

What are *Elilim*?

MARK W. HAMILTON



WHAT ARE ʿELILIM?¹

MARK W. HAMILTON
ABILENE CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY

The word ʿ*elilim* appears in the Hebrew Bible fourteen or fifteen times, always as a designation of deities other than Yhwh (Lev 19:4; 26:1; Isa 2:8, 18, 20; 10:10 (?), 11; 19:1, 3; 31:7; Ezek 30:13; Hab 2:18; Pss 96:5; 97:7; 1 Chr 16:26). Standard lexica derive the word from the root ʿ-*l*, understanding it as a cognate of the Akkadian *ulalu* and Arabic ʿ*alal* or ʿ*alil*,² and the plural of ʿ*elil*, with the singular form appearing four times (Jer 14:14; Zech 11:17; Job 13:4; Sir 11:3). The plural form thus has been thought a sort of frozen dysphemism: “worthless things” equal images of deities other than Yhwh.

The unqualified certainty of recent lexica has not always prevailed, however.³ First, the LXX renders the term inconsistently. In some cases, the Greek translators understood the Hebrew to denote a physical object, a rendering befitting the frequent parallelism between ʿ*elilim* and *pesel* (as in Lev 26:1; Hab 2:18; Ps 97:7; cf. Isa 10:10) or *massékâ* (Lev 19:4; Hab 2:18). Such translations include *ta cheiropoiëta* (“the things made by hand”; Lev 26:1; Isa 2:18; 10:11; 19:1; 31:7), favored in texts emphasizing the object’s manufacture or material. When the visible nature of the ʿ*elilim* is in view, but its manufacture is less salient, the preferred translation may be *eidolon* (Lev 19:14; Hab 2:18; Ps 96:7[MT 97:7]; 1 Chr 16:26). Meanwhile, other texts understand ʿ*elilim* as *theoi* (Isa 19:3, unless the Greek reflects a variant reading ʿ*elohim*) or *daimonia* (Ps 95:5 [MT 96:5]). The translation “worthless” or its equivalent appears only for the singular form ʿ*elil* (*ta mataia* in Zech 11:17; [*iatai*] *kekôn* in Job 13:4; *mikra* in Sir 11:3).⁴

¹ I am grateful to John Huehnergard and Jo Ann Hackett, as well as two anonymous reviewers, all of whom made comments on earlier drafts of this document. Errors of fact or judgment remain my responsibility, of course.

² HALOT 1:56; BDB 47 (tentatively); DCH 1:291.

³ For example, Theodor Nöldeke attempted to explain the word as a “Metaplasmus” of a root ʿ-*l* attested in the Himyaric (now called Ancient South Arabian or Sabaic) word ʿ*lil*; Theodor Nöldeke, “Elohim, El (אֱלֹהִים, אֱל),” *Sitzungsberichte der königlichen preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin* 54 (1882): 1191. Nöldeke’s argument is cited with reservations in BDB 47 but has apparently not commended itself, in part because it depends on decisions about the original text of Isa 10:10 as its primary biblical confirmation. See below.

⁴ Jer 14:14^{Qere} has *qesem wēʿelil*, possibly a hendiadys “divination and

There are two exceptions to this rule, for *ta bdehymata* (“abominable things”) appears in Isa 2:8, 20. That lexeme normally translates the Hebrew words *tô‘ebâ* or *šeqeš* in the LXX, both of which are also dysphemisms, though occasionally it glosses *‘ēlohê-X* (3 Kgdms 11:5^{MSS}, 33). The rendering of Isaiah 2:8, 20 LXX might be an argument for associating the plural *‘ēlîlîm* with the root *‘-l-l*, but the association is weak, since the singular *‘ēlîl* never clearly refers to idols.

Second, the Vulgate always renders *‘ēlîlîm* with a word denoting an image, whether *idolum* (Lev 19:4; 26:1; Isa 2:8, 18, 20; 10:11; 31:7; Ezek 30:13; 1 Chr 16:26), *simulacrum* (Isa 19:1, 3; Hab 2:18), or the nominalized adjective *sculptilis* (Pss 95:5 [MT 96:5]; 96:7 [MT 97:7]). In no case does the translation understand the Hebrew word as “worthless thing.”

Third, even in contemporary scholarship, a certain amount of confusion prevails. Thus Preuss explains the plural form as a diminutive form of *‘el* intentionally analogous to *‘ēlîl* as an expression of scorn, though this thesis can hardly be correct since the reduplication, in a noun, of the second radical of a biliteral root lacks obvious parallels.⁵ At the same time, *qtil* diminutive forms typically resolve to *qtel* rather than *qtil*,⁶ while more to the point *qtil* forms tend to be loanwords.⁷ So there is little if any basis for such a construal as Preuss’s.

FOR FURTHER CONSIDERATION

None of the aforementioned versional evidence disproves the modern lexicography, of course. Nor does it render invalid the translation “idols,” since the biblical texts clearly use the term negatively. Yet the ancient understanding at least opens space for other explanations. A possibility that has received only passing consideration but deserves reexamination is that *‘ēlîlîm* is a loanword from the Akkadian term *illilu* (“deity”), itself a Sumerian loanword EN.LÍL.LÁ.⁸ The oldest appearances of the Hebrew

worthlessness”; see the discussion in Jack R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20* (AB 21A; New York: Doubleday, 1999), 708. LXX’s *oionismata* is a guess, based apparently on the notion that Jeremiah was presenting a list of divinatory practices.

⁵ Horst Dietrich Preuss, “אֱלִיל” *TDOT* 1 (1974): 285. But see Nöldeke’s (“Elohim, El,” 1191 n. 3) proposal of *‘imm* as a possible case, which is undoubtedly wrong.

⁶ Joüon-Muraoka §88Ci.

⁷ As catalogued by John Huehnergard, “Biblical Hebrew Nominal Patterns,” in Jeremy M. Hutton and Aaron D. Rubin (eds.), *Epigraphy, Philology and the Hebrew Bible: Methodological Perspectives on Philological & Comparative Study of the Hebrew Bible in Honor of Jo Ann Hackett* (ANEM 12; Atlanta: SBL Press, 2015), 25–64 (47).

⁸ A hint at this idea appears in John Huehnergard, “Qātil and Qatîl Nouns in Biblical Hebrew,” in Aaron Maman, Steven Ellis Fassberg, and Yonatan Breuer (eds.), *Sha‘arei Lashon: Studies in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Jewish Languages Presented to Moshe Bar-Asher* (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 2007), *3–*45 (*31). The name Enlil itself may be a loanword from a Semitic language that entered Sumerian no later than the early

word occur in Isaiah, a text replete with Akkadian loanwords owing to the awareness of Assyrian propaganda on the part of Isaiah of Jerusalem,⁹ and more generally the intense interaction between Israelite and Mesopotamian cultures during the eighth century BCE and later.¹⁰ In later texts, the meaning of ʿ*elilim* as a term for explicitly foreign deities remained stable.

A significant possible objection to the thesis might appeal to the word's morphology. The Hebrew ʿ*elilim* lacks the geminated *l*, which originated from the assimilation of *n* and *l* in Akkadian.¹¹ However, of the eighty more or less certain Akkadian loanwords in the Hebrew Bible, eight contain non-guttural geminated medial consonants, i.e., forms that could be represented in Masoretic Hebrew as such (*Addaru*, *ikkāru*, *ummiānu*, *aššatu*, *libbātu*, *maššaru*, *nikkassu*, and *šabbītu*).¹² Two forms, influenced by Aramaic, dissimilate the geminated consonants (*maššaru* → *meššār*; *šabbītu* → *šarbīṭ*), and two others simply de-geminate the consonants (*Addaru* → ʿ*ādār*; *nikkassu* → *nēkāsīm*). That is, the differences in spelling are not fatal for understanding the Hebrew lexeme ʿ*elilim* as a loanword, possibly via Aramaic.¹³ In short, then, no convincing argument exists refuting the understanding of ʿ*elilim* as an Akkadian loanword and thus as deriving from a separate root than the singular form ʿ*elil*.

third millennium BCE, as argued by Piotr Steinkeller, “On Rulers, Priests and Sacred Marriage: Tracing the Evolution of Early Sumerian Kingship,” in Kazuko Watanabe (ed.), *Priests and Officials in the Ancient Near East: Papers of the Second Colloquium on the Ancient Near East—The City and its Life held at the Middle Eastern Culture Center in Japan (Mitaka, Tokyo)* (Heidelberg: Winter, 1999), 103–37 (114 n. 36). However, this view has been questioned by several Assyriologists. For the history of that discussion, see Xianhua Wang, *The Metamorphosis of Enlil in Early Mesopotamia* (AOAT 385; Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2011), 6–22; Dietz Edzard, “Enlil, Vater der Götter,” in Paolo Marrassini (ed.), *Semitic and Assyriological Studies Presented to Pelio Fronzaroli by Pupils and Colleagues* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2003), 173–84. The solution to this problem is not crucial to the argument at hand, in any case.

⁹ As discussed by, among others, Peter Machinist, “Assyria and Its Image in the First Isaiah,” *JAOS* 103 (1983): 719–37.

¹⁰ On important aspects of that contact, see Peter Dubovský, *Hezekiah and the Assyrian Spies: Reconstruction of the Neo-Assyrian Intelligence Services and its Significance for 2 Kings 18-19* (BibOr 49; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 2006).

¹¹ On the assimilation of *-n*, see *GAG* §33d-g.

¹² Derived from Paul V. Mankowski, *Akkadian Loanwords in Biblical Hebrew* (HSS 47; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2000), 168–73 and *infra*. On gemination and de-gemination of consonants, see *GAG* §20a-d.

¹³ The reduction of *i-* to *ē-* in initial syllables is documented for Akkadian loanwords in Aramaic, as shown by Stephen A. Kaufman, “On Vowel Reduction in Aramaic,” *JAOS* 104 (1984): 87–95. The vowel reduction would also render the degemination of *-ll-* unavoidable, at least for a Hebrew text borrowing the word (cf. again, *Addaru* → ʿ*ādār*; *nikkassu* → *nēkāsīm*).

A second possible objection arises because *illilu* is fairly rare in Akkadian. However, this point is also not decisive, not only because a number of the Akkadian loanwords in Hebrew are religious words (as well as technological and military/political terms), but because some other fairly rare words did cross the linguistic boundary. These include *šaršerru* → *šašar* (“red clay, pigment” [Jer 22:14; Ezek 23:14]), *šumbu* → *šab* (“wagon, wagon wheel” [Num 7:3; Isa 66:20]), and *kamānu* → *kanwān* (“sweet cake” [Jer 7:18; 44:19]). Admittedly the first two may accompany technology transfer, but the third is unlikely to have done so.

Moreover, the resurgence of Enlil in Assyrian texts, seen prominently in the inscriptions of Assurbanipal,¹⁴ is prefigured in those of Tiglath-pileser III, which refer at least sometimes to Aššur as “Enlil of the gods” (*illil ilāni*).¹⁵ If we could identify a trigger for moving the word *illilu* to Northwest Semitic languages (Aramaic and Hebrew) in the eight century BCE, the oral proclamation of Tiglath-pileser III’s propaganda would be a reasonable guess.

POSITIVE ARGUMENTS

What arguments could move this understanding of the etymology of *ʿēlīlīm* from a possibility to a probability? To make that case, one might consider (1) the process of borrowing from one language to another, and (2) the understanding of the word held by those using it.

First, lexical borrowing meets least resistance when the two languages share similar phonologies,¹⁶ as would have been the case with Akkadian and Hebrew. And while any aspects of language may be borrowed, nouns move most easily from more to less prestigious languages (in this case, Akkadian to Hebrew), particularly when the nouns come from technical or elite zones of the vocabulary.¹⁷

When do speakers recognize a given word as a loanword, and how do they “nativize” it? Frequently, lexical borrowings

¹⁴ Enlil (^dEN.LIL) appears in the inscriptions of Assurbanipal (RINAP 5/1 3.i.38, v.17; 4.i.30; 5.iii.23; 6.i.8; 7.i.89, v.84; 9.iii. 34; 10.iv.11; 11.iv.111, viii.92, 97, ix.74, 77, 84; 23.5, 29, 110), including the phrase *ba’ulāt* ^dEN.LIL (“subjects of Enlil”; RINAP 6.i.8; 7.i.89; 10.iv.11).

¹⁵ RINAP 1 35.i.1, 34; 37.1 (cf. 35.i.21; 37.12; 39.2; 40.3; 46.2). In these inscriptions, Enlil is normally written ^dBAD, but in the phrase *illil ilāni* is written ^dEN.LĪL.LĀ, indicating a subtle theological reflection on the relationship between the entity Enlil and the status of Enlil-ness (so to speak).

¹⁶ See the discussion in Hans Heinrich Hock and Brian D. Joseph, *Language History, Language Change, and Language Relationship: An Introduction to Historical and Comparative Linguistics* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1996), 259.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 258; for a proposed gradient of loan likelihood, see Sarah G. Thomason, *Language Contact: An Introduction* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2001), 66–74.

must be fitted to the phonology of the receptor language. However, morphological refitting also sometimes occurs as in the change of case endings or repluralization.¹⁸ In the present instance the *-im* ending of ʔ*elilim* conforms the word to Hebrew pluralization of masculine nouns.

If ʔ*elilim* is a lexical borrowing from Akkadian, and therefore a homophone of a possibly native Hebrew word ʔ*elil* that appears in biblical texts only as a singular noun,¹⁹ then it would be striking that the loanword is plural at all times. The phonology of the plural (notably the use of the long medial vowel *-i > -i*) would reflect an attempt to conform the loanword to the native word ʔ*elil* while still keeping them distinct.²⁰ In other words, ʔ*elilim* refers to multiple deities conceived of as a group in distinction from the Israelite deity Yhwh. While the common Hebrew word ʔ*elohim* can bear a similar meaning, some reason existed for preferring a foreign-sounding word in certain circumstances (though note the concatenation of the words in Ps 97:7).

Second, to clarify this point, the semantic range and denotation of ʔ*elilim* and thus the earliest known understandings of the word by Hebrew speakers show a clear pattern:

1. The word never refers to Israel's deity;
2. It never designates a class of beings of which Israel's deity is a member (unlike ʔ*el* or ʔ*elohim*);
3. It may refer to artifacts, especially but not exclusively metal objects, and presumably statues (Lev 19:4; 26:1; Isa 2:8, 20; 31:7; Hab 2:18);
4. It may refer to foreign deities (Isa 10:10; 19:1, 3; Ezek 30:13; Ps 96:5; 1 Chr 16:26), but not always is their origin clear, and occasionally the deity seems to be Israelite, though not Yhwh (Isa 10:11; 31:7).

The most revealing uses of ʔ*elilim* appear in what are probably the oldest texts, Isa 2:8, 18, 20; 10:10 (?), 11; 19:1, 3; 31:7. For a word entering Hebrew from Akkadian, a plausible entry point would have been during a period of maximal contact of speakers and maximal differentiation of prestige, a condition that fits the eighth and seventh centuries BCE, precisely coeval with the earlier layers of the book of Isaiah. By the time of the creation of later texts, the word had simply become part of the Hebrew lexicon. A brief investigation of the examples in Isaiah reveals a profile of word usage indicating users' awareness of its foreignness.

¹⁸ Hock and Joseph, *Language History*, 265–66.

¹⁹ But see Huehnergard, "Hebrew Nominal Patterns," 47.

²⁰ An analogy might be the history of the English word *camel*, from Latin *camel[us]* < Greek *kámēlos* < Semitic *gāmal*—the movement of the accent from word final position in Semitic to word initial position in Greek follows the latter language's phonological rules, as would be true in the current English form. Older English forms included *camaylle*, *camell*, *camelle*, and others, showing interference from French dialects and possibly reflecting a different accenture.

Case 1: Isa 2:8, 18, 20. The poem in Isa 2:5–22, which expands upon the hope oracle in 2:2–4 by contrasting the present disaster with a future resolution, depicts the change of situation in part by referring to both the present omnipresence (2:8) and soon-to-be absence (2:18) of the *ʔēlīlīm*, here deities of the Northern Kingdom but manifestly not Yhwh. V. 20 speaks of the destruction of gold or silver deities on the part of their erstwhile users.

While the deities here are not foreign, strictly speaking, the portrayal of Jacob’s desperate state in 2:6–8 highlights an unnatural state of affairs marked by the presence of “diviners like the Philistines” (*ʕonēnīm kappēlīšīm*) and of chariots, apparently of the Assyrian invaders.²¹ In other words, the presence of the *ʔēlīlīm* indicates the foreignness of the moment. One need not accept the view, then, that the deities in question were northern avatars of Yhwh.²² The oracle would be engaging in code-switching, that is, “the use of material from two (or more) languages by a single speaker in the same conversation.”²³ The switching would emphasize the alien nature of the situation the prophet describes.

Case 2: Isa 10:10–11. Arguably, a clearer example of such code-switching occurs in Isa 10:10–11, part of the Assyrian emperor’s invidious speech noting the weakness of conquered powers, moving ever closer to Judah. V. 11’s reference to the *ʔēlīlīm* of Samaria and their defeat probably refers to the common Assyrian practice of deporting divine images to the imperial center. But more interesting, if also more problematic, is v. 10, which many scholars have argued has suffered textual corruption:

Just as my hand has found for the kingdoms of the “idol(s),”

[so will it be] for their images from Jerusalem and from Samaria.

... *kaʔāšer mašpā yādī lēmamlēkōt ʔēlīlīm*

ūpsīlēhem mīrūšalayim ūmīššomrōn

The reading in MT would suggest a translation of the last words in 11a as “kingdoms of futility,”²⁴ punning cleverly on the plural form that appears in v. 10. In MT, again, both the first word in 11b (*ūpsīlīm*) and the resulting chiasmic structure (political word/divine word/divine word/political word pair) lead the poem’s audience to expect the form *ʔēlīlīm* in both verses, allowing the poet to “trick” the audience by using the homophonous

²¹ See J. J. M. Roberts, *First Isaiah* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015), 45.

²² As in apparently *ibid.*, 45–56. Better, Ziony Zevit, *The Religions of Ancient Israel: A Synthesis of Parallaxic Approaches* (London/New York: Continuum, 2001), 515–17.

²³ Thomason, *Language Contact*, 132.

²⁴ Or “worthless kingdoms” as in Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1-39* (AB 19; New York: Doubleday, 2000), 251–52.

native word. However, both 1QIsa^a and LXX cast doubt on MT's reading.²⁵

If we accept the reading of 1QIsa^a, it is curious that the oracle places in the mouth of the Assyrian king the phrase *mamlékôt ʾēlīlīm*, forming a collocation remarkably close to a recurring line in *Enūma eliš*: *malikūt ilāni gimratsunu qātika ušmalli* ("I filled your hands with the kingship of the gods, all of them"), a statement that Tiamat addresses four times to her consort Qingu.²⁶ As is well-known, Isaiah 10 shows extensive knowledge of Assyrian propaganda, making an allusion to a standard, even "canonical," Mesopotamian text both possible and important. The echo of such a line would not just fit Isa 10's already well-attested proclivities toward word play across language barriers, but would mark an extraordinarily subtle bit of counter-propaganda, answering the Assyrian deployment of *Enūma eliš* as a rationale for the allegedly creative dimensions of its expansion by turning it back on its users.²⁷ By recasting the Assyrian king as the embodiment of chaos, not creation, and the acquisition of the kingdoms of gods (now labeled with the foreign-sounding ʾēlīlīm in order to emphasize their sharp distinction from Israel's deity)²⁸ as an

²⁵ The plural form appears in 1QIsa^a, while LXX's *ololuxate* represents a Hebrew *tēhēlū* (C imperfect) or *hēlū* (C imperative) of *yālal* ("to mourn, cry out, ululate"), assuming that the idols in the Israelite capitals should mourn because of their inability to save their worshipers.

²⁶ *Enūma eliš* 1.154; 2.40; 3.44, 102. For a non-normalized transcription, see Philippe Talon, *Enūma eliš: The Standard Babylonian Creation Myth* (SAACT 4; Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2005); and the critical edition of Wilfred G. Lambert, *Babylonian Creation Myths* (Mesopotamian Civilizations 16; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2013), esp. 3–134.

²⁷ On the use of the classic text in Neo-Assyrian inscriptions, see, Elnathan Weissert, "Creating a Political Climate: Literary Allusions to Enūma Elish in Sennacherib's Account of the Battle of Halule," in Hartmut Waetzoldt and Harald Hauptmann (eds.), *Assyrien im Wandel der Zeiten. XXXIXe Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale. Heidelberg 6.-10. Juli 1992* (HSAO 6; Heidelberg: Heidelberger Orientverlag, 1997), 191–207; Eckart Frahm, "Counter-texts, Commentaries, and Adaptations: Politically Motivated Responses to the Babylonian Epic of Creation in Mesopotamia, the Biblical World, and Elsewhere," *Orient* 45 (2010): 3–33 (esp. 8–17); C. L. Crouch, "Ištar and the Motif of the Cosmological Warrior. Assurbanipal's Adaptation of Enūma Elish," in Robert P. Gordon and Hans M. Barstad (eds.), *Thus Speaks Ishtar of Arbela: Prophecy in Israel, Assyria, and Egypt in the Neo-Assyrian Period* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2013), 129–41. It also played a significant role, perhaps more understandably given its focus on Marduk, in Neo-Babylonian propaganda; see Jo Ann Scurlock, "Enūma Elish meets the so-called Babylonian Map of the World: An image and its text," in Pascal Attinger et al. (eds.), *Text and Image: Proceedings of the 61e Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale, Geneva and Bern 22-26 June 2015* (OBO.SA 40; Leuven: Peeters, 2018), 411–22.

²⁸ "Foreign-sounding" because, while the normal Hebrew word ʾēlōhīm can refer in the book of Isaiah to foreign deities (Isa 21:9; 36:18, 19; 37:12, 19, 38; 41:23; 42:17; 65:17), only one such usage can possibly

act threatening cosmic order rather than bolstering it, the echo plays upon the expectations of implied listeners, if not necessarily the real addressees. Whether every member of an Israelite audience would have heard the echo mattered less than its overall impressiveness.²⁹

Case 3: Isa 19:1, 3. The reference to the *ʿēlîlê Mišrayim* in v. 1 is echoed by *ʿēlîlîm* in v. 3, where the word introduces a string of divinatory or funerary words (cf. Isa 2:6), as well as the Akkadian loanword *ʾittîm* (from *eṭemmu* [“ghost, revenant”]), itself a *hapax legomenon* in the Hebrew Bible. Again, the lines emphasize the foreignness of the word by concatenating it with other foreign words, as well as through its placement in a larger poem about Egypt.

Case 4: Isa 31:7. The date of Isa 31 is debatable, in part depending on one’s understanding of a Josianic redaction of the book.³⁰ But the foreignness of the deities is not evident.

In summary, then, the evidence from the book of Isaiah is consistent with the belief that the word *ʿēlîlîm* is somehow “foreign.” As such, the vocabulary item satisfies one possible use of loanwords: even when not strictly necessary because a suitable synonym exists in the receptor language, the loanword may “enrich the language by conveying the new meaning without any ambiguity.”³¹ While the more normal names for deity (other than the Tetragrammaton) can name Israel’s patron deity or others, the word *ʿēlîlîm* admits of no ambiguity, a valuable gain for a text created in part to interpret the tragic history of the late eighth century BCE.

CONCLUSIONS

To conclude, then, the confidence with which modern lexica assume *ʿēlîlîm* to be the plural of *ʿēlîl* without further qualification seems misplaced, as does the assumption that the word is a native Hebrew word meaning “useless things” or some such.

come from the eighth-century prophet (21:9). The word refers to Israel’s deity more than 90 times in the book.

²⁹ It is useful to keep in mind Richard Hays’s distinction between “allusion” (“usually imbeds several words from the precursor text, or it at least in some way explicitly mentions notable characters or events that signal the reader to make the intertextual connection”) and “echo” (“may involve the inclusion of only a word or phrase that evokes, for the alert reader, a reminiscence of an earlier text”). See Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2015), 10. The Isaiah line may be an instance of allusion, with all the deliberateness of choice and expectation of understanding that the term implies. But demonstrating that claim is difficult, and so I opt for the safer label “echo.”

³⁰ See Marvin Sweeney, *Isaiah 1-39 with an Introduction to Prophetic Literature* (FOTL 16; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 405–8; but Roberts, *First Isaiah*, 403–5.

³¹ Hock and Joseph, *Language History*, 289, as part of a larger discussion of the uses of loanwords.

Strong circumstantial evidence exists for understanding the plural form to be a loanword understood as such by its earliest known user, the eighth-century (or slightly later) texts in the book of Isaiah. The uses of the word in those poetically subtle and rhetorically powerful texts show an awareness of the origins of the label in a foreign language and therefore its suitability for naming beings not suitable for Israelite worship. The borrowing of the word seems to have allowed the eighth-century prophet or his immediate successors an opportunity to signal simultaneously their awareness of the linguistic and political dominance of Assyria and their contempt for, and resistance to, that dominance.