

Nebuchadrezzar (Jer. 51:34) is called a tannin because of his voracity for conquest: "He hath swallowed us up like a tannin, he hath filled his belly with my dainties." The tannin here is simply a fabulous serpent monster, and there is no mythical allusion.

The seraphim are undoubtedly connected with the serpent, or dragon. The name is applied only once to divine attendants (Isa. 6:2ff). The same name is given to the serpents which attacked the Israelites in the wilderness, which is probably the reason the name is not given more frequently to supernatural beings. In Greek mythology the dragons are not necessarily evil. They are the clear-sighted ones,²⁷ and there are many instances related of their ministering to divine heroes. The Semitic conception was probably the same, and the seraphim, who are represented as being colossal in size, are the bright ones, the dragons of the gods. In the vision of Isaiah the divine attendants naturally take a form which is already in the consciousness of the seer. The main characteristic of the seraphim is their flying power, and for this each had six wings. The flying serpent (Isa. 14:29) is also a saraph, and it would thus seem that in zoölogy the saraph is a flying serpent, in theology it is a flying heavenly being, and the one is certainly connected with the other. The Seraphim form the body-guard of the Lord, standing about His throne and guarding the holy palace, performing the functions which are most frequently ascribed to the serpent. It may therefore be regarded as certain that the popular, mythic saraph which lies behind, and conditions the conception of the prophet, was a serpent-dragon of one kind or another. As the extra-biblical cherub was evidently the storm-cloud, or its dragon (Ps. 18:10, 11; Ezek. 28:14), hence, from its name, the saraph is most likely the serpent-like lightning.

The Dragon's Well (עין הרתני, Neh. 2:13) must have been a spring or fountain with which some legend of a dragon was connected, in what relation cannot now be ascertained.

²⁷ The root of the name is δράκειν, to see.