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Carly L. Crouch ^a

^a Department of Theology & Religious Studies, University of Nottingham, Uni-versity Park, Nottingham, NG7 2RD, UK

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Adapting the Cosmological Tradition in Isaiah 40-45

C.L. Crouch

Department of Theology & Religious Studies

University of Nottingham, University Park Nottingham NG7 2RD UK

Email: carly.crouch@nottingham.ac.uk

ABSTRACT: The characterisation of Yahweh as king in Isaiah 40-45 and the use of creation language to reiterate Yahweh's power are well known. This article examines the way in which these themes reflect this text's re-working of pre-exilic theology in order to cope with the exilic situation.

It discusses the pre-exilic military tradition, especially in relation to Yahweh's roles as warrior, king and creator, then examines how Isaiah 40-45 adapts this tradition to a changed reality.

It concludes that the author has abandoned the traditional rendering of the *Chaoskampf*, in which Yahweh's roles as warrior, king and creator are linked, in order to retain the characteristics necessary to persuade the exiles of Yahweh's power to save. Though Yahweh remains warrior, king and creator, these characteristics are no longer interconnected.

It has long been noted that Isaiah 40-55 employs language of creation in its efforts to reiterate the authority and power of Yahweh.¹ Similarly, the charac-

1. On creation motifs in Isaiah 40-55 see e.g., R.J. Clifford, "The Hebrew Scriptures and the Theology of Creation," *TS* 46 (1985), pp. 507-523; R.J. Clifford, "The Unity of the Book of Isaiah and its Cosmogonic Language," *CBQ* 55 (1993), pp. 1-17; J.I. Durham, "Isaiah 40-55: A New Creation, a New Exodus, a New Messiah," in J.M. O'Brien and F.L. Horton Jr. (eds.), *The Yahweh/Baal Confrontation and Other Studies in Biblical Literature and Archaeology: Essays in Honour of Emmett Willard Hamrick: When Religions Collide (Studies in the Bible and Early Christianity*, 35; Lampeter: Mellen Biblical Press, 1995), pp. 47-56; M. Fishbane, *Biblical Text and Texture: A Literary Reading of Selected Texts* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1998); N.C. Habel, "He Who Stretches Out the Heavens," *CBQ* 34 (1972), pp. 417-430; P.B. Harner, "Creation Faith in Deutero-Isaiah," *VT* 17 (1967), pp. 298-336; J.G. Janzen, "On the Moral Nature of God's Power: Yahweh and the Sea in Job and Deutero-Isaiah," *CBQ* 56 (1994), pp. 458-478; T.M. Ludwig, "The Traditions of the Establishing of the Earth in Deutero-Isaiah," *JBL* 92 (1973), pp. 345-357; T.W. Mann, "Stars, Sprouts, and Streams: the Creative Redeemer of Second Isaiah," in W.P. Brown and S.D. McBride Jr. (eds.), *God Who Creates: Essays in Honor of W. Sibley*

terisation of Yahweh as king is a recognised component of these chapters' message.² The extent to which these emphases derive from the importance of a cosmological interpretive matrix for pre-exilic Judahite military encounters, however, has not been recognised.

What follows is an examination of how the author of Isaiah 40-45 in particular attempted to re-work the national theological traditions to cope with the new and unfamiliar situation of exile in so far as it had been precipitated by war. This author's assertions of Yahweh's creative power and of Yahweh's role as divine king are more than convenient means of reclaiming Yahweh's authority. Rather, they are a necessary pre-requisite to the announcement of coming salvation. Why this initial foundation is so vital to his overall argument requires an understanding of how the concepts of war, kingship and creation fitted together in pre-exilic Judahite thinking. Accordingly, the first part of this study constitutes a discussion of the traditional Judahite approach to military encounters, particularly the connection of this approach to Yahweh's roles as warrior, king and creator, and the second part examines the way in which Isaiah 40-45 adapts this tradition to the changed national experience.

I

In the pre-exilic theological and mythological matrix of the Judahite élite, Yahweh's status as divine king was intimately connected to his defeat of the forces of chaos at creation. This was articulated as a variation on the widespread ancient Near Eastern creation narrative, the Judahite version being one in which Yahweh defeated in battle the personified forces of chaos, was proclaimed king as a consequence of his military success, and proceeded to create an ordered cosmos.

This assertion, that Yahweh's creative acts were preceded by his military defeat of chaotic forces, may come as a surprise given the lack of an explicit account in the Hebrew Bible of a divine struggle at creation: Genesis 1 has

Towner (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2000), pp. 135-151; T.N.D. Mettinger, "Fighting the Powers of Chaos and Hell—towards the Biblical Portrait of God," transl. F.H. Cryer, *ST* 39 (1985), pp. 21-38; B.C. Ollenburger, "Isaiah's Creation Theology," *Ex auditu* 3 (1987), pp. 54-71; C. Stuhlmüller, *Creative Redemption in Deutero-Isaiah* (*AnBib*, 43; Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1970); C. Stuhlmüller, "'First and Last' and 'Yahweh-creator' in Deutero-Isaiah," *CBQ* 29 (1967), pp. 189-205; J. Vermeylen, "Le motif de creation dans le Deutéro-Isaïe," in L. Devousseaux (ed.), *La Création dans l'Orient Ancien: Congrès de l'ACFEB, Lille (1985)* (*LD*, 127; Paris: CERF, 1987), pp. 183-240.

2. See e.g., H.G.M. Williamson, *Variations on a Theme: King, Messiah and Servant in the Book of Isaiah* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1998), pp. 1-10; T.N.D. Mettinger, "In Search of the Hidden Structure: YHWH as King in Isaiah 40-55," *SEA* 51-52 (1986-1987), pp. 148-157; C. Stuhlmüller, "Yahweh-king and Deutero-Isaiah," *BR* 15 (1970), pp. 32-45; F.M. Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973), pp. 106-108.

been deliberately stripped of this conflict tradition, while Genesis 2-3 knows nothing of it. Yet, though it has been deliberately obscured in the priestly account of creation, it is clear that Judah knew of a cosmological account in which Yahweh's victory over the forces of chaos, embodied as watery sea creatures, preceded and enabled Yahweh's establishment of an ordered world.

That the tradition of Yahweh engaged in battle against watery chaos—often referred to as *Chaoskampf*—was well-known in Judah has already been established by J. Day, in *God's Conflict with the Dragon and the Sea*.³ Important for our purposes, however, is that this motif appears not in isolation, but in conjunction with descriptions of Yahweh's creative acts and the characterisation of Yahweh as king. This conclusion is contra Day, who believes the *Chaoskampf* motif in the Hebrew Bible to be most closely related to the motif's appearance at Ugarit, where it is not attested in conjunction with the god's creative acts, rather than related to the tradition attested in Mesopotamia, where it is. The rationale for our conclusion lies most especially in the psalms.

The collective appearance of Yahweh's kingship, creative activities and battle against chaos occurs clearly in Psalm 93, in which the proclamation that "Yahweh is king" (93,1) is followed by strongly cosmological language alluding to the creation ("He has established the world," 93,1) and a divine battle with the sea ("The floods have lifted up," 93,3).⁴ In Psalm 89, the theme of the battle against chaos at creation (89,10-11) is likewise immediately preceded by language suggesting Yahweh's kingship over other gods:

For who in the skies can be compared to Yahweh?
Who among the heavenly beings is like Yahweh,
A god feared in the council of the holy ones,
Great and awesome above all around him? (89,7-8)⁵

3. J. Day, *God's Conflict with the Dragon and the Sea: Echoes of a Canaanite Myth in the Old Testament* (COP, 35; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

4. Day (*Conflict*, pp. 35-36) notes this connection, suggesting that the idea of Yahweh's kingship may here also be extended to Yahweh's rule over the nations. Given the convergence of these ideas elsewhere, this is highly probable. Verse numbers follow the Masoretic text and translations the NRSV.

5. The connection of this psalm to the cosmological tradition is further indicated by its references to the Davidic covenant—perhaps the most decisive biblical expression of the unified purpose and activity of god and king. The psalm expresses this unity by closely paralleling the description of the king and the description of Yahweh: "You have a mighty arm", the psalm says of Yahweh; "strong is your hand, high your right hand" (89,14); "My hand", responds Yahweh, "shall always remain with him [the king]; my arm also shall strengthen him...I will set his hand on the sea and his right hand on the rivers" (89,22.26). The connection between this unity of god and king and Yahweh's original creative battle against chaos is confirmed by the preceding declaration that

You [Yahweh] rule the raging of the sea;
when its waves rise, you still them.

Psalm 24 too opens with a declaration of Yahweh's role as creator (24,1-2) and, though he considers it an uncertain case, Day concludes that this passage (in conjunction with the reference in 24,8 to Yahweh in military terms) most probably does refer to a battle with the sea.⁶ The psalm concludes with a five-fold declaration of Yahweh's kingship (24,7-10), completing the triad. Without falling into circular arguments, it seems more than coincidental that these three motifs dominate the psalm; collectively, they reflect a tradition of Yahweh's creative battle against the sea, culminating in his coronation as king.

Last but not least is Psalm 18. K.-P. Adam has discussed the royal characterisation of Yahweh in this psalm at length, leaving it necessary only to note the language suggestive of Yahweh's creative role as cosmic victor:

He rode on a cherub, and flew;
 he came swiftly upon the wings of the wind.
 He made darkness his covering around him,
 his canopy thick clouds dark with water.
 Out of the brightness before him there broke through his clouds hailstones
 and coals of fire.
 Yahweh also thundered in the heavens,
 and the Most High uttered his voice.
 And he sent out his arrows, and scattered them;
 he flashed forth lightnings, and routed them.
 Then the channels of the sea were seen,
 and the foundations of the world were laid bare
 at your rebuke, O Yahweh,
 at the blast of the breath of your nostrils (89,11-16).⁷

These texts strongly indicate that there was a tradition in Judah linking the motifs of war, kingship and the establishment of order at creation, even though the limitations of the sources mean that the Hebrew version is difficult to flesh out in terms of terminology and other detail.⁸

You crushed Rahab like a carcass;
 you scattered your enemies with your mighty arm (89,11).

The equation of the enemy with chaos is evident from the poetic parallelism, and its application to the king's mortal enemies clear from the repetition of the same terms in 89,23-24. This part of the psalm concludes with a statement of the royal (covenant) relationship between the god and the king, reiterating the convergence of divine and human activity yet again.

6. Day, *Conflict*, pp. 37-38.

7. For further discussion of Psalm 18 and the cosmological motifs it employs see K.-P. Adam (*Der Königliche Held: Die Entsprechung von kämpfendem Gott und kämpfendem König in Psalm 18* [WMANT, 91; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchner Verlag, 2001]) and C.L. Crouch (*War and Ethics in the Ancient Near East: Military Violence in Light of Cosmology and History* [BZAW, 407; Berlin: de Gruyters, 2009]).

8. For further discussion see Crouch (*War and Ethics*). The first stage of this triad is commonly referred to as the *Chaoskampf* motif, though here this term will be used to refer to the full schema. It is perhaps also worth note that the preceding may have

Particularly important are the causal relationships among these three roles. Yahweh's coronation as king and his actions as creator are predicated on his military victory over the chaotic forces which threaten the universe. This means that, while a challenge to any individual aspect of this triad of divine attributes would pose a challenge to all three, a challenge to Yahweh's military prowess would prove particularly problematic. The cosmological tradition inherited by the exilic prophet and his audience, then, entailed that Yahweh's kingship and creative activities were specifically tied to his military success against the forces of chaos.

No such challenge was likely to occur as long as the activities of Yahweh against chaos were left firmly in the primeval period, concerned only with his original act to defeat the forces of chaos in favour of the original creation of cosmic order. However, in addition to the fully mythological association of Yahweh's victory over chaos with the events at creation, the élites of pre-exilic Judah (like their counterparts elsewhere in the ancient Near East) saw the divine king as battling against chaos also in the present, through the activities of the earthly human king on the battlefield. Just like Yahweh had defeated the forces of chaos in a battle at creation, the human king was also seen to be defeating the forces of chaos in the battles of the present, with his military enemies conceived as historical personifications of chaos. Most importantly, however, the human king was not acting alone in his battle against earthly chaos: Yahweh was also involved in the earthly battle against and defeat of the king's chaotic opponents.

A strong argument for this phenomenon has been made by Adam, who marshals the evidence to contend that the mirrored activities of Yahweh and the human king reflect parallel pursuits of the model of the royal hero ("der königliche Held"):

das Entsprechungsverhältnis zwischen JHWH als königlicher Gottheit und dem irdischen König als Held [konnte] nur deswegen so eng gefaßt werden ... weil beide dieselbe Handlungsrolle einnehmen: Wie JHWH als Held im Kampf eingreift, kann auch der irdische König eingreifen.⁹

He goes on to discuss the phenomenon in detail with respect to Psalm 18 in particular, evincing a number of parallels in the language and imagery used on the one hand of Yahweh and on the other of the earthly king.¹⁰

certain implications for arguments about the geographical location of some or all of Isaiah 40-55, insofar as these arguments are based on the supposed familiarity of the author(s) with Babylonian creation narratives surrounding Marduk: if these traditions are equally native to the Judahite tradition, it need not necessarily be the case that Isaiah 40-55 originated in Babylon (see H.M. Barstad, *The Babylonian Captivity of the Book of Isaiah: "Exilic" Judah and the Provenance of Isaiah 40-55* [Oslo: Instituttet for sammenlignende kulturforskning, 1997]).

9. Adam, *Der Königliche Held*, pp. 29.

10. For further discussion of the shared weaponry of divine and human kings in particular, see N. Wyatt ("Degrees of Divinity: Some Mythical and Ritual Aspects of West Semitic Kingship," in *There's Such Divinity Doth Hedge a King': Selected*

Through this relationship the kingship of Yahweh became intimately entwined with the military endeavors of the human Judahite king. The human king's successes on the battlefield reflected the involvement of the divine king in the fight, and the divine king's power and universal authority was confirmed in the human king's success.

As consequence of this divine-human synergy, the defeat of the human king on the earthly battlefield posed serious problems with regard to the power and authority of the divine king, insofar as the human king's defeat intimated also the divine king's defeat. The exile therefore posed a significant challenge to Yahweh's kingship: when the human king was defeated and the people exiled, it implied that Yahweh had also been defeated. Though there are indications of *ad hoc* responses to Judah's smaller scale and less permanent defeats prior to this time, the exile posed a more lasting and significant challenge.¹¹ The existing framework could accommodate the temporary subordination of Yahweh's human agent against chaos to his enemies (i.e., to chaos) and envision Yahweh's role in this as a limited tolerance of chaotic dominance for moral purposes while Yahweh maintained ultimate control; the human king's thoroughgoing and permanent defeat suggested the permanent triumph of chaos over both the human and divine kings. The total inability of Judah's king to defeat the chaotic Babylonian enemy in battle thereby threatened to undermine the basis for Yahweh's coronation as divine king as well as his claims to be creator of the universe.

II

The belief of an exilic-era audience in Yahweh's ability to save them depended on whether the author of Isaiah 40-45 could convince them that Yahweh's claims to be king and creator were still intact: if Yahweh's power was

Essays of Nicholas Wyatt on Royal Ideology in Ugaritic and Old Testament Literature [SOTSMS; Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005], pp. 151-189).

11. One of the few preserved attempts to deal with this issue in the pre-exilic period is—probably, though the date of the passage is in dispute—the end of Psalm 89. The final verses of the psalm (89:38-51) make it clear that the king's defeat is a theological problem: the assumed synergy of god with king has been disrupted and the king's earthly success is no longer assured. The expectation of divine support for the Davidic king is similarly expressed in the Nathan oracle in 2 Samuel 7, with which this psalm has a close relationship. In the oracle it is noted that when the king does wrong, Yahweh “will punish him with a rod such as mortals use, with blows inflicted by human beings” (2 Sam 7,14). Military defeat, in other words, is accommodated as a means of divine punishment. In the context of Psalm 89, this concept of defeat as a consequence of royal wrongdoing appears to be presupposed, even as the psalmist protests that, in this case, Yahweh's abandonment is unfounded (89,38-51). The balance between the two conflicting elements of the oracle is weighed carefully: between the premise that defeat entails culpability, and the supposition that Yahweh will never abandon the king. Both Psalm 89 and 2 Sam 7,14, however, are ultimately concerned with short-term defeat; the unconditionality of the Davidic covenant which both reflect has no room for the complete destruction of the dynasty as effected by the Babylonian conquest.

less than that of the Babylonian deities (as indicated by his military inability to defeat them) then he could hardly be conceived as king, and if his power did not extend to the entire universe by virtue of his having created it, there could be no foundation for a belief that Yahweh would be able to intervene in earthly events in such a way as to override Babylonian dominance of Judah. Yahweh's claims to universally extending power had previously been predicated on his demonstrated military power in the person of the Judahite king, and his thereupon attendant status as divine king and his role as creator. Both of these latter, however, were based on Yahweh's military success. If Yahweh's military success was no longer self-evident in the successes of the Judahite king, Yahweh's claims to be warrior, king and creator had to be reiterated on their own terms.

A concern with these interrelated concepts is clear already from the opening verses of Isaiah 40. The overarching issue, as is commonly recognised, is the need to reassure the exiles that Yahweh has not forgotten them, but will in fact save them from their present distress (40,1-2). That their specific doubts surrounded Yahweh's claims to be king, creator and warrior is indicated by the immediate introduction of these concepts in 40,3-20. Almost the entirety of the rest of the first half of the work is devoted to various re-visitations of these themes.

The first issue is the text's insistence that Yahweh is king. This appears with various emphases—that it is *Yahweh* who is king; that Yahweh *is*, and has not ceased to be, king; that Yahweh is, whatever else he may be, first and foremost *king*—but to overlook the overwhelming importance of the concept of Yahweh's kingship in these chapters is to miss a—perhaps the—significant object of the argument: none of the rest of the case laid before the exiles may proceed until this point has been indisputably established, because Yahweh's claim to kingship is a claim to power.

The basic assertion of Yahweh's kingship appears in 40,3-9. Though the explicit statement that "Yahweh is king" does not yet appear, the paraphrase in Isa 52,7 makes clear that this is the issue at hand (compare especially 52,7 with 40,9). The initial paragraph culminates with the announcement to the cities of Judah that "Here is your God" (40,9): the figure of the herald is that of the royal attendant announcing the king to his subjects, prefaced by processional language (40,3-4) and reference to the king's glory (40,5).¹² The image is then elaborated through reference to the two primary aspects of ancient Near Eastern kingship: the characterisation of the king as the preeminent warrior, wielding military power (40,10; on which further below), and the characterisation of the king as the benevolent shepherd, caring for his

12. Stuhlmüller (*Creative Redemption*, p. 74) identifies the processional language as polemic against Babylonian processions associated with the *akītu*, Marduk and *Enūma eliš*, but the awareness of the cosmological tradition within Judah means that there need not be externally-orientated polemic here (though the possibility of it in addition to the internal theological argument need not be absolutely excluded).

people, his metaphorical flock of sheep (40,11).¹³ The passage climaxes with a section reiterating these two ideas (40,14.15-17) and connecting them to the component of Yahweh's kingship which, as the specifically divine king, is his prerogative alone: his characterisation as the creator of the heavens and the earth (40,12)—itself the second key pillar on which Yahweh's claims to power must now rest. Isaiah 40,18-20 begins the recycling of these themes, emphasising Yahweh's incomparability particularly: it is Yahweh and no other who is enthroned as king above the earth (40,22), compared to whose power that of human beings is naught (40,22, cf 40,6-8); it is Yahweh who creates (40,22, cf 40,12); and Yahweh who is triumphant over the nations (40,23, cf 40,15-17).¹⁴ The themes are reiterated yet again in 40,25-31: Yahweh is creator (40,26. 28), commander of the hosts of heaven (40,26) and shepherd (40,28-31).

As these assertions are designed to convince the audience that there is reason for hope, this affirmation of Yahweh's persistent kingship which opens the book in Isaiah 40 turns in no short time to assertions that Yahweh, since he is able to act—being still king, creator and warrior, though the emphasis on the last of these is now muted—indeed will act, fulfilling his role as shepherd to his people through an unnamed human agent (Isaiah 41). This culminates in the announcement of Cyrus as Yahweh's chosen agent (Isaiah 45).

Lurking in the background of this happy outcome, however, is a problematic question of the identity of Yahweh's earthly agent, in response to which the prophet makes a novel theological development. In the old schema, Yahweh's military victories were enacted on the historical plane through a human king, and not just any human king but specifically the king of Judah. In the exiles' situation, however, there is no Judahite king through whom Yahweh might act.¹⁵ By implication, Yahweh must engage a non-Judahite agent.¹⁶ As

13. Stuhlmueller (*Creative Redemption*, p. 81) notes the royal shepherd language here, as does M.Z. Brettler ("Incompatible Metaphors for YHWH in Isaiah 40-66," *JSOT* 78 (1998), pp. 97-120); W. Zimmerli ("Le nouvel 'exode' dans le message des deux grands prophètes de l'exil," in J. Cadier (ed.), *Maqqél Shâqédh: la Branche d'Amandier: Hommage à Wilhelm Vischer* [Montpellier: Causse Graille Castelnau, 1960], pp. 216-227, here p. 223) identifies the shepherd image in 49,10 without recognising it as a royal cipher, probably explaining why he finds it incongruous with the passages in which Yahweh is depicted as warrior, e.g. 42,13.

14. On *yšb* in 40,22 as enthronement language, see Habel ("He Who Stretches," p. 421).

15. That the coming acts of Yahweh on earth will be military in nature is—aside from the opening and ongoing references to Yahweh's character as a warrior—affirmed already in 41,15-16. This runs counter to the contentions of M.C. Lind ("Monotheism, Power, and Justice: A Study in Isaiah 40-55," *CBQ* 46 [1984], pp. 432-446) and Janzen ("On the Moral Nature of God's Power") that the polemic of Isaiah 40-55 is directed against violent expressions of power.

16. On the depiction of Cyrus according to the titles and theology of the Davidic tradition, see L.S. Fried, "Cyrus the Messiah? The Historical Background to Isaiah 45:1," *HTR* 95 (2002), pp. 373-393. If Fried is correct her arguments affirm the ones

an agent of destruction this would have been nothing unheard of, but as an agent of salvation a foreign king was something new.

It is perhaps because this is a controversial shift that the initial announcement of Yahweh's coming agent is brief and unspecific. His actions are directly attributed to Yahweh (note especially the grammatical ambiguity in 41,2b); he is not identified by name nor given the title of "king;" and the passage moves almost immediately back to affirmations of Yahweh's creative and military powers (41,4ff), including the first explicit statement that Yahweh is king (41,21). Historical reality requires a human agent for Yahweh who is not a king of Judah, but the unprecedented nature of such a claim demands that the text persistently reiterate its original assertion: that Yahweh is still king, even if he is about to exert his royal, creative military power through an agent other than the king of Judah.

As the text approaches the explicit identification of Yahweh's agent in Isaiah 45, the reiterations of Yahweh's kingship accordingly become more explicit and increasingly insistent: Yahweh is the "king of Jacob" in 41,21, "king of Israel" in 44,6 and, in direct address, "your king" in 43,15. At the same time there is a parallel shift in the language used of Yahweh's creative activities. Whereas until this point the text has referred frequently to Yahweh as the creator of the heavens and the earth, it begins now to speak of Yahweh as the creator of Israel specifically (43,1.7.15; 44,2.21.24). At the same time it introduces language apparently alluding to the tradition of an exodus from Egypt.¹⁷ From the introduction in Isaiah 40 to the explicit announcement of Cyrus in Isaiah 45, the section engages in a gradual narrowing of the focus of the earthly activities of Yahweh the king: it speaks first in the broadest, universal sense of Yahweh as king and creator of heavens and earth and victor over the nations (Isaiah 41-42), moving then to a more specific emphasis on Yahweh as king and creator of Israel and victor over Egypt on Israel's behalf (Isaiah 43-44). Important to note is that this does not constitute a narrowing of Yahweh's claim to power, only a narrowing of focus—a case study familiar and consequently compelling to this particular audience. The actions of Yahweh with regard to Israel are simply the historically specific manifestations of Yahweh's cosmic control. The intimate connection between Yahweh as king and creator of the universe and Yahweh as king and creator of Israel—the one being the specific manifestation of the other—is reiterated in the final run-up to the naming of Cyrus (44,21-24), and the twin themes inter-

made here, as the amalgamation of foreign kingship with the role of the Davidic king necessitates a revision of the traditional perception of the relationship between these two.

17. The nature and extent of exodus imagery in Isaiah 40-55 is hotly contested, in part because using the old exodus as a basis from which to argue for Yahweh's earthly power and referring to the hopeful future in terms of a "second" exodus are often poorly distinguished. For opposite extremes of the argument see Stuhlmüller (*Creative Redemption*) and Barstad (*Way in the Wilderness*).

twine throughout the subsequent Isaiah 45.¹⁸ The argument is that, in the same way that Yahweh has exerted his royal power in the past—over the whole created order at creation and on Israel’s particular behalf in the exodus—now he is exerting this same royal power through Cyrus.¹⁹

Despite this powerful argument for Yahweh’s continued authority and control over the universe as its king and creator, the insertion of a foreign king into the role of Yahweh’s earthly counterpart posed certain difficulties.²⁰ First, it demanded that the power of foreign gods to act—through foreign kings in particular, but ultimately entirely—be absolutely denied: there could be no possibility of attributing Cyrus’s dominance to any deity other than Yahweh. This is already implicit in the idol polemics of the earlier chapters, and this issue comes to the fore in Isaiah 46, after the announcement of the coming of Cyrus. While monolatry was a theoretical, if not always practical, aspect of pre-exilic Judahite theology, the argument of Isaiah 40-45 necessitates a shift toward fully-fledged monotheism.

Second, and crucial for our discussion of the prophet’s interpretation of the warrior-king-creator triad, there is a character in the traditional *Chaoskampf* whose role must be reduced or eliminated: the force of chaos itself, usually appearing in divine form as the deep or the monsters thereof. While the idea of chaos personified as Yahweh’s opponent at the point of creation might in principle be sustainable, the earthly and historical version of the *Chaoskampf* had hitherto identified the historical personification of chaos as the foreign king with whom the Judahite king was engaged. With the identification in Isaiah 45 of just such a foreign king on the side of Yahwistic order—and his dominance not merely a brief chaotic aberration in service of Yahweh’s punitive actions—foreign kings were no longer *ipso facto* chaos. It is accordingly notable that the preceding chapters lack any clear reference to a chaotic opponent of Yahweh, either at creation or on the historical plane.²¹ Though Yahweh is still characterised as a warrior, the only opponents mentioned are characterised in straightforwardly historical terms, lacking any correlations with cosmic chaos. As we have already argued, Yahweh’s conflicts with chaos were never confined to the primeval context but extended

18. On this see also Ollenburger and Vermeylen (Ollenburger, “Isaiah’s,” p. 67; Vermeylen, “Motif,” p. 219).

19. For the contention that all of the references to creation in Isaiah 40-55 are interested solely in the (re)creation of Israel, see Clifford (“Hebrew Scriptures,” p. 519). It is worth mentioning here that the theme of prophetic fulfilment is part and parcel of the text’s argument, a means of reiterating the assertion that Yahweh is in ultimate control over the universe and its history.

20. R.E. Watts (“Consolation or Confrontation: Isaiah 40-55 and the Delay of the New Exodus,” *TB* 41 (1990), pp. 31-59) suggests that this point is the one of which the author most struggles to convince his audience and it is as a consequence that the work is form-critically dominated by disputations.

21. Janzen, developing Lind, explains this absence in terms of anti-Babylonian polemic (Janzen, “On the Moral Nature of God’s Power”; Lind, “Monotheism, Power, and Justice”).

into historical contexts, and the elimination of the chaotic enemy in the latter appears to have had as a consequence the elimination of the chaotic enemy in the former.

In the absence of any such references to a chaotic enemy of Yahweh at creation, what we are left with are various assertions that Yahweh is a victorious warrior over the nations; that Yahweh is king; and that Yahweh is the creator. The causal connection between these three statements, however, has disappeared. No longer is it Yahweh's defeat of the chaotic enemy, whether at the time of creation or in the present, which prompts his identification as king. In order to retain all of the characteristics of Yahweh needed to persuade the exiles of Yahweh's continuing power to save and at the same time acknowledge the changed historical situation and its necessitation of the use of a foreign king as Yahweh's agent, the traditional rendering of the *Chaoskampf* has been abandoned.²²

This interpretation of the prophet's use of the cosmological tradition is in direct opposition to the conclusion reached by T.N.D. Mettinger that the "archaic mythopoetic theme of YHWH's victory over chaos, his kingship and his triumphant return to Zion" constitute the "hidden structure" of Isaiah 40-55.²³ Beginning his argument with the climactic announcement that "Yahweh reigns" in 52,7, Mettinger contended that the interpretive context for this statement includes the reference in 51,9 to Yahweh's defeat of the sea, and that this indicates that "there is a high degree of probability in favour of the conclusion that the archaic mythopoetical pattern is an important part of the thought structure in Isaiah 40-55".²⁴

Setting aside the distance between 52,7 and 51,9, the argument centres on the interpretation of 51,9. It is, without doubt, an explicit reference to Judah's tradition of Yahweh's defeat of chaos, identified as Rahab. However, it is less clear that the tradition is one which the author himself now supports: J.G. Janzen has since argued that the entire passage of 51,9-11 is a quotation of the community's sentiments, rather than a proclamation from the mouth of the prophet.²⁵ Janzen's arguments have merit: from a literary point of view it is the only passage in Isaiah 40-55 with the character of an appeal to Yahweh rather than of an argument directed at the people, and it is difficult to square with not only the theology but also the argument of the rest of the text, particularly given the careful separation of these themes from the traditional *Chaoskampf* motif in the preceding chapters: if the author had intended to use

22. In just the same way, the Genesis 1 account of creation—itsself an exilic or post-exilic text—has dissolved the warrior-king-creator triad. From the exile onward the creative acts of Yahweh are just that: creative acts, unconnected to Yahweh's military engagements.

23. Mettinger, "Hidden Structure," p. 157.

24. Mettinger, "Hidden Structure," pp. 150-153.

25. Janzen, "Moral Nature," pp. 474-475. Watts' ("Consolation or Confrontation") assessment of a confrontational aspect in Isaiah 40-55 would support this reading, with the prophet quoting his opponents to mock and refute their stance.

and support the traditional rendering, his complete failure to do so prior to this point is remarkable. Though coherence is one of the more slippery criteria on which to base such determinations, it would resolve the conflict if here the author is quoting his audience rather than speaking himself.²⁶

Mettinger, however, relies heavily on this passage, and his subsequent conclusions are based primarily on a reference to the drying up of the sea in 42,15-16 (which seems equally likely to be a reference to the exodus as to the *Chaoskampf*) and on the use of hymnic passages closely related to the enthronement psalms.²⁷ With regard to the latter, what is even more remarkable than the similarities of language between Isaiah 40-55 and the psalms celebrating Yahweh's kingship is that none of the Isaiah 40-55 passages which Mettinger identifies as hymnic contain any reference to the cosmological tradition. Nor among the psalms which Mettinger mentions are there any of those which contain strong references to the cosmological tradition; though Psalms 96 and 98 mention the sea, there are numerous psalms with much more explicit cosmological content which the Isaianic author might have chosen were he intending to structure his book on the *Chaoskampf*. The reference to the hymnic tradition in Isaiah 40-55 may well be designed to affirm Yahweh's kingship, but it can hardly be said to affirm the cosmological tradition in its entirety.

We remain, then, with the repeated assertions that Yahweh is a victorious warrior, king and creator, but without any indication that these remain causally connected. Of some interest in interpreting this phenomenon is a study by C. Stuhlmüller, in which he also observed that the themes of Yahweh's kingship and Yahweh's creative acts are not combined in Isaiah 40-55.²⁸ This, he concluded, indicates against the arguments made by S. Mowinckel for an annual enthronement festival in pre-exilic Judah—which Mowinckel, of course, considered intimately related to the tradition that Yahweh's king-

26. It ought also to be noted that the origins and the authorship of the material contained in Isaiah 40-55 have been questioned increasingly over the last decade (for a brief summary, see U. Berges, "Farewell to Deutero-Isaiah or Prophecy without a Prophet," in *Congress Volume Ljubljana 2007* [ed. A. Lemaire; Leiden: Brill, 2010], pp. 575-595, here pp. 578-584; a longer discussion appears in U. Berges, *Jesaja 40-48* [HTKAT; Freiburg: Herder, 2008], pp. 30-43). One of the most significant breaks is perceived between the first half of the book, in which we have been observing this careful division of Yahweh's attributes, and the second half, where a few ambiguous references appear (51,9-10; perhaps also 50,2; 51,15.20; 54,9.11). The suggestion that the more traditional cosmological imagery occurs in texts of separate origin would explain the apparent conflict between these texts and the strident revision of the tradition in Isaiah 40-45.

27. Mettinger, "Hidden Structure," pp. 155-156.

28. Stuhlmüller, "Yahweh-king". The one exception which he notes is Isa 43,15, which refers to Yahweh as creator only of Israel. The combination of kingship and creative powers, however, is not especially a problem; it is their dependence on Yahweh's military triumph against the chaotic enemy which must be avoided.

ship was won through battle against chaos.²⁹ His concern to counter Mowinckel, however, meant that Stuhlmüller did not consider the possibility that the separation of Yahweh's kingship from Yahweh's creative capacities was an original response to the theological problems posed by military defeat and exile.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the need to reassure those who were suffering the consequences of military defeat entailed the abandonment of the cosmological triad of war, kingship and creation, intertwined as it had become with pre-exilic military ideology. No longer could Yahweh's kingship or creative powers depend on the military successes of the Judahite king, yet despite the fall of their king the exiles could retain their trust in the power of Yahweh as the creator of the universe and as divine king. Having persuaded his audience of this in Isaiah 40-45, the latter half of the book could proceed freely to the confident declaration of Yahweh's coming acts on their behalf.

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29. Mettinger, "Hidden Structure," p. 157 n. 15.

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