Title

The Calf of Samaria: The Politics of Cultic Images in Eighth Century Israel

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Publication Date

2023

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Los Angeles

The Calf of Samaria:

The Politics of Cultic Images in Eighth Century Israel

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in Near Eastern Languages and Cultures

by

Elizabeth Grace VanDyke

2023

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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University of California, Los Angeles, 2023

Professor William M. Schniedewind, Chair

The golden calves are the most iconic of ancient Israel's sins. And yet, scholarship focused on these images is scant and repetitive. Previous research has generally sought to determine how idolatrous these statues were according to modern standards, making the calves more theological constructs than ancient cultic objects.

I seek to expand our knowledge of Israel's calves and the cultus surrounding them by investigating the often-overlooked Book of Hosea. This eighth century Minor Prophet is arguably the oldest written critique of the calves extant, making it the place to begin considerations of Israel's calf cultus. However, Hosea's writings on the calves are obscure, and rigorous philology is necessary to understand its three texts on the calves: Hosea 8:5-6, 10:5-6, and 13:2. This dissertation therefore examines these difficult passages and suggests new

interpretations of them based on comparative Semitics and cultural comparisons with Syria and Neo-Assyria. Special consideration is given to the role these objects played in Israelite society, with methodological insights taken from material studies and monumentality.

Overall, it is argued that Israel's calf statues acted as equivalents to cultic statues in other polities. The Calf of Samaria (Hosea 8:6) was associated with the Yahweh of Samaria known from the Kuntillet 'Ajrud inscriptions. It interacted with Israel's priests and kings through rituals and offerings. These rituals became key symbols of divine authorization for Israel's last kings, who struggled to maintain their legitimacy as the Northern Kingdom collapsed. As the society continued to crumble, the weakening of Israel's monarchy strained the cultus that it depended upon. The authors of Hosea thus used the downfall of Israel's kings and kingdom to demonstrate the impotence of the calf statues, making their aniconic rhetoric not merely theological, but socially grounded.

The conclusion of this dissertation suggests that the aniconic reforms of Hezekiah were spurred in part by Israel's downfall and the northern rhetoric surrounding it. The golden calves were thus forever associated with a sin that brought on divine abandonment, as opposed to the divine presence they were intended to mark.

The dissertation of Elizabeth Grace VanDyke is approved.

Catherine E. Bonesho

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2023

To my father, Dr. David VanDyke, who nurtured within me a love of the biblical text and its interpretation, and to my mother, Dr. Rebecca S. VanDyke, who challenged me to pursue my studies through every obstacle.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AB	Anchor Bible
ATD	Das Alte Testament Deutsch
BHS	*Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*. Edited by R. Kittel, K. Elliger, W. Rudolph, G.E. Weil, H.P Rüger, and A. Schenker. Amended 5th ed. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1997.
BDB	*A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament.* Edited by Francis Brown, S.R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs. 12th ed. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 2008.
CAD	*The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago*. Martha T. Roth, editor-in-charge. 21 vols. Chicago: The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 1956–2010.
COS	*The Context of Scripture*. Edited by W.W. Hallo and K.L. Younger. 4 vols. Leiden: Brill, 1992-2016.
DJPA	*A Dictionary of Jewish Palestinian Aramaic.* Michael Sokoloff. 2nd ed. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003.
DN	Divine Name
FOTL	Forms of the Old Testament Literature
GKC	W. Gesenius. *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*. Edited by E. Kautzsch. Translated by A.E. Cowley. 2nd English ed. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1910.
GN	Geographic Name
HALOT	*The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Ludwig Koehler, Walter Baumgartner, and Johann J. Stamm. Translated and edited under the supervision of Mervyn E. J. Richardson. 2 vols. Leiden: Brill, 2001.
HCOT	Historical Commentary on the Old Testament
IBHS	*An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax.* Bruce K. Waltke and Michael O'Connor. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990
ICC	International Critical Commentary
JPS	Jewish Publication Society
KAI	*Kanaanäische und aramäische Inschriften*. Edited by H. Donner and W. Röllig. 3 vols. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1962-2002.
KA	Kuntillet 'Ajrud Inscriptions
LHBOTS	The Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies
MT	Masoretic Text
NCB	New Century Bible
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
OLD	*Oxford Latin Dictionary*. P.G.W. Glare. Oxford: Clarendon, 1982.
OTL	Old Testament Library
RIMA 3	*Assyrian Rulers of the Early First Millennium BC II (858-745)*. Edited by A. Kirk Grayson. The Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia, Assyrian Periods 3. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996.
RINAP 1	*The Royal Inscriptions of Tiglath-Pileser III (744–727 BC) and Shalmaneser V (726–722 BC), Kings of Assyria.* Edited by Hayim Tadmor and Shigeo Yamada.

	The Royal Inscriptions of the Neo-Assyrian Period 1. University Park, PA: Eisenbrauns 2021.
RINAP 2	*The Royal Inscriptions of Sargon II, King of Assyria (721-705).* Edited by Grant Frame. The Royal Inscriptions of the Neo-Assyrian Period 2. University Park, PA: Eisenbrauns, 2021.
SAA 1	*The Correspondence of Sargon II, Part I: Letters from Assyria and the West, Part I.* Edited by Simo Parpola. The State Archives of Assyria 1. Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1987.
SAA 3	*Court Poetry and Literary Miscellanea.* Edited by Alsdair Livingston. The State Archives of Assyria 3. Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1989.
SAA 17	*The Neo-Babylonian Correspondence of Sargon and Sennacherib*. Edited by Manfried Dietrich. The State Archives of Assyria 17. Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 2003.
SAA 20	*Assyrian Ritual Rituals and Cultic Texts.* Edited by Simo Parpola. State Archives of Assyria 20. Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns 2017.
TDOT	Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament. Edited by G.J. Botterweck, H.J. Fabry, and H. Ringgren. 15 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974-2015.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My interest in the golden calf was first sparked during a class on ancient Israelite religion led by Dr. Jeremy Smoak. As it so happened, I was also studying the *Epic of Gilgamesh* in Akkadian that quarter. These two courses presented me with an intriguing textual juxtaposition. On the one hand, there was Exodus 32:1-4, with its matter-of-fact description of the golden calf's human fabrication. On the other, there was Gilgamesh's divinely molded and sculpted form. My curiosity was piqued by these disparate scenes, and I began eagerly researching the creation of divine (or reportedly divine) objects in the ancient Near East. This project grew into a *Journal of Biblical Literature* article,[i] and as time went on, morphed into this dissertation on the calf cultus of ancient Israel.

Along the way, my committee has been constantly helpful in providing feedback, encouragement, and guidance. I am especially grateful to my advisor Dr. William Schniedewind for being a patient mentor and sounding board. I would also like to thank committee members Drs. Catherine Bonesho, Gina Konstantopoulos, Sandra Richter, and Kara Cooney for being wonderful dialogue partners and mentors for this project. While at UCLA, I have also been richly blessed by the instruction of Drs. Barbara Cifola, Yona Sabar, Jeremy Smoak, and Jonathan Winnerman. Finally, I remember with fond regard my lessons with Dr. Bob Englund in Akkadian and Dr. Nancy Ezer in Modern Hebrew. These two wonderful scholars in UCLA's NELC department are both sorely missed.

[i] Elizabeth VanDyke, "Designing the Golden Calf: Pens and Presumption in the Production of a 'Divine' Image," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 141 (2022): 219–33.

The Harry and Yvonne Lenart Graduate Travel Fellowship graciously allowed me to use my grant—which was awarded in the spring of 2020—during the summer of 2022. I am very grateful for their support of my research and their flexibility. I am likewise grateful to the Alan D. Leve Center for Jewish Studies which has supported my research on multiple occasions. I would also like to thank the H. Henry Meeter Center for access to the Hekman Library at Calvin University while I was visiting family during the course of my research.

Dr. David VanDrunen of Westminster Seminary California allowed me to present several chapter drafts as Warfield Seminars over the years. These presentations were immensely helpful to my writing process, and I am indebted to him, the faculty, and the student body for their feedback. Drs. Steve Baugh, Bryan Estelle, Katherine VanDrunen, and Joshua VanEe of WSCAL have supported my career from the beginning, for which I have immense gratitude.

My eight years at UCLA have been plagued by the occasional pandemic, flood, forest fire, moments of institutional upheaval, and literal dumpster fire. Through it all, I have had the most collegial and supportive cohort imaginable, and I would not have survived graduate school without them. More advanced colleagues such as Drs. Nadia Ben-Marzouk, Martin Luther Chan, Andrew Danielson, Jacob Damm, Timothy Hogue, Rosanna Lu, and Jason Price helped me form and steer my research forward. Andrew Bock, David Brown, Aaron Cash, Adam Chebahtah, Brian Donnelly-Lewis, Bryan Elliff, Sparrow Gates, Sarah Harrington, Tyler Jarvis, Marilyn Love, Michael MacDougall, Crystal Melara, Emilie Nordhues, Dr. Megan Remington, Dr. Julianna K. Smith, Larissa St. Clair, Stephen Ward, and Alex Youngstrom enriched my understanding of the Hebrew Bible during the long months of the pandemic and its aftermath. They have all become dear friends as well as colleagues. In this group, I must single out Dr. Megan Remington and Andrew Bock for special notice. Megan and I went through the trenches

of writing dissertations together, and I am so very thankful for her listening ear and sage advice. As for Andrew Bock, his insightful research into eighth century prophecy has frequently (and sometimes exasperatingly) challenged my own. Dialoguing with him has sharpened my thinking and my character, and I am indebted to him for many formative conversations, chapter read-throughs, and cups of coffee.

I have many friends outside of academia who have patiently endured conversations about "the cows" for years now. I am grateful to Laura Sacks for being a source of encouragement from my first day of Ph.D. work on, as well as Avriana Allen, Leah Baugh, Kathy Baugh, Lyn Brumaire and Ward Pettibone, Rachel Clark, Alexandria Choy, Tim Hamilton, Aaron Ma, Evan McConnell, Hannah and Graham Svendsen, and Ayrian Yasar. Moreover, I am filled with gratitude for all the support I have received from the congregation of Grace Torrance for the past eight years.

Despite the fact that my studies have taken me away from home, my family has been unwaveringly supportive. Whether you are in West Michigan, West Virginia, or West Layfette, I miss you all, and I am so grateful for all your love and prayers. My thanks to my sisters, Sarah, Carmen, and Allie VanDyke for the love they have shown me in this particular season.

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, Drs. David and Rebecca VanDyke. Though they are not in the field of biblical studies, they have always been models of intellectual curiosity, perseverance, and humble service. I could not have finished strong without them both, and I dedicate this work to them with love and gratitude.

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INTRODUCTION: THE CALF CULT OF ANCIENT ISRAEL

ITS QUANDARIES, ITS COMPLEXITIES, AND AN APPROACH TO MOVING FORWARD

Of all the objects in the Hebrew Bible, none are quite as notorious as the golden calf statues of ancient Israel.[1] Their creation is the first and greatest sin of the community, both at the foot of Mount Sinai and the founding of the Northern Kingdom under Jeroboam I.[2] These metallic cows are thus used twice in Israel's history as the etiology for the people's divine abandonment (Exod 32-33, 2 Kgs 17:16-18). They are the iconic illustration of Israel's idolatry, serving as the antithesis—repeatedly—for institutions and ritual objects the biblical authors viewed as legitimate, including the tablets of the law, the Tabernacle, the Levitical priesthood, the

[1]The Hebrew Bible recounts different numbers of calf statues. Exodus 32:4 refers to one calf image made of gold that is referred to as plural "gods." First Kings12:28-29 notes two made of gold, one in Dan and one in Bethel. As the calf in Dan is never referred to again, some scholars have doubted its existence Rainer Albertz, *A History of Israelite Religion in the Old Testament Period*, vol. 1 (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994), 144. Hos 13:2 also recounts "calves" though it is unclear where they were and what they were made of. Hos 8:6 mentions a calf in a third possible location of Samaria. For the purposes of this work, I will therefore use the plural "calves" to give the sense the biblical text of Hos 13:2 does. It is possible multiple cities had a calf statue designated to it. For an overview of these issues see Mark S. Smith, "Counting Calves at Bethel," in *"Up to the Gates of Ekron" : Essays on the Archaeology and History of the Eastern Mediterranean in Honor of Seymour Gitin*, ed. Sidnie White Crawford, Amnon Ben-Tor, and Seymour Gitin (Jerusalem: W.F Albright Institute of Archaeological Research: Israel Exploration Society, 2007), 382–94.

[2]The calf cult of ancient Israel appears in a variety of texts in the Hebrew Bible. Exodus 32 and Deuteronomy 9:11-21 both describe a calf and its worship at the foot of Mount Sinai/Horeb. This same calf is also cited in Ps 106:19-20 and Neh 9:18. First Kings 12:24-33 and Second Chronicles 11:15, 13:8 all recount calves of gold made by Jeroboam I. Hosea 8:5-6, Hos 10:5-6, and Hos 13:2 all describe bovine worship at various sites within Israel in the eighth century BCE.

Jerusalem temple, and the Davidic line.[3] Besides the ark of the covenant, there are no objects that loom quite as large in biblical literature.[4]

Yet, extended studies of these pivotal images are scant in the scholarly record. Over the past fifty years only two monographs have been published on the golden calves in the Hebrew Bible, one by Hahn in 1981 and another by Chung in 2010.[5] The goal of both of these monographs was to understand the diachronic and theological development of Israel's calf worship and aniconism—primarily through the texts of Exod 32 and 1 Kgs 12:26-33. However, this approach immediately and inextricably mired these works in controversies regarding Pentateuchal and Deuteronomistic composition. Moreover, neither Hahn nor Chung contextualized the calves against their wider ancient Near Eastern background. They focused exclusively on biblical texts, ignoring archaeological and comparative evidence for Israel's bovine worship.

More recently, Mason and Lupieri have published an edited volume that brings together scholars of the Hebrew Bible, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam to discuss the many traditions of

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[3]The tablets are said to be חרות or engraved by God in Exod 32:15. Meanwhile the calf Aaron made in Exod 32:4 is made with a חרט. The wordplay and proximity of the objects creates a contrasting pairing that heightens the legitimacy of the God-made tablets versus the man-made calf. A similar juxtaposition occurs between the Tabernacle instructions and construction which surround the calf pericope (Exod 24:15-11 and Exod 34-40:38) as well as the Sabbath descriptions that border it (Exod 31:12-17 and Exod 35:2). Jeroboam I likewise made his calves out of competition with institutions the Judeans considered legitimate, mainly the temple (1 Kgs 12:27). He also created alternative festivals for his sites to compete with the Judean system (1 Kgs 12:32-33). Finally, the Levites frequently appear in the chapters surrounding calf texts. Exod 32:25-29 provides them with an etiology that tied them to the cleansing of the calf cultus. Deut 9:8-10:6 describes both the calf creation and appointment of the Levites. 2 Chr 11:13-16 and 2 Chr 13:8-10 recount the moving of northern Levites to the south over disputes regarding the calf cult of Jeroboam I. In sum, the calves are a powerful counterbalance to other cultic objects, personnel, and festivals that the authors of the Hebrew Bible *Geschichte* sought to authenticate.

[4] The term "Israel" in this dissertation refers to the Northern Kingdom unless otherwise noted.

[5] See Joachim Hahn, *Das "Goldene Kalb": Die Jahwe-Verehrung Bei Stierbildern in Der Geschichte Israels*, Europäische Hochschulschriften 154 (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1981); Youn Ho Chung, *The Sin of the Calf: The Rise of the Bible's Negative Attitude Toward the Golden Calf* (New York: T & T Clark International, 2010).

the golden calf.[6] While this source is useful for comparative purposes, most of its articles are cursory summaries. Its essays on the Hebrew Bible in particular are limited to narrow textual analyses and can be critiqued for many of the same flaws as the works of Hahn and Chung. The golden calf is read almost entirely against the backdrop of the accounts of Exodus and Kings in this volume, with few attempts to understand the calves in light of contemporaneous cultic practices in the ancient Near East.

By and large, focused examinations of Israel's calf statues have been relegated to journal articles and chapters in collections.[7] Here, there has been more engagement with archaeology and parallel ancient Near Eastern cultuses and cultures. Smith in particular has published several insightful essays integrating the golden calves into discussions of Israelite deities and cultic sites.[8] Recently, Hundley has written an article providing a summary of scholarly arguments on the calves along with his own interpretations.[9] There are also a few classic treatments comparing the calf cults of Aaron in Exod 32 and of Jeroboam I in 1 Kgs 12:25-33.[10]

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[6] Eric Mason and Edmondo Lupieri, eds., *Golden Calf Traditions in Early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2018). Later traditions involving the golden calf have been explored by James N. Rhodes, *The Epistle of Barnabas and the Deuteronomic Tradition: Polemics, Paraenesis, and the Legacy of the Golden-Calf Incident* (Mohr Siebeck, 2004); Michael Pregill, *The Golden Calf between Bible and Qur'an: Scripture, Polemic, and Exegesis from Late Antiquity to Islam* (Oxford University Press, 2020).

[7]Important shorter works on the calf images include: VanDyke, "Designing the Golden Calf"; Daniel Fleming, "If El Is a Bull, Who Is a Calf? Reflections on Religion in Second-Millennium Syria-Palestine," *Eretz-Israel* 26 (1999): 23–27.

[8] Smith, "Counting Calves at Bethel." See also chapter four of Mark S. Smith, *Where the Gods Are: Spatial Dimensions of Anthropomorphism in the Biblical World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016).

[9] Michael B. Hundley, "What Is the Golden Calf?," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 79 (2017): 559–79.

[10] Gary N. Knoppers, "Aaron's Calf and Jeroboam's Calves," in *Fortunate the Eyes That See: Essays in Honor of David Noel Freedman in Celebration of His Seventieth Birthday*, ed. Astrid Beck et al. (Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans, 1995); Moses Aberbach and Levy Smolar, "Aaron, Jeroboam, and the Golden Calves," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 86 (1967): 129–40.

Most discussions of Israel's calf statues are therefore actually embedded in books on other topics. As mentioned above, the calves play a central role in a constellation of texts, issues, and debates within the Hebrew Bible— including the development of Israelite theology, aniconism, cultural trauma, cultic sites, and the composition of the biblical corpus.[11] They cannot be ignored, and scholars allude to their creation and veneration frequently in their reconstructions of Israelite history.

However, this overarching approach to the calves has led to several subtle and pervasive issues in scholarship. Most of the biblical texts on Israel's calf statues are both brief and vague. The two longest and clearest texts on Israel's creation of the statues—Exod 32 and 1 Kgs 12:25-33—mention that the Israelites referred to these images as "gods" and little else. This lack of data has allowed previous scholarship to make the calves pawns of preconceived theories.[12] It

[11]For examples of the calves in works on Israelite theology and religion see Theodore Lewis, *The Origin and Character of God: Ancient Israelite Religion Through the Lens of Divinity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 197–200, 318–22; Mark S Smith, *The Early History of God: Yahweh and the Other Deities in Ancient Israel*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans, 2002), 83–85; Albertz, *A History of Israelite Religion*, 1:143–45; Frank Moore Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973), 73–75; Yeḥezkel Kaufmann, *The Religion of Israel: From Its Beginnings to the Babylonian Exile*, trans. Moshe Greenberg (London: George Allen and Unwin LTD, 1961), 13, 271–73, 373–74. Texts on aniconism that discuss the calf cult include: Christoph Dohmen, *Das Bilderverbot: Seine Entstehung Und Seine Entwicklung Im Alten Testament*, Bonner Biblische Beiträge 62 (Königstein/Ts: P. Hanstein Verlag, 1985). Discussions of cultural trauma can be reviewed in David McLain Carr, *Holy Resilience: The Bible's Traumatic Origins* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 28–30. Issues regarding the cultic site of Bethel can be seen in Klaus Koenen, *Bethel: Geschichte, Kult und Theologie*, OBO 192 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2003), 95–134; Jules Francis Gomes, *The Sanctuary of Bethel and the Configuration of Israelite Identity*, BZAW 368 (Berlin/ New York: De Gruyter, 2006), 25–28, 145–46, 162–66. Finally, as calf texts appear twice is the Pentateuch and several times in Kings, there has been a great deal of contention over which texts and traditions have primacy. As 1Kings 12:26-33 and Exodus 32 in particular share a great number of details and motifs, most of the discussion has focused on these two texts. Such discussions tend to become very complicated very quickly. For summaries of the key factors and approaches see Aberbach and Smolar, "Aaron, Jeroboam, and the Golden Calves"; William Propp, *Exodus 19-40*, vol. 2A, AB (New York: Doubleday, 2006), 576–79; Robert A. Di Vito, "The Calf Episodes in Exodus and Deuteronomy: A Study in Inner-Biblical Interpretation," in *Golden Calf Traditions in Early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, ed. Eric Mason F. and Edmondo Lupieri F., Themes in Biblical Narrative Jewish and Christian Traditions 23 (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2018), 1–25.

[12] For example, Kaufmann contends that the conceptualizations of the calves changed over time. However, the langue surrounding them in the Hebrew Bible never changes. Kaufmann, *The Religion of Israel*, 271, 374.

has also led to the flattening out of the calf images and the multitude of ways in which the authors of the Hebrew Bible depict and employ them. These images are almost exclusively viewed through the lenses of Exod 32 and 1 Kgs 12:25-33, with few considerations of other—and arguably earlier—calf texts.[13] Finally, this Bible based methodology has often allowed scholars to treat the calves as purely theological *ideas* rather than cultic *objects*. As a result, discussions of Israel's calves over the past hundred years have become immensely theoretical and theological, focusing on the calves' respective deity and the nature of their representation of him, her, or them. While these questions are critical to the history of Israel, they overlook other key investigations of how these objects could interact with their worshippers and their cultures, creating meaning in their wider cultic contexts.

This dissertation therefore seeks to steer scholarship forward by focusing on the cultic and cultural role of the calves as described by the Book of Hosea in Hos 8:1-6, 10:1-7, and 13:2. Scholars often overlook these texts on Israel's calf cultus due to their brevity and obscurity. However, in these passages the authors of Hosea offer up their own unique understandings of these objects' place within Israel's cult.[14] Indeed, though pithy, the Book of Hosea provides glimpses of rituals, practices, and cultural norms associated with Israel's calf worship unknown from any other text in the Hebrew Bible due to its early eighth century northern context.

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[13] For example, Albertz suggests that there was actually one calf image that was shared between the cult sites of Dan and Bethel. He does so based on the evidence from Exod 32:4 and Deut 9:16, which both recount the creation of only one statue. He therefore discounts the language found within 1 Kgs 12:28 itself, which explicitly states that there were two calves. Moreover, Albertz overlooks Hos 13:2, a text that describes calves in the plural. Albertz, *A History of Israelite Religion*, 1:144.

[14] Past studies of Hosea have often assumed one author for the book based on the first-person material in chapter 3. Hans Walter Wolff, *Hosea*, trans. Gary Stansell, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974), xxiii. While the Book of Hosea certainly has a distinctive voice and style, ancient writing was a largely communal affair.

By reading these texts with rigorous philological methods and comparisons with Syrian and Neo-Assyrian cultures, new understandings of these problematic passages can be formed, especially in regard to their linking of the calves with Israelite kingship. Indeed, investigating the calves in Hosea can grant us insights into a complex nexus of culture, cultus, politics, and powerplays in eighth century Israel. These bovine images were the central monuments of Israelite royal religion and power, and discerning their cultural role can deepen our understandings of the book's aniconic rhetoric during Israel's final years.

Throughout the rest of this introductory chapter, I will justify my work's methods and positions. Due to the inherent challenges of working with a book as difficult as Hosea, my philological strategies will be explored first, followed by discussions of the need for materialistic and monumental explorations of Israel's calf cultus. After this description of theory, I will argue for my understanding of Hosea's context at the end of the Israelite monarchy. The next portion of this dissertation will then explore previous treatments of Israel's calves in secondary scholarship. This section will both demonstrate the limits of prior scholarship and situate this dissertation within larger academic discussions. The chapter will then end with a summary outline of the project's sections and overarching arguments.

Approach and Methodology: Moving Calf Scholarship in a New Direction

One of the likely reasons scholars have been hesitant to investigate Hosea—and its calf accounts in particular—is the difficulty of the book. It is commonly claimed that the text of Hosea is only second to Job in terms of opaque language.[15] Hosea contains abundant *hapax legomena*, many of which the versions—including the Septuagint—struggle to translate. The prophecy contains a

[15] Francis Andersen and David Noel Freedman, *Hosea*, AB 24 (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1980), 66.

significant number of otherwise unknown idioms, unexpected and confusing grammatical constructions, and baffling phrases. Explanations for the text's problematic nature have been attributed to corruption in transmission, Hosea's northern dialect, a lack of historical clarity on his setting, or a combination of these factors.[16] Moreover, the prophet's almost ubiquitous use of metaphor, simile, and word play complicate interpretation further, adding a level of poetry and high style to an already difficult text.[17]

Because of these issues, the foundational approach of this dissertation is close reading and careful text criticism. In other words, this project is unapologetically philological. As Sophus Helle muses, "philology happens whenever readers encounter a text that they are, for whatever

[16]The early twentieth century commentator Harper posited a vast number of textual corruptions to account for Hosea's reading difficulties. He even contended that Hosea was the worst preserved of the biblical books. William Rainey Harper, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Amos and Hosea*, ICC (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1905), clxxvi–viii. He is followed by Graham I Davies, *Hosea*, NCB 21 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 38. Those that see matters of dialect or style as the primary reason for the book's issues are A. A. Macintosh, *Hosea*, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997), liii–iv; J. Andrew Dearman, *Hosea*, NICOT (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), 9–11. Yoon Jong Yoo, "Israelian Hebrew in the Book of Hosea" (Diss, Ithaca, NY, Cornell University, 1999). Another school of thought notes the chaotic times in which the book was first composed, positing that this era lent itself to a more fragmentary type of writing in its earliest stages of composition. Note here James Luther Mays, *Hosea*, OTL (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969), 5; Wolff, *Hosea*, xxx. Finally, as Andersen and Freedman summarize regarding Hosea, "The obscurities, which are many, do not point us away from that era [the eighth century] or in any direction in particular; they only expose our ignorance of the circumstances generally, and emphasize repeatedly that the Book of Hosea is maddeningly difficult to grasp, no matter how we approach it." Andersen and Freedman, *Hosea*, 59. Generally, I take the amount and types of text critical issues present within the book as evidence of its early date and long transmission history. This issues will be discussed further below.

[17] Metaphor within Hosea has become one of the dominant trends of exploration for the book in the past several decades. As Wolff remarks, "No other prophet —indeed, not one writer in the entire Old Testament—uses as many similes as Hosea does." Wolff, *Hosea*, xxiv. See: Mason Lancaster, "Like a Lion and the Morning Dawn: Reconceiving Yawheh Through the Metaphors of Hosea 4-14" (Diss, Wheaton, IL, Wheaton College, 2020), 12–21; Brad E. Kelle, "Hosea 4—14 in Twentieth-Century Scholarship," *Currents in Biblical Research* 8 (2010): 314, 355–60; Seong-Hyuk Hong, *The Metaphor of Illness and Healing in Hosea and Its Significance in the Socio-Economic Context of Eighth-Century Israel and Judah*, StBibLit 95 (New York: Peter Lang, 2006); Alice Keefe, *Woman's Body and the Social Body in Hosea*, JSOTSup 338 (Sheffield, Eng.: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001); Göran Eidevall, *Grapes in the Desert: Metaphors, Models, and Themes in Hosea 4-14* (Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell International, 1996); Brigitte Seifert, *Metaphorisches Reden von Gott Im Hoseabuch*, FRLANT 166 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996).

reason, unable to read."[18] Helle calls these moments of impasse in understanding "crises of reading."[19] Due to the style and language of the Book of Hosea, modern readers are confronted with many such crises in its text. And while many scholars acknowledge the need for text criticism and careful reading when they reference Hosea, they often fail to address its "crises" at all. In other words, they cite relevant portions of these verses without fully translating them or considering them within their larger original context.[20] As for scholars who do investigate Hosea's reading difficulties in greater detail, there is a certain tendency in these works to only chose between the options presented by previous scholarship and ancient translation traditions. Creative and contextual grappling with these calf texts has been rare. This dissertation thus seeks to fill this gap in scholarship by reexamining Hosea's calf passages in all of their gory detail. Every biblical translation in this work will belong to the author, complete with justifications for wording either in the main text or in the footnotes.

The philological strategies I have used rely on several layered guidelines. First, though the Masoretic text or MT was not treated as infallible, it was used as the best witness to Hosea overall. Only in exceptional cases have I suggested emendations to the consonantal text, all of which represent scribal errors or readings maintained in later versions such as the Septuagint. In matters of pointing, I have been slightly more flexible, entertaining interpretations other than the Masoretic. Second, I have sought readings that suit the context of book, whether that be the

[18] Sophus Helle, "What Is Philology? From Crises of Reading to Comparative Reflections," *Poetics Today* 43 (2022): 616.

[19] Helle, 615.

[20]Smith, *Where the Gods Are*, 67–68. Mark Leuchter, *The Levites and the Boundaries of Israelite Identity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 133.

setting of the verse in general or of Hosea within its historical moment. In other words, I argue for readings based on their harmony with the MT and their ability to explain the text in context. This approach means that in particularly difficult passages, I have not shied away from suggesting new understandings based on comparative Semitics, reevaluations of Hosea's northern environment, or parallel evidence from surrounding cultures. In other words, I have sought to perform what Barr refers to as "philological treatments" of the text, whereby a new reading, "justifies the existence of the rare or anomalous words which had constituted the original difficulty."[21] While consultations of various translations and the work of other scholars has been fundamental to my process, I have reassessed every one of Hosea's calf passages afresh with both textual and philological approaches in an attempt to better read and understand this challenging topic.[22]

As mentioned above, the difficult nature of Hosea's calf texts means that comparative ancient contexts must be explored to aid in their interpretation. Due to Hosea's date in the eighth century—which will be argued for below—I have most frequently appealed to roughly contemporaneous Neo-Assyrian rituals and cultic habits as parallels, though, when possible, I have used Iron Age Northwest Semitic inscriptions. I use these parallels mainly as heuristics for how the Israelites of the time may have conceived of their cultic objects, their kings, and the rituals surrounding them.[23] Moreover, due to the proximity and contact of these polities at this

[21] James Barr, *Comparative Philology and the Text of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), 6.

[22] Barr, 5–7.

[23] Similar approaches have been taken by Victor Avigdor Hurowitz, "What Can Go Wrong with an Idol?," in *Iconoclasm and Text Destruction in the Ancient Near East and Beyond*, ed. Natalie Naomi May, OIS 8 (Chicago, IL: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 2012), 259–310; Jessie DeGrado, "Kidnapping the Gods: Assyrian Cultic Despoliation and Aniconism in Isaiah 10:5-11," *Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society* 35 (2021): 33–81.

time, it is possible that some rhetorical language and rituals may have been transmitted across Israel, Syria, and Neo-Assyria. In other words, some of these parallels may be simply commonly held and shared ideas.

Finally, in many ways, this dissertation is indebted to theories of materiality and monumentality as aids in its philological approach. These theories investigate objects: how they gain agency in different cultural contexts (despite their seeming lack of power or mobility), how they form communities, how they shape and are shaped by human imagination, identity, and society.[24] The study of materiality in particular examines how *things* have affordance to change their environments, even without human involvement. However, following in the footsteps of Assyriologists Pongratz-Leisten and Sonik, this project seeks to nuance considerations of materiality. As the two authors above point out, images of gods and objects associated with them cannot be treated as mere objects. They had the gods themselves as their referents beyond their physical being. Therefore, Sonik and Pongratz-Leisten adopt an approach which, "regards cultural knowledge and cultural memory as central to and inextricable from any discussion of the materiality of things, particularly …things that have been assigned sacred status due to their consecration, their use in cultic contexts, or their functioning as (secondary) divine agents."[25] In

[24] See in particular: Tim Ingold, "Materials against Materiality," *Archaeological Dialogues* 14 (2007): 1–16; James Osborne, "Monuments and Monumentality," in *Approaching Monumentality in Archaeology*, ed. James Osborne (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2014), 1–22; Ann Brysbaert, "Constructing Monuments, Perceiving Monumentality: Introduction," in *Constructing Monuments, Perceiving Monumentality and the Economics of Building. Theoretical and Methodological Approaches to the Built Environment*, ed. Ann Brysbaert et al. (Leiden: Sidestone Press, 2018), 21–47; Timothy Hogue, "The Eternal Monument of the Divine King: Monumentality, Reembodiment, and Social Formation in the Decalogue" (Dissertation, University of California Los Angeles, 2019), 29–34.

[25] Beate Pongratz-Leisten and Karen Sonik, "Between Cognition and Culture: Theorizing the Materiality of Divine Agency in Cross-Cultural Perspective," in *The Materiality of Divine Agency*, ed. Beate Pongratz-Leisten and Karen Sonik (Boston/Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015), 6.

other words, Sonik and Pongratz Leisten seek to understand cultic objects within and through their human fabricated contexts. It is only through this embedded approach that the nature of the object as one imagined to be linked to the divine can be understood. Sonik and Pongratz-Leisten further emphasize that, "Understanding an object is a historically and culturally embedded, humanly embodied, imaginatively structured event, the meaning of which is always tied to a particular community. Meaning, in such a context, becomes a matter of relatedness that is irreducibly intentional…".[26] In sum: to know an object, one must know its world and the people who surrounded it.

If we are to understand the calves of Israel, we must therefore work to uncover their cultic and cultural contexts. Though the calves may have been small physically and largely inaccessible to the average Israelite, they were key actors in the religious imaginations of the Israelites and later Judeans and Jews.[27] We must therefore ask how the material nature of these objects affected Israelite conceptualizations of them. If the Israelites believed that the calves invoked the presence of their god, as Hosea suggests, how did the material presence or absence affect Israelite religion, politics, culture, and history? Along with ritual specialist Catherine Bell, we might also inquire into how these images may have marked both space and bodies, and how

[26] Pongratz-Leisten and Sonik, 5–6.

[27] Cult statues probably were not massive statues given that they were made of precious metals. Evidence from ancient Egyptian niches for cult statues are 19 to 23 inches tall, from which it is inferred that cult statues were around a foot tall. David Lorton, "The Theology of Cult Statues in Ancient Egypt," in *Born in Heaven Made on Earth: The Making of Cult Images in the Ancient Near East*, ed. Michael B. Dick (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1999), 128. Statuettes which may have been cult statues from the Levant are even smaller. The bronze calf from the northern Samaria hills is a mere 17.5 cm (6.88 in) long and 12.4 cm high (4.9in). It is thought to be from the early Iron I. Amihai Mazar, "The 'Bull Site': An Iron Age I Open Cult Place," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 247 (1982): 27, 32.

they integrated with ritual and negotiations of power.[28] As a book of both social and religious critique, Hosea hints at and responds to these dynamics, providing tantalizing glimpses into the development of both Israelite religion and culture at its fading.

How do you Solve a Problem Like Hosea? A Note on Dating, Composition, and Context

Of course, one of the main struggles of reading Hosea is determining the historic context in which the book should be examined. Though past scholarship generally assumed the book to be the work of a northern Israelite prophet in the eighth century—as the book's incipit implies—there has been a notable breakdown in scholarly consensus over Hosea's dating within the last century.

Beginning with Kaufman, some Israeli scholars have chosen to view the book as composite, with Hos 1-3 being an earlier layer to which Hos 4-14 was added. Kaufmann in particular argued that Hos 1-3 belonged to the ninth century BCE due to its concerns for Baal worship and idolatry. He called the prophet of this section First Hosea. After Jehu's eradication of the Baal cultus, the problems in the Northern Kingdom centered on failing rulers and calf worship. Another prophet—which Kaufmann calls Second Hosea—arose between 732 and 725 BCE to address these issues.[29] However, while this interpretative strategy explains why Hos 1-3 focuses on Baal worship while Hos 4-14 generally does not, it is far too precise in its conclusions to be tenable. Kaufmann's theory relies heavily on biblical narratives about both Baal worship

[28] While monumentality and materiality have been the most important theories in this project, ritual theory and kingship studies have also impacted my hypothesizes and conclusions. See Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); Ernst Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016).

[29] Kaufmann, *The Religion of Israel*, 368–72. He has been followed by H.L. Ginsberg, "Hosea, Book Of," in *Encyclopedia Judaica*, ed. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik (Jerusalem: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007), 1015–17; Mayer I. Gruber, *Hosea*, LHBOTS 653 (New York: T & T Clark, 2017), 11–12, 523.

and Israel's complete rejection of it in the eighth century, a rejection called into question by Kuntillet 'Arjud and the Samaria Ostraca.[30] Nor can Kaufmann's interpretation adequately account for Hos 1:4, a text that condemns Jehu's line.

More recently Dewrell has argued for a date range for Hosea's composition that pushes past traditional understandings. He bases his argument on several mysterious phrases: מלך ירב or the "king of Yareb" in Hos 5:13 and 10:6, and the name Shalman שלמן in Hos 10:14. In both cases, Dewrell argues that these phrases harken back to Neo-Assyrian kings. The מלך ירב (king of Yareb) is an abbreviated Hebraicization of Sennacherib, while שלמן is a shortening of Shalmaneser V. Hosea thus becomes a book reflecting on the fall of the North decades *after* it happened.[31] Both Dewrell's reconstruction of the names and historical contextualization of the book have not gone unchallenged.[32] One of the main issues with his position is that it requires the golden calf to have remained in Israel through the reigns of Tiglath-Pileser III and Sargon II when Israel was actively rebelling. By the time of Sennacherib, the country had been thoroughly subdued. There would have been no need to despoil the god of a thoroughly cowed vassal as

[30] Baal features in the fragmentary inscriptions from Kuntillet 'Ajrud, dating to the start of the eighth century. See plaster inscriptions KA 4.2:5 and KA 4.4:2. Shmuel Ahituv, Esther Eshel, and Zeev Meshel, "The Inscriptions," in *Kuntillet ʿAjrud: An Iron Age II Religious Site on the Judah-Sinai Border*, ed. Zeev Meshel, Shmuel Ahituv, and Liora Freud (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 2012), 110, 117. The Samaria ostraca contain a significant number of Baal theophoric names and are from the first half of the same century. See Caitlin Hubler, "'No Longer Will You Call Me "My Ba'al"': Hosea's Polemic and the Semantics of 'Ba'al' in 8th Century B.C.E. Israel," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 44 (2020): 612–13.

[31] Heath Dewrell, "Yareb, Shalman, and the Date of the Book of Hosea," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 78 (2016): 413–29. More recently he has expanded on this argument in a follow up article: Heath Dewrell, "Depictions of Egypt in the Book of Hosea and Their Implications for Dating the Book," *Vetus Testamentum* 71 (2021): 1–28.

[32] See Jessie DeGrado, "Authoring Empire: Intellectual Engagement with the Neo-Assyrian Empire in the Bible" (Diss, Chicago, IL, University of Chicago, 2018), 152.

Dewrell suggests. Moreover, there is evidence that Sargon II had already despoiled the nation in 720 BCE.[33]

A third camp of scholars dates Hosea to the Persian period, largely based on social factors. This position has recently been defended by Bos who argues that Hosea possesses texts that would have been viewed as subversive by any local king.[34] These anti-monarchical passages in Hosea are too explicit and too radical to belong to a time frame when there was an active monarchy in Israel. Here, Bos correctly notes that most scribes in the ancient world were employees of the state. Given this social and economic control of scribes and their supplies, he asserts that the composing and transmitting of such a dissident text would be all but impossible during the Iron Age.[35] He then suggests that Hosea was more likely to have been written during the Persian period in Judah, which was a time when priests wrote to establish their own power. The Jerusalem priesthood had a vested in suppressing the local creation of kings, leading to their editing and composing of the book. (For Bos, the Persian emperor was not considered a king, but a ruler outside of the discussion.)[36] The work of Hosea thus becomes a Persian Period polemical fiction that was designed to educate scribes and priests. It may contain some original northern

[33] Sargon II describes despoiling Samaria's gods after putting down a rebellion in 720BCE. This event is recorded in RINAP 2:074, iv 25-41. For a discussion of Sargon II's reign and the fall of Israel see Eckart Frahm, "Samaria, Hamath, and Assyria's Conquests in the Levant in the Late 720s BCE," in *The Last Days of the Kingdom of Israel*, ed. Shuichi Hasegawa, Christoph Levin, and Karen Radner, BZAW 511 (Boston/Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019), 55–86., and Bob Becking, *The Fall of Samaria: An Historical and Archaeological Study* (Leiden/New York/Koln: E.J. Brill, 1992).

[34] These anti kingship passages include Hos 8:4a; 10:3-4,7; 13:9-11. James Bos, *Reconsidering the Date and Provenance of the Book of Hosea: The Case for Persian-Period Yehud*, LHBOTS 580 (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 33. Another scholar who accepts this dating schema is Ehud Ben Zvi, *Hosea*, FOTL, XXIA/1 (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005), 18.

[35] Bos, *Reconsidering the Date and Provenance of the Book of Hosea*, 36–37.

[36] Bos, 38.

eighth century material, but for Bos, determining what lines belong to what century is an impossible task.[37]

While Bos is correct that the vast majority of scribes in eighth century Israel would have been employed by the state to both create and copy texts, this all-encompassing approach to scribalism misses the nuance and cacophony present within the eighth century. It was a time period of competing interests between polities, including Israel, Judah, Egypt, Moab, Phoenicia, Aram, and Assyria. The eighth century was also a time period with competing interests *within* polities. There was a rising elite class that needed to be constantly corralled throughout the ancient Near East.[38] Though kings were attempting to contain and centralize their domains, wealthy and educated members of society had their own sources and demonstrations of power.[39] While kings certainly funded scribes to write their propaganda, scribes were also under the employ of the army, rulers of cities, the temple complex, and merchants.[40] Given the weakening

[37] Helpful summaries of Bos's book can be found in the following pages: Bos, 28–33, 36–44. Bos's conclusions end up making the Book of Hosea simultaneously opposed to a monarchy and pro-Davide rulership (42, 46). He claims the book is pro-priestly (32-33), but in making this contention he ignores several key verses that challenge the priests of Israel, such as Hos 4:4, 6,9; 5:1; 6:9; 10:5.

[38] For the argument that the elite class of Assyria in this time undergirded and built up Assyrian kingship, even as their own power expanded, see: Luis Siddall, *The Reign of Adad-Nīrārī III: An Historical and Ideological Analysis of an Assyrian King and His Times*, Cuneiform Monographs 45 (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2013), 100–104, 131; Shana Zaia, "How To (Not) Be King: Negotiating the Limits of Power within the Assyrian Hierarchy," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 77 (2018): 207–16; Beate Pongratz-Leisten, "All the King's Men: Authority, Kingship, and the Rise of the Elites in Assyria," in *Experiencing Power, Generating Authority: Cosmos, Politics, and the Ideology of Kingship in Ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia*, ed. Jane Hill, Philip Jones, and Antonio Morales (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, 2013), 285–310. Discussions of the non-ruling elite in the Levant and their development in the ninth to eight centuries can be found in: Stefania Mazzoni, "La Siria e Il Mondo Greco Arcaico," in *I Greci: Storia Cultura Arte Società*, vol. 3, I Greci oltre la Grecia (Torino: Einaudi, 2001), 297, 325; Alessandra Gilibert, *Syro-Hittite Monumental Art and the Archaeology of Performance: The Stone Reliefs at Carchemish and Zincirli in the Earlier First Millennium BCE* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011), 126–27.

[39] Siddall, *The Reign of Adad-Nīrārī III*, 105–28.

[40] For discussions of military scribes see William Schniedewind, *The Finger of the Scribe: How Scribes Learned to Write the Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 40–41. Prime examples occur in the Lachish and the

power of Israelite kings after Jeroboam II and the mobility of the kingdom's elites, Bos's argument that Hosea could not have been written in the eighth century due to social control is less than convincing.

Dating a biblical book is always a difficult and controversial task. However, alongside scholars such as Carr and Lewis, I find the most compelling explanation of the book's themes and oddities to be an eighth century Israelite origin.[41] My reasons for this dating include Hos 8:1, 9:4, and 9:15 where there are references to the "House of Yahweh." In any Judean context, such a reference would be the temple in Jerusalem. Yet in Hos 8:1 and 9:15 the phrase clearly indicates the land of Israel. It is hard to imagine a Judean scribe applying such a freighted cultic term to the north—its occasional rival and enemy—after its fall.[42] Though there are some pro-Judah verses in the Book of Hosea, there is at least one weirdly specific moment of critique toward the southern kingdom in Hos 5:10. Other indicators of an eighth century date include the book's use of several Neo-Assyrian calques,[43] its knowledge of traditions that have been

Arad letters. Palace scribes are explored in William Schniedewind, *How the Bible Became a Book: The Textualization of Ancient Israel* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 60. A thorough investigation of temple scribes occurs in Karel van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture and the Making of the Hebrew Bible* (Cambridge, Mass.; London: Harvard University Press, 2007), 85–86. 1 Kgs 21:8 and 2 Kgs 10:1,5 presumes scribes found in different Israelite cities beginning already in the ninth century BCE.

[41] David McLain Carr, *The Formation of the Hebrew Bible: A New Reconstruction* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 322–23; Lewis, *The Origin and Character of God*, 321–22. Many commentators fall into this category as well. Wolff, *Hosea*, xxi; Andersen and Freedman, *Hosea*, 31–39; Macintosh, *Hosea*, lxxxiv.

[42] Ps 92:13 is the one other place this reading of the house of Yahweh as "the land of Israel" seems possible. Even if some readers do not agree that these references to the House of Yahweh refer to the land, the mention of a northern temple by this name would be just as strange for a southern writer.

[43] Shawn Zelig Aster and Abraham Jacob Berkovitz, "Akkadian BULLUṬU and Hebrew רפא: Pardon and Loyalty in Hosea and in Neo-Assyrian Political Texts," *Hebrew Studies* 59 (2018): 149–72. These specific instances occur in Hos 6:1; 7:1; 11:3; 14:4. There is also an calque in Hos 10:6 where the image of Israel is said to be caried away (יובל) to the great king (מלך ירב). This verb is somewhat rare in Hebrew, but its comparative Akkadian form, *wabālu*, is extremely common. It is used frequently in Neo-Assyrian texts describing the plundering of other nations gods. Morton Cogan, *Imperialism and Religion: Assyria, Judah and Israel in the Eighth and Seventh Centuries B.C.E.*

otherwise lost,[44] and its anti-Jehuite dynasty polemic which clashes with the account in Kings.[45] Finally, there are certain phrases in this text that mirror the rhetoric of eighth century Northwest Semitic inscriptions,[46] and the style of and methods of the book align with first Isaiah, another arguably late eighth century to early 7th century text.[47]

(Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1974), 23. The term מלך ירב appears to be a play on the "great king of Assyria," which is referenced is such texts as KAI 222 A2:6. Jan Dušek, "Dating the Aramaic Stele Sefire I," *Aramaic Studies* 17 (2019): 3–6; DeGrado, "Authoring Empire," 152.

[44] Examples include the references to Bet Arbel and Shalman in Hos 10:14. While Hos 5:1-10 has often been understood as a reference to the Syro-Ephramite war this conclusion is far from certain. The reference to the עגל שמרון in Hos 8:6 is also otherwise unattested. It is unclear what exactly the book is recalling with its note of the place אדם in Hos 6:7.

[45] Hos 1:4-5. William Schniedewind, "Tel Dan Stela: New Light on Aramaic and Jehu's Revolt," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 302 (1996): 85.

[46] There are a number of phrases and key words that Hosea shares with Northwest Semitic Inscriptions from the eighth century. For example, in KAI 26, a Phoenician inscription from the late eighth century found at Karatepe, king Azitawada claimed he had "shattered the rebels (מלצם) and eradicated all the wickedness (רע) in the land." (KAI 26 AI:8-9). Both of these words are descriptors of Israel's collapsing into chaos in Hos 7:3,5. Note too that the meaning of this word is clearly rebels or seditionists rather than mere scoffers (HALOT לצץ). Both Hosea and Azatiwada also express concerns over gangs (גדודים) and wicked men (רע), though Azatiwada eliminated those threatening his nation, while in Hosea they ran free (Hos 7:1-2, KAI 26 AI:15). The use of שרש for the offspring of rulers is referenced by both Hos 9:16 and KAI 26 AI:10-11 (see also Isa 11:1,10. A synonymous word, עקר, occurs in Sefire KAI 222 A1:3). Similar also is the use of grain and new wine (תירוש) as measures of wealth and abundance (Hos 2:8; 7:14 and KAI 26 A111:7,9) With the Sefire treaty Hosea shows a great concern for those who lie (שקר) against kings, a reference to treaty breaking (Hos 7:1, KAI 222 AI:14). He also uses such words and phrases as כחש (Hos 4:2; 7:3; 10:13; 12:1 [Eng 11:12]) רמיה (Hos 7:16), כזב (Hos 7:13; 12:2 [Eng 12:1]), אלוה שוא (Hos 10:4), מרמה (Hos 12:1 [Eng 11:12], 12:8 [12:7]) and חלק (Hos 10:2) to get this theme of deceit across. This use of deceit for covenant breaking fits with Neo-Assyrian texts as well. Beate Pongratz-Leisten, "'Lying King' and 'False Prophet': The Intercultural Transfer of a Rhetorical Device within Ancient Near Eastern Ideologies," in *Ideologies as Intercultural Phenomena: Proceedings of the Third Annual Symposium of the Assyrian and Babylonian Intellectual Heritage Project Held in Chicago, USA, October 27-3 1, 2000*, ed. A. Panaino and G. Pettinato (Milano: Universita di Boloena, 2002), 215–42. The curse theme of eating without satisfaction is found in both Hos 4:10 (וְאָכְלוּ֙ וְלֹ֣א יִשְׂבָּ֔עוּ) and Sefire (יהינקן עלים ואל ישבע KAI 222 A1:22) (Melissa Ramos, "A Northwest Semitic Curse Formula: The Sefire Treaty and Deuteronomy 28," *Zeitschrift Für Die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 128 (2016): 205–20.). For the shared motifs of making kings (המליך) see chapter 1. Full translations of Sefire can be found in Joseph Fitzmyer, *The Aramaic Inscriptions of Sefire*, 2nd ed. (Rome: Pontifical Biblial Institute, 1995). Azatiwada is translated and commented in K. Lawson Younger, "The Phoenician Inscription of Azatiwada: An Integrated Reading," *Journal of Semitic Studies* XLIII (1998): 11–47.

[47] Themes include the naming of prophetic children with oracular names (Hos 1 and Isa 7:13-17; 8:1-4). Both texts also use the same phrase (דבר דברים) as a reference to making alliances. (Hos 10:4 and Isa 8:10). Style wise, they are very similar, known for their dense language and metaphors that confound scholarship.

As for its references to the calf cult of Israel in particular, Hosea is exceptional in the biblical corpus. Hosea associates the calf with Samaria and Bethel, not Bethel and Dan like the book of Kings. The book describes rituals other texts leave unmentioned (Hos 10:5, 13:2) and which the Septuagint and later traditions found so uncomfortable they reworked some of them.[48] Hosea's descriptions of the calves are also unique, calling one at least one the "Calf of Samaria," that was rejected (זנח) by Yahweh and would become שבבים, a hapax which may mean splinters.[49] In Hos 10:5-6, the calf has priests known as כמרים, who would mourn it as it would become an offering (מנחה) to the king of Assyria (מלך ירב). Moreover, unlike every other text on the calves in the Hebrew Bible, Hosea does not use the calves as a foil for an ideal object or institution the authors supported. For example, in Exod 32, Deut 9:11-10:9, 1 Kgs 12:25-33, and 2 Chron 11:13-17, 13:8-13 the denigration of the calves goes hand in hand with the promotion of the Levities as faithful to Yahweh. In Ps 106:19-20 and Neh 9:16-21, the calves are used as stellar examples of Israel's *past* sins when the people forgot the God of the Exodus and his law. Yet, in Hosea's texts against the calves, the calves themselves are just *wrong*. They are not a tool in a polemic *for* something else. They are the present problem that needs to be confronted. In other words, Hosea's words against the calves have not been reappropriated as the antithesis to a later Judean institution. The text seeks to problematize the images for the sake of problematizing them, indicating that the text was designed to confront a present reality instead of a past one.

[48] The Septuagint removes any notion of "kissing calves" in Hos 13:2 and makes the verse a reference to human sacrifice as there were no calves left in the land. W. Edward Glenny, *Hosea: A Commentary Based on Hosea in Codex Vaticanus*, Septuagint Commentary Series (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2013), 61.

[49] This word is particularly difficult and will be discussed in chapter one. It will be argued in chapter two that Hosea also uses the phrase "Resident of Samaria" for the calf, another phrase otherwise unknown in biblical texts.

The argument for a largely eighth century date does not deny that Hosea had a long transmission history complete with editing. There are portions of the book that have been seemingly shaped to promote the Davidic line and Judean control of Israel (Hos 1:11; 3:6), or which have very hopeful glances towards a return from exile (Hos 3:4, 11:10-11). As Trotter has explored, the book continued to have meaning for later Judean and Jewish readers.[50] Indeed, there is increasing evidence for the movement of northern refugees from Israel to Judah in this time period.[51] It is quite possible Hosea's text was also a transplant to the southern kingdom along with them.[52] But overall, an eighth century date best explains the bulk of the text's unique lexicon and allusions.

Getting more specific than this general period, however, is difficult. The incipit of the book states, that the text is, "The word of Yahweh which came to Hosea son of Beeri during the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, (and) Hezekiah kings of Judah and during the days of Jerobaom son of Joash king of Israel." (Hos 1:1) This range of kings could imply that the original composition of the book began during the relatively secure reign of Jeroboam II and extended beyond the fall and despoiling of the north in some sections, lasting at minimum of a quarter of a century.[53] Because of the complicated nature of dating specific passages, these matters will be discussed throughout the dissertation in their respective chapters.

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[50] James M. Trotter, *Reading Hosea in Achaemenid Yehud*, JSOTSup 328 (New York: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001).

[51] Israel Finkelstein, "Migration of Israelites into Judah after 720 BCE: An Answer and an Update," *Zeitschrift Für Die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 127 (2015): 188–206.

[52] Carr, *The Formation of the Hebrew Bible: A New Reconstruction*, 322–23; Carr, *Holy Resilience*, 39.

[53] Dewrell, "Yareb, Shalman, and the Date of the Book of Hosea," 419. I disagree with Dewrell in putting Hos 10:5-6 during the reign of Sennacherib in particular, though his push to extend the date range of the book past 722 BCE in some instances is appealing.

The Golden Calf in Secondary Scholarship: Deities, Pedestals, and Textual Dependencies

Finally, before embarking into Hosea's accounts of Israel's calves, it is necessary to sketch out previous scholarly literature on both the Israel's calf statues and the Book of Hosea. Through this summary of scholarship, I wish to make two overarching points. The first point is that Hosea's calf texts are almost entirely overlooked. On the one hand, discussions of Israel's calves often ignore Hosea's texts on the calf cultus of ancient Israel, preferring to explore the narratives of Kings and Exodus. On the other hand, scholarship on Hosea often omits the book's condemnations of Israel's bovine images. These texts are therefore something of a blind spot in scholarship on not one but two fronts.

The second overarching point is that treatments of Israel's calf cultus have almost universally sought to determine the degree to which the calves were idolatrous. Nearly every investigation into these images is thus driven by a narrow set of inquiries probing the "lawfulness" of these icons against biblical images codes—or at least modern interpretations of them. While these questions are relevant and necessary, some of them are unsolvable given the evidence currently available. Still, scholarship has continued to focus on these theoretical and theological questions to the detriment of other approaches, including the social function of the calves in Israelite society. As a result, research into the calf cultus has become somewhat stilted and monotonous. Very little progress has been made on understanding these cultic icons and their history over the past century, and scholarship has become somewhat gridlocked regarding certain features of the calf's identity and semiotic purpose.[54]

[54] The work of both Hurowitz and Smith are exceptions to these trends. Hurowitz contextualizes the calves against iconic rituals in Mesopotamia. Smith works to understand the dynamic between the calves, their cities, and their gods. Smith, "Counting Calves at Bethel"; Hurowitz, "What Can Go Wrong with an Idol?"

Part of the reason the debates surrounding Israel's calf cult have remained at a deadlock is their unique place in the history of interpretation. By the Second Temple period, these bovine images were being referenced as iconic examples of Israel's sinfulness. It was an idolatry the whole kingdom had participated in at the foot of Mount Sinai that still required repentance (Neh 9:2,18).[55] Later, the authors of the New Testament would absorb and repurpose this tradition. For example, in Acts 7:39-43 the author cited the calf episode as a premier example of Israel's proclivity for idolatry and stiff-necked disbelief. It was a disbelief the author argued still affected the Jewish community as they had rejected God's word and his Messiah (Acts 7:51-53). Early Christian text subsequently began using the calves in supersessionistic rhetoric contending for the transference of the divine covenant from the "unworthy" Jews to Christians.[56] In response, Jewish scholarship has long sought to mitigate the sin of the calf in various ways and to exonerate the biblical characters involved.[57]

This ancient religious competition between Jews and Christians in many ways still undergirds and directs modern approaches to the calf statues, and scholars should be well aware of their biases when reviewing calf literature and debates. Too often the need to either heighten or lessen the idolatry of the calf has predetermined both scholarly questions and conclusions

[55] It should also be noted that while the biblical texts associate the calves with the Northern Kingdom in particular (1 Kgs 12:25-33; 2 Kgs 17: 16-18), later southern writers also claim the calf cult as *their* sin, extending the guilt to the forefathers of the whole community (Ps 106:19-20; Neh 9:18).

[56] Brevard S Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, OTL (Louisville, KY: Westminster Press, 1974), 575.

[57] Levy Smolar and Moses Aberbach, "The Golden Calf Episode in Postbiblical Literature," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 39 (1968): 91–116; Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, 574–79.

regarding the image. It must be remembered that before the calf was an idol, it was a cultic image, with social and cultural functions. Finally, the need for religious supremacy is arguably part of the reason Hosea features so infrequently in previous calf scholarship: his writings against ancient Israel's cultus simply do not provide the necessary grist for either pro or anti-Jewish polemics.

Because previous scholarship has focused the nature of Israel's idolatry, it has generally assessed the calves in similar ways according to similar metrics. Overall, this approach can be summarized through four interrelated and intertwined inquiries. Each of these inquiries harken back to Israel's conceptualization of the image and the extent of their idolatry and/or apostacy.[58] The first major inquiry scholars have is if the term עגל (calf) is meant to be derogatory on the part of the biblical authors. In other words, were the biblical authors mocking the statue as being a diminutive with the term? If so, this reasoning could imply the image was actually of a full-grown bull and potentially an elder, versus a junior, god. Conclusions to this question have implications for which god the calf was associated with. This question of the calf's respective deity or deities is the second major focus of scholarship. The more foreign the deity, the more egregious Israel's idolatry. However, if the calf was associated with a local god, such as El or Yahweh, the Israelites would have been more in line with the prescriptions of the Hebrew Bible. The third question then wrestles with how the calf was associated with its god: was it an image, pedestal, or symbol? In other words, was this idolatry or a controversial cultic object that was still within the bounds of aniconism? Finally, modern scholarship has long attempted to understand the relationship between calf passages in terms of their textual dependencies. How

[58] A similar layout of these issues can be found in Hundley, "What Is the Golden Calf?" He, however, does not spend as much time on the question of the calf vs. bull debate.

scholars read the compositional history of the biblical texts often impacts their interpretation of Israel's theological development, and vice versa. As the calf is a pivotal plot point in several biblical books, it becomes a frequent crux in interpretations of Israelite religious history.

In the following pages, I will analyze the evidence used to answer these four main inquiries into the calf cult. I will review resolutions that scholars have offered in the past and then provide my own conclusions using the evidence I find most compelling. I will also demonstrate the general lack of engagement with Hosea and other types of perspectives on the calf statues.

1. Is the Hebrew Bible's Designation עגל or "Calf" Reliable?

The first question scholars wrestle with is how best to understand the term עגל (calf) used throughout the Hebrew Bible to describe Israel's cultic statues.[59] There are two possible interpretations of the lexeme, both of which have implications for interpreting the nature of the biblical polemics against the statue. The first option is that the עגל (calf) denotes a male baby calf, still a suckling.[60] The image is therefore that of an animal who is defenseless and powerless, implying that the authors of the Hebrew Bible were deriding the cultic object with the label עגל or calf. Some scholars suggest that its own worshippers called it an אביר, a שר, or a ראם: all lexemes describing fully grown bulls, some of which are used to describe Yahweh (Num 24:8).[61] Scholars who see the term as derogatory point to artistic evidence of suckling calves from the

[59] The one possible biblical exception is Ps 106:19-20. In verse 19 the Israelites are said to make the calf (עֵגֶל) which in vs. 20 is then referred to as "תַּבְנִית שׁוֹר": the image of a bull."

[60] See Mic 6:6

[61] Craig Evans, "Cult Images, Royal Policies, and the Origins of Aniconism," in *The Pitcher Is Broken: Memorial Essays for Gösta W. Ahlström*, ed. Steven W. Holloway and Lowell K. Handy, JSOTSup 190 (Sheffield, Eng.: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 204–6.

ancient world, as well as the clearly derisive name Eglon (עֶגְלוֹן), which translates to "little calf," in Judg 3:12-25. They also note that Yahweh never directly receives the appellation עגל (calf) in the entirety of the Hebrew Bible, though he is described with bovine imagery on multiple occasions.[62] If the bull image was a part of his cult, this reference to it as a "calf" would then be a belittling title that appears nowhere else.

The second option is that עגל could encompass calves from their infancy to their youth, and that the designation implies a virile, vigorous beast who has just reached maturity and full strength. The term עגל was then one that was both emic and etic to the cultus of Israel and in no way derogatory. The evidence for this position is overall more compelling, as it is based on other material internal to the Hebrew Bible, as well as linguistic and comparative data. As Propp has pointed out, עגל appears as an equivalence to שׁוֹר, or bull, in Ps. 106:19-20.[63] A similar parallel of calves and bulls occurs in Papyrus Amherst 63.[64] Propp also notes that the Hebrew feminine form of עגל—עגלה—can denote a heifer that has been trained for farm labor, being potentially up to three years old.[65] Moreover, other deities in the ancient Near East, such as Marduk, were known as calves within their own cultic literature, without demeaning their cult at all.[66] There is

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[62] Albertz, *A History of Israelite Religion*, 1:309. Other scholars in this camp include: Martin Noth, *Exodus*, ed. J.S. Bowden, OTL (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1962), 248; John Van Seters, *The Life of Moses: The Yahwist as Historian in Exodus-Numbers* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), 299; Nicolas Wyatt, "Of Calves and Kings: Canaanite Dimension in the Religion of Ancient Israel," *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* 6 (1994): 86; Mordechai Cogan, *1 Kings*, AB 10 (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 359. The term עגל is used for a suckling calf in the Sefire Treaty (KAI 222 A1:23).

[63] Propp, *Exodus 19-40*, 2A:550–51.

[64] Smith, "Counting Calves at Bethel," 384–85.

[65] Propp, *Exodus 19-40*, 2A:550–51. See Hos 10:11.

[66] Examples abound in Sumerian literature, including Adad, and Sîn. Fleming, "If El Is a Bull, Who Is a Calf?," 26. Other examples include Nanna and Marduk. Barbara N. Porter, ed., *What Is a God? Anthropomorphic and Non-*

also the theophoric name '*glyw* found among the Samaria ostraca. The name means, "the calf of Yahweh," evidence would again indicate the term is not diminutive.[67] In sum, the evidence indicates that an עגל or calf could represent a youthful, unbridled, and fertile deity, one more than capable of protecting his people and providing for their needs.[68] It was moreover, the term the Israelites used for their own deity, as Hos 8:5-6 indicates with the phrase, "the Calf of Samaria" (עֶגֶל שֹׁמְרוֹן).

As Fleming argues regarding bovine imagery from Mesopotamia and Syria-Palestine, the language of a god being a "calf" or "being like a calf" was reserved for second generation gods such as Ba'al, Marduk, or Sin. The image was powerful and often associated with storm deities in particular.[69] As for ancient first-generation gods, such as El, they exclusively took bull, but not calf, imagery.[70]

These ruminations on terminology make it likely that the calf statues in ancient Israel did not presence an elder deity like El, but instead a "junior" god. Still, when discussing the deity presenced by the calves, scholars have suggested a full host of gods and goddesses, including El. As the identity of the bovine-associated-god has clear implications for the depth of Israel's

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Anthropomorphic Aspects of Deity in Ancient Mesopotamia (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2009), 49, 51. There is also the Aramaic bull-calf Būru. Daniel Schwemer, "The Storm-Gods of the Ancient Near East: Summary, Synthesis, Recent Studies (Part II)," *Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Religions* 8 (2008): 7.

[67] Klaus Koenen, "Der Name 'glyw Auf Samaria-Ostrakon Nr. 41," *Vetus Testamentum* 44 (1994): 396–400.

[68] Scholars in this group include: Hundley, "What Is the Golden Calf?," 517; Propp, *Exodus 19-40*, 2A:550–51; Cogan, *1 Kings*, 358; A.H.W. Curtis, "Some Observations on 'Bull' Terminology in the Ugaritic Texts and the Old Testament," in *In Quest of the Past: Studies on Israelite Religion, Literature, and Prophetism, Papers Read at the Join British-Dutch Old Testament Conference Held at Elspeet 1988*, ed. A.S. van der Woude, OTS 26 (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 1990), 21.

[69] Fleming, "If El Is a Bull, Who Is a Calf?," 24.

[70] Fleming, 26.

idolatry and its religious development, arguments over the calves' god have raged. And it to this question of divine referent we can now turn.

2. Who is the Divine Bovine?

Scholars have been offering suggestions for whom the calves of Israel presenced since the days of Philo and the Greek versions of Tobit. Early contenders for the position were all clearly idolatrous. Philo and many early church fathers assumed it was an Egyptian god based on the proximity of the Sinai calf with Egypt.[71] In Greek Tobit, the calf was associated with Ba'al.[72] These trends of thinking continued into the 19th century, when the Egyptian Apis had become a favorite choice, again due to the influence of the Exodus 32 narrative.[73] More recently, a string of writers have argued for a cult of the Mesopotamian god Sin behind the statue, imported from the days and lands of the Patriarchs.[74] Modern scholars have also appealed to Egypt once again. Using evidence from Akhenaton, Oswalt contended for Amon Re.[75] Finally, almost alone, Danielius has proposed the Egyptian goddess Hathor based on the "heifers" mentioned in Hos 10:5, the Septuagint of 1 Kgs 12:26-33, and Josephus.[76]

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[71] John Day, *Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan*, JSOTSup 265 (New York: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 35.

[72] Smith, *The Early History of God: Yahweh and the Other Deities in Ancient Israel*, 35; Day, *Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan*, 25.

[73] Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, 565–66.

[74] Examples include: Immanuel Lewy, "The Story of the Golden Calf Reanalysed," *Vetus Testamentum* 9 (1959): 318–22; Lloyd Bailey, "The Golden Calf," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 42 (1971): 97–115.

[75] John N. Oswalt, "The Golden Calves and the Egyptian Concept of Deity," *Evangelical Quarterly* 45 (1973): 17–18.

[76] Eva Danelius, "The Sins of Jeroboam Ben-Nabat," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 58 (1967): 95–114. The heifers mentioned in Hos 10:5-6 will be discussed in chapter 3.

Scholars have always struggled to harmonize such foreign options with the language surrounding the calves in Exod 32 and 1 Kgs 12:26-33. In these texts, the calves are clearly equated with the god of the Exodus tradition, implying a traditional Israelite deity.[77] Thus, despite the lack of seniority implied by the term עגל, some scholars have therefore promoted El as the god of the calf cultus. The god El at Ugarit had the epithet "bull" and was imaged alongside and as one, making it a somewhat suitable candidate.[78] The Jacob Narratives state that El was worshipped at Bethel (Gen 28:16-22), which later housed a calf (1 Kgs 12:25-33). Moreover, these scholars argue that Jeroboam I was *restoring* the traditional El cultus against the Yahwistic innovations of his neighbors to the south. Evidence for this position has been backed by a reinterpretation of Hos 8:6 by Tur Sinai, followed by Wyatt and Chalmers.[79]

The vast majority of scholars have outright rejected this argument for El as the calf. First of all, as discussed previously, El would not have been represented with calf imagery as he was a senior god. Secondly, making El the god of the Exodus is untenable given the Exodus' clear and

[77] Nahum M Sarna, *The JPS Torah Commentary: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1991), 203. There are few scholars who claim that calf in Exodus is a replacement for Moses. However, this option cannot explain the other calves in the Hebrew Bible. Jack M. Sasson, "Bovine Symbolism in the Exodus Narrative," *Vetus Testamentum* 18 (1968): 384. Amy Balogh, *Moses Among the Idols: Mediators of the Divine in the Ancient Near East* (New York: Fortress Press, 2018), xxv.

[78] Curtis, "Some Observations on 'Bull' Terminology in the Ugaritic Texts and the Old Testament," 21; Fleming, "If El Is a Bull, Who Is a Calf?," 23.

[79] Tur Sinai suggests taking the phrase מישראל (from Israel) in Hos 8:6 as מי שר אל, or "who is bull El." Herz Tur-Sinai, "'abbir," in *Encyclopaedia Biblica* (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1964). [Hebrew]; Wyatt, "Of Calves and Kings," 85–87; R. Scott Chalmers, "Who Is the Real El? A Reconstruction of the Prophet's Polemic in Hosea 12:5a," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 68 (2006): 617–19.

frequent linking to Yahweh.[80] Third, the text critical machinations that make this interpretation possible are extremely suspect.[81]

Moreover, the calf texts themselves seem to indicate that Yahweh was the god imagined to be behind the calves. Aaron plainly declared a "feast for Yahweh" in Exod 32:5 after forging the image, and Jeroboam I's throne that was supposedly given to him by the same deity.[82] The book of Kings also seems to imply this linkage, as Jehu's reforms targeted the Baal cultus of Jezebel but left the calves alone (2 Kgs 10:28-29). If the calf cult was Yahwistic it could also explain why Elijah, Elisha, and Amos do not challenge the calf-cultic space at Bethel.[83] These data points have led the vast majority of scholars to consider the calf cults of Aaron and Jeroboam I to be Yahwistic.[84]

However, this simple picture of a northern, Yahwistic calf-cult has always been complicated by the Book of Hosea. Hosea seemingly targets the Israelite worship of the Canaanite god Baal multiple times.[85] The first three chapters in particular decry Israel for replacing Yahweh with this other god, though portions of the book refer to the worship of plural

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[80] Lewis, *The Origin and Character of God*, 115–18. See also Hos 13:4.

[81] Wyatt and Tur Sinai both suggest adding, moving, or deleting letters that are not otherwise attested. Wyatt deletes hold words without justification. Wyatt, "Of Calves and Kings," 85–86.

[82] 1 Kgs 11:31. Gary N. Knoppers, *Two Nations Under God: The Deuteronomistic History of Solomon and the Dual Monarchies*, vol. 2: The Reign of Jeroboam, the Fall of Israel, and Reign of Josiah, HSM 53 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1994), 35.

[83] Day, *Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan*, 36.

[84] Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, 566; Sarna, *The JPS Torah Commentary*, 203; Cornelius Houtman, *Exodus*, trans. Sierd Woudstra, HCOT (Leuven: Peeters, 1993), 626–27; Angelika Berlejung, "Twisting Traditions: Programmatic Absence-Theology for the Northern Kingdom in 1Kgs 12:26-33* (The 'Sin of Jeroboam')," *Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages* 35 (2009): 25; Smith, *Where the Gods Are*, 110–11; Hundley, "What Is the Golden Calf?," 564.

[85] For references to Baal worship see Hos 2:10, 18.

בעלים or baals as well.[86] Given that Hosea also condemns the worship of "the Calf of Samaria" in Hos 8:5-6 and negatively references the worship of bovine gods in Hos 10:5-6 and Hos 13:2, some scholars have suggested a fully-fledged rival Baal-bull cult present in the north during the eighth century.[87]

Other scholars have instead explained the presence of Baal and bull critiques in Hosea as a result of syncretism. The north's calf image was thus intended to be a presencing of Yahweh, whether created by Jeroboam I or another Israelite leader.[88] However, the choice of a calf for the cultic image demonstrates the influence of either Baalistic or Elohistic imagery and cultic habitus on Israelite religion.[89] Some scholars suggest this Canaanite influence on the Israelite cult may

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[86] Hosea references the baalim (בעלים) in Hos 2:15, 18; 11:2; 13:1. The problem of the plural baals has become an increasingly debated topic in scholarship, along with parallel discussions of Ištar in the Assyrian cultus and the possibility of multiple Yahwehs based on the finds for Kuntillet 'Ajrud. A discussion of the nature of divine multiplicity is beyond the scope of this dissertation. However, evidence does suggest that there was some sort of fragmentation of Yahwehs between the north and the south, with multiple Yahwistic cult sites in the north. It is possible that when Hosea references the Baalim he is references what the authors viewed as false Yahwistic cults that looked "Baalish," and used Baal as a moniker. This position is defended in Jeremias. Jörg Jeremias, "Hosea in the Book of the Twelve," in *The Book of the Twelve: Composition, Reception, and Interpretation*, ed. Lena-Sofia Tiemeyer and Jakob Wöhrle, VTSup 184 (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 112. Summaries of these issues can be found in J. Andrew Dearman, "Interpreting the Religious Polemics Against Baal and the Baalim in the Book of Hosea," *Old Testament Essays* 14 (2001): 9–25; Barbara N. Porter, "Ishtar of Nineveh and Her Collaborator, Ishtar of Arbela, in the Reign of Assurbanipal," *Iraq* 66 (2004): 41–44; Benjamin D. Sommer, *The Bodies of God and the World of Ancient Israel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Spencer Allen, *The Splintered Divine: A Study of Ištar, Baal, and Yahweh Divine Names and Divine Multiplicity in the Ancient Near East*, vol. 5, SANER (Boston: De Gruyter, 2015); Smith, *Where the Gods Are*. There are also scholars who see the reference to Baals in part or in full as a link to Israel's foreign alliances. Brad E. Kelle, *Hosea 2: Metaphor and Rhetoric in Historical Perspective*, AcBib 20 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005).

[87] Andersen and Freedman, *Hosea*, 631; Marvin Sweeney, *The Twelve Prophets*, vol. 1, Berit Olam (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 2000), 30. It must be remembered that the Hebrew Bible remembers a thriving northern Baal cult in the ninth century that may have impacted northern Yahwism.

[88] Scholars such as Finkelstein have argued that the calf cult actually dates to Jeroboam II. Israel Finkelstein, "Between Jeroboam and Jeroboam: Israelite Identity Formation," in *Research on Israel and Aram: Autonomy, Independence and Related Issues Proceedings of the First Annual RIAB Center Conference, Leipzig, June 2016*, ed. Angelika Berlejung and Aren Maeir (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2019), 146.

[89] As El was a bull and Baal could be associated with calves, it is difficult to disentangle which exactly affected the Israelite cult and when. Smith, *The Early History of God: Yahweh and the Other Deities in Ancient Israel*, 85. Moreover, scholars are rarely precise on what this cultic syncretism looked like. For the position that the calf cult

have become so engrained that by the time of Hosea, there was the complete conflation of Yahweh and Baal by some Israelites.[90] Here, Hos 2:18 [Eng 2:16] is inevitably appealed to: " 'And it will come to pass on that day,' declares Yahweh, 'you will call me your husband, and you will no longer call me your master [Baal].'" This verse implies that Yahweh was being called Baal, whether it be the god's personal name or the appellative "master." Given that Hebrew does not allow for the possession of a personal name, the later usage is more reasonable.[91] The authors of Hosea thus opposed—not the worship of a foreign god—but his own god being worshipped in the wrong manner. As Hubler summarizes, "The conflict reflected in Hosea, therefore, is primarily an internal one: a debate about the integrity of YHWHism itself."[92] The explanatory power of this approach for the inscriptional record, Hosea, and the history of Yahwism has led to it becoming a common stance among scholars.[93]

Yet, while Hosea's writings on the calf-cult appear in these discussions of Israelite religion, its relevant verses are actually rarely investigated. Often, scholars cite these passages for their uses of the terms "calves," "Calf of Samaria," and "heifers of Beth-Aven," but leave out

was mainly reflecting El traditions see Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic*, 74; Wesley Toews, *Monarchy and Religious Institution in Israel under Jeroboam I*, SBLMS 47 (Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1993); Lewis, *The Origin and Character of God*, 199, 318.

[90] Smith, *The Early History of God: Yahweh and the Other Deities in Ancient Israel*, 73; Day, *Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan*, 76–77; Hubler, "'No Longer Will You Call Me "My Ba'al,"'" 612–14. Five theophoric Baal names appear in the Samaria ostraca. Day, *Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan*, 72. Baal also appears alongside El and Yahweh at Kuntillet 'Ajrud. Smith, *The Early History of God: Yahweh and the Other Deities in Ancient Israel*, 73.

[91] Hubler, "'No Longer Will You Call Me "My Ba'al,"'" 617.

[92] Hubler, 612.

[93] Mays, *Hosea*, 118; Dearman, *Hosea*, 225; Macintosh, *Hosea*, 105.

any engagement with the context of these verses or even a full translation of them.[94] Moreover, scholars who do grapple with these texts sometimes fail do so in light of the first part of the book. If the authors of Hosea did in fact object to aspects of Israel's Yahweh cult in Hos 2, it follows that this same type of objection appears in chapters 8, 10, and 13. In other words, the Calf of Samaria would have itself been known as Yahweh, and the critiques in the latter part of the book extend to the wider Yahweh cult of the Northern Kingdom.[95] As will be shown in this dissertation, these passages represent discourses within the Yahwistic cultus about Yahwistic associated cult objects, giving us further insight into the material nature of Israelite religion that this dissertation seeks to explore.

3. A Question of Symbolism: Calf-God, Stand, or Sign?

For scholars who do contend that Yahweh was associated with the calf-statues, a key question immediately follows this conclusion: what was the relationship between the calf image/s and Yahweh? Or to put the question more philosophically, what was the relationship between the sign (the calf) and the god signified? As discussed above, often the actual concern behind these inquiries is not the nature of Israelite semiology, but the degree to which the Israelites might be considered idolators for creating and worshipping the calf.

Traditionally, three proposals have been offered for how the calf related to its deity based on ancient Near Eastern parallels. The first, most obvious, and most damning option would be

[94] Examples include P. Kyle Jr. McCarter, "Aspects of the Religion of the Israelite Monarchy," in *Ancient Israelite Religion: Essays in Honor of Frank Moore Cross*, ed. Patrick Miller, Paul Hanson, and S. Dean McBride (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 137–56; Berlejung, "Twisting Traditions"; Stephen Russell, *Images of Egypt in Early Biblical Literature: Cisjordan-Israelite, Transjordan Israelite, and Judahite Portrayals*, BZAW 403 (Berlin; New York: De Gruyter, 2009); Lewis, *The Origin and Character of God*.

[95] This issue is not uncommon among commentators. Many acknowledge the syncretism of Yahweh and Baal in the first chapters, but then treat the calf as non-Yahwistic later in the book.

that the calf statue was imagined to embody Yahweh and act as his physical being within its temple. Theriomorphic cult statues that appear to have acted in such a way have been attested in other parts of the ancient Near East, though most cult statues seem to have been anthropomorphic.[96] Scholars who take this position generally do so because the calf statues are called gods by their worshippers in the biblical text (Exod 32:4, 1 Kgs 12:28). In Hos 8:6, the text states that the calf was "not a god," which certainly implies some Israelites thought that it was one. This position is not the most popular within current scholarship, but it maintains a notable number of adherents, including Houtman and Day.[97]

Many scholars find the idea of Yahweh as a calf simply untenable, leading to a second interpretation. This less daunting option is that the calf statue acted like a divine stand or a pedestal, much like the ark of the covenant in ancient Judah. The calf then was not the embodiment of Yahweh, but a marker of his invisible presence. To rephrase, Yahweh was therefore imagined to be standing over the calf, but not to *be* the calf. Evidence for this theory mostly derives from Syrian stelae and Neo-Assyrian wall art that show gods atop their associated beast. The imagery here evokes the deity's power over the dangerous animal beneath, thereby

[96] Examples of theriomorphic god statues appear in all areas. A Ninevite slab of Babylonian gods being despoiled includes one bird-statue that was likely associated with Marduk. Austen Henry Layard, *The Monuments of Nineveh, from Drawings Made on the Spot* (London: John Murray, 1849), 67a. Other examples include several images of Hittite storm god being worshipped as a bull from Alaca Höyük, one on an orthostat, another on a vase. Both depictions date to around the 16th century BCE. Michele Cammarosano, *Hittite Local Cults*, WAW 40 (Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2018), 66. Egyptian examples abound, though animal forms of gods appear to date to earlier periods or attempts to archaicize. See Ann Macy Roth, "The Representation of the Divine in Ancient Egypt," in *Text, Artifact, and Image: Revealing Ancient Israelite Religion*, ed. Gary Beckman and Theodore J. Lewis (Providence, RI: Brown Judaic Studies, 2006), 25–27.

[97] Lloyd Bailey, "The Golden Calf," *HUCA* 42 (1971): 114; Walter Moberley, *At the Mountain of God: Story and Theology in Exodus 32-34* (Sheffield, Eng.: JSOT, 1983), 47; Curtis, "Some Observations on 'Bull' Terminology in the Ugaritic Texts and the Old Testament," 25; Houtman, *Exodus*, 625–26; Day, *Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan*, 40–41.

expressing the god's mastery over chaotic force.[98] Images of gods standing on bulls are particularly common in this time period in Syria and Mesopotamia as they were traditional pedestals for storm gods such as Baal-Hadad. A host of examples, complete with photos, can be found in Lewis' tome, *The Origin and Character of God*.[99] There are also two scaraboid examples of this motif from Samaria dating to the Iron IIB.[100] For many scholars, the appeal of this theory is that it allows the ancient Israelites to be aniconic in a way similar to the ancient Judeans. The God of Israel was not imaged, but his presence was still concretized and marked. The calves therefore become aniconic cultic objects equivalent to and competing with the ark of the covenant. Many prominent scholars, including Albright, Cogan and Cross, hold to this position, and it the most dominant in the field today.[101]

However, some scholars have objected to the prior option as there is no evidence for calf statues acting as a pedestal for an un-imaged god. They argue that the calf was neither god-image

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[98] Karen Sonik, "Divine (Re-) Presentation: Authoritative Images and a Pictorial Stream of Tradition in Mesopotamia.," in *The Materiality of Divine Agency*, ed. Beate Pongratz-Leisten and Karen Sonik, Studies in Ancient Near Eastern Records 8 (Boston, MA: de Gruyter, 2015), 178.

[99] See Lewis, *The Origin and Character of God*, 150–55, 156. See also Bonacossi and Qasim for a newly discovered example from the Faida Canal in Iraq, likely dating to Sennacherib or one of his sons. Daniele Morandi Bonacossi and Hasan Ahmed Qasim, "Irrigation and Landscape Commemoration in Northern Assyria, The Assyrian Canal and Rock Reliefs in Faida (Kurdistan Region of Iraq): Preliminary Report on the 2019 Field Season," *Iraq*, 2022, 23, 31–32. A Luwian example from Ahmar dating to circa 900 BCE is described Guy Bunnens, J. David Hawkins, and Isabelle Leirens, *A New Luwian Stele and the Cult of the Storm-God at Til Barsib-Masuwari* (Louvain: Peeters Publishers, 2006).

[100] Othmar Keel and Christoph Uehlinger, *God, Goddesses, and Images of God in Ancient Israel*, trans. Thomas Trapp (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 192.

[101] W. F. Albright, *From Stone Age to Christianity Monotheism and the Historical Process* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1941); Noth, *Exodus*, 247; Tryggve Mettinger, "The Veto on Images and the Aniconic God in Ancient Israel," *Scripta Instituti Donneriani Aboensis* 10 (1979): 21–22; Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic*, 73–74; Albertz, *A History of Israelite Religion*, 1:144; Cogan, *1 Kings*, 359; Chalmers, "Who Is the Real El?," 615–16.

or stand but an emblem or standard. The image thus did not embody its deity or represent his pedestal. It simply provided an access point for Yahweh, a type of iconic symbol that was not Israel's god, but a marker for him. This interpretation is old, dating back at least to the early church fathers.[102] Major proponents of this position more recently have included Eissfeldt, who argued that the Exodus calf in particular was a battle standard, and Hundley, who claimed the people in the Exodus tradition wanted a symbol as it, "adds some distance" from the deity.[103]

Unsurprisingly, there are scholars who fit into none of these three simple categories as they combine them. Kaufmann, for example, suggested that the calves of Jeroboam I were originally thought of as cult stands, and only later in the eighth century did the Israelites shift their perception of them into "fetishistic objects of popular worship."[104] The Northern Kingdom thus moved from aniconism into iconism using the same objects. Analogous theories have been suggested more recently by Albertz and Chung.[105] In a similar vein, Coogan suggested, not a

[102] Houtman, *Exodus*, 625.

[103] Otto Eissfeldt, "Lade und Stierbild," *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft; Giessen* 17 (January 1, 1940): 190–213; Hundley, "What Is the Golden Calf?," 570. Hundley's point about the calf statue being a symbol to add distance from the diety is not a good one as the people are uninvolved in making the statue in Exod 32. Instead, Aaron makes the calf (Exod 32:4). Again, it is difficult due to the vagueness of biblical texts on the calf to say exactly what was intended by the image, and yet this vagueness has allowed scholars to suggest their own interpretations. Finally, of all the options for the relation of bull to god, this one seems most unlikely to the author. Divine emblems in Assyrian art are mostly abstract signs on wall reliefs and *kudurrus*—not physical objects. The materiality of the calf as a golden or metal object must be accounted for.

[104] Kaufmann, *The Religion of Israel*, 271, 374.

[105] The power of these interpretations is their ability to explain the prominence the people who made them according to the Hebrew Bible, not so much in any shifting language about the calves themselves. For example, scholars have long noted that Jeroboam I is described in ways reminiscent of Moses in "freeing" the Israelites from the burden of Judean control. He also has prophetic legitimation in 1 Kgs 11. However, he, his calves, and his cultic innovations are later roundly condemned. These shifting perceptions of the king have led scholars to suggest the text of 1 Kgs 12:25-33 was once positive toward the calf cult and Jeroboam. It was only later that the editors repurposed the text to make it a negative polemic. See Chung, *The Sin of the Calf*, 20–21; Albertz, *A History of Israelite Religion*, 1:144–45.

diachronic divide between views of the calf, but a synchronic one. He proposed that religious elite rightly perceived the calves as pedestals, though Israel's more common folk may not have understood the distinction between representation and reality, believing the object itself to be a god.[106] Finally, Mark Smith has suggested that the calves may have held multiple roles, being considered *both* the pedestals for and symbols of Yahweh, if not also a representation of him.[107]

Given the lack of Israelite treatises on the nature of their image—or even a description of the object—some scholars have declared that the relation between the god and the calf cannot be known. As Propp points out, "Part of the perennial appeal of religious iconography—and its nonappeal for monotheistic religions—is the ease with which is sustains multiple interpretations."[108] Propp's caution here is valuable. While scholars can and should theorize on the semiotic relationship between the calf and its god, the conceptualization of the statue was forged by its community.[109] As communities are made up of diverse individuals, ideas regarding these images could vary, shift, and even overlap.

Assyriological scholarship demonstrates the difficulty of interpretating cult statues poignantly.[110] For, despite their wealth of texts and images portraying gods and their

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[106] Cogan, *1 Kings*, 363.

[107]Smith, "Counting Calves at Bethel," 388–91. See also Smith, *Where the Gods Are*, 68.

[108] Propp, *Exodus 19-40*, 2A:583. A similar point is made in Berlejung, "Twisting Traditions," 15.

[109] Pongratz-Leisten and Sonik, "Between Cognition and Culture," 6.

[110] There has also been discussion of cult statues and their relation to their gods in Egyptian culture. Here, the imagery is complex, with periods where the gods were primarily theriomorphically depicted. However, there are also periods where gods could be imaged as part of an animal, human, or a mix of both human and animal. Hathor in particular can be shown in the same scene in multiple ways. Hornung suggests that the ancient Egyptians thought of the actual form of their gods as secret, unknowable, and mysterious. Gods could inhabit man-made images that in some way reflected aspects of their being, but these statues did not actually correspond to their "real" image. Erik Hornung, *Conceptions of God in Ancient Egypt: The One and the Many*, trans. John Baines (Ithaca: Cornell

representations, Assyriologists still wrestle with questions of the relation between Mesopotamian gods and their cultic images and objects.[111] Cult statues were known as gods and treated as living beings who would be clothed and fed.[112] However, one god could have multiple anthropomorphic cult statues, a celestial form, representative weapons, abstract emblems, and then his own unknown, unreachable form.[113] A goddess was connected to all of her physical aspects, but the destruction of one statue or aspect would not destroy the goddess herself. Moreover, gods could abandon their statues if they so choose.[114] In other words, a cult statue was a god, but not the entirety of a god.[115] In response to these factors, discussions of god statues have mushroomed in number over the past three decades, with scholars using different

University Press, 1996), 117–24. See also Lorton, "The Theology of Cult Statues in Ancient Egypt"; Gay Robins, "Cult Statues in Ancient Egypt," in *Cult Image and Divine Representation in the Ancient Near East*, ed. Neal H Walls (Boston, MA: American Schools of Oriental Research, 2005), 1–12.

[111] As scholars of Mesopotamian culture admit, part of the problem in understanding Mesopotamian gods is the wealth of material left behind. There are many genres that describe the gods and their statues, from a vast period of time, that take different tacks and metaphors. For an overview of these issues regarding gods and cult statues see especially Zainab Bahrani, *The Graven Image: Representation in Babylonia and Assyria* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003); Barbara N. Porter, "Introduction," in *What Is a God? Anthropomorphic and Non-Anthropomorphic Aspects of Deity in Ancient Mesopotamia*, ed. Barbara N. Porter, Transactions of the Casco Bay Assyriological Institute, v. 2 (Winona Lake, Ind: Eisenbrauns, 2009), 1–14; Sonik, ""Divine (Re-) Presentation," 2015.

[112] Bahrani, *The Graven Image*, 171.

[113] Pongratz-Leisten and Sonik, "Between Cognition and Culture," 20; Victor Avigdor Hurowitz, "What Goes in Is What Comes Out: Materials for Creating Cult Statues," in *Text, Artifact, and Image: Revealing Ancient Israelite Religion*, ed. Gary Beckman and Theodore J. Lewis (Providence, RI: Brown Judaic Studies, 2006), 11; Porter, *What Is a God? Anthropomorphic and Non-Anthropomorphic Aspects of Deity in Ancient Mesopotamia*, 47.

[114] Sommer, *The Bodies of God*, 23; Sonik, ""Divine (Re-) Presentation," 2015, 150.

[115] Sommer, *The Bodies of God*, 22.

philosophical, religious, and cultural parallels in an attempt to explain how cultic images and objects could relate to their gods.[116] Consensus is far from being reached on these issues.[117]

As Baharani argues in her work *The Graven Image*, there are also larger cultural forces at play behind these discussions of images and meaning. In the first chapter of the book, she summarizes the use of western philosophy and ideas in exploring Mesopotamian religion and aesthetic. She demonstrates that this positionality has allowed scholars to enshrine cultural hierarchies and binaries that impose foreign conceptions on the ancient material.[118] Arguably, many of these same biases have been at play in biblical interpretations of the golden calves as well, as scholars tend to apply their own conceptions of semiology back onto these statues.

In order to confront these difficulties of interpretation, Bahrani creates a theoretical bricolage that shows the similarities of Assyro-Babylonian conceptions with Derrida and Bottéro.[119] In particular she explores the ontologies of these societies through their concept of *ṣalmu*, a rich Akkadian lexeme that has glosses such as "image," "cult statue," and "manifestation."[120] Using royal art, rituals, and omens, Baharani argues that Assyro-Babylonian *ṣalmu* "was itself seen as a real thing. It was not considered to resemble an original reality that was present elsewhere but to contain that reality in itself."[121] In other words, the referent-reality (the god, the king, etc.) participated *in* its depiction. Elsewhere she writes, "*Ṣalmu*, as mimetic

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[116] For example, Dick uses the Catholic idea of transubstantiation as a heuristic for the relationship in Michael B. Dick, "The Mesopotamian Cult Statue: A Sacramental Encounter with the Divinity," in *Cult Image and Divine Representation in the Ancient Near East*, ed. Neal H Walls (Boston, MA: American Schools of Oriental Research, 2005), 43–68.

[117] For a summary of discussions see the collected volume Porter, *What Is a God? Anthropomorphic and Non-Anthropomorphic Aspects of Deity in Ancient Mesopotamia*.

[118] Bahrani, *The Graven Image*, 13–149.

[119] Bahrani, 8–9.

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[121] Bahrani, *The Graven Image*, 127.

representation, may relate to the object as an excess in that it can act as a repetition, a replacement. But it is not an element that represents the whole. It cannot give access to a referent or signified, the *Ding-an-sich*—at least not uniquely—because the referent can be encountered in many phainomena. *Ṣalmu* is therefore a mode of presencing."[122] To rephrase, cult statues as *ṣalmu* were not thought to contain the whole body or person of a god. If this were the case, a god could only have one cult statue. Instead, these *ṣalmu* were extensions and reproductions of the deity that were linked to her and made her *present* in a cyclical system of re-presentation.[123]

Bahrani's interpretation of Assyro-Babylonian images is an intriguing and compelling reminder of the complexity of these questions of gods, their forms, and their statues. However, it is also a sobering reminder that there is not enough data to determine the ancient Israelite conception of their calf statues. Such questions would be tied up with Israelite ontologies, which could change with time and space.

Yet, whether the ancient Israelites perceived Yahweh to be in, with, or above the calf images, socially they seem to have *functioned* as cultic objects equivalent to anthropomorphic Assyrian cult statues.[124] This conceptualization of the calves has already been assumed by several scholars, including Horowitz and Berlejung. Both of these scholars have produced thought-provoking work on the cultic presuppositions behind the calf narratives and the ways in

[122] Bahrani, 137.

[123] Bahrani's work has influenced other Assyriologists, including Pongratz-Leisten and Sonik, "Between Cognition and Culture," 11–12.

[124]Similar arguments have been made with the ark of the covenant. Daniel Fleming, "David and the Ark: A Jerusalem Festival Reflected in Royal Narrative," in *Literature as Politics, Politics as Literature: Essays on the Ancient Near East in Honor of Peter Machinist*, ed. David VanderHooft and Abraham Winitzer (Winona Lake, Ind: Eisenbrauns, 2013), 75–96.

which they were created.[125] This dissertation seeks to continue this line of reasoning and expand it into the work of Hosea. Moreover, as will be discussed below and throughout the dissertation, treating the calves as cult statues is the best heuristic for understanding Hosea's response to them.

This parallel between the calves and ancient Near Eastern cult statues is first seen in the materiality of the calf and cult statues. Both the calves and Assyrian cult statues are always described as being made of precious metals, most commonly gold though occasionally also silver (Exod 32:2-4; Deut 9:16;1 Kgs 12:25-33; Hos 8:4-5, 13:2).[126] As Benzel points out, both gold and silver do not tarnish. They remain shiny and stable in color despite the passage of time. In ancient Mesopotamia, this quality connected them with the concepts of immutability and purity, and from there, divinity. In fact, these metals were the crucial element in the creation of cult statues as the material itself was already thought of as being divine.[127] Gold could even be called the "sperm" of the gods because it was so tightly connected to the fabrication of divine bodies.[128] The fact that Israel's calves were made of gold themselves hints at both their exceptional value, holiness, and close propinquity to the divine—if not also their own divinity.

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[125] Angelika Berlejung, *Die Theologie Der Bilder: Herstellung Und Einweihung von Kultbildern in Mesopotamien Und Die Alttestamentliche Bilderpolemik* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1998), 352–56; Berlejung, "Twisting Traditions," 15, 24–27; Victor Avigdor Hurowitz, "The Mesopotamian God Image, from Womb to Tomb," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 123 (2003): 154–55; Hurowitz, "What Can Go Wrong with an Idol?," 261, 296–99.

[126] Hurowitz, "What Goes in Is What Comes Out: Materials for Creating Cult Statues," 19–20.

[127] Kim Benzel, "'What Goes in Is What Comes Out' – But What Was Already There? Divine Materials and Materiality in Ancient Mesopotamia," in *The Materiality of Divine Agency:*, ed. Beate Pongratz-Leisten and Karen Sonik, SANER 8 (Boston: de Gruyter, 2015), 99–103. Hurowitz, "What Goes in Is What Comes Out: Materials for Creating Cult Statues," 13–15.

[128] Shana Zaia, "All That Glitters : Gold in the Royal Ideology of the Neo-Assyrian Empire," *Kaskal* 16 (2019): 424.

Socially, like Neo-Assyrian cult statues, the calves were also known to receive sacrificial offerings on altars (Exod 32:5, 1 Kgs 12:32 possibly Hos 2:13).[129] They appear in some of Israel's must cherished cult sites, including Bethel, Sinai/Horeb, Dan, and possibly Samaria.[130] Israel's kings and high priests directed their creation (Exod 32:1-4, 1 Kgs 12:25-33).[131] As will be discussed in chapter three, much like the gods of Syria, Babylon, and the ark of the covenant, they could be godnapped, or taken hostage by a foreign power (Hos 10:5-6). Finally, the heavy-handed and repeated Judean polemics against the calves hint at their centrality to the Israelite cult in a way that parallels the ark of the covenant, an object that sat in the sacred space reserved for cult statues in most temples.[132] Moreover, as this dissertation will describe, this cult-statue model can explain several texts in Hosea that scholars have found cofounding or that they have simply ignored.

4. The Calves in Chronology: Textual Dependence, Archaeology, and History

The last area of scholarship in which the calves frequently appear is in establishing the relationship between texts. The main crux of this issue is determining the direction of dependence between Exodus 32 and 1 Kgs 12, though on rare occasions scholars discuss the role

[129] Barbara N. Porter, "God's Statues as a Tool of Assyrian Political Policy: Esarhaddon's Return of Marduk to Babylon," in *Religious Transformations and Socio-Political Change: Eastern Europe and Latin America*, ed. Luther Martin (Berlin/ New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 1993), 15.

[130] See Exod 32; Deut 9:12-21; 1 Kgs 12:28-32; 2 Kgs 10:29; Hos 8:6. See also Israel Finkelstein, "Jeroboam II's Temples," *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 132 (2020): 252–53.

[131] This creation of cult statues by priests and kings finds a parallel in Neo-Assyrian documents. See Davide Nadali and Verderame Lorenzo, "Neo-Assyrian Statues of Gods and Kings in Context: Integrating Textual, Archaeological and Iconographic Data on Their Manufacture and Installation," *Altorientalische Forschungen* 46 (2019): 239.

[132] The competition between the ark of the covenant and the calves has been well established. See Kaufmann, *The Religion of Israel*, 271; Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic*, 74; Mettinger, "The Veto on Images," 20–23.

of Deut 9 and Hosea in the development of the calf tradition.[133] Over the past several decades, archaeological and art historical evidence has been brought into the debates as well. In general, given the amount and types of data available, timelines and theories have multiplied.

Though the traditional view that the Exodus calf narrative is the most ancient of the calf texts has largely gone out of vogue, there are scholars that hold to an adapted form of this position. Both F.M. Cross and Childs suggested that Exodus's account harkens back to ancient Israelite bull worship. Upon reflecting on the role of Aaron within the Pentateuchal narrative, Cross writes, "Underneath the polemical tale must have been a cult legend of the old sanctuary of Bethel claiming Aaronic authority for its bull iconography."[134] Later on, Jeroboam I appealed to this more antiquarian imagery in his cultus, making him a kind of "reformer" of ancient Israelite religion contra the more radical changes happening to the cultus of Yahweh in the south.[135] When Exod 32 was finalized, it was made to reflect the Jeroboamic tradition, especially in regards to its references to "gods" for the singular calf in Exod 32:4.[136] In this way, the narrative of Exod 32 both predates and antedates 1 Kgs 12:25-33.

A second approach has been to take 1 Kgs 12:25-33 as the primary account of the calf cultus of Israel. Exod 32 was written later, and it was designed as a parable against the calf images of the north. This tact explains the odd similarities between Aaron and Jeroboam I,

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[133] For Deuteronomy see: Christine Hayes, "Golden Calf Stories: The Relationship of Exodus 32 and Deuteronomy 9-10," in *The Idea of Biblical Interpretation: Essays in Honor of James L. Kugel*, ed. Hindy Najman and J Newman, JSJSup 83 (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 45–93; Di Vito, "The Calf Episodes in Exodus and Deuteronomy: A Study in Inner-Biblical Interpretation."

[134] Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic*, 74.

[135] Cross, 74; Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, 586; Knoppers, "Aaron's Calf and Jeroboam's Calves," 96.

[136] Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic*, 73–74.

including the almost identical names of two of their sons, their creation of the calves under the pressure of assassination, and the way their images are called gods plural in both texts.[137] This viewpoint dominates modern scholarship, though with a wide variety of dates suggested for both texts. Adherents to variations of this position include Noth, Cogan, and Berelejung.[138]

In recent decades, more complex and detailed theories have been proposed. Some biblical scholars contend there is a northern, pro-calf layer to these texts that was later appropriated and inverted by Judean authors, which explains the role of Aaron the high priest as the calf-creator and the similarities of Jeroboam and Moses.[139] Others believe the calf stories originally targeted the cult of Jeroboam II, but the authors telescoped the texts back to Jeroboam I.[140] Still other scholars have suggested these narratives represent the warring polemics of priestly groups with their different cultic sites.[141] Overall, all of these discussion are inextricably locked into broader compositional debates surrounding the formation of the Pentateuch, Deuteronomistic histories, and the nation of Israel. Discussions of where and how Hosea fits into this puzzle are rare. Unsurprisingly, the end result has been something of a scholastic logjam.

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[137] A full description of similarities can be found in Aberbach and Smolar, "Aaron, Jeroboam, and the Golden Calves."

[138] Noth, *Exodus*, 246; Wyatt, "Of Calves and Kings," 17; Cogan, *1 Kings*, 363; Day, *Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan*, 36; Berlejung, "Twisting Traditions," 20.

[139] Chung, *The Sin of the Calf*, 1–2; Ronald A. Geobey, "The Jeroboam Story in the (Re)Formulation of Israelite Identity: Evaluating the Literary-Ideological Purposes of 1 Kings 11–14," *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures* 16 (2016): 34–35.

[140]Knoppers, *Two Nations Under God*, 2: The Reign of Jeroboam, the Fall of Israel, and Reign of Josiah:44; Berlejung, "Twisting Traditions," 23; Aren M. Wilson-Wright, "Bethel and the Persistence of El: Evidence for the Survival of El as an Independent Deity in the Jacob Cycle and 1 Kings 12:25-30," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 138 (2019): 714; Finkelstein, "Between Jeroboam and Jeroboam: Israelite Identity Formation," 146.

[141] Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic*, 74; Leuchter, *The Levites and the Boundaries of Israelite Identity*, 131.

Though scholars have increasingly used archaeological finds for evidence of Israel's calf cultus, there is to date not much material to go on, especially from later time periods. A tiny silver calf in a model shrine was discovered at a gateway of Ashkelon. It is Middle Bronze in date.[142] At Byblos archaeologists found a miniscule gold-plated metal calf, currently housed at the Louvre. It is from the 19th-18th centuries BCE.[143] A bronze statue was uncovered in the Jezreel foothills—also from the Late Bronze Period. The identity of the god or the use of the statue is entirely unknown, though it is not beyond the realm of possibility that it was Yahweh.[144] Tantalizingly, a ninth- eighth century bronze plaque of a deity riding a bull was found at Tel Dan. However, the deity appears to be female, and it likely represents Istar.[145] In sum, there are no definitive exemplars of metallic bull cult statues of Yahweh in this time period for ancient Israel.

Nonmetallic evidence for bull imagery in ancient Israel is more common, including a basalt statue of an undetermined god standing on bull from Hazor, though it is still Middle Bronze in date.[146] Another basalt bull statue was found at a gate complex in Bethsaida, which was destroyed in the second half of the eighth century and belonged to Geshur. The specific type

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[142] Lewis, *The Origin and Character of God*, 153.

[143] Lewis, 161.

[144] Lewis, 322; Gösta W Ahlström, "The Bull Figurine from Dhahrat Et-Tawileh," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 280 (1990): 80. Mazar, "The 'Bull Site.'"

[145] Lewis, *The Origin and Character of God*, 319–20; Tallay Ornan, "The Lady and the Bull: Remarks on the Bronze Plaque from Tel Dan," in *Essays on Ancient Israel in Its Near Eastern Context: A Tribute to Nadav Na'aman*, ed. Yairah Amit et al. (Winona Lake, Ind: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 297–313.

[146] Tallay Ornan, "The Bull and Its Two Masters: Moon and Storm Deities in Relation to the Bull in Ancient Near Eastern Art," *Israel Exploration Journal* 51 (2001): 17.

of bull statue, however, indicates an astral deity, most likely Adad, was behind the image.[147] There are also a number of controversial images, including the Taanach stand and the Kuntillet ʻAjrud Jar inscriptions, which may or may not be bulls.[148] Again, there is no unequivocal material evidence for Israel's Yahwistic bull cultus in the eighth century, though there may be one exemplar from the tenth century. This dearth of evidence is especially surprising in light of the common motif of gods on bull in Syria and Assyria during this time period.[149]

However, there are hints in the inscriptional record that may indicate that Yahweh was indeed associated with the calf cult. The first is the appearance of the name עגליו—Yahweh is a calf—within Samaria Ostraca no. 41. As Koenen points out, this name of Yahweh parallels similar theophoric names in Akkadian where gods are equated with bulls.[150] Secondly, there is the reference to Yahweh of Samaria in the Kuntillet ʻAjrud inscriptions. While this moniker does not in itself link Yahweh to the calf cult, scholars such as McCarter and Finkelstein have posited that the Yahweh of Samaria should be understood as the "Calf of Samaria" in Hos 8:6.[151] Yet,

[147]Lewis, *The Origin and Character of God*, 330–33.

[148] Lewis, 323–30. For a different stance on Kuntillet ʻAjrud's images see: Ryan Thomas, "The Identity of the Standing Figures on Pithos A from Kuntillet ʿAjrud: A Reassessment," *Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Religions* 16 (2016): 121–91.

[149] Schwemer, "The Storm-Gods of the Ancient Near East: Summary, Synthesis, Recent Studies (Part II)," 34; Ornan, "The Bull and Its Two Masters," 23–25.

[150] Koenen, "Der Name 'glyw Auf Samaria-Ostrakon Nr. 41."

[151] The Kuntillet ʻAjrud inscriptions date to roughly 800 BC, making only five decades off from being Hosea's contemporary. The inscriptions referenced (3.1) can be found in Ahituv, Eshel, and Meshel, "The Inscriptions," 87–90. See also McCarter, "Aspects of the Religion of the Israelite Monarchy," 147. Finkelstein, "Jeroboam II's Temples," 252.

scholars have been very wary or uninterested in putting Hosea's work in dialogue with the desert waystation, despite the parallel phrasing.[152]

However, for all this chaos and conflicting data, there is one matter of dating calf texts that has been a quiet but frequent point of consensus. While 1 Kgs 12:24-33 and Exod 32 receive the bulk of scholarly attention, there is a common agreement that the Book of Hosea contains the *oldest* written critiques of Israel's calves within the Hebrew Bible.[153] Though his aniconism, or rejection of cultic images, is not fully developed, passages such Hos 2:8, 4:17, 8:5-6, 10:5-6, and 13:2 testify to this book's derision for Israel's idols. Yet, while scholars note the presence of these polemics, they have failed to explore them or contextualize them, leaving a tremendous, but fillable, breach in our knowledge of eighth century Israelite religion and its development.

5. A Summary of the Field

In summary, though Hosea's texts on the calf are important citations in histories of God, aniconism, and Israelite religion, they themselves are poorly understood and understudied. These passages are likely the most proximate to the Israelite calf cultus in terms of temporal and geographic setting, and yet scholars continue to focus primarily on Exodus and Kings to research the calf statues. On the one hand, this approach demonstrates the domination of Pentateuchal studies over biblical scholarship and the inquiries it pursues. On the other hand, it showcases how more peripheral texts may in fact be better witnesses to Israelite history and practice as they have not been smoothed over and reworked to the extent of works such as Exodus and Kings.

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[152] Dearman, "Interpreting the Religious Polemics," 19.

[153] Mettinger, "The Veto on Images," 24; Toews, *Monarchy and Religious Institution in Israel*, 168; Michael B. Dick, "Prophetic Parodies of Making the Cult Image," in *Born in Heaven Made in Earth: The Creation of a Cultic Image in the Ancient Near East*, ed. Michael B. Dick (Winona Lake, Ind: Eisenbrauns, 1999), 11.

This review also demonstrates the overwhelming concerns for questions of religion, text, and theology over culture, material, and context within biblical scholarship. Even in the most thorough investigation of Hosea's calf texts to date in Chung's monograph has this bias. His book attempts to argue that the calf became an illegitimate cultic image through its reconceptualization as an actual representation of God rather than a pedestal.[154] As pointed out earlier, the biblical text does not provide us with the necessary information to determine the calf's divine ontology. By focusing only on this inquiry, Chung misses other aspects of the text. Hosea's passages on the calf cannot be understood without investigations into its embedding in Israelite social fabrics and cultural norms. Yet, this is exactly the approach that scholars have continued to take towards these texts.

Finally, it should be pointed out that even scholars who specialize on Hosea generally avoid these passages. The overwhelming majority of work on this Minor Prophet wrestles with the first three chapters, with perennial debates raging over how many wives the prophet had and their occupations.[155] The rest of the book is generally not put in dialogue with this introductory section or vice versa. Moreover, though Hosea is ripe for contextualization against the relatively well documented eighth century, commentators have continued to rely only on the manuscript tradition—and some comparative Semitics— to engage the text.[156]

Chapter Outline

[154] To Chung's credit, he engages the text critical issues of these passages, which many scholars ignore. However, though his book claims Hosea is the first text to oppose the calf, it fronts the texts of Exodus and Kings in its ordering, a strategy that undermines his point. For a summary of his argument see Chung, *The Sin of the Calf*, 202–8.

[155]Brad E. Kelle, "Hosea 1—3 in Twentieth-Century Scholarship," *Currents in Biblical Research* 7 (2009): 187–93.

[156] Nadav Na'aman, "The Book of Hosea as a Source for the Last Days of the Kingdom of Israel," *Biblische Zeitschrift* 59 (2015): 232–56.

This dissertation is framed around Hosea's critiques of the calf statues and will investigate the book's three condemnations of the cultic images in discrete chapters.

Chapter one will focus on Hos 8:1-6. Here, the prophetic text intertwines invectives against Israel's calf and kings, making parallel claims that both calf and kings were man-made and therefore illegitimate. This chapter will therefore explore the creation of cultic images and kings in ancient Israel, Syria, Assyria in order to contextualize this argument. It will be demonstrated that kings and cult statues shared polemics of divine formation and design in the ancient world. This polemic of divine installment was especially common amongst kings who usurped their thrones, as they had no other social capital to draw upon for their validation. Based on evidence from Israel's chaotic end, it is likely this kind of appeal to divine legitimation through prophecy or priestly blessing became common-place and crucial for Israel's final rulers. As Yahweh was the god of Israel, his approval would be necessary for any would-be-king. Yet, as each king died and the kingdom fell into chaos, this narrative was becoming increasingly suspect. Surely divinely made kings could not fail, and yet, they were continuing to do so. This social paradox came to eventually bring the efficacy of the cultus of Yahweh under suspicion, a fact the writers of Hosea used to cast aspersion on its cultic statues in particular. Statues also required divine approval and creation, and if Israel's kings did not have Yahweh's support, it followed that his cultic images did not have it either. Both kings and calves became known as man-made rather than divinely generated. The particular image Hosea contends with in this case is the Calf of Samaria, which dovetails nicely with the Yahweh of Samaria known from the eighth century Kuntillet 'Ajrud inscriptions.

The second chapter will then turn to Hos 10:1-7, a confusing passage that describes the fate of Samaria's cultic image. The focus of this particular dissertation chapter will be on verses

5 and 6, which describe the עגלות בית און, or "the heifers of Beth Aven," a reference most previous scholars have taken to denote Israel's calf statues. However, this chapter will argue instead that these heifers of Beth Aven are in fact actual live heifers. These female cows would ironically drag away(גרר) the actual cult image of Israel, the Resident of Samaria (שכן שמרון), which itself resembled a calf. This reconstruction of the text explains its grammatical disjunctions of Hos 10:5-6 and creates harmony with other passages in Hosea and the Hebrew Bible about the calf cult. Evidence for this reading will be given from a variety of sources, including instances describing divine residents of other cities from Aramaic and biblical texts. Moreover, this chapter will contextualize this reference to the carting away of Samaria's divine resident with the practice of godnapping known from contemporary Neo-Assyrian documents. Despite lamentation and mourning, Israel's god-image would depart. It was powerless to do otherwise, just like Israel's kings. The cult statue, once made to guarantee divine favor and blessing, was instead a curse that brought loss, vanity, and stagnation. Again, the book's polemic plays off ancient Near Eastern tropes regarding cult statues, inverting them to dismantle the cult statue in its cultural context.

Chapter three will cover the last passage about the calf cult in Hosea: Hos 13:2. Though the first half of this verse is relatively straightforward, the second (לָהֶם֙ הֵ֣ם אֹמְרִ֔ים זֹבְחֵ֖י אָדָ֑ם עֲגָלִ֖ים יִשָּׁקּֽוּן) is obtuse and often avoided by scholars due to its obscurity. In order to make sense of this clause, this chapter reviews evidence for kissing cult statues in Neo-Assyria in conjunction with Catherine Bell's ritual theory. Kissing a cult statue was not a commonplace ritual activity in the ancient world as it brought the worshipper into intimate proximity with the divine. It was therefore an action reserved for the most elite religious and political figures in ancient societies: kings, elites, and priests. Only they possessed the divine right, favor, and power to approach a

god. Hosea's description of "kissing calves" is thus a culturally situated shorthand for those in Israel's highest echelons of power.

From this basis, we might then inquire into who the mysterious זבחי אדם mentioned in the verse might be. Previous scholars have rightly shied away from translating this phrase as "human sacrificers," however, they have been unable to provide a better explanation for this wording. If it is assumed that the זבחי אדם were those who could "kiss calves" and therefore have divine favor, those who זבח אדם did so to gain power. Here, it will be argued that Hosea is playing on a distinct meaning of זבח, not as sacrifice, but as butcher. This meaning can be found in several other prophetic biblical texts, often in descriptions of military violence. In other words, this passage is about the brutal carnage of the time, when murder was necessary to both gain and maintain rule. Ironically then, this passage describes a time when men treated calf statues as gods, while simultaneously treating other men as animals to be slaughtered. The prophet inverts expectations with a mere four words, putting the play in the mouths of the Israelites themselves.

The conclusion of this dissertation will then reflect upon the consequences of this study for our understandings of the development of aniconism. As Hendel has previously suggested, the rejection of kings and cult statues appear to have been intertwined in Israelite society. However, while Hendel puts this intertwinement in the period of the United Monarchy or even before, it is perhaps better understood as an impulse of the eighth century.[157] The capture of a Yawhistic state and cult statue would have ramifications for both Israelite and Judean religion.[158] This societal, cultural, and religious trauma would require explanation, and Hosea pointed to the

[157] Ronald Hendel, "The Social Origins of the Aniconic Tradition in Early Israel," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 50 (1988): 380–81.

[158] DeGrado, "Authoring Empire," 58.

sin of the calf statues as the final reason. According to the authors of the book, the fall of Israel's kings provided the proof of the unviability and illegitimacy of Israel's Yahwistic calf cult. With such a poignant example of idolatry's consequences in the north, it is no surprise that Hezekiah's cultic reforms followed shortly afterward.[159] The Calf of Samaria had become the iconic emblem of Israel's sin, condemnation, and divine abandonment, a cultural memory which would continue to fuel Jewish and Christian etiologies, theologies, and cultic practices for centuries to come.

[159] Carr, *Holy Resilience*, 36–39.

CHAPTER 1: THE KINGS AND CALF OF SAMARIA

HOS 8:1-6 AND THE FABRICATIONS OF ISRAEL'S DIVINE REPRESENTATIONS

הֵם הִמְלִיכוּ וְלֹא מִמֶּנִּי הֵשָׂירוּ וְלֹא יָדָעְתִּי כַסְפָּם וּזְהָבָם עָשׂוּ לָהֶם עֲצַבִּים לְמַעַן יִכָּרֵת: זָנַח עָגְלֵךְ שֹׁמְרֹון חָרָה אַפִּי בָּם עַד־מָתַי
לֹא יוּכְלוּ נִקָּיֹון: כִּי מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל וְהוּא חָרָשׁ עָשָׂהוּ וְלֹא אֱלֹהִים הוּא כִּי־שְׁבָבִים יִהְיֶה עֵגֶל שֹׁמְרֹון:

They have made kings, but not by my will. They have made officials, but I have not known (them). Their silver and their gold they have made into idols for themselves. On account of this, Israel is cut off.151F He has rejected your calf, O Samaria. My anger burns against them. How long will they be incapable of purity? For it is from Israel, and a craftsman made it, and it is not a god.152F Thus, the Calf of Samaria will become splinters.
Hosea 8:4-6

Hosea 8:1-6 is the first of Hosea's direct invectives against the calf cult, and yet, commentators and scholars have generally been more curious about the prophet's other target of this passage: the Israelite monarchy. Because the text pushes against Israel's kings and rulers so forcefully, there have been multiple explorations of how anti-monarchical the text's author/s was/were.[160] Answers to this inquiry vary depending on how the scholar situates the text in Israelite history and his or her particular readings of Hosea as whole. Some claim that the Hosea outright rejected

[160] The nature of the book's opposition to the monarchy has been the focus of numerous studies. See Gregory Goswell, "'David Their King': Kingship in the Prophecy of Hosea," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 42 (2017): 213–31; Bos, *Reconsidering the Date and Provenance of the Book of Hosea*, 35–68; Peter Machinist, "Hosea and the Ambiguity of Kingship in Ancient Israel," in *Constituting the Community: Studies on the Polity of Ancient Israel in Honor of S. Dean McBride, Jr.*, ed. John T. Strong and Steven S. Tuell (University Park, PA: Eisenbrauns, 2005), 153–81; Izabela Jaruzelska, "Hosea and Monarchy, Prophets and Politics," *Rocznik Orientalistyczny* 53 (2000): 21–31; Robert Gnuse, "Calf, Cult, and King: The Unity of Hosea 8:1-13," *Biblische Zeitschrift* 26 (1982): 83–92; Grace I. Emmerson, *Hosea: An Israelite Prophet in Judean Perspective*, JSOTSup 28 (Sheffield, Eng.: JSOT Press, 1984), 56–113; A. Gelston, "Kingship in the Book of Hosea," in *Language and Meaning. Studies in Hebrew Language and Biblical Exegesis. Papers Read at the Joint British-Dutch Old Testament Conference Held at London*, OtSt, XIX (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1974), 71–85. However, there have been some scholars who have questioned the quick shift from kingship to cultus and instead read the references to kings as references to gods such as Baal or Molech. See H. S. Nyberg, "Das textkritische Problem des Alten Testaments, am Hoseabuche demonstriert," *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 11 (1934): 249; Henri Cazelles, "The Problem of Kings in Osee, 8:4," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 11 (1949): 24; Gunnar Östborn, *Yahweh and Baal: Studies in the Book of Hosea and Related Documents*, Lunds Universitets Årsskrift (Lund: C.W.K. Gleerup, 1956), 55–56. This position has been dismissed from scholarship as relying too heavily on improbable textual reconstructions.

kingship as an institution.[161] In this view, the book offers some of the most scathing of critiques of earthly monarchs in the Hebrew Bible. Seemingly, the authors of Hosea could only recommend a theocracy, with Yahweh's kingship put its right place. Other interpreters argue for less extreme positions, claiming this text only rejects *Israel's* monarchy, leaving room for a Judean restoration of kingship.[162] Still others claim that the writings of Hosea refer specifically to the last batch of Israel's kings, as they were corrupt, prone to murder, and improperly put on the throne. The text of Hos 8:1-6 is thus not a philosophical polemic against kings per se, but a pointed reaction to the time period of the prophecy.[163]

Overall, these varied interpretations highlight the importance of scholarly assumptions and bias when dealing with a text, and how Hosea itself can be lent to multiple readings. It also reveals how deeply entrenched Hosea scholarship is in preconceived questions—such as the political values of the authors—rather than wider inquiries regarding Israel's culture *and* its religious landscape. As a result, Hosea scholarship has been in something of a rut, as it asks the same types of questions and comes to different solutions based on predetermined thinking.

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[161] Bos contends that some portions of Hosea represent an anti-monarchic faction in Persian Yehud for whom a local monarchy was entirely rejected. Hos 8:4a and Hos 10:3-4, 7 are two such sections (See pages 39-4). Other portions of the book, such as Hos 2:2 and 3:5, were written by factions that were for the restoration of a Davidic monarchy (See pages 64-68) Bos does not address how both such positions ended up in the same collection or how these factions squared their understandings of monarchy with the kingship of the Persian emperor. Bos, *Reconsidering the Date and Provenance of the Book of Hosea*. Another scholar who interprets Hosea's stance toward the monarchy as entirely negative can be found in Ansgar Moenikes, "The Rejection of Cult and Politics by Hosea," *Henoch* 19 (1997): 13; Klaus Seybold, "Melek," in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. C. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 363–64.

[162] Emmerson, *Hosea: An Israelite Prophet in Judean Perspective*, 105–7; Goswell, "'David Their King,'" 218.

[163] Machinist, "Hosea and the Ambiguity of Kingship in Ancient Israel," 171; Gelston, "Kingship in the Book of Hosea," 83.

Yet, despite the variety of interpretations on Hos 8:1-6, scholars do agree on one point almost universally. Many writers note that the passage's opposition to Israel's monarchy was inextricably bound up with its opposition to Israel's cultus. As Machinist comments, "The condemnation of the Israelite kings and those around them is also entwined, as we have seen, with cultic misbehavior. Indeed, the cult permeates the kingship passages…"[164] Similarly, Macintosh writes that these verses, "link indissolubly the sins of idolatry and political apostacy."[165] Or, as Ehud ben Zvi describes, Hos 8:4 in particular, "serves to bring together the common motif of wrongful political leadership and wrongful cultic activities…"[166] Again and again, scholars have commented on how the cult and the kings of Samaria were critiqued simultaneously.

However, when scholars reflect on *why* Hosea explicitly and repeatedly meshes its attacks against king and cult, their reasoning becomes somewhat vague or problematic. For example, some have maintained that the comparison of both king and calf statue heightens their "impotence" as saviors of Israel.[167] Others have suggested that the pairing of the bovine and ruler showcases the complete corruption of Samaria as a center of power.[168] Or, as Andersen and Freedman have contended, the linkage of king and image reflected a "Canaanite kingship ideology" that had been, "incorporated into Israel's cultic and political life."[169]

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[164] Machinist, "Hosea and the Ambiguity of Kingship in Ancient Israel," 165.

[165] Macintosh, *Hosea*, 290.

[166] Zvi, *Hosea*, 168.

[167] Jaruzelska, "Hosea and Monarchy, Prophets and Politics," 27.

[168] Gnuse, "Calf, Cult, and King: The Unity of Hosea 8:1-13," 91.

[169] Andersen and Freedman, *Hosea*, 492.

While Andersen and Freedman's contention that the meshing of kingship and cultic representation was a *foreign* ideology may be problematic—kingship and cultic objects were also inherently linked for many of the kings of Judah and the same was undoubtedly true for Israel—they do note that Hosea's writing is playing off an *ideology*.[170] In other words, there was a wider cultural framework that bound together the making of kings and the making of cult statues, and this prophetic book evokes that system to make its point.[171]

This chapter will explore Hosea's polemic further by using evidence from the Neo-Assyrian period to demonstrate how kings and cult statues in Neo-Assyria, Syria, and Israel were considered to be emblems and markers of divine favor. As such, both had to be divine in origin to be truly effective and authoritative. Often, these divine markers were mutually reinforcing, with kings interacting with the cult statue to reify their divine legitimation, and divine statues and their cult being financially and ritually maintained by the earthly king.

A similar cultural motif appears to be behind Hos 8:1-6, as it highlights the Israelite fabrication of *both* her kings and her cult statues. Thus, with one polemic, the book undermines two pillars of Israelite society. In this way, the text's aniconism is demonstrated to be *socially* conceived. The divine rejection of Israel's kings, an unavoidable conclusion based on the erosion

[170] For other examples of this linkage between kingship and cult statue in the Hebrew Bible, one has to look no farther than Jeroboam I and the golden calf narrative of 1 Kgs 12:27-32. Berlejung, "Twisting Traditions." Other instances could be found in Gideon's creation of the ephod and his flirtation with kingship by naming his son "Abimelek" (Judg 8:27-32), Manasseh's association with illicit cultic objects (2 Kgs 21:3, 7,11) and the destruction of cultic images by both Hezekiah and Josiah (2 Kgs 18:4-6 and 2 Kgs 23:4-20. Moreover, the ark of the covenant's association with David and Solomon seems to have had a similar dynamic to kings and cult statues in other nations. In his work on the idol parodies, Levtow points out these aniconic texts are embedded between Yahwistic hymns to his glory that front his kingship. In other words, we again see the confluence of image politics and kingship. Levtow reviews the importance that divine images in Mesopotamian have in royal discourse as well. Nathaniel B Levtow, *Images of Others: Iconic Politics in Ancient Israel* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2008), 64, 125–29.

[171] Ehud Ben Zvi covers this point well. Zvi, *Hosea*, 168.

of the monarchy, was being extended to demonstrate the divine rejection of Israel's calf statues. Yahweh's renunciation of the one proved his renunciation of the other. The discourses authorizing Israel's kings and calf statue could not be disentangled. This conflation of calf and king would thus prompt an anti-icon polemic that would reverberate not just through other writings of Hosea (Hos 10:5-6; 13:2) but throughout other aniconic texts within the Hebrew Bible as well.

Hosea 8:1-6

Before delving into this chapter's argument, it is first necessary to provide some brief comments as to Hos 8:1-6's setting and my translation of the text. Though the Book of Hosea decries Israel's worship of idols at other points (Hos 2:10,15; 3:1; 4:17; 10:5-6; 11:2; 13:1-3; 14:4,9), Hos 8 is the first time it specifically inveighs against Israel's calf cult. Moreover, this anti-calf polemic appears on the heels of several severe critiques of Israel's monarchy (Hos 7:3,5,7), foreign policy (Hos 7:8,9,11), and religious corruption (7:2,7,10,13-15). Consequences of Israel's cultic aberration are said to be failed crops (Hos 8:7), foreign control (Hos 8:7-10, 14), and banishment from the land of Israel (Hos 8:13). Throughout this broader section, there is a strong theme of Israel's treachery against Yahweh (Hos 7:1,10,13-15; 8:1,3).

As for Hos 8:1-6 itself, the text possesses multiple text critical issues that have long exasperated scholars. For the sake of this dissertation's readability, explanations for my glossing of certain phrases can primarily be found in footnotes throughout the following sections rather than in the main text. To keep these footnotes from becoming overwhelming, I have focused my attentions on simply justifying my readings, rather than providing comprehensive histories of translation and scholarship:

Author's Translation

[The saying] "The trumpet to your mouth!" is like [an appearance of] an eagle[172] over the house of Yahweh.[173]

MT

אֶל־חִכְּךָ שֹׁפָר כַּנֶּשֶׁר עַל־בֵּית יְהוָה[1]

[172] From the earliest versions, translators appear to have struggled to render Hos 8:1a. As the hemistich now stands in the MT, (אֶל־חִכְּךָ שֹׁפָר כַּנֶּשֶׁר עַל־בֵּית יְהוָה) there are two prepositional phrases put in apposition. However, there is no clear subject or verb. In terms of a solution, I agree with Wolff that the terse phrase (אֶל־חִכְּךָ שֹׁפָר) or "to your mouth the shofar!" captures the immediate crisis of battle or social upheaval. Wolff, *Hosea*, 137. A prepositional phrase (אַחֲרֵיךְ בִּנְיָמִין) with a similar usage can be found in Hos 5:8 and Judg 5:14. Another example appears in Isa 8:20a, with commands that simply state: "To the instruction! To the attestation!" These short exclamations omit expected verbs; however, they create an imperatival force. Similar examples can be found in English as well, with prepositional exclamations such as "to your stations" or "at attention" appearing in military vernacular. Likely, the phrase "אֶל־חִכְּךָ שֹׁפָר" recalls the violence in the air during this time period, when coups, violence, Assyrian aggression, and tensions with surrounding smaller polities were becoming increasingly common place. Raising the alarm was becoming all too normal in the prophet's viewpoint. If this phrase is taken as a quote, it can then act as the subject which is compared to the "eagle above the House of Yahweh" in the next phrase. It should be noted that birds of prey, such as Lesser Spotted Eagles and Honey Buzzards, do not maintain a constant presence in Israel. Every year, a roughly a million raptors migrate *through* the country during the spring toward Europe and Asia. Large numbers travel back through in the fall toward their wintering locations in Africa. The timing of these massive migrations is highly predictable and regular, often peaking toward the end of March for the spring migration and mid-September for the fall. Yossi Leshem and Yoram Yom-Tov, "The Magnitude and Timing of Migration by Soaring Raptors, Pelicans, and Storks over Israel," *Ibis* 138 (1996): 188, 194–96; Ron Frumkin, Berry Pinshow, and Shani Kleinhaus, "A Review of Bird Migration over Israel," *Journal Für Ornithologie* 136 (1995): 137, 139. I suggest that when Hosea likened the call to alarm with an "eagle above the house of Yahweh" it was to this regular migration he was appealing to. In Hos 7:11, he appeals to a similar idea, comparing the migration of doves from Egypt to Assyria as a simile for Israel's fickleness. Now, he notes that the violence in the country was like the predictable migration of larger birds of prey.

[173] Scholars debate what the "House of Yahweh" refers to, whether it is a cultic site or a reference to the land as a whole as Wellhausen first suggested. Julius Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Israel*, trans. J. Sutherland Black (Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black, 1885), 22. This phrase "House of Yahweh" does appear to be a cultic site in Hos 9:4. However, when it is used again in Hos 9:15 it seems to be indicating the land as Yahweh states that "from my house I will drive them out." Because the threat of exile is a running theme in the whole of chapter 9, this reference gives the impression that Yahweh will remove his wayward people from what he has already called "his land" in Hos 9:3. Hence, the scope of Hosea's writing is not just that the people will be cut off from their places of worship, but from the entirety of the *land* of Israel. Hosea's language enlarges the concept of Yahweh's house from mere temple into the whole country. This reading has been buttressed by evidence from Neo-Assyrian inscriptions, where Israel is called "the House of Omri." Brad E. Kelle, "What's in a Name? Neo-Assyrian Designations for the Northern Kingdom and Their Implications for Israelite History and Biblical Interpretation," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 121, no. 4 (2002): 639–66. If Israel could be known as the house of a king in foreign literature, it follows that it could be known as the house of her deity within her own religious texts. Harper, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Amos and Hosea*, 308. Other commentators, such as Wolff, attempted to further substantiate this argument, noting that in Egyptian lists some lands are referenced as the "houses" of the local deities. This reading has gained a wide following. For examples of this view see: Wolff, *Hosea*, 137; Andersen and Freedman, *Hosea*, 486; Macintosh, *Hosea*, 292. See discussions of Hos 9 in Gert Kwakkel, "Exile In Hosea 9:3–6: Where And For What Purpose?," in *Exile and Suffering: A Selection of Papers Read at the 50th Anniversary Meeting of the Old Testament Society of South Africa OTWSA/OTSSA, Pretoria August 2007*, ed. Bob Becking and Dirk Human, OtSt 50 (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2009), 139–41; Matthew Suriano, "Breaking Bread with the Dead: Katumuwa's Stele, Hosea 9:4, and the Early History of the Soul," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 134 (2014): 401–2.

יַעַן עָבְרוּ בְרִיתִי וְעַל־תּוֹרָתִי פָּשָׁעוּ׃

Because they have transgressed my covenant and concerning my law they have revolted.[174]

[2]לִי יִזְעָקוּ אֱלֹהַי יֵדַעֲנוּךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל׃

Yet to me they cry: "My God! We have known you!"[175]

[3] זָנַח יִשְׂרָאֵל טּוֹב אוֹיֵב יִרְדְּפוֹ׃

Israel has rejected the good. An enemy shall pursue him.

[4]הֵם הִמְלִיכוּ וְלֹא מִמֶּנִּי הֵשִׂירוּ וְלֹא יָדָעְתִּי כַּסְפָּם
וּזְהָבָם עָשׂוּ לָהֶם עֲצַבִּים לְמַעַן יִכָּרֵת׃

They have made kings, but not by my will. They have made officials, but I have not known (them). Their silver and their gold they have made into idols for themselves. On account of this, Israel is cut off.[176]

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[174] The one strange component of the second half is the use of על with פשע. Normally the object of פשע is given with the ב preposition. Why על was used in this case is a mystery. Scholars have also noted similarities with Deuteronomistic language in this verse with its pairing of תורה and ברית. Some go as far as to say it is a Deuteronomic insertion. Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Israel*, 418. Others maintain that this word choice shows Hosea's forerunning of the later corpus, which the author concurs with. John Day, "Pre-Deuteronomic Allusions to the Covenant in Hosea and Psalm LXXVIII," *Vetus Testamentum* 36 (1986): 7–8.

[175] The crux of this short verse is what to do with its last word, Israel, as it awkwardly hangs at the end of the strophe in the MT (לִי יִזְעָקוּ אֱלֹהַי יֵדַעֲנוּךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל). Simply stated, it does not appear to belong to its context. Yet, it is curious to note, that while there is a spare noun "Israel" in v.2, there is a missing subject in at the end of v.4. The clause ends, somewhat ironically, "so that he is cut off" (לְמַעַן יִכָּרֵת). The immediate referents in v.4 are all masculine plural, meaning the subject which is "cut off" is unknown, but grammatically not the kingmakers, craftsmen, or images mentioned in the verse. According to Hos 8:4, the people of Israel were engaged in illicit, hubristic activities. Clearly, the reader expects there to be a consequence for all of them. Yet, the phrase ends with no specification as to whom will suffer the punishment. Here, it is suggested that a scribal error caused the subject at the end of v.4 to move to the end of v.2. This solution solves tensions in both texts, removing the clumsily positioned "Israel" at the end of v.2, while also providing v.4. with the necessary subject. The original text of v.2 was thus " לִי יִזְעָקוּ אֱלֹהַי יֵדַעֲנוּךָ" and the original ending of v.4 was "לְמַעַן יִכָּרֵת יִשְׂרָאֵל" This kind of transfer could happen in two ways. First, a scribe could have run out of room while finishing the line of v.4. As sometimes occurs, the last word would then be squeezed above or below the connected text. If the last word of v.4, Israel, was put above its correct line, it may have become attached by the next copyist to the end of the material in the line it now occupied: the end of v.2. A second option would involve a scribe omitting the word "Israel" in a manuscript. When the text was later being edited, this omission was noticed, and the word was inserted between lines in the correct location. However, as the next copyist transmitted the text, the word was included with the line above (the material in v.2) rather than the line below (v.4) where it belonged. In either case, a word from v.4 became a part of the material of v.2 in the line above. Given the amount of text between v.2 and v.4, the first option seems more likely.

[176] The MT of Hos 8:4b is missing the subject which will be "cut off," (כַּסְפָּם וּזְהָבָם עָשׂוּ לָהֶם עֲצַבִּים לְמַעַן יִכָּרֵת׃). A solution has already been laid out above under the discussion of Hos 8:2. In the original text, Israel was the subject of יִכָּרֵת. A two-part scribal error saw the word being added to material above its correct line with the rest of v.4 into v.2. The united actions of Israel's individuals, in creating kings and cult statues, would have ramifications for the whole nation.

He has rejected your calf, O Samaria. My anger burns against them. How long will they be incapable of purity?	5זָנַח עֶגְלֵךְ שֹׁמְרוֹן חָרָה אַפִּי בָּם עַד־מָתַי לֹא יוּכְלוּ נָקִיֹּן:
For it is from Israel, and a craftsman made it, and it is not a god.[177] Thus, the Calf of Samaria will become splinters.[178]	6כִּי מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל וְהוּא חָרָשׁ עָשָׂהוּ וְלֹא אֱלֹהִים הוּא כִּי־שְׁבָבִים יִהְיֶה עֵגֶל שֹׁמְרוֹן:

Hosea's Yoking Together of Samaria's King and Calf

As can be seen through the above translation, Hosea 8:1-6 pairs Samaria's kings and calves in a variety of ways. The first is sheer proximity. Hosea explicitly condemns Israel's kings in Hos 8:4a. In the next breath, Hosea moves from the creation of Israel's kings to her creation of cult

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[177] The first phrase of this verse (כִּי מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל) has been perennially problematic as there is no subject which can be "from Israel" as the text is preserved in the MT. The second phrase (וְהוּא חָרָשׁ עָשָׂהוּ) is repetitive and awkward. Scholars have proposed all manner of emendations for these problems, including adding consonants and spaces to fix the text. (See Harry Torczyner, "Dunkle Bibelstellen," in *Vom Alten Testament: Karl Marti zum 70 Geburtstage, gewidmet von Freunden, Fachgenossen, und Schülern.*, ed. Karl Budde (Giessen: Töpelmann, 1925), 278; Wyatt, "Of Calves and Kings," 86.) However, no one has considered *transferring* a letter to restore the text. By moving the *waw* from the first הוא in the verse to the next word—חרש —the passage becomes entirely smooth. The first phrase gains a subject that can be "from Israel." The next strophe thenloses its doubling of pronouns. Moreover, this emendation creates a rhyme in Hos 8:6a, in which each strophe ends with the third masculine plural pronoun or suffix. Hos 8:6a in the original manuscript would thus read: כִּי מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל הוּא וְחָרָשׁ עָשָׂהוּ וְלֹא אֱלֹהִים הוּא. As scholars have noted, there are a number of copy errors in Hosea, and likely this verse has one of them. The ח of חרש and the ה of הוא look similar in both Paleo Hebrew and Jewish scripts. It is likely that one scribe forgot the waw on חרש, and in making corrections, incorrectly added it to the word in front of it: הוא. Due to the law of "lectio difficilior lectio potior" the error was cemented by the time of the Dead Sea Scrolls. See fragment 4Q167 f4:3 (https://www.deadseascrolls.org.il/explore-the-archive/image/B-474908). A similar misplacing of a *waw* occurs in Hos 8:12, with the waw on יאכלו more naturally fitting on יהוה.

[178]The word שְׁבָבִים is another one of Hosea's *hapax legomenon* that is particularly difficult to understand. The Septuagint claims the calf has led Samaria astray (διότι πλανῶν ἦν ὁ μόσχος σου Σαμάρεια); the Peshitta has an equivalent sense. The Targums, meanwhile, translates the hapax as "chips of planks" (נסרי לוחין). And the Vulgate for almost inscrutable reasons provides the gloss "*aranearum telas*": spiders' webs. Likely the Latin translators saw "עַכָּבִישׁ" instead of "שְׁבָבִים". Medieval scholars offered an additional solution. Ibn Ezra suggested שְׁבָבִים meant "flames." Macintosh, *Hosea*, 310.

Modern scholarship tends to follow the Targums. This idea of the calf becoming "splinters" or "fragments" receives some backing from possible cognates in Arabic, Middle Hebrew, and Syriac. This option all suits Mic 1:7 where cultic images would be "crushed" (כתת). For examples of those that take this position see: Wolff, *Hosea*, 142; Andersen and Freedman, *Hosea*, 496; Davies, *Hosea*, 203; Mays, *Hosea*, 113; Gruber, *Hosea*, 53; DeGrado, "Authoring Empire," 155–56. Albright, however, sides with Ibn Ezra, seeing the calf as having a wooden frame which would burn. W. F. Albright, "Anath and the Dragon," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 84 (1941): 17 n.26.This reflects the destruction of Aaron's calf in Exod 32:20. There are parallels to this word in Akkadian and Syriac. s.v. HALOT "שׁבב II" I have tentatively followed this translation based on these pieces of evidence.

statues, or עצבים. The creation of kings and images is therefore brought up within the same thought within Hos 8:4, with the implication that both had been made for the people and by the people.

The next verses then focus specially on Samaria's calf image, always referring to it as "the Calf of Samaria" (Hos 8:6) or "your calf, O Samaria" (Hos 8:5). These designations link the image specifically with the capital of Israel, drawing further lines between Israel's political center and her religious icon. Calf and capital were bound up together.[179]

The next way the text pairs together Israel's rulers and calf statue is their origins. The nation had "made king(s)" (המליכו) but they were not from God (ממני).[180] In the next phrase, the authors create a pun. Using the verb השירו, a denominative verb from the word for officials, Hosea states that Israel's kings *and* political elite had been made without divine knowledge. The government of the kingdom was thus entirely fabricated.[181] However, there is another way in which to read this verb. As medieval commentators such as Rashi argued, the verb could be a by form of סור, which in the *hiphil* means, "to remove." The implication thus becomes that Israel

[179] Similar intertwinement of cult center and capital can be seen in Neo-Assyrian culture as well. Shana Zaia, "Divine Foundations: Religion and Assyrian Capital Cities," in *As Above, So Below: Religion and Geography*, ed. Gina Konstantopoulos and Shana Zaia (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2021), 120–21.

[180] The verb המליכו can reference the making of one or many kings. I assume the plural reading based on the account of Israel's final decades in the Book of Kings and the reports of the Neo-Assyrian royal annals. I read ממני as being, "from God's will" based on a similar construction in Isa 30:1. Wolff, *Hosea*, 139.

[181] Eighth century Israel saw an increasingly powerful, wealthy, and visible elite class. The power of this group be seen through the writings of Amos, Hosea, and the Samaria Ostracon. See Roger S Nam, "Power Relations in the Samaria Ostraca," *Palestine Exploration Quarterly* 144 (2012): 155–63; Izabela Jaruzelska, "The King and Officials According to Hosea," *Poznańskie Studia Teologiczne* 10 (2001): 13–20. See also Hos 3:4; 7:3,5,16; 8:10; 9:15; 13:10. Evidence for this class can also be found in Amos 3:15 and 4:1, though the term שַׂר does not appear in these texts. For scholars who argue for this reading see: See Macintosh, *Hosea*, 298; Wolff, *Hosea*, 132; Andersen and Freedman, *Hosea*, 492.

had made kings and removed them, all without divine approbation.[182] Because השירו can be understood either way, and Hosea as a whole has a penchant for paronomasia, both readings against Israel's leadership should stand.[183] In sum, God had had no input into the creation or replacement of Israel's kings or elites; they were both entirely man-made.

The text then draws out the same man-made nature of Israel's cultic objects. Hosea 8:4b reads, "Their silver and their gold they make into idols for themselves (כַּסְפָּם וּזְהָבָם עָשׂוּ לָהֶם֙ עֲצַבִּ֔ים), so that Israel is cut off." Though the verb changes, the idea of origins remains. Both kings and images were being produced by the people of Israel. This critique is then applied to the Calf of Samaria in v.6b, "For it is from Israel, and it a craftsman made, and it is not a god" (כִּי מִיִּשְׂרָאֵ֔ל הוּא וְחָרָ֣שׁ עָשָׂ֔הוּ וְלֹ֥א אֱלֹהִ֖ים הֽוּא).[184] Israel had made her kings, rulers, idols, and calf. The king was not from God (ממני) but Israel (v.4). Similarly, the Calf of Samaria was from Israel (כִּי מִיִּשְׂרָאֵ֔ל הוּא) and rejected by God (v.5-6). Indeed, the calf was a forgery, which the text makes emphatically clear by its statement that, "it is not a god" or potentially, "it is not God" (v.6).

The last way the passage brings together the calf and the king is the idea of divine spurning. According to Hos 8:4, God did not acknowledge (ידע) Israel's rulers. Likewise, God rejected (זנח) the calf in v.5. The verb choice in both cases is especially acerbic. In v.2 the Israelites claim to know (ידע) God, but as the passage makes clear, they do not actually seem to know him at all. In exchange, God does not "know" their leaders in Hos 8:4. Moreover, Israel is

[182] This reading has always had a following though it is less prevalent than the above. See Gelston, "Kingship in the Book of Hosea," 83. For a history of reading traditions see Macintosh, *Hosea*, 298.

[183] Generally, scholars do not argue for understanding this verb as a pun. Some Israeli scholars have argued that this verb is an example of biblical ambiguity. Gruber, *Hosea*, 345–46.

[184] I have argued an earlier footnote for emending this text due a scribal copy error in which a waw was moved from the word חרש to the pronoun הוא, which ruined the natural balance of the strophes.

said to have rejected (זנח) the good in v.3 scholars have often noted, "the good" (טוב) in this case seems to be an allusion to Yahweh.[185] Therefore, just as Israel rejected God, now he rejected (זנח) their calf-god-statue.[186] Israel is thus served back the actions she directed toward her deity, leading to his divine renunciation and abandonment with both her kings and her calf.

Having demonstrated Hosea's coupling of calf and king—both in terms of their shared human etiology and their divine repudiation—we may turn to the question of *why* the prophetic text creates this paralleled polemic. What drove this association between Israel's political figureheads and cultic figurines? And moreover, what consequences does this linkage have for how we understand Hosea's argument against the Calf of Samaria?

In order to answer these questions, this chapter will proceed in four parts. As Hosea derides the origins of Israel's kings as being merely from the people, it is first necessary to explore from whence other ancient Levantine, Syrian, and Mesopotamian kings claimed their

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[185] Gruber, *Hosea*, 342; Macintosh, *Hosea*, 295–96.

[186] This interpretation is not without controversy. The Septuagint makes the verb זנח an imperative to fit the second-masculine-singular suffix on calf. Aquila, the Syriac, and the Targums make it a third person indicative; Symmachus, Quinta, and the Vulgate read a third-masculine singular passive. In sum, early attestations provide three separate interpretations. Either Israel is called to reject the calf, the people of Israel are rejecting (or possibly "erring after" the calf according to the Targums and Syriac) and finally, the calf is rejected. None of these interpretations agree with the MT: "he has rejected your calf."

Modern scholars are unsurprisingly just as divided as ancient commentators over how to treat זנח. Some accept the third-masculine singular זנח, noting that Hosea shifts subject and viewpoint frequently. The implication is that Yahweh rejects the calf. See Andersen and Freedman, *Hosea*, 494., and Gruber, *Hosea*, 349–50. This strategy has not been wholly convincing, leading some scholars to emend the pointing of זנח. The outcome is thus either a second masculine imperative (in line with the Septuagint) or a *Qal* masculine singular passive particle (in line with various Greek manuscripts and the Vulgate). Hence, either God is commanding Israel to reject the calf or the calf itself is rejected. The imperative argument is made in Wolff, *Hosea*, 132., and Jaruzelska, "Hosea and Monarchy, Prophets and Politics," 27. The passive emendation is held by Mays, *Hosea*, 113. Davies finds all the above solutions unpersuasive and suggest that a first-person verb version of זנח has been corrupted and should be restored. Davies, *Hosea*, 200–201. While all the above options maintain the same meaning of זנח, the last proposed interpretation does not. Gnuse and the *NEB* both argue that the verb in this case should be read as "to stink" in line with an Arabic cognate and the meaning of the verb in the Hiphil in Isa 19:6. Gnuse, "Calf, Cult, and King: The Unity of Hosea 8:1-13," 87. To summarize: there are over five different interpretations and emendations for this one verb, and the field is far from consensus as to the correct solution. The author has chosen to let the MT stand.

rights to rule. Key in this investigation will be the verb that Hosea uses for making kings, המליך. Through this investigation, it will be proved that in this time period, kings claimed that various gods made them king. This point is hardly surprising, but it often goes overlooked when scholars examine Hos 8:4-6. Moreover, this dynamic of divinely sanctioned kinship is especially apparent in kings who took power through a coup or questionable means. As Israel's final kings all struggled to hold the throne, this type of polemic would likely have been foundational to their claims to the monarchy. Usurper kings such as Menahem and Pekah would have thus proclaimed their right to their positions through Yahweh's election of them. However, Hosea ironically puts this idea on its head by saying Israel's kings were merely human-constructs and therefore false, an argument further proved by the implosion of Israelite kingship in this period.

The next section of this chapter will then discuss the origins of cult statues in Neo-Assyrian texts as evidence from Israel's neighbors in Syria is sadly lacking in this time period. Here, it will be demonstrated that rituals and royal writings refer to the cult statues as divinely born and created. These images were not the work of humans, but of the gods themselves. As one ritual statues, they were, "born from heaven."[187] Therefore, Hosea's position that the calf was "from Israel" and that, "a craftsman made it" conflicts with traditional understandings of cultic statues and objects in the ancient Near East. What it does share, however, is a desire for a divinely sanctioned and sourced cultus. Israel simply did not fulfill this ideal.

The third section will then explore how kings and cult statues were mutually dependent using evidence from the Neo-Assyrian period. Kings interacted with the gods in order to

[187] Ninevite Recension of the *Mīs-pî Ritual.* Line 190. See C. B. F Walker and Michael Brennan Dick, *The Induction of the Cult Image in Ancient Mesopotamia: the Mesopotamian Mīs Pî ritual* (Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, Institute for Asian and African Studies, University of Helsinki, 2001), 96–97.

demonstrate their piety and right to rule. Cult statues were thus maintained and promoted by kings and priests vying for popularity and authority. Neo-Assyrian literature thus had a habit of linking kings with cult statues and cult statues with kings, both in how they treated their own rulers and gods, and the gods and rulers of other nations.

The fourth and final section of this chapter will then return to the Book of Hosea's polemic. While Neo-Assyrian and Syrian ideas of kingship and cult statues likely did not have a genetic effect on ancient Israel, they do illustrate how these religious and political figures could interact within an ancient society in the eighth century. The book's position against Israelite kings and cult statues thus—ironically—harmonizes with other ancient Near Eastern texts in its pairing of kings and cult statues. However, instead of using the same language of divine origin to promote both king and image, the authors of Hosea use the concept of divine absence to call both into question. The two were intertwined in the prophetic imagination, and the corruption of the one implicated the corruption of the other. In sum, for the authors of Hosea, the disarray and disintegration of Israel's kingship demonstrated the inefficacy of the kingdom's icon. The fall of Samaria was thus linked to the "great sin" of her calf cult. An object that many Israelites revered had become an idol.

Divine Kingmakers: Inverting a Royal Authorization Polemic

As noted above, Hosea's censure of Israel's political system focused on its "DIY" or its "do it yourself" approach. The people had made a king or kings, but they were not from Yahweh. The same could also be said of Israel's elites. The ruling classes of the nation were not known by its God (Hos 8:4). Divine disproval and even wrath colors the text as a result (Hos 8:5-6).

Here, Hosea's phrasing of the issue makes his critique especially poignant. The prophet states that the people of Israel had, "made kings" or possibly "made a king" (המליכו), putting מלך

in the causative or C stem. This form of the verb מלך has gained a great deal of scholarly interest over the past thirty years due to its appearance in several royal steles from the ninth and eighth centuries in Syria as well as narratives in the Hebrew Bible. In each case, the kings creating these Iron Age stelae were seeking to legitimize their reigns by proclaiming that their authority came from a higher power. It will be argued that this "divine election" polemic was necessary as the creators of these stelae were either usurpers or those whose rise to power was highly contested. By appealing to their divine election, these kings could color over the objectional aspects of their ascent. Biblical narratives with Yahweh "making kings" (המליך) corroborate this image. So long as these kings had successful reigns, this divine backing could remain unchallenged.

As the last kings of Israel had several usurpers among them, it is likely that this idea of the divine election of certain individuals to the throne was being used to stabilize political coups. However, as Israel broke under the weight of Assyrian incursion, this narrative of divine favor became more and more untenable. The book's critique thus appears to be taking a polemic of usurper kings—one likely used frequently as Israel's rulers continued kill their predecessors in the late eighth century —and marking it as a lie. Israel's kings had not been created by Yahweh, as could be seen in the violence within the nation (Hos 8:1, 3). This theft of a divine right by Israel's people could thus explain, in part, the divine wrath the nation was experiencing.

The first example of this causal form of מלך occurs in the Tel Dan Stele, an Old Aramaic text from the second half of the ninth century BCE.[188] It is well known from biblical and Neo-Assyrian sources that the narrator of this text, Hazael, came to rule Damascus under somewhat

[188] For descriptions of the Tel Dan inscription see Matthew Suriano, "The Apology of Hazael: A Literary and Historical Analysis of the Tel Dan Inscription," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 66 (2007): 163–76; Schniedewind, "Tel Dan Stela."

suspicious circumstances. Second Kings 8:7-15 goes so far as to make him the murderer of the previous king. Assyrian records refer to him as, "a son of a nobody" who had no right to the Aramean throne.[189] Scholars often contend that he was an outright usurper of the monarchy.[190]

However, according to the stele, Hazael was an authorized ruler. He claimed that "Hadad made me myself king and Hadad walked before me" (ו]ׄהמלכ·הדד [·] אׄ[ית·] אנה·ויהכ·הדד·קדמי) (KAI 310:4-5).[191] As Schniedewind notes of this line, "The use of the *Haphel* conjugation of the verb מלכ highlights the unusual succession of the usurper Hazael. That is, the deity Hadad made him king rather than Hazael's receiving the office from his father".[192] In other words, to shore up his somewhat tenuous claim to the throne, Hazael argued that Hadad had given him the divine right to rule. As Lemaire and Suriano have contended, this "divine right to rule" was likely concretized through a prophetic oracle or anointing.[193] In this manner, Hazael's dubious rise to power could be validated, as it was ordained by the nation's god himself. According to Suriano, "The meaning of Hazael's word choice was not to highlight the precarious event of his accession but rather to demonstrate the theological justification for his course of action. The use of the verb

[189] See RIMA 3: 40, i25-ii6. K. Lawson Younger, "'Hazael, Son of a Nobody': Some Reflections in Light of Recent Study," in *Writing and Ancient Near Eastern Society: Papers in Honour of Alan R. Millard*, ed. Piotr Bienkowski, Christopher Mee, and Elizabeth Slater (New York/London: T & T Clark, 2005), 246–48.

[190] Younger, 248; Hélène Sader, "History," in *The Aramaeans in Ancient Syria*, ed. Herbert Niehr, HdO 106 (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2014), 35.

[191] KAI 310 1:4-5. Suriano, "The Apology of Hazael," 165.

[192] Schniedewind, "Tel Dan Stela," 78.

[193] Suriano, "The Apology of Hazael," 166; André Lemaire, "The Tel Dan Stela as a Piece of Royal Historiography," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 81 (1998): 6–7.

hmlk indicates that prophetic oracle endorsed Hazael's claim, which was usually the case in the foundation of Israelite dynasties."[194]

The same causative form of the verb מלך also occurs within the Zakkur inscription (KAI 202), a basalt stele dating to around 800 BCE from Tell Afis, a city in modern day Syria about 20 miles south of Aleppo.[195] Like the Tel Dan inscription, the Zakkur inscription is a royal monument written in Old Aramaic. Early in the first part of the stele, Zakkur recounts that, "Baʿalšamayin saved me, and stood with me, and Baʿalšamayin made me king over Hazrak." (ו[חצל] [נ]י·בעלשמין·וקם·עמי·והמלכני·בעלשמ[ין·על] [ח]זר̊ך) (KAI 202 A:2-4). Baʿalšamayin's endowment of Zakkur's kingship is then brought up again in line 13 of the inscription. Facing a siege, Zakkur prayed to Baʿalšamayin for salvation, to which the god responded through seers and diviners, saying, "Do not fear for I have made you king." (אל·תזחל·כי·אנה·המל[כתך) (KAI 202 A:13). For Zakkur, divine approval was thus doubly confirmed. First, through the visions and then through the saving of the city.

What scholars have found fascinating about the Zakkur inscription, however, is its lack of specifics on Zakkur's parentage. He provides no details about his family line or history. The only background the reader receives about him is that he was, "a man of ,ענה" which scholars have taken as a man of 'Anah, a city on the Euphrates or as a "humble man".[196] Zakkur's

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[194]Suriano, "The Apology of Hazael," 166.

[195]For descriptions of the Zakkur inscriptions see Edward Lipiński, *The Aramaeans: Their Ancient History, Culture, Religion* (Leuven/Paris: Peeters, 2000), 254–58; Herbert Niehr, "Royal Inscriptions from Samʾal and Hamath as Sources for the History of Anatolia and Syria in the First Half of the 1st Millennium B.C.," in *Writing and Rewriting History in Ancient Israel and Near Eastern Cultures*, ed. Isaac Kalimi (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2020), 71–78.

[196] Lipiński, *The Aramaeans*, 254. C. L. Seow, "West Semitic Sources," in *Prophets and Prophecy in the Ancient Near East*, ed. Martti Nissinen, Robert K. Ritner, and H. Craig Melchert, WAW (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2019), 256.

qualifications for kingship therefore rested solely on the patronage of Baʿalšamayin, as expressed through the messages of religious specialists, and an extensive list of accomplishments during his reign that he details throughout the stele.[197]

The void of information on Zakkur's predecessors and family line is especially startling when viewed in comparison to other Aramaic and Phoenician royal monuments. Most royal inscriptions, regardless of genre, start with the establishment of royal pedigree. This fronting of royal parentage is found in the Ahiram Sarcophagus (KAI 1:1), the Elibaal Stelae (KAI 6 1:1), the Shipitbaal inscription (KAI 7 1:1), Kilamuwa stele (KAI 24:1), the Mesha Stele (KAI 181 1:1), the Melqart Stele (KAI 201 1:1) the Panamuwa inscription (KAI 214 1:1), Bar-Rakib's Panamuwa Inscription (KAI 215), and the Bar-Rakib Inscriptions (KAI 217 1:1, KAI 218 1:1).[198] A kingly bloodline was the ideal foundation to king's right to rule. Yet familial heritage is entirely missing from the Zakkur stela; instead, he claims the term מלך or king through divine right.

Given that Zakkur's predecessor—the Luwian Uratamis—was not his relative, there is a general consensus that Zakkur was a pretender to the throne of Hamath.[199] He had not received his rule through the expected channel, but instead grasped it through violence, collusion, or other illicit means. This break in dynasty meant that Zakkur had to turn to foundations other than the genetic to bolster his reign. Hence, like Hazael, Zakkur turned to the gods. Supposedly,

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[197] Herbert Niehr, "Strategies of Legitimation of the Aramaean Kings in Ancient Syria: Three Case Studies on Damascus, Hamath and Yadiya/Sam'al," in *Tales of Royalty: Notions of Kingship in Visual and Textual Narration in the Ancient Near East*, ed. Elisabeth Wagner-Durand and Julia Linke (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2020), 169–71.

[198] The Ekron inscription also falls in this vein, though it uses שׂר instead of מלך. See KAI 286 1:1-3. From reconstructions the El-Kerak inscription likely fits this model as well. (KAI 306 1:1)

[199] Suriano, "The Apology of Hazael," 166.

Baʿalšamayin himself was behind Zakkur's rise (KAI 202 A:3, 13). Chances are that the god's priests and prophets who communicated his messages supported Zakkur and aided his ascent to power. Zakkur's ability to withstand the siege against him, rebuild Hazrak (KAI 202 B:4), fortify the whole nation (KAI 202 B:8), establish temples (KAI 202 B: 9, 12), and monuments (KAI 202 B:13) then further concretized his divine ordination. However, the support of the gods and their mouthpieces was a crucial foundation for Zakkur's polemic.

A similar reflex can be found in the Hebrew Bible's use of המליך (to make a king). This verb is only used with God as the subject for three kings in the Hebrew Bible: Saul (1 Sam 15:11, 35), David (1 Chr 28:4), and Solomon (1 Kgs 3:7, 2 Chr 1:8, 9,11).[200] In the first two cases, neither king could rely on their lineage to back their power claims. They also both had prophetic confirmation of their divine calling from Samuel (1 Sam 10:1-9, 22-24; 16:12-13). For David, this confirmation was especially crucial given his usurper status. As for Solomon, the beginning of his rule was notably tumultuous. There were still Israelites who supported Saul's line over David's (2 Sam 2:1-32; 3:1,6; 2 Sam 16:5-14; 20:1-2, 5-22). One of his brothers had already tried to overthrow their father (2 Sam 15-18), and another one of his brothers had attempted to steal the throne from him before he had even been coronated (1 Kgs 1:5-27, 41-53; 2:13-25, 28-35). Moreover, Solomon had to purge several other prominent members of society to stabilize his control (1 Kgs 2:13-46). While the writers of the Hebrew Bible certainly paint Solomon's right to the throne as deriving from David, they also highlight his divine election

[200] Saul's case is interesting. God commands Samuel to make the Israelites a king in 1 Sam 8:22 (See also 1 Sam 12:1). The Israelites then make Saul king before God in 1 Sam 11:15. The only times God claims to have made Saul king, the comments are fronted with God's regret at having done so (1 Sam 15:11,35).

from among David's heirs due to the initial resistance to his authority or residual concerns to his legitimacy (1 Kgs 3:7; 9:5; 2 Chr 1:8, 9,11).

The divine kingmaking of an unexpected successor is a theme in other texts as well, both within the biblical corpus and the ancient Near East more broadly. Though the verb המליך is not used in these narratives, the stories of Jeroboam I (1 Kgs 11:29-40), Jehu (1 Kgs 19:16; 2 Kgs 9:1-3), and Hazael (1 Kgs 19:15; 2 Kgs 8:7-15) all feature prophets who make kings outside of the line of succession based on divine instructions. Instances of gods electing an unexpected king beyond the Levantine corpus are also apparent in the documents of Tiglath-Pileser III, Sargon II, Cyrus the Great, and Darius the Great.[201]

These examples are not given to undercut the general theme in the ancient world that kings had divine approval and positioning.[202] However, scholars have noted that kings who had tenuous and contested claims to power often relied more heavily on these kinds of narratives.[203] Kings who did not descend from royal lines—or whose royal lines were still controversial as in Solomon's case—had to find such alternative foundations for their legitimacy. These foundations often relied on the kingdom's cult to concretize the new king's divine appointment. A usurper

[201] For discussions of Tiglath-Pileser III and Sargon II see Bradley J. Parker, "The Construction and Performance of Kingship in the Neo-Assyrian Empire," *Journal of Anthropological Research* 67 (2011): 367. The same dynamic can be seen with Esarhaddon's and Assurbanipal's use of omens and divination in Beate Pongratz-Leisten, *Religion and Ideology in Assyria*, SANER 6 (Boston/Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015), 373–78. See the "Cyrus Cylinder" trans. Mordechai Cogan *COS* 2.124: 314-16 and the Behistun Inscription for later examples. Saber Amiri Parian, "A New Edition of the Elamite Version of the Behistun Inscription (I)," *Cuneiform Digital Library Bulletin* 3 (2017): 2–3.

[202] Peter Machinist, "Kingship and Divinity in Imperial Assyria," in *Text, Artifact, and Image: Revealing Ancient Israelite Religion*, ed. Gary Beckman and Theodore J. Lewis (Providence, RI: Brown Judaic Studies, 2006), 166, 177; Pongratz-Leisten, *Religion and Ideology in Assyria*, 209.

[203] Niehr, "Strategies of Legitimation of the Aramaean Kings in Ancient Syria," 178–79; Karen Radner, "Assyrian and Non-Assyrian Kingship in the First Millennium BC," ed. Giovanni Baptista Lanfranchi and Robert Rollinger (Padova: Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München, 2010), 27.

king's enthronement by a god would have been communicated through prophetic or priestly means, and likely would have contained a judgment of the deposed predecessor having acted in a way that was displeasing to the gods.[204] From this basis, the new king could confirm his calling through a successful reign, including victories over enemies, expansion of borders, and the building of temples.[205]

Hosea's critique "they have made kings but not from me," in Hos 8:4 thus reflects a larger discursive strategy of kings in the ancient Near East. Gods were supposed to make their representative kings, especially ones whose rules were unanticipated. This polemic of divine election would have been employed by Israelite kings such as Menahem, Shallum, Pekah, and Hoshea as none of them could claim direct lineage to the king who preceded them. It is enticing to imagine what gods, cultic centers, and priestly factions they could have turned to in making such assertions of divine election. However, as the god of Israel, Yahweh was arguably the most appealing candidate. Given the number of coups the Book of Kings records in this time period, it is even possible that consecutive usurpers professed their divine election by Yahweh, as well as his rejection of their forebearer.[206]

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[204] There are a number of texts from the standpoint of the usurper that claim that the predecessor displeased the gods. Examples include the Hebrew Bible's accounts of Saul's sins, leading to David's reign (1 Sam 15:10, 22-23), as well as Jehu regarding Ahab (2 Kgs 9:7-10). Sargon II claims this regarding Shalmaneser V in the Assur Charter (K. 1349:30-34) H. W. F. Saggs, "Historical Texts and Fragments of Sargon II of Assyria. 1. The 'Aššur Charter,'" *Iraq* 37 (1975): 14–15. Cyrus wrote that Nabonidus had, "done away with the worship of Marduk." "Cyrus Cylinder" trans. Mordechai Cogan *COS* 2.124: 315 (lines 3-19).

[205] Niehr, "Strategies of Legitimation of the Aramaean Kings in Ancient Syria," 177–79.

[206] Biblical evidence for Israel's coups is mostly clearly noted in 2 Kgs 15:8-31; 17:1-6, with king Zechariah being killed by Shallum who was killed by Menahem. Menahem's son, Pekahiah, was killed by Pekah. Pekah was removed by some combination of Hoshea and Tiglath-Pileser III. John H. Hayes and Jeffrey K. Kuan, "The Final Years of Samaria (730-720 BC)," *Biblica* 72 (1991): 154–56. Other evidence for the tensions of the time appear in Isa 9:20-21 and Hos 7:6-7.

Yet, at whatever stage of Israel's dissolution this chapter reflects, these claims of divine election were not being substantiated by successful dynastic successions or peaceful rules. Kings continued to die violently in office. Israel continued to lose either resources or land to Assyria. According to Hosea, there were rampant gangs (Hos 6:9; 7:1), murders (Hos 4:2; 6:8-9; 7:7) Israelites driven to Egypt (Hos 6-7.8:13; 9:6), drought (Hos 4:3; 8:7; 13:15), oppression (Hos 5:11; 7:9; 12:8-9), and spreading fear (Hos 10:8). All of these catastrophes were classic signs of divine anger and abandonment in the ancient Near East.[207] And they rocked the nation in successive waves.

Israel's making of unsuccessful kings, supposedly through divine election, thus came to erode the very idea that Yahweh was supportive of her government at all. As Hosea saw it, the Israelites had asserted their knowledge of God (Hos 8:2) but had in fact divorced him through their false claims (Hos 8:3). Their kings reflected man-made lies. Likewise, their princes and court officials were established without divine knowledge. Their rulers were imposters, and the troubles of the nation proved it. As a result, Israel was bound to feel the weight of foreign impositions (Hos 8:7,10), infertile lands (Hos 8:7), and a return to Egypt in a kind of Exodus reversal (Hos 8:13). In sum, the God of Israel was no longer with his people (Hos 8:13), even when the Calf of Samaria and other Israelite gods remained in their temples. And it was to these representations of the divine the prophet turns next.

"Who has the Right to Make a God?": Delegitimizing the Calf of Samaria

[207] Examples of divine abandonment occur in Hos 4:6; 5:6; 9:17. Discussions of divine abandonment occur in Cogan, *Imperialism and Religion*, 11; Steven Holloway, *Aššur Is King! Aššur Is King!: Religion in the Exercise of Power in the Neo-Assyrian Empire* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 145–47.

As with his critique of Israel's kings, Hosea's main issue with Israel's gods appears to be their human origins. As will be shown below, the production of divine statues in the ancient Near East was again a divine right, one that the prophet condemned the Israelites for appropriating. As cult images and kings employed similar and mutually reinforcing legitimization strategies and discourses, the illicit fabrication of the one could be used by the writer of Hosea to implicate the illicit fabrication of the other.[208] These false divine images were thus polluting the nation and bringing on the divine absence they were created to prevent.

Outside of the Hebrew Bible, however, evidence for Israel's creation of royal cult statues is scant. Even comparative evidence for parallel practices in Syria and Egypt is lacking.[209] Few cult statues, if any, have survived from antiquity.[210] Though there are some extant records that describe the creation of divine images, it appears to have been topic ancient writers were hesitant to recount.[211]

Thus, we must turn to what remains of Neo-Assyrian documents on cult statues for heuristic and comparative purposes. Though ancient Israelite conceptions of cult statues and their creation was likely distinct, Neo-Assyrian documents can provide us insight into the types of

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[208] VanDyke, "Designing the Golden Calf," 225–26.

[209] Lorton, "The Theology of Cult Statues in Ancient Egypt," 147–58. A cuneiform copy of the *Mīs-pî* ritual was found at Hamath in Syria, dating between the ninth and eighth centuries. Walker and Dick, *The Induction of the Cult Image in Ancient Mesopotamia*, 67, 71–72.

[210] Examples of possible cult statues from Egypt can be found in Lorton, "The Theology of Cult Statues in Ancient Egypt," 129. The Neo-Assyrians depict the capture of enemy cult statues in a variety of wall reliefs. Layard, *The Monuments of Nineveh*, 67a. There are also reliefs of cult statues in procession being worshipped by kings. Bonacossi and Qasim, "Irrigation and Landscape Commemoration in Northern Assyria," 22–23. Archeological evidence for cult statues from Neo-Assyria is quite thin. Nadali and Lorenzo, "Neo-Assyrian Statues of Gods and Kings in Context," 234–35.

[211] Seth Richardson, "The Hypercoherent Icon: Knowledge, Rationalization, and Disenchantment at Nineveh," in *Iconoclasm and Text Destruction in the Ancient Near East and Beyond*, ed. Natalie Naomi May, OIS 8 (Chicago, IL: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 2012), 239–40.

validation strategies, rituals, and uses of cult statues that may have informed the Northern Kingdom's cultus. Moreover, as the two polities of Israel and Neo -Assyria interacted during this period, it is possible that some rhetoric, rituals, and ideals of the Neo-Assyrian cult may have impacted the cultic habits of its occasional vassal.[212]

The most informative ritual for the creation of cult statues is known as the *Mīs-pî* or the "washing of the mouth." This ritual is first referenced in the description of a Gudea Statue in 2150 BCE and is mentioned again in the fascinating ninth century BCE *Sun God Tablet of Nabu-apla-iddina*.[213] Actual copies of its instructions do not appear until the Neo-Assyrian period. The findspots range: there are number of copies at Assurbanipal's library, with more at Ashur, Sultantepe, Babylon, Sippar, and one ninth to eighth century exemplar at Hamath.[214] Thus, though no complete copies remain, scholars have a fair assessment of its contents, though the ordering of the ritual appears to have varied between recensions.[215]

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[212] Several vectors of transmission have been proposed between Assyria and the Levant in this time period. Aster has noted that the Neo-Assyrians wined and dined emissaries from their vassals on a yearly basis when annual tribute was due. It is known that Samaria participated in this ritual, allowing some members of its elite (if not its king) to experience Neo-Assyrian culture and propaganda. Shawn Zelig Aster, "Israelite Embassies to Assyria in the First Half of the Eighth Century," *Biblica* 97 (2016): 179. Other vectors may have been mediated through Syria and Anatolia. As Ramos has argued, Mesopotamia and Syrian language and motifs may have been transmitted to Judah through Aramaic oath ceremonies. Ramos, "A Northwest Semitic Curse Formula: The Sefire Treaty and Deuteronomy 28," 207, 217–18.

[213] Walker and Dick, *The Induction of the Cult Image in Ancient Mesopotamia*, 58; Christopher E. Woods, "The Sun-God Tablet of Nabû-Apla-Iddina Revisited," *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* 56 (2004): 43, 86.

[214] Walker and Dick, *The Induction of the Cult Image in Ancient Mesopotamia*, 67–68.

[215] Walker and Dick, 69.

The ritual provides instructions for the induction of a cult statue into its temple after its creation, or possibly its refurbishment.[216] According to Dick, the goal of the process was to take a lifeless statue (*ṣalmu*), "that has not had its mouth opened does not smell incense, does not eat food, and does not drink water," and to open its mouth so it may breathe and eat.[217] During the ritual the statue had its mouth smeared with sweet and aromatic substances such as honey, ghee, and cedar, awaking it to tastes and smells.[218] Priests also performed "mouth-washing" on the statue with holy water, in some recensions over fourteen times.[219] The goal of the procedure "was aimed at achieving total purity and permitting the god to assume his position in the company of the other gods."[220] The ritual therefore had to take place outside of the city and temple in a "pure place," which the instructions describe as reed hut alongside a freshwater river within an orchard.[221] Likewise, the materials of the ritual had to be pure, and the statue itself is declared to be pure multiple times.[222]

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[216] Some scholars suspect that the ritual may have been performed regularly and not only at its creation. Irene J. Winter, "'Idols of the King': Royal Images as Recipients of Ritual Action in Ancient Mesopotamia," *Journal of Ritual Studies* 6 (1992): 32.

[217] Walker and Dick, *The Induction of the Cult Image in Ancient Mesopotamia*, 70.

[218] Hurowitz, "The Mesopotamian God Image, from Womb to Tomb," 147.

[219] Hurowitz, 150.

[220] Hurowitz, 147.

[221] Walker and Dick, *The Induction of the Cult Image in Ancient Mesopotamia*, 70.

[222] The reed huts had to be made out of "pure reeds" and "pure clay" in the Ninevite Ritual Tablet, lines 8-9. The water used to sprinkle objects and the statue likewise had to be pure and drawn from the Tigris (Lines 42, 52, 56). The phrase, "Pure statue, suited to great divine attributes" is recited to the statue toward the end of the ritual (line 162). The Sultantepe version has a chant that, "the statue is born in a pure place." ST 200 Incantation, line 189. For transliterations and translations of these texts see Walker and Dick, *The Induction of the Cult Image in Ancient Mesopotamia*.

Though scholars debate if the imagery of the ritual was enacting the statue's metaphorical birth or if it was merely a rite of passage, in every version there is a clear tension between the statue's human fabrication and its divine origins.[223] One the one hand, the *mīs-pî* requires purification of the workshop (*bīt mummi*) where the image was formed. The statue's craftsmen had to come to the orchard with the statue and their tools. They were themselves to participate in the statue's enlivening.[224] The ritual therefore does not seek to hide the fact that the statue was fabricated by human workmen.

At the same time, the *mīs-pî* systematically denies that any humans contributed to the god's formation in its incantations and actions. The statue's materials are said to be divine and divinely sourced in the ritual instructions.[225] Phrases such as, "In heaven by your own power you are born" and "You are counted among your brother gods" are whispered in the god's ears or spoken to it.[226] The workman's tools are laid before the statue and then thrown into the river.

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[223] There has been some debate about the metaphorical meaning of the ritual. Berlejung saw it as a rite of passage. Berlejung, *Die Theologie Der Bilder: Herstellung Und Einweihung von Kultbildern in Mesopotamien Und Die Alttestamentliche Bilderpolemik*, 212–46. Boden's dissertation interprets it a birthing scene. Peggy Jean Boden, "The Mesopotamian Washing of the Mouth (Mis Pi) Ritual: An Examination of Some of the Social and Communication Strategies Which Guided the Development and Performance of the Ritual Which Transferred the Essence of the Deity into Its Temple Statue" (Ph.D., United States -- Maryland, The Johns Hopkins University, 1999), 170–220. The original study was done by Thorkild Jacobsen, "The Graven Image," in *Ancient Israelite Religions: Essays in Honor of Frank Moore Cross*, ed. Patrick Miller, Paul Hanson, and Dean McBride (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 15–32. A renewed investigation is in Walker and Dick, *The Induction of the Cult Image in Ancient Mesopotamia*. A helpful summary can be found by Hurowitz, "The Mesopotamian God Image, from Womb to Tomb."

[224]See Ninevite Ritual Text, lines 55, 68-69, 66-89. Walker and Dick, *The Induction of the Cult Image in Ancient Mesopotamia*, 87–89.

[225] See Ninevite Ritual Text, lines 9-10, 40, 46, 184. Walker and Dick, 87–97. For discussions of the divine sourcing of cult statue materials see Hurowitz, "What Goes in Is What Comes Out: Materials for Creating Cult Statues"; Benzel, ""What Goes In Is What Comes Out""; Zaia, "All That Glitters."

[226]See Ninevite Ritual Text, Lines 133, 165. Walker and Dick, *The Induction of the Cult Image in Ancient Mesopotamia*, 92–95.

The workmen then swear repeatedly, "I did not make the statue."[227] In some versions the ritual commands the workman's hands be cut off with a wooden sword.[228] While this last step was symbolic and not actually practiced, it demonstrates the visceral unease there was towards the human fabrication of a god. For how could a human create the gods who had made humanity?

This tension appears in other texts besides the *Mīs-pî.* In the Ashur-Babylon text A (AsBbA), king Esarhaddon reflects on this very dynamic after being commanded by the gods to refurbish the divine images of Babylon. In consternation he prays to the gods:

> Who has the power, O great gods, to create gods and goddesses? You continually send me to an inaccessible place to (perform) a difficult task. Is the renovation work within the capability of the people who are deaf (and) blind, who do not know themselves (and) whose future is (still) undecided? The (task of) creating gods and goddesses is in your power (and) your responsibility! So create the cella of your majestic divinity by yourselves, and let [what]ever is in your heart be done in accord with the unalterable (words) spoken by your lips! Grant the skilled craftsmen, whom you ordered to perform this work, sublime knowledge, like the god Ea, their creator, and teach them the skills (needed)! (Then,) by your exalted command, may they (the craftsmen) allow the action of the god Niššīku to remove whatever is their handiwork![229]

As the prayer makes clear, Esarhaddon did not think it possible for a human to make a god. The formation of gods could only be accomplished by other gods. And yet, the prayer notes the human craftsmen involved in the process. Their humanity, however, is seen as something to be abrogated. Esarhaddon beseeched his gods that these mere mortals be given the wisdom and skill of their divine creators. If the gods worked through these craftsmen, the statue could be a god

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[227] See Ninevite Ritual Text, Line 179. Walker and Dick, 107–8.

[228] Walker and Dick, 114.

[229] Translation taken from Amitai Baruchi-Unna, "Esarhaddon's Prayer in the Inscription AsBbA as Related to the Mīs Pî Ritual," *JCS* 69 (2017): 206. The overarching historical context of this prayer and the policies surrounding it has been discussed in Barbara N. Porter, *Images, Power, Politics: Figurative Aspects of Esarhaddon's Babylonian Policy* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1993).

itself and not a human product. The task of making gods was therefore perceived to be a divine act. The men involved were chosen and inspired by the divine, and their input could be removed by the gods through ritual. As Hurowitz summarizes, the Assyrians, like the biblical authors, "…recognized the impossibility of a man creating a god. However, rather than desisting from the attempt, they claimed that they were not making a god in the first place, but the gods themselves were."[230] As the *Mīs-pî* incantation states, "In heaven by your own power you [the god] are born."[231]

Though the versions of the *Mīs-pî* we have discussed describe the enlivening of cult statues, there is also evidence that the ritual was practiced on other sacred objects. King's statues[232], divine symbols[233], and cultic objects[234] all had the *Mīs-pî* performed on them. The ritual created the purity needed for divine association and presencing.

In summary, Assyrian cult statues, like Assyrian kings, were to be made through divine action and will. Through oracles, dreams, and rituals Assyrian priests and kings determined when it was time to make a god, who would make the image, and how it was to be executed.[235] This

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[230] Hurowitz, "The Mesopotamian God Image, from Womb to Tomb," 150.

[231] Ninevite Ritual Text, Line 59a-60. In Walker and Dick, *The Induction of the Cult Image in Ancient Mesopotamia*, 88–89.

[232]Machinist, "Kingship and Divinity in Imperial Assyria," 181.

[233] Tallay Ornan, "In the Likeness of Man: Reflections on the Anthropocentric Perception of the Divine in Mesopotamian Art," in *What Is a God? Anthropomorphic and Non-Anthropomorphic Aspects of Deity in Ancient Mesopotamia*, ed. Barbara Porter (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2009), 122.

[234] Ornan, 95.

[235] Walker and Dick, *The Induction of the Cult Image in Ancient Mesopotamia*, 114–17; Hurowitz, "What Can Go Wrong with an Idol?," 269–92; Karen Sonik, "Divine (Re-) Presentation: Authoritative Images and a Pictorial Stream of Tradition in Mesopotamia.," in *The Materiality of Divine Agency*, ed. Beate Pongratz-Leisten and Karen Sonik, SANER 8 (Boston, MA: de Gruyter, 2015), 166.

method allowed the gods to work through their worshippers. The statue would thus suit the god's divine standards, and through the *Mīs-pî* become a god itself.[236] The god would then live in its temple and protect its people, bringing with it prosperity, safety, and long life.[237] Though humans had participated in its fabrication, the statue was a work of the god. Indeed, in some Akkadian texts the statue is called "the work of the god" (*šipir ilu*).[238]

Furthermore, there are biblical examples for this kind of authorization strategy for several objects. Divine commissioning, inspiration, and design were necessary for the Tabernacle in ways that Hurowitz has argued parallel Mesopotamian building texts.[239] The Tablets of the Law are said to be inscribed by both Moses and God in a way that corresponds with the divine human synergy of the *Mīs-pî* (Exod 34:1). The holiness of the stone cut "without hands" in Dan 2:34 taps into this desire as well.[240] First Chronicles 28:18 describes the divine blueprint for the temple in Jerusalem. These examples from the biblical tradition demonstrate that the polemic of divine fabrication was employed in Judah, if not also Israel.

Moreover, this appeal to divine origin occurs in the Exodus Calf narrative. In Exod 32:23 Israel's high priest states that he did not form the bovine image (though he clearly did so in Exod

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[236] Bahrani, *The Graven Image*, 171.

[237] Zaia, "Divine Foundations: Religion and Assyrian Capital Cities," 117.

[238] Walker and Dick, *The Induction of the Cult Image in Ancient Mesopotamia*, 106–7 n.109; Marc van de Mieroop, *The Ancient Mesopotamian City* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 48.

[239] Exod 25:8; 31:1-11. Victor Avigdor Hurowitz, *I Have Built You an Exalted House: Temple Building in the Bible in Light of Mesopotamian and Northwest Semitic Writings* (Sheffield, Eng.: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992), 109–13, 168–70. Brian Donnelly-Lewis, "The Tabernacle Manual: Exodus 25:1–31:18 in Light of the Cuneiform Procedural Genre," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 141 (2022): 630.

[240] A divine creation ideal for things made "without hands" occurs in Greek literature as well. The phrase for it is *acheiropoete.* Pongratz-Leisten and Sonik, "Between Cognition and Culture," 8.

32:4) but that it simply appeared out of the fire after he threw in the gold.[241] While we can only conjecture on the history of this particular line, it is possible that it reflects actual Israelite rhetoric about the creation of their calf statues. There are only a few things said to emerge from flames in the Pentateuch. The calf is one, and the word of God at Horeb is the other (Deut 5:22-23). In this way, the calf's genesis could have mirrored that of the Torah as emerging from the blaze of God's presence. Whether the worshippers of the calf statues or the authors of the Deuteronomistic tradition developed this polemic first is beyond the scope of this dissertation. However, this shared trope demonstrates that even competing cultic ideas can use the same justifications for their authenticity.

And yet, for all the rhetoric, polemics, and rituals the northern Israelites may have appealed to for the calves' divine origins, Hosea quite bluntly inveighs,

> Their silver and their gold they have made into idols for themselves. On account of this, Israel is cut off. He has rejected your calf, O Samaria. My anger burns against them. How long will they be incapable of purity? For it is from Israel, and a craftsman made it, and it is not a god. Thus, the Calf of Samaria will become flames. (Hos 8:4b-6)

Instead of being from Yahweh, Hosea claims the calf was a product of Israel's hubris that they had made for themselves rather than their God. It was from their own imagination (Hos 8:6), and their own craftsman (Hos 8:6). The Israelites had not followed their God's instructions regarding his cult in making the statue (Hos 8:1, 4). In fact, they did not know Yahweh at all, though they claimed they did (Hos 8:2). The calf was, therefore, not a god at all because it did not reflect divine inspiration or divine genesis. According to Hosea, even if the Israelites may have tried to

[241] VanDyke, "Designing the Golden Calf," 219, 233; Hurowitz, "The Mesopotamian God Image, from Womb to Tomb," 154–55.

purify the statue in ways parallel to the *Mīs-pî*, they themselves were incapable of purity (נקין) as mere human beings who had not kept the covenant. The end result was a cult statue rejected by the very God the Israelites had forged it for, and a divine wrath that would destroy, not only the image, but the nation who dared to make it.

The Book of Hosea's polemic against the calf therefore shares with the Neo-Assyrian cultus a parallel requirement for divine participation in making cultic objects. It was not an activity for mere mortals, especially those without divine commissioning. On this point, the authors of Hosea, the priests of Assyria, and the cultic specialists of Israel could all agree. Yet, where the ancient Israelites saw a synergy of divine and human craftsmanship in the creation of the calves, the writers of Hosea did not. The failing state of the nation proved that the calf image had been made for Israel by Israel, rather than made by Yahweh. Thus, the prophet's polemic attacks the image by inverting the very logic the Israelites used to legitimize it. The divine origins Israel claimed for the calf were the very thing the book denies, making the calf a mere image. In this way, the Calf of Samaria became the sin of Israel, rather than the presencing image of her deity.

Gods and Kings

The Book of Hosea thus paints *both* Israel's monarchy and cult statues as forgeries. Israel's cultus and kingship were both fraudulent stand-ins for divine will. As a result, Yahweh had rejected the kings and Calf of Samaria. On the one hand, this polemic reflects the shared divine etiologies of Israel's kings and calves. On the other hand, it taps into the closely intertwined nature of kingship and cultic image in the ancient Near East.

As Assyriologists and Biblical scholars have noted, the line between the political and the religious was so blurred in the ancient world that it was frequently nonexistent.[242] Kings could serve as high priests.[243] Religious banquets defined the limits of a polity and bound the gods to its protection.[244] Political treaties were made before divine symbols and images so that the gods could act as guarantors.[245] To rule a kingdom was to serve at the behest of its gods.[246] In sum, there was no true division between temple and state. The two institutions were entirely entangled.

One of the most important roles of a king was to therefore to provide for and maintain the cult of his land—at the peak of which were its gods.[247] Royal propaganda of the Neo-Assyrians and Syrians therefore frequently recount the acts of kings for their city's cult statues. Kings of Neo-Assyria gave offerings to these images and kissed the ground in front of them.[248] If the gods had communicated that they needed new or improved statues or temples, they gave their commands to the king.[249] Kings worked with priests and scribes to commission and design

[242] Pongratz-Leisten, *Religion and Ideology in Assyria*, 217–28; Berlejung, "Twisting Traditions," 1–3, 6.

[243] Machinist, "Kingship and Divinity in Imperial Assyria," 156–57.

[244] Pongratz-Leisten, *Religion and Ideology in Assyria*, 401–2.

[245] Holloway, *Aššur Is King! Aššur Is King!*, 166.

[246] Shana Zaia, "Kings, Priests, and Power in the Neo-Assyrian Period," *Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Religions* 19 (2019): 153–54.

[247] Pongratz-Leisten, *Religion and Ideology in Assyria*, 88.

[248] Angelika Berlejung, "Refreshed Cultic Kisses: Forms of Encounter between Gods and Humans," in *Divine Secrets and Human Imaginations: Studies on the History of Religion and Anthropology of the Ancient Near East and the Old Testament*, ed. Angelika Berlejung (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2021), 54.

[249] Berlejung, "Twisting Traditions," 6.

accessories, vehicles, and furniture for their divine lords, including chariots and beds.[250] Wars were waged on the god's behalf, and city wide festivals were arranged in their honor.[251] If a king needed to flee his city, he would take his gods with him to keep them safe.[252] As Zaia summarizes, ""Essentially all of the king's actions were for the exultation of, and support by, the gods of Assyria."[253]

The relationship between kings and cult statues was not just a one-way street, however. Kings could reap immense benefits through their interactions with, and support of, these divine objects. According to Porter, Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal managed to improve their relationship with Babylon through their restoration of the kingdom's cult statues and temples. They presented themselves as servants of both the Assyrian and Babylonian gods, and by keeping Babylonian religious customs, they prevented significant rebellions in a perennially contentious corner of their empire.[254]

On a social level, the monarchy of Neo-Assyria was thus indebted to its cult and vice versa. Kings supported the gods financially and religiously, and in turn they could gain ideological and social capital with their people and elites, as well as divine support for their reign, their economies, and their military actions. While this relationship between god and king

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[250] Barbara N. Porter, "Blessing from a Crown, Offerings to a Drum," in *What Is a God? Anthropomorphic and Non-Anthropomorphic Aspects of Deity in Ancient Mesopotamia*, ed. Barbara N. Porter (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2009), 192–93.

[251] Pongratz-Leisten, *Religion and Ideology in Assyria*, 392, 435.

[252] Cogan, *Imperialism and Religion*, 31–33.

[253] Shana Zaia, "State Sponsored Sacrilege: 'Godnapping' and Omission in Neo-Assyrian Inscriptions," *Journal of Ancient Near Eastern History* 2 (2015): 26–27.

[254] Porter, *Images, Power, Politics: Figurative Aspects of Esarhaddon's Babylonian Policy*, 120.

could be complicated by the machinations of individual priests, prophets, and scribes, the needs of the gods could provide justifications for royal policies and campaigns.[255] In exchange the gods (and their priests) received a royally funded home and lifestyle.

When the Neo-Assyrians began conquering their neighbors under Tiglath-Pileser III, their approach to suppressing rebellions often relied on manipulating a similar dynamic between gods and kings in other kingdoms and city-states. Treaties were made, with kings swearing before images of both their gods and the gods of Assyria. The oath was thus enforced by local and foreign deities, including the curses for breaking the treaty. Images and kingship thus appeared side by side again, establishing the loyalty of their people, on clay tablets if not reality.[256]

Moreover, as Berlejung has demonstrated with the example of Gaza, the Assyrians would—at times—take captive the royal families and cult statues of seditious nations in order to gain the obedience of the nation.[257] Without god and king, a polity could not function independently, leaving a political void that the Assyrians could take advantage of.[258] As Holloway summarizes, "The frequent collocation of the deportation of divine statues and the deportation of captured kings represented the decisive removal of the nuclear symbols of

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[255] The dynamic here could often be subtle and hard to determine. Syrian scholar-scribes played a key role in forming and mediating ideas of kingly power for the gods and the elites. Pongratz-Leisten, *Religion and Ideology in Assyria*, 331–33. Pongratz-Leisten, "All the King's Men." Priests could also act independently or out of order, as seen in Zaia, "Kings, Priests, and Power in the Neo-Assyrian Period."

[256] Holloway, *Aššur Is King! Aššur Is King!*, 166.

[257] Angelika Berlejung, "Shared Fates: Gaza and Ekron as Examples for the Assyrian Religious Policy in the West," in *Iconoclasm and Text Destruction in the Ancient Near East and Beyond*, ed. Natalie Naomi May, OIS 8 (Chicago, IL: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 2012), 160.

[258] Cogan, *Imperialism and Religion*, 37.

statehood, a vacuum into which Assyria could, at its discretion, introduce puppet kings, Assyrian rulers and Assyrian treaties."[259] Both king and gods would be housed in Assyria, far from their people, but cared for.[260] The capture of a city's gods and ruler incentivized good behavior on a variety of levels. Polities that obeyed the covenant with the Assyrians could have their gods and kings restored.[261] Breaking the treaty, however, would have dire consequences. Here, there is a divergence in treatment between cult statues and kings. While the Assyrians only on the rarest of occasions destroyed foreign cult statues, they were more than willing to make examples of rebellious foreign kings in brutally public manners.[262]

Through these examples, we can see the intertwined role of kings and cult statues in ancient Mesopotamia and the Levant during the eighth century. Monarchs and images played similar functions in establishing divine presence, favor, and will for their polities. Indeed, kings were at times referred to as the "image" (*ṣalmu*) of the god.[263] Their political role as kings could not be disentangled from their religious role as representatives of the gods they worshipped. Kings were arms of divine power and presence, and the cult statues they interacted with played a role in both local and foreign political spheres.

Kings, Calves, and the Aniconism of Hosea

[259] Holloway, *Aššur Is King! Aššur Is King!*, 195–96.

[260] Cogan, *Imperialism and Religion*, 40; Richardson, "The Hypercoherent Icon," 242.

[261] Cogan, *Imperialism and Religion*, 34; Holloway, *Aššur Is King! Aššur Is King!*, 197.

[262] Zaia, "State Sponsored Sacrilege: 'Godnapping' and Omission in Neo-Assyrian Inscriptions," 40.

[263] What it means for a king to be an image of the gods is a complex metaphor, the meaning of which is debated. See Bahrani, *The Graven Image*, 139–42; Machinist, "Kingship and Divinity in Imperial Assyria," 162, 171.

Hosea's double-barreled approach to Israel's kings and calves thus reflects a dynamic steeped into the ancient Near East. If Israel's kings were anything like the rulers of their neighbors, they would have sought the favor of their gods by caring for their cults and cult statues. Like Jeroboam I in 1 Kgs 12:25-33, they would have invested in the creation and maintenance of cultic sites and images as a means of bolstering and delineating their own power. Their propaganda would have been filled with accounts of enacting divine will: commissioning precious objects for the god, offering sacrifices at the right time, participating in the correct rituals, and doing everything exactly as the deity ordained. Kings would have cared for every cultic site under their purview, leaving none abandoned or forgotten. They would have interacted with the Calf of Samaria as the presencing object of their high god through offerings and other rituals.[264] They would have presented themselves as extensions of divine presence, in ways that paralleled and complemented the Calf of Samaria.

Thus, Hosea's conjoined protest against calf and king is expected rather than surprising.[265] Both king and calves relied on the same divine authorization strategies, meaning any religious critique in this time period would also be inherently political. To question the authenticity of a cult image would have ramifications for the authenticity of the kings they supported. Likewise, to invalidate Israel's kings would present challenges to the kingdom's cult. These two supposed extensions of Yahweh's presence were mutually reliant, and Hos 8:1-6 demonstrates the depths to which they were intertwined.

[264] See chapter three of this dissertation.

[265] This point is against Cazelles, "The Problem of Kings," 21–22.

Hosea's aniconic polemic is thus not merely theological. It is thoroughly socio-political and enmeshed in the eighth century and its fallout. The downfall of Israel's monarchs was tearing at the social fabric of the Northern Kingdom, and Hosea's barbed reaction demonstrates how certain members of the Yahwistic cult responded to Israel's collapse. Despite kings' attempts to observe and please Israel's God/gods, the nation was showing more and more signs of corruption and fragility. This disjuncture between cultic expectation and reality created a cognitive dissonance for the people of Israel and Judah. How could a Yahwistic king and kingdom undergo defeat and dissolution?

Hosea's response demonstrates one answer to this question that threaded the needle. The book contends that Yahweh was still in control, but he was not represented by the calf-gods Israel worshipped. Indeed, these versions of him were false and man-made, and they caused the very issues Israel's kings and priests sought to prevent in maintaining their cultus. The result would be the end of Israel's calf cult and her kingship through Neo-Assyrian aggression. The powerless statues and kings would be carted away or destroyed, realities that Hos 10:1-6 reflects upon. It is to this section of Hosea's contentions against the calf cult of Israel we may now turn.

CHAPTER TWO: EVICTING THE RESIDENT OF SAMARIA

HOSEA 10:5-6 AND THE CARTING AWAY OF SAMARIA'S CALF-GOD

לְעֶגְלוֹת֙ בֵּ֣ית אָ֔וֶן יָג֖וּרוּ שְׁכַ֣ן שֹׁמְר֑וֹן כִּֽי־אָבַ֨ל עָלָ֜יו עַמּ֗וֹ וּכְמָרָיו֙ עָלָ֣יו יָגִ֔ילוּ עַל־כְּבוֹד֖וֹ כִּי־גָלָ֥ה מִמֶּֽנּוּ׃
גַּם־אוֹתוֹ֙ לְאַשּׁ֣וּר יוּבָ֔ל מִנְחָ֖ה לְמֶ֣לֶךְ יָרֵ֑ב בָּשְׁנָה֙ אֶפְרַ֣יִם יִקָּ֔ח וְיֵב֥וֹשׁ יִשְׂרָאֵ֖ל מֵעֲצָתֽוֹ׃

Indeed, the heifers of Beth Aven themselves will drag away the Resident of Samaria, so that its people will mourn on its account, and its foreign-priests will tremble over it, over its glory, which had departed from it. Even it will be brought along to Assyria, an offering for the great king; He will take the shameful-thing of Ephraim, and Israel will be disgraced on account of his plans.
Hosea 10:5-6

Hosea 10:1-8 is infamous as one of the most perplexing sections of a perplexing book. Though verse 5 in particular promises valuable insight into Israel's calf cult, its grammar and phrasing have so frustrated scholars that it has often been deemed incomprehensible, if not entirely corrupt. As Smith has commented, "Unfortunately, we have more questions than answers for MT Hos 10:5."[266] Dearman concurs, noting that, "Verse 5 is a textbook illustration of Hosea's allusive style, atypical vocabulary, and alteration of perfect and imperfect verbs. Virtually every term invites comment."[267] As a result, scholars have avoided this passage almost entirely in their treatments of the golden calf cult.

This chapter offers a new reading and correction to this text based on comparative materials from Neo-Assyria and the Levant. Arguably, Hos 10:5 has been misunderstood based on the misreading of one letter: the *lamed* fronting the word "heifers" in the text. By reinterpreting this one consonant as an *asseverative* rather than a preposition, the passage can be restored to its original sense, which is not about how the residents of Samaria feared for the

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[266] Smith, *Where the Gods Are*, 68.

[267] Dearman, *Hosea*, 265.

heifers of Beth Aven. Instead, it is about the Resident of Samaria, the god who had abandoned his people and his cult statue. Eventually and ironically, his divine image would be offered up to the king of Assyria, and according to Hosea, this object that had been crafted to display Israel's splendor, would instead become her shame.

A Translation of Hos 10:1-8

Before delving into Hos 10:5-6 in particular, this chapter will provide the reader with a new translation of the pericope of Hos 10:1-8 and a discussion of its setting. Comments about specific readings can be found in the footnotes. Verses 5 and 6 will be investigated throughout the body of this chapter.

Hos 10:1-8

Author's Translation	**MT**
Israel is a cancerous vine, and his produce is comparable to him; according to the increase of his produce he has increased altars; according to the wealth of his land his has made a wealth of standing stones.[268]	[1]גֶּפֶן בּוֹקֵק יִשְׂרָאֵל פְּרִי יְשַׁוֶּה־לּוֹ כְּרֹב לִפְרִיּוֹ הִרְבָּה לַמִּזְבְּחוֹת כְּטוּב לְאַרְצּוֹ הֵיטִיבוּ מַצֵּבוֹת׃

[268] Interpreters argue over the meanings of two words in this verse, both of which are difficult to understand within context. The first issue is the phrase "גֶּפֶן בּוֹקֵק," translated here as "cancerous vine." Elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, the verb בקק and its derivates have connotations of "to destroy," "to lay waste," and "to empty." (See Isa 19:3 and HALOT s.v. "בקק I") Yet translators and commentators have rarely, if ever, given this nuance to the lexeme in Hos 10:1 due to the context—which seems to presume a flourishing of produce, altars, and standing stones. As such, most scholars read "בּוֹקֵק" with a resonance which is opposite to its usages elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible. Wolff, *Hosea*, 170. Davies, *Hosea*, 234. The justification generally given is the Arabic cognate *baqqa* "to be (cause to be) plentiful." The next strophe of the verse describes the "fruit of Israel" and how it is "יְשַׁוֶּה to him. Regrettably, the verb "שוה" is the second area of dispute. In the *piel* this verb means either to "make like," "to even out," or "to place with." HALOT s.v. "שוה I" Because Israel is a vine which must produce fruit, and this proliferation is somehow tied to the expansion of Israel's cultic places (Hos 10:1b), translations have ranged in meaning, understanding שוה with connotations of "commensurate," "yielding," and "cause to be ripe." One detail that has often escaped scholar's notice is that גֶּפֶן in this case is not a normal grapevine. The noun is masculine and not feminine, which is generally expected for grapes in Israel. However, in another northern text Israelite text, 2 Kgs 4:38-40, the masculine version of גֶּפֶן refers to a wild vine with poisonous offshoots. The plant looked like it was suitable for consumption, but when added to a dish those who tried it shouted, "there is death in the pot!" (2 Kgs 4:40) Likely, it is this deceptive plant that is referenced here. Hosea was describing his country as a wild, bitter, poisonous vine (See also Hos 10:4). Despite the fact that it appeared to be edible, it would contaminate and corrupt all who ate of it. This sense is then extended through the adjective בוקק, which has the same connotations as other locations in the Hebrew Bible:

[2]חָלַק לִבָּם עַתָּה יֶאְשָׁמוּ הוּא יַעֲרֹף מִזְבְּחוֹתָם
יְשֹׁדַד מַצֵּבוֹתָם׃

Their heart is duplicitous,[269] now they will suffer for their guilt. He himself will fracture their altars; he will destroy their standing stones.

[3]כִּי עַתָּה יֹאמְרוּ אֵין מֶלֶךְ לָנוּ כִּי לֹא יָרֵאנוּ אֶת־
יְהוָה וְהַמֶּלֶךְ מַה־יַּעֲשֶׂה־לָּנוּ׃

Surely now they should say, "We have no king, because we did not fear Yahweh," and "the king: what could he do for us?"

[4]דִּבְּרוּ דְבָרִים אָלוֹת שָׁוְא כָּרֹת בְּרִית וּפָרַח כָּרֹאשׁ
מִשְׁפָּט עַל תַּלְמֵי שָׂדָי׃

They have spoken in negotiations,[270] swearing falsely in the cutting of a covenant, and judgement[271] has broken out like a blight upon the furrows of the field.

[5]לְעָגְלוֹת בֵּית אָוֶן יָגוּרוּ שִׁכֵּן שֹׁמְרוֹן כִּי־אָבַל עָלָיו
עַמּוֹ וּכְמָרָיו עָלָיו יָגִילוּ עַל־כְּבוֹדוֹ כִּי־גָלָה מִמֶּנּוּ׃

Indeed, the heifers of Beth Aven themselves will drag away the Resident of Samaria, so that its people will mourn on its account, and its foreign-priests will tremble over it, over its glory, which had departed from it

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something which actively lays waste and destroys. This meaning puts the word in harmony with its Syriac cognate, which means "to rot." Hence, the lexeme בוקק does not denote positive flourishing, but an invasive and profligate blight which was subjugating the landscape. (Hos 4:3) And the produce of this weed, was "commensurate to it" or "comparable to it." The fruit of Israel's actions would only poison those who ate it. The multiplication of religious spaces, both in terms of pillars and altars, was actually not a sign of religious growth but of religious cancer. (Hos 4:13-14, 10:13)

[269] Most discussions focus on the word חלק in this verse as it has two possible definitions in Hebrew that could fit this passage. The first is "to be smooth," which when used in conjunction with the mouth or words connotes flattery or insinuation. HALOT s.v. "חלק I" The second definition means "to divide" or "apportion." HALOT s.v. "חלק II" As the verb is not a passive, it should be read in accordance with the first option. The heart of Israel was deceptive; though it looked appealing from the outside, it was rancid.

[270] The phrase דִּבְּרוּ דְבָרִים is idiomatic and the exact nuance is somewhat debated. The exact phrase appears in Jer 29:23 and appears to have connotations of formal dialogue and treaty making. It is also used as a description of prophetic discourse and oral epistolary. (See also Deut 18:20; Jer 23:28; Ezek 12:25, 28; 14:9.) However, many scholars understand the line in Hosea as a reference to promises of allegiance or the creation of a combined strategy. A few others read it against Isa 58:3 and take it as "speaking mere words." Given the context, the nuance of making negotiations in bad faith seems most fitting.

[271] What מִשְׁפָּט means in this passage is debated. In Hebrew it can either refer to justice more abstractly or judgments more concretely (See BDB s.v."מִשְׁפָּט " HALOT s.v. "מִשְׁפָּט ") It is hard to imagine "justice" in the positive sense growing like a poisonous plant where crops belong. A reading of "judgment" seems more likely. As Hosea will reiterate in 10:13, Israel had planted the seeds of her destruction. Her false promises were breaking down the society they were supposed to preserve. They were to reap what they had sown (Hos 8:7), and eat what they had planted (Hos 10:13).

Even it will be brought along to Assyria, an offering for the great king; He will take the shameful-thing of Ephraim, and Israel will be disgraced on account of his plans.	6גַּם־אוֹתוֹ לְאַשּׁוּר יוּבָל מִנְחָה לְמֶלֶךְ יָרֵב בָּשְׁנָה אֶפְרַיִם יִקָּח וְיֵבוֹשׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵעֲצָתוֹ׃
Samaria resembles her king,[272] (being) like foam[273] on the face of the water.	7נִדְמֶה שֹׁמְרוֹן מַלְכָּהּ כְּקֶצֶף עַל־פְּנֵי־מָיִם׃
And the high places of Aven will be destroyed, the sin of Israel. Thorn and bramble will come up over their altars. And they will say to the mountains, "cover us!" and to the heights, "fall upon us!"	8וְנִשְׁמְדוּ בָּמוֹת אָוֶן חַטַּאת יִשְׂרָאֵל קוֹץ וְדַרְדַּר יַעֲלֶה עַל־מִזְבְּחוֹתָם וְאָמְרוּ לֶהָרִים כַּסּוּנוּ וְלַגְּבָעוֹת נִפְלוּ עָלֵינוּ׃

The Historical Context of Hos 10:1-8: the Problem of Divine Abandonment

Before defending this new interpretation, it is necessary to first contextualize Hos 10:5 within its literary and chronological situation. Once this baseline has been established, the specific challenges of these verses can be delineated in detail.

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[272] The verb נִדְמֶה comes from the root דמה, which can be translated in the Niphal as "to be like", "to be silent", or "to be destroyed." (HALOT s.v. דמה I and HALOT s.v. דמה II). Modern translators have generally taken the verb as "to be destroyed" in harmony with Hos 10:15b which declares the king of Israel would perish at dawn. (See Wolff, *Hosea*, 171.) However, due to the awkward syntax of the verse, they have varied in terms of which was destroyed: Samaria or her king. The pointing of the verb, a masculine singular participle, indicates "her king" was the subject destroyed according to the MT. This translation forces the city to be inelegantly sandwiched between the verb and its suffixed subject. Moreover, if the text were un-pointed, it would be easier to read "Samaria is being destroyed (of) her king," and the resulting reading is still difficult. Yet, these tensions are resolved when נִדְמֶה is read with the gloss "to resemble." (Similar to Ezek 32:2) This glossing demands two following nouns, ergo "Samaria resembles her king." This interpretation does require changing the pointing on the verb to reflect a feminine participial reading; however, it harmonizes the consonantal text. It also reflects the message of the whole chapter (Hos 10:3, 15). The Northern Kingdom and her capital were kingless; the fate of their deposed monarch would soon belong to the citizens, and their cultic objects, as well.

[273] Sadly, the word which Samaria resembles—קֶצֶף—is a hapax that has no obvious cognates in closely related Semitic languages. (See HALOT s.v. "I קצף" and HALOT s.v. "קֶצֶף") For linguistic and contextual reasons, the most likely reading appears to be "foam" or "bubbling water." Here the Targumic rendering is helpful, as it has a word (רתח) that could imply both "boiling" in a verbal sense, and "anger" in a nominal one. This was likely the range of קצף as well. Furthermore, as Cohen has demonstrated, there is often a link between words for "anger" in Semitic languages and terms for foam or poison. Chayim Cohen, "'Foam' in Hosea 10:7," *Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society* 2 (1969): 26–28. Likely this same interplay of Semantic ranges is at work here. Finally, foam is an expected object on the surface of water which gives a pronounced emphasis to Israel's fleeting nature. Echoing similar metaphors in the Hosea which appeal to "dew," "mist," or "vapor" the prophet declares that the rest of Israel's existence will be as brief as a bubble on the water's surface. (See See Hos 6:4; 13:3.)

The pericope in which Hos 10:5 falls (Hos 10:1-8) jumps between metaphors and cultural targets in a manner characteristic of the second section of the book.[274] However, like Hos 8:1-6, this passage frames much of its discussion of Israel's failing cult and society with remarks on her defunct monarchy, which provides hints as to the pericope's temporal setting. In Hos 10:3 the prophet states, "For now they should say, 'We have no king, because we have not feared Yahweh.' And, 'What could the king accomplish for us?'"[275] The first statement emphasizes the time period with the word "now," and it makes it clear that Israel was, at that point, kingless. And while Hosea recommended that the people of Israel consider the pointlessness of kings, it is likely that they were still seeking a replacement monarch. Otherwise, the prophet's second statement would ring hollow. A similar impression is given in Hos 10:7, when the prophet writes, "Samaria is like her king, like a bubble on the surface of water."[276] The imagery here implies the fragility and connectivity of both king and state, each lasting a mere moment before

[274] For a discussion of scholarly consensus on the borders of this particular unit of text and a thorough analysis of some of its particularities see: DeGrado, "Authoring Empire," 150–58.

[275] I have chosen to translate the imperfect verb יאמרו in Hos 10: as obligatory in nature. As will be demonstrated below, the loss of a king and societal breakdown were classic signs of divine disfavor and even abandonment in the ancient world. According to this mindset, the Israelites should have been seeking to right whatever wrongs had angered their god, accompanied by appeasing him with offerings. The prophet is thus demonstrating how the Israelites *should* have reflected upon their current circumstances. It is also notable that the language of 1 Sam 12 reflects the language of this passage. At one of the coronations of Saul, Samuel told the people that if they feared (ירא) Yahweh and obeyed his voice, things would go well for both themselves and their king (1 Sam 12:14). If they did not, both they and their king would be swept away (1 Sam 12:25). Samuel's discussion of the matter also seems to imply that kings were among the things that were vain and pointless in matters of the nation's survival (1 Sam 12:21). This language appears to reflect a shared tradition between Hosea and Samuel, rather than of direct dependence one way or the other. As Finkelstein has argued, the Saul cycles appear to have been maintained and composed in northern Israel, most likely under Jeroboam II. Though this section of Kings is not part of the "pro Saulide" corpus, it seems to reflect dialogue with the tradition by both the writers of Hosea and of Samuel. Israel Finkelstein, "Saul, Benjamin and the Emergence of »Biblical Israel«: An Alternative View," *Zeitschrift Für Die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 123 (2011): 365–66.

[276] The reading of this verse is difficult and debated. See: Wolff, *Hosea*, 171; Macintosh, *Hosea*, 406; Dearman, *Hosea*, 259. Cohen, "'Foam' in Hosea 10:7," 26–28. Other helpful discussions on this text can be found in Macintosh, *Hosea*, 406–8; Machinist, "Hosea and the Ambiguity of Kingship in Ancient Israel," 161; DeGrado, "Authoring Empire," 151.

vanishing. As Samaria resembled her ruler, it follows that he was already gone, with the city bound to continue after him. Thus, verses 3 and 7 both indicate that Samaria had no king on the throne but potentially maintained some form of independence. If Hos 10:15 was written during this time frame as well, a similar impression is given. Dating Hos 10:5 thus pivots on finding a time frame when Israel had lost her native king but could still conceive of replacing him as the nation still had some cohesion and self-governance.

Unfortunately, answering this question of date quickly becomes mired in larger issues regarding the fall of Samaria. The progression and nature of Samaria's decline is a complex problem that is frustrated by politically driven texts which are often fragmentary and seemingly contradictory. 2 Kgs 17:1-6 is the relevant text in the Hebrew Bible on the issue, but it is difficult to tell how exactly the chronology of events it describes fit together. The royal inscriptions of Shalmaneser V, which could be the most elucidatory witnesses to events on the Assyrian side, have vanished. The records of his successor Sargon II are often achronological and patchy in regard to Samaria.[277] The archaeological evidence from Israel's political capital is also sadly partial and often inconclusive.[278] Scholarly debate on the chronology of events is contentious, with Assyriologists, biblical scholars, archaeologists, and Egyptologists all weighing in on the

[277] For a succinct summary of relevant primary sources see K. Lawson Younger, "The Fall of Samaria in Light of Recent Research," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 61 (1999): 461–82. The foundational work on the fall of Israel began with Hayim Tadmor, "The Campaigns of Sargon II of Assur: A Chronological-Historical Study," *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* 12 (1958): 22–40. Subsequently, Bob Becking's published dissertation has become standard reading on the topic. Becking, *The Fall of Samaria: An Historical and Archaeological Study*.

[278] Ron E. Tappy, "The Final Years of Israelite Samaria: Towards a Dialogue between Texts and Archaeology," in *"Up to the Gates of Ekron": Essays on the Archaeology and History of the Eastern Mediterranean in Honor of Seymour Gitin*, ed. Sidnie White Crawford and et al (Jerusalem: W.F Albright Institute of Archaeological Research: Israel Exploration Society, 2007), 258–79.

issue with its all facets, whether they be linguistic, historical, textual, archaeological, or methodological.[279]

Some consensus has developed, however. In general, most scholars now hold that Samaria was conquered twice.[280] The first time the city surrendered was under Shalmaneser V around 722 BCE, as the Hebrew Bible and the Babylonian Chronicle recount. From the archeological evidence, it appears that the city was not razed and may have even suffered minimal damage.[281] It is unclear at this point how many Israelites were exiled or killed. Two to three years later, the city rebelled again, alongside Damascus and other cities that had been previous servants of Assyria. Sargon II's records indicate that he again took the capital, and that he subsequently carried off the city's gods and people. He installed a governor in Samaria, and the country never again resisted Assyrian dominance. Intriguingly, no mention is made of Israel's king within Sargon II's writings.[282]

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[279] A helpful resource which gathers together the research of a variety of specialists can be found in the following edited volume. Shuichi Hasegawa, Christoph Levin, and Karen Radner, eds., *The Last Days of the Kingdom of Israel*, BZAW 511 (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2019).

[280] The two conquering schema is held by Tadmor, Becking, and Younger. (Tadmor, "The Campaigns of Sargon II of Assur"; Becking, *The Fall of Samaria: An Historical and Archaeological Study*; Younger, "The Fall of Samaria in Light of Recent Research.") This growing consensus was immediately challenged by Na'aman, who posited that Shalmaneser V had to put down multiple Samarian revolts during his reign, one of which was left to Sargon II to finally crush. Nadav Na'aman, "The Historical Background to the Conquest of Samaria (720 BC)," *Biblica* 71 (1990): 206–25. Likewise, Kuan and Hayes contended that there were additional conquests according to a more chronological reading of 2 Kgs 17 (Hayes and Kuan, "The Final Years of Samaria (730-720 BC)."). Finally, Tetley has argued there was only one siege of Samaria that was led by Sargon II. M. Christine Tetley, "The Date of Samaria's Fall as a Reason for Rejecting the Hypothesis of Two Conquests," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 64 (2002): 59–77. In general, however, the consensus around the two-campaign theory has remained the dominant theory for the past thirty years.

[281] Tappy, "The Final Years of Israelite Samaria: Towards a Dialogue between Texts and Archaeology," 268, 276; Bob Becking, "How to Encounter an Historical Problem? '722–720 BCE' as a Case Study," in *The Last Days of the Kingdom of Israel*, ed. Shuichi Hasegawa, Christoph Levin, and Karen Radner, BZAW 511 (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2019), 27.

[282] Tadmor leaned toward this royal absence in Sargon II's records as evidence that Israel was being held together by generals when the city capitulated. Tadmor, "The Campaigns of Sargon II of Assur," 37. While scholars are often

Taken alongside the books of the Hebrew Bible, this leaves two possible moments for the removal of Hoshea king of Israel. If 2 Kgs 17:1-6 is read sequentially, Hoshea was dethroned, restrained, and put in jail before the Assyrian siege of the Samaria. This would mean that Israel was kingless for at least three years, if not more, before being conquered the first time. This narrative, however, does not explain why Assyria felt the need to invade the region at that particular moment. There are also some compelling reasons for doubting a sequential reading of the text.[283] As such, scholars largely believe that the restraining and imprisoning of Hoshea coincided with the capture of the capital, though the matter is far from certain without Assyrian records.

The next possible historical setting for Hos 10:5 would follow in the wake of Shalmaneser V in 722 BCE, when Samaria had a brief window of freedom once again almost immediately after its submission. This moment of independence occurred during the turmoil surrounding the death of Shalmaneser V and the rise of Sargon II. It was an opportune, if ill-fated, moment to stage a rebellion. According to Sargon II's records, several nation states colluded against him, including Qarqar, Damascus, Hamath, Arpad, Ṣimirra, and Samaria.[284] His

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ambivalent about when Israel became kingless, most agree that there was no figure in charge after Hoshea. Frahm, "Samaria, Hamath, and Assyria's Conquests in the Levant in the Late 720s BCE," 75; Na'aman, "The Historical Background to the Conquest of Samaria (720 BC)," 218–19. Based on the fragmentary Nimrod Prism and Hos 8:1-6, Kuan and Hayes alone maintain that another individual managed to win the throne of Israel after Hoshea. However, their readings are tentative and the achronological nature of the inscription must be kept in mind. Moreover, as was argued earlier, Hos 8:1-6 fits better the state of Israel before Hoshea. Hayes and Kuan, "The Final Years of Samaria (730-720 BC)," 173.

[283] Younger, "The Fall of Samaria in Light of Recent Research," 477–78. An overview of the problems of the text can be found in Christoph Levin, "In Search of the Original Biblical Record of the Assyrian Conquest of Samaria," in *The Last Days of the Kingdom of Israel*, ed. Shuichi Hasegawa, Christoph Levin, and Karen Radner, BZAW 511 (Boston/Berlin: de Gruyter, 2019), 255–57.

[284] Na'aman and De Grado argue that Calno should be added to this list based on Isa 10:9. Nadav Na'aman, "New Light on Hezekiah's Second Prophetic Story (2 Kgs 19,9b-35)," *Biblia* 81 (2000): 394; DeGrado, "Kidnapping the Gods," 53. For the original source material found on Sargon II's wall reliefs see RINAP 2:001, 23b-25.

response was merciless. He had the leader of the rebellion brought to Assyria to be publicly flayed alive, he exiled 27,290 of Israelites,[285] and he "counted [as] booty the gods who helped them."[286] Nothing is said of the king of Samaria or her leaders, and from this point on, several Assyrian governors would rule over the thoroughly devastated region.

From the somewhat garbled archeological record, it appears that the city of Samaria itself was never burned to the ground by either Sargon II or Shalmaneser V. However, the Assyrians had so crippled the Northern Kingdom that it took centuries for the region to recover its population and economy.[287] The country would never again resist Assyria or even Babylon. After the massive deportations enacted by Tiglath-Pileser III and Sargon II, one wonders how many military minded individuals were left in the region to even try.

Hosea 10:1-8 could thus fall between the capture of Hoshea in 725 BCE-—should it have occurred—and the claiming of the city by Sargon II in 720/719.[288] Though either dating is possible given the available data, the author has a slight preference for setting this text in the backdrop of the Sargonic campaign for several reasons. First of all, it is known that Sargon II

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[285] A description of Assyria's massive deportation project, especially in regards to Samaria, can be found in Karen Radner, "The 'Lost Tribes of Israel' in the Context of the Resettlement Programme of the Assyrian Empire," ed. Shuichi Hasegawa, Christoph Levin, and Karen Radner, BZAW 511 (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2019), 101–24.

[286] RINAP 2: 074, iv 32-33.

[287] Avraham Faust, "Settlement, Economy, and Demography under Assyrian Rule in the West: The Territories of the Former Kingdom of Israel as a Test Case," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 135 (2015): 774–78.

[288] For scholars who agree with this dating see Wolff, *Hosea*, 174–75; Macintosh, *Hosea*, 393; Dearman, *Hosea*, 262. Dewrell has recently argued that the "king of Yareb" in vs. 6 refers to king Sennacherib, putting the date of this text somewhere between 705 and 681 BCE Dewrell, "Yareb, Shalman, and the Date of the Book of Hosea." DeGrado has rightly critiqued this argument for missing cues in the text about godnapping and dates this situation to the reign of Sargon II. DeGrado, "Authoring Empire," 151–54. The other issue with Dewrell's stance is that it puts Hosea's discussion of kingship fifteen or more years past the fall of Samaria. This dating would mean Hosea's writings on the monarchy were coming in a period where it was a null and void topic. By the time of Sennacherib, deportations out of Israel had stopped, leaving very few elites and other native Israelites left in the land to even debate the topic. See K. Lawson Younger, "Israelites in Exile," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 29 (2003): 44.

took Samarian cultic objects as spoil. This measure was an extreme one for the Assyrians, and it was not always employed.[289] If Shalmaneser V had taken the cult statue, it would also imply that the Israelites had reforged it before this new attestation was also taken away by Sargon II. While this is certainly possible, given the tight timeline between the campaigns, it is less likely. Secondly, this reading of events better fits 2 Kgs 17, which seems to compress and compile events in a way that is slightly achronological. Thirdly, while it is uncertain if Hoshea was dethroned before the campaign of Shalmaneser V, he was undoubtedly removed afterward. Like other kings, Shalmaneser V would probably have arranged a governor for the newly conquered city. However, given how quickly Israel again rebelled, this figure could not have held his position long, and Israel would once again have a power vacuum. With how fragmentary the country was at this point, it would be a difficult task for any one individual to again take the reigns of power.[290] It is conceivable that the city lasted one to two years without a specific head during this fraught time, and certainly more conceivable than the state being kingless from 725BCE to 720/719BCE.

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[289]As Zaia has pointed out, "…godnapping was a powerful tool for asserting hegemony and for demoralizing subjugated peoples, who were thereby deprived of their gods and divine protection." Zaia, "State Sponsored Sacrilege: 'Godnapping' and Omission in Neo-Assyrian Inscriptions," 20. However, as she argues, the Assyrians almost never named the gods they despoiled, fearing divine retribution (49). Often the Assyrians would use other methods besides violence or godnapping to suppress rebellion, including marriage alliances, cross deportation, and building up local palaces, as Fales has demonstrated. Frederick Mario Fales, "On Pax Assyriaca in the Eighth-Seventh Centuries BCE and Its Implications," in *Isaiah's Vision of Peace in Biblical and Modern International Relations: Swords into Plowshares*, ed. Raymond Cohen and Raymond Westbrook (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 25–29.In other words, Assyria did not always despoil the gods of the nations they conquered, though it was not an infrequent occurrence as they attempted to enforce the loyalty of troublesome subjects who rebelled. See Cogan, *Imperialism and Religion*, 24, 37; Holloway, *Aššur Is King! Aššur Is King!*, 123, 195–96.

[290] Both Becking and Fleming have noted that the region of Israel was not easy to unite, with centralization a tenuous proposition based on geographic and social causes. Becking, "How to Encounter an Historical Problem?," 23; Daniel Fleming, *The Legacy of Israel in Judah's Bible: History, Politics, and the Reinscribing of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 298.

After this point, the city had no gods that the prophet could inveigh against. Samaria would have a Sargon II approved governor rather than her own kings, and the people that Hosea charged with corrupt rulership would no longer be in power. At the very latest, his writings could reflect the period after the capture of the city but before the great exile of Israelites by Sargon II in 716 BCE. Putting the chapter this late, however, seems unlikely. The theme in this text is the loss of Israel's king, not the gaining of an Assyrian overlord.

These kingless years before the invasion of Sargon II would have presented a paradox to the people of Israel. The Samarian monarchy had been undergoing collapse for decades and was now finally gone. A massive portion of their territory was now controlled by Assyria, with the population that had once been there now exiled, killed, or living in poverty. From Hosea's descriptions, it seems alongside these larger issues there was—not surprisingly—social chaos, injustice, and cultic corruption.[291] Simply put, the nation was crumbling at the foundations.

All of these traumas—the loss of king, the loss of territory, the loss of justice—were classic signs of divine abandonment in the ancient world. As Cogan summarized, "Mesopotamian historiography, almost from its inception, had considered that the displeasure of a deity with the behavior of his subjects could cause natural disaster and/ or national destruction. Misfortunes suffered at the hands of an enemy were rationalized as one's abandonment by his own gods."[292] Sonik concurs, noting, "Abandonment by a patron god, whether metaphorical or material (as, for example, through the theft or destruction of the cult statue), was associated with

[291] The Book of Hosea describes the breakdown of societal trust in Hos 10:4, claiming that oaths were made and broken. Other examples of social chaos, such as roaming gangs and violence, can be seen in Hos 4:1-2; 6:8-9; 7:1; 12:8. Issues of injustice are brought up in Hos 10:4; 12:8-9. The prophet targets Israel's priests in Hos 4:6-9; 5:1; 6:9; and seems to deride them with the term כמר in Hos 10:5.

[292] Cogan, *Imperialism and Religion*, 11.

the withdrawal of divine favor and could signal dire consequences – misfortune, devastation, even utter destruction – for a city, much as abandonment by a personal god could lead to grave misfortune for an individual."[293] Urban and natural landscapes alike were impacted by the loss of the god. The land itself would, "weep and mourn" for the lost god.[294] Similar conceptions appear in biblical texts as well. Classically, the Ark Narrative recounts a moment of "divine abandonment," but Lamentations, Ezekiel, and many Psalms also dwell on the concept at length.[295] The Book of Hosea itself describes such an issue; in chapter 4:3 the land languishes and mourns due to the contention of God with his people.[296] In Hos 5:6 the text says that even if people searched for Yahweh with sacrifices in tow, they would not find him as, "he has withdrawn from them" (חָלַץ מֵהֶם). Ominously, descriptions of warfare follow this passage (Hos 5:8-9). In sum, the loss of divine presence in an ancient city was equivalent to its death sentence, with natural disaster, defeat, or plague sure to follow on its heels.

With the catastrophes facing the nation of Israel, it would only be logical for the worshippers of the god of Samaria to assume that their god abandoned them. While the priests and prophets may have attempted to explain the causation of the divine disfavor, there was a more pressing issue. Seemingly, all these catastrophes occurred while the god of Samaria

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[293] Sonik, ""Divine (Re-) Presentation," 2015, 150.

[294] Bahrani, *The Graven Image*, 178; Pongratz-Leisten, *Religion and Ideology in Assyria*, 88.

[295] For general overviews see: Joel S. Burnett, *Where Is God?: Divine Absence in the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010); F. W. Dobbs-Allsopp, *Weep, O Daughter of Zion: A Study of the City-Lament Genre in the Hebrew Bible* (Roma: Biblical Institute Press, 1993).

[296] The Hebrew of the verse is as follows: "עַל־כֵּן ׀ תֶּאֱבַל הָאָרֶץ וְאֻמְלַל כָּל־יוֹשֵׁב בָּהּ בְּחַיַּת הַשָּׂדֶה וּבְעוֹף הַשָּׁמָיִם וְגַם־דְּגֵי הַיָּם יֵאָסֵפוּ." Hosea here appears to be employing a double pun, as אבל can mean "to mourn" as well as "to dry." HALOT s.v. אבל II.; likewise, אמל can denote "to dry out," "to dwindle," or, as in Akkadian, "to be sad." HALOT s.v. אמל I. Moreover, it should be noted that the words sound exceedingly similar, creating a lovely word play between both meaning and sound.

remained *in his house*. The Calf of Samaria was safe and sound in his shrine while a cacophony of current events indicated that the divine presence had left. This awkward state of affairs continued on at least until Shalmaneser V took the city in 722 BCE, and, given the evidence of Sargon II's prism, it more likely dragged on for another two years. While Israel fell into disarray, Yahweh of Samaria, also known as the Calf of Samaria (Hos 8:6) was tangibly and physically at home, but metaphorically and theologically, he had absconded. In other words, the presencing marker of the god was there as seen by the cult statue, but the god was not. Its worshippers were therefore mourning the statue because "its glory has departed from it" (עַל־כְּבוֹדוֹ כִּי־גָלָה מִמֶּנּוּ) (Hos 10:5b).

The awkward paradox of having a divine statue but no divine presence would clearly demand resolution. Somehow, the priests of Samaria would have to alleviate the cognitive dissonance of their people when it came to their god, who was somehow both absent and present simultaneously. Moreover, they would need to decide what to do with the defunct cult statue. After all, what use was god's body when the god no longer in-dwelt it?[297]

It is in this fraught religious and social context that Hos 10:1-8 was composed. Like the people of their time, it appears that the writers of Hosea were grappling with the question of divine abandonment. For many Israelites, the godnapping of the calf statue of Samaria by the Neo-Assyrians would have been the final damning indication of Yahweh's departure. However, for the authors of Hosea the capture of the calf was the final proof of its ineffectiveness as a divine marker. It was a powerless object and always had been. The calf could not save itself, let alone the Israelites. It would not listen to their laments; it could only be dragged away. The Book

[297] Of course, the god was forged from precious materials such as gold and silver. It was therefore not entirely useless; it was just not the numinous representation of divine protection and favor it was supposed to be.

of Hosea's aniconism was thus set in a counter dialogue with the religious and political debates concerning divine presence and kings of the time, and it responded to these events in the creation of its polemics.

Derogatory Heifers, Calf Cults, and Cow Pens: Previous Understandings of Hosea 10:5

Having discussed the historical background of this text, we may move on to the text critical difficulties present within Hos 10:5a, the first and most challenging being how to understand the verse's initial word. In this section, Hosea pivots to a new topic, seemingly, the "heifers of Beth Aven." The MT reads, "לְעָגְלוֹת בֵּית אָוֶן יָגוּרוּ שֹׁכֵן שֹׁמְרֹון." At first gloss, these "heifers"(עגלות) were in a precarious situation. Most translators read this phrase as stating that the residents of Samaria "feared for them" (יגורו) though the cause of the fear is elided from the text.[298]

Scholarly wranglings with this passage have offered several identifications for these previously unknown "עגלות" or "heifers." Some connect the heifers to the golden calf cult of Bethel, arguing that Hosea's use of feminizing language is intended for mockery of Israel's beloved icons.[299] Others have questioned the likelihood of this interpretation, as the calves are nowhere else in the MT or Hosea described as female, even in derogatory contexts.[300] This has led to several suggestions for repointing the word, not as עֶגְלוֹת but as עֶגְלוּת, the abstract version of the noun. Thus, the inhabitants of Samaria would fear for the "calf-ishness"/ "calf cult" of Beth Aven, or potentially its "calf pens"—a reference to the cult site of the image— as DeGrado

[298]The author, along with many other scholars, reads Beth Aven as a play on Bethel.

[299] This view can be found in Dearman, *Hosea*, 224; Zvi, *Hosea*, 212.

[300] Curiously, Josephus and the Septuagint call Jeroboam's calves in 1 Kgs 12:28 heifers. Danelius, "The Sins of Jeroboam Ben-Nabat," 99.

has argued.[301] Similarly, Smith has tentatively offered up the explanation that this reference to the heifers or "עגלות" may recall masks or votives that were shaped like calves used in ancient Israelite ritual, but he does not provides a full translation of the text.[302] Unfortunately, all of these translations remain improbable. If the people of Samaria feared for the calf images of Bethel, why would the prophetic authors refer to them in the abstract and not as a concrete object, as they have in the rest of the book? As for the work of DeGrado and Smith, their physical interpretations have more appeal. Still, Smith's interpretive move is largely based on conjecture; nor does it smooth out the difficulties of the verse. DeGrado's explanation does not work on a temporal level, as the Israelites were apparently fearing for a godless and void cultic site. Hence, despite a renewed interest in this verse in recent years, finding a historically, contextually, and grammatically reasonable understanding of its phrasing has alluded scholarship.

The confusing and tenuous nature of these interpretations has led other scholars and interpreters to simply ignore this feminine plural quirk in the MT. This was the preferred method of ancient versions, notably, the Septuagint, the Peshitta, and the Targums.[303] All of these texts glossed the word in the masculine, thus harmonizing the verse with other passages in the Hebrew Bible and Hosea. This reflex is present within modern scholarship as well, including

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[301] For those who read "calfishness" see: Wilhelm Rudolph, *Hosea.*, KAT 13 (Guẗersloh: G.Mohn, 1966), 195–96; Jörg Jeremias, *Der Prophet Hosea*, ATD 24 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1983), 127; Macintosh, *Hosea*, 399–400; Chung, *The Sin of the Calf*, 195. DeGrado takes a slightly different tack on this by glossing the term as "calf pen" in light of Mishnaic Hebrew parallels. DeGrado, "Authoring Empire," 150–51.

[302] Smith, *Where the Gods Are*, 67–68. Smith, "Counting Calves at Bethel," 390.

[303]The Septuagint reads "μόσχῳ" meaning a singular male calf, as does the Peshitta. Eric Tully, *The Translation and Translator of the Peshitta of Hosea* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2015), 171. The Targums designate the calves as plural but maintain the masculine (עִגְלַיָּא). Only the Vulgate follows the MT with *vaccas*. Macintosh, *Hosea*, 399.

commentators such as Wolff and Mays.[304] However, the Vulgate does maintain the feminine plural alongside the MT, and the rule of *lectio difficilior* should make scholars pause before deleting not one but two letters from the MT.[305] In other words, it is easier to understand how the textual traditions could harmonize readings toward a lone male bovine, rather than explain how the calf was feminized and multiplied in only this one location within the Hebrew Bible.

The rest of MT Hos 10:5 compounds these difficulties with additional complications, making it impossible to tell what is happening to these "heifers"(עֶגְלוֹת) The first issue is a mismatching of number between the verb and its subject. The verb (יגורו) in the verse is plural. As the *lamed* proclitic on עגלות (heifers) seemingly marks the initial construct chain as the indirect object, the one option left for a subject in the phrase is the שכן שמרון, which has traditionally been translated as "residents of Samaria" despite the singular form of שכן. Scholars have had to explain the discrepancy between the numbers in the object and subject as a result of the "collective" nature of שכן (resident) which is not seen elsewhere with this noun in the Hebrew Bible but does occur with its synonym יושב (inhabitant).[306] In this way the "resident" of Samaria becomes the "residents of Samaria" (or community of Samaria) and the grammatical

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304 Some scholars explain the harmonization as scribal error. However, such an error is unlikely given that it is multiple letters long. For an example of a scholar who argues for scribal error see Wolff, *Hosea*, 171. Mays punts entirely, only noting the suggested reading of the BH. Mays, *Hosea*, 138.

305 This case regarding the primacy of the MT is also made by Mark Smith and by Jessie DeGrado. Smith, "Counting Calves at Bethel," 387; DeGrado, "Authoring Empire," 150.

306 See especially Gen 4:20; Exod 34:15; Isa 5:3 and Macintosh, *Hosea*, 399. In regards to the versions, the Septuagint pluralizes the inhabitants of Samaria (οἱ κατοικοῦντες Σαμάρειαν,) and understands "יגור " as "to wander" (παροικήσουσιν). The Peshitta's translation is similar. Tully, *The Translation and Translator of the Peshitta of Hosea*, 171–72. The Vulgate glosses "worship" (*coluerunt*) instead of "wander" but also pluralizes "inhabitants." As for the Targums, this appears to have been a verse where more license was taken. The גור is translated with "פלח " "to worship", and the subject is simply "they." The result of their worship of the calf is that a king and his army will come upon against them and deport them (מַלַּךְ בְּמַשִׁרְיָ תיה יִסַּק עֲלֵיהוֹן וְיַגלֵי יָתְהוֹן).

problem is thus seemingly fixed. The resulting translations generally read the "residents of Samaria" as "fearing for" whatever cow-like-objects belonged to Beth Aven.

However, after solving one grammatical issue in Hos 10:5, the interpreter is immediately confronted by another. Throughout the rest of the Hos 10:5-6a, the object of the verbs, which one would expect to be the feminine plural heifer things, suddenly reverts back to masculine singular, not just once, but eight times: "So that its people can mourn over it, and its foreign-priests upon it may rejoice, on account of its glory that has departed from it. Yet, even it will be brought to Assyria as an offering to the 'great king.'" (כִּי־אָבַל עָלָיו עַמּוֹ וּכְמָרָיו עָלָיו יָגִילוּ עַל־כְּבוֹדוֹ כִּי־גָלָה מִמֶּנּוּ: גַּם־אוֹתוֹ לְאַשּׁוּר יוּבָל מִנְחָה לְמֶלֶךְ יָרֵב) Ignoring for a moment the contradictory verbs and their alternating imperfect and perfect forms (which will be dealt with below), it is apparent that either Hosea has inexplicably switched back to writing of one calf instead of a female herd of them, that something has gone missing from the text, or that the reader has misunderstood the true subject of the passage.

There is one final issue in this verse. Whatever object "it" was, the item caused heightened and contradictory emotional responses amongst the peoples and religious specialists of Israel.[307] The people mourned it (אבל), while the foreign priests (כמר) rejoiced over it (גיל). The problematic word here is גיל, which most often means "to rejoice."[308] Hosea uses the word

[307] The word for priest in this passage, כמר, is known primarily from Aramaic where it is the standard word for the occupation. Scholars debate whether Hosea uses it here with derogatory connotation or not. See Dearman, *Hosea*, 259; Gruber, *Hosea*, 415. As the term is so rarely used in the Hebrew Bible and as Hosea shows special sensitivity to the linguistic resonance of words, it is likely that he used the term to "foreignize" the calf worship which he opposed.

[308] Most ancient versions, including the Septuagint, Vulgate, Targums, and Peshitta, gloss גיל in this context with the sense of joy or rejoicing. Tully, *The Translation and Translator of the Peshitta of Hosea*, 171; Macintosh, *Hosea*, 403. Modern translations vary from "show distress" (A. A. Macintosh, "A Consideration of the Problems Presented by Psalm II.11 and 12," *Journal of Theological Studies* 27 (1976): 3, 5.), to "tremble" (Dearman, *Hosea*, 259.), to "wail." (DeGrado, "Authoring Empire," 151.)

with exactly this resonance in Hos 9:1, parallel to the verb שמח, "to be glad." As the cultural and historical context of these verbs is entirely missing, scholars have been left confused as to why the people would grieve an object, while the priests would celebrate it.

The only clues as to context are the final comment of the verse and the continuing discussion of the object's fate in Hos 10:6. Both these sections seem to imply that "it" was going to be removed from Israel. Hosea 10:5 mentions the thing's glory (כְּבוֹדוֹ) would depart from it (גָּלָה מִמֶּנּוּ) a phrase that echoes language from the Ark Narrative in 1 Sam 4:21-22. In this narrative, it is twice iterated that "the glory had departed from Israel" (גָּלָה כָבוֹד מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל), referencing the Philistines' capture of the ark of the covenant. The shared language between Hosea and First Samuel gives the sense of national trauma and of loss, specifically regarding cultic objects.[309] This idea is then buttressed by the next verse, in which the prophet states: "it also will be brought to Assyria, an offering for the 'great' king…" (Hos 10:6a) Yet, it is not clear how this context of the item's impending removal applies to Hos 10:5 and its description of joy, mourning, and heifers.

Hence, it is no surprise that Hos 10:5 is generally suppressed in discussions of Israel's golden calves. The text is baffling in its current form, and it is disjunctive with every other passage on the calf cult in the Hebrew Bible with its description of heifers instead of calves. Moreover, the text contradicts itself, as between Hos 10:5a and 5:b there is considerable discrepancy between the identification, gender, and locations of the passages' subject. Added to this confusion is the use of the antonyms of "mourning" and "rejoicing" in Israel's response to

[309] Joel Burnett, "The Question of Divine Absence in Israelite and West Semitic Religion," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 67 (2005): 35. It should also be noted that I am not arguing for textual reliance of Hosea on 1 Sam 4 or vice versa. Instead, it should be noted that both texts are appealing to a common stock of phrases regarding divine absence.

the object in question. How these verbs fit into the context of the object's loss to Assyria is simply opaque. Overall, these difficulties call for some form of emendation and reconceptualization of the verse; as it currently stands, it is all but nonsensical.

A Proposed Solution to the Grammatical Quandaries of Hos 10:5a

As noted above, there are two main grammatical difficulties within Hos 10:5. First, the main verb (יגורו) in the first part of the verse is plural, yet, as there are no other options for a subject, it must be paired with a masculine singular noun (שכן שמרון). Secondly, the referent of the masculine singular objects in v.5 by default must be linked, in some way, to the feminine plural heifers. This construction has forced scholars to justify two contorted grammatical linkages in the span of one verse, both of which are trying to explain the use of a masculine singular nominal. The fact that two such difficulties appear within the same verse prompts a question: what if the two issues are related? What if, in fact, the current form of the MT has made the object of the verse (שכן שמרון) its subject, and its subject (עגלות בית און) its indirect object?

Here, I suggest that scholars have misunderstood the *lamed* which fronts this verse. If the *lamed* is not a preposition, Hos 10:5a suddenly has a plural nominal with which to pair with יגורו in עגלות בית און, and Hos 10:5b has its masculine singular referent in שכן שמרון.[310] In other words, the heifers of Beth Aven can יגורו and the שכן שמרון can be the masculine singular object for which the people of Israel mourn. This reading requires understanding the *lamed* as a proclitic asseverative and not as a preposition, and it results in the proposed translation: "Indeed, the

[310] Samaria or "שמרון" is unlikely to be the object as this noun is feminine within the Book of Hosea. See Hos 8:5; 10:7; 14:1.

calves of Beth Aven will drag away the Resident of Samaria."[311] This reading does require revocalizing יגורו so that it derives from the verb גרר instead גור. However, it otherwise preserves the consonantal text, harmonizes with Hos 10:6, and clarifies an unreadable strophe.

In the sections that follow I will explain my reading in detail, and furthermore, justify how this reading may have been lost during Hosea's long transmission history. This chapter will then reflect on the impact of the calf's godnapping on aniconism.

Looking for Gods in all the Wrong Places: The Resident of Samaria in Hosea 10:5

Traditionally, scholars have understood Hos 10:5-6 as a text on the calf cult of Israel based upon its mentioning of the "עגלות בית און." Yet, as discussed previously, it is impossible to equate these heifers with the divine figure in the rest of the verse based on grammatical concerns. The calf cult of Samaria is thus not alluded to with the phrase "the heifers of Beth Aven." Instead, the prophet uses another appellation for the god of the Northern Kingdom and of its calf cult: the Resident of Samaria.[312]

Since the discovery of the Kuntillet 'Ajrud inscriptions, there has been increasing interest in the ways in which the peoples of the ancient Near East designated their deities, especially regarding local manifestations of gods bound to geographic locations. In his discussion of "Yahweh of Hosts," Emerton demonstrated that the divine name could be put in construct with

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[311] The asseverative lamed is an older feature of Hebrew that most commonly occurs as a proclitic on nouns, as it occurs here in Hos 8:5. It is an emphatic, deictic form that fell out of usage and was mostly preserved by its reinterpretation as a preposition. Daniel Sivan and William Schniedewind, "Letting Your 'Yes' Be 'No' in Ancient Israel: A Study of the Asseverative לא and לאה in Hebrew," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 38 (1993): 220–21; John Huehnergard, "Asseverative *la and Hypothetical *lu/Law in Semitic," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 103 (1983): 590–91.

[312] Others, such as Andersen and Freedman, as well as Kuan and Hayes, have suggested that the god in the passage is the god residing in Samaria. However, they have still argued that the cows mentioned earlier in Hos 10:5 are divine. Andersen and Freedman, *Hosea*, 547–48; Hayes and Kuan, "The Final Years of Samaria (730-720 BC)," 175–77.

locations and objects based on the inscriptions from Kuntillet ʻAjrud.[313] Though he acknowledged that the discovery had implications for whether there were multiple Yahwehs or multiple "manifestations" of Yahweh, Emerton was hesitant to delve into the issue too far. McCarter, in contrast, expanded the discussion, arguing that "Yahweh of Samaria" and "Yahweh of Teman" fit divine name constructions common in the rest of the ancient Near East. These constructions put the divine name (DN) in construct with a geographic name (GN): Divine Name of Geographic Name. He also added the form "DN in GN" based on passages in 2 Sam 15:7 and Phoenician inscriptions.[314] McCarter's theory was that local Canaanite cults of other deities were subsumed into the nationalistic Yahwistic one, creating different flavors of the Yahweh cult around Israel. At times, these "semi-independent" Yahweh cults came to act, "almost as if they were distinct deities."[315]

More recently, Smith has consolidated the work of previous scholars on geographic divine appellations and then expanded upon them. In his topical work, *Where the Gods Are*, he lists several divine name constructions, with examples from various ancient Near Eastern languages, including Hebrew, Ugaritic, Arabic, Akkadian, and others. One of his listed constructions is "DN inhabitant of GN." This appellation uses verbs of dwelling such as ישב or שכן to designate the city or place in which the god was said to reside.[316] This terminology is used

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[313] J. A. Emerton, "New Light on Israelite Religion: The Implications of the Inscriptions from Kuntillet ʿAjrud," *Zeitschrift Für Die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 94 (1982): 9, 19.

[314] McCarter, "Aspects of the Religion of the Israelite Monarchy," 140–41.

[315] McCarter, 141–42.

[316] The examples from Hebrew use the verbs ישב "to inhabit" and שכן "to reside." The cognate Ugaritic form is *yṯb.* Aramaic attests both cognates for these verbs in *yšb* and *škn*. The Akkadian lexemes derive from *ašābu.* Smith, *Where the Gods Are*, 72–76.

in Ps 135:21, “Blessed is Yahweh from Zion, *the resident of Jerusalem*. (שֹׁכֵן יְרוּשָׁלָ֑ם) Hallelujah!” A parallel phrasing appears in Isa 8:18, “Behold, myself and my children whom Yahweh has given to me, for signs and for wonders in Israel, from before Yahweh of Hosts, the one *who resides on mount Zion*” (הַשֹּׁכֵן בְּהַר צִיּוֹן). Additional instances of this form appear in Joel 4:17, 21 [Heb] and Deut 33:16.[317] Examples appear outside of the Hebrew Bible as well. Notably, the community at Elephantine described “*yhw ʾlhʾ škn yb*”—"Yahu the god settled of Yeb.”[318]

Presumably, just as Yahweh in Judah was referred to as the “Resident of Jerusalem” by his worshippers, the god of the Northern Kingdom was called the “Resident of Samaria” by his.[319] This term “resident” connotes the indwelling of the god with the city, a clear reference to a temple or cultic shrine, the house of the deity. Within these houses, the “resident” of the city would live, as embodied or represented by cultic objects such as the ark of the covenant or cultic statues.[320] This would imply that the god of Samaria was not only worshiped in the region but maintained a permanent cultic shrine or temple there as well. The idea has already been suggested by several scholars based on the phrase “Calf of Samaria” in Hos 8:5 and “Yahweh of

[317] Finite verbal forms rather than participle can be found in Num 5:3; 35:34; Jos 22:19; Ezra 6:12; Ps 68:16.

[318] Smith, *Where the Gods Are*, 76.

[319] A similar argument appears in Andersen and Freedman, *Hosea*, 556.

[320] McCarter, “Aspects of the Religion of the Israelite Monarchy,” 139–40. Smith notes that this specific title may, “denote residence for deities.” Smith, *Where the Gods Are*, 77. For the Mesopotamian intertwining of city and god see Mieroop, *The Ancient Mesopotamian City*, 46–48.

Samaria" in the Kuntillet 'Ajrud inscriptions.[321] As with Jerusalem and many Assyrian and Babylonian sites, the capital had become the divine seat of power for the national god.[322]

The title of "resident of a GN," especially in regard to a nation's capital, also blends the political with the cultic. It highlights the meshing of a nation's governance with their god's dominion; the house of their god was adjacent to the house of their kings. Just as Yahweh possessed a special relationship with Jerusalem, as the city that, "manifested his might".[323] Samaria was the display of this deity's power, wealth, and providence.

This phrase, "the Resident of Samaria" is does not mean that Israel did not also maintain other key cultic sites, or that Yahweh could not have dwellings elsewhere. Indeed, Hosea mentions many other Israelite cultic locations, sites as Bethel, Gilgal, Shechem, Mizpah, and Gilead.[324] But under the Omrides and increasingly with Jeroboam II, Israel centralized around the capital with a complex administration and unprecedented wealth, including a massive royal palace.[325] The capture of the city by Shalmaneser V was notable, enough so that it was recorded

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[321] McCarter, "Aspects of the Religion of the Israelite Monarchy," 139; Finkelstein, "Jeroboam II's Temples," 252. Neo-Assyrian witnesses to Samaria indicate the presence of a shrine as well, a seen for example in the Nimrud Prism. See Cogan, *Imperialism and Religion*, 104–5; Becking, *The Fall of Samaria: An Historical and Archaeological Study*, 31; DeGrado, "Kidnapping the Gods," 48.

[322] For discussions of the Neo-Assyrian tendency to mesh capital and divine seat see: Zaia, "Divine Foundations: Religion and Assyrian Capital Cities," 119–21; Pongratz-Leisten, *Religion and Ideology in Assyria*, 205–6. Smith makes this argument with Ugarit and Jerusalem as well. Smith, *Where the Gods Are*, 107–8.

[323] Smith, *Where the Gods Are*, 30.

[324] Bethel is known as Beth Aven and Bethel in Hosea. The city appears in Hos 4:15; 5:8; 10:5, 14; 12:5. The Book of Hosea rails against Shechem in Hos 6:9, and Gilgal in Hos 4:15; 9:15; 12:12. Gilead appears in Hos 6:8; 12:12. Israel Finkelstein contends that Hosea's Gilead may actually be a reference to Penuel. Finkelstein, "Jeroboam II's Temples," 252.

[325] Israel Finkelstein, *The Forgotten Kingdom. The Archaeology and History of Northern Israel* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013), 78, 91–93; Nam, "Power Relations in the Samaria Ostraca," 161.

in the Babylonian Chronicle.[326] We also have inscriptions of Sargon II that claim, "I counted as spoil the gods who helped them" (*u ilū tiklišun šallat[iš] amnu*).[327] While this phrase is likely influenced by formula it likely reflects a real temple looting.[328] Furthermore, Finkelstein argues that in the early eighth century BCE several smaller shrines in the Northern Kingdom stopped functioning. He argues that this shift hints at a "cultic reorganization" around Samaria and royal authority.[329] Thus, it is no surprise and even expected that a strong, royal cult would develop alongside Israel's growing monarchy, one where the head deity was closely aligned with the nation's kings. As Thorkild Jacob says of deities in this period, the gods came, "to embody more and more the political interests of their cities and countries … Since the gods were in large measure identified with their main places of worship as local and national gods, they became, of course, unavoidably drawn into political conflicts as partisans."[330] As will be demonstrated below, the Resident of Samaria was no exception to this pattern.

In calling the god of Israel the "Resident of Samaria" in this passage, the authors of Hosea appear to be playing of the title's political and stabilizing connotations. Instead of referencing the god as "the Calf of Samaria" as they did in Hos 8:5, which emphasized the form of its cult statue, the composers chose a title that had resonances of the deity's enduring,

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[326] Kelle, "What's in a Name?," 663; Frahm, "Samaria, Hamath, and Assyria's Conquests in the Levant in the Late 720s BCE," 82.

[327] Nimrud Prism, col iv lines 32-33. Frahm, "Samaria, Hamath, and Assyria's Conquests in the Levant in the Late 720s BCE," 72.

[328] Even if Sargon II took credit for the actions of Shalmaneser V, an option very few Assyriologists today hold, Samaria's precious cultic materials would have been despoiled at some point.

[329] Finkelstein, *The Forgotten Kingdom. The Archaeology and History of Northern Israel*, 138–39.

[330]Thorkild Jacobsen, *The Treasures of Darkness: A History of Mesopotamian Religion* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1976), 231.

unmoving presence within the capital. The Resident of Samaria was the protective deity of the city, the god of her kings.[331] Samaria was the space in which this god's cult statue was housed, where monarchs and priests could access the god through ritual and prayer. Yet, in Hos 10:6, the Resident of Samaria's image is moved from the city and brought to the king of Assur. This title thus fronts the powerlessness of Israel's national deity *and* her governing structures. Just as their kings had fallen and disappeared, so now too would the figurehead of their state cult.[332] Israel was thus gutted of its monarchs and their divine right to rule. The nation had been nullified.

It seems that as memory of the kingdom of Israel faded, the term "Resident of Samaria" was lost as a known divine appellation. This loss could have occurred naturally, as generations of Israelites refugees forgot their cultic distinctions and intermarried with local populations. Later scribes who transmitted Hosea, many of whom were likely Judean, could have been ignorant of the title within a couple generations of Israel's fall. Conversely, the copiers of the MT could have actively suppressed knowledge of a competing Israelite god and sought other interpretations of the verse. In any case, the reading of Resident of Samaria or "שכן שמרון" as a divine referent was exchanged for a plausible understanding of the text as *residents* of Samaria. This reinterpretation, however, leaves no possible object for Hos 10:5b. The people and priests of Israel still had to be mourning something that would be taken to Assyria. The scribes of the MT subsequently had to find a divine object to cohere with the rest of the verse.

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[331] Finkelstein argues that Yahweh of Samaria in the Kuntillet 'Ajrud inscriptions was the protective deity of the capital. The Resident of Samaria may be a shrouded way of referencing this god. Finkelstein, *The Forgotten Kingdom. The Archaeology and History of Northern Israel*, 149.

[332] See Hos 3:4; 7:7; 10:3, 7; 13:10, 11.

Simultaneously, the *lamed* at the front of heifers was causing interpretative issues as the asseverative *lamed* fell out of use.[333] This combination of factors led to the all too tempting solution to understand לעגלות בית און as the indirect object of the verse, instead of its subject. This new reading forced the reworking of the text, necessitating the reading of יגורו as "to fear" instead of its original meaning which will be discussed below. In this way, the consonantal writing of the verse never changed, though the meaning of its verb did. Subsequently, the *lamed* on heifers was reinterpreted as a preposition to smooth out the anticipated understanding of the text. The Residents of Samaria would fear *for* the heifers of Beth Aven. As a result, Hosea's writing become garbled. The draw of עגלות or "heifers" for a divine referent was simply too powerful for the transmitters of the Hebrew Bible to resist, even with its feminine plural ending. In this way, the reading that possessed greater grammatical difficulties came to dominate over the one that was more theologically problematic. Curiously, the text critical history of Hos 10:5 may thus both uphold and problematize the rule of *lectio defilicor*. It is a reminder to biblical scholars that the more difficult reading can occur not only within grammar, but also within concepts of cult and knowledge.

Carting Away the Calf of Samaria: Hosea 10:5-6 and Why One Might Move a Deity

Having suggested that the real god in Hos 10:5 is the Resident of Samaria and not the heifers of Beth Aven, we must consider what exactly the heifers are doing in this passage. How could the cows of one city, Bethel, relate to the cultic figurine of another? What is the context of this verse, and how does Hosea's description of it play into his polemic?

[333] Sivan and Schniedewind, "Letting Your 'Yes' Be 'No' in Ancient Israel," 220–23.

First, it is immediately clear that the glossing of the verb יגורו cannot be the traditional "to fear." As skittish as the heifers of Bethel may have been, it seems unlikely they would have been in terror (גור) of the national deity of Samaria, which was more than likely a smallish golden calf figurine. Because יגורו is a weak verb, there are several possible interpretations for its root when the vocalization is removed, including יגר, נגר, גרר, and גרה. The most fitting option in this context is the Hebrew root גרר, which is defined in HALOT as "to drag away." Though not a commonly attested word in the Hebrew Bible, גרר has cognates in a variety of Semitic languages, all of which mean "to pull" or "to drag."[334]

The image then becomes the heifers of Beth Aven pulling away a cart with the Resident of Samaria inside.[335] Like the ark of the covenant in 1 Sam 6, the cult image of Israel would be drawn away in a oxen pulled cart. Also like the ark of the covenant, female cows would do the pulling.[336] A second example of this kind of movement appears in 2 Sam 6, when David and his entourage attempted to transport the ark of the covenant upon a cart into the city of Jerusalem. This transportation method leads to the unfortunate Uzzah event, but the passage still demonstrates an impulse towards moving sacred objects with carts within the ancient Levant. This same means of transportation appears in the Zukru festival of Emar. Though the text does

[334] HALOT s.v. גרר. Cognates in Arabic, Syriac, and several other Aramaic dialects mean "to drag" or "to pull." DJPA s.v. גרר. The use of this lexeme is most likely playing off the word "to wander" (גור) and the verb גיל (to fear, or to exclaim) in the next line.

[335] Another possibility could be the word "carts" (עֶגְלָה) in the plural. However, heifers seem to be a smoother and more fitting understanding of the consonants and context.

[336] In 1 Sam 6 more mature female cows (פָּרוֹת) are used to pull the cart.

not make it apparent if the gods were being moved with oxen, donkeys, or horses, the ritual several times refers to a wagon that was moving the gods outside of the city.[337]

In context, the cart imagery creates a compounding irony. If the Resident of Samaria was also the Calf of Samaria of Hos 8:5, which seems likely as the titles hint at a national god, the Resident of Samaria's likeness was that of a calf. The fact that female calves were used to pull the god away thus highlights the deity's immobility as a mere object. The Calf of Samaria, instead of pulling a wagon, would be himself carted into exile away by heifers. The authors of Hosea therefore craft a not-so-subtle polemic against the cult statue. The calf-god of Israel lacked any form of agency. The Resident of Samaria was a calf carted around by cows, unable to move himself and motionless. Thus, like idol parodies elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, the authors of Hosea mock the calf statue as being inert and lifeless (Jer 10:5; Ps 105:7; Hab 2:19).

This renewed translation of the verse immediately provokes questions of context. First of all, why would the god be being taken from his sanctuary? What would cause the people of Israel to remove their god from his shrine and take him elsewhere during such a fraught and fractured political time? And furthermore, why would the calves of *Beth Aven* pull away the god of Samaria? Certainly, Samaria had her own cows for pulling carts. What drove Hosea to reference the heifers of Bethel?

So far as the author can surmise, there are two plausible explanations for why the Resident or Calf of Samaria would need to be moved away from its home city given ancient parallels. The first option would be that the heifers of Bethel were transporting the god to prevent

[337] Fleming, "David and the Ark," 86; Daniel Fleming, "Seeing and Socializing with Dagan at Emar's Zukru Festival," in *The Materiality of Divine Agency*, ed. Beate Pongratz-Leisten and Karen Sonik, SANER 8 (Boston/Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015), 201–3.

his capture by the Assyrians. Rather than keeping the image in a capital soon to be besieged and potentially captured, the people sequestered and hid the priceless piece further south in Bethel. There are numerous examples of kings and priests fleeing with their gods during the Neo-Assyrian era, though they were rarely successful in the long run.[338] It could be that the people of Israel mourned the movement of their god from the capital, though they were hopeful it could one day be restored.

A few problems hamper this interpretation. If גיל is taken as "rejoicing" the interpretation falls apart. Priests would not be pleased, let alone gleeful, to move the image in impending invasion (Hos 10:5). Moreover, Bethel, though further south than Samaria, would have made a dubious safe haven for any Israelite in this time period, not to mention a valuable national symbol. On the level of practicality, keeping the image in a well-fortified area, such as the Samaria, would have greater appeal and would be better strategy.[339] On the level of religion, removing the god from the city may well have been perceived as removing Samaria's last remaining patron and protector.[340] In sum, while it is possible that this passage refers to the sequestering of the deity, there are better options.

A second interpretation would be that this verse refers to the god's being taken away to Assyria, which certainly fits the context.[341] The next verse says, "it also will be brought to

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[338] Cogan, *Imperialism and Religion*, 30–33.

[339] Samaria seems to have been well fortified. It was built on a large hill, had earthworks that dominated the tel, and may have had a moat on its southern side. Israel Finkelstein, "Observations on the Layout of Iron Age Samaria," *Tel Aviv* 38 (2011): 196–98, 206.

[340] Holloway, *Aššur Is King! Aššur Is King!*, 194–96; Cogan, *Imperialism and Religion*, 33.

[341]Other scholars have argued that Hosea 10:1-7 responds to Samaria's despoilation under Sargon II. See: DeGrado, "Authoring Empire," 149–58; Martti Nissinen, "The Book of Hosea and the Last Days of the Northern Kingdom," ed. Shuichi Hasegawa, Christoph Levin, and Karen Radner, BZAW 511 (Boston/Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019), 377–78.

Assyria, an offering to the great king…" (Hos 10:6a). This "also" (גם), could be a subtle reference to the last king of Israel, who likely was captured and brought there as a "war criminal."[342] Thus, Israel's king and god would both end up in the same place: Assyria. The nuancing of the verb גרר in Aramaic makes the imagery even starker, as the lexeme is sometimes used to describe the "dragging" of bodies along the ground.[343] This glossing of the verb then parallels other texts describing the capture of cultic objects. In the Moabite Stele despoiled cultic objects are said to be dragged into the presence of the conqueror's gods.[344] The use of such phrasing heightens the powerlessness of the conquered people and their deities before the victors. The Calf of Samaria would be treated as freight and spoil. It would become a mere trophy in the land of Israel's enemies. It is this sense, that of plundering the calf-statue of Israel, which best contextualizes and explains the verse in a historical framework.

Having established that the Calf of Samaria was being forcefully deported and treated as spoil, the question now becomes why the heifers of Beth Aven were dragging it away in particular. There are also several ways to understand the use of Bethel's livestock in this scenario. The first and potentially most appealing option would be to argue that the Resident of

[342] Stephen Zawadzki, "Hostages in Assyrian Royal Inscriptions," in *Immigration and Emigration within the Ancient Near East, Festschrift E. Lipinski*, ed. Karel van Lerberghe and Antoon Schoors (Leuven: Peeters, 1995), 457.

[343] JDPA s.v. "גרר"

[344]See the Moabite stele KAI 181:12,18. Neo-Assyrian reliefs have images of soldiers carrying despoiled gods out of captured cities. However, it is hard to imagine they carried these gods in such a way the total distance from the conquered city to Assyrian territory. Moreover, gods on wagons could be how the Israelites imagined cult despoilation (i.e., the Philistine capture of the ark in 1 Sam 6). For images of the Neo-Assyrian capture of gods under Tiglath-Pileser III and Sennacherib see DeGrado, "Kidnapping the Gods," 80.

Samaria was actually housed in Bethel.[345] Cows from the town where the Calf of Samaria "lived" would be used to bring it to its captors. While this argument may have some appeal based on the evidence from 1 Kgs 12, the titles used in the Book of Hosea for this god make this reading less plausible.[346]

There is a second option, however. When Assyrian kings recounted the plunder they took from their enemies, they included comments about the people, goods, and livestock they procured. Tiglath-Pileser III, for example, upon conquering Israel when it was under Pekah, commented that he had "carried off (*ašlula*) their livestock".[347] After taking a city in Damascus, he states, "I carried off (*ašlula*) 800 people, with their possessions, their oxen, (and) their sheep and goats."[348] Likely, when either Shalmaneser V or Sargon II took the Resident of Samaria from his shrine, they were also in the process of rustling the cattle of the whole region. As the city of Samaria was not burned to the ground and would subsequently become the center of Assyrian operations in the region, it would likely be the staging point for the deportation of people and calves, whether they be metallic or organic.[349] It is thus not difficult to see how the

[345] This is a popular of the location of Israel's calf cult. See Wolff, *Hosea*; Hayes and Kuan, "The Final Years of Samaria (730-720 BC)," 167; Na'aman, "The Book of Hosea as a Source for the Last Days of the Kingdom of Israel," 244.

[346] It is interesting to note that "the high places of Samaria" are also condemned in the words of the old prophet of 1 Kgs 13:32, the strange story which follows on the heels of the calves' creation.

[347] RINAP 1:44,17.

[348] RINAP 1:20,14b. Translation from Holloway, *Aššur Is King! Aššur Is King!*, 106.

[349] Shawn Zelig Aster, "Sargon in Samaria—Unusual Formulations in the Royal Inscriptions and Their Value for Historical Reconstruction," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 139 (2019): 601.

heifers of Bethel, the original cult site of the calves, could have ended up pulling a cart out of Samaria.[350] Israel's god had been taken captive. In other words, he had been "god-napped"

The final translation of Hos 10:5a would thus be, "Indeed, the heifers of Beth Aven will drag away the Resident of Samaria." For Israelites who worshipped the Calf of Samaria, this moment would be devastating confirmation that their god had abandoned them. The loss of their cult statue to the Assyrians would prove that their deity was angry. Lamentations and self-reflection would follow. What had they done wrong to deserve their god's wrath? What would cause the Resident of Samaria to leave his city? Why had the divine presence (כבוד) left the statue, allowing it to be taken? (Hos 10:5)?

For the authors of Hosea, however, the deportation of the cult statue was proof of its impotence and counterfeit status. The Calf of Samaria could not resist Assyria. It could not save its people. Indeed, it could not even move. Instead, it would be dragged around, and finally: "It also to Assyria will be brought, an offering (מנחה) to the 'great king.' He will take-captive the disgraceful-thing of Ephraim, and Israel will be ashamed of its plans" (גַּם־אוֹתוֹ לְאַשּׁוּר יוּבָל מִנְחָה לְמֶלֶךְ יָרֵב בָּשְׁנָה אֶפְרַיִם יִקָּח וְיֵבוֹשׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵעֲצָתוֹ) (Hos 10:6).[351] Again, the writers connect the calf to its Israelite origins. It was an object and ideal created by Ephraim and Israel. The cultic object had never been approved by Yahweh; it was of local human manufacture and therefore false. Thus, this statue that the Israelites had made to house a divine presence (כבוד) never possessed it to

[350]Neo-Assyrian wall reliefs depict oxen pulling chariots of booty away from conquered cities. Oded Borowski, *Every Living Thing: Daily Use of Animals in Ancient Israel* (Walnut Creek, Calif: AltaMira, 1998), 122.

[351] According to the pointing in the MT, this strophe should be read, "Ephraim will take shame" (בָּשְׁנָה אֶפְרַיִם יִקָּח). This awkward phrase is mostly glossed over in commentaries. Yet, a more tempting and smoother reading can be produced by putting בָּשְׁנָה in construct with Ephraim. The verb לקח is also used in the ark narrative to describe the Philistine's possession of the ark, and a similar sense is likely meant here (1 Sam 5:1). The calf being shameful may be implied in Hos 9:10.

begin with. It represented Israel's wealth and power, rather than Yahweh's. As Hos 4:7 states, "In accordance with their greatness they have sinned against me [Yahweh]. I wil therefore exchange their glory (כבוד) for vanity (קלון)." Here, there are many themes shared with Hos 10:1-6, not the least of which is the idea that Israel's pride was being turned into her shame.

As DeGrado has laid out, Hos 10:5-6 responds to the issue of "godnapping" from the perspective of godnapped countries. This viewpoint is rarely preserved from the ancient world, though there is a great deal of evidence for how the Assyrians justified their divine despoliations.[352] Here, a question that DeGrado asks while reflecting on the godnapping descripted in Is 10 becomes relevant to Hos 10. In sum; "Whereas the conquest of other cities… did not necessarily impinge on Yahweh's agency, the focus on Samaria raises a pressing theological issue: what did it mean for representations of Yahweh to be captured, and what might it mean if the same fate befell Judah?"[353] According to DeGrado, the writer of first Isaiah responded to Assyrian propaganda and threat to cult objects through mimesis, echoing Assyrian statements while also inverting them. The biblical text thus notes Assyria's power but subordinates it to Yahweh. Like Assyrian propaganda, it highlights the passive futility of Syrian and Levantine cultic objects. However, unlike Assyrian propaganda, "Isa 10:11 contains an implicit critique of iconism that calls into question the viability of images as markers of divine presence."[354] As DeGrado has demonstrated, one of the reactions to Assyria's despoilation of

[352] The Assyrians claimed that the gods of the nations they conquered wanted to leave, as the gods were angry with their people. At times, however, the Assyrian kings seemed to rise above the gods of the lands they conquered. Such propaganda was inherently problematic for vanquished peoples and Assyrians alike, provoking the question of who had preeminence, Assyrian kings, or local gods? DeGrado, "Kidnapping the Gods," 65.

[353] DeGrado, 58.

[354] DeGrado, 77.

divine images was to call into question the very divinity and power of such images. Isaiah's aniconism thus becomes socially situated, a dramatic response to the icon politics of his day and age.

Arguably, Hos 10:5-6 follows a trajectory similar to Isa 10. The passage makes Israel's cult statue entirely passive and nonresponsive. Heifers had to pull it away (Hos 10:5). It would be brought "as an offering" to the king of Assyria, an image which plays off the Resident of Samaria's calf image (Hos 10:6) and closely follows Neo-Assyrian phrasing for godnapping.[355] Thus, like Isaiah, the Book of Hosea's stance against cult images is framed in light of it current social and historical moment. The god image that Israel had put her trust in was lifeless. It could not resist Assyria, a force Yahweh had authorized (Hos 11:5), and furthermore, it could not respond to its worshippers, despite their cries for its attention. This local, iconic manifestation of the Yahweh cult was false.

The Lamenting of Israel's People and Foreign Priests: The Futility of Images in Hosea 10:5

The second part of Hos 10:5 recounts how the Israelites worshippers of the calf of Samaria responded to their impeding divine abandonment. Though they had lamented (אבל), crying for their absent god to return to his city and his home (the prescribed activities to lure a god back to his residence) he had remained absent. No matter their sighs and tears regarding the cult statue, its glory (כבוד) had departed. As in other parts of the Hebrew Bible, כבוד here seems to denote

[355] The word מנחה is most frequently a reference to grain offerings in the Hebrew Bible. But, it can also be used of offerings of meat (Gen 4:4, 1 Sam 2:17, 29), and as a word denoting "tribute" (Judg 3:17; 2Kg 17:3-4). By using this word, Hosea can pun on the idea of the calf as a meat offering and as a present to the Assyrian king. Moreover, the use of the phrase גַּם־אוֹתוֹ לְאַשּׁוּר יוּבָל parallels the Akkadian "*ana mat Assur wabalu*" which was used by the Neo-Assyrians as a formula for godnapping. Cogan, *Imperialism and Religion*, 23.

divine presence and majesty.[356] Arguably, cult statues in the ancient world were to embody the כבוד of their deities. They were the physical manifestation and presencing of the god. Yet, Samaria's calf was hollow, godless, and lifeless. No amount of praying or lamenting by the nation could change the grim reality that their god was gone.

This verse prompts the question of what the כמר or "foreign priests" are doing in Hos 10:5. If גיל in Hos 10:5 means "rejoicing," as it does elsewhere in the book, the priests' response to the Calf of Samaria's banishment is nonsensical. No priest would celebrate the removal of their god to a foreign country. A parallel meaning to the people's mourning (אבל) is anticipated. According to MacIntosh, rabbinic commentators struggled with these contradicting verbs as well. To solve this problem, they read גיל as an *'adḍād*, a word that can mean both its meaning and its antonym. They argued for this based on parallels with the root *tet -resh-bet* in Arabic, which refers to the physical agitation of both those who are overjoyed and despairing. MacIntosh then extended their reading by pairing it with the work of J.D. Michaelis, who contended that the word גיל in Hebrew represents the merging of two different roots, *a pe yod* יגל which meant "to fear," and an ayin yod verb, which meant "to rejoice." This reading further harmonizes with the use of גיל in Ps 2:11, where it is used in proximity to nouns and verbs of reverential fear and trembling.[357]

Concluding Remarks

In sum, Hosea's writings echo the moment the Calf of Samaria was taken from its capital, dragged away by the very types of creatures it resembled. Though its people had mourned it,

[356]Burnett, "The Question of Divine Absence in Israelite and West Semitic Religion," 225.

[357] Macintosh, "A Consideration of the Problems Presented by Psalm II.11 and 12," 3–4, 7–8.

calling the god to his city, they had been abandoned. The work and pleadings of priests, likewise, had no effect on this local Yahweh manifestation. The divine abandonment the people feared was now physically realized. Israel had become a people without a king and without a god. The image they had trusted would be taken to Assyria, a piece of spoil in the empire's ever-growing collection.

According to the prophetic text of Hosea, no number or type of appeal could have ever restored divine protection to Samaria because the calf-icon had never been a valid representation of Yahweh. It was an Ephraimite object, not a god (Hos 8:6). Thus, though the Israelites protested that they knew Yahweh (Hos 8:2), they had never actually feared him (Hos 10:3) They had committed cultic hubris in creating and worshipping it against the will of the deity. The calf's despoiling was thus not a sign of divine abandonment. It was the cause of it.

In such a context of despoiled images the reforms of Hezekiah and Isaiah come into sharper relief. If the Yahwistic images of Israel could not save her, would any divine images save Judah? And moreover, were such images to be understood as the root of divine wrath, rather than their solution? As northern refugees flooded south, bringing with them the writings of Hosea, it is likely that their experiences impacted many of the policies Hezekiah enacted. Iconism had proved devastating, and a different form of religious tradition would arise in sharp reaction during the protracted era of crisis Neo-Assyria fomented.

CHAPTER THREE: BUTCHERING MEN TO KISS CALVES

THE INTERMINGLING OF KINGSHIP, VIOLENCE, AND RITUAL IN HOSEA 13:2

וְעַתָּה֙ יוֹסִ֣פוּ לַחֲטֹ֔א וַיַּעֲשׂ֥וּ לָהֶ֛ם מַסֵּכָ֖ה מִכַּסְפָּ֑ם כִּתְבוּנָ֣ם עֲצַבִּ֔ים מַעֲשֵׂ֥ה חָרָשִׁ֖ים כֻּלֹּ֑ה
לָהֶם֙ הֵ֣ם אֹמְרִ֔ים זֹבְחֵ֥י אָדָ֖ם עֲגָלִ֥ים יִשָּׁקוּֽן׃

And now they continue to sin, and they make for themselves cast-metal statues from their silver; according to their understanding (they make) idols, all of it the work of craftsman. They say to themselves, 'those who butcher men will kiss calves.'
Hosea 13:2

The Book of Hosea explicitly turns to the calf cult one last time in Hos 13:2. As with Hos 8:5-6, this verse highlights the fabricated, illegitimate nature of the idol, noting again its creation by craftsmen (חָרָשִׁים), its sourcing from precious metal, and its forging according to human understanding (כִּתְבוּנָם).[358] The result of this sin in both texts is the snuffing out of Israel's people (Hos 8:7; 13:3). Though cultic images in the ancient world were made to anchor divine favor and blessing, the prophet saw Israel's idolatry as achieving the exact opposite; and he reinforces this point once again.

Yet, Hos 13:2 does more than repeat arguments from earlier in the book. This verse brings up new material and critiques that both mesh with and depart from other considerations of the calf cult in Hosea. At first glance, this text does not seem to link the problems of kingship and cult statues as Hos 8:4-6 and Hos 10:1-8 do. It focuses instead on a vague "they" who make an image for themselves (וַיַּעֲשׂוּ לָהֶם מַסֵּכָה) (Hos 13:2aβ), and talk amongst themselves saying,

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[358] As the word תְּבוּנָה is otherwise unattested in the Hebrew Bible, its interpretation has caused some discussion. The ancient sources by and large translate this word in accordance with the lexeme תבנית or "blueprint." This reading requires some emendation to the next, including changing the *waw* into a *yod* and then metathesizing the *nun* and the new *yod*. Scholars such as Irvine have found this reading appealing as this nominal form is rare, if not absent, from biblical Hebrew. See: Stuart A. Irvine, "Idols כתבונם : A Note on Hose 13:2a," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 133 (2014): 509–17. However, counter examples of the form have been proposed by Rendsburg, who argues that the noun as it stands should be kept, with the understanding that it means, "skill" or "wisdom." Gary Rendsburg, "כִּתְבוּנָם (Hosea 13:2)—Stet," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 139 (2019): 195–201.The author is inclined to agree with Rendsburg on text critical grounds.

"זֹבְחֵי אָדָם עֲגָלִים יִשָּׁקוּן" (Hos 13:2bβ).[359] While the ancient versions and modern scholarship generally agree that the last two words reference the kissing of calf statues, the interpretation of "זֹבְחֵי אָדָם" has led to a myriad of solutions and proposed corrections for the verse.[360]

In order to better interpret Hos 13:2, this chapter will explore the cultural significance of ritual kissing in the Neo-Assyrian empire. With this background, it will be demonstrated that this kind of intimacy with a god was reserved for kings and priests. Likely, a similar understanding of the ritual existed in ancient Israel, with the ability to approach the physical representation of the deity set aside for those of the highest royal and temple ranks. The right to "kiss calves" in Hos 13:2 can thus be understood as a metonym for divine authorization, and those who, "זבחי אדם" or "kiss calves" could achieve it. However, along with other interpreters, I am wary of understanding "זבחי אדם" as a reference to human sacrifice in the cultic sense. Instead, it will be argued that these individuals were "butchers of men," a reference to the chaos of the time, when the right to high positions was likely earned through military and violent means. In this way, the Book of Hosea again crafts an irony around the calf statues, as an image of a beast—one often used for sacrifice—was kissed, and men were slaughtered for the right to do so. Thus, even at the end of Israel's independence, ritual and rule continued to move hand in hand, with political authority still bound to Israel's cult statues and cultic traditions.

Hosea 13:2b: A Summary of the Issues

[359] The phrase for "they talk amongst themselves" is from the Hebrew "לָהֶם֙ הֵ֣ם אֹמְרִ֔ים". This phrasing is somewhat peculiar, and scholars debate its reliability. See below for further discussion.

[360] So far as the author is aware, no one has suggested that the Israelites were kissing actual farm animals. The debates around this passage surround instead the kissing of cult statues and their representational function.

Before delving into the main argument of this chapter, descriptions of the text critical issues in Hos13:2b and previous scholarship discussing them is in order. The whole strophe reads as follows, "לָהֶם֙ הֵ֣ם אֹמְרִ֔ים זֹבְחֵ֖י אָדָ֑ם עֲגָלִ֖ים יִשָּׁקֽוּן" or "to themselves they are saying, 'those who butcher men will kiss calves'" and the following discussion will consider each of its three clauses in turn. As mentioned above, scholars have struggled with how to understand this part of the verse both syntactically and contextually, and questions emerge for each of its three phrases.

The first syntactical issue is how to understand the phrase "לָהֶם֙ הֵ֣ם אֹמְרִ֔ים", "to themselves they are saying." Understandings of the text vary, and translations include "They say to them,"[361] a reading which closely follows the Septuagint (αὐτοῖς· αὐτοὶ λέγουσιν), "They say to themselves,"[362] and "Of them [referencing the idols] they say."[363] Others have suggested the phrase is the result of dittography and the "לָהֶם" (to them) should be deleted.[364] Still others have argued לָהֶם (to them) is in the wrong location and that it belongs behind אֹמְרִ֔ים (those who are saying). This view also suggests changing the *yod* in זֹבְחֵ֖י to a *waw*, producing the a final reading of, "They say, 'To them sacrifice!'"[365]

[361] Gruber, *Hosea*, 530–32.

[362] Wolff, *Hosea*, 219. The Vulgate translates, "To these they themselves say" (*his ipsi dicunt*). The Targums maintain the pronouns but change the verb to טעי, meaning to lead astray, creating the concept instead that, "they lead themselves astray" (לְהוֹן אִנּוּן מַטעַן).

[363] Macintosh, *Hosea*, 523. A similar reading can be found in Freedman's and Andersen's translation, which reads, "Those who sacrifice people speak to them." Here, "them" references the idols of Hos 13:2a. However, as the last reference to these images is a masculine singular (מַעֲשֵׂ֥ה חָרָשִׁ֖ים כֻּלָּ֑הּ), this reading is less likely. Andersen and Freedman, *Hosea*, 632.

[364] Davies, *Hosea*, 287.

[365] Mays, *Hosea*, 171.

However, despite its irregularity, the phrase, "לָהֶם֙ הֵ֣ם אֹמְרִ֔ים" can be understood perfectly well in context without text critical emendation, making no text critical changes necessary. The question thus becomes whether the preposition להם should be understood reflexively, reflecting discourse within a group about itself, hence the translation, "they say to themselves,"[366] or as a simple indirect direct object creating two groups meaning, "they say to them" or potentially, "they say with respect to them."[367] As usual, Hosea's vague context provides little assistance in answering this question of subject, making any of these readings equally possible given available data. Therefore, for the sake of simplicity, I will read this verse as referencing the discussions within one group about itself, translating it as, "they say to themselves," rather than suggesting that the authors have two distinct groups in mind that are unspecified.

The next issue is how to understand the phrase "זֹבְחֵ֖י אָדָ֑ם" that appears within the direct speech. One option is to take this construct phrase as "those who sacrifice men," or, less-woodenly, "sacrificers of men," with אדם specifying what is sacrificed.[368] While scholars such as Wolff see this as a reference to human sacrifice, most resist this reading as out of touch with the biblical tradition.[369] Generally, human sacrifice in the Hebrew Bible references child sacrifice,

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[366] This use of the *lamed* would fall into a subsection of what Joüon calls the *lamed* of the *dativus commodi,* or a dative expressing to whom or for whom an action is done. By using a verb and pronoun suffixed to the *lamed* with the same referent, "a reflexive nuance" is created. This construction gives a meaning, "which may roughly be equivalent to some reflexive verbal nuance." Similar uses are cited in Joüon §133d. A comparable use of the verb appears earlier in Hos 13:2 with the phrase, "וַיַּעֲשׂוּ לָהֶם֙ מַסֵּכָ֔ה", meaning "they make a cast metal image for themselves" where the suffixed pronoun must be understood reflexively to make sense of the verse.

[367] Waltke and O'Conner term this usage of the *lamed* as one of "specification." *IBHS* §11.2.10d, examples 18 and 19.

[368] This would be similar to what Waltke and O'Connor refer to as a "genitive of species." *IBHS* § 9.5.3g, examples 44 and 45.

[369] Wolff—almost alone among scholars—believes Hosea here references child sacrifice. Wolff, *Hosea*, 225.

not the killing of adults as אדם would seem to indicate.[370] The dissatisfaction with this reading has led scholars and translators to pursue other meanings of the phrase. Some, as mentioned previously, emend זבחי (plural participle meaning "those who sacrifice") to זבחו (an imperative from the verb to sacrifice) and take אדם (man) as a vocative, leading to a reading of "Sacrifice! O men!" This reading first appears with Vulgate and has some standing.[371] However, this emendation fails to harmonize with the next verb, which is not an imperative but a masculine plural imperfect, ישקון. This difficulty has led to a related reading, of "Sacrifice! Men will kiss calves."[372] Still, problems remain. Though the command to sacrifice seems clear at first glance, this command's connection to men kissing calves is obscure to the point of incomprehensibility.

Another tact scholars have attempted is to rework the meaning of the construct phrase. Thus, instead of conveying what is sacrificed, זבחי אדם specifies a *type* of man: one among men who sacrifices. Gesenius takes this line of reasoning, following in the footsteps of medieval Jewish scholar David Kimchi. He draws upon a similar phrase in Isa 29:19, which references the "אֶבְיוֹנֵי אָדָם" or the "poorest among men."[373] While this reading has initial appeal, אֶבְיוֹנֵי אָדָם is not exactly parallel to זֹבְחֵי אָדָם. The first phrase uses an abstract noun derived from a stative verb and creates a superlative sense; the second uses an active particle and lacking a superlative meaning.

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[370] Saul M. Olyan, *Violent Rituals of the Hebrew Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 27.

[371] The Latin is as follows: *immolate homines*. See Macintosh, *Hosea*, 523. The Septuagint reads a plural imperative as well (*Θύσατε*) but takes "men" as an accusative. The verse then finishes with a reasoning that cannot be found in any other tradition, mainly, that the nation has run out of calves. The Greek is as follows, "*Θύσατε ἀνθρώπους, μόσχοι γὰρ ἐκλελοίπασιν*." The dearth of livestock thus led to human sacrifice in the Septuagint's purview. Glenny, *Hosea: A Commentary Based on Hosea in Codex Vaticanus*, 171.

[372] This is by far the most popular reading. See: Mays, *Hosea*, 171; Jeremias, *Der Prophet Hosea*, 159, 162; Davies, *Hosea*, 287; Dearman, *Hosea*, 316.

[373] GKC § 128l; 132c. See also: Macintosh, *Hosea*, 522–23; Gruber, *Hosea*, 530–31.

Given the tentative nature of this reading, pause must be given, especially as this interpretation of "those who sacrifice" does not help elucidate what it means to "kiss a calf" as will be demonstrated below. In sum, scholarship has been unable to find a suitable understanding of this phrase in context, a trend that continues with the next phrase in the verse.

Generally, modern scholars do not debate the last two words of this text, עגלים ישקון, "they will kiss calves." Both the MT witnesses and the Vulgate agree on this sense of the verse, making it an appealing reading. However, it appears that the ancient versions were less comfortable with this idea, as most of them rewrite the verse to delete references to the ancient Israelites kissing idols.[374]

Yet, despite the consensus on this reading of Hos 13:2 in the modern era, there is little consensus on *how* to interpretate the polemic of these words. Many scholars simply pass over the phrase, stating that the cultic practice of kissing is "obscure" or "not well understood."[375] Others cite the practice of kissing Ba'al in 1 Kgs 19:29 as parallel to this passage, but then do little more than note that Hosea seems to disapprove of the practice, which seemingly denoted giving loyalty to a god.[376] Some scholars push this idea further and claim that the text mocks the idea of

[374] The Vulgate does not have the exact word "kiss" but instead *adoro,* a word with many nuances, one of which is make homage or obeisance to. As will be discussed below, ritual kissing could involve kneeling to kiss the ground before a statue, and it this way, the Vulgate seems to be reading נשק in Hos 13:2. *OLD,* s.v. "adōrō." As for other traditions, the Septuagint has, "Sacrifice, O men! For the [supply] of calves has failed" (ὑσατε ἀνθρώπους, μόσχοι γὰρ ἐκλελοίπασιν). The Targums put the whole phrases as, " לְהוֹן אִנּוּן מַטעַן נְבִיֵּי שִׁקְרָא דָּבְחִין לְעוֹבָד יְדֵי אֲנָשָׁא תּוֹרַיָּא לְעֻגלַיָּא :נָכְסִין", "they lead themselves astray, prophets of the lie sacrifice to the work of men's hands, bulls are slaughtered for calves." See Macintosh, *Hosea*, 523; Glenny, *Hosea: A Commentary Based on Hosea in Codex Vaticanus*, 171.

[375] Dearman calls it "obscure." Dearman, *Hosea*, 320. Freedman and Andersen claim, "Ritual kissing is not well attested in the ancient world." Andersen and Freedman, *Hosea*, 632.

[376] Davies, *Hosea*, 287. Similar in Gruber, *Hosea*, 531–32.

kissing calves as an "absurdity."[377] Still others, following the work of Rabbinic commentators such as Ibn Ezra, argue that the line is meant to provoke ethical irony, as either men or bulls were killed in sacrifices, while calf images were being kissed.[378] Outside of this interpretation, however, scholars rarely attempt to connect the allusion to sacrifice in this passage to the description of kissing calves.

Overall, scholarship seems to be at a loss with what to do with Hos 13:2b. There is a bland consensus that the prophet opposed the cultic practices mentioned in this text, but the passage has garnered little more interest or comment from specialists. There is also a strong hint of Protestant bias in some treatments, with a presumption that the eighth century prophet would object to the religious rituals of his day (such as the kissing of cult objects) with Luther-like sensibilities.[379] As we have so little evidence for the cultic practice of the Northern Kingdom from a textual standpoint, this nonchalant dismissal of the passage is regrettable.

Plainly, a new tactic is needed in approaching Hos 13:2b, one which is sensitive to text critical issues, examines the text within its ancient Near Eastern context, and takes a more nuanced stance towards ritual and its role in society. With these considerations in mind, we will turn to examine other instances of kissing cult statues in Neo-Assyria in order to understand how the ritual featured in societies contemporary to Israel. Here, two overarching questions will guide our inquiries. First, who was allowed to participate in the kissing of cult statues? And secondly, how did this ritual benefit its participants? Foundational to this investigation will be the work of

[377] Wolff, *Hosea*, 236. An analogous sentiment appears in Mays, *Hosea*, 173.

[378] Macintosh, *Hosea*, 523–24.

[379] Gruber especially objects to this type of bias against religious veneration of objects, noting the modern day practices of kissing rosary beads and scrolls as a counter point. Gruber, *Hosea*, 530–31.

Dr. Catherine Bell and her considerations of ritual practice.[380] With these heuristics, we can then reexamine Hos 13:2b and suggest an elite setting for the ritual, one which would be highly coveted by priests and political figures alike.

How to Get to First Base with a God in Assyria

Before delving into *who* could kiss a god in Assyria, a brief aside must be provided on *how* the gods were kissed. In the vast majority of exemplars from Neo-Assyrian records, the type of kissing mentioned is the kissing of the god's feet (*šēpē nuššuqu*) or the kissing of the ground in front of him or her (*ina pān PN qaqqara nuššuqu*).[381] In either case, the worshipper would thus approach, kneel, and take on a deferential, submissive posture toward the god in the process of kissing. According to Gruber's study on *Aspects of Non-Verbal Communication in the Ancient Near East* these kinds of actions could be considered a gesture of worship, but also of homage, gratitude, subservience, or entreaty.[382]

To kiss a god thus created a dynamic that was both inherently intimate and hierarchical. Kissing required that the agent be in the presence of the deity and, potentially, even in direct contact with his or her body. But it also positioned the agent as someone *lower* than the deity and subject to him. Here, Bell's work on ritualization is key in that "ritual, by focusing on the making and remaking of the body, reproduces the sociopolitical context in which it takes places while

[380] Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*.

[381] For summaries of ritual kissing in Neo-Assyria see Mayer I. Gruber, *Aspects of Nonverbal Communication in the Ancient Near East*, vol. 1 (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1980), 257–91, 320–46; Angelika Berlejung, "Kultische Küsse: Zu Den Begegnungsformen Zwischen Göttern Und Menschen," *Die Welt Des Orients* 29 (1998): 80–97; Berlejung, "Refreshed Cultic Kisses"; Bruno Meissner, "Der Kuß Im Alten Orient," *Sitzungsberichte Der Preussischen Akademie Der Wissenschaften, Philosophisch-Historische Klasse*, no. 28 (1934): 914–30; Sylva Harst, *Der Kuss in Den Religionen Der Alten Welt: Ca. 3000 v. Chr. - 381 n. Chr* (Münster: LIT Verlag Münster, 2004).

[382] Gruber, *Aspects of Nonverbal Communication*, 1:263–64, 277–78.

also attempting to transform it."[383] The body of the "kisser" was thus one embodying a two-fold position in Neo-Assyrian society. It existed beneath the god and in service to him/her. But it also possessed access to the god, a position which was far from typical in Assyrian society.[384]

As scholars have frequently noted, this ritual deliberately reproduced well-known scenes from the royal court. Kissing the king's feet was a common occurrence during treaties, tribute offerings, and coronations, allowing vassals and magnates to reify their allegiance to the Assyrian king and their submission to his power.[385] The gesture was so evocative, that when the verb for "to kiss the feet of PN" or "to kiss the ground before PN" occurs in the durative in Akkadian texts, it creates a metaphor for political submission and homage, though it could also be used in the preterite for discrete instances.[386] References to this practice occur through the annals of Assyrian and Babylonian kings, and even Cyrus makes use of the trope in his famed Cylinder.[387] Court kissing is also imaged on steles, including the Black Obelisk where Jehu kisses the ground in front of Shalmaneser III.[388] During this time period, it was also a literary

[383] Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, 209.

[384] The limited access to cult statues can be seen in Assyrian royal archives. Only priests and kings could enter the areas where these divine images were kept. When the gold or gems of statues went missing—as happened from time to time—priests were the most immediate suspects. Zaia, "Kings, Priests, and Power in the Neo-Assyrian Period," 160–61; Uri Gabbay, "The Kalû Priest and Kalûtu Literature in Assyria," *Orient* 49 (2014): 121.

[385] Berlejung, "Refreshed Cultic Kisses," 55.

[386] Gruber, *Aspects of Nonverbal Communication*, 1:258, 266.

[387] Gruber, 1:265. The kiss of obeisance was a long-lasting tradition; it appears in the writings of both Nabonidus (See 3.3 Babylon-Stele V.5 in Hanspeter Schaudig, *Die Inschriften Nabonids von Babylon Und Kyros' Des Grossen, Samt Den in Ihrem Umfeld Entstandenen Tendenzschriften. Textausgabe Un Grammatik*, AOAT 256 (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2001), 516. and of Cyrus: "Cyrus Cylinder" trans. Mordechai Cogan *COS* 2.124: 315 (line 6).

[388] For an image of said obelisk see: E.A. Wallis Budge, ed., *A Guide to the Babylonian and Assyrian Antiquities* (London: Harrison and Sons, 1900), 24.

and artistic trope as far as Egypt. The Nubian pharaoh Piye commissioned a victory stele where he was surrounded by other kings bowing and kissing the ground before him.[389]

In one prominent Neo-Assyrian example, Tiglath-Pileser III boasted,

> [(As for) Hi]ram of the land Tyre, who conspired with Raḫiānu (Rezin) (against me), [...] — I captured (and) plun[dered the city] Maḫalab, his fortified city, together with (other) large cities (of his). [...] he came [be]fore me and kissed my feet. [I received] twenty talents of [gold, ...], multi-colored [garments], linen garments, eunuchs, male (and) female singers, ... [...], Egypt[ian horses, ...].[390]

In "kissing the feet" of Tiglath-Pileser III, Hiram thus—physically and/or metaphorically—positioned himself within the hierarchy of Assyria. He was one who had lowered himself before the Assyrian king. The ritual thus embodied a social reality where Hiram would serve and submit to his new suzerain. The act was costly—as the list of tribute demonstrates—but it allowed him to keep his throne and his life. However, the ritual of kissing Tiglath-Pileser III's feet also gave Hiram a kind of power. He had been in contact with the king of Assyria. This contact enabled him to continue ruling his nation, personifying for his people the rule of Tiglath-Pileser III that he had put himself under. A layered hierarchy was thus actualized, with Tiglath-Pileser III standing above Hiram, and Hiram standing above his people.

Assyrian writers were well aware of how ritualized kissing created this layered hierarchy and even referenced it in their writings. One magnate of Sargon II's, named Hunnî, wished for his king that, "He may see the workmanship of the temples of his gods and kiss their beautiful feet; may those (gods) whose temples you have made shine like sunrise, bless the king my lord,

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[389] See "The Victory Stela of King Piye (Piankhy)" in *COS* 2.7:42-51. The reference to kissing the ground in front of Piye occurs on page 50.

[390] RINAP 1:49, r.5-8.

and may we, the royal servants, kiss the feet of the king, our lord."[391] This quote intentionally sets Sargon II as the tangible link between the gods (as represented in their cult statues) and his servants. The gods of Assyria were the rulers Sargon II served and gave homage to, as expressed by his kissing of their feet. This intimacy with the divine physically concretized his ruling of Assyria on their behalf. Hunnî, as his magnate, then wished to replicate this process in his kissing of Sargon II's feet. In touching the feet of the king, he would portray his submission to Sargon II's power *and* his proximity to it. Like Hiram of Tyre, Hunnî's proximity to the royal body represented how he himself could authority. Thus, Hunnî's authority tangibly derived from Sargon II, whose authority in turn derived from the gods of Assyria, who in turn had their own hierarchies.[392] In sum, the ritual embodied a whole hierarchy of power, at whose highest point was the gods, with the king at their feet, and his vassals and magnates beneath him.

As kissing a god required intimate contact and imparted divine legitimation to rule, it was a strictly controlled and fenced activity. As Angelika Berlejung summarizes, "this form of approaching a god was reserved for the priest, the Assyrian king, and possibly the crown prince…"[393] In other words, to be one who could kiss a god, was to be one in authority, either over the god's nation or the god's household.

Rituals texts, letters, and epics bear out this limitation on the gesture. The vast majority of texts that mention the kissing of cult statues or the ground before them, have the king as the agent. A tablet recording a ritual performed by Assurbanipal in the month of Shebat-Adar states

[391] SAA 1:133, r.1-9.

[392] SAA 3:2 o.11.

[393] Berlejung, "Refreshed Cultic Kisses," 55–56.

that, "[On the 18th day] the king came do[w]n to the House of God. He k[is]sed [the ground] before Aššur, started the [cen]ser, ascended [the dais], and set the ta[bl]es [befo]re Lord Tiara."[394] Other texts describing the gesture are more spontaneous. For example, a letter from the king's magnate Nemed-Laguda informed the king, "Later on, as soon as the king has defeated his enemies and has come to Babylon and kissed the ground in front of Marduk and Zarpanitu, [we shall send him] every information that we hear."[395] In this context, kissing the ground before the gods was associated with gratitude for a king's military success, a trend that also appears as far back as the Old Babylonian period.[396]

Examples where other elite figures are said to kiss a god possibly occur in SAA 20:37 and the text known as *The Underworld Vision of an Assyrian Prince*. In SAA 20:37, the specialist is instructed that, "when you are to kiss the feet of gods, you say, 'May [Heaven and Ap]sû bless you(sg)!"[397] Here, it is not clear who the worshipper is. It is possible that he is a *sangû* priest and not a king. However, if the text is actually a form of the *tākultu* ritual, as Pongratz-Leisten has argued, this ritual may too be a reference to a kingly rite.[398] As for the *The Underworld Vision of an Assyrian Prince,* it describes a dream, wherein a figure who appears to be a prince of Assyria descends to the deep before the god Nergal, whose majesty overwhelmed him. The prince recounts, "I looked at him and my bones shivered! His grimly luminescent

[394] SAA 20:9 i.o.11-12.

[395] SAA 17:146, o.10-11.

[396] Gruber, *Aspects of Nonverbal Communication*, 1:277.

[397] SAA 20:37, r.20.

[398] Pongratz-Leisten, *Religion and Ideology in Assyria*, 394; Troels Pank Arbøll, *Medicine in Ancient Assur: A Microhistorical Study of the Neo-Assyrian Healer Kiṣir-Aššur*, Ancient Magic and Divination 18 (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2020), 210–11.

splendour overwhelmed me, I kissed the feet of his great divinity and knelt down. Then I stood up, while he looked at me, shaking his head."[399] Though this is not strictly a kissing of a cult statue, the scene again demonstrates the bounds of who may kiss the divine, mainly, their favored royal representatives.[400]

An attentive reader will note that there is no direct, indisputable evidence that Neo-Assyrian priests could kiss the gods or the ground before them. There is good reason, however, to believe that they participated in this ritual. Like the king of Assyria, certain priests could enter and navigate the spaces where cult statues were kept.[401] It is also known that on occasion, priests enacted rituals on a king's behalf.[402] These facts make it likely that high ranking priests would

[399] SAA 3:32, r.14. (P337164).

[400] So far as the author can discern, there are only a few possible exceptions to this ritual pattern within Neo-Assyrian literature. The first, as Berlejung describes, are references to the kissing of the gods in prayers and personal names. However, as she demonstrates, allusion to the ritual in these contexts appears to be a "general expression of humility and veneration" rather than a notation of actual practice. (Berlejung, "Refreshed Cultic Kisses," 56.) A second place where non-royals and non-priests may have been able to kiss the ground in front of a cult statue may have occurred during public procession. However, in some ways, this example proves the rule. Only on the rare and highly structured occasions when a statue left the temple could it be so venerated by the public. (Beate Pongratz-Leisten, *Ina Šulmi Īrub: Die Kulttopographische Undideologische Programmatik Der Akītu-Prozession in Babylonien Und Assyrien Im I. Jahrtausend v. Chr.* (Mainz: Verlag Philipp Von Zabern, 1994), Text 13, o.16.) Moreover, the people along the procession route could not touch the statue, but deferentially kept their distance as they bowed to the ground. This ritual kissing was thus not about the impartation of power to the subjects of the god, but about his or her power over the community. The third example could potentially break the mold of other kissing rituals by allowing a king to directly kiss the face of a goddess. According to Berlejung, in a tablet describing a royal ritual of Tukulti-Ninurta I, the king is said to kiss, "her lips." Sadly, the context of this line is broken, but Berlejung has argued that the most likely candidate to be kissed in this instance would be the cult statue of the goddess Šarrat-šadê, or the Lady of the Mountains. (Berlejung, "Refreshed Cultic Kisses," 56–57.) A parallel text describes a similar encounter of Tukulti Ninurta I with Šarrat-šadê: the Lady-of-the-river. Again, the context is broken, but the information we do have implies that the king kissed the goddess and had the statue dwell in his house. As Berlejung summarizes, this moment between goddess and king, "also seems to have included an erotic dimension." (Berlejung, 59.) However, this version of ritual kissing, while still limited to royalty, appears to be exceptional, limited to these goddesses and to Tukulti Ninurta I.

[401] Zaia, "Kings, Priests, and Power in the Neo-Assyrian Period," 160–61. Gabbay, "The *Kalû* Priest and *Kalûtu* Literature in Assyria," 121.

[402] Zaia, "Kings, Priests, and Power in the Neo-Assyrian Period," 155–56.

show deference to the gods with such a gesture. The Neo-Assyrian bias toward royal rituals has merely made witnesses to such events hard to recover.

Overall, Neo-Assyrian evidence of kissing cultic statues—or the ground before them—indicates that it was an act strictly limited to the worthy and the powerful: kings, priests, and potentially heirs to the throne. Especially in the case of kissing the god's feet, the act was intimate, allowing the ritual specialist to share in divine power and authority while simultaneously denoting his submission to the gods. The ritual reflected the development of Assyrian court ritual, where powerful men —vassal kings, courtiers, and magnates—kissed the king's feet to personify their own loyalty and connection to Assyrian power.

Kissing the Gods in Ancient Israel

Returning our attention back to Hos 13:2b, there is strong evidence to suspect that the ritual act of "kissing calves" in ancient Israel reflected dynamics of power similar to those in Neo-Assyria.[403] In other words, to get close to these cultic images, one had to be worthy of the

[403] It is intriguing to note that while the biblical account implies that the Israelites kissed a theriomorphic image, some Assyriologists have resisted the idea that this ritual occurred with these kinds of bestial divine representations. Berlejung in particular insists that the ritual of kissing requires semblance between the god and the worshipper, meaning that it could only work between two anthropomorphic figures. (Berlejung, "Refreshed Cultic Kisses," 58, 60–61.) However, if these animals represented a platform on which the deity stood, as depicted in Levantine, Syrian, Hittite, and Neo-Assyrian iconography, to kiss them would be to kiss the "ground" on which the deity was positioned, creating a ritual scene parallel to the kissing the ground in front of a deity or of his or her feet. A similar concept has been proposed with the discussion of "war chariots" as the "feet" of the deity in Beate Pongratz-Leisten, Karlheinz Deller, and Erika Bleibtreu, "Götterstreitwagen Und Götterstandarten: Götter Auf Dem Feldzug Und Ihr Kult Im Feldlager (Taf. 50-69)," *Baghdader Mitteilungen* 23 (1992): 296.

For Assyrian examples of artwork depicting the god positioned atop an animal see the canal relief from Maltai: Victor Place and Thomas Félix, *Ninive et l'Assyrie*, vol. 3 (Paris: Imprimerie impériale, 1867), pl 45, https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47e2-f69a-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99. Another Neo-Assyrian example has recently been discovered in the Faida region of Iraq. See Bonacossi and Qasim, "Irrigation and Landscape Commemoration in Northern Assyria," 23. As for Syrian evidence, there is a eighth century BCE stele from Arslan Tash of Adad on a bull *Adad Stèle from Arslan Tash (AO 13092)*, eighth century BCE, Basalt Relief, eighth century BCE, Lourve, https://collections.louvre.fr/en/ark:/53355/cl010120231. A similar stele was found in the Euphrates river in Syria in 1999, which is described at length in Bunnens, Hawkins, and Leirens, *A New Luwian Stele and the Cult of the Storm-God at Til Barsib-Masuwari*. Finally, an orthostat from Late Bronze Hazor has most of the remains of a male god standing on a bull. *Statue of the Storm-God on the Back of a Bull*, Basalt, Late Bronze Age,

access: a king or priest of the Northern Kingdom. As in Neo-Assyria, it is unlikely that the average Israelite would have had such close association with a divine representation made of precious metals and elite skill (Hos 13:2a). Kissing a divine figure would be an act performed by a very select few, who possessed a great deal of power in Israelite society and cult, in other words a king, city ruler, or a priest.[404]

Some scholars may object that this does not cohere with the image of the ritual provided by 1 Kgs 19:18. This verse is situated in the dialogue between Yahweh and Elijah on Mount Horeb after his flight away from Jezebel. Here, Israel's God tells his prophet, " וְהִשְׁאַרְתִּי בְיִשְׂרָאֵל שִׁבְעַת אֲלָפִים כָּל־הַבִּרְכַּיִם אֲשֶׁר לֹא־כָרְעוּ לַבַּעַל וְכָל־הַפֶּה אֲשֶׁר לֹא־נָשַׁק לוֹ:." "I will preserve in Israel seven-thousand, all of whose knees have not bowed to Ba'al, and all of whose mouths have not kissed him."[405] Frequently, this verse has been read so that the bowing and the kissing are part of the same ritual, which fits with the imagery of Assyrian evidence for kissing cult statues. However, as the passage claims that God will preserve *only* seven-thousand individuals in Israel who had

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Israel Museum, https://www.imj.org.il/en/collections/394217-0. More examples can be found in Lewis, *The Origin and Character of God*, 137, 150–57, 319, 402-404. As Smith has argued, this function of the animals (and specifically the calves) as "pedestal" does not preclude their embodying the deity and possessing other functions Smith, *Where the Gods Are*, 66. As with Assyrian deities, the relationship between theriomorphic image and god may have been complex. To stand above an animal was to have mastered it and to *be* it in a metaphorical sense as argued by Davide Nadali, "Aššur Is King!: The Metaphorical Implications of Embodiment, Personification, and Transference in Ancient Assyria," in *Researching Metaphor in the Ancient Near East*, ed. Marta Pallavidini and Ludovico Portuese (Harrassowitz Verlag, 2020), 73–74. A layered relationship between deity and animal image, one with multiple connotations and interpretations, is likely the best understanding of these types of images. However, without further literary evidence, it is difficult to determine the metaphysics of divine bodies in the ancient Near East, let alone the Hebrew Bible. For a description of debates surrounding gods and their bodies see Porter, "Introduction."

[404] This theory is exactly counter to that of Jeremias. Because Hos 13:2 refers to calves in the plural, he contends that the images are not the focal point of the royal cult. Instead, they were replicas, which common folk were allowed to kiss. Jeremias, *Der Prophet Hosea*, 162.

[405] The verb נשק may indicate its object with or without a *lamed* preposition, though it most ordinarily does use the *lamed*. See Ruth 1:9, 14 for examples.

not participated in the ritual, this reading could be read as implying that kissing Ba'al was commonplace, an accessible demonstration of veneration throughout the land.

However, pause should be taken in regards to this interpretation of 1 Kgs 19:18. In the context of this verse, God describes a future slaughtering: "And it will come to pass, that the one who escapes the sword of Hazael, Jehu will kill; and the one who escapes the sword of Jehu, Elisha will kill" (1 Kgs 19:17). It is only after this portended slaughter that God makes his claim that he would preserve the seven-thousand. However, as Schniedewind as pointed out, 1 Kgs 19:17-18 makes it very unclear who was to be killed.[406] Likewise, it is difficult to determine who exactly would be preserved, other than they have not given allegiance to Ba'al.

From the biblical accounts, however, those who died as a result of Jehu's coup were primarily from the leading class of Israel. Those killed in the massacre included Ahab's family (2 Kgs 9:8-10, 24, 33; 10:7), his courtiers (2 Kgs 10:11, 17), his priests at Jezreel (2 Kgs 10:11), and finally the prophets of Ba'al (2 Kgs 10:18-27). In sum, Jehu killed off the very people in Israelite society likely to have intimate access to Ba'al's cult statue. As a result, power throughout the country would shift to those with loyalty to Yahweh, and a new elite would rise. The 7,000 should therefore be understood—not as the remaining population of Israel—but as a symbolic number referencing the remaining governors of society under Jehu.[407] Jehu's religious "reform"—as in so many other cases throughout history—can thus be understood as a means of seizing and re-shuffling power within a society. The former ruling classes had been removed, with the justification that they had been loyal to Ba'al, leaving room for new Israelite leaders to

[406] Schniedewind, "Tel Dan Stela," 83.

[407] Interestingly, seven-thousand is also the number of Judean איש חיל or "soldiers" taken into Babylonian captivity in 2 Kgs 20:24.

come to the fore. Power in ninth century Israel was therefore shifting hands under the guise of religious loyalties. Likely, dynamics at the end of the eighth century in Israel were likely similar, with those seeking to change power structures doing so through ideological, rather than merely political, means.

The Butchers of Men

Having established that "kissing calves" in Hos 13:2 references a ritual reserved for the most elite of Israelite temple and court, the next question becomes what the prophet meant by זבחי אדם or "sacrificers of men." It was these types of people who would "עגלים ישקון" or "kiss calves," a mark of ascending to the highest echelons of Israelite society, with access to the god's presence. However, as stated at the beginning of this chapter, scholars have been hesitant to understand this phrase with the plain sense of "human sacrificers." While this hesitation is right, as will be demonstrated below, alternative understandings for these words have rarely been offered. Two of the most common words in the Hebrew Bible have thus stunted interpretation, especially when paired with "kissing calves" (עגלים ישקון).

The problem with understanding זבחי אדם as referencing "sacrificers of humans" is that it is far too generic. When the authors of the biblical text discuss human sacrifice, it is almost always specific to one of two categories.[408] The first and most prominent example is that of

[408] There are two possible exceptions to these broad categories. The first is the offering up off the priestly bones at Bethel by Josiah in 1 Kgs 13:2 and 2 Kgs 23:16. However, as these priests were already dead and decomposed, this type of "human sacrifice" does not appear to fit the context of Hos 13:2. The other possible exception is the difficult case of Jephthah's daughter. In this context, the judge swears that whatever comes out of his door he would offer as a whole burnt offering (וְהַעֲלִיתִהוּ עוֹלָה) (Judg 16:31). When his daughter walks through the door first, the text implies that this oath then becomes the occasion for human sacrifice, though seemingly unintentionally (Judg 11:34-39).

child sacrifice.[409] Parents would cause cast their infants into the fire as offerings for Molech (באש העביר).[410] The phrasing here is idiomatic, and also, very distinctive from זבחי אדם (human sacrificers). The other prominent type of human sacrifice in the Hebrew Bible is the offering up of firstborns, with the age of the progeny often unspecified. Infamously, Isaac was nearly made into a burnt offering (העלה עלה) at an unknown age (Gen 22). Supposedly, the king of Moab also ritually killed his firstborn in a successful attempt to earn divine favor (2 Kgs 3:27). However, here again the phrasing is distinct as the king of Moab, "offered him [his heir] as a whole burnt offering on the wall" (וַיַּעֲלֵהוּ עֹלָה עַל־הַחֹמָה) (2 Kgs 3:27aβ).[411] In sum, neither of these types of sacrifices—infant or firstborn— fit the wording of human sacrifice present within Hos 13:2. Though man (אדם) certainly denotes people, it does not denote children in particular. As for understandings of firstborn slaughter, Hosea seemingly has the wrong idiom, using זבח (sacrifice) instead of the expected phrase of, "העלה עלה"—the offering up of a whole burnt offering. The wording of the phrase thus excludes the known forms of human sacrifice in the Hebrew Bible, and another interpretation must be found for the זבחי אדם (sacrificers of men).

When considering this enigmatic group, it must be remembered that its members were among those seeking power in Israel's political-religious system. Thus, whatever it meant to "זבח" or "sacrifice" a person, it was an act that helped move one up the ladder of power. Here, Ehud Ben Zvi's work provides a helpful way forward. Though Ben Zvi still holds that the

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[409] Olyan, *Violent Rituals of the Hebrew Bible*, 27; David Wright, "The Study of Ritual in the Hebrew Bible," in *The Hebrew Bible: New Insights and Scholarship*, ed. Frederick Greenspan (New York: New York University Press, 2008), 126.

[410]For examples see Deut 18:10; 2 Kgs 16:3; 17:17; 21:6; 2 Kgs 23:10; 2 Chr 33:6; Ezek 20:31. For a full study of the ritual see Heath Dewrell, *Child Sacrifice in Ancient Israel* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2017).

[411] This verb is also used when Jephthah swears that whatever comes out of his door on his return home he would sacrifice (Judg 11:32). As a result, the passage insinuates that he sacrifices his daughter (Judg 11:39).

passage most likely references the killing of humans in ritual, he does state that the verb זבח, "does not necessarily demand that they [humans] be slaughtered for cultic purposes."[412] The verb could thus connote simple slaughter and violence against human beings, rather than the ritually loaded act scholars have been baffled by.

This reading of זבח as "slaughter," or "butcher" in a non-ritual sense fits the semantic range of the word in several passages within the Hebrew Bible. For example, in an oracle against Egypt in Jer 46, the scene described is one of battle. Though the Egyptians had amassed a great army, they would be decimated by the peoples of the north. As the prophecy sums up, "But that day belongs to Yahweh of Hosts, a day of vengeance, to avenge himself upon his foes. And the sword will devour to its satisfaction, and it will drink from their blood, for the *slaughter* (זֶבַח) belongs to the lord, Yahweh of Hosts in the land of the north, by the river Euphrates." (Jer 46:10) The context of Jer 46:10 is clearly one of warfare—not of temple sacrifice. The word זבח was thus being used to describe the butchery of war as human beings killed other humans. This destruction of human life did belong to God, but the text implies that the sword eats the meal, not the deity.

A similar scene appears in Ezek 39:17. The prophet is commanded to speak to the birds and wild animals, that they might devour the corpses of armies left on a battlefield. As Yahweh states to the birds, "I have slaughtered (זבח) for you a great slaughter (זבח גדול) on the hills of Israel, and you will eat flesh and drink blood." Here again, the context is far from ritual practice. God was not offering a sacrifice of human-bodies in veneration or worship of wild animals. The

[412] Zvi, *Hosea*, 282. Ben Zvi posits several readings of this text, holding that all of them were possible and may have even been implied by the prophet. Thus, "sacrifice" could refer to violence against humans OR as a ritual act. However, as Ben Zvi does not explain how human sacrifice would allow one to kiss calves, this layered interpretative method is not entirely convincing.

word זבח here refers instead to the presentation of human bodies as "dead meat." After the armies of Gog and Magog had been butchered, they could be consumed by animals in a battlefield style barbeque, inverting the normal operations of the food chain.

A final example appears within Isa 34:5-15. This passage describes the destruction of Bozrah through the metaphor of a great slaughter of animals, which the passage makes clear actually refers to the destruction of Edom's nobility alongside of her peoples. The specific line in question has language similar to Jer 46:10, stating that: "כִּי זֶבַח לַיהוָה בְּבָצְרָה וָטֶבַח גָּדוֹל בְּאֶרֶץ אֱדוֹם", meaning, "for a slaughter belongs to YHWH at Bozrah, and a great butchery in the land of Edom" (Isa 37:6b). The violence done against the city thus takes the garb of the slaying of animals. Again, the verb does not appear to be used in a cultic sense. Rather, the word is being used to describe the systematic killing people as though they were beasts.[413]

All told, זבחי אדם does not have to refer to human sacrifice with a cultic resonance as so much of previous scholarship has presumed. Instead, the phrase in Hos 13:2b implies the killing of other human beings, a violent butchering that was not religious in nature. The verse thus reflects upon the most necessary characteristic of Israel's elite at that time: they were killers. The advantage of this interpretation is that it meshes with our understandings of Israel's final rulers and their ascensions to power. It was a time in which authority could not be justified by appeals to lineage or mere ritual, but instead was negotiated through conspiracy, bloodshed, and battle. Authority could only be grasped by those willing to fight for it, and while military strength was a constant hallmark of ancient kingship, it appears that at this point in Israel's collapse, violence

[413] A final and ironic example may be found in Jehu's message to the prophets of Ba'al when he states that he was preparing, "a great sacrifice to Ba'al" (כִּי זֶבַח גָּדוֹל לִי לַבָּעַל) (2 Kgs 10:19) However, the sacrifice instead becomes a slaughter of the very ritual specialists he invited (2 Kgs 10:25).

was its defining feature.[414] Only those who had killed and were willing to continue killing could move up through Israel's ranks, gaining the proximity to the divine that the elite craved. Simply stated, to become king, one had to kill.

The Irony of Hos 13:2b

With this background reasoning, I propose that Hos 13:2b should be translated, "They say to themselves, 'those who butcher men will kiss calves.'" As medieval and modern scholars have thus long recognized, the phrase wields a brutal irony.[415] Israelite calf statues were being treated with reverence, in line with the treatment of Neo-Assyrian kings at their court.[416] They were even kissed. Meanwhile, humans were treated like calves, animals to be slaughtered in pursuit of

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[414] See discussions in the Introduction and chapter 1. See also Pongratz-Leisten, *Religion and Ideology in Assyria*, 225, 254.

[415] Macintosh, *Hosea*, 523–34.

[416] The conceptualization of "kissing calves" as a ritual indicating the kingship of Yahweh and his empowering of Israelite kings meshes well with interpretations of a fragmentary passage within *Papyrus Amherst* 63. This document is an Aramaic text written in Demotic script, recovered from Egypt from an unprovenanced location. Dating and deciphering this decontextualized text is difficult, especially as it is very clearly a collection of materials from various times and places. The section that has most caught scholarly attention is a passage which parallels Ps 20. Some scholars have postulated that the Psalm may have been transmitted by northern transplants to Egypt, meaning that at least one portion of the text may have derived from ancient Israel. Some scholars have even argued for an Israelite location as specific as the cult center of Bethel (Ziony Zevit, "The Common Origin of the Aramaicized Prayer to Horus and of Psalm 20," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 110 (1990): 224.). For the purposes of this chapter, the material that is most intriguing is a section in a very broken portion of Papyrus Amherst 63 that Steiner has translated as, "let them kiss [your] bull[s], let them desire your calves." (The Aramaic reads as, "*yšq(w) tr[yk] ʾyḥʾ mdw ʿglyk*." Col. V: Line 12). As Smith points out, the passage seems to use calves and bulls interchangeably to refer to the same deity. Moreover, it appears to appeal to the same ritual practice as Hos 13:2b. Smith, "Counting Calves at Bethel," 385–87. Given that the context of this line is almost entirely missing, little more may be said regarding it, and we must be satisfied with conjecture for now. However, it should be noted that this section and others in Papyrus Amherst 63 have been connected with other Israelite rituals, specifically ones that exalt Yahweh's kingship. This line about "kissing bulls" and "desiring calves" may have originally been a part of one such ritual text. For an argument that several of these passage in Papyrus Amherst 63 preserve Northern Israelite liturgical texts see: Karel van der Toorn, "Celebrating the New Year with the Israelites: Three Extrabiblical Psalms from Papyrus Amherst 63," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 136 (2017): 644. For an argument that another text in this papyrus describes a divine marriage from a blend of Aramean and Levantine cultures, a ritual often associated with kingship, see Tawny Holm, "Nanay and Her Lover: An Aramaic Sacred Marriage Text from Egypt," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 76 (2017): 23. Note: the context of this section is so broken that Karel van der Toorn does not include it in his translation. Karel van der Toorn, ed., *Papyrus Amherst 63*, AOAT 448 (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2018).

divine favor. As Ehud ben Zvi summarizes, "Rather than slaughter calves (for food) they [the Israelites] kiss them; and rather than kiss human beings, they slaughter them."[417] In pursuing dominance, the Israelites had come to treat humans—even kings—as animals, while simultaneously treating the image of an animal like a king.[418] The critique of Israel's icon is thus sharp and visceral, utilizing a double play on god's theriomorphic image (the calf) and the word זבח in order to denigrate its worship.

As in Hos 10:5-6, the prophecy derides Israel's calf images by juxtaposing them with actions related to actual cows. Here in Hos 13:2b the act is slaughter, and the contrast demonstrates how the calf statues were sacrificed for—instead of being sacrificed themselves. Kissing a calf statue came at the price of human butchery, instead of the expected reverse. For Hos 10:5-6, the irony relies on the use of cows to pull wagons, and how the Calf of Samaria itself would be dragged way by calves. The juxtaposition thus highlights the image's immobility against the power of the animals it resembled. By putting the calf images in these contexts, the prophet reveals how Israel's glory and its cult had in fact become it shame and its downfall (Hos 4:7). These images made to reflect Israel's power were in fact powerless. Though they were made to guarantee elite authority, they were causing elite violence and turnover.

The acerbic nature of Hos 13:2b is then further intensified by its context. The text puts the damning phrase in the mouths of those who worshipped the calf statues. It comes across as an

[417] Zvi, *Hosea*, 282. See also Macintosh, *Hosea*, 523–24.

[418] Portraying competing kings as animals to be hunted and slaughtered is a trope in Neo-Assyrian art. Sculptures depicting the fight against the Elaminte king Neumann dehumanizes him, giving him lion like features. Ashurbanipal is also shown pouring out a libation offering near his corpse, a ritual which parallels scenes of ceremonial lion hunts. Julian Reade and Barbara N. Porter, "Religious Ritual in Assyrian Sculpture," in *Ritual and Politics in Ancient Mesopotamia*, AOS 88 (New Haven, CT: American Oriental Society, 2005), 21.

almost axiom for the Israelites regarding their rulers. The prophet thus creates a scenario with Israelite society condemning itself, as it acknowledges that its elites could only gain their positions through the strategies of dehumanization and violence. Yet, Israel continued to make and worship these very images, trusting its own knowledge and expertise (Hos 13:2a) rather than Yahweh's (Hos 13:4). The result was the vanishing of Israel's kings and rulers (Hos 13:10) as well as her capital (Hos 14:1 [Heb], 13:16 [Eng]), and her people (Hos 13:4). According to Hosea, in seeking to prevent its collapse, the people of Israel had caused it. Kissing these calf statues—a ritual designed to legitimate authority, concretize divine intimacy, and create order—had resulted in a succession of illegitimate kings, divine abandonment, and chaos.

Towards the end of *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, Catherine Bell stated that, "Just as the belief structures that may undergird ritual power can be neither proved nor disproved, so the successes and failures of the application of power are also beyond real proof or disproof. Such power is vindicated only by general and continued well-being; it is indicted by widespread and sustained social problems."[419] In other words, for rituals to be seen as effective in the ancient world, society had to remain stable, if not come to flourish. Otherwise, the practice of the ritual would be brought into question. Often these doubts in ritual effectiveness were first directed at the accuracy with which they had been performed—perhaps a priest misspoke, or an object was out of place. A ritual's failure could also be placed on the practitioner. Yet, it appears that at the close of the kingdom of Israel, Yahwists were using the kingdom's degradation as evidence for the corruption and incapability of its cultic center: the calf images themselves. Social disaster

[419] Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, 212.

was thus eroding public trust in Israel's kings, priests, and the cultic statues through which they portrayed their divine authorization. This argument against the calf statues was then permenantly cemented by Israel's annexation and deportation, creating a polemic that would indelibly mark Judean memory and theology throughout the rest of the Hebrew Bible.[420]

[420] Carr, *Holy Resilience*, 20–22, 26–37.

CONCLUSION

Like the ark of the covenant, the fate of Israel's calf statues is a matter of speculation. They may have lived among Sargon II's horde of gods for a time, being cared with offerings lest the gods of Israel become enraged with Neo-Assyria.[421] They could have been callously broken down for their composite components, stolen, lost or forgotten—whether by their captors or their captor's conquerors.[422] However, the Israelites who made them would never reclaim them. Culture, politics, and religion would never be the same in the region after the Neo-Assyrian takeover.

Yet, the legacy of the calf cultus of the Israel was just beginning. These images would continue to play an outsized role in Yahwistic religion after they vanished—only not in the north were they were conceived. Instead, their memory would imprint Judah for centuries, shaping her people's conceptions of sin, idolatry, and history (2 Kgs 17:16; 2 Chr 13:8-12). Ironically, the golden calves turned into scapegoats. Exile and catastrophe were pinned on these objects and their cultus, providing an etiology for the trauma northern Israelites suffered and which the southern Judeans witnessed.

The fact that the calves were monumentalized as the cause of the exile in later texts such as 2 Kgs 17 hints at the key place they possessed in Israel's political and cultural life. As this dissertation has shown, they were closely aligned and allied with the northern monarchy. As the access points to Yahweh(s) in the north, these images would have received the attentions and

[421] Assyriologists are not entirely certain of what happened to the gods the Assyrians captured. Evidence from prior Assyrian kings hints that they were settled either within or at the gate of temples. See Cogan, *Imperialism and Religion*, 27–28; Zaia, "State Sponsored Sacrilege: 'Godnapping' and Omission in Neo-Assyrian Inscriptions," 38. Watch also *Indiana Jones and the Raiders of the Lost Ark.*

[422] Nadav Na'aman, "The Recycling of a Silver Statue," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 40 (1981): 47–48.

offerings of anyone seeking divine favor. However, only the highest ranked members of Israel's priesthood and kings could approach these objects. These precious statues were set apart for those in power, and simultaneously they were marked as significant by those in power in a symbiotic feedback-loop. In this way, the kings, capital, and calves of Israel gained authority from their interactions with one another. Their relationship was mutually self-enforcing and intertwined. Cultic and political power was thus centralized and focused into the two representations of divine will known in king and calf.[423]

When Israel's political system fell into turmoil, this nexus between king and cult statue created paradoxes for the Israelites. As can be seen in Hos 13:2, the calves became linked to human power struggles and violence, rather than divine right. Israel's kings were known to be murders who had been set on their thrones through human intention, instead of divine election (Hos 8:4; 13:2). The assaults on the nation from without and the chaos within pointed to Yahweh's abandonment of his people. The calf statues would have been seen as markers of a divine void, rather than divine presence. Even before the Calf of Samaria was exiled to Assyria, some Israelites may have believed that the כבוד (glory/presence) of Yahweh of Samaria had left the images. But no amount of lamentation by the people and priests of the Northern Kingdom (Hos 10:5) brought back the god or his favor to the statues or the land. And then, the statues themselves were gone. Some kind of explanation, a rationale, for this total divine withdrawal would be necessary. For what would drive away a god from his people into the land of the

[423] Again, I am not arguing that the kings of Israel were divine images or considered to be gods themselves. However, they were undoubtedly seen as mediators of divine will and pleasure.

Assyrians? Or as DeGrado has put the question when reflecting on Isaiah 10: "what did it mean for representations of Yahweh to be captured…"[424]

The Book of Hosea points to one resolution of this problem of divine abandonment. Even before the capture of the statue, the corruption of Israel's monarchs was eroding confidence in the effectiveness of Israel's cultic images. It has been argued elsewhere that there were already aniconic tendencies—if not laws—in Israelite religion by the eighth century.[425] Now, these aniconic ideals were brought to bear against her principle divine objects. The calves became known as blasphemous and human fabrications. They were impotent things that could not move themselves, needing to be pulled along by the very animals they resembled (Hos 10:5). They could not rescue themselves, let alone the nation. As the authors of Hosea ironically point out, they would be served up as an offering to a foreign king, much like a real calf may have been (Hos 10:6).

This idea of the impotence of cultic images was then later cemented by the Neo-Assyrian capture of other gods— including the statues of Hamath, Damascus, and Arpad.[426] Cult statues were, in the end, not-gods (לא אלהים), with the calves being so especially (Hos 8:6). Yet, by blaming the statues—but not Yahweh—the Israelite cultus could survive even though Israel's kings and calves had not.

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[424] DeGrado, "Kidnapping the Gods," 58.

[425] The eighth century date of the law has been argued for by Hogue, "The Eternal Monument of the Divine King: Monumentality, Reembodiment, and Social Formation in the Decalogue," 231–32. For those who hold a *de facto* aniconism see: Mettinger, "The Veto on Images," 10.

[426]See Isa 10:9-10. DeGrado, "Kidnapping the Gods," 78.

It was an argument that the Judeans to the south would absorb along with Israelite refugees. It has often been overlooked that Hezekiah's iconoclastic purges (and attempts at cultic centralization) occurred in the aftermath of the north's conquering.[427] The failure of Yawhism and its associated monarchy in the north therefore had direct ramifications for their religious neighbors across the border. Cultic images became associated with divine wrath, rather than divine presence. As such, they were destroyed. When Jerusalem survived Sennacherib's invasion, Hezekiah found all the justification for and proof of the policy he could ever need. The only marker of Yahweh's divine presence that had *not* been overcome was the ark of the covenant, where Yahweh, the God of Hosts resided. What better evidence of Yahweh's unique presence in the city—as opposed to Samaria and other Yahwistic cult sites—could there be?

Moreover, Hezekiah maintained his throne while so many northern Yahwistic monarchs had not. The Davidic line and its capital were thus seen to be divinely elected against the stark backdrop of Israel, her kings, her capital, and her cult. Here again, the tight binding between the cultic and the political in the ancient world comes to the forefront. Whatever the religious competition between the cults of the north and south had looked like before this point, Jerusalem and the Davidic kings had become the victors.

As generations passed, the Book of Hosea continued to be copied and transmitted in the south, and its language and imagery found its way into other Judean texts. The book's ability to explain tragedy as a result of idolatry made it resonant with later audiences, especially when the Judeans faced their own exile. Two such exemplary passages are Jer 2-3 and Eze 16. Both texts

[427] The codifying of aniconism is normally argued for in the context of the Babylonian exile or later periods. Yitzhaq Feder, "The Aniconic Tradition, Deuteronomy 4, and the Politics of Israelite Identity," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 132 (2013): 271–72.

are saturated with Hoseanic motifs and phrasing: the adultery-idolatry metaphor created by the word זָנָה (Hos 1:2; Jer 2:20, 3:20; Ezek 16:15), the concepts of "exchanging the glory (כבוד) for shame" (Hos 4:7; Jer 2:11), the references to not-gods (לא אלהים) (Hos 8:6; Jer 2:11), discussions of Israel's youth in the desert (נְעוּרִים) (Hos 2:17; Jer 2:2; Ezek 16:22), the emphasis on covenant language (Hos 2:18; Ezek 16:8)… etc. Hoseanic language also came to be tied to later reflections on idolatry, including Psa106:19-20 (Hos 4:7) and even Romans 1:23. The book provided a wellspring of imagery and metaphors from which biblical authors would continue to draw to explain their circumstances, even centuries after 722 BCE.

Overall, the Book of Hosea testifies to the power of images and objects in the human imagination. In its writings, we can trace how the Calf of Samaria and other Israelite cult statues went from being the most prized possessions of Israel's polity, to their most despised and abhorred mistakes. The book is thus a witness to the complex entanglements of history, politics, power, and ritual, and all the unexpected turns of events that can happen as cultures collide.

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