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Chapter 1

Overview of the Birds in the Old Testament/Hebrew Bible

I begin by attempting to place the “birds” within the matrix of OT/HB understandings of the animal world. On a foundational level, some debate remains over whether the OT/HB presents the world of animals as consisting of three or rather four sub-categories.¹ The three-part division comes in the Bible’s first chapter.² It both accords with the three realms of water, earth, and sky, and appears in the charge to the humans:

God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over (1) the fish of the sea and over (2) the birds of the air and over (3) every living thing that moves upon the earth.” (Gen 1:28, NRSV)

A four-part categorization appears most readily in Gen 9:2 and in Lev 11:46, where the land animals are split into two categories:³

The fear and dread of you shall rest on (1) every animal of the earth [בְּכָל־חַיַּת הָאָרֶץ], and on (2) every bird of the air [בְּכָל־עוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם], on (3) everything that creeps on the ground [בְּכָל־אֲשֶׁר תִּרְמַשׁ הָאֲדָמָה], and on (4) all the fish of the sea [וּבְכָל־דְּגַי הַיָּם]; into your hand they are delivered. (Gen 9:2, NRSV)⁴

This is the law pertaining to (1) land animal [הַבְּהֵמָה] and (2) bird [וְהָעוֹף] and (3) every living creature that moves through the waters [וְכָל־נֶפֶשׁ הַחַיָּה הַרְמוֹשֶׁת בַּמַּיִם] and (4) every creature that swarms upon the earth [וְכָל־נֶפֶשׁ הַשְּׂרָצָה עַל הָאָרֶץ] (Lev 11:46, NRSV).

This categorization also appears within the flood narrative when three of the four categories appear, logically omitting the water creatures (Gen 6:7; 7:8; 7:23; 8:17;

¹ Cf. Peter Riede, *Im Spiegel der Tiere: Studien zum Verhältnis von Mensch und Tier im alten Israel*, OBO 187 (Fribourg, Switz.: Universitätsverlag; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2002), 216–18.

² This also seems most fitting for the poetry of Ps 8:8–9 [ET vv. 7–8]

³ Cf. Richard Whitekettle, “Rats Are Like Snakes, and Hares Are Like Goats: A Study in Israelite Land Animal Taxonomy,” *Bib* 82 (2001): 345–62. He identifies the key distinction between the two kinds of land animals as consisting of their method of propulsion: those that move *over* the land (i. e., *בהמה*) and those that move *along* the ground (*שרץ* or *רמש*). He notes that size may be a good rule of thumb, but it is not a surefire divider between the two land animal taxa (*ibid.*, 347–48). See also Houston, *Purity and Monotheism*, 35. OG offers forms of *ἔρπαιόν*, for which LSJ defines as “*beast or animal which goes on all fours ... creeping thing, reptile, esp. snake.*” In one case for a hound, but otherwise for reptiles, insects, snakes, and monsters.

⁴ See also Deut 4:17–18; 1 Kgs 5:13b; and Ezek 38:20. Gen 1:26 is quite similar but it divides “animal of the earth” into “cattle” and “wild animals.”

cf. 1:30).⁵ It is quite intriguing that even within accepted individual compositions, such as P, a diversity of classification systems may appear: Gen 1:28 offers a tripartite structure, while Gen 1:30 and 9:2 exhibit four categories.⁶ One might opt for a diachronic differentiation in these cases,⁷ or, on the other hand, the movement between them might simply show that the categorization remained flexible in the milieu of the formulation of this text. Finally, A. Schellenberg argues that the choices of animals in *these* two P texts (in contrast to some other P texts from the *Urgeschichte*) reflect the animosity between humans and animals in the ancient world because they leave out “cattle” (בהמה), which would not have posed a threat to humans.⁸ If she is correct, then it may be precarious to expect Gen 1:30 and 9:2 to provide foundational classifications of the animal world. However, the texts’ placements at the beginning of Genesis do call for such foundational statements, at least as they become part of longer and longer narratives. Furthermore, whether one can expect a term to designate domesticated cattle specifically at this point in the narrative remains debatable.

In any case, “everything that is in the heavens” (Gen 9:2), or the flying things (Lev 11:46: העוף), makes up a primary level of zoological classification in the biblical conceptualization that appears as a single category in the P texts of Gen 1–11. Furthermore, within the Priestly Primeval History texts of Gen 1 and 9, along with Ps 8 and Gen 2–3, which Schellenberg identifies as the key biblical material addressing the human-animal relationship, birds/flyers play a minimal role. Genesis 1 and 9 treat them only marginally. Psalm 8 only accords half of the first hemi-stich in v. 9 to them (9aα), while even the fish (9aβ) are addressed further in 9b. The flyers of the air do appear in Gen 2:19–20 as part of the creatures led before the Adam to receive their names, though the text concerns itself for little more with regard to the animals as a whole except to show that they are unequal to humanity, necessitating the formation of the woman.⁹ They remain undifferentiated, and they do not pose any kind of threat to humanity in these key passages,¹⁰ unlike the serpent (Gen 3), the Leviathan of the waters (Job 41:1–11), or Behemoth (Job 39:15–18), to name a couple of biblical examples.

⁵ Also Lev 20:25 and Hos 2:20.

⁶ Most scholars view both Gen 1 and 9 as parts of P. This particular difference within P receives little attention. For example, it does not appear in the lengthy commentary of Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, BKAT 1.1 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1974).

⁷ Cf. Howard Eilberg-Schwartz, *The Savage in Judaism: An Anthropology of Israelite Religion and Ancient Judaism* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1990), 219.

⁸ Annette Schellenberg, *Der Mensch, das Bild Gottes? Zum Gedanken einer Sonderstellung des Menschen im Alten Testament und in weiteren altorientalischen Quellen*, ATANT 101 (Zurich: TVZ, 2011), 48, 66–67.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 197.

¹⁰ The lack of threat contrasts with, for example, the role of the Anzu bird in Mesopotamian myth.

The importance of this discussion will emerge in its application to the two main passages under discussion in this volume: Lev 11 and Deut 14 do not offer the same systems of classification.

With regard to the two systems of animal classification, the early layer of Lev 11 (vv. 2–23) exhibits a four-part structure: Lev 11:2b–8 address animals moving *over* the ground (בהמה); vv. 9–12 concern aquatic creatures; vv. 13–19 consider large winged animals; and vv. 20–23 have small winged animals in mind. There is, therefore, a significant difference from the expectations set in place from Gen 1–9 and Ps 8, among others.

It should be noted; however, the text does not make a clean break between v. 19 (large flyers) and v. 20 (swarmers or small flyers): In fact, MT places a section break (*setumah*)¹¹ between vv. 20 and 21, rather than between vv. 19 and 20 or between vv. 23 and 24! I see this section break as indicating reliance on the categorization of Deut 14, where Deut 14:20 (note the similarity to Lev 11:20) indicates a subsection *within* the third section on flyers.¹² The repeat of a variation of the statement (שקץ הוא לכם), which appears at one particular location in each of the two previous sections (Lev 11:10 for water animals and v. 13 for large flyers), supports the separation of these small flyers into a category of their own.

The question of structure can also be addressed by looking at the introductions of the first three sub-sections: In Deuteronomy, all three (14:4, 9, and 11–12) include a demonstrative pronoun and a positive statement about eating some of the animals from the category:

4: זאת הבהמה אשר תאכלו This is the beast that you may eat

9: את זה תאכלו מכל אשר במים This you may eat from everything that is in the waters.

11–12: כל צפור טהרה תאכלו וזה אשר לא תאכלו מהם All clean birds you may eat, but this you may not eat from them.

Within the third category – the flyers – which ends in v. 20 with a restatement of v. 11, Deut 14:19 inserts a statement on the “flying swarmers” (those moving *along* the ground, following Whitekettle’s categories).¹³ Its presence in both

¹¹ Though it indicates a *continuation* from one section to the next, designating less separation than a *petuhah*. Cf. Emanuel Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001), 50–51.

¹² Cf. Houston, *Purity and Monotheism*, 65. He states, “I conclude that we have in Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14 two distinct developments of a set of toroth approximately corresponding to what we now find in Lev. 11.2b–14, 16a, 20.” I will address his argument for the later addition of 15, 16b–19 (*ibid.*, 47–48) below. Earlier (*ibid.*, 33–35), Houston argues for a threefold division in Lev 11:2–23, wherein vv. 20–23 constitute a subsection of the fliers. A further set of animals appears in vv. 29–30 (שרץ), animals moving along the ground, but these verses come in the section of vv. 24–47*, which generally do not concern consumption, but rather touching, and is for this reason (among others) considered later. Consumption of these small land animals appears in vv. 41–42, and Houston sees this constituting a fourfold categorization.

¹³ Whitekettle, “Rats Are Like Snakes.”

books (also Lev 11:20) might suggest that it belongs to the *Vorlage*, as I will discuss below.¹⁴

However, it could also represent a late update. In Deut 14, only v. 19 addresses these “swarming flyers”; a positive statement on which of them Israelites may consume does not appear;¹⁵ and no demonstrative pronoun is found. As a result, I see Deut 14 as exhibiting a three-part structure, with the statement on the “flying creepers” representing a subsection of the “flyers.”

Turning to Leviticus, 11:2b, 9, and 13 include a demonstrative pronoun:

2b: *זאת החיה אשר תאכלו מכל־הבהמה אשר עליה־אֵרֶץ*: This is the creature that you may eat from all the beasts which are upon the ground.

9: *את־זוֹת תֵּאָכְלוּ מִכֹּל אֲשֶׁר בַּמַּיִם*: This you may eat from everything which is in the waters.

13: *זאת־אלה תִּשְׂקֹץ מִן־הָעוֹף לֹא יֵאָכְלוּ*¹⁶: But these you shall abhor from the flyers – they shall not be eaten.

The first two coincide in naming the permitted action, that one may eat *מִכֹּל*, “some of” the category of animal named. The treatment of the large flyers in v. 13 differs: it omits a statement saying one may eat some of the members in that animal category (found, however, in Deut 14:11 and 20). Given this lack of the demonstrative, a three-part structure appears foundational for this text as well.¹⁷

Treatment of the “winged swarmers” then begins in Lev 11:20 (*כָּל שְׂרָץ הָעוֹף*) then begins in Lev 11:20 (*כָּל שְׂרָץ הָעוֹף*): *ההלך עלי־ארבע שקץ הוא לכם*: “Every winged swarmer walking upon four legs: it is detestable for you”). The lack of a demonstrative pronoun and opening statement that one may eat some of the animals in the category indicates a divergence from the features of the earlier sections of the list. Given the presence of the three-part structure evident in Deut 14 as well, vv. 20–23 likely represents a secondary addition that creates a fourth category out of the shared *Vorlage*’s three (still visible in the Deuteronomy list).¹⁸ Thus, provisionally speaking, some signs of redactional

¹⁴ See Section 4.3 The Small (Swarming) Flyers.

¹⁵ Though none fit this category according to Deut 14, which represents a direct difference from Lev 11:20–23. Cf. Houston, *Purity and Monotheism*, 48.

¹⁶ SamP reads the 2mp *תֵּאָכְלוּ*, smoothing out the term by turning the passive *niphal* 3mp into an active *qal* 2mp.

¹⁷ Houston, *Purity and Monotheism*, 43–48; Lance Hawley, “The Agenda of Priestly Taxonomy: The Conceptualization of *שָׂרָץ* and *שְׂקָץ* in Leviticus 11,” *CBQ* 77 (2015): 234–35. Hawley argues that each of the three spheres (land, water, air) have both “swarmers” and “non-swarmers,” seeing continuity with the Priestly system on display in Gen 1; see also Houston, *Purity and Monotheism*, 104–5. However, the “swarmers on the land” do not appear until Lev 11:29, presumably (by many interpreters) a later text. Furthermore, the discussion of water animals in vv. 9–12 does not focus on the distinction between “swarmer” and “non-swarmer” as something that matters. Therefore, Hawley reads Gen 1 too strongly into Lev 11:2–23, imputing a structure that may not be present. For Lev 11:10, cf. Houston, “Towards an Integrated Reading of the Dietary Laws of Leviticus,” in *The Book of Leviticus: Composition and Reception*, ed. Rolf Rendtorff and Robert A. Kugler, VTSup 93 (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 156. He argues, “‘all the swarming things of the water and all the living creatures in water’ is a hendiadys, simply describing all water creatures.” This argument also weakens Hawley’s categorization.

¹⁸ See Nihan, *From Priestly Torah to Pentateuch*, 325. He states: “The source-critical analysis of

growth appear in the Leviticus version.¹⁹ These coincide with the four sections in Gen 9:2 and Lev 11:46. However, the four categories in Lev 11:2–23 *differ* from the other four-part structures in that the swarmerers are flyers, rather than those “on the earth.”

This discussion indicates the flexibility and flux within the biblical categories for flyers/birds. In the main, all flyers appear lumped together, but especially Lev 11:20–23 separates out a further category, the “small flyers,” or more appropriately the “winged swarmerers.” As a result, interpreters that see Lev 11:2–23 as part of the same P strata found in Gen 1 would need to explain why the two texts conceptualize the animal world differently. Furthermore, those viewing Lev 11 as the source text for Deut 14 should grapple with the different presentation of Lev 11:20–23.

1.1 Terms and Classifications for “Bird”

The remainder of this larger section divides into a discussion of terms for “bird,” fowling, human use of birds, birds and religion (with subsections on sacrifice, divine images, and birds in religious conceptions of the world and symbolic systems), and avian metaphors.²⁰

1.1.1 עוף: Flyer

While discussing terms for a title like “bird” appears otiose, its relevance emerges through comparison of Deut 14:11, which uses צפור for what one should not eat, while Lev 11:13 has העוף.²¹ The significance arises later in the chapters: Deut 14:19–20 then states:

וכל שרץ העוף טמא הוא לכם לא יאכלו 19: And every flying swarmer, it is unclean for you.
They may not be eaten.
כל-עוף טהור תאכלו 20: Every clean flyer you may eat.

Lev 11 has indicated that it consisted of a classification of the entire animal kingdom; this system is primarily based on a division into three separate realms (land, water, air), though a further distinction is made between עוף, “birds”, and שרץ העוף, winged swarmerers.”

¹⁹ For more detailed comments, see below, Chap. 4.

²⁰ Except for the detailed discussion of the types of birds that will appear in conjunction with the philological discussions, I am generally following the approach of Peter Riede, “Vogel,” *WiBiLex*, n.d., <https://e-www.bibelwissenschaft.de/wibilex/das-bibellexikon/lexikon/sachwort/anzeigen/details/vogel/ch/7c35f3e0d8086bb593f2e09540d09dac/>. Berner organizes his article in *EBR* according to region, though within the section on the OT/HB he follows a similar structure, omitting discussion of individual species and genera.

²¹ The difficulty is recognized by Philip J. Budd, *Leviticus* NCB (London; Grand Rapids, MI: Pickering; Eerdmans, 1996), 168. He states, “The word *birds* can be used for all creatures of the air, including insects (vv. 20, 21, 23; Deut. 14:19). More usually it clearly has the narrower connotation (*sic!*) *birds* (e.g., Gen. 8:20; 1 Sam. 17:44; 2 Sam. 21:10 ...)” [emphasis original].

These designations parallel the ones in Lev 11:20, which, however, appear to have inserted a significant amount of text, such that it becomes the “flying swarmers” that *walk on the ground* [lit. upon four] that are unclean, except for those like locusts that have hinged knees in vv. 21–23.

The differences between these verses, when read synchronically, indicate that some distinctions can be made between “large flyers” (צפור), “flying swarmers” (שרץ העוף), and “all flyers” (כל-עוף) in Deut 14:11, 19–20 (but this is not the case for Lev 11:20–23 as argued above). Presumably the first two categories demarcate sub-categories of “flyers.”²²

This is but one example of determining the importance of the *kinds* of terms that are employed to designate categories. In terms of the philology of the broader comparative Semitic context, the verbal form *ʿp* likely appears in Arslan Tash KAI 27:27 and 28 in verbal and nominal forms.²³ The nominal form *ʿpt* stands parallel to *llyn* “night demons,” which certainly provides a sinister implication of the term not readily apparent in the Hebrew contexts.

It may also be attested in KAI 222B 33 (Sefire); but in this context one might also read *ʿp* II (“to grow weary”). The verb appears several times in Ugaritic with the basic meaning “to fly” in the G.²⁴ The nominal form *ʿp* is also extant from Ugarit, both in masculine (*ʿpmm*, a m.p. noun + enclitic *m*) and feminine (*ʿpt*)²⁵ forms, meaning “birds of the sky (KTU 1.22 I 11) as well as “perishing” in a broken context (1.18 IV 42). Thus, the Ugaritic and West Semitic evidence adds little to our understanding beyond what one might already deduce from the biblical texts themselves. The term can refer to flying creatures in general or more specifically to birds.

1.1.2 צפ(ו)ר: Flyer

As for the likely onomatopoetic *ʿsp(w)r*,²⁶ it is attested in Punic (Marseilles Tariff: KAI 69:12, 15),²⁷ while the plural absolute appears as *ʿsyprmm* in a broken context in Neo-Punic Trip 51:7.²⁸ The context of KAI 69 clearly deals with animals brought for cultic offerings. The text identifies several categories – *ʿspr*, *ʿgmm*

²² Note the similar comment by James W. Watts, *Leviticus 1–10*, HCOT (Leuven: Peeters, 2013), 219.

²³ Cf. Frank Moore Cross and Richard J. Saley, “Phoenician Incantations on a Plaque of the Seventh Century B. C. from Arslan Tash in Upper Syria,” *BASOR* 197 (1970): 46–47 and n. 36.

²⁴ *DULAT*, 173; *KTU* 1.19 III 44; 1.10 II 11; 1.10 II 23; 1.13:8. There is one appearance of a *polel* (1.4 II 10), which is rendered “To fly (around someone) > to attempt to seduce, bewitch” (ibid).

²⁵ Also in *KAI* 10:5 (Yehaumilk, 5th–4th cent. BCE, Phoenician). Most interpreters understand the term to mean “winged disk”; cf. *DNWSI*, 878.

²⁶ Riede, *Im Spiegel der Tiere*, 201. The term sounds like the whirring of wings.

²⁷ Also in line 11 in a broken context.

²⁸ Tripolitanian Inscription 51; cf. Giorgio Levi Della Vida, “Ostrakon Neopunico Dalla Tripolitania,” *Orientalia* 33 (1964): 1–14.

and ṣṣ . Unfortunately, all identifications of the latter two remain speculative.²⁹ However, this text uses the term *ṣpr* as a broader term that can be modified into sub-categories.

In Deir Alla Combination I, a notoriously difficult text to reconstruct out of a multitude of small plaster fragments from eighth century BCE Transjordan, the term appears in line 11.³⁰ Some attempt to see a more specific identification in this term, especially “sparrow,” to go along with the readings of *ywn* as “dove” and *drr* as “swallow” earlier in the line.³¹ Such use, if correctly identified, diverges from that in *KAI* 69. Finally, in Official Aramaic the cognate term *ṣnpr* is extant in Ahiqar, where in line 82 it appears to have a smaller bird in view.³²

The corresponding – not cognate – term in Ugaritic is *ʿsr*, cognate to Akk. *iṣṣū-ru*. This general term appears in Ugaritic for birds as food (4.751:5) and sacrifice (1.105.24 among many others).³³

This detailed evidence indicates at least two Hebrew terms, *(w)p* and *ṣpr/ṣnpr/ṣypr/ṣpwr*, can designate the general category of “flying creatures” or “birds” in West Semitic languages.³⁴ This conclusion suggests the possibility for some variety in their scope of meaning and for some sub-categories. This distinction bears some importance for the dietary prohibitions. For Deut 14, *צפור* must include “large flyers,” given that a number of birds in the list that follows are quite expansive.³⁵ As a result, narrowing *צפור* to something akin to “sparrow,” as one might do for Deir Alla Combination I, cannot obtain. This category in Deut 14:12–18 basically includes all birds + bats. However, in Ps 84:4 [ET: 3] the term more likely indicates smaller birds that find sanctuary in the temple, often translated “sparrow” given the parallel term is *דרור*: “swallow(?)”.³⁶ This combination also appears in Prov 26:2 concerning birds given to quick flight. “Large flyer” also likely takes on further specificity in Lev 14:4–7, 49–53, where the term concerns a pair of birds used in a ritual concerning skin/scale-growths on humans or houses.

²⁹ I will discuss the importance of the possible meanings and implications below, 1.3 Cultic Use of Birds.

³⁰ Line 9 according to C. L. Seow, “West Semitic Sources,” in *Prophets and Prophecy in the Ancient Near East*, ed. Peter Machinist, WAW 12 (Atlanta: SBL, 2003), 210.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 211. Also see *DNWSI*, 973 for similar readings.

³² Lines numbered according to *CAL*. According to *DNWSI*, 973, it is line 98. H. L. Ginsberg translates (*ANET*, 428): “For a word is a bird: once released, no man can re[capture it].” It also appears in several other lines (186, 198), but the broken context renders it useless for drawing out any further connotations of the term.

³³ *DULAT*, 177–78.

³⁴ In addition to Akkadian influenced *ʿsr* in Ugaritic.

³⁵ Contrast Driver, “Birds in the Old Testament I,” 6. He understands it to mean “‘titters’ ... and so stands for all the passerine birds [those with three toes pointing forward and one back, facilitating perching] and many, if not most, other small birds which are not specifically named.”

³⁶ Alice Parmelee, *All the Birds of the Bible: Their Stories, Identification and Meaning* (New York: Harper, 1959), 161–62. This provides some further justification for the translation of the term as sparrow in the Deir Alla combination.

Therefore, the detailed nature of these flyers may rather emerge from the context and not from the term itself.

One might argue that the most appropriate rendering of the term for Deut 14:11 arises on analogy with the Ugaritic *ʿsr*, indicating “edible birds.” As a result, Deut 14:11 would read: “Every clean edible bird you may eat.” Opposing this understanding would be the question of whether the text/audience would view the list of prohibited birds as edible. That is, unless “clean” and “edible [bird]” more or less express the same content, in which case their combination then has the effect of providing emphasis (as a tautology). However, this relationship between the two terms is unlikely, given the 3.m.p. pronoun in v. 12a, *זה אשר לא־תאצלו*, *מהם* (“But these you shall not eat from them”). Thus a general rendering of “large flyers” (i. e., birds + bat) represents the appropriate level of taxonomy for *צפור* *šippôr* in Deut 14:11, given that the term parallels *עוף* in the statement of v. 20: *כל־עוף טהור תאכלו* (“every clean flyer you may eat”), where only the terms for bird/large flyer are different, though in v. 20 the category has grown to include the smaller flyers, *כל שרץ העוף* (“every flying swarmer”) as well.

1.1.3 גזול: *Young Bird*

A final category of “flyers” in the HB/OT may occur in *גזול*, a term extant only in Gen 15:9 and Deut 32:11. While *HALOT* translates “young eagle” for the Deuteronomy passage, the bird serves as part of Abraham’s offering in Genesis. This datum shows that “eagle” is extrinsic to the core of the meaning: *HALOT* renders the term “turtledove” for Gen 15:9,³⁷ though this has little textual justification. Comparative evidence suggests “young pigeon” (Arab., Syr.), and Driver opts for the appropriate rendering of the term as the non-specific “young bird.”³⁸ So, this term views the flyers in a different manner, focused on their state of immaturity.

1.1.4 שרץ העוף: *The Small Flyer*

The smaller flyers, while not the focus of this monograph, provide a contrast with those of the larger varieties of flyers in Lev 11:13–19/Deut 14:12–18. They are designated by *שרץ העוף* in both Deut 14:19 and Lev 11:20, providing more of a challenge, given that the precise meaning of *שרץ* remains disputed. The root appears in verbal (*qal*) and nominal forms. Comparative Semitic languages attest Akk. “to clutch, clasp”; Syr. “to creep”; and Eth. “to sprout, shoot, bud” for the verbal form.³⁹ *HALOT* offers “creep, move, swarm” as the basic definition,

³⁷ *HALOT*, 182.

³⁸ Driver, “Birds in the Old Testament I,” 6. This is much preferable to Staubli’s attempt to see this as a wild partridge, cf. Thomas Staubli, “Hühneropfer im Alten Israel: Zum Verständnis von Lev 1,14 im Kontext der Antiken Kulturgeschichte,” in *The Books of Leviticus and Numbers*, ed. Thomas Römer, BETL 215 (Leuven: Peeters, 2008), 363.

³⁹ From *HALOT*, 1655.

though “teeming” appears in its explanations of specific passages. The subjects for the verb circle around frogs, aquatic wildlife, humans (Gen 9:7) or the Israelites (Exod 1:7), as well as the Nile or land itself (Gen 1:20–21; Exod 7:28; Ps 105:30). BDB provides the basic rendering “swarm, teem.”⁴⁰ Gesenius¹⁸ agrees with “kriechen, wimmeln,” which becomes “sich vermehren, fortpflanzen.”⁴¹

For the nominal form, comparative evidence basically only yields Eth. “offspring, twig.” BDB renders the Hebrew noun as a collective, “swarmers, swarming things,” noting that it applies to aquatic animals, small reptiles and quadrupeds, and in Deut 14:19/Lev 11:20–21 to insects.⁴² HALOT agrees, providing a longer explanation: “swarm, a mass of small animals or reptiles which naturally occur in large numbers.”⁴³

One reason for my attention to these terms arises from the secondary literature devoted to them with regard to Lev 11. M. Douglas’ *Leviticus as Literature* makes a significant shift from her earlier work: rather than the *mode of movement* marking the distinction for these animals, she argues that Leviticus designates the swarmers as culturally shunned in response to their incredible fertility:

They are symbols of fruitfulness in animal creation. Eating the teeming creatures offends God’s avowed concern for fertility. The ancient association of the temple with fertility supports the idea that harming the teeming creatures is wrong.⁴⁴

Douglas’ focus on fertility has garnered some interest: Ruane follows this logic of the shunning of an animal because of its fertility in her interpretation of the pig. She notes, “Although the criteria of cud chewing and cloven hooves are the stated rationale for the cleanness of land animals, it is also the case that almost all types of unclean land animals such as rodents, dogs, cats, rabbits, reptiles, and amphibians, bear in multiples.”⁴⁵ However, as she goes on to remark, this criterion neither applies to air nor sea creatures (nor to camels and a couple other land animals!).⁴⁶ The number of exceptions calls the applicability of this criterion into question, at least as a *primary* distinction, and, as she mentions, it does not provide assistance for understanding the reason for the differentiation between birds. The prolific nature of some clearly acceptable birds (doves and pigeons, partridges, and geese) mitigates against her proposal.

One can critique Douglas’ revised attempt to interpret the logic behind the shunning of the swarmers as something positive, in part from the observation that Lev 11:10 includes שָׂרֵץ animals in both aquatic animals permitted and

⁴⁰ BDB, 1057.

⁴¹ Ges¹⁸, 1413.

⁴² BDB, 1057.

⁴³ HALOT, 1656.

⁴⁴ Mary Douglas, *Leviticus as Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 168.

⁴⁵ Nicole J. Ruane, “Pigs, Purity, and Patrilineality: The Multiparity of Swine and Its Problems for Biblical Ritual and Gender Construction,” *JBL* 134 (2015): 493.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 497.

among those prohibited from consumption.⁴⁷ There is also some question whether the core meaning of שרץ concerns fertility rather than locomotion. Whitekettle contends that the basic distinction of the category of שרץ animals lies in their “sprawling stance.”⁴⁸ His argument accounts for the evidence from the alternate term used at some points for describing this category: רמש (e. g., Gen 1:20–21). However, locomotion seems too restrictive a category to encompass all the uses of שרץ, so fertility can also designate the key feature, such as for its uses for humans in Gen 9:7; Exod 1:7.

1.1.5 עיט: Bird of Prey

Moving to a different sub-category of flyers – in this case large flyers, Hebrew also attests to a categorical term often understood as “birds of prey”: עיט for which BDB takes the basic verbal root to mean “scream, shriek,” based especially on Arabic comparative evidence.⁴⁹ In Ugaritic, however, the term indicates an edible animal.⁵⁰ HALOT instead compares to Arabic *gāṭa* (“to hide, with a cognate substantive, within a *gawṭun* hide, hole, dip”).⁵¹ According to this Arabic comparative term, some indicators lead away from some kind of attacking connotation, thus reducing the likelihood that “bird of prey” renders the term appropriately. While עיט does not appear in the dietary laws, the rendering “bird of prey” fits well with many interpretations of the implicit reasoning behind the outlawing of most of the large flyers as birds of prey, thus making its meaning relevant for the dietary prohibition texts.

The nominal term appears eight times with variable connotations.⁵² The contexts of Gen 15:11 and Ezek 39:4 indicate that the birds can eat either carrion or be otherwise carnivorous. In Ezek 39:4 the phraseology presents the interpreter with some difficulties. A number of terms for birds receive the corpses of Gog’s armies: צפור כל-כנף. לעיט צפור כל-כנף. Zimmerli understands צפור כל-כנף as “nähere

⁴⁷ See Houston, “Towards an Integrated Reading of the Dietary Laws of Leviticus,” 156. Note the broad critique of Douglas’ new interpretation in this essay.

⁴⁸ Whitekettle, “Rats Are Like Snakes,” 354. He goes on to explain (ibid., 355): “In Land Animals with a sprawling stance, the limbs move beside the body with limb segments (e. g., the femur or foot) describing horizontal ellipses relative to the shoulder and hip ...” Note also his comment (ibid., 359): “In summary, the locomotion of legless Land Animals involves movement that is either exclusively or largely confined to a horizontal plane relative to the ground.”

⁴⁹ BDB, 743; Driver, “Birds in the Old Testament I,” 5–6.

⁵⁰ DULAT, 192 notes that the corresponding Ugaritic term, *t*, only appears several times, usually in broken contexts, and it remains unclear whether it concerns a bird or a fish. It refers to an edible animal (!) according to the context in 4.247.24, where it is part of an administrative list containing other edible animals and bread.

⁵¹ HALOT, 816, referencing James Barr, *Comparative Philology and the Text of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1968), 128–29, where the play on the double mention of עיט *‘ayit* – homonyms in this case – in the verse is discussed.

⁵² Gen 15:11; Job 28:7; Isa 18:6 (2×); Isa 46:11; Jer 12:9 (2×); Ezek 39:4.

Beschreibung” for לעיט.⁵³ If this were the case, then עיט would equal “every winged flyer,” which would make the term into a very general term for “bird.” Gesenius instead understands the preposition ל as doing double duty, so the expression means “for predatory birds, for birds of every winged flyer.”⁵⁴ Here the context clearly points to carrion consumption, which accords with the contextual understanding of לצפור כל-כנף in 39:17. This reading provides both some explanation of עיט as well as a new wrinkle in the possible meaning of צפ(ו)ר! These connotations for עיט fit well with Gen 15:11, where the same creatures try to snatch away the animal offerings that Abram lays out (including צפור).

In Jer 12:9, the category of bird is described along with what might be a hyena (צבוע) to indicate the kind of behavior that “my inheritance [is] for/to me” (העיט) לי (צבוע נחלתי לי). A second alternative is a “speckled” bird of prey, as a G passive participle of the root צבע, “soak, dye” from Akkadian and found in later Semitic languages. It is difficult to determine if this behavior concerns Yahweh’s people as a whole or rather Jeremiah’s relations more specifically because both appear in the close context, but the Judahites as a whole seems more likely. In any case, Yahweh or Jeremiah is alive, so it does not necessarily indicate the consumption of carrion. Depending on the species of hyena, if that be the better reading, diets can range from primarily scavenging to primarily hunting. However, both seem to be options for all species of hyena. The comparison in Jer 12:9b “The עיט surround it” (העיט סביב עליה) focuses more specifically on the method of approaching or acquiring the food, rather than the nature of the food itself.

If one opts for “speckled,” then the term may instead denote something that makes a creature stand out from the rest of its species, and is therefore attacked because it is different.

The more readable Isa 46:11a may offer some insight.

קרא ממזרח עיט Calling from the east, an *‘ayit*,
מארץ מרחק איש עזתו from a faraway land, a man of my counsel

After comparing the Babylonian divine images with Yahweh (vv. 1–9), Yahweh declares in v. 10 that his plan will take place. The first concrete image of this plan consists of his calling the עיט from the east, paralleled in the following line as “the man of his (K)/my (Q) counsel from a distant land,” indicating Cyrus.⁵⁵ One possible connection arises from the likelihood that Cyrus’s standard consisted of the mythological *shahbaz* bird, the “royal falcon.”⁵⁶ One might certainly expect

⁵³ Walther Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 25–48*, BKAT 13.2 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1969), 929.

⁵⁴ GKC, § 119 hh. Cf. similar expressions in Gen 1:21; 7:14; Ezek 17:23; and 39:17.

⁵⁵ Peter Riede, “Raubvogel,” *WiBiLex*, n.d., <https://www.bibelwissenschaft.de/stichwort/32727/>.

⁵⁶ A. Shapur, “Derafs” *Encyclopedia Iranica*, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/derafs>, originally published: 1994, last updated: 2011. This article is available in print: Vol. VII, Fasc. 3, 312–15. He notes “Xenophon in *Cyropaedia* (Book VII, C.1) as: ‘... and the word went down

that the emblem of the conquering and reigning Achamaenids would intend to depict some strength and aggressiveness.

The term עֵיט also appears in Isa 18:6, where its status as “bird of prey” remains questionable. The context of Isa 18:6 concerns the judgment of Cush, but here the image consists of an orchard: at the time when blossoms develop into unripe fruit (בָּסֵר in v. 5), pruning will take place. These pruned branches, presumably with fruit, comprise the analogy for what is left “for the *bird* of the mountains” (לְעֵיט הַרִים).⁵⁷ The imagery indicates a frugivorous rather than a carnivorous bird, paralleled in the subsequent lines by the beast of the earth. The bird summers upon the berries, while the beast winters upon them. However, given the judgment context of the oracle, one might argue that the imagery of a carrion-consuming bird has bled into the picture because the analogy of the birds and beasts feasting on berries becomes colored by the prophecy’s meaning: in fact, they will feast on human corpses.

The appearance of the term in Job 28:7 has completely different connotations, set in parallel with אֵיה. Both birds apparently seek wisdom, but neither of the two types can find the source of wisdom. The אֵיה has an eye that cannot see in this context, suggesting that the bird was generally known for having much better vision than other creatures, yet even it cannot find wisdom’s source. Just how the עֵיט should know the path receives no elaboration. Presumably its eyes also possess the ability to see objects from a considerable distance, similar to the אֵיה (falcon?).⁵⁸

There are two (possibly three) appearances of the denominative verb: in 1 Sam 14:32 Q; 15:19; and 25:14. In the first two, the context calls for some kind of ravenous falling upon, likely in the manner of birds falling upon a meal. In 1 Sam 25:14, on the other hand, the verb describes Nabal’s treatment of David’s messengers in a negative manner, which HALOT renders as “to shout at, address angrily.”⁵⁹

Given the diversity of varying biblical usages of the noun עֵיט, describing the semantic field of the term as “bird of prey” still does fit most scenarios. Some contexts certainly imply carrion consumption (Gen 15:11; Ezek 39:4; note the similar implication for use of the verb). Jeremiah 12:9 might allow for a carnivorous conception, emphasizing, however, the manner of a circling attack. Job

*the lines, ‘Eyes on the standard and steady marching!’ The standard was a golden eagle, with outspread wings, borne aloft on a long spear-shaft, and to this day such is the standard of the Persian king’ (however, here he is describing Artaxerxes II’s standard at Cunaxa).” Cf. Xenophon, *Anabasis* 1.10.12; see a similar eagle on the chariot of Darius III; Curtius Rufus, 3.3.16.*

⁵⁷ JPS renders “kites of the hills.” Most English translations offer “birds of prey” (NRSV, NIV, ESV, NASV), though “ravenous birds” (i. e., JPS 1917) also appears. Some opt for the non-descript “fowls of the mountains/hills” (KJV; NET); in German, LUT has “Geier,” and ZB offers “Raubvögeln.” LXX simply renders πετεινοίς (birds), which fits the context well.

⁵⁸ See below 3.2.

⁵⁹ HALOT, 816.

28:7 focuses on the bird’s acute sight, and Isa 46:11 on the attacking posture of Cyrus the Great exemplified in the royal standard. However, the two uses of the term in Isa 18:6 suggest the consumption of fruit, though the underlying analogy to dead human corpses may have supplied the reason for the choice of this category of bird.

Let me now apply this discussion to the dietary laws. Given that many interpreters deduce the carnivorous nature of a majority of the forbidden birds as the reason for their status as unclean (Deut)/shunned (Lev), it is striking that the designation טיט does not appear in the lists of Lev 11/Deut 14. One might wonder why? One explanation, fitting well with Milgrom’s rationale on the rejection of carnivorous animals,⁶⁰ is that טיט addresses a broad category of birds, while Lev 11/Deut 14 concern themselves with more specific family, genus, or species designations. Yet, if this categorical term could simplify the prohibited birds in the same way as the criteria given for the large land animals and aquatic creatures, it seems its use would offer the easiest solution. As a result, the absence of this term provides an argument (though from silence) against Milgrom’s basic premise.

However, the Ugaritic evidence, if in fact a cognate and referring to the same kinds of birds, raises a serious question about the feasibility of consumption. If the ʾ denotes a bird consumed in Ugarit, which manifests considerable similarity to consumption practices in ancient Israel, then one might conclude that Lev 11/Deut 14 permit the general consumption of this category of fowl for Israelites as well! I choose caution with regard to this assertion, however, given the large body of scholarly tradition that would fit some of the unclean/shunned birds from Deut 14/Lev 11 into the larger category of טיט. Most likely the lack of criteria for prohibition of large flyers should simply indicate that there was not a single trait (or very short list) that would lead to prohibition. Furthermore, the terms in Ugaritic from the Late Bronze Age and Hebrew from the Iron Age may have shifted in their meaning.

1.1.6 Summary

This section has investigated the various Hebrew terms for “birds/flyers” or sub-categories of birds. The term עוף indicates the broadest term for “flyers,” going beyond “bird” and also including insects. Limiting the category – at least in some contexts – is צפור, which can suggest something akin to a sparrow, while indicating broad groupings of flyers in others. In any case, the comparative evidence suggests that both these terms include edible birds. Thirdly, the few appearances of גוזל point toward a category of “young flyer.”

Two further categorical terms are שרץ and עיט. The former has elicited considerable discussion around the question of whether it primarily indicates a mode

⁶⁰ Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 3 (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 701.

of locomotion or rather fertility. In some cases, the evidence leans in favor of locomotion, given that this rendering also accounts for the closely related term רמש, while in others, only fertility seems appropriate. Finally, the biblical use of עיט largely indicates a carnivorous type of bird that can have incredible vision and a circling type of approach. However, Isa 18:6 and the Ugaritic evidence point in a different direction, that of a frugivorous bird that found its way to the (Ugaritic) table.

1.2 Bird Depictions in the Hebrew Bible

Looking at birds in general in the Hebrew Bible is of course a large task in and of itself. Riede, who offers the most extensive work in this regard in recent decades, considers birds according to their genus/specie types, how they were caught, their uses (for humans), religious uses, and metaphorical connections.⁶¹ Following his lead, this section will consider the ways that flyers appear throughout the biblical material in an attempt to understand their place in the larger thought world of the literature. Key issues include their relationships with God, humans, other animals, and among themselves. This broad overview provides the larger context for the kinds of associations with birds that could lead to the role of some types in the cult on one hand, and the exclusion of others from consumption on the other.

First, in terms of their larger place in the world and in relation to God, birds receive their own realm for life in Gen 1:20, though they must touch down on earth, as perhaps noted in 1:22 (cf. Ezek 38:20; Hos 2:18; 4:3), rendering them participants in the events on earth. A similar notion of a separate realm belonging to the birds – though not birds alone – likely stands behind the comparisons between certain Mesopotamian kings' exploits and the realms of birds. For example, both Shamshi-Adad V and Assurbanipal proclaim that they passed through regions where not even wild animals and birds dwell. The desert especially constitutes such a region.⁶²

They receive the same punishment and deliverance as humans and beasts in the flood narrative in Gen 6:7 (cf. 7:21, 23) and 7:3.⁶³ Birds, then, are co-creatures with humans (and beasts) and covenant partners along with Noah as well. Furthermore, their punishment in the flood suggests that they possess a level of responsibility for the violence that led to the divine destruction through water. Hosea 4:1–3 pronounces a similar shared punishment: because of a panoply of

⁶¹ For an overview see Riede, "Vogel." Much of his further work on animals is collected in Riede, *Im Spiegel der Tiere*.

⁶² See CAD I: 210–11 for sources from the reign of Tiglath-Pileser I until Assurbanipal.

⁶³ Detailed discussion of this theme appears in Schellenberg, *Der Mensch, das Bild Gottes?*, 39–42.



Fig. 1: Ancient Egyptian bird-catchers from Thebes, Tomb of Nakht, 52, 1420–1411 BCE. Plate 48 from Nina M. Davies, *Ancient Egyptian Paintings*, 1936.

iniquities reminiscent of the Ten Commandments, everything dwelling in the land, including beasts of the field and birds of the heavens will languish.

However, alongside their mutual responsibility, humans receive dominion over the fowl in 1:26–28, and humans name them in 2:20. Birds become afraid of humans in 9:2, while still participating in the Noachic covenant in 9:10.

Second, perhaps the most dominant conceptualization of birds in ancient Israel appears in a number of biblical texts that play on the relative weakness of most birds in comparison to humans. Comparison with a captured bird in the Psalms can express the worshipper's helplessness (Pss 74:19; 124:7). Proverbs (6:5) compares a person who stands surety for another with a bird caught in a snare. In fact, the Hebrew Bible frequently employs the motif of fowling: the world from which the texts emerged clearly imagines certain strains of birds as rather helpless and easily captured. For example, in Qoh 9:12 a person's end surprises them in the same way as a fowler's trap suddenly snags a bird (see a similarly surprising capture for a young man by an adulterous woman in Prov 7:23).

Fowling took place from the Middle Stone Age onward, also with the use of bow and arrow, as one would expect.⁶⁴ And, unlike the intent to capture fowl primarily for food, hunting could also serve as a royal pastime, likely for other reasons than to promote the image of the king's strength. This motivation appears in

⁶⁴ Elisabeth Osten-Sacken, *Untersuchungen zur Geflügelwirtschaft im Alten Orient*, OBO 272 (Fribourg, Switz.: Universitätsverlag; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2015), 36.

several Neo-Assyrian palace reliefs that show archers hunting *small* birds, therefore less likely to show the king's ability to prevail over a ferocious opponent.⁶⁵

A third category concerns meanings that arise from birds' interactions with their young. This image seemingly contrasts sharply with fowl as weak, generally shown as the bird hovering in protection. The most prominent representations in this category consist of images of the protection given by a parental bird's wing. Related are the *nešer* ("eagle, vulture") fluttering over its young. This symbolism arises from the relative helplessness of baby and young birds coupled with the adult instinct to protect their young. The images provide apt analogies for the description of the divine care for humans.

One such text is Isa 31:5, where God acts like flying birds (כַּצְפוּרִים עֹפוֹת) to protect Jerusalem. Further similar avian imagery appears in conjunction with God in numerous circumstances, especially in relation to the protective wing, as in Pss 17:8; 36:8 [ET: 7]; 57:2 [ET: 1]; 61:5 [ET: 4]; 63:8 [ET: 7]; 91:4; and Ruth 2:12.⁶⁶ The protective wings of cherubim over the Ark perhaps also deserve mention (e. g., Exod 25:20; 37:9; 1 Kgs 8:7).

In a rather striking narrative that portrays birds in a different type of protective role, ravens also take on the role of divine provider for Elijah, bringing him bread and meat twice daily (1 Kgs 17). Identified as unclean in Deut 14:14 (shunned in Lev 11:15 MT),⁶⁷ they nonetheless can bear food for the prophet, demonstrating Elijah's state of extreme helplessness.

While the overarching image in these texts presents the notion of a powerful bird, it likely develops in conjunction with the rather helpless nature noted above for a bird's eggs or young. Thus, the protective image relates closely with the notion of an adult bird protecting its young.

Fourth, some texts note the special proximity of some birds to God. This association could arise from several mutually supporting images. On the one hand is the association of deities with the heavens (Qoh 5:2 "for God is in heaven, and you upon earth"). Since birds ascended higher in the ancient world than any other living creature, they come nearer to the divine realm than other beings. On the other hand, small birds make their nests in small niches of large buildings. The largest buildings of the ancient Near East tended to house the gods, again underlining the close proximity of some birds with the divine realm.⁶⁸ Psalm 84:3–5 [ET: 2–4] highlights this connection:

⁶⁵ See the discussion of a royal bird-hunting party from Sargon II's Khorsobad palace and Assurbanipal's North Palace in *ibid.*, 139–41.

⁶⁶ For representative iconographic depictions from eighth-century BCE Arslan Tash and Iron I Egypt, see Keel, *Die Welt der altorientalischen Bildsymbolik*, 171.

⁶⁷ However, not in early LXX manuscripts. See discussion below, in 3.3.

⁶⁸ Note the similar appearance of birds in temples in Mesopotamia as early as Ur II Gudea, where a kind of pigeon/dove (tu^{mušēn}) live in Eninnu's temple. Cf. Osten-Sacken, *Untersuchungen zur Geflügelwirtschaft*, 298.

My self longs, and even faints for the courts [חצרות] of Yahweh.
 My heart and my body cry praise to the living god.
 Even the bird [צפור] has found a house,
 And the swallow [דרור] a nest for itself to lay her young – your altars,
 O Yahweh of the armies, my king and my God.
 Happy are those dwelling in your house, they will continue to praise you.

In this text, the worshiper pines for structures that make up the sanctuary complex in which especially birds find places not only to dwell, but also to raise the next generation in safety. As a result of their dwellings in sanctuaries, such birds could bring messages from the divine world to humans: Figurines of doves/pigeons appear throughout the iconography of ancient Mesopotamia, Syria, Mycenaean locations, and Turkey in close connection with deities, most often goddesses, at times even on their shoulder or head. Placing these attestations together with Anat's role as winged messenger in the Baal Cycle, the dove may take on a special role as messenger from Yahweh in Ps 68:12–14 to announce a victory.⁶⁹ Further is the connection that continued for millennia between goddesses of love and the dove.⁷⁰

Within these foundational categories – or perhaps better stated: constructed on the foundation of these categories, the Hebrew Bible conceptualizes and contextualizes birds in a number of ways. Most prominent for the present discussion include cultic and religious associations, militaristic connections, and fantastic birds.

1.3 Cultic Use of Birds

Within the broader biblical context of these images, the religious use of birds as sacrificial animals seemingly lies at the opposite end of the pendulum from birds declared unclean or abhorrent. My discussion of sacrificial use of birds informs the understanding about clean/unclean birds by way of describing the contrast. Their place in cultic practice relates to (1) their sometimes proximity to humans

⁶⁹ Othmar Keel and Urs Winter, *Vögel als Boten: Studien zu Ps 68, 12–14, Gen 8, 6–12, Koh 10, 20 und dem Aussenden von Botenvögeln in Ägypten*, OBO 14 (Fribourg, Switz.: Universitätsverlag, 1977), 34–36. Cf. *ibid.*, 78: “Wenn die Göttin als Freudenbotin auch nirgends deutlich in Vogelgestalt erscheint, so ist doch die Affinität der Göttin zum Vogel, besonders zur Taube (Ikonographie), einerseits und ihre Funktion als Freudenbotin andererseits bezeugt und das stützt sowohl die Annahme, die Freudenbotinnen (מבשרות) in Ps 68,12 seien mit den Tauben in Ps 68,14 identisch, wie auch die Annahme, die Taube der fernen Götter in Ps 56,1 bezeichne Anat oder Astarte in Taubengestalt und in ihrer Funktion als Botin für die fernen Götter.” They note (*ibid.*, 109–42) similar associations in Egypt for the announcement of a victory or enthronement. More recently, see also Schroer, *Die Tiere in der Bibel*, 78–79. However, the evidence is not as clear as these authors' suggest. Cf. Izak Cornelius, “Astarte,” *IDD*.

⁷⁰ Cf. Peter Riede, “Taube,” *WiBiLex*, September 2010, <https://www.bibelwissenschaft.de/stichwort/32559/>.

in reliance on humans for food and protection, (2) their usefulness to humans, and (3) their relative weakness that allows for humans to trap them. Sacrifice arises as one of their key purposes in the story of Noah (7:3 – a non-P text), though not the only one, as they also serve as “instruments” to verify the receding of the floodwaters. Their depiction as offerings begins in earnest in Gen 15:10 and becomes a regular part of the Sinai sacrificial system in Lev 1:14; 7:26; 14:4–7, 49–53.⁷¹ However, the ritual texts generally identify only two categories of birds as appropriate for sacrifice: the תור and the יונה.⁷² Naturally neither of these categories of birds appears on the prohibited lists in Deut 14/Lev 11, indicating that in the stages of composition when *at least* Lev 11 appears together with Lev 1–7, they belong to the clean and edible birds. One important question with regard to the identification of the nature of these birds lies in whether they were domesticated or wild birds. Answering this question will illuminate the Israelite/biblical connection between the cult and animal (here: avian) world.⁷³

The general view of scholarship is summed up by Houston, who proposes, “I think we can reasonably assume that doves were kept as domestic birds, especially since otherwise they would be the only wild victim permitted in the sacrificial codes of Ugarit and Leviticus ...”⁷⁴ This argument develops simply from a logical presupposition about the relationship between the table and the altar (or rather: domicile and the altar): Because people supposedly raised all other sacrificial items in Ugarit and biblical texts (Israel/Judah) as *domesticated animals*, this must have been the case for the birds (which Houston assumes are doves and pigeons) as well.⁷⁵

⁷¹ I am not implying that Gen 7:3; 15:10 represent the earliest historical texts. At this point I simply present an overview in terms of the order of appearance in the direction of reading.

⁷² The one exception is the mention of the גזל “young bird” in Gen 15:9. For more detail on this type of fowl, see above 1.1.3.

⁷³ A more developed form of the following argument appears in Spiciarich and Altmann, “Chickens, Partridges, and the /Tor/.”

⁷⁴ Houston, *Purity and Monotheism*, 188. Similarly Oded Borowski, “Animals in the Religions of Syria-Palestine,” in Collins, *A History of the Animal World*, 412. He surmises: “The large quantity of birds that must have been required for sacrifices suggests that the Israelites were not relying on captured birds, but that the majority were probably raised under controlled conditions. However, no columbaria or other installations related to bird-keeping earlier than the Hellenistic period have been discovered in Palestine.” See further the similar assumption in Jacob Milgrom, “Ethics and Ritual: The Foundations of the Biblical Dietary Laws,” in *Religion and Laws: Biblical, Judaic and Islamic Perspectives*, ed. Edwin B. Firmage, Bernard G. Weiss, and John W. Welch (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 178–80. He asserts that the “domesticated” and “unblemished” belong to the Lord as sacrifices, citing Lev 22:17–25. The problem with this assertion is that it omits reference to birds.

⁷⁵ The discussion below will challenge the assertion that only domesticated animals were sacrificed in the Levant and elsewhere. Note Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, 720. He claims the wild species of *’yl* and *yhm̄r* appear in the Ugaritic sacrificial list of CTA 61 (= KTU 2.9 = UDB 2.9); however, the more recent UDB, 562 does not offer this reading and should therefore be omitted from the discussion. In any case, as Milgrom notes (*ibid.*), deer remains were found in an Iron Age I–II cultic context at Dor.

Milgrom's landmark commentary argues that the development toward sacrifice of solely domestic animals represents a "conscious effort to restrict the sacrificial quadrupeds to a narrower range of edible animals, namely, the domestic species, as a model for the differentiation between priests and Israelites."⁷⁶ He maintains that the purpose for this distinction lies in this analogy between consumption habits and holiness – that is, allowed proximity to the deity. In the same way that sacrificial animals represent a subcategory of those allowed for Israelite consumption, a distinction is also made between clean and unclean (or abhorrent [שקץ]) animals. This distinction functions, according to Milgrom, as an analogy of the separation between Israel (only clean animals for consumption) and the rest of humanity (all animals, but not their blood because of the prohibition in Gen 9). Milgrom unfortunately does not consider the merits of this same analogy in his discussion of the birds. Because he assumes that the Lev 11 treatise on the birds comes from the same compositional layer as vv. 2b–8 (on the large quadrupeds), one would expect the same conception to carry through: only *domesticated* birds should be available for sacrifice.

Watts also accepts this presupposition: "Since P permits only domestic animals on the altar, [Lev] 1:14 makes the best sense if it refers to the two major categories of domesticated food birds in the ancient Near East, chickens and pigeons."⁷⁷ Thus, while he changes out one of the kinds of fowl (chickens instead of doves), he maintains the underlying premise. As support he refers to the *Hellenistic period* dove industry in Israel, yet no evidence exists of such practice earlier, except one dovecote in the Transjordan near Amman, likely from the Iron Age II.⁷⁸

Borowski goes so far as to claim, "There is no question that, during the Iron Age, some birds were domesticated or were raised under controlled conditions."⁷⁹ Now, while considerable evidence for *some* domesticated fowl in the larger region exists (see below, chap. 2), support for the domestication of *these* particular birds proves harder to find. As support, however, he turns to the biblical text, citing 1 Kgs 5:2–3 [ET: 4:22–23] and Jer 5:27–28. What do these texts

⁷⁶ Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, 720. Similarly Rolf Rendtorff, *Leviticus*, BKAT 3 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2004), 26. He states, "Darin wird zugleich eine Einschränkung sichtbar: Von den Haustieren werden nur die Nutztiere genannt, die auch als eßbar gelten, ..." However, Rendtorff takes this as a possible indication (*ibid.*, 73) that vv. 14–17, which address the avian offering, represent an addition. Specifically on the types of birds, Rendtorff writes (*ibid.*, 74): "In V [14]b. wird dieser allgemeine Ausdruck [ףע] jedoch eng begrenzt auf zwei Arten von Tauben. ... Dies hat seinen Grund vermutlich darin, daß Tauben die einzigen Vögel waren, die in Israel in der alttestamentlichen Zeit domestiziert und als Hausvögel neben die Haustiere treten."

⁷⁷ Watts, *Leviticus 1–10*, 219–20.

⁷⁸ Randa Kakish, "Evidence for Dove Breeding in the Iron Age: A Newly Discovered Dovecote at 'Ain Al-Baida/'Amman," *Jordan Journal for History and Archaeology* 6 (2012): 175–93.

⁷⁹ Oded Borowski, *Every Living Thing: Daily Use of Animals in Ancient Israel* (Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira, 1998), 152.

say? The first text intends to depict Solomon's glory by means of a description of his table:

| | |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| ויהי לחם־שלמה ליום אחד שלשים כר | (2) Now Solomon's provisions for one day were 30 |
| סלת וששים כר קמח | measures of fine flour, and 60 measures of flour. |
| רעי ומאה צאן לבד מאיל וצבי ויחמור | (3) 10 fattened cattle and 20 pasture cattle, and |
| וברברים אבוסים: | 100 herd animals, beside some deer, gazelle, and |
| | fallow deer, and <i>fattened fowl</i> |

Windham agrees with Borowski, arguing that the “fattened fowl” (ברבורים) (אבוסים) of 1 Kgs 5:2–3 [ET: 4:22–23] could point to domesticated birds.⁸⁰ One might perhaps draw support from the appearance of the birds in the Leviticus offering instructions that point to readily available fowl available for purchase.⁸¹

The depiction in Jer 5:26–28 offers similar data in this regard:

| | |
|--------------------------|---|
| כי־נמצאו בעמי רשעים | (26) For wicked (ones) are found among my people, |
| ישור כשך יקושים | he lies in wait like ones setting snares, |
| הציבו משחית אנשים ילכדו: | they set a trap; they capture men. |
| ככלוב מלא עוף | (27) Like a cage full of birds, |
| כן בתיהם מלאים מרמה | thus their houses are filled with treachery. |
| עליכן גדלו ויעשירו: | In this way they become great and wealthy. |
| שמנו עשתו ... | (28) They become fat [and] sleek ... |

Verses 27–28 depict birds as captive and fattened. However, if v. 26 is justifiably added to the context, then the caged birds appear of a wild variety, caught by trapping. For the metaphorical sense of the text to be understood, the captive men at the end of v. 26 must originally have maintained some sense of freedom that the wicked took away from them in the same way that a fowler ensnares wild birds.

Taking the two texts together, the fattened birds of 1 Kgs 5:3 [ET: 4:23] and the comparison of those ensnared by the wicked with fattened birds in cages in Jer 5:26–28 do indicate that birds *in some way* could be kept for food. However, there is more than one way for birds to come into the seller's possession. Why not consider capture as an option, given the iconographic evidence for capture, force feeding in Egypt, and textual evidence in Jer 5:26?

The Egyptians domesticated a small number of bird species, though they trapped many other kinds of birds. Most of these birds took part in great semi-annual migrations from the colder regions of Asia and Europe to Africa in the fall months (of the Northern Hemisphere) and from Africa back north in the spring. Ancient Egyptians kept great numbers of them for consumption in pens after

⁸⁰ The meaning of this phrase remains unclear. Cf. HALOT, 154: states “onomatopoeic word,” and then cites Noth, *Könige*, 58: “not to explain any more,” going on to note other suggestions such as cuckoo, goose, and young chicken.

⁸¹ Mary Ruth Windham, “An Examination of the Relationship between Humans and Animals in the Hebrew Bible” (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 2012), 39.

capture until eating them.⁸² Thus one might envision a continuum between the completely wild animal or bird, then perhaps birds or animals trapped and kept for consumption, those tamed, and at the other end of the spectrum, animals like cattle and sheep, which were bred and raised in domestic settings.

In fact, this raises the question of definitions: what does one mean by *domestication*, and how does one identify a *domesticated* species? Providing a summary of the biological identifiers of domestication, C. Driscoll et al. remark:

Hard definitions are elusive because domestication is a continuous transition, attributes differ by species, and genes and environment interact to produce selectable characteristics that may vary with circumstance. However, an interconnected and characteristic suite of modifiable traits involving physiology, morphology and behavior are often associated with domestication. Critically, all domesticates manifest a remarkable tolerance of proximity to (or outright lack of fear of) people. Reproductive cycle changes such as polyestrusness and adaptations to a new (and often poorer) diet are typical. Common physical and physiological recurrences among domesticated mammals include: dwarfs and giants, piebald coat color, wavy or curly hair, fewer vertebrae, shorter tails, rolled tails, and floppy ears or other manifestations of neoteny (the retention of juvenile features into sexual maturity). Behaviorally too, domestication is not a single trait but a suite of traits, comprising elements affecting mood, emotion, agnostic and affiliative behavior, and social communication that all have been modified in some way.⁸³

To summarize and apply this definition to the discussion of birds in the ancient Near East, specifically the southern Levant associated with the biblical texts, several indicators of *domestication* could play a significant role:

- (1) Tolerance of proximity to humans, in the sense that the animal will not flee proximity to humans if given the opportunity,
- (2) Change in reproductive cycle,
- (3) Adaptation of diet,
- (4) Changes or accentuations of specific physiological features,⁸⁴
- (5) Behavioral changes.

However, of these changes, very few appear in the currently available material, iconographic, or textual sources. Changes in the physiological features of cattle, sheep, goats, and horses set these animals off from their wild counterparts. This

⁸² See below, 2.2 for more detail.

⁸³ Carlos A. Driscoll, David W. Macdonald, and Stephen J. O'Brien, "From Wild Animals to Domestic Pets, an Evolutionary View of Domestication," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 106.Supplement_1 (2009): 9972.

⁸⁴ Abra Spiciarich has suggested in personal communication that changes in bone structure represents one of the major identifiable developments in the faunal record of the chicken population in the past 1,000 years would be analogous to what one might hope to find in the ancient record. Salonen perhaps argues for such a change evident in the *philology* of Akkadian for the "turtledove" (See below, 2.3). For similar conclusions to my own, see Osten-Sacken, *Untersuchungen zur Geflügelwirtschaft*, 21.

is not the case for pigeons/doves. Likewise, one might suggest increased docility for the herd and flock animals. Criteria 2–3 play little role in available sources.

The first criterion of proximity to humans does appear in ancient sources. With regard to birds, the need to cage the birds in Jer 5:26–28 could disqualify these birds from being domestic. On the flip side, the use of domesticated geese in Egypt to lure wild fowl into the reach of the fowler in iconographic depictions shows a special relationship between humans and these animals. Furthermore, while perhaps outside these specific categories, the *introduction* of the chicken (*Gallus gallus*) by humans to the ancient Near East over the course of the second millennium BCE indicates the domesticated nature of this species.

Therefore, the question of *which* birds fall into the various categories of consumed birds in the pre-Hellenistic periods also proves significant. According to the faunal remains gathered to date, the goose, particularly the graylag goose, stands as the best candidate for “domesticated,” better than the chicken or dove/pigeon (*Columba* species). In Egypt and in Mesopotamia, temple records and specific terms indicate the keeping of geese.⁸⁵ Remains of the goose constitute the most frequently found avian remains in the southern Levant for a domesticated bird, though they do not feature prominently in the Bible. Their possible appearance in 1 Kgs 5:3 [ET: 4:23] marks the sole place they might be found. Furthermore, they were clearly domesticated in Egypt.

Given that the domestic chicken (*Gallus gallus*) is not native to the southern Levant, their appearance does suggest human involvement and therefore assumedly domestication as well. However, as I will discuss below, their remains only become prominent in the territory of Israel/Judah in the *Hellenistic period*.

It is more difficult to apprehend the status of the pigeon/dove (*Columba livia*) with regard to domestication because their faunal remains lack features that distinguish between the domestic and wild varieties. The best support for any domestication comes from Akkadian philology (and the Transjordanian dovecote), which I will discuss below.

However, evidence in the biblical texts proves wanting. In addition to the two texts already discussed, Riede calls on a different text, Isa 60:8, and supposes: “Vermutlich seit dem 6. Jh. v. Chr. gab es für die domestizierten Vögel entsprechende Taubenschläge (Jes 60,8).”⁸⁶ Yet the word he translates “Taubenschläge” (“dovecote”) is אַרְבַּתֵּיהֶם, literally “their lattices/windows.” As Dalman notes in his early survey of animal usage, wild dove/pigeons stand in the foreground in the Hebrew Bible, so this verse more likely has holes in the rocks in view.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ Ibid., 197–98.

⁸⁶ Riede, “Tauben.”

⁸⁷ Gustaf Dalman, *Arbeit und Sitte in Palästina: Zeltleben, Vieh- und Milchwirtschaft, Jagd, Fischfang*, vol. 6 of *Beiträge zur Förderung christlicher Theologie* 2/33 (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1939), 95. Another option is that the birds had found places in the sanctuary buildings to build their nests; see Walter C. Bouzard, jr., “Doves in the Windows: Isaiah 60:8 in Light of Ancient

In any case, this discussion of the boundary between “domestic” and “wild” with regard to birds raises the question of the relationship between the *household* boundary and the altar (rather than the *table* and the altar).⁸⁸ This open question takes shape around the identification of the birds sacrificed, which birds might have been domesticated, and whether the birds sacrificed consisted of wild or domestic birds, and just what one means by “domesticated.”

On the whole, I argue that scholarship should abandon the presupposition that “Israelites” – especially according to P – only sacrificed “domestic” animals. Several lines of argument undermine this assumption. First is the fact that the Iron Age I installation at Mt. Ebal contains deer remains in what was likely a cultic setting, which shows that a sacrificial tradition bearing a number of similarities to those later appearing in the biblical texts.⁸⁹ Second, following Staubli and Watts, there are questions whether the birds are all doves (and pigeons) in the Leviticus (and Num 6:10) offering lists. Even if they are, this does not guarantee these birds were domesticated. And third, Mesopotamian and Punic evidence present alternative comparative evidence showing further use of wild animals in sacrificial settings, in contrast to the Ugaritic evidence often cited in support of the sole use of domesticated animals in sacrifice.

With regard to Mt. Ebal, the cultic sacrifice of fallow deer indicates clear use of a non-domesticated animal in the southern Levant. One might question, however, whether such action was carried out by “Israelites.” Zertal finds that much of the practice follows the (later) prescriptions found in Leviticus in terms of sacrificial and slaughtering method, though of course not the presence of fallow deer – thus explained as an early or proto- “Israelite” practice later abandoned.⁹⁰

Mesopotamian Lament Traditions,” in *David and Zion: Biblical Studies in Honor of J. J. M. Roberts*, ed. Bernard Frank Batto and Kathryn L. Roberts (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2004), 307–17.

⁸⁸ There is little doubt about a connection between table and altar, as shown by Ronald Hendel, “Table and Altar: The Anthropology of Food in the Priestly Torah,” in *To Break Every Yoke: Essays in Honor of Marvin L. Chaney*, ed. R. B. Coote and N. K. Gottwald, *Social World of Biblical Antiquity* 3 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2007), 131–48; Alfred Marx, “Mahl und Mahlgemeinschaft zur Zeit des zweiten Tempels gemäss der Priesterschrift,” in *Der eine Gott und das gemeinschaftliche Mahl: Inklusion und Exklusion biblischer Vorstellungen von Mahl und Gemeinschaft im Kontext antiker Festkultur*, ed. Wolfgang Weiss, 2. corrected ed., *Biblich-Theologische Studien* 113 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Theologie, 2012), 11–29. Yet this connection does not adequately demarcate the reasons for the particular animals chosen for offerings in the pentateuchal sources.

⁸⁹ Cf. Houston, *Purity and Monotheism*, 149. He notes the sacrifice of fallow deer himself. However, he fails to incorporate this datum into his conclusion that Israel only sacrificed domestic animals.

⁹⁰ Adam Zertal, “An Early Iron Age Cultic Site on Mount Ebal: Excavation Seasons 1982–1987: Preliminary Report,” *TA* 9 (1986): 105–65. Fallow deer made up approximately 10% of the total faunal remains and 21% in the central structure, according to Ralph K. Hawkins, “The Iron Age I Structure on Mount Ebal: Excavation and Interpretation” (Ph.D. diss., Andrews University, 2007). See pp. 101–267, for compelling arguments in support of the cultic nature of the site.

The importance of this argument here lies in the undercutting of the widely-held premise that ancients, especially the Israelites, only sacrificed domesticated animals. Similar sacrificial practice of wild animals occurred in Mesopotamia, where wild game – including bandicoot rats! – appeared at the divine table.⁹¹

Turning to the sacrificial fowl in the biblical texts, translations usually render both terms in Leviticus תור and בני יונה as types of doves or pigeons in keeping with the Septuagint and Targumic translations. However, when considering the question of domestication, while rock doves / domestic pigeons – which are the same species of *Columba livia* – appear in the archaeological record, one cannot distinguish between the wild and the domestic varieties on the basis of the zooarchaeological material examined thus far.⁹² Neither have archaeology or the study of iconography identified any structures where people kept the birds in the Levant prior to the Hellenistic period columbaria, such as those from Hellenistic period Maresha and Ramat Rahel, except for the lone exception of 'Ain al-Baida, Jordan. And this single discovery contrasts the great rise in dovecotes in the Hellenistic period.

It may be helpful to turn to comparative contexts for insight on this issue. Houlihan argues, “It is our contention then that the Egyptians were familiar with and domesticated two species of dove, the Turtle Dove [*Streptopelia turtur*] and another variety, without any neck markings, maybe the Laughing Dove [*Streptopelia senegalensis*], and commonly used one name (*mnwt*) for both.”⁹³ In support he notes that offering bearers often carry turtledoves in depictions found in tombs and sanctuaries. This evidence certainly indicates that they function as part of the sacrificial system, but it does not mean that they were domesticated.

General claims are also often made for much earlier domestication of pigeons, perhaps receiving some support from the flood narrative in Gen 8:8–12.⁹⁴ However, even though the homing abilities of pigeons are extremely well documented and appropriated throughout modern history, it could be that the help provided by these birds in ancient Israel, Egypt, and Phoenicia related more to their migratory patterns, to which Wenamun (eleventh century BCE) refers: “Do you not see the migrant birds going down to Egypt a second time?”⁹⁵ The earliest messenger role of birds comes from Medinet Habu, which depicts Ramesses III's

⁹¹ Joann Scurlock, “Animal Sacrifice in Ancient Mesopotamian Religion,” in Collins, *A History of the Animal World*, 394.

⁹² Paul Croft, “Archaeozoological Studies Section A: The Osteological Remains (Mammalian and Avian),” in *The Renewed Archaeological Excavations at Lachish (1973–1994)*, ed. David Ussishkin, Publications of the Institute of Archaeology 4 (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University Press, 2004), 2308.

⁹³ Houlihan, *The Birds of Ancient Egypt*, 105.

⁹⁴ Cf. Keel and Winter, *Vögel als Boten*, 80–91. The Mesopotamian traditions, as their discussion shows, focuses much more on the raven than on the dove, the addition of which appears to have been a West-Semitic adaptation brought about by the non-Priestly source.

⁹⁵ “The Report of Wenamun” trans. Miriam Lichtheim (COS 1.41:92).

Festival of Min (twelfth century BCE). In several scenes, four birds are released as messengers to the four corners of the world to announce the enthronement of the pharaoh. In this case, the birds are likely European rollers, again a bird well known for its migratory habits.⁹⁶ A similar role may have been accorded to the pigeon.

As a result, little comparative evidence supports the early domestication of the dove/pigeon even in Egypt, in spite of Houlihan's claim. In fact, Brewer instead concludes that only two fowl were domesticated, the greylag and the white fronted goose.⁹⁷ He calls upon the category of "tame" as a category between "domesticated" and "wild," proposing that the vast quantities of fowl available for consumption (and as pets) came from trapping migratory birds.⁹⁸

Applying these observations from the Egyptian context to Israel raises questions about the understanding of an inward progression through concentric circles from wild to domesticated to altar. This conception appears, for example, in Milgrom's interpretation of the animals acceptable for "food" as representing respectively the nations, Israel, and Yahweh.⁹⁹ Perhaps biblical scholars should include *at least* tame or caught animals among the categories of animals that could function as offerings in the Priestly or other texts on the basis of this first line of evidence.

For the second line of inquiry, several interpreters demur to the traditional identification of תור as turtledove.¹⁰⁰ Staubli provides the most detailed arguments against the traditional understanding: he proposes that the term instead began as the designation for a bird from the family *phasianidae* in the early layers of the Hebrew Bible and the time period of the Israelite/Judahite cult contained therein.¹⁰¹ Others, quite recently Watts's commentary on Leviticus, understand the term to refer to the domesticated chicken, *Gallus gallus*, at least in the P texts of Leviticus.¹⁰²

The main arguments against the turtledove (*Streptopelia turtur*) is as follows: why would the Hebrew Bible name two kinds of birds of the same family

⁹⁶ Keel and Winter, *Vögel als Boten*, 133–36.

⁹⁷ Douglas Brewer, "Hunting, Animal Husbandry and Diet in Ancient Egypt," in Collins, *A History of the Animal World*, 453.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 435–36. Brewer surmises, "The wild bird resources of Egypt were so large that widespread domestication of birds simply may not have been as efficient as hunting and trapping."

⁹⁹ Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, 719.

¹⁰⁰ The term appears 14 times: Gen 15:9; Lev 1:14; 5:7; 5:11; 12:6; 12:8; 14:22, 30; 15:29; Num 6:10; Ps 74:19; Song 2:12; Jer 8:7.

¹⁰¹ Staubli, "Hühneropfer im Alten Israel," 355–59.

¹⁰² Watts, *Leviticus 1–10*, 219. His argument seems to misunderstand Staubli's presentation when writing "Staubli (2008) argued that תור/תור originally meant 'chicken ...,' unless Watts means 'partridge' by 'wild hen.'" This confusion likely arose from the German term "Hühnervogel," which *can* mean "chicken," but which Staubli uses more broadly for partridges and various species of wild fowl in the preexilic period.

(*Columbidae*), when both the dove/pigeon and turtledove might be subsumed under the term *יונה/יונה*?¹⁰³ A second argument against this identification arises from the faunal evidence as well: very few positively identified remains of the turtledove species appear in the record from the Late Bronze to the Early Roman periods at all. Finally, if the assumption that Israel was only to sacrifice domestic animals were correct, then *Streptopelia turtur* would be a poor option, given that it is a migratory bird.¹⁰⁴ As a result, the question arises as to what *תור* may instead designate. Perhaps “turtledove” is an innovation by the LXX translators, as I will discuss below.

First, however, what information do the biblical text and comparative cultures provide about doves/pigeons? I begin with the undisputed term, *יונה*. The dove or pigeon (*יונה*) itself appears in HB/OT numerous times: in the flood narrative (Gen 8:8–12), offering lists (Lev 1:14; 5:7, 11; 12:6, 8; 14:22, 30; etc.), and as a term of endearment (Song 2:14; 4:1) among others. Some texts highlight their moaning sound (Isa 38:14; 59:11; Nah 2:7),¹⁰⁵ while Song 1:15; 4:1 compares the eyes of the woman lover to those of doves/pigeons.

As mentioned above, some evidence could support the domestication of this fowl, in some contexts, such as in Mesopotamia, even prior to the large columbaria constructed in the Hellenistic period and later, such as at Tel Maresha. Salonen proposes an etymology for the logogram of *sukanninu* (turtledove) – TU.GUR₄ to mean “fat dove.” He postulates that it constitutes a mix between a domesticated *Columbia livia* – Akkadian *summatu*, which Utnapishtum sends out in Gilgamesh Tablet XI’s version of the flood, and which is found in captivity from the Old Babylonian period onward¹⁰⁶ – and the wild stock dove (*Columba oenas*). He postulates that the bird becomes domesticated, rather than simply being caught and fattened. This *sukanninu* frequently ends up on the Mesopotamian table as well as in the sanctuary.¹⁰⁷ In fact, ten thousand appear on the table in Assurnasipal’s Calah banquet. However, as CAD posits, it may rather be that they were caught and then fattened, suggesting instead that they remained undomesticated:

¹⁰³ Staubli, “Hühneropfer im Alten Israel,” 362, gives relevant evidence for why this expression might be understood as a genus term.

¹⁰⁴ Contrary to what Staubli argues (*ibid.*, 363), at least one species of non-migratory dove is found in Palestine. One is the Eurasian collared dove (*Streptopelia decaocto*). Another sometimes placed in this genus is the laughing dove (*Spilopelia senegalensis*), which Houlihan argues that Egyptians domesticated, as I note above. However, many migratory birds were caught and kept in large numbers, as depicted in Egyptian iconography.

¹⁰⁵ In Mesopotamia the *Columbia livia* is *summatu*, written as tu-musen. Though often consumed, they also appear in the *Šumma Alu* omen texts, crying in someone’s house (CT 38 31 r 14; CT 38 2.41).

¹⁰⁶ CAD: S, 379.

¹⁰⁷ Salonen, *Vögel und Vogelfang*, 251, 254.

The suggestion ‘turtledove’ is based on the onomatopoeic Sum. name *tukur*; possibly the *sukanninu* is a wild dove, as it is caught by the fowler; it can also be kept and fattened ... among domestic fowl (ducks and geese), albeit in much smaller numbers.¹⁰⁸

In fact, the note of the “much smaller numbers” may be the decisive evidence in suggesting that they were *caught* rather than domesticated, also underlying the impressive nature of the 10,000 on Ashurnasirpal’s banquet table. Second, Salonen’s argument is based on the *Columba livia* itself having been domesticated, but there is little evidence for this conclusion. Finally, if one compares with Egypt, it is likely that most birds in Mesopotamia too were caught in the wild and then kept for a time to fatten them up before consumption, rather than breeding in a domestic setting and becoming domesticates.¹⁰⁹

Turning to the southern Levant, the view from the archaeological reports of avian remains also provides little in the way of support for pre-Hellenistic domestication. Analysis of the remains from Jerusalem’s City of David and Ophel have found limited pigeons/dove (*Columba livia*) from Iron Age remains.¹¹⁰ However, by the Early Roman period onward, the numbers increased dramatically.¹¹¹

A second contrary argument comes in the form of views on the contested term תור. Staubli posits that the term originates as a group of wild fowl.¹¹² He leaves unanswered which of several species of wild fowl the תור would denote, suggesting especially the black partridge (*Francolinus francolinus*, Linnaeus, 1766), the chukar partridge (*Alectoris chukar*), and the sand partridge (*Ammoperdix heyi*) as options.¹¹³ All these varieties are typically wild, which carries the abovementioned implications for the origins of the animals used in the cult and the animals on the Israelite table. In terms of comparative Semitics and philology, early in his discussion he suggests that the meaning “turtledove” only arose with the Septuagint.¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁸ CAD: S, 354.

¹⁰⁹ Brewer, “Hunting, Animal Husbandry and Diet in Ancient Egypt,” 453–54.

¹¹⁰ Liora Kolska Horwitz and Eitan Tchernov, “Bird Remains from Areas A, D, H and K,” in *City of David Excavations: Final Report*, ed. Donald T. Ariel, vol. 4 of *Excavations at the City of David 1978–1985, Qedem 35* (Jerusalem: the Institute of Archaeology, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1996), 298–99; eadem, “Subsistence Patterns in Ancient Jerusalem: A Study of Animal Remains,” in *Excavations in the South of the Temple Mount*, ed. Eilat Mazar and Benjamin Mazar, Qedem 29 (Jerusalem: Institute of Archaeology, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1989), 144–54; Karin Tamar and Guy Bar-Oz, “Zooarchaeological Analysis of the Faunal Remains,” in *The Summit of the City of David Excavations 2005–2008: Final Reports*, ed. Eilat Mazar (Jerusalem: Shoham, 2015), 497–510.

¹¹¹ Ram Bouchnick, “Meat Consumption in Israel during the Late Second Temple Period” (Ph.D. diss., University of Haifa, 2011).

¹¹² Staubli, “Hühneropfer im Alten Israel,” 355. He writes, “Anders als bisher geglaubt, sind die in Palästina heimischen Hühnervögel (Halsbandfrankolin, Chukarhuhn und Arabisches Wüstenhuhn) unter dem Namen תור im Opfersystem Israels repräsentiert und gehörten demzufolge auch zur Speise des Volkes und der Gottheit.”

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 361.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 358.

Later in his discussion, however, he appears rather to argue that Jer 8:7 bears witness to a change of meaning for the term within the biblical material itself.¹¹⁵

Given the apparent difficulties within Staubli's own article itself, what does the biblical material indicate? Within the biblical evidence, several important considerations occur. First, in non-sacrificial texts (which are few), Ps 74:19a could imply some kind of a domesticated bird: אֶל־תִּתֵּן לַחַיִּית נֶפֶשׁ תּוֹרֵךְ (May you not give to the wild beast the life of your *tôr*). However, within the context of the psalm, which emphasizes God's sovereignty over all of creation in the past, another interpretation also appears plausible. In support of allowing for the possibility of a wild bird for the תּוֹר, v. 14 speaks of God giving the Leviathan as food to the "inhabitants (עַם, lit. *people*) of the wild" in the past. Because Leviathan does not fit the category of "domesticated animal," and the psalmist fears God's similar treatment of himself, God's תּוֹר, the comparison's emphasis lies instead in that the human psalmist is much more vulnerable than mighty Leviathan, yet their plights could be similar.

Some help may arise from the comparative Semitic evidence that Staubli points to, which is discussed more thoroughly by Salonen. Salonen identifies the Akkadian *tarru*, *darru* (logogram: DAR.MUŠEN) as either the black francolin (*Francolinus francolinus*), the see-see partridge (*Ammoperdix griseogullaris*), or the rock partridge (*Alectoris chukar*).¹¹⁶ CAD, on the other hand, demurs to identify *tarru* as a partridge, or any other particular bird, for that matter. However, it is clear that *tarlugallu* (written DAR.LUGAL.MUŠEN: "royal *tarru* bird") means, or at least came to mean, "rooster."¹¹⁷

Several further pieces of evidence from Akkadian texts provide insight for the biblical discussion. First, in Old Babylonian period Mari, one caught the DAR.MUŠEN and bound them together, indicating that they were not domesticated.¹¹⁸ In spite of this wild character, the term also acquires some religious associations, though not as an offering.¹¹⁹

However, while "turtledove" can appear with the writing TU.GUR₄ (or similar Sumerogram) in Akkadian, the term for "turtledove," as discussed above is quite

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 364.

¹¹⁶ Salonen, *Vögel und Vogelfang*, 151. CAD T:241. Where Driver ("Birds in the Old Testament II," 130) came up with Akk. *turtu* meaning turtledove is unclear when compared with CAD.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 237. Black and Al-Rawi note that the term likely appears in Akkadian *prior* to the introduction of the *Gallus gallus*. In this case, it was applied to the chicken while earlier denoting other (or another) similar birds. See J. A. Black and F. N. H. Al-Rawi, "A Contribution to the Study of Akkadian Bird Names," *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie und Vorderasiatische Archäologie* 77.1 (1987): 199 and n. 6. Also note the more recent discussion of Osten-Sacken, *Untersuchungen zur Geflügelwirtschaft*, 433–36.

¹¹⁸ Arm IV 9.6–7.

¹¹⁹ In terms of its associations, STT IX 341 and CT 41.5 connect the bird with the deity Papsukkal (a messenger god). It also appears in the omen texts of *Šumma Alu* (CT 38 31.15), where a future event is foretold if it cries or rather vomits in a house.

different: *sukkanninu*. These birds eventually end up frequently on the Mesopotamian table.¹²⁰ In any case, while the term is certainly a different one, these turtledoves appear regularly in Akkadian offering lists in large numbers together with doves, in spite of their caught nature.

One can therefore conclude that these turtledoves do function as part of the offerings in Mesopotamia,¹²¹ and one option is that Mesopotamians viewed them as wild fowl that one might catch and fatten. Therefore, *domestication* did not function as a definitive boundary for the category of “sacrificial” animal, at least in Mesopotamia. If this way of thinking influences the conceptions in Israel and the Torah at all, then it may indicate some fluidity in the connection between the boundaries of the Israelite household and the boundaries of the divine table. And this obtains whether תור means “turtledove” or “partridge.” The birds definitely were highly desirable for food in Mesopotamia, given their place as one of the many birds on the menu from Ur in the early periods to Assurnasirpal’s dedication banquet for Calah.¹²²

In addition to the comparative philological evidence from Akkadian, one can garner further support for Staubli’s position in the southern Levant from the recent excavations of Ramat Rahel (several km from Jerusalem) from the late Iron Age II, which uncovered a pit of partridge bones (*Galliformes* – thus from the avian *family* of partridge, not a particular species, though this family does not include doves/pigeons) from a feasting context.¹²³ Two factors, however, mitigate the support offered by this find: First, while feasting and sanctuary sacrifice often overlap in ancient Israel, this does not appear the case in this scenario. Second, Ramat Rahel may not represent typical Judahite/Israelite practice in general, given its strong connections to Assyrian culture.¹²⁴

In any case, partridges – specifically chukar partridge (*Alectoris chukar*)¹²⁵ – made up the major portion of the avian remains of a feast. The excavators posit that after the feast the partakers then deposited the remains of the consumed animals and dishware in a pit dug especially for that purpose. These remains

¹²⁰ Salonen, *Vögel und Vogelfang*, 254.

¹²¹ See CAD S 2:353 for a list of texts.

¹²² The list includes *iššūru rabū, usu, kurkū, mesuki, qārībi, summatu*, TU.GUR₄.MUŠEN, and MUŠEN.TUR.TUR. Cf. D. J. Wiseman, “A New Stela of Aššur-Našir-Pal II,” *Iraq* 14 (1952): 24–44.

¹²³ Deirdre N. Fulton et al., “Feasting in Paradise: Feast Remains from the Iron Age Palace of Ramat Rahel and Their Implications,” *BASOR* 374 (2015): 36. The excavators have identified 38 of 42 animal bones as partridge, one from a goose, and three from a small bird, which they theorize as a songbird. Fulton et al. view fish as the main course of this festive meal.

¹²⁴ See Oded Lipschits, Yuval Gadot, and Dafna Langgut, “The Riddle of Ramat Rahel: The Archaeology of a Royal Persian Edifice,” *Transeu* 41 (2012): 67–68.

¹²⁵ I am grateful to Deirdre Fulton for clarifying this point further for me in private communication.

consisted of sheep, cattle, partridge, goose, a song bird, catfish, sea bream, and other fish.¹²⁶

The excavators explore of the meaning of the elevated consumption of fish and birds in a material fashion, suggesting that the change in the environment, that is, the planting of a paradise complete with a complicated water system, attracted a higher number of birds and provided ponds to keep fish.¹²⁷ If this is the case, then does this event demonstrate diacritical feasting of the Judahite political elite of the late seventh–early sixth century,¹²⁸ in the choice (as elites, they could choose!) of a meal with such a large percentage of fish and birds because this could more easily take place in the environs of a garden setting like Ramat Rahel? Because earlier excavations often encountered increased difficulty in recovering fish and avian remains compared to the recovery of larger mammals, feasting depictions from the surrounding cultures provide insight.

One such depiction that proves insightful appears in the menu of Ashurnasirpal II's banquet dedicating the city of Calah. It indicates that birds and fish had a lower value than quadrupeds, which appear first in the list of meat. However, numerous kinds of birds – including doves and turtledoves/partridges – then come, followed by 10,000 fish (a smaller number in comparison to the quadrupeds and fowl).

Second, in Polyaeus' recounting of Cyrus' banquet, in the middle of the list of animal meat, quite similar to their placement in Ashurnasirpal's menu, one finds:

- Four hundred fat geese.
- Three hundred turtles.
- Six hundred small birds of different kinds.
- Three hundred lambs.
- One hundred goslings.¹²⁹

While not following exactly the same progression, given that lambs and turtles mix in with the fowl, the middle location indicates items of some though not primary importance.

¹²⁶ On the significance of the inclusion of catfish, a prohibited type of water animal, see Omri Lernau, "Remains of Kosher and Non-Kosher Fish in Excavated Sites in Israel" (presented at the The Larger Context of the Biblical Food Prohibitions: Comparative and Interdisciplinary Approaches, Lausanne, 2017). See also my forthcoming discussion, "Aquatic Creatures in the Dietary Laws: What the Biblical and Ancient Eastern Contexts Contribute to Understanding Their Categorization," in *To Eat or Not to Eat?: Collected Essays on the Biblical Dietary Laws* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, forthcoming). In short, catfish and shark or ray remains appear frequently in Bronze through Persian or Hellenistic sites associated with Israelites/Jews.

¹²⁷ Fulton et al., "Feasting in Paradise," 42.

¹²⁸ On the term "diacritical feast" see Michael Dietler, "Theorizing the Feast: Rituals of Consumption, Commensal Politics, and Power in African Contexts," in *Feasts: Archaeological and Ethnographic Perspectives on Food, Politics, and Power*, ed. Michael Dietler and Brian Hayden, Smithsonian Series in Archaeological Inquiry (Washington, D. C.: Smithsonian, 2001), 85–88.

¹²⁹ *Stratagem* IV.3.32, from the late second century CE.

Athenaeus also provides a description of the Persian table, collected from Heracleides of Cumae which includes: “horses and camels, and oxen, and asses, and stags, and an immense number of sheep; and a great many birds too are taken; and the Arabian ostrich [οἱ τε στρουθοὶ οἱ Ἀράβιοι] (and that is a very large animal), and geese, and cocks; ...”¹³⁰ Especially of interest here is the mix of birds, though the appearance of the ostrich (στρουθός), if in fact the same as Hebrew *בַּת יַעֲנָה* in the dietary prohibitions, also proves important below.¹³¹ Chickens are included, but so are geese, which, as is shown by Assurnasipal’s banquet, had been fattened for feasting for many centuries in Mesopotamia before Achaemenid rule, not to mention in Egypt. Therefore, the appearance of *Gallus gallus* in this context has little bearing on their significance in an offering context.

Finally, the third-century BCE Marseilles Tariff (*KAI* 69) written in Punic presents the fees due to priests at the Baal Zaphon sanctuary.¹³² The order of the animals demonstrates a similar situation with regard to the relative value of animals. It begins with cattle *’lp*, then moves to calves, then adult animals of the flock, then their young, and finally to birds. Furthermore, the payment to the priest declines each step of the way. Offering a bull costs ten shekels but a bird $3/4 + 2$ ZR.¹³³

This inscription also distinguishes between two types of birds that worshipers might bring: *’gmn* and *’šš*. These terms remain puzzles. Donner and Röllig note that scholars generally relate the first term to the Semitic root *g-n-n*, “cover, protect,” which leads some to the conclusion of a domesticated bird, with the second term, *’šš*, then extrapolated to refer to wild birds.¹³⁴ These terms, both given the precarious identification of their meaning and also their context in a *Punic* cultic setting from the third century BCE, do not feature as a central plank in my argument. However, along with other strands, they do point toward questioning the *presupposition* (rather than conclusion) by biblical interpreters of the domestic nature of the *תור* in the Leviticus offering texts. Staubli’s suggestion has plenty of merit once one strips away the assumption that birds for sanctuary offering had to be domestic.

¹³⁰ 4.145. This source, the *Deipnosophistae*, arose from around the turn of the third century CE as a collection of earlier sources. On the relationship of such lists of provisions with royal feasting in the Hebrew Bible see Carol Meyers, “Menu: Royal Repasts and Social Class in Biblical Israel,” in *Feasting in the Archaeology and Texts of the Hebrew Bible and Ancient Near East*, ed. Peter Altmann and Janling Fu (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2014), 129–47.

¹³¹ The Greek term *στρουθός* typically does function as the rendering for *bat ya’anah*. See below, 3.4., for further discussion.

¹³² Whether in Marseilles or Carthage remains unclear.

¹³³ A denomination smaller than a quarter-shekel according to *KAI* (vol. 2:85). It only appears in this inscription (*KAI* 69 lines 7, 9, 11) and *KAI* 74 line 7.

¹³⁴ *KAI* 2:85–86: “einschließen, schützen’ ... ‘eingeschlossener, d. h. domestizierter Vogel’ ... Im Gegensatz dazu mag צִפְרָ (צפר) ein Wildgefögel sein (oder gegenüber den nicht mehr fliegenden Haustieren, überhaupt ‘fliegendes ...’” Cf. *DNWSI* 1:10, 230; 2:973–74.

Staubli goes on to conjecture that the widespread introduction of domesticated chickens by the Assyrians and later the Persians led to the decline of consumption of indigenous types of partridges.¹³⁵ While *Gallus gallus* (chicken) was present earlier, as I will show below, the presence of *Alectoris chukar* (chukar partridge), the one species of partridge posited by Staubli that is actually common in the faunal record, does decline significantly beginning in the Persian period. However, the species does not disappear from the southern Levant, which poses a difficulty to the postulate that they were forgotten. More likely, in my opinion, the meaning of the term was lost in the Greek-speaking Jewish community in Egypt: chukar partridge were just never among the many types of fowl present in Egypt.¹³⁶

Turning to Watts's suggestion that the תור could include the domesticated chicken, he offers three reasons in support of his contention that domestic chickens were offered in preexilic Israel: (1) Staubli offers no good reason why תור could not include domestic chickens; (2) nowhere else does P allow for the offering of wild game; and (3) P may not be preexilic.¹³⁷ In order to evaluate this proposal, I first summarize the non-biblical evidence around the *Gallus gallus* in the region in the Iron Age and Persian period, after which I will return to his arguments.

There is little question that the southern Levantine communities display familiarity with the hen and rooster of *Gallus gallus*. The rooster appears in ancient Near Eastern iconography in Mesopotamia on a fourteenth-century BCE Assyrian ivory and in Egypt on an ostrakon from Thebes from the thirteenth century. The southern Levant boasts of a twelfth–ninth-century BCE seal from el-Jib (Gibeon) depicting a rooster. The clearest support comes in the form of the sixth century BCE seal of Ya'azanyahu from Tell en-Nasbah (Mizpah, 12 km northwest of Jerusalem), which contains the depiction of a rooster.¹³⁸ This era – the sixth–fifth century exilic and postexilic periods – constitutes the high point for iconographic depictions of roosters in the region of Israel.¹³⁹ In addition one might include two unprovenanced pieces, a scarab of two roosters facing off that dates, on the basis of the paleography of the inscribed *ḥsr/ḥrs*, to the ninth or

¹³⁵ Staubli, "Hühneropfer im Alten Israel," 365–66. As I will discuss below, his reconstruction has been proven false in one sense. Chicken were present in the southern Levant far earlier, as the zooarchaeological data and iconography shows. They were consumed as well, as cut marks indicate.

¹³⁶ As a result, one might ask when partridges stopped being offered in Israel and Judah, assuming that P does reflect the realities of sacrifice on this matter at some point in time. My discussion ends in the early Hellenistic period, so a more thorough discussion of the change, which I would posit for this period, might prove worthwhile.

¹³⁷ Watts, *Leviticus 1–10*, 220.

¹³⁸ See the forthcoming overview of the iconography in Jürg Egger, "Rooster," *IDD*. Also William F. Badè, "The Seal of Jaazaniah," *ZAW* 51 (1933): 150–56.

¹³⁹ Egger, "Rooster."

eight century (Avigad 1142) and a stamp seal impression with a rooster whose head is sunken aggressively (Avigad 13), inscribed with *lyhw'hz bn hmlk* “belonging to Jeho’ahaz, son of the king.”¹⁴⁰ In any case, when compared with the finds from Greece to Mesopotamia, the Neo-Babylonian and Persian periods emerge as the most prolific for representations of chickens (esp. roosters) in the iconographic record.

In the biblical text there is the questionable translation of Prov 30:31 זרזיר as “rooster” in many translations, though by others as “greyhound.”¹⁴¹ Similarly suspect is the translation of שכוי in Job 38:36 as rooster, for which interpreters also suggest a variety of other options.¹⁴² Even more questionable is the proposal that תכיים in 1 Kgs 10:22/2 Chr 9:21, means chicken; again, other renderings (in this case “peacock” or “ape”) prove more likely, though the term is absent from the OG, and therefore it may represent a Hellenistic period addition.¹⁴³ Therefore it is better to rely on the material and iconographic evidence.

In addition to the iconography, A. Spiciarich has recently collated the zooarchaeological data from the Late Bronze to the Early Roman periods for the avian remains.¹⁴⁴ Her data show that investigators have identified remains of *Gallus gallus* from the Iron I northern coastal site of Tell Dor (9) and the northern site of Shiloh (5), and in Iron Age (unspecified) remains from the coastal site of Tel Michal (5). From Jerusalem, the City of David excavations have yielded minimal amounts from Iron II (3: from Areas M1 + D1), and the Ophel as well (6). Moving later to Iron IIC and the Babylonian period, again a minimal amount has emerged from the Negev site of Tel ‘Ira and Jerusalem (City of David Area G = 1). The amount of chicken remains around the same percentage in Persian Yehud (Horvat Zimri = 2; City of David Area G = 1), the Negev (Tel ‘Ira = 3), and the northern site of Tel Qashish (1). In contrast, a large number appear among the massive bone assemblage in coastal Tel Michal (51) at a time when Phoenician traders and a Persian army garrison dominated the site.¹⁴⁵ In general, however, the numbers remain fairly constant at a rather low number. *Gallus gallus* bones typically make up around 2% of the animal bone remains from pre-Hellenistic sites.

¹⁴⁰ Nahman Avigad and Benjamin Sass, *Corpus of West Semitic Stamp Seals* (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities: Israel Exploration Society: Institute of Archaeology, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1997). The latter’s authenticity is suspect.

¹⁴¹ “Rooster” follows the LXX translation, ἀλέκτωρ, but the comparative Semitic evidence points in different directions: Syriac *zazī/ūrā* and Arabic *zurzūr* both mean starling, while Arabic *zirzirru* means migratory locust.

¹⁴² LXX offers ποικιλικήν, a neologism also found in Exod 37:21 meaning “embroidered.” For a brief overview of the options and reasons against understanding the term as “rooster,” see Norman C. Habel, *The Book of Job, a Commentary*, OTL (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1985), 523.

¹⁴³ See HALOT: 1731.

¹⁴⁴ Spiciarich and Altmann, “Chickens, Partridges, and the /Tor/.”

¹⁴⁵ Ze’ev Herzog, “Michal, Tell,” *OEANE* 4:21–22.

Croft sums up both the evidence for her analysis at Lachish and the broader region aptly: “The extreme paucity of their [chicken] remains during the Iron Age indicates that chickens must not have been very common at the time at Lachish, as was also the case elsewhere.”¹⁴⁶ Nonetheless, their presence is indubitable.

The major change in their numbers comes about in the Hellenistic and especially by the early Roman period, when the abundance of *Gallus gallus* skyrockets.¹⁴⁷ The most striking find from the Hellenistic period comes from Maresha: chicken bones represent 29% of the *total animals* found, according to the number of identified species (NISP), which includes sheep, goats, cattle, etc.¹⁴⁸ To take one prominent example from the early Roman period, they represent 38% of the avian remains found in the City of David excavations by Horwitz and Tchernov.¹⁴⁹

What can one glean from this relatively consistent but small number of remains until the Hellenistic period? Perry-Gal et al. conclude that the change represents a shift in dietary patterns away from cockfighting and ritual activities (which they do not explain) toward consumption.¹⁵⁰ This conclusion also receives support from the depictions of roosters in seals and other iconography. I suggest that prior to the Hellenistic period, some elites alone in Israel/Judah kept a couple hens to breed roosters. Their place with the elites also aligns with the Akkadian/Sumerian designation “royal-hen” (*tarlugallu*): this animal appeared at the royal court and was accordingly identified “hen of the king.”¹⁵¹

The Lachish evidence shows that the inhabitants ate the hens quite early on as well,¹⁵² but the real interest was in roosters, likely for sport or perhaps merely to keep in the royal gardens along with other exotic animals, rather than in raising domestic chickens for consumption.¹⁵³ If they had been interested in raising

¹⁴⁶ Croft, “Lachish, The Osteological Remains (Mammalian and Avian),” 2310.

¹⁴⁷ Lee Perry-Gal, Guy Bar-Oz, and Adi Erlich, “Livestock Animal Trends in Idumean Maresha: Preliminary Analysis of Cultural and Economic Aspects,” *ARAM* 27 (2015): 217. They state, “This new food preference likely reflects the strong Hellenistic influences that characterizes Maresha, Tel Anafa, Sha’ar Ha’amakim and Tel Dor.”

¹⁴⁸ Lee Perry-Gal et al., “Earliest Economic Exploitation of Chicken outside East Asia: Evidence from the Hellenistic Southern Levant,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 112.32 (2015): 2.

¹⁴⁹ Horwitz and Tchernov, “Bird Remains from Areas A, D, H and K.” Some percentages are even higher.

¹⁵⁰ “Livestock Animal Trends in Idumean Maresha,” 216.

¹⁵¹ Similarly Osten-Sacken, *Untersuchungen zur Geflügelwirtschaft*, 429.

¹⁵² Very minimal evidence of egg consumption has appeared from Iron Age Ekron in microarchaeological analysis that likely has found chicken egg shell remains; see Arlene Miller Rosen, “‘BA’ Guide to Artifacts: Microartifacts and the Study of Ancient Societies,” *BA* 54 (1991): 97–103. She also concludes that these were items restricted for elite consumption (*ibid.*, 101).

¹⁵³ Perhaps a counter argument could be made from the numerous depictions of roosters on a pedestal in Mesopotamian iconography, which one could interpret as a cultic (offering?) association. However, these depictions may represent the deity Nusku (cf. Osten-Sacken, *Untersuchungen zur Geflügelwirtschaft*, 442–43). This association has yet to appear in the Levant,

them for food, it is likely that they would have realized sometime in the centuries between the introduction of chickens in the Middle Bronze Age and the Iron Age II that these creatures represent fowl one can easily raise for consumption.¹⁵⁴

From this evidence, I return to Watts's arguments. His third argument about the time of the emergence of P (preexilic, exilic, or postexilic) has little relevance because the drastic rise in chicken remains only takes place in the Hellenistic period. It does not appear that chickens became very widespread before this time. In any case, perhaps domestic chickens *may* have been included along with other birds as תור. However, Watts's conclusion proves difficult with regard to both the iconographic data from the Iron Age (or rather, pre-Hellenistic periods) and the related *place* of this animal in the thought world of ancient Israel: its place was as a fighting bird more so than as food.

Furthermore, he, too, is stuck with the conundrum of why the chicken would then have changed its name in Hebrew? Why does it become known under the simple term עוף or תרנגול (*tarnegol* arises clearly from the Sumerian > Akkadian term) in rabbinic literature? If one continues to hold the analogy between the human table and the divine table, then there would be good reason to *keep* them as part of the offerings, especially when one considers the change in the animal's function in the Hellenistic and Roman periods into a bird for consumption.

Third, his reliance on the extension of P's supposed limitation of the altar to domestic animals does not hold true for the dove/pigeon, so one should abandon it as a necessary criterion for the תור, whatever its identification.

Watts's proposal that the תור meant "chicken" does not represent the most viable option for a textual tradition from the preexilic, exilic, or postexilic periods. While domestic chickens *may* have been acceptable on the preexilic altar, they were not viewed primarily as food until the Hellenistic period, which engendered a massive change in the relationship between human and hen.

With regard to the תור, the best understanding of its field of meaning concerns members of the family of *Phasianidae* fowl, especially chukar partridges but also possibly including the random chicken. Thus, the term תור in the Hebrew Bible likely designates a broader category – a family and not a species.

If pressed for an explanation as to why the LXX changes the understanding of תור to turtledove, as mentioned above this may result from the lack of partridges,

and the biblical text does not emphasize roosters in the sacrificial prescriptions. Furthermore, apotropaic functions arise for roosters that, once again, remain absent from the biblical text.

¹⁵⁴ Note the evidence for use of *Gallus gallus* for purposes other than food in a number of cultures. See Naomi Sykes, "A Social Perspective on the Introduction of Exotic Animals: The Case of the Chicken," *World Archaeology* 44.1 (2012): 158–69. She notes (*ibid.*, 160): "Indeed, in the case of domestic fowl it would seem that the principal motivation for their spread from Asia was never their primary products but rather those that could be 'cropped' through life: their sound (recent genetic work on fowl from the Pacific islands suggested that sea-faring populations may have valued cockerels as 'fog horns' (Hannote pers. comm.), perhaps for their eggs, probably for their feathers and certainly for cockfighting."

especially the chukar partridge (*Alectoris chukar*) in Egypt. This bird only spread as far as the Sinai Peninsula, and Houlihan does not even include it in his study of the birds of ancient Egyptian iconography. On the flip side, the turtledove appears in Egyptian art quite frequently.¹⁵⁵

In sum, this discussion of the cultic use of birds has shown that the distinction between wild fowl and domestic fowl in relation to the sacrificial altar proves considerably fuzzier than often proposed. The evidence in favor of this conclusion arises from a number of perspectives: (1.) non-domestic animals appear on the altars in surrounding cultures; (2.) the likelihood that the תור designates a partridge or some combination of *Phasianidae* family fowl; and (3.) the likelihood that many or even all doves/pigeons may have been caught in the wild and kept until slaughter, rather than raised domestically at all periods in the Israel and Judah until the Hellenistic period. The blurring of this distinction paves the way for the possibility, or even likelihood, that the criteria governing the determination of clean and unclean (or abhorrent) types of animal meat also display multiple perspectives rather than a singular logic.

1.4 Militaristic Connections

While the sacred fowl appear in similar texts as the polar opposite of the prohibited birds, many interpreters argue for considerably more *conceptual* proximity between the prohibited birds of Lev 11/Deut 14 and avian representations appearing in contexts of war. As noted already,¹⁵⁶ when birds appear in the numerous biblical contexts that concern battle: two themes predominate. In some cases, they display connections with the onset of the fighting itself, but in the majority of texts they mop up afterwards. In other words, they can play an important role both as a predator and in the related notion of eating the flesh of the dead after a battle.

When marking the onset of fighting, birds represent the speed of the attackers. One example concerns the עי representing Cyrus and his army in Isa 46:11a: “Calling from the east an עיט / From a distant land, the man who carries out my (*ketiv*: his) counsel.”¹⁵⁷ Habakkuk 1:8b likewise focuses on the speed of the

¹⁵⁵ Houlihan, *The Birds of Ancient Egypt*, 103–6. As mentioned by Stefan Schorch (personal communication), a problem with this explanation lies in the understanding of תור as “turtledove” in rabbinic Hebrew.

¹⁵⁶ See 1.2 Bird Depictions in the Hebrew Bible.

¹⁵⁷ Note the similarities in Akkadian royal annals: Daniel David Luckenbill, *Historical Records of Assyria: From the Earliest Times to Sargon*, vol. 1 of *Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylonia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1926). Ashurnasirpal II compares himself and his soldiers similarly: (ibid., 143, 168): “I stormed the city; my warriors flex like birds against them.” For both Ashurnasirpal (ibid., 156) and Shalmaneser III (ibid., 229): My warriors pursued (*lit.*, flew at) them like the (divine) Zū-bird.” On mythical birds, see the next section (1.5).

cavalry analogous to speedy birds: “Their horsemen come from far away; they fly like an eagle [נשר] swift to devour” (NRSV). A similar image appears in Lam 4:19, where the pursuers chase like נשר of the sky. The depiction of the Assyrian king and army in Isa 8:8 heaps up several images focusing primarily on Assyria as a flood; one minor image, however, concerns the outstretched wings that fill Judah. In these and several other places, such as texts and images from the larger Mesopotamian context, birds take on decidedly different connotations from those situations where they represent the prey or where they represent the protector. Different types of birds come into view. Simply stated, some birds are predators, others prey.

Birds also appear frequently at the conclusion of the battle. One example appears in Jer 7:33: “The corpses of this people will be food for the birds of the air and for the animals of the earth, and no one will frighten them away.” Somewhat opaquer is Jer 15:3, which seems to depict an order of events: first the sword, then dogs dragging away bodies, and third birds and wild animals consuming the remaining carrion. A number of similar images appear in the exilic and later images of Jeremiah (16:4; 19:7; 34:20) and Ezekiel (29:5 32:43; 39:4), but also in narratives such as the David and Goliath story in 1 Sam 17:44, 46.¹⁵⁸

Such evidence has led some scholars to the position summarized by Berner as follows, “The נשר as well as birds of prey in general (Heb. טעי) are part of the imagery of prophetic judgment scenes, where they symbolize imminent destruction ... or are referred to in order to express the impossibility of escaping the divine punishment.”¹⁵⁹ Note that Berner appears to limit these roles to the categories of birds designated as “birds of prey.”

However, the Hebrew Bible extends the image to the more general category “birds of the air” (עף השמים) found in Jer 7:33, but actually very frequently: 1 Sam 17:44, 46; 2 Sam 21:10; 1 Kgs 14:11; 16:4; 21:24; Ps 79:2; Jer 15:3; 16:4; 19:7; 34:20; Ezek 29:5. I include this exhaustive list to demonstrate that in fact the biblical texts do not limit the *kinds* of birds involved in consuming the corpses of the dead after military action, except that the birds all apparently can fly, or are associated with the heavens, presumably as flyers, in some way or another. While the specific setting concerning the post-battle scenario invariably places some limitations on the types of birds in view, the expression itself proves quite broad. Therefore, the general nature of the list should provide some pause with regard to the common conclusion that the carnivorous or carrion-eating nature

¹⁵⁸ This image also appears in Neo-Assyrian literature. On the giving of corpses to birds among other creatures, see the reference to Assurbanipal in Houston, *Purity and Monotheism*, 190.

¹⁵⁹ Christoph Berner, “Bird of Prey,” *Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception* 3:1212.

of the birds led to their prohibition in Lev 11/Deut 14 as Berner and many since the Talmudic period have suggested.¹⁶⁰

1.5 Fantastic Birds

Conceptions of winged creatures extend far beyond the birds and insects found in the surrounding regions of the southern Levant, Egypt, and Mesopotamia inhabited by the Israelites and Jews. Many mythological beings also exhibited wings, contributing their weight to the notion of “birds,” “fowl,” or “avian creatures” in ancient Israel.¹⁶¹

Why include discussion of these “fantastic” birds in a study focused on unclean “real” birds? Two reasons come to mind. First, fantastic animals – that is “unreal” hybrids and monsters – connect with powerful symbolism.¹⁶² This status can often relate to their natures as “taxonomic aberrations” – animals that do not “fit” a particular culture’s classifications of animals, much like Douglas’ approach to the “unclean” in her early work.¹⁶³

Second, while one might expect a clear distinction between the mythical and the unclean, several non-pentateuchal texts associate them quite closely. Overlap appears most prominently in Isa 34:11–14, where both wild and mythical birds or creatures comprise the list of various ruin dwellers: hawk, owl, Lilith, and possibly “goat demon.”¹⁶⁴ The importance of hybridity as a conception for the “demonic” or for “evil” or just for the “powers beyond the human world” may provide some insight into the conceptual distinctions between “clean/unclean” or “shunned/welcomed” in the legal texts. Houston makes this connection explicit:

There is however a special literary context in which many of the unclean species appear, including many of the birds that do not appear elsewhere outside Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14, and it may enable us to use extrabiblical evidence. This is the prophetic curse of destruction, when it extends to descriptions of the deserted ruins of the doomed place,

¹⁶⁰ E. g., Christoph Berner, “Birds (I. Ancient Near East; II. Hebrew Bible/Old Testament),” *EBR* 3:1215. He states, “... it seems to be certain that most of these birds are birds of prey of some sort, and it is therefore reasonable to assume that they were categorized as impure because of their habit of eating living blood or feeding on corpses.” Note the consideration (based on the much later conclusions of *m Hul* and *Ep. Arist.* 146!) in Milgrom, “Ethics and Ritual,” 178.

¹⁶¹ Cf. Windham, “Examination of the Relationship.” She notes (*ibid.*, 76), “Any discussion of the Israelites’ relationship to the animals surrounding them should include some consideration of the fantastic animals described in the Hebrew Bible.”

¹⁶² Dan Sperber, “Why Are Perfect Animals, Hybrids, and Monsters Food for Symbolic Thought?,” *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 8 (1996): 147.

¹⁶³ E. g., Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 55. There she states, “But in general the underlying principle of cleanness in animals is that they shall conform fully to their class.”

¹⁶⁴ For this understanding of שְׁעִירִים, compare Lev 17:7; 2 Chr 11:15. OG translates the term in Isa 13:21 with *daimónia*; however, the same Greek term renders צִיִּים in Isa 34:14, where the term *onokéntauroi* (donkey-centaur) renders שְׁעִירִים.

which become the habitation of many wild creatures, including a surprisingly high proportion of those that appear in our chapters as unclean. There are also passages that use the same idea of the ruins as the habitation of wild creatures, though they are not of the same genre.¹⁶⁵

The explicit connection drawn by Houston significantly raises the level of importance for the discussion of fantastic birds, especially given the increase in scholarship on this topic in biblical research.

Recent scholarship has pointed out the close association between the “hybrid” and the “monstrous” in a wide variety of cultures and ages, including those represented in the Hebrew Bible and broader ancient Near East.¹⁶⁶ The beasts in Dan 7 as well as the hybrid monstrosity of Pharaoh in Ezek 29 and 32 demonstrate how hybrid animals take on powers of mythic proportions, making them adversaries for Yahweh.¹⁶⁷

With specific application to the dietary laws, if OG correctly renders בַּת הַיְעָנָה as στρουθός (ostrich) in Lev 11:16/Deut 14:15,¹⁶⁸ then the hybridity of the fantastic may undergird the prohibition of the eating the meat of this creature.¹⁶⁹ As A. Angelini highlights, the monstrosity of this bird, articulated in Greek antiquity by Aristotle in the fourth century BCE, arises from its hybrid nature:

De plus, si l'autruche était dans le Proche-Orient ancien un animal inquiétant, voire monstrueux, elle était perçue dans l'Antiquité classique comme hybride hors catégorie et classée par Aristote parmi les *amphoterizontes*, les animaux ambigus qui échappent à toute classification : avec des ailes énormes qui sont pourtant incapables de la faire voler, elle fonde la légendaire rapidité de sa course sur ses longues pattes; bipède, elle a les pieds fendus comme les quadrupèdes, et son corps est couvert de plumes comme celui des oiseaux.¹⁷⁰

Its ambiguity may have posed a problem, which would, of course, fit well with the notion of impurity as “dirt,” matter out of place, formulated in Douglas’ early work. Douglas specifically focuses on the mode of locomotion appropriate for

¹⁶⁵ Houston, *Purity and Monotheism*, 194. He points to Isa 13:21–22, ; 34:11–15; Jer 50:39; Mic 1:8; Zeph 2:14; Ps 102:7; Job 30:29; as well as KAI 222 A.33 (Sefire) and Deir ‘Alla Combination I.

¹⁶⁶ E. g., Anna Angelini, “L’Imaginaire Comparé du Démoniaque dans les Traditions de l’Israël Ancien: Le Bestiaire d’Esäie dans la Septante,” in *Entre dieux et hommes: anges, démons et autres figures intermédiaires: Actes du colloque organisé par le Collège de France, Paris, les 19 et 20 mai 2014*, ed. Thomas Römer et al., OBO 286 (Fribourg, Switz.: Universitätsverlag; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2017), 116–34, and the other contributions in this volume.

¹⁶⁷ Cf. Safwat Marzouk, *Egypt as a Monster in the Book of Ezekiel*, FAT II/76 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015).

¹⁶⁸ See my defense of this conclusion below, 3.4.

¹⁶⁹ Though the more difficult question might relate to ostrich eggs. The biblical dietary prohibitions do not explicitly ban them, yet were they then acceptable for consumption? I raise this question because they appear on some menus, like that of Assurnasirpal’s Calah Banquet.

¹⁷⁰ Angelini, “L’Imaginaire Comparé du Démoniaque,” 123. She references Aristotle, *On the Parts of Animals*, 697b.14–26 [4.14]; *On the Generation of Animals*, 749b.17–25.

each category of animals.¹⁷¹ However, the hybridity of a creature itself need not render it problematic, in and of itself, as I will show below.

In addition to the possible connection between the potentially problematic nature of the mixture of categories with regard to the ostrich, the biblical tradition found in Isa 34 includes several other birds appearing on the lists of Lev 11/ Deut 14: קאָט, (pelican and/or desert owl), ינשוף (hawk, owl, or ibis), ערב (raven, crow, etc.), and דיה (kite).¹⁷²

The location of the beasts and birds may prove more decisive for their categorization. The mention of Dan 7 points to the possibility of specific *locations* that indicate negative supra-human powers. The book of Daniel localizes such powers with the sea, an oft-explored motif in biblical and ancient Near Eastern studies, given the sea's connections with Yamm in Ugaritic literature and Tiamat in Mesopotamia. With regard to Mesopotamia, it is also striking that Tiamat's army in *Enuma Elish* consists of numerous hybrid creatures that she forms such as lion monsters, lion men, scorpion men, fish men, and bull men.¹⁷³ Their mixed nature underscores their ferocity.

One line of reasoning in support of this hypothesis of the hybridity of creatures contributing to their unclean/abhorrent nature arises from the *interchangeability* of the OG translations of various "beasts of the ruins" found in Isa 13:21–22 and 34:11–14. While the OG renders,¹⁷⁴ for example, בת יענה, with different terms in the two passages, both terms refer to what moderns typically classify as "mythical" beings (δαυμόνια), which the OG version of the biblical texts begins to identify as negative. A second line of support comes from the nature of the location: ruins. Ruins, associated with destruction and the irreversible loss of previous civilization often resulting from divine judgment, can indicate distance from the holy sphere.¹⁷⁵ As such, the overlap with impurity clearly emerges because both exist (or should exist) at a distance from the divine presence in a sanctuary. In any case, this category also extends beyond biblical texts, appearing in Sefire I A 32–33.¹⁷⁶

With regard to threatening powers, the steppe or desert – easily associated with places of ruin – also represented places of demonic threats in Mesopotamian

¹⁷¹ Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 55.

¹⁷² This tradition includes Zeph 2:13–15, Isa 13:19–22; 14:23; Jer 49:33 (MT); 30:28 in the LXX; 50:39–40 (MT); 27:39–40 in the LXX); See Christophe Nihan, "Les habitants des ruines dans la Bible hébraïque," in Römer, *Entre dieux et hommes*, 88–115. See below, chap. 3 for the identifications of these birds.

¹⁷³ 1.140–45; 2.28–29; 3.31–33, 90–91. Translated according to Benjamin R. Foster, "Epic of Creation," COS 1.111:392–93. Also noted by Friedhelm Hartenstein, "Cherubim and Seraphim in the Bible and in the Light of Ancient Near Eastern Sources," in *Angels*, ed. Friedrich V. Reiterer et al., Deuterocanonical and Cognate Literature Yearbook (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2007), 157.

¹⁷⁴ Assuming it is reading MT in both cases: cf. Angelini, "L'Imaginaire Comparé du Démoniaque."

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 117.

¹⁷⁶ Also noted by Houston, *Purity and Monotheism*, 194.

conceptions. The *lillu/lillutu* demons frequented such locations, much like the goat for Azazel in Lev 16:

Lamaštu est ainsi renvoyée vers “les animaux de la steppe”, auxquels elle doit servir de nourrice. Le cas d’Azazel, sorte de démon mentionné dans le rituel de Lv 16 et qui est également associé à la “steppe” ou au “désert”, atteste clairement du fait que cette conception faisait encore partie de l’imaginaire – et même, d’une certaine manière, des pratiques! – des scribes qui ont composé la BH.¹⁷⁷

However, an animal’s connection to the ruins does not operate as the *sole* factor determining their acceptability: the צבי, gazelle, also appears in this context in the Sefire inscription (though not directly in biblical material).¹⁷⁸ Deuteronomy repeatedly highlights the acceptability of the gazelle for human consumption: it appears on the list of clean animals in 14:5, as well as an example of edible “wild” meat suitable for clean *and* unclean members of the “Israelite” community in 12:15, 22; 15:22. Solomon’s royal table also served its meat (1 Kgs 5:3 [ET] 4:23), as did Assurnasirpal II as part of his banquet to inaugurate his new capital city, Calah. Finally, Isaac not only eats wild meat, but he prefers it in Gen 27 (even if he ironically cannot taste the difference).

In sum, an overlap appears between the chaos of the places of ruin and the negative super-human powers associated with these places. Still, an animal’s presence among the ruins does not immediately render it unclean or abhorrent, as seen with the gazelle.

Hybrid mythical creatures also play positive roles in the cultic and other realms described within the Hebrew Bible and beyond.¹⁷⁹ This double role of the fantastic need not elicit surprise. Cultural theorist Dan Sperber argues

From fantastic animals to perfect or unworthy horses, symbolic representations of animals ... evoke a worse world, that of anomaly, and a better one, that of perfection. They provide a contrasted and contrasting imaginary background for knowledge of the world as it is.¹⁸⁰

In other words, fantastic, unreal animals (or hybrids of real animals with fantastic attributes) can serve to mark what a culture or individual perceives as wrong – or potentially wrong – with the world, on the one hand, and on the other, what is right.

¹⁷⁷ Nihan, “Les habitants des ruines dans la Bible hébraïque,” 103.

¹⁷⁸ A weak connection arises through the gazelle’s appearance in Isa 13:14. They do appear on the fringes along with fantastic creatures in Egypt as well; cf. Dimitri Meeks, “Fantastic Animals,” *Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt* 1:504.

¹⁷⁹ Greek writers such as Pliny and Diodorus comment on exotic animals from Arabia, and Diodorus (2.51.2) uses the term “double animals,” meaning the bringing together of two different kinds – hybrid. See Anna Angelini, “Biblical Translations and Cross-Cultural Communication: A Focus on the Animal Imagery,” *Semitica et Classica* 8 (2015): 33–43.

¹⁸⁰ Sperber, “Why Are Perfect Animals, Hybrids, and Monsters Food for Symbolic Thought?,” 166–67.

The cherubim and seraphim in particular show how biblical texts could embrace positive roles for mythical hybrid creatures, contrasting with, for example, the Leviathan and Behemoth in Job 40–41 among others.¹⁸¹ Hartenstein points out that in the Mesopotamian sphere, such creatures – *Mischwesen* – appear in positive roles concerning (1) the symbolism of ruling and (2) protection from evil.¹⁸² As such they appear close to human and divine rulers. By taking the best attributes of various creatures, such fantastic creatures embody something better than the normal. They assumed a similar role in Egypt, where such composite creatures represent “the tentative representation of a divine, supernatural power.”¹⁸³

The cherubim are foremost among these mythical creatures within the Hebrew Bible, appearing in Gen 3:24; Ezek 1 and 10; Exod 25:18–20; 26:1, 31; 36:8, 35; 1 Kgs 6:29, 31; 7:39; 8:6–7; Ps 18:11//2 Sam 22:11; and 2 Chr 3:14. Most of these appearances take place in relationship to the inner sanctum of God’s dwelling, keeping with Hartenstein’s categories. Furthermore, these locations for the cherubim accord with their settings within the temple or royal palace, also including (paradisiacal) garden allusions found throughout the Eastern Mediterranean.¹⁸⁴

While Exod 20:4 and Deut 5:8 forbid rendering Yahweh in the form of a bird, the deity elsewhere still rides upon a cherub like the wind (Ps 18:11), and the footstool before the divinity takes that same form in Exod 25:18–20. Therefore, at least some biblical authors have little problem bringing their deity into close proximity with birds or bird-like creatures, similar to the case with other animals, whether clean (a bull in Gen 49:24; Isa 49:26) or unclean (a lion in Hos 5:14; 11:10).¹⁸⁵

As discussed below, considerable overlap exists in this category with winged creatures from the surrounding cultures, such as the *lamassu* – hybrid lions or

¹⁸¹ For one of many ways of highlighting their mythical power, Angelini points out the OG translates בַּהֶמָּה differently in Job 40:25 than where it detects a reference to a domesticated animal: Angelini, “Biblical Translations and Cross-Cultural Communication.”

¹⁸² Hartenstein, “Cherubim and Seraphim in the Bible and in the Light of Ancient Near Eastern Sources,” 157. He states, “One main area where [*Mischwesen*] play an important role (apart from the sphere of demonology) is the *symbolism of ruling*, in both the realms of the divine and of humans. The addition of capabilities like flying (wings of eagles), physical power and fertility (the bull), threatening features and behaviour (e.g., the lion’s roar, talons of the eagle, scorpion’s tails, snake’s bites) and, finally, wisdom and skills (human heads) culminate in pictures of superiority. We find such beings in the Ancient Near East especially in contexts where it seemed necessary to *represent power and to prevent from evil*” [italics original].

¹⁸³ Meeks, “Fantastic Animals,” 1:504.

¹⁸⁴ For discussion and iconography, see Othmar Keel, *Die Geschichte Jerusalems und die Entstehung des Monotheismus*, Orte und Landschaften der Bibel IV, 1 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007), esp. 311–16.

¹⁸⁵ This particular bull connection of course led to problems for some, resulting in the critiques of Jeroboam and in Exod 32–34; Hos 8:5–6; etc.



Fig. 2: Eighth-century BCE Neo-Assyrian *lamassu* from King Sargon II's palace at Dur Shar-rukin in Assyria (now Khorsabad in Iraq). Louvre AO 19858. Image credit to Abdalla Dabdoub [CC BY-SA 4.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=72261412>].

bulls. These creatures played central roles in Mesopotamian societies as beneficent demons: as protectors of thresholds, of gates, and of entrances to important spaces.¹⁸⁶

Their location at the *limen* – threshold – fits well with their dual/hybrid nature: they are half of one thing and half of another.¹⁸⁷ They appear in biblical texts as cherubim and in Egypt as sphinx.¹⁸⁸ Mesopotamia also had winged genies, how-

¹⁸⁶ Keel shows that early in the art-historical record they often appear in a different role, “Der Kerub erscheint als ein aggressives, gefährliches Wesen, das die Vegetation als Lebensgrundlage bedroht und von Göttern und Helden bekämpft ... Keruben sind also weniger als geistvolle Verkörperungen höchster Eigenschaften, sondern eher als eine Art gefährlicher Kampfhunde zu verstehen.” Keel, *Die Geschichte Jerusalems*, 279, 299.

¹⁸⁷ D. Foxvog, W. Heimpel, and D. A. Kilmer, “Lamma/Lamassu A,” *RIA* 6:447.

¹⁸⁸ T. N. D. Mettinger, “Cherubim,” *DDD*, 189–92.

ever, which appear as more human-like creatures, though they could have eagle or griffon heads.

While the cherubim imagery does develop some unique characteristics in different biblical texts (compare Ezek 8–11; 1 Kgs 6:23–27; and Exod 25), where the cherubim alternately transport, form a throne for, or protect the royal deity,¹⁸⁹ in all cases they appear in close proximity to Yahweh, suggesting their extreme holiness. Just as in these biblical texts, thrones made of (or flanked by) mythical creatures of a cherubim-like nature appear in Byblos, Hamath, and Megiddo. Again, their location at the boundary between the divine and human or the royal and common fits with their hybrid/dual human and animal forms.

Seraphim also belong to this category. Mettinger notes that they are generally conceived as winged serpents, arising from the Egyptian Uraeus serpent and found in the Southern Levant on scarabs and symbols from the Iron Age (and earlier).¹⁹⁰ In the Egyptian context, they generally function as protective genies for royal and divine figures. This understanding fits well for the appearances of the creatures in the Pentateuch.

However, significant disagreement arises with regard to their most well-known appearance, around the altar in Isaiah's vision (6:1–8), where two seraphim each have six wings. Day, building on the Uraeus connections, understands the associations of the seraphim in Isa 6 as the personification of lightning, relating them to Pss 29; 104:4; Hab 3:9; and Baal's servants from various Ugaritic texts.¹⁹¹ They have thunder-like voices and a fiery nature, and smoke accompanies their appearance. The lack of the attestation of a six-winged serpent might suggest that the author of the Isaianic text makes an adjustment in this text to fit his own purposes,¹⁹² perhaps to highlight the holiness of the place,¹⁹³ given their proximity to the ruler. As Keel points out, the many stamp seal impressions of two or four-winged Egyptianizing Uraei from the eighth and seventh centuries BCE in Judah make a strong case for this background in Isa 6,¹⁹⁴ which likely dates to this very period.¹⁹⁵ The creatures proclaim the holiness of Yahweh, while the

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 190–91. Connections are often made with the Nehustan of Numbers.

¹⁹⁰ Idem, "Seraphim," *DDD*, 742–44.

¹⁹¹ John Day, "Echoes of Baal's Seven Thunders and Lightnings in Psalm 29 and Habakkuk 3:9 and the Identity of the Seraphim in Isaiah 6," *VT* 29 (1979): 143–51.

¹⁹² Hartenstein, "Cherubim and Seraphim in the Bible and in the Light of Ancient Near Eastern Sources," 166.

¹⁹³ Keel, *Die Geschichte Jerusalems*, 389.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 386–90.

¹⁹⁵ Rather than a serpent, which has yet to appear in the archaeological record with six wings, Morenz and Schorch note that six-winged genies from Mesopotamian are attested: Ludwig D. Morenz and Stefan Schorch, "Der Seraph in der Hebräischen Bibel und in Ägypten," *Or* 66 (1997): 375–81. They go on to present significant Egyptian evidence that the seraphim in Isa 6 could have arisen from six-winged griffons that took on the role of palace guards. These mythical flyers add to the category of "protective birds" for the Hebrew Bible, serving to underscore the holiness of such creatures in this text.

prophet proclaims his unclean lips. Both the prophet and the seraphim require protection from the nearness of the divine holiness.

Bringing together this short discussion of the fantastic creatures – typically composites or *Mischwesen* – from various texts of the Hebrew Bible and beyond informs the discussion of the dietary prohibitions by noting the various possible connotations involved in the blurring of boundaries. Some of them certainly take on negative hues. These accord with Douglas' framework and the strict adherence in *some* of the dietary prohibitions, especially those of the large land animals that typically receive the bulk of the discussion on dietary prohibitions in scholarship. Yet Lev 11/Deut 14 pronounces some of the animals appearing in such liminal contexts throughout the ancient Near East, such as the gazelle, permissible for human consumption. Furthermore, there are a number of positive if terrifying significations connected to some threshold beings in the broader geographical and cultural context. For the Bible in particular, the cherubim and seraphim show that such composite creatures enjoy close proximity to deities and royalty, often taking on protective roles. As a result, anomaly alone does not prove a decisive factor for banning specific creatures from the divine presence and rendering them unclean or abhorrent.

1.6 Conclusions

The cultural import of birds in the larger milieu of the Ancient Near East provides a number of possible directions for theorizing the categorizations of the flyers into clean/unclean (Deut 14/Lev 11) or acceptable/abhorrent (Lev 11). To begin on the most basic level, much of the above discussion serves to add layers of complexity to typical scholarly interpretation of the prohibited birds, a necessary addition due to the lack of textually explicit criteria for the prohibitions and the tenuous identifications of the types of birds that chapter 3 addresses.

The variety of general terms and contexts for the appearances of flyers in the biblical texts have revealed that birds do not fit quite as easily into the simple categories of (1) carrion-eaters/carnivores = unclean and aggressive, (2) herbivores = clean, and (3) some domesticated = sacrificial. The picture drawn by the comparative ancient Near Eastern textual and iconographic evidence points in other directions, as do the limited avian faunal remains from the Levant.

With regard to the appearance of birds in cultic settings, I have provided several lines of inquiry that call the domestic nature of the birds in the Levitical sacrificial directives into question. The import of this discussion for the dietary prohibitions lies in its demonstration that some “wild” animals appear on the biblical altar. No definitive boundary line around the altar limited it to domestic animals. In fact, the fowl most clearly domesticated prior to the Hellenistic period in the ancient Near East – geese and ducks – do not figure *at all* in the biblical

prescriptions on offerings of fowl. It is rather one category of birds known to have been caught, kept, and fed in Mesopotamia and Egypt (pigeons/doves), and another that figures less often in Mesopotamia and Egypt, especially on a large-scale basis but appears more frequently in the zooarchaeological remains in the Iron Age (partridge, though perhaps also some chicken).

The discussion of fantastic animals notes the presence of both beneficent and malevolent “demons.” Just like the case with “real” animals, not all fantastic creatures fall into one category of positive or negative, though all possess powers that can threaten humans. Some supra-animalistic hybrid creatures reside close to the deity and threaten humans due perhaps to their holiness (seraphim and cherubim), while others exemplify danger arising from some kind of evil or association with the chaos of destroyed civilization (Lilith, goat demon). While the birds associated with these places of ruin appear to be identifiable with “natural” species, their *symbolically* hybrid nature – natural and demonic – plays an important role in these contexts.