

**Ezekiel's Vision:
The Astrological Hypothesis of the Living Creatures
and Wheels Intersecting Wheels Full of Eyes.**

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ABSTRACT

Dr. Michael Heiser proposed that Ezekiel's visions, in Chapters 1 and 10 of the Book of Ezekiel, should be interpreted astrologically. The vision, according to this Astrological Hypothesis, interprets the wheels of the divine throne-chariot as the circle of the zodiac and the Living Creatures as the four constellations associated with the cardinal directions in ancient Babylonian astrology. The mysterious eyes that appear in the wheel rims and all throughout the Living Creatures are also interpreted astronomically as the stars that make up the zodiac and the celestial background of the scene. To support this hypothesis Dr. Heiser proposed that the word "eyes" in the text be translated as "Sparkling" or "gleaming". He also proposed that the eagle face of the Living Creature correlates to the constellation Ophiuchus as represented in its ancient form. Interlinear bibles that provide Hebrew-to-English translations, validate the proposed translation of eyes. Heiser's choice of Ophiuchus is not a suitable match for the eagle face. Scorpio is attested in the Babylonian star compendiums, but there is good evidence that the constellation Aquila – the eagle – which lies just outside the ecliptic but is located near Scorpio and Ophiuchus, is a better match. This article will review and validate Dr. Heiser's evidence and provide additional evidence that the Astrological Hypothesis is the most coherent explanation for the interpretation of Ezekiel's vision.

INTRODUCTION

The first and tenth chapters of the book of Ezekiel describe bizarre scenes from a vision the prophet had while in exile in Babylon. These visions of winged hybrid creatures with terrifying features next to intersecting wheels, all covered in eyes, have long fascinated bible readers. They have proven difficult to interpret for scholars, pastors, and lay people alike. In the context of modern English translations, the visions have invited speculation that Ezekiel is seeing a vision of extra-terrestrials using ancient lost technology connected to the modern phenomenon of Unidentified Flying Objects (UFO).

Since at least the Renaissance, artists have tried to understand and capture the vision, in all its unsettling and odd details, in paintings and pictures. Using artificial intelligence image generating programs, modern social media has been inundated with depictions of “biblically accurate angels” resulting from literal interpretations of how the text reads in modern bible translations.

Dr. Michael Heiser, in blog posts and podcast episodes¹, attempted to correct the framing of these visions within their proper Ancient Near Eastern (ANE) context. Dr. Heiser put forth a hypothesis that elements of the vision should be viewed and interpreted astrologically and/or astronomically. That what Ezekiel’s vision describes, in both the wheels and the Living Creatures, is a picture of the zodiac, constellations, the ecliptic, celestial orbits, and of stars; and that all of these images are rooted in Babylonian cosmology.

This “Astrological Hypothesis”² is coherent, has high explanatory value in the context of the book of Ezekiel, but as presented by Dr. Heiser, contains two contentious issues. The first

significant piece of evidence Dr. Heiser cites in support of his hypothesis involves the reinterpretation of the word used for “eyes” in the text. All English translations tend to agree on the use of the word eyes. With the proliferation of interlinear translations available, it should be easy to validate or falsify this claim.

The second major piece of evidence asserts that the living creatures are representative of ancient Babylonian constellations that represent the cardinal directions. In his hypothesis, Heiser relies on the constellation Ophiuchus the serpent bearer. This is the second contentious issue. While this constellation was recognized in Babylonian astronomical compendiums, it is typically depicted as a man holding a serpent, or multiple serpents. Heiser insists that the ancient form of this constellation is an eagle holding a serpent. This assertion is not well supported by the available evidence.

The nature of interpreting ancient texts like the Bible is subjective, making a broad range of interpretive options possible. If a close examination of these two contentious issues shows them to be incorrect, insufficient, or incoherent, this alone may not automatically falsify the Astrological Hypothesis. Particularly if additional evidence or clarifications can be introduced and applied in a way that is coherent.

In elucidating his hypothesis to a popular or lay audience, Dr. Heiser was not able to explore all the points of contact it has to Babylonian astronomy/astrology. This study is intended to provide additional evidence in support of the Astrological Hypothesis while critically examining the two contentious points on which a large part of it is based. This will require a careful exploration of elements found in the descriptions of the living creatures and the wheels in light of their Babylonian context. It’s beyond the scope of this study to examine everything in the

vision but the elements that require particular attention include the wings, the faces, the wheels, and the eyes.

While the primary purpose of this study is to explore and validate the Astrological Hypothesis as an interpretive framework for the vision of Ezekiel, the secondary purpose is to show that the vision may not be as bizarre as it first seems. That the invocation of popular notions including disembodied eyes, flying saucers or advanced UFO technology are not required for proper interpretation, nor are they sustained by the text in its original context which includes the iconographic and mythological traditions from the period.

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THE VISIONS

Any analysis of this sort must start with a review of what the two visions say in modern English versions of the Bible. The New International Version (NIV), which provides good typical translations into English, will be used.

Ezekiel 1:4-18

⁴I looked, and I saw a windstorm coming out of the north—an immense cloud with flashing lightning and surrounded by brilliant light. The center of the fire looked like glowing metal,

⁵and in the fire was what looked like four living creatures. In appearance their form was human,

⁶but each of them had four faces and four wings.

⁷Their legs were straight; their feet were like those of a calf and gleamed like burnished bronze.

⁸Under their wings on their four sides they had human hands. All four of them had faces and wings,

⁹and the wings of one touched the wings of another. Each one went straight ahead; they did not turn as they moved.

¹⁰Their faces looked like this: Each of the four had the face of a human being, and on the right side each had the face of a lion, and on the left the face of an ox; each also had the face of an eagle.

¹¹Such were their faces. They each had two wings spreading out upward, each wing touching that of the creature on either side; and each had two other wings covering its body.

¹²Each one went straight ahead. Wherever the spirit would go, they would go, without turning as they went.

¹³The appearance of the living creatures was like burning coals of fire or like torches. Fire moved back and forth among the creatures; it was bright, and lightning flashed out of it.

¹⁴The creatures sped back and forth like flashes of lightning.

¹⁵As I looked at the living creatures, I saw a wheel on the ground beside each creature with its four faces.

¹⁶This was the appearance and structure of the wheels: They sparkled like topaz, and all four looked alike. Each appeared to be made like a wheel intersecting a wheel.

¹⁷As they moved, they would go in any one of the four directions the creatures faced; the wheels did not change direction as the creatures went.

¹⁸Their rims were high and awesome, and all four rims were full of eyes all around.

Ezekiel 10:9-22

⁹I looked, and I saw beside the cherubim four wheels, one beside each of the cherubim; the wheels sparkled like topaz.

¹⁰As for their appearance, the four of them looked alike; each was like a wheel intersecting a wheel.

¹¹As they moved, they would go in any one of the four directions the cherubim faced; the wheels did not turn about as the cherubim went. The cherubim went in whatever direction the head faced, without turning as they went.

¹²Their entire bodies, including their backs, their hands and their wings, were completely full of eyes, as were their four wheels.

¹³I heard the wheels being called “the whirling wheels.”

¹⁴Each of the cherubim had four faces: One face was that of a cherub, the second the face of a human being, the third the face of a lion, and the fourth the face of an eagle.

¹⁵ Then the cherubim rose upward. These were the living creatures I had seen by the Kebar River.

¹⁶ When the cherubim moved, the wheels beside them moved; and when the cherubim spread their wings to rise from the ground, the wheels did not leave their side.

¹⁷ When the cherubim stood still, they also stood still; and when the cherubim rose, they rose with them, because the spirit of the living creatures was in them.

¹⁸ Then the glory of the Lord departed from over the threshold of the temple and stopped above the cherubim.

¹⁹ While I watched, the cherubim spread their wings and rose from the ground, and as they went, the wheels went with them. They stopped at the entrance of the east gate of the Lord's house, and the glory of the God of Israel was above them.

²⁰ These were the living creatures I had seen beneath the God of Israel by the Kebar River, and I realized that they were cherubim.

²¹ Each had four faces and four wings, and under their wings was what looked like human hands.

²² Their faces had the same appearance as those I had seen by the Kebar River. Each one went straight ahead.

Chapter 1:22-28 goes on to describe a “vault” or an “expanse” above the heads of the living creatures. Upon the vault sits a throne and upon the throne sits the Deity surrounded by a melammu or radiance, a stock ancient near eastern (ANE) description “indicating divine and royal power”³. The Living Creatures, the vault, the throne, and Yahweh seated upon it all move in unison at His command. The impression is that the throne is, somehow, borne by the creatures and their accompanying wheels. These two motifs, the storm theophany and God appearing on His divine chariot-throne are both common throughout the bible. “Yhwh enthroned on the cherubim was a central image in the Judahite tradition portraying Yhwh as king,”^{4,5} Dale Launderville says in his article *Ezekiel's Throne-Chariot Vision: Spiritualizing the Model of Divine Royal Rule*. Ezekiel is right inside the vision. He's experiencing the storm and having a close contact with all its details. Psalm 18 also describes a storm theophany with a divine chariot-throne vision but with fewer details than Ezekiel. This wide-angle view is one example that provides a conceptual backdrop for better understanding Ezekiel's vision (See also Psalm 104:2-4):

Psalm 18

⁶In my distress I called to Yahweh.
I cried to my God for help.
From his temple he heard my voice;
my cry came before him, into his ears.

⁹He parted the heavens and came down;
dark clouds were under his feet.

¹⁰*He mounted the cherubim and flew;
he soared on the wings of the wind.*

¹¹He made darkness his covering, his canopy around
him—

the dark rain clouds of the sky.

¹²Out of the brightness of his presence clouds
advanced,
with hailstones and bolts of lightning.

The Psalmist doesn't describe many of the details of the theophany that Ezekiel provides. Ezekiel, and his readers, are provided with an overwhelming amount of detail and the details means something. They are provided for a reason. Isolating the description of the Living Creatures in 1:6-11 provides the data required to begin to understand the vision. We read:

Ezekiel 1:5-11

⁶but each of them had **four faces** and **four wings**.

⁷Their legs were straight; their **feet were like those of a calf** and gleamed like burnished bronze.

⁸Under their wings on their four sides **they had human hands**. All four of them had faces and wings,

⁹and the wings of one touched the wings of another. **Each one went straight ahead**; they did not turn as they moved.

¹⁰Their faces looked like this: Each of the four had **the face of a human being**, and on the right side each had **the face of a lion**, and on the left **the face of an ox**; each also had **the face of an eagle**.

¹¹Such were their faces. They each had two wings spreading out upward, each wing touching that of the creature on either side; and each had two other wings covering its body.

It is clearly a bizarre scene. The hybrid entities, located right next to the divine chariot-throne, are often interpreted as “angels” this is a poor word choice. Its use is understandable given the modernist lens of pop-culture through which religion, particularly Christianity, gets

interpreted. Pop cultural institutions like movies, television and cartoon shows are the modern iconographers and through them, anything supernatural is usually thought of as an “angel” or “demon.” This reduction is simplistic but understandable. However, as Dr. Heiser has pointed out in many places, particularly his book *Angels* the term angels, “denote what the members of the heavenly host do, or which provide a profile of activity.”⁶ Not all supernatural entities are tasked with delivering messages. When they are dispatched on a mission to share a message, they become mal’ak or “messenger.” Entities that reside within the unseen, supernatural realm may be tasked with a variety of roles or functions. The living creatures in Ezekiel’s vision remain silent. They seem to be described as conveying the throne-chariot but they do not convey any verbal messages to Ezekiel, therefore the terms mal’ak, messenger, or angel are not appropriate. Ezekiel does clearly identify them in 10:20 as Cherubim, a term which Heiser describes as “guardianship of the presence of God.”⁷ This is suitable in the context of a scene featuring an enthroned Yahweh.

Isolating the description of the wheels in verses 1:16 & 18 we read:

Ezekiel 1:16 & 18

¹⁶This was the appearance and structure of the wheels: They **sparkled like topaz**, and all four looked alike. Each appeared to be made like a **wheel intersecting a wheel**.

¹⁸Their rims were high and awesome, and all four rims were **full of eyes all around**.

Again, a bizarre image. Are these literally wheels filled with eyes? The text implies they are imbued with a spirit. Does that mean they are living beings themselves? Are these another form of “angel”? Wheels on a chariot-throne make interpretive sense but wheels intersecting wheels is not a typical construction. Typical interpretive frameworks take the view that the

intersecting wheels imply an ability to move in any direction. The Astrological Hypothesis does not falsify that view, but it does provide a viable alternative interpretation.

3

MODERN IMAGE INTERPRETATIONS

Renaissance artist Bernard Picart's picture of Ezekiel's vision is a good example of the typical iconography that emerges when attempts are made at depicting these living creatures. The wheels are generally shown next to the creatures as the text would seem to indicate. The entire vision is set in a Hellenized version of a white, cloud-filled liminal space in the sky as shown in Figure 1.



Figure 1: Bernard Picart's Ezekiel's Vision (Courtesy rijksmuseum.nl)

Other artistic interpretations, as shown in Figure 2 and 3, are quite popular on social media. These literal interpretations provide a disturbing image with shock value that appeals to online visual culture. They are consistent with the English translations of the descriptions and are often referred to as “biblically accurate angels”.



Figure 2. “Biblically Accurate Angel” (Courtesy Etsy)



Figure 3. “Biblically Accurate Angel” (courtesy Twitter)

The other common depiction sees the wheels as some type of spaceship or UFO, possibly like the one shown in Figure 2. This idea goes back at least to 1968 with the publication of Erich Von Daniken’s book *Chariots of the Gods*.⁸ A superficial reading of the English translations of these chapters of Ezekiel can lead to these various hypotheses, but they apply a modern filter

over the Biblical text. The proper context of Ezekiel's vision is not the Renaissance or technologically advanced modernity. What is the proper context in which these visions could be more properly understood and what hypotheses better support that context?

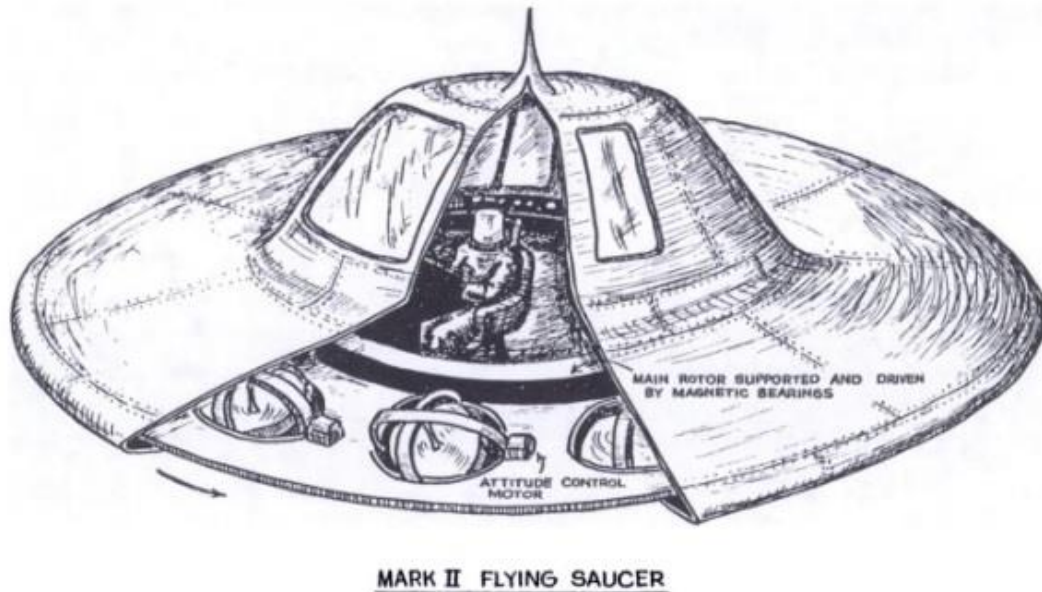


Figure 4. Mark II Flying saucer concept. Note the gyrosopic "wheels" intersecting the saucer.

MESOPOTAMIAN CONTEXT AND ICONOGRAPHY

By the time of Ezekiel's exile to Babylon, Mesopotamian civilization had existed for thousands of years. The Mesopotamian region had seen the rise and fall of powers from the Sumerians to the Babylonians to the Akkadians, to the Hittites. Each empire elevated its favored gods to the tops of their pantheons but despite these power shifts, the entire region maintained a significant amount of cultural and, particularly, religious homogeneity. The stories, legends and myths of the area were old and well known through oral traditions, monumental sculpture,

cuneiform texts, cult practices and public iconography. Its into this Ancient Near Eastern (ANE) or Mesopotamian context that Ezekiel had his vision.

The Living Creatures are described as four-faced entities with four wings. They have wings that stretch up and touch the creature next to them and a set of wings that cover their bodies. The Ancient Near Eastern belief systems were populated by many composite creatures that were made up of various combinations of human and animal parts. These creatures survive in iconography in carvings, on ceramics, and statuary. Ezekiel's living creatures share many of the iconographic elements from the ANE but they are unique. Nothing about the Living Creatures matches exactly with ANE counterparts. As Lena-Sofia Tiemeyer states in her article *Zechariah's Spies and Ezekiel's Cherubim*, "given our present knowledge, the biblical cherubim are unparalleled in the ancient Near East."⁹

As Constance Ellen Gane notes in her thesis, *Babylonian Hybrid Creatures*, there is a broad spectrum of these composite beings. Her study, which examines the extant iconography of the Neo-Babylonian (NB) period (626-539 BC) covers a variety of entities including human, fish and bird-headed Apkallu, Bull-men, human-headed bulls, winged bulls such as the Lamassu. Neo-Babylonian iconography also includes human-headed lions (Sphinx) both with wings and without, canine-headed demons, dog-humanoids, lion-headed eagles, merman and goat-fish. She identifies the purpose for why these entities are depicted this way.

"Most basic is the function of such portrayals as metaphors for supernatural beings, with hybrid body parts representing various attributes."¹⁰

The Living Creatures in Ezekiel's vision may be unparalleled in the ANE, but that doesn't mean the iconography of the ANE is silent on the interpretive framework for what these Living Creatures are, and what they are doing. Knowing what types of images were prevalent

within the culture at the time of Ezekiel's vision, and understanding their connections and meanings helps to demystify many aspects of the vision. All the important individual elements of Ezekiel's Living Creatures - the four faces, hybrid bodies, eyes - all do have parallels in ANE iconography, and these parallels have attributes that can point to a proper interpretive framework.

5

THE FOUR FACES

The University of Chicago's Museum contains many artifacts from ancient Babylonia. Two statuettes from that collection, dating from the 17th or 18th century B.C., feature four faces. These statuettes are believed to depict a "god of the four winds and a goddess of rainstorms."¹¹



Figure 5. Babylonian four-faces statuettes from 18th to 17th BC. (Courtesy University of Chicago)

The only matching physical element in these statuettes is four faces but its interesting to note their association with wind and storm phenomena. Ezekiel’s vision opens with a storm theophany from within which the four-faced Living Creatures emerge. Though their appearance is different, the conceptual tie-in is obvious.

Ezekiel 1:4-6

⁴I looked, and I saw a windstorm coming out of the north—an immense cloud with flashing lightning and surrounded by brilliant light. The center of the fire looked like glowing metal,

⁵and in the fire was what looked like four living creatures. In appearance their form was human,
⁶but each of them had four faces...

The conceptual tie-in to wind and storm phenomena is obvious but these statuettes, with their four faces, do not show the morphological differences that Ezekiel describes. Recall that Ezekiel saw four unique faces in his vision as 1:10 shows:

¹⁰Their faces looked like this: Each of the four had the face of a human being, and on the right side each had the face of a lion, and on the left the face of an ox; each also had the face of an eagle.

In his doctoral thesis, *Ezekiel in Context*, Brian Neil Peterson claims that the ANE precedent for Ezekiel's vision can be found in a story known as the *Underworld Vision of an Assyrian Prince*. This story, found on a tablet labeled VAT 10057¹², is an unprecedented work. In the story, the main character named Kumma falls into a deep sleep and descends into the underworld with the intent of contacting Nergal, King of the Underworld. When he finally descends to the underworld, Kumma encounters Nergal holding court with his wife Eriskegal by his side and surrounded by 13 other entities or gods. Some of these gods have proper names and some are only identified by their function or other characteristics they embody. None of these gods are four-faced – though one is two-headed - and some of their descriptions clearly parallel the faces in Ezekiel's vision. The tablet preserves most of these descriptions.

“I saw Namtar, the vizier of the underworld who fashions the visceral omens; a man stood before him while he held the hair of his head in his left hand and wielded a dagger in his right [...].

“Namtartu, his wife, had the head of a cherub, (her) hands and feet being human. Death had the head of a dragon, his hands were human, his feet[...].

“The Evil Genie had a human head and hands, was crowned with a tiara and had the feet of an eagle. With his left foot he was trampling on a crocodile.

Alluhappu had a lion's head, his four hands and feet were (like) those of human beings.

The Upholder of Evil had the head of a bird, his wings were spread out and he flew here and there; (his) hands and feet were human. Humut-tabal the ferryman of the underworld, had an Anzu head, his four hands and feet[...].

“The Ghost had an ox's head, his four hands and feet were (like) those of human beings. The Evil Spirit had a lion's head, (his) hands and feet were those of Anzu. Sulak was a lion, standing constantly on his hind legs.

“The Oath had a goats head, (his) hands and feet were human. Nedu, the porter of the underworld had a lion's head, and huan hands, his feet were those of a bird. Total Evil had two heads, on was the head of a lion, the second was the head of [...].

“[Muh]ra had three feet, the two front ones were those of a bird, the rear on was that of a bull. He had fearsomeness and luminous splendour. Of two gods I did not know the names – one had the head, hands, and feet of Anzu, in his left hand[.....].

“The other had a man's head, he was crowned with a tiara, carried in his right hand a mace, in his left hand, before him, In all, fifteen gods were present. I saw them and saluted [them] in prayer.”¹³

Several of these gods have lion heads. One has a human head; one an ox head and another the head of a bird. One is identified as having the head of a cherub. All these features match the description of faces in Ezekiel's vision. Several descriptions mention that these gods have similar traits to the Zu-Bird. This creature, also known as Anzu, is itself a hybrid and is described in Nili Wazana's article *Anzu and Ziz: Great Mythical Birds in Ancient Near Eastern, Biblical, and Rabbinic Traditions*:

“Sumerian myths depict Anzu as a mountain-dwelling bird of prey. Like Labbu, the lion-serpent, it is a composite creature, portrayed in literature and iconography as an eagle with a lion's face.”¹⁴

Assyriologist Thomas Fish, in an article on the Zu Bird states the following:

Bilingual texts, in Sumerian and Accadian, of the first millennium, identify the god known to the Semites in Mesopotamia as Zu, with the god known to the Sumerians of the third millennium as the “divine Im-dugurd bid”, i.e. bird of the “heavy storm”.¹⁵

While these gods of the underworld are not an exact match to the Living Creatures described by Ezekiel, they do attest to the existence and cultural history or iconographic tradition that the prophet repurposes for his own use. Both Ezekiel’s Living Creatures and the gods of the Babylonian pantheon are clearly associated with storm phenomena which is important to note because not only does it help explain what Ezekiel is seeing, it also orients Ezekiel’s vision skyward. Viewing storm phenomena requires looking up into the sky. Even at distance where the viewing angle is lower, the storm is still occurring in the sky. Views of a storm taken from a far enough distance will eventually reach a point where the sky intersects with the horizon. Both points will become important later.

In *Ezekiel in Context*, Brian Peterson’s thesis, he quotes an older work by Isaac Mathews in which Mathews compares the faces of the Living Creatures with the primary gods of the Babylonian pantheon.

“The bull colossus, with ox-face, was the symbol of Marduk; that with the lion-face was Nergal, the god of the underworld and of plague; that of the eagle was Ninib, god of the chase of war; while the human face represented Nabu, the announcer or revealer.”¹⁶

The Babylonian pantheon is not a stable unit. It is constantly in flux with lesser deities rising to challenge the dominant hierarchy. Deities are always associated with more than one sphere of influence and so to their iconography can also shift and vary. It’s not uncommon for two gods to share the lion and bull face at different times or in different places where they are found. Ninib, for example is an early form of the name for the god Nintura, and searches reveal

little connection with an eagle icon. So, too with a similar search for Nabu. The iconography that Mathews declares, and Peterson cites with such certainty is difficult to validate through a survey of other available scholarship. This may present a future line of inquiry.

If we accept Mathews’s hypothesis, that the Living Creatures represent these gods from the Babylonian pantheon, then another connection with the Astrological Hypothesis becomes apparent. As Ulla Koch-Westonholtz notes in her massive treatise *Mesopotamian Astrology*:

“Certain planets and constellations were referred to collectively as the ‘Gods of Night’”¹⁷

And most of the gods had an astronomical counterpart as Koch-Westonholts also notes. Marduk is Jupiter. Saturn is identified with Nintura, as is Mercury. However, Mercury is also identified with Nabu. But again, Mercury can also be associated with Marduk. Mars is associated with Nergal. Taking Mathews’s scheme and imposing the associated planets in place of the faces render’s the following associations shown in Figure 4:

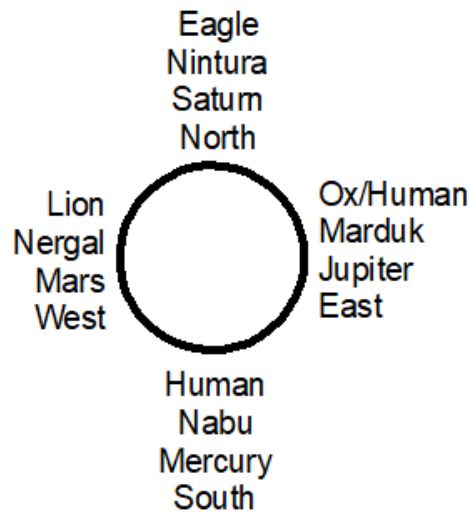


Figure 6. Living Creatures Face/Direction/Planet Scheme

One other feature to note about the Living Creature’s appearance is their implied directionality. The text, in verse 1:12 says

“¹²Each one went straight ahead. Wherever the spirit would go, they would go, without turning as they went.”

The fixed nature of their directionality implies a connection with the four cardinal points. This is a point Dr. Heiser makes in linking the creatures in Ezekiel’s vision to the astrological hypothesis. It’s a claim backed up by other scholarship from the field of astronomy as well. In *Origins of the ancient constellations* John Rogers writes:

“These earliest zodiacal constellations must have been established in Sumer or earlier in Elam. Three were large, conspicuous, realistic animals, symbols of strength and power: the Bull, the Lion, and the Scorpion. Along with the water-pouring god, Aquarius, they contained the four cardinal points around 4400-2200 BC.”¹⁸

Notice that, except for Scorpius, three of these constellation animals match the faces of Ezekiel’s Living Creatures. Taurus the Bull, Leo the Lion, Aquarius the man or anthropomorphic god, are transparent in their similarity. Scorpio is more difficult as a scorpion and an eagle are not the same, and usually not conflated. Dr. Heiser deals with this detail by substituting Scorpio with the constellation Ophiuchus. The diagram that accompanies his blog post explains that the Eagle is the ancient form of Ophiuchus, (serpent holder) and that since Ophiuchus stands above Scorpio it is closely related. Dr. Heiser may find this close association compelling enough to support his Astrological Hypothesis, but it seems forced. However, this point alone does not falsify the Astrological hypothesis as three out of the four constellations are a good match and there may be better solution. Rogers again in the same paper states:

“These constellations each contain first-magnitude stars (Aldebaran, Regulus, Antares and Fomalhaut), which were close to the cardinal points and became known as the Royal Stars in later Persia. However, Fomalhaut was too far south to be clearly seen at that epoch; Altair may have been adopted instead and this may have been the origin of the Eagle as another “Royal” constellation. The four royal stars may be symbolized in Persepolis, in a vast bas-relief of a king slaying a griffin (ed. Zu-Bird), which has the

horns and body of a bull, mane and forelegs of a lion, tail of a scorpion, and wings and hindlegs of an eagle. Variants with parts of a man instead of a scorpion were first seen on a 19th-century BC stone from Syria and later in Ezekiel 1:1-28 and Revelation 4:6-7.”¹⁹

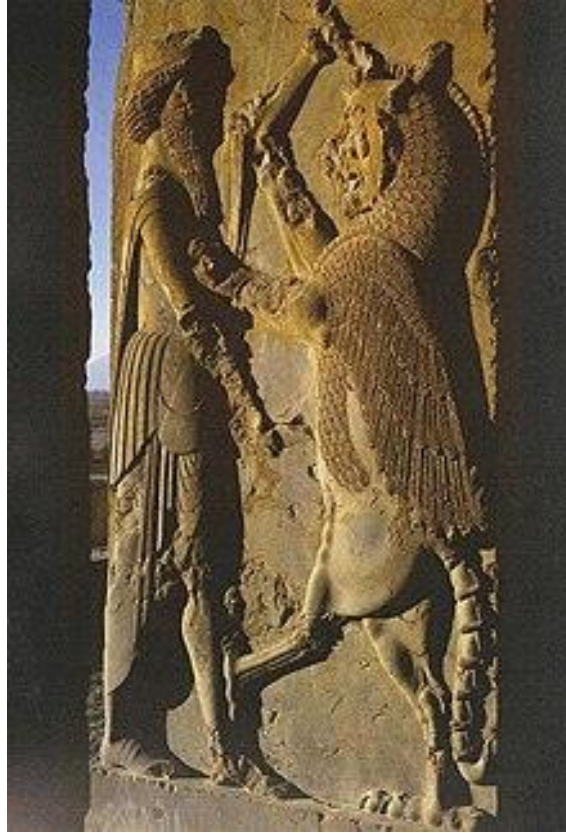


Figure 7. Bas-relief from Persepolis depicting the four royal stars in the form of a hybrid creature. (Courtesy Wikimedia Commons)

If we take Rogers’s hypothesis seriously, we are left with imagery that matches all four faces. Altair, known as the Eagle star, is the brightest star within the constellation Aquila which, to ancient Babylonians, was envisioned as an eagle. While this scheme is better than a simple substitution, it does remain somewhat unsatisfactory. Aquila is also near Scorpius, but Dr. Heiser’s alternative Ophiuchus is closer. But the bigger issue is that the Babylonian star texts and iconography clearly use the Scorpion, not Ophiuchus or Aquila.

So, the connection remains somewhat tenuous. But the fact remains that in ancient Mesopotamia, both the civic calendar and the agricultural calendar relied on observations of the

“heliacal” rising (and setting) of these four constellations and their associated stars to determine the time and season. To an observer on earth, these constellations, along with all the others in the zodiac, would appear to move or proceed in a cycle through the vault of the heaven throughout the night.

6

THE WINGS

Pazuzu²⁰ is the Mesopotamian king of the wind demons and has one of the clearest conceptual links to the Ezekiel vision, though the elements are, again, not identical. This entity, shown in Figure 6, has only one face and, though a hybrid creature, is anthropomorphic with a canine face, four wings, and bird-like feet.



Figure 8. Pazuzu, King of the Wind Demons. (Courtesy Wikimedia Commons)

Pazuzu is also depicted with a snake-like phallus prominently displayed while Ezekiel's Living Creatures are depicted more modestly, using their lower wings to cover their body.

What do the wings do? What do they mean? Mesopotamian myth is instructive on this point. In one story, Adapa a wise man from the city of Eridu is tasked with providing fish to the city and its god. Neils-Erik Andreasen, in his article *Adam and Adapa: Two Anthropological Characters* explains a vignette from the myth:

“Once, a sailing mishap on a fishing expedition made him (Adapa) curse the south wind, thereby breaking its wing, whereupon the land was deprived of its cooling and moist breezes.”²¹

Here we see the clear association of the wings with the provision of the wind. In the case of Adapa, he curses the “south” wind. Scott Noegel, in his article *On the Wings of the Winds: Towards an Understanding of Winged Mischwesen in the Ancient Near East* draws a clear connection between winged hybrid creatures, wind and one additional element, the cardinal directions.

“Literary depictions and iconographic images of wings on various hybrid creatures are a means of depicting that creature's association with wind and the cardinal directions, and that recognizing this correlation offers greater insight into the function and meaning of these creatures in the written and iconographic records generally.”²²

Of the winged entities in Ezekiel, Noegel writes the following:

“Like Pazuzu and the Egyptian depictions of the four winds, the cherubim's four wings embody the four winds. The creatures' “four-ness” allows them to move and face in every direction without needing to turn around.”²³

Like the four faces, the four wings point to an association with the cardinal directions. This is an important element of Dr. Heiser's Astrological Hypothesis as the cardinal directions are associated with four important constellations as has already been discussed.

OTHER WINGED CREATURES

In Ezekiel Chapter 10 the living creatures are called Cherubim, a term that denotes a certain function within the divine order. As Dr. Heiser notes in his book on Angels:

“Protecting the sanctity of God’s presence is obviously a functional role.”²⁴

Babylonian iconography depicts hybrid creatures protecting imperial compounds and spaces. These images often featured a winged bull with a human head as shown in Figure 7.

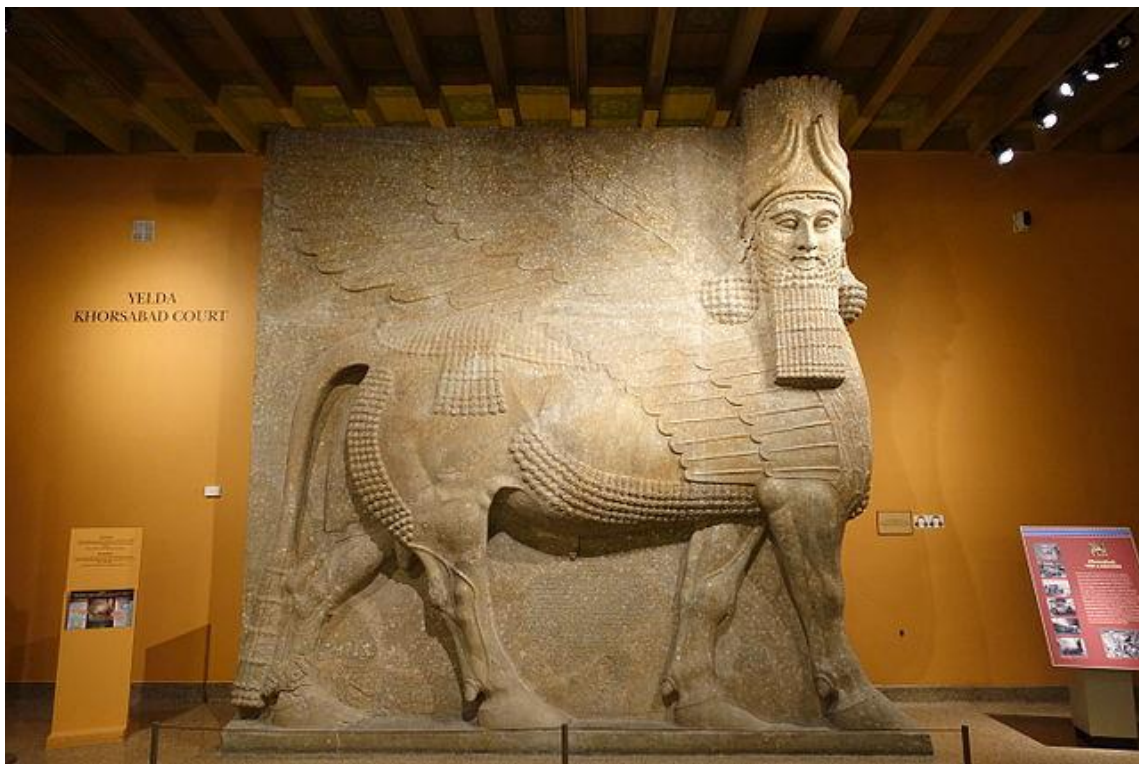


Figure 9. Lamassu the Babylonian Throne Guardian/Gatekeeper (Courtesy Wikimedia Commons)

Known as Lamassu, this 16-foot-tall statue guarded the entrance to the throne room of Sargon II, king of Assyria (721-705 BC), in his palace. Is this icon relevant to what Ezekiel saw? It could help explain several elements and inconsistencies. Note that Ezekiel 1:7 states:

⁷Their legs were straight; their feet were like those of a calf and gleamed like burnished bronze.

Note also that there is a slight difference between the faces listed in chapter 1 and chapter 10:

Ezekiel 1:10

¹⁰Their faces looked like this: Each of the four had the face of a human being, and on the right side each had the face of a lion, and on the left the face of an ox; each also had the face of an eagle.

Ezekiel 10:14

¹⁴Each of the cherubim had four faces: One face was that of a cherub, the second the face of a human being, the third the face of a lion, and the fourth the face of an eagle.

Chapter/Verse	Left	Front	Back	Right
1:10	Ox	Human	Eagle	Lion
10:14	Cherub	Human	Eagle	Lion

Puzzling, perhaps but Lamassu answers that question and keeps the images consistent as the hybrid-being with the body of an ox/bull who also has a human face. The change is not insignificant though. There is a clear theological reason for the Ezekiel to make this switch, but that discussion is outside the scope of exploring the Astrological Hypothesis.

The Apkallu and Genius iconography from the ANE, as shown in Figure 8 is also a close match with anthropomorphic figures bearing four wings, some with human faces and some with bird-like faces.



Figure 10. Winged Genius (courtesy the Author) and Apkallu reliefs (courtesy Wikimedia Commons).

Clearly there is an association between Ezekiel's Living Creatures and the following:

1. Storm phenomenon.
2. Wind, particularly the four winds of the cardinal directions.
3. Babylonian conceptions of gods who have celestial counterparts.
4. Constellations or the "gods of the night" especially the constellations of the four cardinal points.

THE WHEELS

As scholar's have noted, Ezekiel's vision is the divine chariot-throne upon which the Deity travels to his people. There is, therefore, an obvious connection to wheels. Chariots have wheels, even chariots bourn by attendants can have wheels under them. But these wheels seem unique, they are "wheels intersecting wheels" and they are "full of eyes." Some have interpreted the intersecting wheels as indicating their ability to move in any direction as the biblical text in 1:17 seems to indicate:

¹⁷As they moved, they would go in any one of the four directions the creatures faced; the wheels did not change direction as the creatures went.

In this context the wheels seem to be one of the easier aspects of the vision to interpret. Wheels were common in ancient Babylon. As were chariots and wheeled thrones. Sennacherib is depicted in a wall relief shown in Figure 9²⁵, as riding his throne chariot, being drawn along, and attended to by servants. On Sargon's palace façade, Figure 10, a relief shows a very similar style of chariot, unoccupied, but being bourn along by servants.

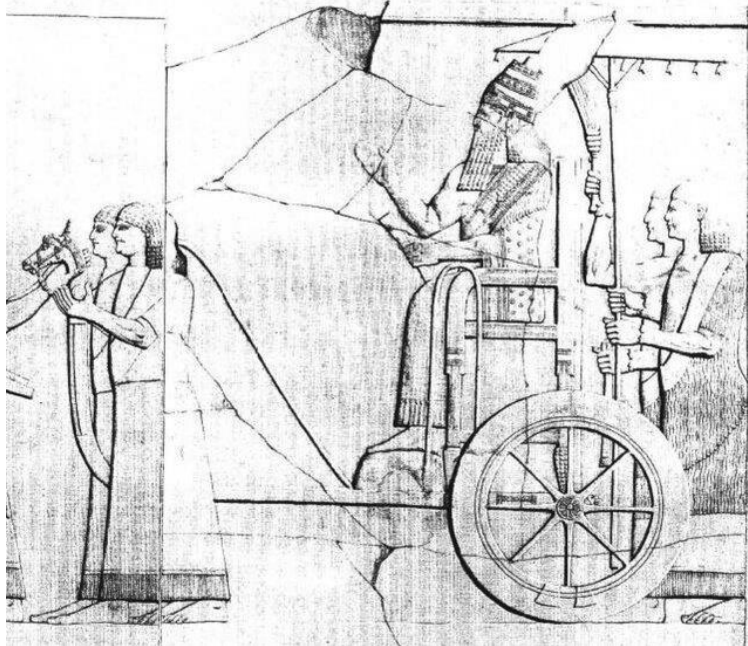


Figure 11: Senacharib riding his throne-chariot. (In van Dijk-Coombes, 2018, used without permission)



Figure 12: Sargon's throne-chariot being borne upon the shoulders of servants. (Courtesy Louvre)

The existence of wheels is consistent with the overall genre of a divine chariot-throne scene, but the curious intersection of the wheels within wheels remains more difficult to understand until you import Dr. Heiser's Astrological Hypothesis.

“Rims are what? Things that go in circles. Wheels go in circles. And the zodiac goes in a circle. Since Ezekiel sees all four

constellations moving at once, his vantage point was high above the entire cosmos.”²⁶

Later he simply states:

“The ‘wheels within wheels’ is a way of symbolically describing the stars (constellations) in their courses.”²⁷

But is it that simple? If the prophet is, in fact, at a vantage point that allows him to see all four creatures moving as the zodiac make’s its revolution through the night, then surely, he is able to observe other rotary motion as well. All heavenly bodies are subject to rotational movement. The sun, moon, and planets all appear to orbit around the earth. Consider the disk of the earth situated in the middle of the wheel of the zodiac, then add in the motion of these other objects which follow their own paths. Conceptually, these could be considered wheels within wheels.

But it may not even be that difficult as there is also the concept of circularity embedded within the previously discussed concepts of wings, winds and cardinal directions. Noegel in his article *On the Wings of the Winds* states the following:

“The Mesopotamian connection between wings, winds, and the four cardinal directions obtains also in references to the *kippatu*, a term that means “circle, loop, circumference, and totality”. When used of the earth or the winds it represents all directions, *i.e.*, everywhere the wind blows. Thus, we hear about the king: *ana kippat erbette tabti tetepus*, “you (the king) have shown kindness to all the circle of the four (quarters)”. In the Poem of Erra, Anu ordains the winds by commanding them: *Kima sari Zi[q]ma kippata bita*, “blow like the wind, survey the circle” (I, 36). The stormgod Adad also possesses the *Kippa tsar erbetti*, “circle of the four winds”, and thus, he *sabit kibat sare* (IM.MES), “controls all the winds”.”²⁸

Ezekiel 1:20 says:

²⁰Wherever the spirit would go, they would go, and the wheels would rise along with them, because the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels.

While the Hebrew word in this passage translated “Spirit” is ru-ah, this same word (ru-ah) is translated earlier in verse 4 as “wind” and in the Hebrew is immediately described as a whirlwind. Whirlwind has rotary motion. In 10:13 the wheels are called the “whirling wheels”. If we replace the word “spirit” in 1:20 with “wind” the passage becomes:

²⁰Wherever the spirit would go, they would go, and the wheels would rise along with them, because the *wind* of the living creatures was in the wheels.

Conceptually, this notion of wind and whirling winds being associated with the Living Creatures, which are next to the wheels and whose spirit or winds animate the wheels may be an explanation for the movement of the zodiac itself. From Ezekiel’s vantage point, could he have seen a picture similar to Figure 10?

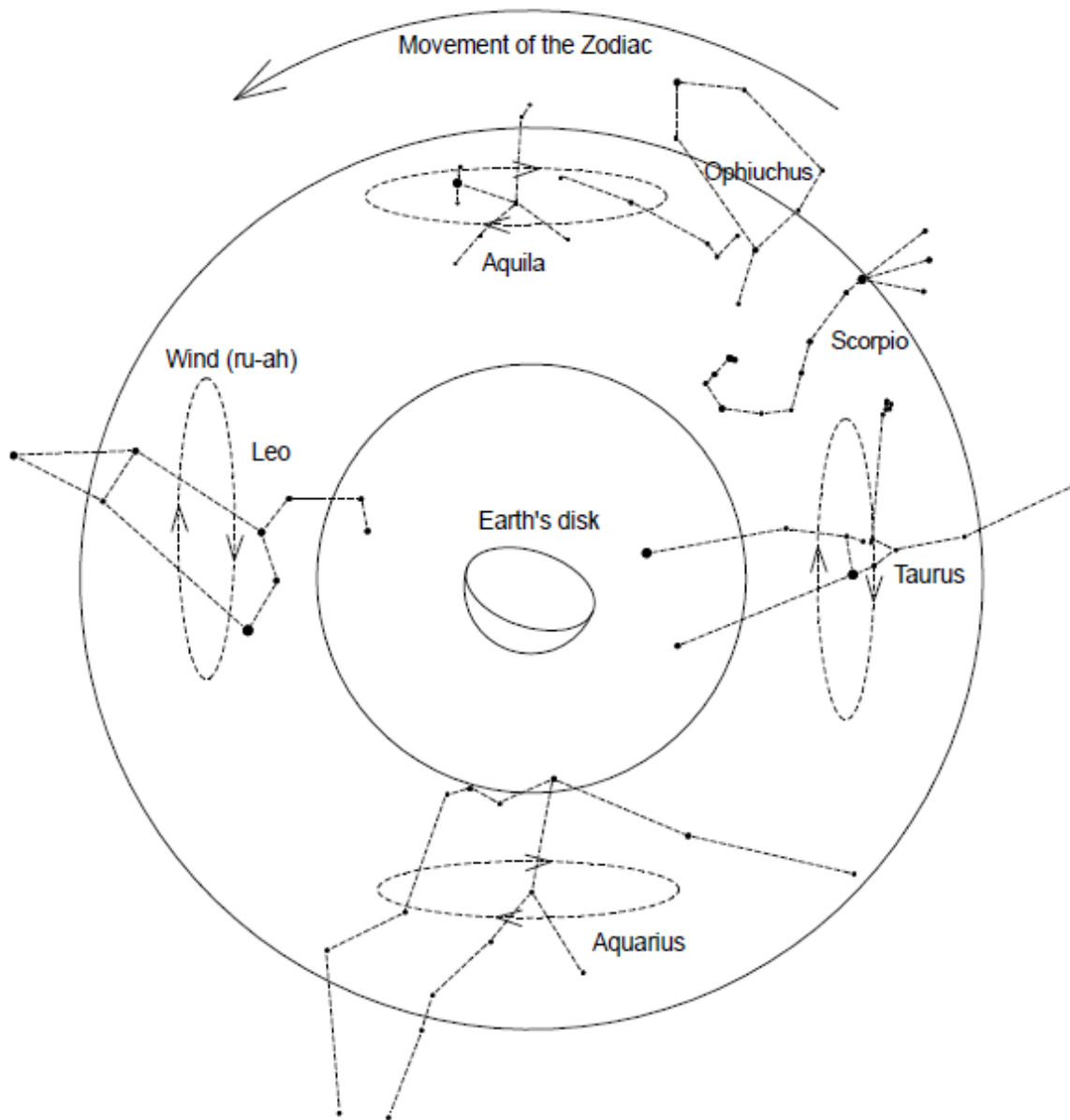


Figure 13. The Zodiac Wheel with the Living Creatures Whirling Winds Depicted. (Courtesy the Author)

The zodiac is made up of many more constellations than the six shown here. This view is simplified to the four main constellation groups (and including Scorpio and Ophiuchus) which relate to the Living Creatures of Ezekiel's vision. It should be imagined with the additional zodiacal constellations and against a background of all the remaining stars that exist outside the ecliptic or are not part of the major constellations. These stars would still be observable during

the night. In the Astrological Hypothesis, its these stars that are equated with what modern translations of Ezekiel calls “eyes”.

9

THE EYES

Ezekiel 1:18

¹⁸Their rims were high and awesome, and all four rims were full of eyes all around.

Ezekiel 10:12

¹²Their entire bodies, including their backs, their hands and their wings, were completely full of eyes, as were their four wheels.

It should be apparent by now that most of the elements in Ezekiel’s vision - faces, wings, and wheels – have several layers of meaning. They are multifaceted elements of the vision and though its beyond the scope of this paper to discuss their various theological implications, each layer of meaning does have a corresponding message or meaning. These various layers are not in conflict, in fact they seem to build upon and support one another such that they should not be considered as competing. This is a case of both/and, not either/or.

So too with the eyes. That is, if the English translation is correct and readers are meant to think of eyes, there is a practical and coherent theological reason for that. As Lena-Sofia

Tiemeyer explains in her article *Zecharia’s Spies and Ezekiel’s Cherubim*:

“These eyes are best understood as symbols of the cherubim’s all-seeing character and constant watchfulness, although they may also have had a physical dimension as eye-shaped gem stones that gave them a sense of majesty and awesomeness.”²⁹

It's not apparent that Tiemeyer is aware of the Astrological Hypothesis but her comment about eye-shaped gem stones is interesting in light of extant small statuary from the ANE that contain exactly those types of impressions and have celestial connotations. In the images in Figures 14-16³⁰ this motif is apparent, and the celestial connection is most obvious in the Bull of Heaven statuette.



Figure 14. Bull Statuette with Impressed Rosettes (In Hartner, 1965, used without permission)



Figure 15. Bull of Heaven Statuette with Inlaid Astrological Symbols (In Hartner, 1965, used without permission)



Figure 16. Lion Statuette with Inlaid Stones (In Hartner, 1965, used without permission)

Some scholars have also put forward the idea that, if Ezekiel is describing a chariot wheel, perhaps the eyes refer to the rivets within the rims, holding the parts together. This idea works, but the concept of omniscience - the all-seeing nature of Yahweh - is the most often cited meaning behind the eyes. Dr. Heiser's Astrological Hypothesis, which is not well developed within the available scholarship, seems to point to a much more coherent understanding. Dr. Heiser's hypothesis is largely built on a revised translation of the word used for "eyes". He states:

"The one thing I think most noteworthy about all this is the eyes. In Ezekiel 1 we read that the wheels were full of eyes. What does that have to do with the zodiac or astrology? Simple. The Hebrew word for "eyes" is 'ayin. This is the normal word for that body part through which we see. The same word is also used (by Ezekiel, no less — in the SAME CHAPTER) to describe "sparkling" or "gleaming" (cf. Ezek. 1:4; Ezek. 1:16). Here's a suggestion: "eyes" should be understood in Ezekiel 1 AND Ezekiel 10 as "stars" ("sparkling things"). This fits amazingly well with chapter 10, since there, both the creatures and the wheels have the eyes."³¹

There are three points that need to be true for this portion of Dr. Heiser's hypotheses to work:

1. 1:14 should contain the Hebrew word ayin.
2. 1:4 should also contain the word ayin.
3. 1:16 should also contain the word ayin.

Given the proliferation of on-line interlinear bibles available, this assertion should be very easy to validate or falsify. On-line interlinear bibles place the original Hebrew next to the English translation to facilitate deeper word study. The relevant passages are Ezekiel 1:18 for the original use of the word eyes. The other two where, according to Dr. Heiser's Astrological Hypothesis, the same word is used for "sparkling" or "gleaming" are 1:4 and 1:16. Figure 17 is a

screenshot from the interlinear bible at Biblehub.com showing the use of the word eyes in the prototypical verse 18.

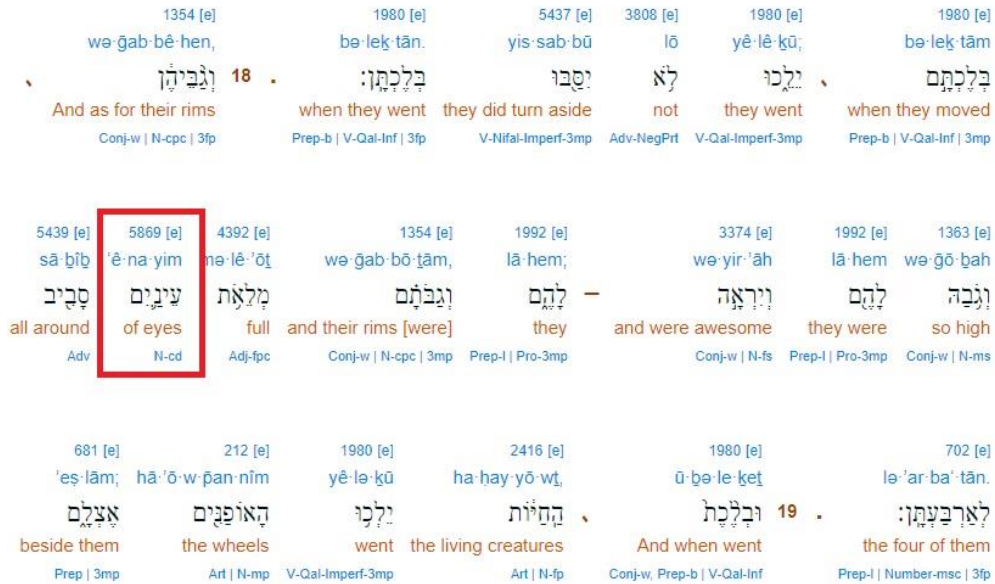


Figure 17.

Using this resource, things immediately get complicated. The word “eyes” is not by itself, it’s prefixed by the word of as highlighted. The two are translated a e-na-yim. It’s easy to draw a conceptual link between the suffix of this word a-yim and link it to its probable root ayin as Dr. Heiser explains. However, in the other two passages, where this word is supposedly translated, neither ayim nor ayin appear where Dr. Heiser says they should appear.

6828 [e]	4480 [e]	935 [e]	5591 [e]	7307 [e]	2009 [e]	7200 [e]
has-sā-pō-wn,	min-	bā-'āh	se-'ā-rāh	rū-ah	wə-hin-nēh	wā-'ē-re
וּמִצָּפוֹן	מִן	בָּאָה	סַעְרָה	רוּחַ	וַהֲבִיֵּה	וַאֲרָא
of the north	out	was coming	a whirlwind	wind	and behold	And I looked
Art N-fs	Prep	V-Qal-Prtcpl-fs	N-fs	N-csc	Conj-w Interjection	Conj-w V-Qal-Conseclmperf-1cs

5439 [e]		5051 [e]	3947 [e]	784 [e]	1419 [e]	6051 [e]
sā-bīḇ;	lōw	wə-nō-ḡah	mit-laq-qa-haṭ,	wə-'ēš	gā-ḡō-wl	'ā-nān
סָבִיב	לוֹ	וְנֹגַהּ	מִתְלַקַּחַת	וְאֵשׁ	גְּדוֹלָה	עָנָן
all around	it	and brightness [was]	engulfing itself	and with [raging] fire	great	a cloud
Adv	Prep 3ms	Conj-w N-fs	V-Hilpael-Prtcpl-fs	Conj-w N-cs	Adj-ms	N-ms

8432 [e]	784 [e]	8432 [e]	2830 [e]	5869 [e]	8432 [e]
ū-mit-tō-w-kāh,	hā-'ēš.	mit-tō-wḵ	ha-haš-mal	ke-'èn	ū-mit-tō-w-kāh,
וּמִתּוֹכָהּ	הָאֵשׁ:	מִתּוֹךְ	הַחֹשֶׁמֶל	כְּעֵין	וּמִתּוֹכָהּ
And from within it	of the fire	out of the midst	of amber	like the color	and radiating out of its midst
Conj-w, Prep-m N-msc 3fs	Art N-cs	Prep-m N-msc	Art N-ms	Prep-k N-csc	Conj-w, Prep-m N-msc 3fs

Figure 18: Ezekiel 1:4

4639 [e]	212 [e]	4758 [e]	6440 [e]	702 [e]	2416 [e]
ū-ma-'ā-šē-hem	hā-'ō-w-pan-nīm	mar-'ēh	pā-nāw.	le-'ar-ba-'aṭ	ha-hay-yō-wṭ
וּמַעֲשֵׂיהֶם	הָאוֹפָנִים	מַרְאֵה	פָּנָיו:	לְאַרְבַּעַת	הַחַיּוֹת
and their workings [was]	of the wheels	The appearance	its faces	with four	each living creature
Conj-w N-mpc 3mp	Art N-mp	N-msc	N-cpc 3ms	Prep-l Number-msc	Art N-fp

4639 [e]	4758 [e]	702 [e]	259 [e]	1823 [e]	8658 [e]	5869 [e]
ū-ma-'ā-šē-hem,	ū-mar-'ē-hem	le-'ar-ba-'tān;	'e-hād	ū-ḡe-mūṭ	tar-šiš,	ke-'èn
וּמַעֲשֵׂיהֶם	וּמַרְאֵיהֶם	לְאַרְבַּעַתָּן	אֶחָד	וְדָמוּת	תְּרִשִׁישׁ	כְּעֵין
and of their workings	and the appearance [was]	had {all} four	one	and likeness	of beryl	like the color
Conj-w N-mpc 3mp	Conj-w N-mpc 3mp	Prep-l Number-msc 3fp	Number-ms	Conj-w N-fs	N-ms	Prep-k N-csc

7253 [e]	702 [e]	5921 [e]	212 [e]	8432 [e]	212 [e]	1961 [e]	834 [e]
nīḇ-'ē hen	'ar-ba-'aṭ	'al-	hā-'ō-w-ḡān.	be-tō-wḵ	hā-'ō-w-ḡān	yih-yeh	ka-'ā-šer
רִבְעֵיהֶן	אַרְבַּעַת	עַל-	הָאוֹפָן:	בְּתוֹךְ	הָאוֹפָן	יְהִיָּה	כַּאֲשֶׁר
any one of directions	four	Toward	of a wheel	in the middle	a wheel	it were	as
N-mpc 3fp	Number-msc	Prep	Art N-ms	Prep-b N-msc	Art N-ms	V-Qal-Imperf-3ms	Prep-k Pro-r

Figure 19: Ezekiel 1:16

There are several possibilities that might explain this. Hebrew is a complex language and translation, and transliteration are also complex processes. There are numerous codices and manuscript traditions that terminology can be drawn from. Scholars do their best to analyse and

assess these differences when piecing together the English version. Or there may be some other nuance of language or the transmission process that remains hidden. The question then becomes, what led Dr. Heiser to assert his point so confidently about the use of the term *ayin* in all three of these locations?

In both his blog post and the Naked Bible Podcast episode 367, Dr. Heiser references Daniel I. Block, an Old Testament scholar who authored a two-volume commentary on the book of Ezekiel. Of the eyes, Block says:

“The eyes are difficult to interpret. The word *ayin* had been used earlier for “sparkle, gleam” (vv. 4, 16), and this may point the way to its interpretation here. Some have explained the glistening quality of the rims as the flashing for nail fittings attached to the outside of the chariot wheels as the wheels turned. However, it seems more likely that Ezekiel’s use of *ayin* reflects the Babylonian influence. The Akkadian cognate *inu*, written with the determinative *aban*, “stone,” denotes an “eye-shaped pebble (of precious stone). These “eye-jewels” are of a piece with the wheels that “sparkle like beryl” and with the majesty and awesomeness that characterize the entire vehicle. This interpretation is preferable to the traditional view that the eyes symbolize the all-seeing and all-knowing character of God.”³²

But Block does not provide any specific information on which manuscript tradition he is using in his translation of *ayin*. A careful reading of the footnotes indicates that he, like all OT scholars, are taking all manuscript traditions and the work of other scholars into account in all the interpretive work within his commentary. But one scholar quoting the work of another scholar for which the trail seems to run cold is wholly unsatisfactory. Is that enough to call the entire Astrological Hypothesis into question? The answer is no and certainly not until an attempt has been made to survey additional resources.

Fortunately, another on-line source at netbible.org also has an interlinear feature. The passage under study can be searched and an interlinear of the Hebrew shown side-by-side.

Highlighting a word in the netbible.org application will automatically highlight the other uses of that word in both the Hebrew text and the translation. The screen shot in Figure 17 shows the English word “eyes” highlighted, along with its Hebrew counterpart and it also shows every other word within the passage that has the same Hebrew root. In this application, the same word for eyes in 1:18 is also use for:

Verse	Translation
1:4	glowing
1:7	Like polished bronze
1:15	gleaming
1:22	glittering
1:27	glow

enormous cloud, with lightning flashing,¹² such that bright light¹³ rimmed it and came from¹⁴ it like glowing amber¹⁵ from the middle of a fire. **5** In the fire¹⁶ were what looked like¹⁷ four living beings.¹⁸ In their appearance they had human form,¹⁹ **6** but each had four faces and four wings. **7** Their legs were straight, but the soles of their feet were like calves' feet. They gleamed²⁰ like polished bronze. **8** They had human hands²¹ under their wings on their four sides. As for the faces and wings of the four of them, **9** their wings touched each other; they did not turn as they moved, but went straight ahead.²²

10 Their faces had this appearance: Each of the four had the face of a man, with the face of a lion on the right, the face of an ox on the left, and also the face of an eagle.²³ **11** Their wings were spread out above them; each had two wings touching the wings of one of the other beings on either side and two wings covering their bodies. **12** Each moved straight ahead²⁴—wherever the spirit²⁵ would go, they would go, without turning as they went. **13** In the middle²⁶ of the living beings was something like²⁷ burning coals of fire²⁸ or like torches. It moved back and forth among the living beings. It was bright, and lightning was flashing out of the fire. **14** The living beings moved backward and forward as quickly as flashes of lightning.²⁹

15 Then I looked,³⁰ and I saw one wheel³¹ on the ground³² beside each of the four beings. **16** The appearance of the wheels and their construction³³ was like gleaming jasper,³⁴ and all four wheels looked alike. Their structure was like a wheel within a wheel.³⁵ **17** When they moved they would go in any of the four directions they faced without turning as they moved. **18** Their rims were high and awesome,³⁶ and the rims of all four wheels were full of eyes³⁷ all around.

לִאֲרֵבֶעֶתָם

1:9 חֲבֵרֵת אִשָּׁה אֶל אַחֲוֹתָם כְּנִפְיָהֶם לֹא יִסְבוּ בְלִכְתָּן אִישׁ אֶל עֵבֶר פָּנָיו יִלְכוּ

1:10 וְדַמּוּת פְּנֵיהֶם פָּנֵי אָדָם וּפְנֵי אַרְיֵה אֶל הַיְמִין לִאֲרֵבֶעֶתָם וּפְנֵי שׁוֹר מִהַשְּׂמָאוֹל לִאֲרֵבֶעֶתָן וּפְנֵי נֶשֶׁר לִאֲרֵבֶעֶתָן

1:11 וּפְנֵיהֶם וְכַנְפֵיהֶם פְּרֻדוֹת מִלְמַעְלָה לְאִישׁ שְׁתֵּים חֲבֵרוֹת אִישׁ וּשְׁתֵּים מַכְסוֹת אֵת גְּיִתֵיהֶנָּה

1:12 וְאִישׁ אֶל עֵבֶר פָּנָיו יִלְכוּ אֶל אֲשֶׁר יִהְיֶה שְׂמֵהּ הַרוּחַ לִלְכֹת יִלְכוּ לֹא יִסְבוּ בְלִכְתָּן

1:13 וְדַמּוּת הַחַיּוֹת מֵרְאִיהֶם כַּגִּחְלִי אֵשׁ בַּעֲרוֹת כְּמֵרָאָה הַלְּפָדִים הִיא מִתְהַלֶּכֶת בֵּין הַחַיּוֹת וְנִגְהָ לְאִשׁ וּמֵן הָאֵשׁ יֵוצֵא בִרְקַק

1:14 וְהַחַיּוֹת רְצוּא וְשׁוֹב כְּמֵרָאָה הַבּוֹק

1:15 וְאֵרָא הַחַיּוֹת וְהִנֵּה אוֹפֵן אַחַד בְּאַרְצָן אֶצֶל הַחַיּוֹת לִאֲרֵבֶעֶת פָּנָיו

1:16 מֵרָאָה הָאוֹפְנִים וּמַעֲשִׂיהֶם כְּעֵיִן תְּרִישִׁישׁ וְדַמּוּת אַחַד לִאֲרֵבֶעֶתָן וּמֵרְאִיהֶם וּמַעֲשִׂיהֶם כְּאֲשֶׁר יִהְיֶה הָאוֹפֵן בְּתוֹךְ הָאוֹפֵן

1:17 עַל אַרְבַּעַת רַבְעֵיהֶן בְּלִכְתָּם יִלְכוּ לֹא יִסְבוּ בְלִכְתָּן

1:18 וּגְבִיהֶן וּגְבָה לָהֶם וְיִרְאָה לָהֶם וּגְבָתָם מְלֵאת עֵינַיִם סָבִיב לִאֲרֵבֶעֶתָן

1) eye 1a) eye 1a1) of physical eye 1a2) as showing mental qualities 1a3) of mental and spiritual faculties (fig.) 2) spring, fountain

Figure 20: Netbible.org screenshot of Ezekiel 1:4-18

Another site, <https://www.biblewebapp.com/study/> produces a similar result as shown in

Figure 15:

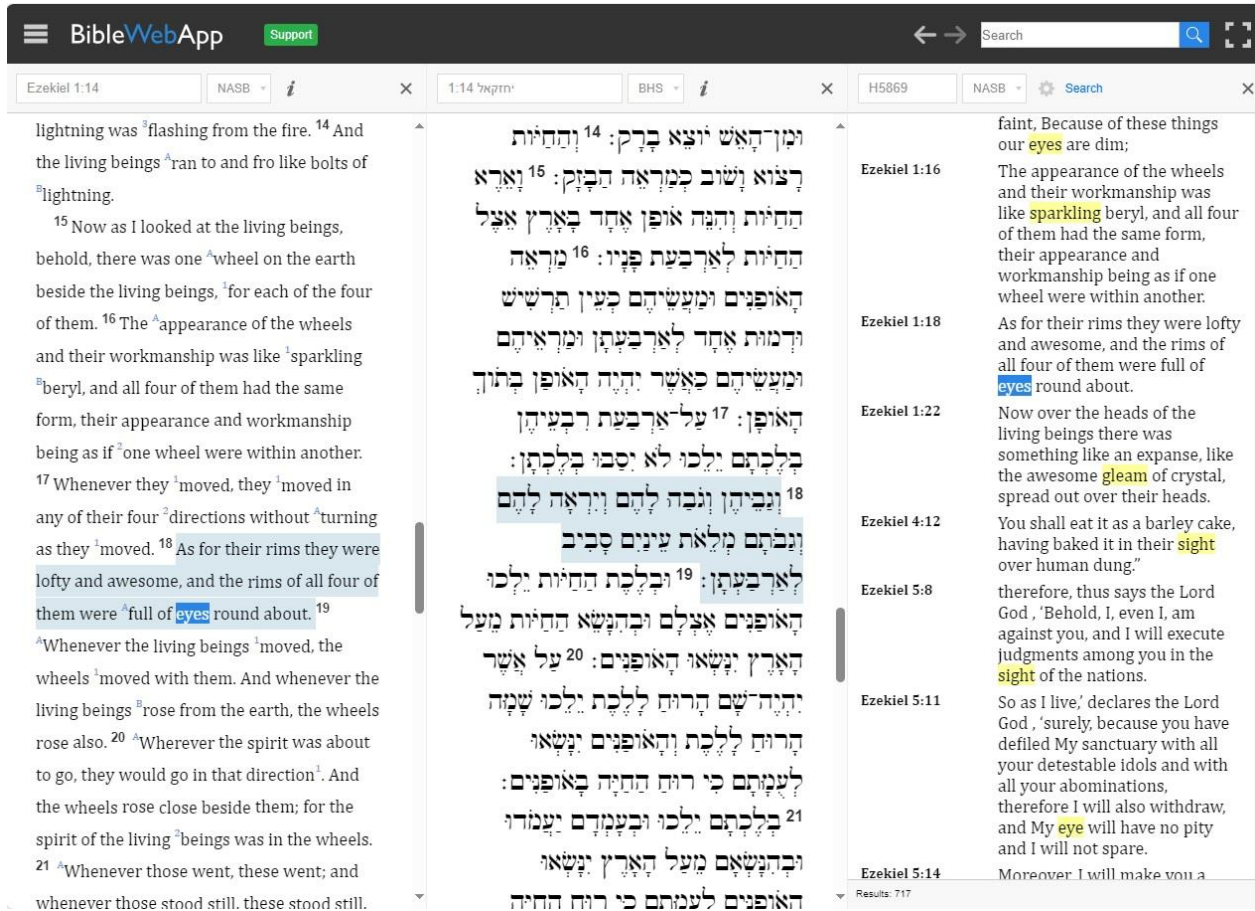


Figure 21: screenshot from biblewebapp.com showing Ezekiel 1: 14-21

Both sources reinforce the point made by Block, and adopted by Dr. Heiser in his Astrological Hypothesis. Block does not draw the conclusion that the glowing, sparkling, and gleaming might relate to stars, particularly the ones within the zodiacal constellations, that seems to be a Heiser innovation and insight. But Block does note that one interpretive option is think of them as “eye-jewels”. This is remarkably similar to what Tiemeyer says, and what the statuettes in figure 11-13 show.

CONCLUSION

Dr. Michael S. Heiser proposed an astrological reading of Ezekiel's vision of the Living Creatures/Cherubim and the wheels within wheels that were covered in eyes. He proposed this hypothesis in a Blog post on his website and in episode 367 of the Naked Bible Podcast. Due to reasons one can only speculate on, Dr. Heiser provided only simple explanations and evidence he felt sufficient to support his hypothesis.

Unfortunately, he died prior to completing work on a book about astral prophecy from which he drew some of the material and evidence for his podcast. And, unfortunately, the evidence for his hypothesis suffered from two significant problems. His choice of the constellation Ophiuchus as the source of the eagle face on the Living Creature/Cherubim, and a heavy reliance on the translation of the word for "eyes".

Dr. Heiser, had he been able to complete his book on astral prophecy, may have been able to address these two issues more completely. But fortunately, Dr. Heiser's podcasts, videos and books all modeled his method for studying the bible which relied heavily on the work of prior and contemporary research by other scholars. He often described his job as "connecting the dots" between the points that scholars knew were there but didn't get transmitted to the laity in the pew or into popular culture.

This paper, while exploring Dr. Heiser's Astrological Hypothesis for understanding Ezekiel's bizarre vision, attempted to use the vey study methods he embodied in all his work to validate or falsify that hypothesis. A review of the scholarly work available, has clarified, and

provided supporting evidence that reinforces the coherence and explanatory value of the Astrological Hypothesis. This evidence includes the close association of the Living Creatures/Cherubim with iconic images of Babylonian gods, particularly gods associated with wind and storm phenomenon from which they emerge. This association with wind provides a connection to the cardinal directions, which also provides a connection to the constellations and specifically four constellations within the Babylonian zodiac.

The zodiac travels along an ecliptic which is a cosmic circle, not unlike a large wheel, with a rim full of stars. The word for eyes can be seamlessly translated into words that match the description of what stars do – glow, sparkle, etc. All these elements work together and have iconographic support from the time and place Ezekiel was writing. If the Astrological Hypothesis is accepted, it does falsify some of the previous explanations for the vision, particularly the notion of Ezekiel describing a flying saucer. It also calls into question the idea of the eyes representing omniscience, though that concept is still has some support and maintains its explanatory value. But the final word on this should be left to Dr. Heiser, who concludes in his blog post:

“Ezekiel’s visions are about an enthroned God who controls the cycles of time - the zodiac and its movements - and is up to something....”³³

Notes:

1. See Heiser, 2008 and Heiser, 2021.
2. Heiser never referred to an “Astrological Hypothesis” in any of his work. I have adopted this designation to provide a suitable title to the entire system of thought that Heiser expounded on this topic in his blog post and podcast.
3. Zelig Aster, Shawn. *Ezekiel's Adaptation of Mesopotamian Melammu*. *Die Welt des Orients* 45.1 (2015): 10-21.
4. LAUNDERVILLE, DALE. “*Ezekiel's Throne-Chariot Vision: Spiritualizing the Model of Divine Royal Rule.*” *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, vol. 66, no. 3, 2004, pp. 361–77.
5. For more information on the Throne motif in the Bible and the ANE, see Gallusz, 2013 and van Dijk-Coombes, 2018.
6. Heiser, Michael S. *Angels: What the Bible Really Says About God's Heavenly Host*. Lexham Press, 2018.
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10. Gane, Constance E., “*Composite Beings in Neo-Babylonian Art.*” Diss. UC Berkeley, 2012.
11. <https://isac.uchicago.edu/collections/highlights/highlights-collection-deities>
12. For more on the Underworld Vision of an Assyrian Prince, see Loktionov, 2017; Sanders, 2009; and Bach 2018. To read the transliteration and translation of the vision, visit <http://oracc.org/saao/P337164/>.
13. <http://oracc.org/saao/P337164/>; retrieved
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19. Ibid.
20. For more on Pazuzu see Noegel, 2017 and Maiden, 2018.
21. Andreasen, Niels-Erik. "Adam and Adapa: two anthropological characters." *Andrews University Seminary Studies (AUSS)* 19.3 (1981): 1.
22. Noegel, Scott B. "On the Wings of the Winds: Towards an Understanding of Winged Mischwesen in the Ancient Near East." (2017): 15-54.
23. Ibid.
24. Heiser, Michael S. *Angels: What the Bible Really Says About God's Heavenly Host*. Lexham Press, 2018.
25. See van Dijk-Coombes, 2018.
26. Heiser, Michael S., *Revelation 4 Part 2*, <https://nakedbiblepodcast.com/podcast/naked-bible-367-revelation-4-part-2/>, 2021
27. Ibid.
28. Noegel, Scott B. "On the Wings of the Winds: Towards an Understanding of Winged Mischwesen in the Ancient Near East." (2017): 15-54.
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Figure 2 – Courtesy etsy user UberKio. Used without permission.

Figure 3 – Courtesy Twitter user @TheProjectUnity. Used without permission.

Figure 4 – Pawlicki, T.B. *How to Build a Flying Saucer*, in Childress, David Hatcher. *The Anti-Gravity Handbook*. Adventures Unlimited Press, 2003.

Figure 5 - <https://isac.uchicago.edu/collections/highlights/highlights-collection-mesopotamia#:~:text=Four%2DFaced%20God%20and%20Goddess,back%20of%20a%20crouching%20ram.>

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Figures 14, 15 & 16 - Hartner, Willy. “The Earliest History of the Constellations in the near East and the Motif of the Lion-Bull Combat.” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, vol. 24, no. 1/2, 1965, pp. 1–16.

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