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Fig. 1. A Cherub of Raphael, from his Sistine Madonna.



Fig. 2. A Cherub of Biblical Times, supporting the throne of King Hiram of Byblos.

WHAT WERE THE CHERUBIM?

Today we think of a cherub as a tiny winged boy, following the tradition of Renaissance artists (see Fig. 1). This conception was directly borrowed from pictures of Graeco-Roman "loves" or Erotes, familiar to us from the excavations of Pompeii. The actual appearance of the cherubim of the Old Testament was already forgotten before the time of Christ, and Josephus (1st century A.D.) says that "no one can tell what they were like."

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Since the veil of the Tabernacle was decorated with embroidered cherubim, and the walls and the religious objects of Solomon's temple lavishly adorned with them, we ought to be able to identify them in contemporary Syro-Palestinian art. The account of the Ark of the Covenant shows that only a creature with wings can be considered. If, therefore, we study all known representations of animals and hybrid creatures, partly animal, we find one which is much more common than any other winged creature, so much so that its identification with the cherub is certain: that is the winged sphinx or winged lion with human head. In Egypt the wingless sphinx and the griffin appear; in Babylonia and Assyria the winged bull with a human head prevails; but in Syria and Palestine it is the winged sphinx which is dominant in art and religious symbolism.

The God of Israel was often designated as "He who sitteth (on) the cherubim" (I Sam. 4:4, etc.). The conception underlying this designation is well illustrated by representations of a king seated on a throne supported on each side by cherubim, which have been found at Byblus, Hamath, and Megiddo, all dating between 1200 and 800 B.C. Fig. 2 is the first mentioned, showing King Hiram of Byblus (Period of the Judges) seated upon his cherub throne. Pottery incense altars found at Taanach and Megiddo are archaeological parallels to the wheeled lavers ("bases") of Solomon's temple, which were decorated with lions and cherubs, according to I Kings 7:36.

The primary function of the cherub in Israelite religious symbolism is illustrated by two Biblical passages. A very ancient hymn, found twice in the Bible, has the words, "And He rode upon a cherub and did fly" (IISam. 22:11, Ps. 18:11); the second is Ezek. 10:20. The conception of the deity as standing or as enthroned on an animal or hybrid creature was exceedingly common in the ancient Near East, but it was most common in Syria and Northern Mesopotamia between 2000 and 700 B.C. In Babylonia the figure of a deity is replaced in certain cases by a winged shrine and later by a thunderbolt. So in Israelite symbolism between 1300 and 900 B.C., the invisible Glory (Jehovah) was

conceived as enthroned upon the golden cherubim or standing on a golden bull.

W. F. Albright

HEROD'S NABATAEAN NEIGHBOR

Herod Antipas, who reigned in Galilee from 4 B.C. to 39 A.D., was strong and clever enough to be called "that fox" by Jesus (Luke 13:32) and "king" by Mark (Chap. 6:14), but he had a neighbor who was stronger and more clever than he. That was Aretas IV (9 B.C.-40 A.D.), king of the Nabataeans, whom St. Paul mentions in I Cor. 11:32. Herod had married the daughter of this king; but during a visit to



Fig. 3. A Nabataean Altar.



Fig. 4. A Receptacle for Offerings.

Rome he had met his sister-in-law, Herodias, over whom he so lost his head that a marriage was arranged with her. For denouncing this marriage, John the Baptist was imprisoned and later beheaded. Herod's first wife, the daughter of Aretas, fled to her father, who sent an army and soundly defeated his son-in-law.

The ancient historian Josephus tells us that Aretas' daughter had asked to be sent to Machaerus, just east of the Dead Sea. Director Glueck of the American School of Oriental Research in Jerusalem has been thoroughly exploring this region, and has discovered that Machaerus was in Herod's territory, but so close to the border that a flight of only