first looking at the references to the sun in Qohelet that are not part of the phrase “under the sun”. It was argued that these references might indeed exhibit deconstructive polemical irony in as much as they could be interpreted as containing ambiguous allusions to ANE solar mythology. Following this, I discussed those themes in Qohelet that are combined with the book’s sun imagery and which are also paralleled in solar mythology. This discussion included creative suggestion regarding the possible polemical deconstruction involved when Qohelet refers to issues such as justice, knowledge, time, vapour, evil, God, toil, etc. Possible traces of syncretism were also noted. Several additional miscellaneous possible allusions were also discussed. In the end, the possible functions of the supposed allusions to solar mythology were indicated. These include not only ambiguous allusion but also irony, polemics, deconstruction and syncretism.

Chapter 8

In the final chapter of this study, several remaining issues were under consideration. First, speculation ensued with regard to the possible implications my theory might have for certain basic interpretative questions on which, as was indicated in chapter 2, there is little consensus. Included here were suggestions with regard to the profile of the implied and the real authors, possible historical contexts in which the book might have originated, the ANE background of Qohelet, and finally, remarks pertaining to the message of the book. Thereafter, the heuristic value of the theory was discussed as its ability to account for many peculiar features of the book was indicated. Lastly, I reconstructed several hypothetical anticipated critiques this study might evoke from the academic community. It was indicated why most of the possible objections are invalid as they are mostly based on fallacious arguments or on a misunderstanding of what this study’s claims and purpose involved.

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SUMMARY

Possible allusions to Ancient Near Eastern solar mythology in Qohelet – a comprehensive enquiry

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DEPARTMENT: Ancient languages

DEGREE: D Litt

The book of Ecclesiastes is infamous as a piece of controversial literature. Commentators differ with regard to their views on matters such as the book's historical context, translation, structure, Ancient Near Eastern background, message, etc. One of the many apparent oddities in the book are the numerous references to the sun. There are approximately thirty-five of these references! Thirty of these can be found in the constantly recurring phrase "under the sun - an expression which echoes mysteriously like a refrain through the book. Many questions, still unanswered, are prompted by the incessant repetition of this phrase.

Contemporary popular interpretations of the function of the phrase "under the sun" can broadly be classified as belonging to one of two categories. Firstly, there is the conservative interpretation. According to this view, the function of the phrase is restrictive. It is indicative of a supposed cosmic dualism implying the presence of an alternative realm as opposed to the earthly domain and its secular atheism. The second view is that adopted by more critical scholars. In their view, the phrase functions simply an inclusive spatial designator. However, a closer look at the instances in which the phrase occurs in the intratextual context show that, while both of these interpretations have some merit, they are ultimately unsatisfactory. They fail to explain the need for the sun imagery's constant recurrence throughout the book.

What no one seems to have noticed is the possible significance of the repetition of the sun imagery in the book in the way in it was combined with certain themes, a peculiar theology and a strange self - presentation by the author. To be sure, when the sun imagery is assessed in the context of ANE solar discourse, its combination with certain themes in Qohelet becomes quite significant. Consider this data reformulated as four basic questions and answers:

- Who is speaking?..... A king.
- Where did he look?Under the sun.
- What does he observe there.....Injustice, ignorance, death, etc.
- How is God depicted?.....Judge, Creator, etc.

When these aspects of Qohelet's message are viewed from the intertextual context of Ancient Near Eastern solar mythology – a legitimate hermeneutical experiment given the repeated references to the sun – the answers that can be given in response to the questions of "who?", "where?", "what?" and "God?" appears to be very significant. In solar mythology, the sun gods were the deities particularly concerned with the issues of

justice, divination, times, kings, life, royalty, the cosmic and social orders, etc. - the same issues that Qohelet is concerned with in relation to what happens "under the sun". Moreover, according to the Old Testament witness, Israel was thoroughly familiar with these ideas. Qohelet's sun imagery seems to be filled with allusions to the beliefs of solar theology in ways that are simultaneously ambiguous, ironical, polemical, deconstructive and syncretistic. This is a new perspective on the book and seems able to account for the author's need to refer repeatedly to the domain "under the sun". It also explains why Qohelet combined these references with a certain peculiar theology and why he was interested in specific issues such as justice, knowledge, life, time, death, the king, etc.

GRANDI DUM

Die ... is ...

Die ... is ...

Die ... is ...

- ...
- ...
- ...
- ...

Die ... is ...

OPSOMMING

Moontlike sinspeling op Ou Nabye Oosterse son mitologie in Prediker – n komprehensiewe ondersoek

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Die boek Prediker is algemeen bekend as omstrede literatuur. Kommentatore verskil oor baie aangeleenthede bv. die boek se historiese konteks, vertaling, struktuur, Ou - Nabye-Oosterse agtergrond, boodskap, ens. Een van die baie ooglopende eienaardighede van die boek is die talle verwysings na die son. Hierdie verwysings vind ons ongeveer vyf en dertig keer in die boek. Dertig van hierdie verwysings is vervat in die frase "onder die son" wat op 'n vreemde wyse soos n refrein deur die boek weergalm. Daar is steeds 'n magdom onbeantwoorde vrae wat na aanleiding van hierdie spesifieke herhaling gevra kan word.

Huidiglik populêre verklarings van die *funksie* van die frase "onder die son" in Prediker kan breedweg in twee kategorieë geplaas word. Eerstens is daar 'n konserwatiewe interpretasie wat die frase se funksie verstaan as synde beperkend en duidend op n kosmiese dualisme wat die bestaan van 'n alternatiewe werklikheid teenoor dit wat die wêreld se sekulêre ateïstiese perspektief kan raaksien. Tweedens is daar die kritiese interpretasie. Volgens hierdie siening is die frase bloot 'n inklusiewe ruimtelike aanduider. 'n Nadere beskouing van die tekste waarin die frase figureer, dui egter aan dat beide hierdie perspektiewe, hoewel albei iets van die waarheid beet het, steeds nie bevedigend kan verklaar hoekom die skrywer juis hierdie frase so dikwels herhaal nie.

Wat niemand blykbaar raakgesien het nie, is die moontlike belang van die herhaling van verwysings na die son soos dit in die boek gekombineer word met die outeur se self - identifikasie, 'n vreemde teologie en n belangstelling in sekere spesifieke onderwerpe. Hierdie kombinasie kan soos volg gerekonstrueer word:

- Wie is aan die woord?..... 'n Koning.
- Waar kyk Prediker?..... Onder die son.
- Wat sien hy daar?..... Ongeregtigheid, onkunde, dood, ens.
- Hoe tipeer hy God?..... Regter, Skepper, ens.

Wanneer hierdie aspekte egter vanuit die perspektief van Ou-Nabye-Oosterse sonmitologie en simboliek beskou word – 'n moontlikheid wat gesuggereer word deur die herhaalde verwysings na die "son" – blyk die antwoorde op Prediker se "wie?", "waar?", "wat?" en "God?" vrae uiters betekenisvol te wees. Dit wil voorkom asof Prediker deur die kombinasie van hierdie vier aspekte subtiel sinspeel op die populêre idees van Ou-Nabye-Oosterse sonmitologie. In Ou-Nabye-Oosterse sonmitologie was die songode diegene wat spesifiek besorgd was oor konings, geregtigheid, regverdigheid, lewe, die bepaling van tye, divinasie, ens. – presies dit wat Prediker

geïnteresseer het i.v.m. scenarios in die domein “onder die son”. Boonop impliseer die Ou Testament dat Israel met hierdie idees goed bekend was.

Gevolglik lyk dit of ons inderdaad in die boek Prediker met 'n duidelike geval het van sinspeling op die dogmas van sonmitologie te make het. Die sinspelings blyk verder elemente van dubbelsinnigheid, ironie, polemie, dekonstruksie en sinkretisme te vertoon. Hierdie nuwe teorie verklaar hoekom Prediker so herhalend na die domein “onder die son” wil verwys. Dit verklaar ook hoekom hy dit kombineer met 'n sekere teologie en 'n intense belangstelling in spesifieke temas soos geregtigheid, kennis, die koning, tyd, die dood, ens.

KEYWORDS

Qohelet
Sun
Mythology
Hermeneutics
Wisdom literature
Ancient Near East
Deconstruction
Allusion
Justice
Ignorance

SLEUTELWOORDE

Prediker
Son
Mitologie
Hermeneutiek
Wysheids literatuur
Ou Nabye Ooste
Dekonstruksie
Sinspeling
Geregtigheid
Onkunde