

Ancient of days

I. Introduction. Since the end of the 19th cent. the vivid imagery language of the vision of Dan 7:2–14 led to an intense debate on the underlying influences and traditions (for a detailed overview see EGGLEER 2000). The few suggested iconographic influences on the A. o. d. relate to his outward appearance, his being enthroned, the throne itself, and the audience of the judgment scene (EGGLEER 2000: 107–109). However, the proposals are hardly convincing, do not go beyond pinpointing a few isolated images, and are not based on systematic iconographic studies.

A more methodical approach to a possible iconographic influence on the imagery of the A. o. d. in the judgment scene of Dan 7 would evaluate the overall iconographic landscape, which was potentially most influential on the vision (see for example EGGLEER 1998: 440–465). Whether suggested points of contact are sufficiently compelling to adduce a link to the text of Dan 7 is another matter, considering that the iconographic influence is only one among others.

Research history shows that the background of the imagery of Dan 7 is most likely located in Syro-Palestine from the Late Bronze Age to the Persian period. Within this time frame the present article addresses representations of enthroned male figures from Palestine/Israel, which are considered most relevant for a possible iconographic influence on the A. o. d. Conceptual as well as descriptive parallels will be pursued in regard to the overall theme in which the A. o. d. is set, particular features of the A. o. d., and the throne he is seated on.

II. Iconographic discussion. A comparison of the judgment scene of the A. o. d. with the representations of the enthroned from Palestine/Israel shows that no convincing parallel can be adduced for a similar topical overall constellation (EGGLEER 1998: 466–469). Often the depicted enthroned figures lack an iconographic context or attributes which would help to determine the nature of the throne scene. Even when such attributes are present, mainly royal or divine insignia or plant elements, they can only indicate the general notions of dominion or life. On the other hand, scenes with an iconographic context involving an enthroned male figure such as lyre player, banquet, or offering scenes have nothing in common with the judgment setting of Dan 7. Only one scene with a similar topic could be identified, namely a 2nd mill.

cylinder seal from Gezer (MACALISTER 1912: II 346, no. 37; III pl. 214:25), that shows the overcoming of a dangerous animal in the presence of an enthroned, a theme which is not of Levantine origin but has affinities to Mesopotamian and Anatolian traditions from the late 3rd/early 2nd mill. (DELAPORTE 1910: pl. 29:432, 433; COLLON 1986: pl. 8:57; PORADA 1948: pl. 49:321; WARD 1910: figs. 1a, 270; AL-GAILANI WERR 1988: pl. 22:2; TEISSIER 1994: nos. 143, 147, 191, 211, 298–301, 467). This import is therefore hardly enough to build a case.

Several features characterize the enthroned of Dan 7, namely, that he is “advanced of days”; his raiment is white; and his hair is like pure wool, lamb’s wool, or pure white wool (on the different translations for ‘*mr nq*’ see CHARLES 1929: 182f; KEARNS 1982: 183–185; COLLINS 1993: 301). The first attribute is generally interpreted as indicating an aged being or expressing dignity, while some regard it as reference to eternal existence. Although only a few scholars connect the white hair of the A. o. d. with old age or majesty and the majority consider the white hair and dress as indicating a realm of light and purity, there have been several attempts made to find iconographic parallels to a wise enthroned figure who is advanced in years. COLLINS pointed out that “white hair is not predicated of God in the Hebrew bible” (1993: 301), thereby hinting that this feature must come from elsewhere. He mentions in this regard the gray beard, others the gray hair of →El (DELCOR 1971: 151; LACOCQUE 1979: 143) or bearded Zeus (MONTGOMERY 1927: 297; HARTMAN/DI LELLA 1978: 218). More important than the white color, which does not appear on the iconographic representations possibly relevant for the imagery of Dan 7, is the fact that terms like “advanced in years” or “white/pure (= bright) hair” are differently expressed on the iconographic level. One way to express seniority and higher authority in ancient Near Eastern art is by way of a beard (see MÖTEFINDT 1923; BÖRKER-KLÄHN 1972–1975; STAEHELIN 1975). It would therefore be interesting to investigate how depictions of bearded enthroned deities fit into the imagery of the enthroned of Dan 7.

The iconography of the bearded enthroned god in Palestine/Israel in the time frame here under consideration can roughly be subdivided into three periods: from Late Bronze Age to Iron Age I (1550–1000) some bronze cast Syro-Canaanite deities in seated posture are bearded (Khirbet Yanun:

ZERTAL 1979: 60; Megiddo: LOUD 1948: pls. 237/238:30 = NEGBI 1976: no. 1453; Beth-Shean: ROWE 1940: pls. 35:9; 65A:2 = NEGBI 1976: no. 1448), which are generally identified as El-type god (e.g., WELTEN 1977: 101; WEIPPERT 1988: 300; for a suggested classification as →Baal type see KEEL/UEHLINGER 1998: 58, 118). In this period enthroned Egyptian or local deities with strongly Egyptian iconography featuring a beard are →Amun (Megiddo: LOUD 1939: pl. 62: 377), →Ptah (Tel Zippor: BIRAN/NEGBI 1966: pl. 22E), and →**Mekal 1***. In those cases in which the object held by the enthroned is known, it is always the *was* →scepter, with the exception of the bronze figure from Megiddo which holds a floral element. When the enthroned bearded god in this period appears together with humans he functions as supreme god, either of the pantheon or a city.

During the 8th–7th cent. the bearded enthroned on several stamp seals from Palestine/Israel (KEEL/UEHLINGER 1998: 306–309, figs. 305a, c, 306a–c) has been identified with the moon god (→Sin), a deity already referred to by BAUMGARTNER (1926: 22) when discussing the iconographic background of the A. o. d. DALMAN (1906) even published one of these seals under the title “A newly found image of Yahweh.” The bearded enthroned god on an 8th cent. cylinder seal from Beth-Shean (PARKER 1949: pl. 18:122) has been characterized as lunar El (KEEL/UEHLINGER 1998: 314). All these representations place the bearded enthroned into the sphere of life: he may be flanked by trees, indicating the gates of heaven from whence he makes his appearance; be associated with the tree of life, which is nourishing an animal; or be associated with the Egyptian sign of life. While the bearded enthroned appears in the second half of the 2nd mill. as static deity that conveys an aura of authority with his scepter, the bearded enthroned moon god of the 8th/7th cent. emerges dynamically in a boat from the gate of heaven (KEEL/UEHLINGER 1998: figs. 306a–c) to illuminate the earthly sphere with his light (on the heavenly god in the 1st mill. see NIEHR 1990; for the astral aspect particularly pp. 141–147). His nature as celestial being is underlined by the absence of human beings in his presence, which stands in contrast to 2nd mill. representations of the bearded enthroned god.

In the Persian period the bearded enthroned again reverts under Phoenician influence to a more 2nd mill. type of god. Numerous terracotta figurines (Beth-Shean:

FITZGERALD 1931: pl. 24:2–3; STERN 1982: 165f, 178, fig. 283; Tel Zippor: NEGBI 1966: nos. 65–67, pl. 9:65, 67; Tell eš Šafi: BLISS/MACALISTER 1902: 39, 141, fig. 53; Lachisch: TUFNELL et al. 1953: pl. 33:17–19; Tel ‘Erani: CIASCA 1963: pl. 16; Makhmish: AVIGAD 1960: pl. 10A–B) depict a static enthroned deity but one less associated with authority than with patriarchal and fatherly aspects since the hands do not hold a symbol of dominion but fondle the beard. In the case of a stone figurine from Makhmish (STERN 1982: 164, fig. 278) that displays Greek influence, even the hands are unmoving but are placed on the armrest of the throne. Entirely different is the representation of the deity on the unique drachm with the inscribed legend *yhd* (Yehud), probably minted at the beginning of the 4th cent. in Jerusalem (KIENLE 1975: pl. 2; WEIPPERT 1988: pl. 22:1; MILDENBERG 1998: pl. 21:1), which will be discussed in more detail below.

The third comparative aspect between the A. o. d. of Dan 7 and the iconographic imagery from Palestine/Israel concerns the throne he is seated on. Dan 7:9 describes it as having wheels (*glg*) of burning fire. The concept of a movable *throne* with wheels, which appears in the Old Testament only in Eze 10, should not be confused with the imagery of the moving god in his *chariot* (see Deu 33:26; Psa 18:10; 68:33; Hab 3:8; Isa 66:15 and KEEL 1978: 182–187 for related images). Among the visual representations of the bearded enthroned god from Palestine/Israel, only the above-mentioned Yehud coin comes close to the concept of Dan 7. The bearded god appears seated on a winged wheel with a bird perching on his outstretched hand (for the latter feature cf. also a Samarian coin with an enthroned Persian dignity: MESHORER/QEDAR 1991: no. 19); in the right lower corner is the face of a figure. The closest iconographic parallel to the Yehud coin is the depiction of the Greek god Triptolemos in a wheeled chair with a wing emerging from its axle which appears on red-painted Greek vases of the 5th cent. (KIENLE 1975: pl. 4:1). A similar representation from the second half of the 6th cent. with Dionysos on a black painted vase (KIENLE 1975: pl. 4:2) evokes the impression of a procession in which Dionysos was probably pulled on his wheeled chair. As tempting as it is to see in the Yehud coin a blueprint of the A. o. d. seated on a throne with wheels, it needs to be noted that in comparison to Dan 7 the Yehud coin does not depict a throne with wheels but only a wheel on which the deity sits, and that the Yehud coin’s wheel is winged, a

feature that is not present in Dan 7. Thus correspondence occurs only on the conceptual level, namely in regard to a movable seated deity.

III. Conclusion. A survey of the iconographic landscape of Palestine/Israel from the middle of the 2nd mill. to the Persian Period indicates that no iconographic overall scenery exists that can convincingly be considered as a parallel to the judgment scene of the A. o. d.

In regard to specific features of the A. o. d., it has been suggested that the “white hair” of the enthroned A. can be understood as an expression of dignity, authority, and seniority. Transposed by visual means of expression, such a figure would probably be expected to be a figure with a beard. Particularly interesting in this regard are 8th/7th cent. depictions of the enthroned bearded moon god emerging from the gate of heaven, characterized by its trees with an aura of life, to enlighten the earthly sphere with divine light. In a similar manner the A. o. d. makes his appearance above in the celestial realm. Both perceptions of the divine view the enthroned as a distant god who is not associated with humans. It would be far-fetched to suggest that these 8th–7th cent. throne scenes of the moon god were the iconographic blueprint for Dan 7, but both seem to operate with a similar *Vorstellungswelt* or concept in regard to the enthroned god, which is markedly different in earlier and later times. Also of interest is THEUER’S concluding remark in her comprehensive study on the moon god in the religions of Syro-Palestine, when she states “daß der höchste Gott Judas in der ausgehenden Königszeit als lunare Gottheit vorgestellt wurde bzw. lunare Züge übertragen bekam” (2000: 559).

A similarity of concepts but not of descriptive details can be noted between the Yehud coin and Dan 7. Both operate with a movable seated deity. In contrast to the representations of the A. o. d., which can be related to a well-attested iconographic tradition of the celestial enthroned god, the singularity of the Yehud coin hampers the case that it can account for the description of the throne with wheels in Dan 7.

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