The God from Teman and the Egyptian Sun God: A Reconsideration of Habakkuk 3:3–7

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The hymn to YHWH in Habakkuk 3 is regarded as one of the most difficult texts in the biblical prophetic literature. Various questions have arisen in research regarding it: Did chapter 3 belong originally to the Book of Habakkuk, or did it previously exist as an independent unit, to be joined later to the other two chapters? Was the prophet Habakkuk himself the author of the chapter, or was it perhaps someone else? When was the hymn written and what was its *Sitz im Leben*? Was it used in the Temple ritual, or was it meant to serve on certain festivals and holidays? What are the mythical elements and archaic traditions embedded in this hymn?

Some of these questions have been answered in many of the studies and commentaries on the Book of Habakkuk published in recent years.[1] The following discussion is devoted mainly to one of these issues, namely the mythical background of Habakkuk 3. However, since our starting point is some of the commonly accepted views in the study of Habakkuk, we shall summarize them briefly.

A. Chapter 3 is not foreign to the Book of Habakkuk, but an integral part of the prophet's endeavor. It completes the previous chapters both thematically and conceptually.

B. The hymn in its current form, studded with notes and marks which are meant for musical performance (על שגיונות at the opening; סלה in vv. 3, 9, 13; and למנצח בנגינותי at the end) was indeed used in the Temple ritual.

The present article is a slightly revised version of a Hebrew article that appears in *Homage to Shmuel: Studies in the World of the Bible*, eds. Z. Talshir, S. Yona, D. Sivan (Jerusalem, 2001), 409–32.

Please note the following abbreviations:

CT A. de Buck, *The Egyptian Coffin Texts*, 7 vols. (Chicago, 1935–1961).
Gr. A. Gardiner, "Lists of Hieroglyphic Signs," *Egyptian Grammar* (London, 1966), 438–543.
JARCE *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt.*
JSSEA *Journal of the Society for the Study of Egyptian Antiquities.*
LÄ *Lexikon der Ägyptologie*, eds. W. Helck and W. Westendorf (Wiesbaden, 1972–1989).
Les. K. Sethe, *Ägyptische Lesestücke* (Hildesheim, 1959).
Pyr. K. Sethe, *Die Altägyptischen Pyramidentexte* (Hildesheim, 1969), vol. 1.

1. Two monographs devoted to a classification and survey of these investigations were published: P. Jöcken, *Das Buch Habakuk* (Köln-Bonn, 1977) and A. van der Wal, *Nahum, Habakkuk: A Classified Bibliography* (Amsterdam, 1988). For an excellent summary of previous research, see also M. A. Sweeny, "Habakkuk," *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (1992), 3.1–6; and Y. Avishur, *Studies in Hebrew and Ugaritic Psalms* (Jerusalem, 1993), 111–205.

C. Habakkuk was active at the end of the seventh century B.C.E., which is the period in which the hymn was composed; but its material also contains archaic motifs and traditions.

The ancient material has been researched extensively in recent years. Some scholars point to its affinity to the Babylonian creation epic. Others find here a residue of the Ugaritic myth about the battle of Baal against the Prince Yam and Judge Nahar, while others see it as a synthesis of both.[2] In our view, there are additional archaic elements hidden here, derived not from northern or northeastern cultures but from another ancient culture, the Egyptian. In addition to Ugaritic and Babylonian elements, Habakkuk 3 reveals some distinctive Egyptian features. Our discussion, then, is devoted to two topics: (1) exploring and exposing the Egyptian roots in Habakkuk 3, and illuminating some of the ambiguous verses of the chapter against the Egyptian background; and (2) an attempt to discover how the Egyptian material found its way into the hands of the Hebrew author. However, before we begin with these issues, we must say a few words about the structure and content of the text, whose clarification is essential in determining the material that is relevant to our research.

The hymn consists of two basic parts, vv. 3–7 and vv. 8–15, which are quite different in content and formulation. The two parts are framed by a prologue (vv. 1–2) and an epilogue (vv. 16–19).

Prologue: After the title תפילה (Prayer) the prophet, speaking in first person, recalls God's great deeds of the past.

Part A describes the arrival of YHWH from the south, in the third person. Accompanied by the entourage of *Deber* and *Rešef*, YHWH casts his wrath and dread over nature's forces as well as over human beings residing near the site of his theophany in the south.

Part B addresses God directly, in the second person, describing his struggle with the sea as he is borne in his chariot, equipped with his war weaponry. The sea is identified with the nation's enemies, while God is about to come to the rescue (vv. 12–14).

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2. The link between Habakkuk 3 and the Babylonian creation myth was discussed by, e.g., F. J. Stephens, "The Babylonian Dragon Myth in Habakkuk 3," *JBL* 43 (1924), 290–93; W. A. Irwin, "The Psalm of Habakkuk," *JNES* 1 (1942), 10–40; idem, "The Mythological Background of Habakkuk Chap. 3," *JNES* 15 (1956), 47–50. The analogy with the Ugaritic myth was demonstrated by T. H. Gaster, "The Battle of the Rain and the Sea," *Iraq* 4 (1937), 21–32; W. F. Albright, "The Psalm of Habakkuk," in H. H. Rowley, ed., *Studies in O.T. Prophecy* (Edinburgh, 1950), 1–18; U. M. D. Cassuto, "Chapter 3 of Habakkuk and the Ras Shamra Texts," *Biblical and Oriental Studies* (Jerusalem, 1975), 2.3–15; J. Day, *God's Conflict with the Dragon and the Sea* (Cambridge, 1985). However, today most scholars opt for a synthesis of these two approaches; e.g., H. G. May, "Some Cosmic Connotations of *Mayim Rabbîm* 'Many Waters'," *JBL* 74 (1955), 9–21; T. Hiebert, *God of My Victory* (Atlanta, 1986), 101–9; Avishur, *Studies*, 125–33; S. E. Loewenstamm, *The Evolution of the Exodus Traditions*, trans. B. Schwarz (Jerusalem, 1992), 247–48. We support the latter approach: despite the obvious affinity between Hab. 3:5–18 and the Ugaritic literature in respect of content and ideas, on the one hand, and style and vocabulary, on the other, one should not exclude the possibility of a double impact, namely, that Canaan and Babylonia both left their imprint on this psalm. Finally, the possibility that both Canaanite myth and the Babylonian cosmogony borrowed from a common Semitic source also merits consideration.

Epilogue: The prophet, speaking here, as in the prologue, in the first person, resumes his description of the troubled situation in the present, and expresses his sharing in the grief of the nation. He concludes by declaring his full faith in God's deliverance.[3]

The two central parts of the poem contain two ancient traditions: the theophany in the south, which is linked to the very beginning of the history of Israel, and God's battle against chaos, which symbolizes the beginning of universal creation.[4]

1. Hab. 3:4: Previous solutions

The following discussion focuses on the first part of the chapter, vv. 3–7, where most of the Egyptian elements and imagery occur. The central verse in this section, albeit the most enigmatic one, in the chapter, is v. 4:

וְנֹגַהּ כָּאוֹר תִּהְיֶה/קְרָנַיִם מִיָּדוֹ לוֹ/וְשָׁם חֶבְיוֹן עֻזּוֹ

This verse, consisting of three equal cola, has received an abundance of interpretations and explanations. Here are some of them. The Septuagint shows the following rendering:

> And his brightness shall be as light
> there were horns in his hands
> and he caused (lit. put) a mighty love of his strength

The Septuagint, followed by the Syriac version, turns נֹגַהּ, "brightness," into נגהו, "*his* brightness," meaning the brightness of God; קְרָנַיִם were interpreted here, as well as in the Vulgate, to mean the horns of an animal; and מִיָּדוֹ, "from his hand," was read by both as בידיו, "in his hands" (pl.). שָׁם was assumed by the Septuagint, as well as the Vulgate, to derive from the root שִׂים, meaning "to put"; and חֶבְיוֹן to stem from the root חבב, "to like, love." The Septuagint rendering makes little sense, and indicates that even the Greek translators had difficulty with the enigmatic verse.

Modern studies have suggested a variety of emendations, according to the myriad interpretations given to the image of YHWH as a bull, a storm god, or a sun deity. The most commonly accepted interpretation is that of Albright, arguing that God is described here as a bull:

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3. An extensive analysis of the structure of Habakkuk 3 falls outside the scope of our discussion. For such a study, see, e.g., Avishur, *Studies*, 114–21, and Hiebert, *God*, 59–80.

4. Two different traditions were noted by J. Jeremias, *Theophanie-Die Geschichte einer alttestamentlichen Gattung* (Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1965), 38–51, and Albright, "The Psalm," 8–9, who assumes a combination of ancient Israelite and Canaanite poems. Loewenstamm, *The Evolution*, 248, goes too far in arguing that the two traditions were completely blended. As Cassuto showed ("The Israelite Epic" in *Biblical and Oriental Studies* [Jerusalem, 1975], 1.83–96), all of the Ugaritic material appears in the second part of the chapter (8–10, 12, 14–15) and only a single (and doubtful!) Ugaritic idiom, ויתר גויים, appears in its first part. On this last issue see Loewenstamm, "The Ugaritic Myth of the Sea and Its Biblical Counterparts," *Comparative Studies in Biblical and Ancient Oriental Literatures*, *AOAT* 204 (Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1980), 358–59, n. 33.

⟨Yahweh⟩ attacked like a bull(?)	[יהוה] יְנֻגַּח כַּאֲבִר
Provided with tossing horns,	תְּהֶיֶה קַרְנַיִם מְיַדּוֹ[ת] לוֹ
Rejoicing in the day of His triumph[5]	וְשָׂמֵח בְּיוֹם עֻזּוֹ

Irwin, who believes that YHWH is depicted here as the storm god, suggests viewing this phrase in line with v. 11 which follows, and reads:

(His spear) flashes as the light;	וְנָגַהּ כָּאוֹר חֲנִית (or חֲנִיתוֹ)
(the lightning) he makes (his arrows).[6]	בְּרָקִים יָשִׂים חִצֵּי עֻזּוֹ

Jeremias, who assumes that YHWH is described here as a sun deity, restores the first colon of the verse in the following way:

Brightness as flame under him.[7]	ונֹגַהּ כָּאוּר תַּחְתָּיו

Other scholars are usually more reserved concerning emendations and deal with the text as it is. Most agree as to the general meaning of the first and third cola. The first refers to the appearance of YHWH, accompanied by exceeding light, expressed in the term נֹגַהּ, "brightness" (see below), whereas the third colon, which describes YHWH as "hidden," refers to the opposite quality. This quality of YHWH, which is also mentioned in other places in the Bible (Ps. 18:12; Exod. 33:17–23; Num. 12:6–8, etc.) is expressed here in the term חֶבְיוֹן,[8] a hiding-place.

The meaning of the remaining colon קַרְנַיִם מְיַדּוֹ לוֹ is the most problematic and disputed. The key word here is קַרְנַיִם, and the interpretation of the entire phrase depends on determining its exact meaning. Three possible explanations have been proposed in research.

a. Animal horns.[9] Following the Septuagint and the Vulgate, many believe that the intention was bull's horns, literally or metaphorically. Thus, קַרְנַיִם מְיַדּוֹ לוֹ means two horns affixed to the side of his head, while יד means "side." In these scholars' opinion, the primary meaning of קֶרֶן in the Bible is animal's horn, also reflected in the depiction of Moses descending from the Mount Sinai in Exod. 34:29–35: "the skin of his face קָרַן." This interpretation is further reinforced by the ancient Near Eastern custom of monarchs and rulers to wear a two-horned helmet as they go to war. Another possible explanation is viewing "horn" as an image of power and might (cf. Deut. 33:17). This is supported by the word עֻזּוֹ, which appears in the parallel colon. Horn is used in reference to God's strength in other places in the Bible (2 Sam. 22:3; Ps. 18:3), and likewise in reference to foreign gods and monarchs in the Canaanite and ancient Egyptian literature.

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5. Albright, "The Psalm," 11–14.

6. Irwin, "The Psalm," 20–21, 40.

7. Jeremias, *Theophanie*, 39. Hiebert (*God*, 17) also presumes that a fire is meant and reads: וְנָגַהּ (verb) כְּאוֹר הַרוֹגָה (i.e., like a destroying fire).

8. Cf., e.g., R. D. Haak, *Habakkuk*, *SVT* 44 (Leiden, 1992), 84–86, 89–90, and see ibid. (n. 403) for the proposal to identify חביון with Ḥebi, a Canaanite god mentioned in Ugaritic as well as in Eblaitic sources; cf. P. Xella, "Haby," in K. Van der Toorn et al., eds., *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible* (Leiden, 1995), cols. 715–16.

9. See Albright, "The Psalm," 11–12; Hiebert, *God*, 18; B. Kedar-Kopfstein, "*Qeren*," *TWAT* 7.188; Haak, *Habakkuk*, 86–88; J. M. Sasson, "Bovine Symbolism in the Exodus Narrative," *VT* 18 (1968), 380–87.

b. קַרְנַיִם are a lightning rod.[10] Scholars holding this opinion find intimations here of the image of the storm god. He appears in ancient iconography carrying a lightning rod designed as a two- or three-pronged pitchfork. The term קַרְנַיִם in the dual, therefore, refers to the two-pronged lightning rod held in God's hand (cf. the Septuagint and Vulgate versions above); thus וְשָׁם חֶבְיוֹן עֻזּוֹ means: there, in his lightning rod, is where his power lies hidden.

c. קַרְנַיִם are the rays of the sun.[11] The supporters of this view argue that in this case, and in the description of Moses in Exodus 34, קַרְנַיִם means "solar rays." They rely on biblical as well as extra-biblical references. The term הוד, used in the epiphany of YHWH, indicating the brilliance and exceeding light radiating from his image (Ezek. 1:27–28; Ps. 104:2; cf. Job 40:10), is mentioned in Hab. 3:3, and appears also in reference to Moses in Num. 27:20. Haran points out that this characteristic is closely parallel to the light radiating from the face of gods (and deified kings) in Mesopotamia (called *melammū*). Thus, the god Marduk is depicted as a bearded man sitting on a throne or chariot with sun rays beaming from behind his shoulders. Also Apollo, the Greek sun god, appears wearing a crown decorated with sun rays.[12] According to this interpretation one should understand the verse as follows. The appearance of God is accompanied by intense light and brilliance emanating from his hands, his sides; this light is where God is hidden, or concealed—וְשָׁם חֶבְיוֹן עֻזּוֹ, as the intense light blinds any mortal who looks upon him so that one cannot see his image (cf. Exod. 33:20).[13]

These are the three suggestions raised in research to explain Hab. 3:4. However, they are all rather tenuous, and each has its own disadvantage.

a. The interpretation of animal horns does not suit the context of God's theophany, which is accompanied by brilliance and intensive light, as expressed in terms such as הוד (v. 3), נֹגַהּ, and אוֹר (v. 4).

b. Explaining קַרְנַיִם in the sense of lightning may seem more suitable in this context, but lightning is never called קֶרֶן or קַרְנַיִם in biblical language, and it never appears in the vicinity of these terms. Nor does this meaning seem to hold in what was said about Moses in Exod. 34:30.

c. The interpretation of קֶרֶן as "ray of light" or "solar ray" (just like the explanation of "animal horn") requires the interpretation of the word יד in the sense of "side";

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10. This view is supported by J. H. Eaton, "The Origin and the Meaning of Habakkuk 3," *ZAW* 6 (1964), 145, 148; idem, *Obadia, Nahum, Habakkuk and Zephaniah* (London, 1961), 112, who maintains that the word אוֹר in the first colon of v. 3 refers to lightning, which serves as God's weapon. He is followed by J. J. Roberts, *Habakkuk*, *OTL* (Kentucky, 1991), 134–35; Avishur, *Studies*, 161–62; Irwin, "The Psalm," 20; J. C. de Moor, *The Rise of Yahwism* (Leuven, 1990), 131, n. 134; cf. *BDB*, 902.

11. See T. H. Gaster, "On Habakkuk 3,4," *JBL* 62 (1943), 345; M. Haran, "The Shining of Moses' Face: A Case Study in Biblical and Ancient Near Eastern Iconography," in W. B. Barrick and J. R. Spencer, eds., *The Shelter of Elyon, Essays on Ancient Palestinian Life and Literature in Honor of G. W. Ahlström* (Sheffield, 1984), 159–73; B. S. Childs, *Exodus*, *OTL* (London, 1974), 609–10; W. Rudolph, *Micha-Nahum-Habakkuk-Zephanja*, *KAT* (Stuttgart, 1975), 231, 234. Cf. Rashi: "קרנים refers to light (מָאוֹר) when it bores and lights through a hole like producing horns and thus כי קרן עור פניו."

12. See Haran, "The Shining," 167–68; J. R. Bram, "Sun," *Encyclopaedia of Religion* (New York, 1987), 13.136–39.

13. Cf. T. H. Gaster, *Myth, Legend and Custom in the Old Testament* (New York, 1969), 2.669–70; W. H. Ward, *Micha, Zephaniah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Obadia and Joel*, *ICC* (Edinburgh, 1928), 22; see also n. 20 below.

but nowhere in the Bible do we find this meaning of the word יד in reference to a person or any living creature. Furthermore, it always appears in conjunction with the preposition אל "to" (אֶל יד) or עַל "on" (עַל יְדֵי), but the word יד in that sense never appears as an independent form.[14]

2. *A new explanation in the Egyptian setting*

a. *Amarna religion*

The problematic verse may be resolved in light of the perceptions and beliefs prevalent in Egypt in the fourteenth century B.C.E., known as the Amarna or the Aten religion. This religion extraordinary in the history of Egypt, was introduced by Amenhotep IV, Akhenaten, who ascended the throne in 1351 and reigned until 1334. Some regard the religious reform of this king as the first attestation of monotheism in the world. But whether it was a true monotheism or not, it is clear that Amarna religion was belief in one god, the god Aten. A new iconographic symbol was given this god, a sun disc with radiating rays each terminating in human hands imparting signs of life (*ʿnḫ*) and strength (*wꜣs*) to the king and his family (see figure 1). The idea expressed in this symbol, namely, the god bestowing grace upon the king, is represented both in the art of the period—i.e., in the wall decorations of buildings and tombs—and in the inscriptions of the king and his high officialdom.

For instance, in the inscription from the tomb of a courtier named Tutu, it is said:

> [When you are shining] you light up (*ḥḏ.k*) the two countries (i.e., Egypt) and your rays (*stwt.k*) are (shining) upon your beloved son, your hands carry life (*ʿnḫ*) and power (*wꜣs*).[15]

In the boundary stelae of Amarna, the new capital built by Akhenaten, the king declares that when Aten shines in Akhetaten (Amarna) he fills it with "his fair and loving rays, which he casts upon me, consisting of life (*ʿnḫ*) and dominion (*wꜣs*) forever and ever."[16]

The main source of our knowledge of the new religion is the Hymn to the Aten, which was probably composed by the king himself. As it appears from this hymn, one of the main features of the Amarna religion is the concept of the Aten as a universal god—no longer a national god of Egypt alone but the god who created all people and all languages, the god who bestows life and nurtures all of humankind. The Aten is the god of Egypt's neighbors in north and south, Syria and Nubia—in the words of the hymn:

> The lands of Hor and Kush
> The land of Egypt,
> You set every man in his place,
> You supply their needs;
> Everyone has his food
> His lifetime is counted . . .

14. See *BDB*, 390–91 and cf. P. R. Ackroyd, "*yād*," *TDOT*, 5.400–401.

15. M. Sandman, *Texts from the Time of Akhenaten* (Brussels, 1938), 75, lines 10–12.

16. W. J. Murnane and C. C. van Siclen III, *The Boundary Stelae of Akhenaten* (London-New York, 1993), 22–23, 34, 38–39, 48; see ibid., K11 and cf. K4, K79.

Fig. 1. Akhenaton and his family standing under the radiant sun-disc, making floral offering to the Aten. The sun-disc, adorned with the uraeus cobra, imparts symbols of power (*wꜣs*) and life (*ʿnḫ*) to the royal family. Relief of the Royal Tomb. (C. Alfred, *Akhenaton, king of Egypt* [London, 1988], fig. 8).

You made Nile (Hapy) in the netherworld
You bring him when you will,
To nourish the people . . .
All distant lands, you make them live,
You made a heavenly Nile (Hapy) descend to them
(The Hymn to the Aten, ll. 8–9).[17]

17. Our translation is based on the text edition of N. de Davies, *The Rock Tombs of El Amarna* (London, 1903–1908), 6.29–31, pls. XXVII, XLI. For an English translation see: M. Lichtheim, *Ancient*

Another innovation in Amarna religion is the ritual of light. The emphasis is not on worshiping the sun as a physical body that projects heat, but the adoration of the sun as a celestial luminary, the origin of light.[18] Already in the very beginning of Akhenaten's reign, when the sun god was still called by his old name, Re-Harakhti, and depicted in the traditional image of a man with a falcon's head wearing a sun disc, it was said that he rejoices in the horizon "in his name Shu (the god of light) which is in (or from) the Aten (the sun disc)" (The Hymn to the Aten, l.1). Light is the source of life on earth: "You are indeed one, but millions of lives (are) inside you to make them life" (The Short Hymn to the Aten).[19]

The terminology and expressions accompanying the description of the god Aten are usually associated with the semantic field of light: to illuminate (*sšp, s'ḥḏ, psḏ*), to shine (*wbn*), rays (*stwt*), brilliance (*ṯḥn*).[20] The opposite of this light is night's darkness (*kkw*), which symbolizes death: "When you set in western horizon, Earth is in darkness as if in death" (The Hymn to the Aten, l. 3).[21]

Another element which distinguishes the new religion is the abstraction of the god's image. The god Aten, unlike more ancient gods, is not presented as a sculpted or painted image. The concept is that the heavenly image of the god cannot be rendered as an earthly materialization (theomorphism). This concept is expressed in the following saying of the king: "(God is) the one who built himself with his own hands, and no craftsman knows him."[22] The only tangible embodiment of the god Aten, then, is on the one hand, the sun disc in the sky—"You alone, shining in your forms of Aten" (The Hymn to the Aten, l. 11[23])—and on the other, the king, the earthly embodiment of the celestial god:

> There is no other who knows you,
> Only your son, Neferkheprure, Wa-ni-Re
>
> (The Hymn to the Aten, l. 12).[24]

The Aten religion, then, was essentially universal, focused on the celestial light, the sun, which exists anywhere on earth, unlinked to any particular theomorphic mate-

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Egyptian Literature (Berkeley, 1976), 2.96–100; W. J. Murnane, *Texts from the Amarna Period in Egypt* (Atlanta, 1994), 112–16.

18. Cf. J. Assmann, "Die 'Häserie' des Echnaton. Aspekte der Amarna-Religion," *Saeculum* 23 (1972), 116–18; D. B. Redford, "The Sun Disc in Akhenaten's Program: Its Worship and Antecedents, I," *JARCE* 13 (1976), 47–56; J. P. Allen, "The Natural Philosophy of Akhenaten," in W. K. Simpson, ed., *Religion and Philosophy in Ancient Egypt* (New Haven, 1989), 89–101; E. Hornung, *Echnaton, Die Religion des Lichtes* (Zürich, 1995), 61–62.

19. In addition to the "Hymn to the Aten" found in the tomb of Ay, the Commander of Chariotry, the Amarna tombs also contained a shorter version of the hymn which is named here "The Short Hymn to the Aten." Sandman, *Texts*, 15, lines 4–9; Lichtheim, *Literature*, 2.90–92; Murnane, *Texts*, 159.

20. The perception of the Aten (the physical sun disc) as a source of light is perhaps also reflected in the musicians' custom in the Amarna period of tying a white band over their eyes; L. Manniche, "Symbolic Blindness," *Cd'E* 53 (1978), 13–21.

21. See n. 17 above.

22. W. Helck, *Urkunden der 18 Dynastie* (Berlin, 1958–71), 22.12–13.

23. See n. 17 above.

24. See n. 17 above.

rialization. Therefore, it may well have been more apt for propagation among the neighboring cultures than any Egyptian religious concept that preceded it.

b. Interpreting Hab. 3:4 on the basis of Amarna religion

Difficult terminology and expressions that are supposedly ambiguous and obscure in Hab. 3:4 may be clarified and explained in view of the Egyptian belief in the god Aten. וְנֹגַהּ כָּאוֹר תִּהְיֶה/קְרָנַיִם מִיָּדוֹ לוֹ/וְשָׁם חֶבְיוֹן עֻזּוֹ is a literal description of the Egyptian god's symbol.[25]

וְנֹגַהּ כָּאוֹר תִּהְיֶה. The primary meaning of נֹגַהּ is "brilliance" or "brightness" deriving from light, and it is often borrowed to describe the appearance of God (see, e.g., Ezek. 1:4, 13, 27; 10:4 [in reference to God's glory]; Ps. 18:13; 2 Sam. 22:13).[26] אוֹר here means sunlight,[27] so the meaning of וְנֹגַהּ כָּאוֹר תִּהְיֶה is that the brilliance and brightness, accompanying an epiphany of God, are like sunlight.

In the two remaining cola of the verse the Hebrew God seems to carry the image of the Egyptian sun god, the Aten.

קְרָנַיִם מִיָּדוֹ לוֹ. In מִיָּדוֹ the *mem* ("from"), as the prefix of the word, should be deleted, as dittography of the *mem* that is the suffix of the previous word קְרָנַיִם. לוֹ should be interpreted as genitive *lamed*, meaning rays (are) his own hands. The difficulty in this explanation is in the repetition of the possessive indication ידו, "his hand," and לוֹ, "his." It would be preferable to apply תִּהְיֶה in the first colon to the second colon also: קרנים ידו (תהיה) לו, "his hand will be rays." Be that as it may, the meaning of the verse is, God's rays are his hands.[28]

וְשָׁם חֶבְיוֹן עֻזּוֹ. וְשָׁם indicates the hands, or the rays shaped like hands,[29] where God's power is hidden. עֻזּוֹ, his power, refers to the hieroglyphic sign *wꜣs* (Gr. S40),

25. After these lines had been written, I found that 60 years ago I. Zolli argued in "Una teofania biblica et la riforma religiosa di Amenofi IV Echenaton," *Actes du XXe Congrès International des Orientalistes* (Louvaine, 1941), 278–85, that the emblem of the sun disc from the Amarna period is reflected in the phrase קרנים מידו לו, which he rendered (like the Septuagint and the Vulgate), "Rays are in his hands." But in subsequent studies his view did not attract the attention it merited. Surely, today our knowledge of Amarna religion surpasses significantly that of Zolli's time owing to the great quantity of finds that have emerged in recent years; note in particular the reconstruction of the original buildings of Akhenaten, conducted since 1966 by an expedition from the University of Pennsylvania.

26. Cf. H. Eising, "*nāgah*," *TDOT*, 9.186; F. Schnutenhaus, "Das Kommen und Erscheinen Gottes im Alten Testament," *ZAW* 76 (1964), 9–10.

27. אוֹר also refers to sunlight in 2 Sam. 23:4; Isa. 60:19; Jer. 31:34; Eccl. 12:2, etc.; but אוֹר is not always associated with sunlight. See S. Aalen, "*'ōr*," *TDOT*, 1.151.

28. Another way to understand the syntax of קרנים ידו לו is: "Rays are his hands" (e.g., are hands to/for him); cf. Gen. 11:3. I thank the editor, Prof. Ed Greenstein, for this helpful suggestion.

29. Zolli, "*Una teofania*," proposed a different explanation for שָׁם based on comparison with the Egyptian. He assumes that שָׁם might be a faulty writing of the Egyptian term *sšm*, i.e., god image. This term relates originally to the god statue that was carried in processions, and it stresses the aspect of concealment and mystery typical of a god; see B. Ockinga, *Die Gottebenbildlichkeit im Alten Ägypten und im Alten Testament, Ägypten und Altes Testament 7* (Wiesbaden, 1984), 41–45; J. F. Quack, *Die Lehren des Ani*, *OBO* 141 (Fribourg-Göttingen, 1994), 175–76. The Hebrew scribe, who did not know Egyptian, possibly copied the Egyptian word wrongly, but one cannot accept the notion that an Aten statue is concerned here; the main characteristic of the Aten cult, which distinguishes it from previous Egyptian sun gods, is its abstract symbol (the sun disc) and the rejection of theomorphy, of the Aten and of other gods as well.

the symbol of power and dominion bestowed upon the king and his royal family by the god Aten (see figure 2).[30]

Hence, the interpretation of the verse in light of the Egyptian parallel is: the epiphany of God resembles the rising sun, accompanied by intense light, and in his rays, which are his hands, his charismatic power lies hidden. Hab. 3:4 is therefore a literal description of the Egyptian icon. The symbol of the Egyptian sun god from the Amarna period was borrowed to describe the appearance of the Hebrew God. The advantage of this explanation is in the fact that it leaves the Masoretic text intact, except for a minor emendation, namely, omission of the *mem* to correct an error of dittography.[31]

3. Additional Egyptian features in Hab. 3:3–7

Further support for this interpretation is provided by the following details, which appear in the first part (vv. 3–7) of Habakkuk 3, there too revealing a certain contact with Egypt.

a. On the one hand, the image of YHWH as depicted in this part of the chapter differs from the image that follows in the second part (vv. 8ff.), but, on the other hand, it is close to the description of the god Aten in the Amarna writings.

b. The portrayal of YHWH arriving from south (vv. 3–7) is clearly related to the biblical tradition of the Israelites' origin being in the south, in Egypt.

c. Additional motifs in vv. 3–7 may be explained against the Egyptian background, and not necessarily—as they have generally been interpreted until now—as a product of contact with Canaanite or Mesopotamian mythology.

We shall discuss these matters in detail.

a. YHWH is portrayed in vv. 3–7 as an abstract, ethereal image. His glory and fame, his brilliance and power, are mentioned (vv. 3–4). His revelation, we are told, shatters the forces of nature and causes dread among people (vv. 6–7). However, nothing is said about YHWH's emotions. The absence of reference to this is remarkable by comparison with the second part of the hymn, where we are told about God's "wrath" (vv. 8, 12), his "anger" (v. 8), and his "rage" (v. 12). The deity, as described in the first part of Habakkuk 3 then, is cold and calculating, devoid of emotions such as anger, mercy, and forgiveness. These characteristics are typical of the Egyptian god Aten; as Redford has put it:

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30. The origin of the *wꜣs* hieroglyph, which depicts a scepter, consists of a shaft surmounted by an angled traverse section, shaped as the head of some animal, is not clear. But the *wꜣs* is always used to express power, dominion. From early times it is shown carried by deities who endow it to the king, which indicates that *wꜣs* probably means "charismatic power." See M. Malaise, "Aton, le sceptre Ouas et la fête Sed," *Göttinger Miszellen* 50 (1981), 47–64; K. Martin, "Was-Zepter," *LÄ* (1986), 6.1152–54; R. H. W. Wilkinson, *Reading Egyptian Art* (London, 1994), 181; A. Gardiner, in O. Firchow, ed., *Festschrift für H. Grapow zum 70 Geb.* (Berlin, 1955), 2.

31. Some scholars also find the imagery of the Aten sun-disc in Ps. 104:28. Here the providing god is thus described: "Open your hand, they are well satisfied" (28). This depiction may recall the endowing hands of the Aten. See P. E. Dion, "YHWH as Storm-god and Sun-god: The Double Legacy of Egypt and Canaan as Reflected in Psalm 104," *ZAW* 103 (1991), 61, n. 71; J. G. Taylor, *Yahweh and the Sun: Biblical and Archeological Evidence for Sun Worship in Ancient Israel* (Sheffield, 1993), 228.

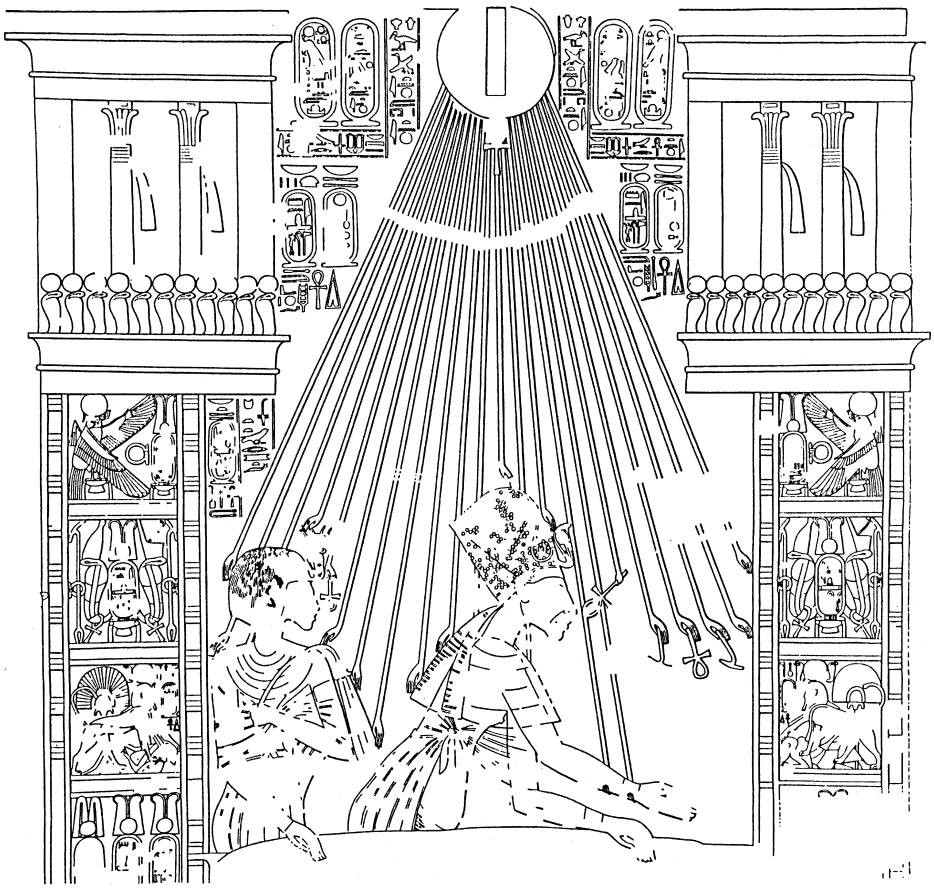

Fig. 2. Akhenaton and Nefertiti standing on the palace balcony. Above, the radiating hands of the Aten bestowing signs of power (*wꜣs*) and life (*ʿnḫ*) upon the royal pair. Copy in line of a relief in the tomb of the vizier Ramose. (C. Aldred, *Akenaton, king of Egypt* [London, 1988], fig. 12).

> But the new concept of deity that Akhenaten produces is rather cold. His disc created the cosmos and keeps it going; but he seems to show no compassion to his creatures. He produces them with life and sustenance, but in a rather perfunctory way. No text tell us he hears the cry of the poor man, or has compassion on the sick, or forgives the sinner.[32]

This portrayal of the god Aten is quite different from the image of the Hebrew God as he is usually described in the Bible. The latter is a deity of mercy and grace, who responds to the suffering and misfortune of the individual and the community; this is a god who repents and regrets what he has done, but also a god who can be vengeful and resentful; a god that becomes enraged, and vents his wrath upon his enemies (Gen. 6:6–7; Exod. 34:6–7; Num. 14:18–20; Deut. 32:11, 21–24, 41–43, etc.).

32. D. B. Redford, "The Sun-Disc in Akhenaten's Program: Its Worship and Antecedents, II," *JARCE* 17 (1980), 24.

b. The arrival of God from the south, and his appearance, are described in vv. 3–7:

God came from Teman,	אֱלוֹהַּ מִתֵּימָן יָבוֹא
the Holy One from Mount Paran. *Selah.*	וְקָדוֹשׁ מֵהַר פָּארָן סֶלָה
His Glory covered the heavens,	כסה שמים הודו
and the earth was full of his praise. . . .	וּתְהִלָּתוֹ מלאה הארץ . . .
He stopped and shook the earth;	עָמַד וַיְמֹדֵד אֶרֶץ
he looked and made the nations tremble.	רָאָה וַיַּתֵּר גּוֹיִם
The eternal mountains were shattered.	וַיִּתְפֹּצְצוּ הָרְרֵי עַד
the everlasting hills sank low . . .	שַׁחוּ גִּבְעוֹת עולָם . . .
I saw the tents of Cushan under affliction;	תַּחַת אָוֶן רָאִיתִי אָהֳלֵי כוּשָׁן
the tent curtains of the land of Midian trembled (NRSV).	יִרְגְּזוּן יְרִיעוֹת אֶרֶץ מִדְיָן

The tradition concerning the arrival of God from the south recurs in three other poetic passages, usually considered among the earliest compositions in the biblical literature: Judg. 5:4–5; Ps. 68:8–9; and Deut. 33:2. These three passages, as well as the aforementioned section from Habakkuk, belong to the literary pattern of theophany, and resemble each other, in structure and content, as shown by Jeremias.[33] The uniform structure includes the mentioning of God, a verb or verbs referring to his arrival, and a place name, preceded by the preposition *min/m* (from). The common content is the description of God's arrival, the effect of his appearance on natural forces—earth, sky, mountains and hills, and the names of the places: Seir, Mount Paran (parallel to Sinai in Deuteronomy 33), Field of Edom, and Teman. Hab. 3:3–7 describes God as he arrives from Teman and Mount Paran. He casts his wrath and dread upon mountains and hills, as well as on human beings residing in the areas near the site of the apparition, Kushan, Midian, and perhaps also On (see discussion below).

Of the three parallel passages, the closest to Habakkuk is Deut. 33:2:

The LORD came from Sinai, and dawned from Seir upon them;	ה׳ מסיני בא וזרח משעיר למו
he shone forth from Mount Paran. With him were myriads of holy ones;	הופיע מהר פארן ואתה מרבבת קדש
at his right, a host of his own (NRSV).	מימינו אשדת למו

The arrival of God is indicated here by the verb זרח, meaning to rise up, to shine, associated with the sun,[34] like קרנים in Hab. 3:4; and, perhaps, also by the word אֲשְׁדָּת, which some scholars suggested to explain on the basis of Aramaic and Syriac, as outpouring, diffusion of light, namely an abundance of light to the right side of God.[35]

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33. Jeremias, *Theophanie*, 9–10; for extensive treatment of these passages see ibid., 7–78, and L. E. Axelsson, *The Lord Rose Up from Seir, OT Series* 25 (Lund, 1987), 48–55.

34. The verb זרח usually refers (in 12 out of 18 instances) to the rise of the sun in the sky; cf. מִזְרָח, "place of sunrise"; and see H. Ringgren, "*zārah*," *TDOT* 4.141–43 and Schnutenhaus, "Das Kommen," 9. But at times it is also used metaphorically to describe God's appearance (e.g., Deut. 33:2, Isa. 60:2).

35. This explanation of the ἅπαξ λεγόμ אֲשְׁדָּת was first proposed by C. J. Ball, "The Blessing of Moses (Deut. XXXI)," *PSBA* 18 (1896), 119–20; he was followed by I. L. Seeligmann, "Before any King

Thus, in Deuteronomy 33, as well as in Habakkuk 3, the description of God arriving from the south is tinted with solar elements. In Habakkuk the names Teman and Mount Paran indicate the stations in God's passage in his travel from the south. Teman is not mentioned in the parallel passages, but it appears in the Bible as a synonym or in reference to Edom and Seir, as in Judges 5 or Deuteronomy 33.[36] Mount Paran, which in Hab. 3:3 stands in parallelism with Teman, is identified as a region south of Canaan, east or west of the Arabah.[37] Even though these names originally indicated some specific areas, they appear to refer to the southern region in general when used in the literary pattern of theophany. Likewise, Kushan and Midian in verse 7 should not be understood as specific regions but as the general wandering area of the nomadic tribes, the Kushites and Midianites. It extends from the southern part of Transjordan in the east to the Egyptian border in the west.[38]

As mentioned, the tradition reflected in these passages on the arrival of God from the south is an archaic heritage, and from recent archaeological discoveries, it seems to have been well known in Israel in the First Temple period. These discoveries include inscriptions from the 9th–8th centuries B.C.E., discovered at Kuntillet Ajrud in the northern Sinai, a site which served as a stage for caravans on their way south to Elat. In these inscriptions the name *YHWH Tmn* appears several times, and in one of them the verb *zrḥ* is used to describe the appearance of God, exactly as in Deuteronomy 33: וימסנ הרמ . . . ובזרח אל meaning, "when God shines forth . . . the mountains melt."[39] As in the biblical passages dealing with the theophany, the phrase *YHWH Tmn* should also be understood here as a reference to God's arrival

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Reigned over the Israelites," in A. Hurvitz, E. Tov, S. Japhet, eds., *Studies in Biblical Literature* (Jerusalem, 1992), 191, and by Avishur, *Studies*, 163. This meaning is also maintained by Cassuto, "Deuteronomy Chapter XXXIII and the New Year in Ancient Israel," *Biblical and Oriental Studies* (Jerusalem, 1973), 1.50.

36. Teman is the name of Esau's grandson (Gen. 36:11) and a region of Edom (Gen. 36:34 = 1 Chron. 1:53); it stands in parallelism with Edom and Seʿir (Obad. 8–9, Jer. 49:7, 20).

37. For the location of Mountain Paran and its references in the Bible see Hiebert, *God*, 86–88.

38. The Midianites are depicted in the Bible as nomads wandering in the southern marches of Israel, which include the Sinai peninsula as far as southern Transjordan (Gen. 25:4–6; 36:35; Num. 10:29–31, etc.; Josh. 13:21; Judg. 6:3, 33, 7:12, 1 Kgs. 11:18). As to *Kušan*, Albright was the first to identify it with the *Kušu* who appear in the Egyptian sources as early as the second millennium B.C.E. (in the Execration Texts [Posener E50–51] and in the Tale of Sinuhe, l. 220). These sources show that *Kušan* was one of the nomadic tribes that lived in the deserts located in the south and southwest of Israel. The close relation between the Midianites and the Cushites is evident from the fact that Zipporah, Moses' wife, is at times called a Midianite (Exod. 2:16–21) and at times a Cushite (Num. 12:1) (supposing that the two passages refer to the same woman). Scholars assume that these two tribes were blended into one national identity. See Hiebert, *God*, 88–89; B. Mazar, "*Cushan*," *Encyclopaedia Biblica* (Jerusalem, 1962), 4.70–71; idem, *Canaan and Israel* (Jerusalem, 1974), 17–18, n. 15 [in Hebrew].

39. The complete text is as follows:

וּבזרחֵ אל . . . / וימַסֵּן הָרם/ וידַכֵּן גִּבְנַ(נּ)ם . . .
לְבָרֵךְ בַּעַל בְּיֹם מלחמה/ לְשֵׁם אֵל בְּיֹם מִלְחָמָה

See S. Aḥituv, *Handbook of Ancient Hebrew Inscriptions* (Jerusalem, 1992), 160–61 [in Hebrew]; M. Weinfeld, "Recent Publications 3: Further Remarks on the Ajrud Inscriptions," *Shnaton* 6–7 (1978–79), 238 [in Hebrew]; idem, "Kuntillet ʿAjrud Inscriptions and Their Significance," *Studie Epigrafici e Linguistici* 1 (1984), 126.

from the south, and not as an indication of a local god. Travelers heading south would pray to this god to assure them a safe and sound journey.[40]

The tradition of the southern origin of the Hebrew God, which recurs in the Bible and in extra-biblical sources, has an apparently historical basis. Support for this may be found in the Egyptian sources. In topographical lists from the time of Amenhotep III, Akhenaten's father, and in copies of these lists from the period of Ramesses II (13th century B.C.E.), there is a region named *tꜣ šꜣsw Yhw*, "the land of the Shasu Yehu." Since this region is followed in the list by "the land of Shasu Seir" we assume that we are dealing here with a region named after Yehu, a local god who was worshiped in the land of Seir, the wandering area of the tribes of Midian and Kushan mentioned in Habakkuk 3.[41]

Finally the difficult phrase at the beginning of verse 7 תַּחַת אָוֶן רָאִיתִי has been emended to read תְּחַת אוֹן וְתִירָא "On will fear and be frightened."[42] This emendation is supported by the fact that at least in one other reference in the Bible the spelling of the Egyptian town On is אָוֶן (Ezek. 30:17; cf. Gen. 41:45, 50, etc.; and perhaps also Ps. 78:51). According to this version the city On, *Iwn* in the Egyptian sources, which was located in the northern part of present-day Cairo, should be added to the list of landmarks on God's journey from the south. This detail is significant to our discussion since that city was an important center of sun worship in Egypt, from the Old Kingdom period to the late period, as attested by its Greek name Heliopolis, the sun city. Furthermore, Akhenaten was brought up and raised in On, and also served as the "First Prophet" of the local god Re-Harakhti. An additional argument seems to exist here in support of understanding Habakkuk 3 in light of the Amarna period in Egypt.

In sum, whether the city of On is connoted in Hab. 3:7 or not, there is no doubt that Hab. 3:3–7, as well as Deut. 33:2 and the inscriptions from Kuntillet Ajrud, all reflect a tradition that uses solar elements vividly to depict God's arrival from the south. Was this tradition based on an awareness of the sun god Aten's religion, which originated in the south, in Egypt?

c. On his journey from the south God is accompanied by a powerful entourage, *Deber* and *Reshef*, and his appearance spreads fear and havoc among the forces of nature (vv. 5–6). These details have been usually interpreted in light of the northern mythology, but they also find their place in ancient Egyptian belief.

Reshef is mentioned in the Bible several times (in singular and plural form) in the sense of a plague demon. As in Habakkuk, he appears together with *Deber*, in

40. Cf. J. A. Emerton, "New Light on Israelite Religion. The Implications of the Inscriptions from Kuntillet ʿAjrud," *ZAW* 94 (1982), 13, 19.

41. On the supposition that the Midianites worshiped a god named *Yhu*, who is mentioned in the Egyptian sources, and on the possibility that during his sojourn among them Moses became acquainted with this god, see: N. Shupak, "The Monotheism of Moses and the 'Monotheism' of Akhenaten," in *The Bible as a Meeting Point of Culture through the Ages, Sevivoth* 34 (1995), 26–27 [in Hebrew]; cf. also Axelsson, *The Lord*, 59–61 and an extensive bibliography there.

42. This is the opinion of Zolli, "*Una teofania*," 282; N. H. Tur-Sinai, *Pešuto šel Miqra* (Jerusalem, 1967), 3/b. 522; and Avishur, *Studies*, 171–72. The association of אָוֶן (wickedness) with the pagan town On (Heliopolis) may reflect a wordplay, which also appears with similar connotation in Hosea (4:15; 5:8; 10:5). There the epithet "house of אָוֶן" denotes the town of Bethel. I thank my friend Ruth Zakovitch for advising me of this reference.

the historical hymn in Psalm 78 which describes in detail the Egyptian Plagues: "He delivered their beasts to pestilence (read לַדֶּבֶר instead of לברד), and their cattle to plague (לָרְשָׁפִים) . . . and he delivered their animals to pestilence (לַדֶּבֶר)" (vv. 49–50). Likewise, it is present in Deut. 33:23ff., which deals with various plagues that God is going to cast upon his people: "They will be wasted with hunger, devoured by pestilence (רשף). . . . "[43] *Reshef* is known as a Canaanite god of Plague whose cult was widespread in Western Asia. He appears alongside the god Baal in Ugarit, and is identified with the god Nergal in Babylon and Apollo in Greece. However, *Reshef* is also among the foreign gods adopted by the Egyptians.[44] His portrait frequently appears on tombstones, bronze and stone statues, and amulets. The worship of *Reshef* was common in Egypt from the fifteenth century and through the Ptolemaic period. In the time of the 18th dynasty, a period relevant to our discussion since Akhenaten ranked among its kings, *Reshef* became the personal god of Amenhotep II, and served as god of war, chariots, and horses. Later on, from the Ramesside period, he became more popular and was worshiped as a protective god, powerful and influential in matters of magic.

Reshef's worship was widespread not only among the foreign population in Egypt, but also among the Egyptians themselves. In that sense he differs from other foreign gods who penetrated the Egyptian pantheon through contact and trade with northern neighbors. Therefore, his mention in Habakkuk 3, alongside other Egyptian elements, may reveal an Egyptian rather than a Semitic background.

The arrival of God accompanied by powerful and frightful forces like *Deber* and *Reshef* causes excitement and tremors in nature: ויתפצצו הררי-עד שחו גבעות עולם (cf. v. 10, ראוך יחילו הרים).[45] This subject is characteristic of passages dealing with theophany in general, and those depicting the southern arrival of God in particular (Judg. 5:4–5; Ps. 68:8–9). It is common in research to compare this image with the description of the appearance of Mesopotamian and Ugaritic gods, which similarly causes much commotion and upheaval of natural forces, and there also the motif of two messengers in wartime is present.[46] Yet in the Egyptian literature as well the revelation of god is accompanied by earthquakes and celestial turbulence of stars and planets, and there, too, the god is escorted by various symbols of power

43. Also see Job 5:7, Ps. 76:4, Song of Sol. 8:7; 1 Chron. 7:25 (as a proper name).

44. On *Reshef* in the Bible and the ancient Near East see S. E. Loewenstamm, "*Rešep*," *Encyclopaedia Biblica* (Jerusalem, 1976), 7.437–41 [in Hebrew]. Two comprehensive studies devoted to Rešep in Ancient Egypt were published in recent years: W. J. Fulco, *The Canaanite God Rešep* (New Haven, 1976) (also dealing with the relevant passages in the Bible) and I. Cornelius, *The Iconography of the Canaanite Gods Reshef and Baʿal* (c. 1500–1000 B.C.E.), *OBO* 140 (Fribourg-Göttingen, 1994), 23–133, 235–64; also see: R. Stadelmann, *Syrisch-palästinensische Gottheiten in Ägypten* (Leiden, 1967), 52–76; W. Helck, *Die Beziehungen Ägyptens zu Vorderasien im 3 und 2 Jahrtausend v. Chr.* (Wiesbaden, 1971), 450–73; W. K. Simpson, "Reschef," *LÄ* (1983), 5.244–46.

45. In view of the emendation proposed by Hiebert (*God*, 20) to the first part of v. 6 עמד וימדד ארץ ראה ויתר גויים, this text too relates to the motif of cosmic turmoil which is part of the divine manifestation. Hiebert suggests reading וינדד "to move" instead of וימדד "to measure," and he renders ויתר as deriving from *ntr* "to spring, jump"; namely, YHWH caused the earth to move and the nations to jump. This interpretation finds support in other passages where the verbs *nwd* and *ntr* concern theophany (Isa. 24:20; Job 37:1).

46. See Loewenstamm, *The Tradition*, 248; Jeremias, *Theophanie*, 75–76; Avishur, *Studies*, 110; Gaster, *Myth*, 670–72.

and might[47] similar to *Reshef* and *Deber* in Habakkuk 3. For instance, in "The Tale of the Shipwrecked Sailor," presumably composed in the Middle Kingdom period, the arrival of the serpent, the island's god, is described as follows:

> Then I heard a sound of thunder and thought, it was a wave of the sea.
> Trees splintered and the ground trembled (ll. 56–60).[48]

In the Pyramid Texts from the Old Kingdom period it is said:

> The sky is overcast,
> The stars are darkened,
> The vaults quiver,
> The bones of the earth-gods tremble,
> The planets(?) (lit., those who move) are stilled (*Pyr.* 393a–c).

We find in the Coffin Texts from the Middle Kingdom period the following:

> Trembling falls on the eastern horizon of the sky
> at the voice of Nut (*CT* VII 252a).

This motif, which originally belonged to accounts of theophanies, was adopted for the royal inscriptions, which tended to use images and expressions borrowed from divine phraseology to emphasize the kings' superhuman grandeur. One example is found in the hymn to king Sesostris III (19th c.):

> His awe has struck the Bowmen in their lands,
> His fear has killed the Nine Bows (Egypt's enemies) (*Les.* p. 66 4–5).

In the Poetical Stela of Thutmose III (15th c.) the god Amen says to the king:

> I set your might (*bꜣw*), and your fear in every country,
> The dread of you as far as the heaven four supports,
> I magnified your awe in every body (ll. 3–4).[49]

The arrival of the king, who is actually a reflection of god's manifestation, is accompanied by various symbols of power and might remarkably close to the image of *Reshef* and *Deber*:

> The king's powers (*kꜣw*) are behind him,
> His *ḥmswt* (synonym to *kꜣ*) are under his feet,
> His gods are on his head,
> His uraei (defending cobras) are on his brow (*Pyr.* 396a–b).

Or:

> Your might (*bꜣ*) is yours, within you,
> Your power is yours, behind you,
> Your *wrrt* crown is yours, upon your head,

47. See E. Hornung, *Conceptions of God in Ancient Egypt: The One and the Many*, trans. J. Baines (London, 1982), 129–33.

48. A. M. Blackman, "The Story of the Shipwrecked Sailor," in *Middle-Egyptian Stories, Bibliotheca Aegyptiaca* 2 (Brussels, 1932), l. 43.

49. A. de Buck, "The 'Poetical' Stela of Tuthmosis III," in *Egyptian Readingbook* (Leiden, 1963), 53, lines 14–15.

Your *miswt* crown is yours, upon your shoulder . . .
The followers of the god are behind you,
The nobles of the god are in front of you (*Pyr.* 753a–54a).

In the Poem of the Kadesh Battle from the period of Ramesside II (13th c.) the rebels cry out to each other:

Beware! Watch out! Do not approach him (the King)!
The great Sakhment (Plague goddess) is with him,
She is with him on his horses, her hand is with him;
Any one who goes to approach him,
A flame of fire is coming to burn his body (ll. 286–89).[50]

4. Conclusion

Our investigation shows that the text of Habakkuk 3 brings together archaic traditions based on myths and beliefs prevalent in the ancient Near East. Apart from ancient Canaanite and Babylonian elements, which have been extensively discussed in earlier research, we also observe here Egyptian motifs and imprints. The Egyptian material is mainly concentrated in the first section of the chapter (vv. 3–7), and it is reflected in the imagery of the sun disc with radiating arms, the portrayal of *Reshef*, god of war, the depiction of turmoil in nature, and the fear among human beings at the appearance of God; and perhaps also in the mention of the city of On (v. 7).[51] Without the exposure of the Egyptian roots in the biblical text, the first part of Habakkuk 3 remains ambiguous and unclear.

Habakkuk 3 reflects a phenomenon similar to the one in the hymn Psalm 104, which has long been recognized by scholars as bearing a remarkable resemblance to the Egyptian Hymn to the Aten.[52] In addition to parallels in content and in terminology to the Egyptian hymn, Psalm 104 likewise reveals some distinctive Canaanite

50. K. A. Kitchen, *Ramesside Inscriptions* (Oxford, 1979), 2.87–88.

51. To the list of Egyptian elements in Hab. 3:3–7 one may also add הליכות עולם לו in v. 6. As it stands, this colon is out of place. Supposing that הליכות עולם, which means a marching encompassing the whole world (cf. Ps. 68:25; Job 6:19), refers to the daily travel of the sun, the problem is solved by transferring הליכות עולם לו to the end of v. 4. This sun imagery is characteristic of the Egyptian conception from as early as the Middle Kingdom, and is particularly common in the New Kingdom when the sun-disc became a universal emblem. The king's conquest could be said to encompass "all that the sun encircles" (*EA* 369; D. B. Redford, *Akhenaten* [Princeton, 1984], 170, and idem, "The Sun Disc," 49) or that the ruler's name was set up "from the sun's rise until its setting" (*EA* 288, cf. 147). This interpretation is reinforced by the fact that also in Ugaritic and Akkadian the word *hlk(t)* refers to the orbits of the stars; Hiebert, *God*, 20.

52. The following is a selected list of studies published in recent years on the comparison of the Hymn to the Aten with Psalm 104. Only few scholars assume a direct borrowing from the Egyptian Hymn: A. Barucq, *L'Expression de la Louange divine et de la prière dans la bible et en Égypte* (Cairo, 1962), 316–21; P. Auffret, *Hymnes d'Égypte et d'Israël: Etudes des structures littéraire*, *OBO* 34 (Fribourg-Göttingen, 1981), 133–310; Taylor, *Yahweh*, 225–30. Most commentators maintain an indirect influence through Canaanite mediation: P. C. Craigie, "The Comparison of Hebrew Poetry: Psalm 104 in the Light of Egyptian and Ugaritic Poetry," *Semitics* 4 (1974), 10–21; C. Uehlinger, "Leviathan und die Schiffe in Ps. 104, 25–26," *Biblica* 71 (1990), 499–526; Dion, "YHWH as Storm god," 43–71; J. Assmann, "Akhanyati's Theology of Light and Time," *Proceedings of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities* 7/4 (1992), 143–76.

elements which refer to ancient mythology and northern vistas.[53] This phenomenon accords with the ancient custom that prevailed in the ancient Near East beginning with the New Kingdom in Egypt (15th c. B.C.E.), namely blending elements deriving from different cultures and religions.[54] For instance, in the Amarna letters Pharaoh, the earthly embodiment of the sun god, is compared to the Canaanite god Baal, who shakes the earth with his roaring (*EA* 147); and in the Kuntillet Ajrud inscriptions the Hebrew God is referred to by various names such as "Yahweh of Samaria" and "Yahweh of Teman," and he is likened to Baal on his battle day.[55]

A question surely arises as to how motifs relating to the Amarna belief, dating from the fourteenth century B.C.E., came to be known by a Hebrew prophet living in the late seventh century B.C.E. Before attempting an answer, we should recall that the Aten's religion avowed a universal outlook and worshiped one single god of abstract image, thus rejecting the idea of mythology, plurality of gods, and the worship of wood and stone. It was therefore closer to the monotheistic Hebrew faith than any other pagan religion. Hence it could have left its mark on ancient Hebrew religion. Another pertinent matter is the relationship between Egypt and its neighbors in the Amarna period. The contact between Egypt and its neighboring countries in that period was quite close, especially with the northern neighbors. There is evidence of delegations from foreign lands (Nubia, Syria, Libya, Heth) bringing gifts to the king of Egypt; references are found to marriages between the Egyptian royal family and Mitannian princesses; to the entertainment of foreign rulers in Pharaoh's court; to officials of Semitic origin serving in high-ranking positions (like Tutu, who was "The Mouth of the King" and his "First Prophet in Aten's Temple," or Aper-El who was his vizier); and to musicians of northern origin whose playing accompanied the royal ceremonies.[56]

The region of Israel and Syria was at that time under Egyptian dominion. The Amarna letters, sent by local rulers of this region to Pharaoh, are sprinkled with ideas, expressions, and metaphors that are distinctly Egyptian. For instance, common appellations for the king in these letters are "my sun," "the sun god," "the sun in the sky," and "the sun god who rises above" (*EA* 55, 147, 224, 234, 254, 298, 329, etc.). There is also the expression "the (king's) strong arm" to indicate the physical power of the king (*EA* 286, 288, etc.). One of the most outstanding examples is the following segment from the letter of Abimilk, Prince of Tyre, studded with Egyptian expressions and metaphors:[57]

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53. The Egyptian elements in Psalm 104 are the following: the depictions of day, night and sea (20–23; 25–26); God as a supplier of irrigation and nourishment (10–15; 27–28) and as the endower of his creatures with the breath of life (29–30). The Canaanite imprints in the psalm are: God driving on clouds (v. 3); winds and lightning as his messengers (v. 4); rebuking the sea and confining it within bounds (vv. 6–9); the Leviathan (v. 26); theophany accompanied by earthquakes and volcanic eruption (v. 32; but this may be also considered as an Egyptian element: see discussion below); and landscape typical of the northern regions, i.e., mountains, rocks, cedars of Lebanon, and wild goats (vv. 16–18).

54. Cf. Dion, "YHWH as Storm God," 67–68.

55. See n. 36 above.

56. L. Green, "The Origins of the Giant Lyre and Asiatic Influences on the Cult of the Aten," *JSSEA* 23 (1993), 56–62.

57. See W. F. Albright, "The Egyptian Correspondence of Abimilki, Prince of Tyre," *JEA* 23 (1937), 190–203.

My lord is the sun-god, who arises over the lands day after day
as ordained by the sun-god his gracious father,
Who gives life by his sweet breath (*šeḫw*),
And returns with his north wind,[58]
Who sets the whole land in peace by his strong arm (*EA* 147, ll. 5–12).

Addressing the king as the sun god, the expression "strong arm," and the parallel pair "sweet breath" and "northern breeze" are all common linguistic usages in Egyptian literature. The central idea in this section, namely, the god bestowing the breath of life, is a recurring theme in hymns to the Aten:

The sight of your rays (is) a breath of life to the nose
(The Short Hymn to the Aten).[59]

The earth was created by you, as you made it
When you dawn they live,
When you set they die;
You are lifetime, one lives by you
(The Hymn to the Aten, l. 12;[60] cf. Ps. 104:29–30).

Thus, the Amarna Letters are filled with idioms and terms usually reserved for hymns to the Egyptian gods. A recently published study by Hess illustrates that they also have certain characteristics in common with the biblical Psalms. This similarity, in vocabulary, structure, and purpose, proves, according to this scholar, that there was a scribal tradition in Jerusalem.[61] If Hess's opinion is correct and such a tradition indeed existed in Jerusalem, it presumably was influenced, at least in the early stages of its crystallization, by the older institution of the Egyptian scribe.[62]

Let us return now to the opening question: How did the information about the Aten religion reach the prophet, or author, who lived and created centuries later? The Egyptian material, as reflected in Habakkuk 3, probably found its way to the hands of the Hebrew writer indirectly through the mediation of the Canaanites, whose close contact with the Egyptians was discussed above. However, the information about the Egyptian sun religion may well have stemmed from direct contact between Israel and Egypt. Egyptian concepts and beliefs may have been kept in the memory of the Hebrew nation since the time when the Israelites still lived in Egypt

58. "And returns with his northern wind" is the rendering of W. L. Moran, *The Amarna Letters* (Baltimore-London, 1992), 233, who is followed by Assmann, "Akhanyati's," 168, and idem, *Moses the Egyptian* (Cambridge-London, 1997), 192. Moran's translation relies on the fact that the words "sweet breath (*šeḫw*)" and "north wind" are coupled in parallelism in the Egyptian literature. Their distribution is especially wide in the New Kingdom (18–19 Dynasties). In this period they appear mainly in the Sun's hymns or in the king's hymns when he himself is likened to the Sun god; this was shown by C. Grave, "Northwest Semitic Ṣapānu in a Break-up of an Egyptian Stereotype Phrase in EA 147," *Orientalia* 51 (1982), 161–82.

59. Sandmann, *Texts*, 15, lines 7–9.

60. Ibid., 95, lines 17–18.

61. R. S. Hess has noted the possibility that a Canaanite scribal tradition existed at Jerusalem from the Amarna period through the Israelite period; "Hebrew Psalms and Amarna Correspondence from Jerusalem: Some Comparisons and Implications," *ZAW* 42 (1989), 249–65.

62. This is confirmed by Hebrew words associated with the vocation of the scribe that are clear adaptations of the Egyptian (*deyô* [Jer. 36:18] *qeset* [Ezek. 9:2–3, 11]) and the name of King David's scribe *šiša', šawša'* (1 Kgs. 4:4; 1 Chron. 18:16; cf. 2 Sam. 8:17; 20:26) which derives from Egyptian; see: N. Shupak, *Where Can Wisdom Be Found*, *OBO* 130 (Fribourg-Göttingen, 1993), 349–51.

(assuming, of course, that at least some Israelites did indeed sojourn in Egypt). Obviously, any theory about the way the Egyptian elements reached the biblical author remains speculative. It is doubtful that a definitive answer may be found as to how these elements survived for hundreds of years until they resurfaced in the prophecy of Habakkuk.

Nevertheless, one may assume that a residue of the Egyptian solar religion was preserved in certain circles of sun worshipers in Israel. The existence of this cult in Israel, from the monarchic period until the Babylonian exile, is well attested, not just in the biblical scriptures but principally from archaeological finds unearthed in recent years.[63] A fine example is the image of winged sun disc, a distinctive Egyptian emblem created by combination of the sun disc signifying the god Re with the falcon representing the god Horus, found in archeological remains from the First Temple period, as well as in biblical prophecy from the Second Temple period. This symbol adorns the *lmlk* seal imprinted on jar handles from Judea, and it is also used by the prophet Malachi to illustrate the reward in store for the righteous: "But to you who fear my name the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in his wing" (Mal. 3:20).[64] The concepts and beliefs concerning the Egyptian god Aten may have been retained, then, in circles of worshipers who revered the Sun god in Israel, and could sprout and re-surface later in the prophecy of Habakkuk, at the end of the seventh century B.C.E.

Finally, even though any opinion regarding the way this foreign material penetrated the Bible is only speculation, one thing is clear: biblical literature in general and the hymn of Habakkuk 3 in particular are rooted in traditions and concepts that were prevalent in the ancient Near East. The authors of the Bible lived and created in a heterogeneous world, where various traditions, views, and beliefs, stemming from different cultures, coexisted. Many of these traditions were probably infused and blended with one another well before the seventh century B.C.E. The author of Habakkuk 3 was no longer aware of the various foreign roots of his composition when he incorporated them into his hymn of praise to God.

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63. Many studies have been devoted lately to the issue of a sun cult in Ancient Israel. See, e.g., N. Sarna, "Ps. 19 and the Near Eastern Sun-God Literature," in *The Fourth World Congress of Jewish Studies* (Jerusalem, 1967), 1.171–75; J. W. McKay, *Religion in Judah under the Assyrians* (London, 1973), 28–73, 97–124; idem, "Further Light on the Horses and Chariot of the Sun in the Jerusalem Temple," *PEQ* 105 (1973), 167–69; H. P. Stähli, *Solare Elemente in Jahweglauben des Alten Testaments*, *OBO* 66 (Fribourg-Göttingen, 1985); M. S. Smith, "The Near Eastern Background of Solar Language for Yahweh," *JBL* 109/1 (1990), 29–36; idem, "Review of Stähli Solare Elemente," *JBL* 106 (1987), 513–15; and Taylor, *Yahweh.*

64. For the significance of the Egyptian symbol see S. B. Hassan, "A Representation of the Solar Disc with Human Hands and Arms and the Form of Horus of Beḥedet," *Annales du Service des Antiquités de l'Égypte* 38 (1938), 531–61; A. Gardiner, "Horus the Behdetite," *JEA* 30 (1944), 49. The emblem of winged sun-disc appeared also in the northern iconography, in particular in Mesopotamia and Syria (see, e.g., G. E. Mendenhall, *The Tenth Generation* [Baltimore, 1974], figs. 5–9; *ANEP* 281, 493). But the Egyptian evidence is older, so we assume that this solar imagery derived from Egypt and not from the northern regions. Cf. Taylor, *Yahweh*, 42–58, who maintains that this emblem penetrated Israel as a result of the relationship between Egypt and Judah in the late 8th c. B.C.E. when Hezekiah formed an alliance with Egypt against Assyria. For the royal ideology expressed in this emblem see Mendenhall, ibid., 34, and also Smith, "Review," 514, who assumes that the same ideology is reflected in the Judean *lmlk* seals.