

# CORPSES, CANNIBALS, AND COMMENSALITY: A LITERARY AND ARTISTIC SHAMING CONVENTION IN THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST

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**Abstract:** In this contribution, I examine several ancient Near Eastern literary texts and artistic variations on the “banquet motif” in which one finds people dining while others die. I argue that these depictions constitute a hitherto unrecognized artistic device rooted in social protocol that represents an inversion of the custom of abstinence during mourning. It thus functions to underscore the contempt of those dining for the dying by depicting their deaths as unworthy of lament. In addition, the motif characterizes the dining party as symbolically and/or physically abased, because of his or her hubris, and thus deserving of a shameful death. Inversely, it portrays the dining party as symbolically and often physically elevated, and reveling in a divine reversal of circumstance.

**Key Words:** feasting, mourning, shaming, dismemberment, hubris, ancient Near East

In the ancient Near East, commensal eating and drinking were determined by social conventions and ideology.<sup>1</sup> In the Hebrew Bible, for example, one is expected not to eat while mourning (2 Sam 3:35, 12:21–22, Ezra 10:6, Esth 4:3). This is because eating and drinking were equated with life’s enjoyments; hence the couplet: “All the days of the afflicted are evil, but the cheerful of heart has a continual feast” (Prov 15:15, cf. Isa 22:13, Qoh 2:24). Consequently, savoring a sumptuous meal while others suffer constituted a

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<sup>1</sup>See, e.g., Grottanelli 1989, 272–332; Jenks 1992, 250–254; Pollock 2003, 17–38; Smith 2003; Feldman 2014, 63–68; Ermidoro 2012, 153–176; 2015.

violation of social custom.<sup>2</sup> Thus, Uriah insists on avoiding a good meal while his comrades fight on the battlefield (2 Sam 11:11), and Isaiah decries lavish royal feasts while the innocent endure hardship (Isa 5:8–23).

It is with such conventions in mind that I shall examine several ancient Near Eastern literary texts and artistic variations on the “banquet motif”<sup>3</sup> in which one finds people dining while others die.<sup>4</sup> I submit that these depictions constitute a hitherto unrecognized artistic device rooted in social protocol that represents an inversion of the custom of abstinence during mourning.<sup>5</sup> It thus functions to underscore the contempt of those dining for the dying by depicting their deaths as unworthy of lament. In addition, the motif characterizes the dying party as symbolically and/or physically abased, because of his or her hubris, and thus deserving of a shameful death. Inversely, it depicts the dining party as symbolically and often physically elevated, and reveling in the divine reversal of circumstance. Textual examples include fourteen biblical pericopes (Genesis 37, 40, Exodus 12, Judges 14, 1 Kings 18, 2 Kings 9, Isaiah 25, Amos 6, Esther 7, Daniel 5, Mark 6, 14–16, Revelation 19, Judith 12–13), two tales of divine feasts in the Ugaritic *Epic of Baal*, and one in *Enūma eliš*. Four visual examples appear on the Sumerian Standard of Ur, and on sculpted bas-reliefs from

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<sup>2</sup>On the relationship between food and justice, see MacDonald (2008, 166–195), who discusses the biblical theme of the table as a context for divine judgment.

<sup>3</sup>On the “banquet motif” in ancient Near Eastern literature and art, consult Dentzer (1982), Lloyd (1990, 169–193), Collon (1992, 23–30), Pinnock (1994, 15–26), Schmandt-Besserat (2001, 391–403).

<sup>4</sup>This is to be distinguished from meals eaten on behalf of, or along with, the deceased, since they presumably already had mourning rites performed for them and in no way shamed the dead. See, e.g., Lewis 1989; Tsukimoto 1985; MacMullen 2009; 2010, 597–613.

<sup>5</sup>Feldman (1977), Anderson (1990) and Olyan (2000) have shown that the dyadic pair “grief” and “joy” in the Hebrew Bible do not represent emotional states, but rather ritual behaviors. In legal contexts, to “love,” “hate,” “honor,” and “shame” do not express feelings, but instead define legal relationships, such as loyalty, obedience, and their opposites. It is in this light that I aver we may see mourning and feasting as mirror rituals. Indeed, both involve kinship ties, the gathering of people, and playing of music, and each can last seven days. However, the ritual actions of mourning are inverted in feasting. Thus, mourning rites include abstinence from food, water, and anointing oil, tearing clothes, wearing sackcloth, throwing dirt on one’s head, sitting or lying on the ground, wailing, tearing one’s hair, self-gashing, and guests who offer comfort. Feasting involves an abundance of fine food and wine, wearing of fine clothing, sitting on fine furniture, revelry, anointing heads with fine oil, coiffured hair, and guests who receive comfort. Therefore, mourning and feasting inversely related. On mourning rituals in the ancient Near East, see Scurlock (1995, 1883–1893), Nasrabadi (1999), and Pham (1999, 16–24).

Sargon II's palace at Khorsabad, Sennacherib, and Assurbanipal's palaces at Nineveh.

## HEBREW BIBLE

### Genesis 37: Joseph and His Brothers

In the Hebrew Bible, the motif first appears in the alarming story of Joseph's jealous brothers who sit down to eat immediately after casting him headlong into a pit. Initially, the brothers had intended to kill him before tossing his corpse into it, but the eldest brother, already in trouble with his father, talked the others out of it. The account is extremely terse, comprising just two lines: "They took him and they threw him into the pit, and the pit was empty, it had no water in it. And they sat down to eat bread" (Gen 37:24–25).

Interpreters typically have seen the passage as underscoring Joseph's life-threatening situation. Thus, adopting a reading from *b. Shab.* 22a, Rashi saw the waterless pit as signaling the presence of snakes and scorpions. However, I submit that by juxtaposing Joseph's imminent death with his brothers' cavalierness, the passage underscores their disdain for him. This was partially espied by Nahum Sarna, who understood the pit as a cistern that normally might contain water, and the commensal meal as conveying the brothers' collective rage: "One has only to bear in mind that lack of a proper burial was considered to be the supreme dishonor in order to imagine something of the frenzied intensity of the brothers' hatred for Joseph" (Sarna 1989, 259).<sup>6</sup>

To his keen observation, I add that casting Joseph into a pit is physically and symbolically an act of abasement, one that reverses Joseph's position of superiority as perceived by his brothers. Joseph had two dreams that suggested to his brothers his self-importance. In the first, his sheaves of grain stood upright, while theirs bowed to his, which provoked them to ask, "Will you verily reign over us? Will you verily rule over us?!" (Gen 37:5–8). In the second, he dreamed that the sun, moon, and eleven stars bowed to him. Because of these haughty dreams, they envied him (Gen 37:9–11) and plotted to kill him, saying to one another: "Here comes this lord of dreams" (Gen 37:19), a sarcastic barb loaded with pejorative power.<sup>7</sup> Sarna's comment is again apposite:

There is something portentous about this meal, as there is about the merchandise of the caravaners, for later in the narrative both appear, and in the

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<sup>6</sup>On improper burial as a cause for shame, see Olyan (1996, 201–218) and Lemos (2006, 225–241).

<sup>7</sup>The rare demonstrative pronoun הַלְזֶה "this" conveys the added pejorative force. See Noegel 2004, 23–30.

same language, as symbols of the reversal of fortunes between Joseph and his brothers. (Sarna 1989, 260)

Though in the end, Joseph escapes death, the narrative goes to lengths to show that the brothers intended him to experience a shameful death. Not only did they consider him unworthy of a proper burial, their cover story concealed an equally violent death wish, one that made his demise sound like an act of God—“a savage (lit. evil) beast ate him” (Gen 37:20).<sup>8</sup> In fact, after Joseph was taken to Egypt, they retained this lie to convince their father of his death. They showed him his tunic, which they had dipped in goat’s blood, and Jacob wailed, “A savage beast ate him. It utterly tore up (טָרַף טָרַף) Joseph” (Gen 37:33).

#### Genesis 40: Pharaoh and His Chief Baker

The motif appears again in the Joseph cycle in the gruesome account of Pharaoh’s feast. As the narrator informs us, he had ordered a “feast (מְשֶׁתֶּה) for all his servants” after imprisoning his chief cupbearer and chief baker (Gen 40:20). It is during the feast that Pharaoh summons the chief baker, beheads him, and has his body impaled on a pole.<sup>9</sup> The text draws a parallel to Joseph’s experience in Gen 40:15 by way of Joseph’s reference to the dungeon as a בּוֹר, the same word used of the “pit.” Thus, here again the circumstance is one of physical abasement, and though the narrator does not inform us as to the nature of the baker’s crime, the text characterizes it as a breach of rank, and therefore of the cosmological order, for we are told that it was a transgression “against *their lord* (לְאֲדֹנֵיהֶם) the king of Egypt” (Gen 40:1).<sup>10</sup> Note

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<sup>8</sup>Biblical texts portray death by wild animals as an act of God. Thus, Elijah calls upon Yahweh to summon bears upon children (2 Kgs 2:24). Note also that it is Yahweh who sends the mammoth fish to devour Jonah (Jon 1:17). The Day of Yahweh too is described as an attack of wild animals (Amos 5:19, cf. Hos 13:7–8). See also the “act of God clause” inherent in Jacob’s words to Laban that he did not claim from him any animals that were טָרְפָה, “torn (by wild beasts),” but rather bore the loss himself (Gen 31:39). Conversely, being able to kill a wild beast also required divine help (Judg 14:6, 1 Sam 17:34–37, Ps 91:13, cf. Prov 28:15).

<sup>9</sup>A similar fate befell king Saul (1 Sam 31:9–10). Both beheading and impalement (often in tandem) were known in ancient Egypt and in the Near East generally. It is curious why translations typically do not render the beheading, despite the Hebrew phrase מִקֶּלְךָ, “from off of you” in Joseph’s prediction: “Pharaoh will lift your head *from off of you* and impale you upon a pole” (Gen 40:19). Indeed, when used spatially the compound preposition מִן + עַל usually denotes separation. See, e.g., Gen 38:14, Deut 9:17, 1 Sam 4:18, Job 19:9, Ps 108:5, etc.

<sup>10</sup>Following *Bereshit Rabbah* 88:2, Rashi understands their crimes to be far pettier: a fly was found in Pharaoh’s goblet and a pebble in his bread.

that the phrase “their lord” is superfluous unless intending to emphasize their hierarchical relationship. See similarly the otherwise unnecessary סָרִיסָיו, “his officers” in the next verse: “And Pharaoh was angry on account of *his* two officers, on account of the chief cupbearer and on account of the chief baker” (Gen 40:2). Since Pharaoh left the baker’s impaled, headless body for the vultures,<sup>11</sup> we can posit that the author wanted us to comprehend the offence as grave enough to shame him in life and in death (40:1).<sup>12</sup> The juxtaposition of a feast with the impalement of someone who normally would supply the feast, highlights Pharaoh’s scorn of the baker and suggests the baker’s hubris. That the pharaoh should feast while the baker is impaled only adds to the shame of his unnatural death and lack of burial.

### Exodus 12: The First Passover

The same social conventions inform arguably the most famous dining incident in the Hebrew Bible—the first Passover.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, the Israelites celebrated the Passover at the height of the Egyptians’ suffering. Already, in Exod 10:7, Pharaoh’s officials had advised him to let the Israelites go, because Egypt had אָבְדָה, “perished.” In addition, at midnight on the eve of the Passover celebration, the Egyptians would endure the deaths of their firstborn children and livestock (Exod 12:12, 12:29).<sup>14</sup> That Yahweh and the Israelites despised the Egyptians is clear throughout the narrative of the plagues, but it is made especially obvious in the climactic threefold reference to the Egyptians as Yahweh’s enemies in the Song at the Sea (Exod 15:6, 15:9, 15:12). Moreover, the poem emphasizes the arrogance of the Egyptians by quoting their boast-

<sup>11</sup>The devouring of corpses by scavenging birds (and animals) denotes a lack of proper burial, and thus a shameful end. See Deut 28:26, 1 Sam 17:44, 17:46, 1 Kgs 14:11, 16:4, 21:24, Jer 7:33, 16:4, 19:7, 34:20, Ps 79:2.

<sup>12</sup>We are not told the nature of the baker’s offense, but impalement on a pole in ancient Egypt punished a variety of crimes including treason, rebellion, and desecrating or stealing from sacred places such as tombs or temples. See Booche 1986, cols. 68–82. On the theme of judgment and food in this pericope, see MacDonald (2008, 184–185).

<sup>13</sup>Though biblical narratives do not employ the term מִשְׁתֶּה, “feast” for the Passover, many aspects of the Passover, including *inter alia*, its attachment to the celebration of Unleavened Bread, use of cooked meat, and attachment to joy, force us to consider it one. See Altmann 2011, 186–198. Cf. the feasting motif in Exod 24:9–11, discussed by Lloyd (1990, 186–188).

<sup>14</sup>Unlike the other pericopes about feasts, this one takes place not in repose, but in haste and in preparation for rapid departure (Exod 12:11). Nevertheless, by the Second Temple period, the Passover meal required reclining and wine (Mishnah, *Pesahim* 10.1). On the influence of the Greek symposium tradition upon Jewish commensal meals at this time, see Smith (2003, 147–150).

ing: “I shall pursue, I shall overtake, I shall divide the spoil, I will gorge my appetite on them, I will draw my sword, my hand will destroy them” (Exod 15:9). Like the pit and dungeon in the Joseph cycle, the Sea of Reeds symbolically and physically abases them. Here the Egyptians sink “like lead” in the depths of the Sea (Exod 15:10). Their belittlement fulfills Yahweh’s intention to “humble” Pharaoh before him (Exod 10:3). Additionally, since the poem invokes the *Chaoskampf motif*, it also celebrates Yahweh’s victory over the sea.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, because death at sea made a proper burial impossible, the Passover feast during which Yahweh’s Destroyer spared the Israelites, makes the Egyptians’ shameful deaths even more pronounced.<sup>16</sup> At the same time, the Israelites’ passage through the Sea of Reeds elevates their status to a free people.

#### Judges 14: Samson’s Feast

The motif next appears in the story of Samson, who held a *מִשְׁתֶּה*, “feast,” for thirty young men to celebrate his wedding to a Philistine woman (Judg 14:10). At the start of the feast, Samson poses a riddle to the people who chose his fellow feasters: if they answer the riddle, they will receive thirty linen garments and thirty sets of clothes. If not, they will provide him with the materials. On the fourth day of the seven-day feast, the people threatened Samson’s wife to acquire the riddle’s answer or have her father’s household burned to death. She pressed Samson with tears for the answer until he relented. She told the companions, who then revealed the riddle’s answer before sunset on the seventh day (Judg 14:17–18). Immediately afterwards, the narrator states that the spirit of Yahweh rushed upon Samson, and he went down to Ashqelon, and killed thirty men. He stripped them of their garments and used them to pay off the wager. The pericope ends by recording Samson’s hatred: “His anger burned, and he went up to his father’s house. And Samson’s wife became that of his feast-companion” (Judg 14:19–20). This, then, sets in motion a series of sallies and counter-attacks between Samson and the Philistines, with the Philistines incurring increasingly more casualties (Judg 15–16).

Here again we find the abutment of feasting with the slaying of victims. The text notes Samson’s loathing for them by recording his anger, but also at the start of the next chapter, in which her father explains that he gave Samson’s wife to another, because “you (Samson) hated her vehemently”

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<sup>15</sup>Cf. Isa 51:10. See Cassuto 1972, 62–90; Cross 1973, 117n18; Day 1985, 96–101; Levenson 1988.

<sup>16</sup>While the Egyptians viewed drowning in the Nile as a blessed and honorable death, they regarded dying beyond Egypt’s borders as a tragedy. Thus, efforts were made on behalf of some to retrieve bodies from foreign soil for proper burial. See Taylor 2001, 39–41.

(Judg 15:2). The tale shames the victims by portraying them as Ashqelonites, and therefore, uncircumcised Philistines (cf. Judg 14:3). We also hear nothing of their burials. In addition, they die because other Philistines had cheated to obtain the riddle's answer. Moreover, the ultimate cause of Samson's anger, his wife, is shamed by being given to another man without a formal divorce, and by meeting a horrific end when the Philistines burn her and her father's household (Judg 15:6). Meanwhile, Samson is elevated through his successive military victories against the Philistines. The abasement and elevation are marked symbolically in the narrative by clarifying that Samson **וַיֵּרֵד**, "went down" to slaughter the Ashqelonites, and afterwards **וַיַּעַל**, "went up" to his father's house (Judg 14:19). In the end, Samson's leadership of Israel lasted twenty years (Judg 15:20).

### 1 Kings 18: Elijah and Ahab

The juxtapositioning of death and dining occurs also in the account of Elijah and the prophets of Baal following the contest on Mount Carmel. There we read how Elijah ordered the people to slay the prophets:

Then Elijah commanded them, "Seize the prophets of Baal. Do not let a single man escape!" And so they seized them, and Elijah brought them down to the Wadi Qishon and he slaughtered them there. And Elijah said to Ahab, "Get up, eat, and drink, for there is the sound of a heavy rain." (1 Kgs 18:40–41)

Observe how immediately after the slaughter, Elijah commands Ahab to eat and drink. Since we hear nothing about the prophets' burials, we must assume that Elijah intended to shame their corpses.<sup>17</sup> The sound of impending rain suggests that the meal aimed to celebrate the drought's end. Nevertheless, its mention immediately after the massacre forces readers to evaluate Elijah's personality, one already cast as austere and inflexible.<sup>18</sup> In keeping with other demonstrations of the motif, we may see Elijah's command as emphasizing Yahweh's abhorrence of the prophets of Baal, whose haughtiness led them to believe that their god would emerge victorious in the contest. Though Elijah did not join Ahab's feast, the narrator states that he had a private meal. After Elijah fled to Horeb and fell asleep, an angel awakened him, saying "get up and eat," and offered him baked bread and a jar of water (1 Kgs 19:5–6).<sup>19</sup>

<sup>17</sup>Elsewhere we are told when corpses are removed from their shameful predicaments, e.g., 1 Sam 31:12, Mk 6:29, John 19:38–40. Saul's body was probably burned by his warriors because he had been mutilated. John and Jesus receive a proper burial, the former by his followers, the latter by a stranger.

<sup>18</sup>Garsiel (2014, 81) observes here a parallel with the story of Joseph in the pit, though he does not note the others studied here.

<sup>19</sup>On eating as a theme in the Elijah narratives, see MacDonald (2008, 180–183).

Note also that the story involves physical and symbolic abasement in that we are told that Elijah וַיִּרְדֵם, “brought them down” to the Wadi Qishon to kill them (1 Kgs 18:40). Thus, the contest of Baal’s pompous prophets starts on the summit of Mount Carmel, but concludes with their shameful deaths in a dry river valley.<sup>20</sup> Whereas, the thunder that now peals on high reminds us of Yahweh’s elevated position.

## 2 Kings 9: Jehu and Jezebel

We next encounter the motif in the grisly report of Jezebel’s death. As the narrator informs us, Jehu ordered some eunuchs to cast her body out of an upper story window: “And he (Jehu) said, ‘Throw her down!’ And so they threw her down, and some of her blood splattered the wall and the horses, and he trampled her.”<sup>21</sup> Jehu went in and ate and drank (2 Kgs 9:33–34). As observed by Mordechai Cogan and Hayim Tadmor, “Jehu proceeds as though nothing has happened, his anger still burning hot. Only after he calmed down did he order Jezebel’s burial.”<sup>22</sup>

As with the previous examples of the motif, the narrative symbolically and physically abases Jezebel, this time by hurling her down from an upper story window. In addition, the narratives depict her as an arrogant and manipulative *femme fatale*. When Ahab failed to obtain Naboth’s vineyard, she upbraided him: “Is this how you act as king over Israel? Get up and eat! Let your heart be glad. I will get you the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite” (1 Kgs 21:7). She then arranged for false witnesses to accuse Naboth of blasphemy, and he was stoned to death. Her actions not only perverted justice, they usurped the king’s power.

Just before her death, the narrator also describes her as applying eye make-up and gazing from the upper window (2 Kgs 9:30), actions associated elsewhere with haughtiness and sexual impropriety (Jer 4:30, Ezek 23:40–41, Hos 2:2).<sup>23</sup> This image conforms with what Jehu had told her son Joram just

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<sup>20</sup>Implicit in the geography and mention of an impending storm is that Yahweh will fill the wadi with an onrushing torrent and cleanse it of the mutilated corpses.

<sup>21</sup>Translators often render “they (i.e., the horses) trampled her,” but the verb is in the masculine singular, i.e., וַיִּרְמֶסְנָהּ, suggesting that Jehu did the trampling, perhaps with the aid of the horses.

<sup>22</sup>Cogan and Tadmor 1988, 112.

<sup>23</sup>See also the Targum to Isaiah 3:16 in which the “wanton eyes” of the “haughty women of Zion” are rendered with וּמַסְרֵבֶקֶן עֵינֵינָּה “eyes painted.” On the “woman in the window” motif, see Seeman (2004). Parker (1978) argues that Jezebel was attempting to seduce Jehu. However, see Olyan 1985, who sees her as preparing to meet her death in dignity. I suggest the ambiguity of the passage permits both perspectives, the former from an angle looking up at the window (Jehu’s), and the latter, from the window looking down (Jezebel’s).

before killing him and shaming his body: “‘How can there be peace,’ he asked, ‘as long as the prostitutions of Jezebel, your mother, and her sorceries are so many?’” (2 Kgs 9:22). It is only begrudgingly that Jehu permits Jezebel a burial, ordering: “See to that cursed woman (הַאֲרִירָה) . . . and bury her, for she was a king’s daughter” (2 Kgs 9:34). Nevertheless, we quickly learn that an honorable burial was impossible, because dogs had devoured her body, leaving only her skull, feet, and hands (2 Kgs 9:35). The fulfillment of Elijah’s curse (2 Kgs 9:10), made effective by Jehu’s own words, thus marked Jezebel’s end as shameful. Indeed, her remains were likened to “dung (דִּמְן) on the ground in the plot at Jezreel,” which provoked the peoples’ caustic saying, “This is Jezebel,” i.e., “This is manure” (2 Kgs 9:37).<sup>24</sup> Thus, in this pericope too, the juxtaposition of Jezebel’s death and Jehu’s dining underscores his fierce animus towards her, while connoting her shameful arrogance. Since Jehu then becomes king, the meal also marks his elevated status.<sup>25</sup>

#### Isaiah 25: The “Messianic Feast”

Isaiah’s prophecy of “messianic” blessings also employs the motif.

Yahweh of Hosts will make for all the people on this mountain a lavish feast,

A feast of aged wine, fat of meats, and aged refined wines.

He will swallow on this mountain the face of the covering, the covering over all the peoples,

And the veil that veils over all the nations. He will swallow Death forever.

And he will wipe away, my Lord Yahweh, a tear from all faces,

The reproach of his people, he will remove from the earth.

Indeed, Yahweh has spoken. (Isa 25:6–8)

Notwithstanding the difficulty of the passage’s interpretation, the motif’s essential elements are present. Yahweh intends to host a luxurious מִשְׁתֵּה מְשֻׁבָּה, “feast,” during which Death himself will die. Moreover, Isaiah prophesies that Death’s demise will remove the shame of the people. Since being swallowed by the earth is described elsewhere as a shameful punishment for those who contemn Yahweh (Numbers 16), we must see Death’s demise as shameful. Though Death proceeds to the underworld, he ironically receives no burial.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>24</sup>The name אֲרִירָה “Jezebel,” means “where is the prince (i.e., Baal)?,” but here it suggests “where is the manure?,” for אֲרִירָה can mean “prince” or “manure.” See Gray 1978, 551; Cogan and Tadmor 1988, 113.

<sup>25</sup>MacDonald (2008, 174), argues that Jehu’s dinner constitutes an enthronement meal.

<sup>26</sup>Note that Num 16:30 clarifies that Korah and his group descended into the underworld while “alive” for “contemning” (אָרַף) Yahweh. In addition, when the earth closed

The prophecy then continues its theme of abasement and reversal of fortunes:

Indeed, the hand of Yahweh will rest on this mountain, and Moab will be threshed down under it, like straw threshed in manure.

And he shall spread his hands in its midst like a swimmer spreading out to swim.

He will abase his (Moab's) arrogance with the tricks of his hands.

And the lofty fortress of your walls he will lay low, he will abase, he will cause it to touch the underworld, even the dust. (Isa 25:10–12)

Thus, Isaiah's use of the motif incorporates the same features as the previous examples: a meal during which a host revels in the ignominious death of an enemy, who is symbolically and physically abased for his arrogance.

#### Amos 6: Samaria's Feasting Elite

Amos exploits the motif to quite a different effect in his prophecy against the *marzēah* feasts of Samaria's elite:<sup>27</sup>

[Woe to those] lying on ivory beds, and sprawling upon their divans.

And eating lambs from a flock, and calves from the midst of the stall.

Snatching upon the mouth of the lyre, and like David, they consider themselves instruments of song.

Drinking from bowls of wine, and they anoint (themselves with) the best oils.

Yet they remain unconcerned over the ruin of Joseph.

Therefore, now they will go into exile at the head of the exiles, and removed will be [the] sprawlers' spree. (Amos 6:4–7)<sup>28</sup>

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its mouth, we are told that it “covered” (כִּסָּה) them. The word choice allows one to distinguish the event from a proper “burial” (קָבַר). The poetic recollection of the incident in Ps 106:7 does the same.

<sup>27</sup>Several scholars have seen the feast as cultic in nature, but not necessarily as funerary. Discussions of the evidence appear in Paul (1991, 210–212) and McLaughlin (2001, 70–79). Greer (2007) offers additional evidence for seeing it as a cultic feast including the use of cultic cups and the anointing with choice oils. The nature of the feast matters little to arguments offered here, since the motif appears in a variety of consumption settings.

<sup>28</sup>Greer (2007, 247) suggests that we translate מְרִיחַ as “cultic banquet.” While the prophet clearly evokes the institution of the *marzēah*, the vocalization suggests that we render the lexeme differently. Eissfeldt (1966) suggests we render it “revelry,” but sees here an allusion to the *marzēah*. I translate here with Paul (1991, 210), who captures both nuances with “spree.”

Here the prophet depicts the revelers as so intoxicated with their feasting that they are oblivious to the suffering of Joseph. Though “Joseph” here is an appellation for Israel (cf. Amos 5:15), Amos cleverly incorporates the name so that the passage alludes to the traditions of the figure of Joseph. He does so in four ways. First, he employs the word שָׁבַר for “ruin,” a term that also can mean a dream’s “interpretation” (e.g., Judg 7:15).<sup>29</sup> This naturally recalls the talent that landed Joseph in the pit and allows us to render the line: “They remain unconcerned over Joseph’s interpretation(s).”<sup>30</sup> The allusive quip asserts that Israel’s elites, like Joseph’s brothers, did not perceive the signs that their own loss of power was imminent. Second, his prophecy states that those who feast while Joseph suffers will be forced to relocate to another land. This is precisely what happened to Joseph’s brothers, who were forced to move to Egypt. Third, note how the feasters are indifferent to Israel’s suffering in the same way as the brothers were indifferent to the figure of Joseph while they ate (Gen 37:25). Finally, Amos evokes the story of Joseph by making the feasters the true antagonists. Like the brothers who dined while Joseph lay in the pit, Israel’s elite will find themselves on the wrong side of divine will. Usually it is the feaster who enjoys the shameful demise of his conceited enemy. Here it is the feasters who arrogantly deem themselves as David’s equivalent. In fact, it is Israel’s pomposity that will bring Yahweh’s punishment: “I loathe the pride of Jacob, and his fortresses I detest” (Amos 6:8).<sup>31</sup> They falsely trust in their own might and ask, “Have

<sup>29</sup>On the use of polysemy in dream texts, see Noegel (2007b).

<sup>30</sup>The verse is extremely sophisticated, for the verb נָחַל, here rendered “remain unconcerned” (a niphil form of the verb חָלָה “be unconcerned, sick, weak”), when used in conjunction with שָׁבַר as “wound,” can connote a medical situation. See Paul 1991, 209–210; McGarry 2009. This renders the line, “They are not sickened by Joseph’s affliction.” To these observations, I add that the verb נָחַל paronomastically also echoes נָחַל “divide as a possession” (a piel form of the verb נָחַל), used in reference to tribal land allotments (e.g., Josh 14:1, 19:51). Thus, Amos’s accusation, “Yet they have not grieved over the ruin of Joseph” also allusively suggests: “They have not yet divided the broken-piece(s) of Israel.”

<sup>31</sup>The prophet’s antanaclastic use of the root ראש encourages one to connect the crime to the punishment. He opens by describing Israel as feeling secure and proud, because the ראשית “chief” of the nations must come to them (6:1). We then hear that the elite use the ראשית “best” oils to anoint themselves (6:6). For this, they will take their place at the ראש “head” of the exiles (6:7). One of the reasons cited for the punishment is that they had turned justice into ראש “poison” (6:12). On these and other cases of antanaclasis here, see Paul (1991, 210n96). On the use of such devices to convey *lex talionis* and as means of connecting dreams to their interpretations, see Noegel (2007b, 123–128).

we not taken to us horns by our own strength?” (Amos 6:13). For their hubris, Amos prophesies their shameful deaths—their bodies will not be buried, but burned in heaps (Amos 6:9–10, cf. 2:1).<sup>32</sup>

#### Esther 7: Ahasuerus and Haman

The motif also occurs in the account of Haman’s death at the hand of the Persian king.<sup>33</sup> The incident occurs during a royal feast, during which Esther reveals Haman’s plot to kill the Jews. When the king asks Esther who was responsible, she replies, “A foe and enemy! This wicked Haman!” (Esth 7:6). The king then “arose in his wrath” and stepped into the royal garden to contemplate his punishment (Esth 7:7). Meanwhile, Haman pleaded with Esther for his life, but the king misperceived his actions.

Then the king returned out of the palace garden into the place of the banquet of wine; and Haman was fallen upon the couch whereon Esther was. Then said the king: “Will he even force the queen before me in the house?” (Esth 7:8)

The king then had him impaled on the pole that Haman had prepared for Mordecai (Esth 7:10).<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>Amos 6:9 is a difficult verse. Most take *וּמְסַרְפוּ* as a by-form of the root *שָׂרַף* “burn.” For other options, including an older suggestion that the root refers to the use of resin to anoint the dead, see Paul 1991, 215–216. The LXX offers no help on the matter as it refers neither to burning nor resin. However, the Targum Jonathan reads *מְמַיְדָא* “the burner” and the Vulgate, *comburet eum* “burn him.” Regardless, whether the bodies were burned, or whether they fell to pestilence or the sword, they clearly have been exposed en masse. Pinker (2003) suggests that the context is a natural disaster.

<sup>33</sup>Perhaps the motif also is present in Genesis 14. After the defeat of Chedarlaomer and the other kings of the East, Melchizedek brings bread and wine to Abram. Abram had joined their coalition because the kings had taken Lot. Some Jewish traditions (e.g., *Bereshit Rabbah* 43:7) regard the bread and wine as a sacrificial offering, because Melchizedek is said to be a “priest of God Most High” (Gen 14:18). Others simply see here food for the weakened soldiers. It also is possible that bread and wine came from the food that the eastern kings had taken from Sodom (Gen 14:11). We are not told that Abram ate the food, but it is implied by context, for when the king of Sodom told Abram to take his share of the spoils, he asked only for “nothing but what the young men have eaten” (confirming that they had eaten the food), and the “share of the men who went with me” (Gen 14:24). If Abram partook of the food, then it would signify his disdain for the coalition of eastern kings, and their shameful arrogance. Josephus, *Antiq.* I.181, understood the meal as a lavish *εὐωχίαν* “feast” and a show of *ξένια* “hospitality” (cf. *Bereshit Rabbah* 47:8).

<sup>34</sup>The idiom for impalement is the same as that found in the account of the chief baker in Gen 40:19, 40:22. Interestingly, *Esther Rabbah* 7:10 states that Haman was beheaded too. On impalement in the ancient world, see Cook (2014, 312–315).

Once again the motif contrasts dining and dying to underscore the hatred of the feaster for the deceased, whom the narrator labels “the enemy of the Jews” (Esth 8:1). Indeed, the king’s wrath does not subside until after they impale Haman (Esth 7:7, 7:10). As with the previous examples, the story portrays the deceased as particularly bumptious. When he first learns that Esther had him invited to the feast, he boasts to his wife and friends:

And Haman recounted to them the splendor of his riches, the number of his sons, all the promotions with which the king had honored him, and how he had advanced him above the officials and the servants of the king. Then Haman said, “Even Queen Esther let no one but me come with the king to the feast she prepared. And tomorrow also I am invited by her together with the king.” (Esth 5:11–12)

Four elements in the story mark Haman’s shame. The first is the king’s perception, though inaccurate, that Haman was forcing himself upon his queen, an action that was tantamount to claiming the throne.<sup>35</sup> The second is the immediate reaction of the king’s officers—**וּפָנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ הִקְפּוּ**

“they covered Haman’s face” (Esth 7:8). The covering of one’s face elsewhere appears as an act of shame (Ps 44:15, 69:7).<sup>36</sup> Third, though the story relates Haman’s execution by impalement, it says nothing about his burial, thus adding additional shame to his death. Since the pole on which he was impaled stood fifty cubits high, i.e., roughly 75 feet, his abasement was more symbolic than physical (Esth 7:9).<sup>37</sup> Moreover, Haman’s crime also results in the impalement of his ten sons, whose executions the Judahites treated like a holy war, as they took no spoils (Esth 9:10, 9:14–15). The final moment of shame occurs when the king gives Haman’s property to Esther (Esth 8:1).<sup>38</sup> Alternatively, Esther, Mordecai, and the Jews are notably elevated.

That the feast and execution are intended to signal a reversal of fortunes is made explicit by the narrator: “the enemies of the Jews hoped to have rule over them; whereas it was turned to the contrary, that the Jews had rule over them that hated them” (Esth 9:1).<sup>39</sup> Thus, once again the juxtaposition of

<sup>35</sup>Noted by Berlin (2001, 70–71).

<sup>36</sup>In Esth 6:12, the same verb (i.e., **הִקְפָּה**) refers to Haman covering his head in grief, after the king forced him to honor Mordecai.

<sup>37</sup>Indeed, it makes ironic the elevated position to which Xerxes had appointed Haman (Esth 3:1). In *Esther Rabbah* 2:14, the shame of impalement (here reimagined as crucifixion) is conveyed by the opposition **מְרוֹמִים** “exulting” and **צוֹלָב** “crucifixion.”

<sup>38</sup>Observed by Berlin (2001, 72).

<sup>39</sup>For the ways in which chapter 8 demonstrates Haman’s reversal of fortunes, see Berlin (2001, 72–81).

dining with dying gives greater contour to the diners' hatred for the dying, in this case the king and Esther's antipathy for Haman, and stands as a testimony against the pride of Haman.

#### Daniel 5: Belshazzar's Feast

In this well-known story, Belshazzar, the Babylonian king, hosts a drinking feast (Dan 5:1). While imbibing the wine, the king orders his attendants to bring forward the gold and silver vessels that had been taken from the temple in Jerusalem so that he, his nobles, wives, and concubines might drink from them. After drinking from the sacred vessels, they "praised the gods of gold and silver, of bronze, iron, wood, and stone" (Dan 5:4). At this very moment, the fingers of a man's hand appeared and wrote a cryptic message on the wall (Dan 5:4). The king then summoned his enchanters, astrologers, and diviners, and promised them, that if one of them could interpret it, he would receive purple clothing and gold chain, and would become the third highest ruler in the kingdom (Dan 5:7). When the experts failed, Daniel was summoned. He reproached the king for not heeding the lessons of his father, whose pride and arrogance caused him to lose his mind and throne:

You have not humbled your heart, though you knew all this. Instead, you have raised yourself up over the Lord of Heaven. You have had the vessels from the temple brought to you, and you and your nobles, your wives and your concubines drank wine from them. You praised the gods of silver and gold, of bronze, iron, wood, and stone, which cannot see or hear or understand. And you did not honor the God who holds in his hand your life and your ways. (Dan 5:22–23)

Daniel then interprets the divine message as predicting Belshazzar's end. Despite forecasting his doom, the king awards Daniel the promised gifts and change in status (Dan 5:29). The narrator then tells us that the king was killed that very night (Dan 5:30).

Each of the motif's elements occurs in this brief account. A setting of feasting is followed immediately by someone's death, in this case the king's. The king's hubris is described in great detail, as is Daniel's elevated status, and both illustrate a divine reversal of circumstance. Though the text does not state how Belshazzar died, the Aramaic verb *קטיל* suggests that God executed him as a form of punishment.<sup>40</sup> We read of no burial.

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<sup>40</sup>E.g., *Tg. Exod* 19:13, *b. San.* 41a, *Ber.* 54b, *Pes.* 50a, Peshitta to *Gen* 26:11, *Jer* 48:15, *Matt* 2:16, *Lk* 11:47, 12:4.

## NEW TESTAMENT

## Mark 6: Herod and John the Baptizer

The motif appears at least three times in the New Testament,<sup>41</sup> first in the brief account of John the Baptizer's execution.<sup>42</sup> I shall rely on Mark, though the account also occurs with some variation also in Matthew.<sup>43</sup> According to Mark, King Herod ordered a banquet (δεῖπνον) on his birthday for his high officials and military commanders and other leaders of the Galilee (Mk 6:21). During the banquet, Herod became so enamoured with the dancing of Herodias's daughter, that he offered to give her anything she desired.<sup>44</sup> Her request, suggested to her by Herodias, was "the head of John the Baptizer on a platter" (Mk 6:25, Matt 14:6–8). Not wanting to break his oath before his guests, he fulfilled her request. Thus, Herod compounded the shame of John's arrest and imprisonment (Mk 6:17, 6:26, Matt 14:3), with a death by mutilation.

As with the previous cases, the major elements of the motif are present.<sup>45</sup> A feast is held during which someone dies shamefully. The hubris of the

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<sup>41</sup>Is it possible that a variation on the motif appears in Jesus's parable about the rich man and Lazarus? The allegory juxtaposes a wealthy man bedecked in purple and fine linen, who lives sumptuously every day, with a diseased pauper, who lies at his gate longing to eat whatever falls from his table (Lk 16:19–21). Each man's experience after death is a direct result of his behavior while alive: the rich man suffers a perpetual torment of fire in Hades, while the poor man, separated from him by an impassible chasm, rests comfortably. Implicit in the rich man's lifestyle and the mention of his table scraps is the notion of feasting. Moreover, only the rich man is said to have been buried when he died. When the pauper passed, angels carried him to Abraham's side. Like Jesus's crucifixion, the parable transforms the victim's shame into a position of honor after death. Indeed, the parable concludes by teaching that those who do not listen to Moses and the Prophets will not be convinced of the resurrection of the dead.

<sup>42</sup>The motif examined here should be added to the list of literary features operating in the New Testament. Smith (2003, 236–241), offers compelling evidence for a number of literary "banquet motifs" and cases of irony in the Gospels, which he argues draw on a variety of feasting traditions. As he states: "The Gospel writers are all accomplished story-tellers, and the banquet is a stock motif for storytelling" (276). Nevertheless, Smith does not discuss the motif examined here. On the literary aspects of the New Testament generally, see Cox 2006; Keefer 2008; Theissen 2011.

<sup>43</sup>The relationship between the Gospels is complex and the literature on it is voluminous. The prevailing theory is that Matthew and Luke, and possibly John, represent a development of what is found in the Gospel of Mark. Hence my focus on Mark. See Koester 1990; White 2011; Brown 1966–1970; Haenchen 1984; Collins 2007, 94–95.

<sup>44</sup>If the daughter is indeed Herod's, as the earliest manuscripts say, then the king's delight is implicitly incestuous, putting Herod in an even worse light. See Glancy 1994, 34–50.

<sup>45</sup>Smith (2003, 240) sees Mark as having a strong sense for meal symbolism and cognizant of both the "rash, drunken king" motif and the "messianic banquet" motif.

victim is registered by Mark's explanation for Herodias's grudge against John: he had dared to tell Herod his marriage was unlawful (Mk 6:18, Matt 14:3–4).<sup>46</sup> The victim is symbolically and physically abased (imprisoned) and shamed (beheaded).

Nevertheless, a comparison of the motif in Mark with its usage in the Hebrew Bible brings to the fore a couple of meaningful variations.<sup>47</sup> First, though John suffered a shameful death, his disciples diminish that shame by laying his body in a tomb (Mk 6:29, Matt 14:12). Second, the host of the feast does not relish the defeat of the victim (though Matthew's account differs in this respect).<sup>48</sup> On the contrary, according to Mark, Herod feared John while he was alive, and his execution, which he regretted, continued to haunt him. In fact, he presents the entire account of the execution as a flashback to explain Herod's reaction to various reports concerning the identity of Jesus. Some were saying he was Elijah, while others saw him as a prophet of old. However, the claim on which Herod fixated was that he was John the Baptizer returned from the dead (Mk 6:14–15). This does not mean that John's death went uncelebrated. Herodias clearly got what she wanted. Not only did she enjoy a reversal of circumstance, she did so by manipulating the tetrarch's authority. Her ghastly request that John's head be served on a wooden board from which guests usually would eat meat with their fingers only emphasizes her desire to see John shamed in death.<sup>49</sup>

#### Mark 14-16: The Shaming of Jesus

The motif is also operative in the description of the events leading to and including Jesus's crucifixion. I again rely primarily on the account in Mark, though the motif is present with some variation in all the Gospels. After his disciple Judas betrayed him, Jesus was arrested, at which time his disciples

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<sup>46</sup>In accordance with Lev 18:16, 20:21.

<sup>47</sup>An ironic contrast occurs in the placement of the pericope about Jesus's first miraculous feeding of thousands immediately after this account (Mk 6:3–44). Bolstering the contrast is an *inclusio* formed by the apostles' departure and return (Mk 6:7–13, 6:30), which bookends John's suffering. Jesus had sent out the apostles with their newly given authority over impure spirits. They return unaware of the necessity of his coming suffering. Moreover, the loaves and fishes pericope is marked with allusions to eucharistic language. I thank my colleague Michael Williams for pointing this out and for bibliographical leads on the New Testament materials. Smith (2003, 241–242) also briefly describes the contrast between the two scenes and sees the miraculous feeding story as recalling the messianic banquet in Isa 25:6–8.

<sup>48</sup>See Janes 2006.

<sup>49</sup>See, e.g., the *πίναξ*, "platter," at *Od* 1.141, 16.49. On the text as assimilating John to Elijah and Herodias to Jezebel, see Anderson (2008, 129–130).

“left him and fled” (Mk 14:43–45, Matt 26:47–57, Lk 22:47–54, John 18:2–12). His betrayal, arrest, and the desertion of his disciples each attaches shame to Jesus.<sup>50</sup> He then was led before the Sanhedrin, who accused him of blasphemy and condemned him as *ἐνοχον εἶναι θανάτου*, “deserving of death” (Mk 14:64, cf. Matt 26:66, Lk 23:1–4, John 19:7). They spat in his face, blindfolded him, and struck him with their fists. Others slapped him and mocked him: “Prophesy!” (Mk 14:65, Matt 26:67–68). Meanwhile, his disciple Peter denied him (Mk 14:65–72, Matt 26:69–75, Lk 22:54–62, John 18:15–18, 25–27), and according to Matthew, Judas hanged himself (Matt 27:5), two events that connect additional shame to Jesus and his movement (cf. Lk 9:26). The next morning, the chief priests, elders, and teachers of the law planned for his crucifixion, a form of execution intended to mark one’s shame publicly (Mk 15:1, Matt 27:1, Heb 12:2).<sup>51</sup> After the crowd demanded his death, Jesus was then flogged, stripped, and forced to wear a scarlet robe and acanthus crown. Soldiers knelt before him and mocked him as a would-be king. They then spat on him, beat him, and stripped him again before leading him to his execution (Mk 15:14–20, Matt 27:26–31, Lk 23:11, John 19:2). After crucifying him, the soldiers divided up his clothes, and watched his agonizing death (Mk 15:24, Matt 27:35–36, John 19:23–24). Meanwhile, the others crucified with him joined the crowds hurling insults at him (Mk 15:27–32, Matt 27:44, Lk 23:36).

Of special interest to this study is that Mark states that Jesus’s humiliation and crucifixion took place during a *ἑορτή*, “feast,” as part of the Passover celebration (Mk 15:6, Matt 27:15).<sup>52</sup> However, here again we find a slight variation on the motif, for as we have seen, the juxtaposition of a feast with someone’s shameful death usually underscores the feaster’s contempt for the deceased. However, here the text records Pilate’s ambivalence. He asks, “Why? What crime has he committed?” (Mk 15:14). Matthew goes even farther to show that Pilate found Jesus blameless. He tells us that Pilate

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<sup>50</sup>On codes of shame and honor in this period, see Daube 1956; Plevnik 1993; Malina 2001; Downing 2007; Rohrbaugh 2010, 109–125.

<sup>51</sup>Cook 2011, 193–213; 2014, 418–423; Malina and Neyrey 1988; 1991, 25–66.

<sup>52</sup>The Greek *ἑορτή* can mean “feast” or “festival.” In Mark 15:6 it appears on its own, but in Mark 14:2, it is connected to the Passover, since it follows *πάσχα*, “Passover” and *ἄζυμος*, “Unleavened Bread” in the previous verse. Luke 22:1 refers to the event as *ἑορτὴ τῶν ἄζύμων*, “Feast of Unleavened Bread,” and the *Πάσχα*, “Passover.” Mark and Luke accord with Matthew by making the last supper the Passover meal. However, John 19:14 states that the crucifixion took place on the day of the preparation of the Passover, thus making Jesus the sacrificial lamb. Since the story of the Passover in Exodus 12 also contains the motif (see above), it likely was employed in the Gospels to evoke parallels with that text.

washed his hands of the matter, proclaiming, “I am innocent of this man’s blood. . . . See to it yourselves!” (Matt 27:24). Luke too casts Pilate, and also Herod, as less indulgent in Jesus’s suffering, though relenting in the end (Lk 23:4–24, cf. John 19:12–16). According to Mark, Pilate gave up Jesus to please the crowd (Mk 15:15), whereas in Matthew, much like the story of Joseph’s brothers, Pilate realized that they had brought Jesus to him out of φθόνος, “envy” (Matt 27:17). Regardless of Pilate’s role in delivering up Jesus, the fact that the feast was part of the Passover celebration, places the contempt for the victim more centrally upon the celebrants who chanted for his crucifixion.

Another twist on the motif comes after Jesus’s death, for while one expects his corpse to remain shamefully exposed to the elements and vultures, like John the Baptizer, we are informed that he received a proper Jewish burial (Mk 15:42–46, Matt 27:57–60, Lk 23:50–53, John 19:38–42). The Johanne account adds that the Jewish leaders did not want the crucified bodies to remain suspended on the Sabbath, so they asked Pilate to have their legs broken and taken down. When the soldiers found Jesus already dead they did not break his legs. Nevertheless, one of the soldiers speared his side, thus mutilating, and further shaming, his body (John 19:31–34).

In the previous examples of the motif, the shamed one typically is abased symbolically and physically. Certainly, the long trail of humiliating acts performed against Jesus conforms to this pattern. The fact that the bystander who offered him sour wine could barely reach him with a reed (Mk 15:36), illustrates that his final abasement was more symbolic than physical.<sup>53</sup> Nevertheless, much like Joseph who was saved from the pit and who rose to great power over his assailants, Mark tells us that Jesus rose from the dead (Mk 16:6, Matt 28:5–6, Lk 24:6, John 20:9). Thus, the narrative marks his end as elevated. It proclaims that he ascended to heaven to sit on the right hand of God (Mk 16:19, Lk 24:51, John 20:17). Other textual witnesses state that he descended and ascended from the pit (Eph 4:9–10), and that those who believe in him will not be κατασχύνω “put to shame” (Rom 10:11). The story thus inverts the expected pattern by transforming notions of shame to notions of glory (Lk 24:26). In essence, he is depicted as shaming shame itself (Heb 12:2).

#### Revelation 19: The Banquet of the Apocalypse

The motif also appears with some variation in the account of the slaying of the two beasts and their followers in John’s apocalypse.

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<sup>53</sup>See the discussion of Collins (2007, 757).

And I saw an angel standing in the sun and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the birds that fly in middle-heaven, “Come and gather yourselves together for the great banquet [τὸ δεῖπνον τὸ μέγα] of God, that you may eat the flesh of kings, and the flesh of captains, and the flesh of mighty men, and the flesh of horses, and of them that sit on them, and the flesh of all, free and slave, both small and great.” (Rev 19:17–18)

Here, instead of inviting human guests, the angel summons scavenging birds to feast on the carrion of God’s enemies.<sup>54</sup> Previously, John had described them as led by two arrogant beasts inspired by Satan. The first spoke blasphemies against God, his name, tabernacle, and angelic host, and was worshiped by people not listed in the Book of Life (Rev 13:5–8). The second, a false prophet, performed wonders that deceived others into worshiping the beast (Rev 13:13–15). John also warned his listeners that those who accepted their lying spirits would see their own shame as if walking naked (Rev 16:15). Thus, for their hubris, God punishes the beasts and their followers by abasing them symbolically and physically, and by shaming their deaths.

And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet who wrought miracles before him, with which he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast, and them that worshiped his image. The two of them were cast alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur. And the remnant were killed with the sword that went forth from the mouth of the rider on the horse, and all the birds gorged themselves on their flesh. (Rev 19:20–21)

Though the feasters are birds and not humans, their identification as flying in μεσουράνημα, “middle-heaven,” the zenith of the universe, marks them as cosmically significant.<sup>55</sup> Moreover, the use of the expression τὸ δεῖπνον τὸ μέγα “great banquet” leaves no doubt that a celebratory feast is intended. Indeed, δεῖπνον here stands in stark contrast to its use immediately before with reference to the “marriage banquet (δεῖπνον) of the Lamb” (Rev 19:9). As Craig Koester observes:

The banquet motif points to the outcome of basic commitments. The faithful have a place at Christ’s wedding banquet, whereas the beast’s allies can

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<sup>54</sup>The prophecy has long been understood as drawing upon ancient Near Eastern divine combat mythology, as well as Ezek 39:17–21, which summons birds and beasts to a sacrifice. See Collins (1976, 57–100), who also sees the influence of the Leto-Python-Apollo myth; cf. Court 1979, 220; Roloff 1993, 220. More recently, Koester (2014, 760, 762) has shown that the battle scene also draws on other imagery from the Hebrew Bible.

<sup>55</sup>Also active in middle-heaven is a speaking eagle (Rev 8:13) and another angel (Rev 14:6). On this cosmic place, see Aristotle, *Meteorologica* 378a9, Hephaestio, *Astrologus* 2.11.18. Vettius Valens, *Astrologus* 5.26, refers to Aries with the title μεσουράνημα κόσμου, which places him at the zenith during creation.

anticipate becoming a meal for the birds in the battlefield banquet of God.  
(Koester 2014, 767)

## APOCRYPHA

### Judith 12-13: Judith and Holofernes

The apocryphal story of Judith also makes use of the motif. It gives the report of a drinking feast (πότην) hosted by Holofernes, chief captain of the Assyrian army, for his highest ranking officials (Jdt 12:10–16). The feast, which tested the stamina of the guests and staff alike (Jdt 13:1), was a pretense arranged by Holofernes to defile Judith and shame her (Jdt 12:16). However, Judith used his attraction to her to gain private access. She then beheaded him in his bed while he lay drunk. Her motive was to take vengeance on Israel’s “enemies” (Jdt 13:5, 13:11, 13:14). After severing his head, she handed it to her maid, who stuck it in her πήραν τῶν βρωμάτων, “bag of food” (Jdt 13:9–10). Later she showed it to the elders of the city, and in fitting Assyrian style, had it hung on the highest place of the city walls (Jdt 14:1, 14:11). The text shames Holofernes’s death not only through mutilation, but by demonstrating that “Yahweh had struck him down by the hand of a woman” (Jdt 13:15). Indeed, when the captain’s eunuch discovered his headless corpse, he screamed, “one woman of the Hebrews has brought shame (αἰσχύνην) upon the house of king Nebuchadnezzar” (Jdt 14:18). In the end, the Israelites enjoy a victory feast (Jdt 16:20).

Again, the story contains each of the motif’s conventions. Someone receives a shameful death during a feast and is symbolically and physically abased for having ἐμεγαλορρημόνησεν, “boasted,” one’s might against Israel (Jdt 6:17), and for one’s ὑπερηφανία, “arrogance” (Jdt 9:9),<sup>56</sup> while the other party is elevated. Nevertheless, like the prophecy in Amos 6, the story flips the motif’s expectations by making the feaster the shamed victim.

## UGARITIC TEXTS

Given the relative ubiquity of the motif in the Hebrew Bible, it should not surprise one to find it also in the Canaanite texts from Ugarit (ca. fourteenth–thirteenth centuries BCE).

### Epic of Baal: Baal vs. Yam

I begin with the Ugaritic *Epic of Baal*, in which the storm god follows his annihilation of the sea god Yam with a feast. True to epic form, the pericope is rich in imagery, both of the battle and the meal, and its description is lengthy, occupying the end of one tablet and the start of another (CAT 1.2 iv

<sup>56</sup>On Holofernes’s arrogance, see Corley (2012, 46–48).

20–1.3 i 28). The poem relates how Baal achieves his victory with the aid of two magical weapons created by the divine craftsman Kothar-wa-Ḥasis. The weapons leap from Baal’s hands at his command and strike Yam between the eyes. Yam collapses and falls to the ground, dead. Immediately afterwards, the narrator introduces us to a banquet in which an unnamed attendant serves Baal a fattening breast cut with a salted knife and offers him a massive goblet of mixed wine drawn from a thousand pitchers. Accompanying the meal is the music of singers with cymbals (*CAT* 1.3 i 2–21).<sup>57</sup>

The contrast between the two scenes could not be more dramatic. The first is rapid, violent, and climactic in mood and movement; the second is calm, orderly, and described as a steady sequence of sensory delights. While the placement of the banquet scene after the cosmic battle suggests that it represents a victory feast, the juxtaposition again adheres to the conventions of the motif.<sup>58</sup>

We know that Baal despised Yam, because Kothar-wa-Ḥasis referred to him as Baal’s enemy (*CAT* 1.2 iv 8–9). Baal’s hatred for Yam was ignited when Yam’s messengers first confronted El in Baal’s presence while they were dining and demanded that El hand over Baal as his slave (*CAT* 1.2 ii 20–35). As the text informs us, Yam had instructed his messengers to register their disrespect by not bowing before El and the divine assembly when delivering their missive (*CAT* 1.2 ii 14–16). When the assembly sees the messengers approach, they instead bow their heads, a gesture that Mark Smith interprets as “tantamount to deference or submission” to Yam (*CAT* 1.2 ii 23–24) (Smith 1994, 300). Perceiving the messengers’ actions as an act of hubris, Baal struck them, which forced Anat and Athtar to grab his arms to prevent further violence (*CAT* 1.2 ii 38–40).

As in the biblical examples, the feast that Baal enjoys after Yam’s death both conveys his loathing for him and marks his defeat as payback for his arrogance. Yam’s last breath depicts his symbolic and physical abasement: *yprsh̄ ym yql arš*, “Yam collapses and falls to the earth” (*CAT* 1.2 iv 25–26). Not only is the motion downward, the word *arš*, “earth,” when used in reference to death, can signify the “underworld.” Moreover, as with the biblical examples of the motif, here too the deceased incurs a shameful death, for we are told that after Yam died, Baal dismembered him and scattered his remains, thus prohibiting a proper burial.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>57</sup>Iconographic representations of banquets at Ugarit feature only a single guest. See Caubet 2013.

<sup>58</sup>Smith (1997, 106) labels the pericope “Baal’s Victory Feast.”

<sup>59</sup>*CAT* 2.4 iv 27 reads: *yqt b’l wyšt ym ykly tpt nhr*, “Baal dragged and dismembered Yam, he finished off Judge River.” However, if derived from *šty*, the verb could mean

## Epic of Baal: Anat vs. Baal's Enemies

Another juxtaposition of violence and dining appears in the very next column, this time with reference to Baal's sister, Anat. The narrator first describes her bloody rage against Baal's opponents (*CAT* 1.3 ii 7–14).<sup>60</sup>

She smites the clans of the seashore,  
 She strikes the men of the sunrise.  
 Beneath her, like balls, are heads,  
 Above her, like locusts, palms,  
 Like locusts heaps of warrior-palms.  
 She hangs heads on her back,  
 She fastens hands to her belt.  
 She gleans knee-deep in the blood of the soldiers,  
 Neck-deep in the gore of warriors.

Immediately afterwards, Anat returns to her house, her blood lust still unsated, and arranges tables and chairs for a feast (*CAT* 1.3 ii 17–22). However, this time the food and drink for the feast is provided by the flesh and blood of her opponents. After her cannibalistic meal, she wipes the house of gore, washes her fingers in their blood, returns the chairs and tables to storage, and cleans herself with rainwater (*CAT* 1.3 ii 27–41).

Once again we find an act of violence immediately followed by a dining scene. However, much like the account of John's beheading in Mark 6, the meal is even more horrific than the violence that preceded it.<sup>61</sup> Anat not only shames her enemies by mutilating them and reveling in their lack of burial, she gloats over their savage demise.

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“drank,” also a fitting image for Yam's death. The latter meaning was espied by Whitney (2006, 170). See *DULAT*, 848, 852, s.v. *št* and *šty*. Nevertheless, the verb *št* is polysemous and also can mean “pour out,” and it occurs elsewhere in reference to water (*CAT* 1.16 i 34). Cf. Hebrew פָּצַץ, “pour out (liquid)” or “extinguish (life).” On polysemy as a feature of Ugaritic texts, see Noegel (1995; 2014).

<sup>60</sup>Lloyd (1996) fittingly reads the text as reflecting the king's ritual killing of prisoners of war before the deity.

<sup>61</sup>In *CAT* 1.5 i 22–27, Mot commands Baal to invite him to a feast so that he can murder him. His intentions are cannibalistic: “Let me tear you to pieces, let me eat hands, innards, forearms” (1.5 i 4–6). Unfortunately, the columns that follow are fragmentary, making it impossible to know whether the invitation was ever realized. *CAT* 1.4 iv 12–18 reveals that afterwards Baal visited the divine council while they were feasting, and in 1.5 v, he descended to the underworld. Unfortunately, one cannot tell whether Baal's death occurred during the feast. If it did, then this would be a third example of the motif from the Ugaritic corpus.

Her innards swelled with laughter,  
 Her heart fills with joy,  
 Anat's innards with victory. (*CAT* 1.3 ii 25–27)

The juxtaposition of violence and dining vignettes here achieves much the same effect as it did in the previous example, though with heightened effect—it provides a literary means of casting Anat as contemptuous of Baal's enemies, but even more so than Baal had been. It also depicts the annihilation of their enemies as “just desserts” for their hauteur.

### MESOPOTAMIAN TEXTS

*Enūma eliš*: Marduk and Tiamat

The motif also occurs in the Babylonian creation account, *Enūma eliš* (ca. 1500–1100 BCE).<sup>62</sup> As in the Ugaritic texts, the story unfolds in epic style and with lengthy detail about a war waged by the goddess of the primordial deep, Tiamat, against the other gods. Shortly after their birth accounts, the narrator informs us that Tiamat and her brood “plotted [evil] against the gods their progenitors” (I:128). Soon they were “preparing for battle, furious, raging, they arrayed a host to start the battle” (I:131–132). In preparation, Tiamat married and “exalted Qingu, and magnified him among them. The head of the army, the leader of the host” (I:148–149). She “sat him on a throne, (saying) ‘I have chanted a spell for you and raised you above the host of the gods, I have appointed you ruler over all the gods’” (I:152–154). She then fastened the Tablet of Destinies to his chest, which enabled him to decree their destinies (II:43–44).

When wise Ea catches wind of the coup, he informs his father, Anshar: “our mother Tiamat hates us (*izirranati*)” (II:11). Fearing for their lives, the gods cower before her, until the divine warrior Marduk steps forward to challenge her. In the ensuing battle, Marduk kills her, slices her open and rips out her entrails. He then casts down her corpse and stands on it (IV:101–104). Next he slaughters her supporters. Returning to Tiamat's corpse, he smashes her skull, and slashes her arteries to drain her blood (IV:130–131). He severs her corpse in half *kīma nūn maštē* “like a fish for drying” (IV:137), and later stabs her eyes (V:53–55). Her body parts then become the building materials for Marduk's new cosmos. His last act is to query the Anunnaki, “Who caused Tiamat to rebel (*ušabalkituma*), and press for war” (VI:101–104)? Qingu is ferreted, bound, and brought before Marduk, who slashes his arteries and creates humankind with his blood (VI:31–33). Shortly afterwards, Marduk invites the gods to a banquet (*qerītu*): “Take your pleasure! Sit down in joy”

<sup>62</sup>On the various proposals for dating *Enūma eliš*, see conveniently Abusch (1999).

(VI:70–73)! They oblige him, beer-mugs are provided, and we are told that they enjoyed themselves immensely (VI:74–76).<sup>63</sup>

The feast simultaneously celebrates Marduk's triumph in battle, his enthronement, and the building of his temple. The victory is cosmological. The juxtaposition of the feast shortly after Qingu's death, the very climax of the battle narrative involving Tiamat, again emphasizes Marduk's loathing for his enemies. In fact, the story highlights their hubris on several occasions. Not only does the story describe an evil rebellion, Marduk berates Tiamat directly for her hubris: "Why must you attack and be arrogant (*eliš našātima*), and labor to provoke war" (IV:77–78)? Indeed, she also had given Qingu the Tablet of Destiny without going through the proper channels. Thus, he also rebukes her: "It is improper (*lā simatīšu*) for you to appoint him (Qingu) with the rite of Anuship" (IV:82). After Marduk retrieves the Tablet, the narrator reminds us that it *lā simatīšu*, "was not properly his" (IV:121). Of Tiamat we also hear: *ina šaptīša lullâ ukâl sarrāti*, "in her lips she possessed untruth and falsehood" (IV:72).<sup>64</sup> The enemy horde is a *ayābu mutta'īdu*, "vainglorious foe" (IV:124). For their arrogance, a divine reversal is set in motion: the enemies are abased, mutilated, and shamed, while Marduk becomes king of the gods.

#### MESOPOTAMIAN ART

Having examined examples of the motif in biblical, Ugaritic, and Akkadian literature, I now turn to the three pieces of visual art from Mesopotamia.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>63</sup>Though time elapses between the building of the temple and the feast, the poem telescopes the events simply by reporting that it was a year-long project (VI:60–61). The literary tactic results in keeping the feast and the slaughter of Qingu in visual and thus cognitive proximity.

<sup>64</sup>I derive *lullâ* from Sumerian *lul* "untrue," as suggested by Lambert (2013, 476).

<sup>65</sup>Three other visual representations are worthy of note, but not inclusion. The first is the White Obelisk of Assurnasirpal II (ninth century BCE). It combines images of feasting with images of warfare, but the registers depicting each scene are not in close proximity. In addition, though two registers on one side depict a chariot over an enemy, the obelisk contains no mutilated corpses. The inscription too, while noting the king's anger over the rebellion of Ḫarira, makes no reference to shaming the dead. Moreover, the direction in which one should read the obelisk is a matter of debate. See Pittman 1996. The second item is a thirteenth, or perhaps twelfth century BCE, ivory plaque from Megiddo depicting a ruler seated in a cherubim-flanked throne and drinking from a cup, while soldiers present bound, naked prisoners (often interpreted as Shasu). See Loud 1939, 13, plate 4. The warriors' nudity appears to highlight their shame, but the feast is not commensal and there appears no image of death. The third item is an Egyptianized bronze bowl of Phoenician manufacture from Salamis, Cyprus that dates to Iron Age II (British Museum inventory number 1892/5-19/1), published by Markoe (1985, 174–175, 251). It features an erotic banqueting scene along its edge and a pharaoh smiting his enemies at its center. It

Though artistic representations are not texts, there exist many conceptual overlaps between ancient texts and the arts (including architecture and textile production) in terms of patterning.<sup>66</sup> Indeed, whether in literature or in the visual arts, the effect upon the viewer of contrast through juxtapositioning is the same.<sup>67</sup>

### Sumerian Standard of Ur

The famous box known by the misnomer “Standard of Ur” (ca. 2600–2400 BCE), contains three registers on each of its two larger sides. In the uppermost register on one of them, we see a banquet in which a king, indicated by his larger size and distinctive clothing,<sup>68</sup> holds a cup in his right hand while facing guests doing the same (fig. 1, p. 291).<sup>69</sup> In the lowest register on its other side is a military campaign (fig. 2, p. 291). The panel shows four enemies trodden by chariots; all of them naked.<sup>70</sup> In the middle register on the same side, soldiers kill some enemies and spare others. In the top register, they

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is tempting to see the depiction of birds over the pharaoh’s head as vultures waiting to devour the shamed corpses. Nevertheless, I do not see the bowl as containing the motif examined here, because the enemy is unspecified and the center image is an ubiquitous type-scene. Moreover, it is difficult to understand how an image informed by an Egyptian royal ideology that defines foreigners as personifications of chaos could have functioned in a non-Egyptian, non-royal context other than as a symbol of magic or exotica, perhaps conferring elite status.

<sup>66</sup>For example, one can find examples of narrative programs, repetition and variation, symmetry, gendered parallelism, visual puns, as well as ring structures in ancient Near Eastern texts and the visual arts. See, e.g., Douglas 1999; Albenda 1992, 297–309; Watson 1980, 338n85; Roaf and Zgoll 2001; Watanabe 2004; Bahrani 2004; Kilmer 2006; David 2014; Schroer 2014; Crawford 2014. If Ataç (2010, 145–201) is correct that the scribal-sacerdotal elite had a supervisory hand in the design and production of the reliefs, then one would expect an overlap between the literary and visual arts.

<sup>67</sup>On the use of juxtaposing to create analogy in Mesopotamian art, see Ataç (2010, 1–38).

<sup>68</sup>The figure wears the same clothing as Urnanshe, the first king (lú.gal) of Lagash, on a limestone plaque depicting the celebration of a feast after building the temple for the god Ningirsu. See Zettler 1998, 6.

<sup>69</sup>On the uniqueness of the “Standard” among glyptic banquet scenes, see Renette (2014, 83–85).

<sup>70</sup>The corpse on the far right is naked, but not mutilated. It only appears that way, because some of the shell tesserae are missing. I thank Richard Zettler for confirming this, personal communication, April 15, 2015. The position of human and animal corpses beneath the horses is a motif that would enjoy a long tradition in ancient Mesopotamia. See Ataç 2010, 16.

lead naked prisoners before the same ruler who hosts the banquet on the other side. The enemies' nudity heralds their shame.<sup>71</sup>

Since the box contains no text, we cannot know who the figures are or what act of hubris inspired the campaign, but generally such battles were responses to perceived infractions, whether rebellions or border encroachments.<sup>72</sup> Nevertheless, the object displays all of the conventions of the motif. The trampled bodies render the enemy physically and symbolically abased before the suzerain, who drinks to their demise. Their abasement is conveyed structurally as well, for the king appears elevated and larger on both sides of the box in the uppermost register, whereas the naked dead appear on the bottom register opposite the side of the feast. In fact, in the feast scene, the king's body literally breaches the top frame.<sup>73</sup> Scholars have interpreted the feast as a victory celebration and have understood both sides of the box as representing the ideology of Sumerian kingship—the king as a powerful military leader, mediator of the gods, and purveyor of their abundance.<sup>74</sup> The Standard of Ur also represents the oldest use of the motif examined here.

#### Sargon II's Palace at Khorsobad

The second example of the motif appears in Room 2 at Dūr-Šarrukîn, Sargon's palace at Khorsobad (ca. 721 BCE). Sargon's reliefs represent the earliest artistic displays of commensal meals by Neo-Assyrian kings, for whom Stefania Ermidoro has shown, the feast constituted an important vehicle for their self-representation and the reification of their status and power (Ermidoro 2015). Though most of Sargon's palace reliefs were lost accidentally shortly after their excavation, we still possess the finely executed drawings made of them by Paul Emile Botta and Eugène Flandin.<sup>75</sup> The reliefs form upper and lower registers that run in a right-to-left direction along every wall. One half of the upper register shows captured enemies who wear skin garments. The other half depicts a banquet that concludes with an image of the king feasting, though the final portion has not survived. Representative of

<sup>71</sup>Ataç (2010, 40–41) argues that the depiction of slain nude enemies identifies them with animals killed during the hunt.

<sup>72</sup>Thus, the earliest historical document and depiction of Sumerian warfare, the co-called "Stele of Vultures" records the cause of the king Eannatum's attack against Umma:  $lú\ umma^{ki}.ke_4\ šu\ du_7.ra_2\ e.ma.da.dug_4\ lagaš^{ki}\ gaba.bé\ šu\ e.ma.us_2$  "the leader if Umma acted belligerently against it and defied Lagash." See <http://cdli.ucla.edu>, Q001056, o ii 23. See also Postgate 1992, 250–256.

<sup>73</sup>Observed by Renette 2014, 84.

<sup>74</sup>See Hansen 1998, 45–47; Reade 2003, 97–100.

<sup>75</sup>See Albenda 1986.

the banquet scene are Slabs 18–19 (fig. 3, p. 292), depicting a victory feast.<sup>76</sup> The lower register on both sides illustrates Sargon's sixth campaign against several cities in the Zagros in 716 BCE, including Ganguḫtu, Kišesim, Bit Bagiya, Tikrakka, Kindau, and Ḥarḥar (Reade 1976). Of special note are those that show the sieges of Bit Bagiya (fig. 4, p. 292), Tikrakka (fig. 5, p. 292), Kindau (fig. 6, p. 293), and Ḥarḥar (fig. 7, p. 293). In something of a visual narrative climax, the successive campaigns increasingly leave more corpses.<sup>77</sup> In each of the four cases, the dead bodies are not only naked, they are headless and otherwise dismembered, thus magnifying their shame.<sup>78</sup> The repetitive nature of Assyrian battle scenes, much like repetition in magical incantations, serves to reify through performative means the ritual annihilation of the enemy (Bahrani 2008, 52). Visually, the reliefs underscore the king's role as god's viceroy restoring the cosmic order (Noegel 2007a; Pongratz-Leisten 2007; Collins 2014, 635).

Little by way of written evidence exists for what prompted Sargon's hatred of these cities. Tikrakka appears nowhere else in his inscriptions, and Bit Bagaya and Kindau appear only briefly in the Annals.<sup>79</sup> We know only a bit more about Ḥarḥar. When Sargon took it, he replaced its ruler Kibaba, erected a stele to himself, and renamed the city after his own name, Qār-Šarrukîn (Frahm 2009, 71–74).<sup>80</sup> Despite the general lack of written evidence, the blood-curdling bas-reliefs leave no doubt of Sargon's disdain for the rebellious cities that sought to challenge his rule. In addition, by littering the ground with naked human remains, the reliefs offer a physical and symbolic abasement of the enemy. Indeed, in an Assyrian context, such mutilation prevented descendants from making funerary offerings.<sup>81</sup> Moreover, Sargon's

<sup>76</sup>On banquets as elements of victory celebrations in Assyrian art, see Reade 2005, 5–27; Radner 2011, 53n39. Melikian-Chirvani (1992), similarly notes the theme of *bazm* “feasting” and *razm* “warfare” in Persian sources, and argues that they belong to the legacy of the Sasanids.

<sup>77</sup>Though not all the reliefs are completely extant, it is noteworthy that the sieges of Ganguḫtu and Kišesim depict the inhabitants as raising their arms in surrender, but show no corpses. See Slabs 22, 28–29. It is possible that some slain enemies appear in Slab 24, but it is difficult to tell from Flandin's drawing. If there are no corpses there, then the battle scenes are indeed narrated visually as a crescendo of violence, concluding with Ḥarḥar, which also is depicted as the largest of the cities.

<sup>78</sup>Albenda 1986, plates 112–113 (Slabs 5–9), 116–121 (Slab 10, 13–19), 123 (Slab 1 in door H), 126 (Slab 22), 128 (Slabs 28–29).

<sup>79</sup>See the convenient discussion in Russell (1999, 120–121).

<sup>80</sup>A number of letters to Sargon from his officials stationed at Ḥarḥar also exist. See Fuchs, Parpola, and Reade 2001.

<sup>81</sup>See May 2010, 109n6.

elevated status is conveyed visually by placing the feasting scene in the upper register atop the pictures of warfare.

#### Sennacherib's Palace at Nineveh

One also finds the motif in Room 28 (Slabs 9–10) of Sennacherib's Palace at Nineveh (fig. 8, p. 293). The left side of the relief depicts two scribes stoically recording the spoils of war before a pile of decapitated heads. On the far right, one soldier slaughters a ram, whose severed head lies on the ground before him in a way that is analogous to the human heads.<sup>82</sup> Behind him two soldiers roast the meat on both sides of a fire built from wooden booty. The soldier on the right stands holding one portion of meat over the fire, while placing another into his mouth. The register just below (not shown here) portrays soldiers bringing forth their war trophies, including more enemy heads. Thus, once again a commensal meal is placed in immediate contrast with images of horrific death.

As John Russell suggests, the relief probably represents one of Sennacherib's several campaigns to Babylonia.<sup>83</sup> Though we cannot know for certain which of them it is, Sennacherib's inscriptions concerning his first campaign illustrate well his hatred of Babylonian hubris. Thus, he refers to the Babylonian king, Marduk-apla-iddina II (Merodach-Baladan), as an *ayyābu lemnu bārānū karaš surrāti ēpiš lemutti ša anzillašu kittu* "evil enemy, insurrectionist, schemer of rebellion, doer of evil, whose treachery is true" (C1:6), *šū imdi gallê lemni* "that stanchion of an evil demon" (C1:17), and *šū ēpiš lemneti* "worker of iniquity" (C1:26). The Arabs, Arameans, and Chaldeans who came to his aid also are *bēl ḥiṭṭi* "sinners" (C1:52). Similarly, the warriors of Ḫirimmu are *nakrū* (LÚ.KÚR) *akšū* "wicked enemies" (C1:58).<sup>84</sup>

The enemy's dismemberment again marks their shame, and their heads, now stacked on the ground, physically and symbolically register their abasement. Meanwhile, the soldier shown eating stands in an elevated position with respect to the enemy heads, a message underscored by the discarded ram's head. Thus, the scene is reminiscent of Sennacherib's attack against the rebels of Kutha in Babylonia, about which he recalls: *asliš uṭebbiḫ* "I slaughtered (them) like sheep" (A1:23) (Grayson and Novotny 2012, 33). Though those enjoying the meal are not royals, they likely are elite warriors, since they feast on the spoils while other soldiers continue to work.

<sup>82</sup>Observed by Ataç 2010, 62.

<sup>83</sup>See Russell 1991, 148–149.

<sup>84</sup>The text appears on the First Campaign Cylinder (= C) from Nineveh in Grayson and Novotny (2012, 32–34, 36).

## Assurbanipal's Palace at Nineveh

A final demonstration of the motif appears on Slabs B and C in room S<sup>1</sup> of Assurbanipal's north palace (ca. 645 BCE). The large stone panels depict the king reclining on a divan and feasting with his wife in the royal garden (fig. 9, p. 294). Framing the image are palm trees and a grapevine bower, emblematic of fertility (Albenda 1974; Collins 2004). To the left, female attendants bring delicacies and a harpist strums pleasantries in way reminiscent of Amos's prophecy against Samaria. To the right of the scene is a small stand on which rest the bow, quiver, and sword of the king's defeated half-brother, Šamash-šum-ukîn, king of Babylon.<sup>85</sup> Hanging from the royal divan is an Egyptian *mnit*-necklace, which Pauline Albenda observes, completes the portrait of Assurbanipal's international power.

By incorporating these objects into the garden scene, a striking contrast between the past and present is effected. The trophy objects recall the earlier years, the period of military challenges and subsequent victories. Additionally, the trophies serve to reinforce the power of Assyrian kingship while, of course, giving no hint of any possible setbacks encountered by Assyria during those turbulent years. (Albenda 1977, 45)

Of course, this is not the only striking contrast the image presents. Indeed, the garden scene would appear to suggest nothing but repose were it not for the mutilated head of the Elamite king, Teuman, hanging on a pine tree in the background to the left (fig. 10, p. 294).<sup>86</sup> As in the examples above, the juxtaposition of images of dining and violent death emphasizes the absolute hatred that Ashurbanipal had for the Elamite king.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>85</sup>Albenda 1977, 37–38. Barnett (1975, 36) suggests that Teuman's hand and scepter also hang from another tree, presumably the hand on the far right side of the slab (C), where one sees a fist holding a long pole, ostensibly coming from the trunk of the palm tree. Nevertheless, the slab (D) adjoining to the right is missing, and so it is possible that it might have shown another living figure to whom the hand belongs. See Barnett 1976, plate LXIII.

<sup>86</sup>Collins (2006) observes that the pine is native to Assyria, and opines that it underscores the death of the foreign king by Assyrian hands.

<sup>87</sup>Compare this scene with another relief from the palace at Nineveh that provides a snapshot of the Assyrian campaign against the Elamite town of Ḫamanu from Room S<sup>1</sup>, Slab A. In the upper register, one sees the sacking of the city, its towers ablaze, while soldiers dismantle the wall's brick's and timbers from above. From the city gate march soldiers carrying spoils of war. In the register directly below the violent scene are Elamite captives dining together with women present, while two guards stand watch with shields in hand. As Reed (2007) has shown, this juxtaposition functions to show Assurbanipal's merciful side. In essence, it achieves the opposite effect as the royal dining scene.

Additional evidence for the king's hatred of Teuman appears in his annals inscribed on Prism A, in which he villifies Teuman as *multaḥru ša ikpuda lemuttu* "the braggert, who planned evil" (A iii 37).<sup>88</sup> On Prism B, Assurbanipal calls him *tamšil gallê* "the image of a demon" (iv 74), who *lā mušāqir ilī* "does not esteem the gods" (v 35), and who *ištene'a lemuttu* "plotted evil" (iv 78, v 3–4) with a *pīšu erḥu* "provocative mouth" (v 2). It is Teuman who sent his envoys to Assurbanipal with a *šipir mēreḥti* "insolent message" (vi 60). According to the same Prism, Assurbanipal had displayed Teuman's severed head conspicuously in front of the gate in the middle of the city at Nineveh *mahḥuriš* "like an offering" (B vi 66–67).<sup>89</sup> Presumably he did this before reclining on his divan, but after forcing Dunanu, the king of Gambulu who had come to Teuman's aid, to wear it around his neck (vi 50–51). Afterwards, he poured a libation over the head, in a way reminiscent of his lion hunt (A2 i 14'–A1 ii 1–3).<sup>90</sup> As with the previous examples of the motif, the scene displays the feaster's disdain for the deceased, while marking the enemy's hubris. It also emphasizes the shame of the dead, whose mutilation ensured that a proper burial and offerings would never take place.

### CONCLUSIONS

The seventeen literary texts and four artistic items examined above offer evidence for a long-lived Near Eastern artistic motif that juxtaposes scenes of dining and violent death.<sup>91</sup> The motif has as its primary function the sham-

<sup>88</sup>Citations follow Borger 1996, 38, 97–99, 106–107.

<sup>89</sup>The use of the adverbial *-iš* "like" clarifies that, despite the libation, it was not a true offering.

<sup>90</sup>As reconstructed by Borger (1996, 301–302). On the connection to the lion hunt, see Pongratz-Leisten (2007, 20). On the link between the royal hunt and images of warfare, see (Collins 2014). I add that Room 2 in Sargon's palace at Khorsobad is mirrored by Room 7, in which an upper register depicts a banquet, and the lower register, a royal hunt.

<sup>91</sup>The motif may be present, at least latently, in several early Jewish and later rabbinic traditions concerning the righteous who will feast upon the Leviathan and Behemoth in the world to come. The tradition derives in part from ancient wide-spread conceptions of a cosmic battle between a warrior god and the forces of chaos (embodied as a dragon), and from exegetical readings of several biblical passages that refer to the Leviathan, e.g., Gen 1:21, Isa 27:1, Job 26:12, 40:25, Ps 74:13–14, 104:26. See already Gutmann 1968. The traditions recast the primordial battle as an eschatological one. Despite the presence of some of the motif's features, no single written source juxtaposes the slaying of Leviathan with a feast. They either mention the slaying of Leviathan by Yahweh or the angel Michael, Yahweh's preservation of Leviathan as food for the future, or the devouring of the Leviathan by the righteous in the world to come. Whitney (2006, 31–58), asserts that I Enoch

ing of the deceased.<sup>92</sup> It achieves this by inverting social conventions that require abstinence while mourning.<sup>93</sup> Thus, dining while others die marks the deceased as unworthy of grief. The motif also shames the dead by registering their hubris, abasing them physically and/or symbolically, and by way of mutilation, nudity, and/or improper burial. For the dining party, the motif indicates their contempt for the deceased and their joyful triumph by means of physical and/or symbolic elevation and a divine reversal of circumstance.

When considered collectively, what is most noticeable is the wide variety of consumption settings in which the motif occurs. Four of the meals appear fairly ordinary (Genesis 37, 1 Kings 18, 2 Kings 9, Sennacherib's soldiers).<sup>94</sup> Seven constitute feasts, five distinctly military, though one is hosted by an officer (Judith 12–13), four by kings (Esther 7, Daniel 5, Herod, Sumerian

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60:7–10, 60:24, 4 Ezra 6:49–52, and 2 Apoc. Bar. 29:4, refer to the righteous feasting on the slain body of creatures in the world to come. However, while each of the passages sees them as potential food, there is no reference to a feast or to the righteous, and thus, it is possible that each constitutes an exegetical expansion of Psalm 74:14, where the Leviathan are said to be “food for the people of the desert.” Consequently, I hesitate to impose the later rabbinic understanding of the eschatological feast on these older texts. Several later sources also contain partial elements of the motif (*inter alia*: *Midr. Lev. Rab.* 22.10, *Midr. Tanhuma*, Leviticus 7, *Apoc. Abraham* 10:10, 21:4, *b. Baba Batra* 74b–75a, *Pesiq. Rab Kahana*, suppl. 2.4, *Midr. Jonah*, and *Pirque-de-Rabbi Eleazer* 9–10). The pericope in *b. Baba Batra* comes closest by discussing God's preservation of the Leviathan in salt as a meal for the future's righteous, and by citing the slaying of Leviathan in Isaiah 27:1 in support. It also states that the angel Michael will hunt the Leviathan in the future, but the entire text is an exegetical discussion and not a narrative, and the mention of a feast comes later when it turns to the interpretation of Job 40:30: יִכְרוּ עֲלָיו חֲבָרִים: “Will traders barter for it (i.e., Leviathan)?” The rabbis understand the verse to mean: “Will scholars feast upon it?” (with some support from the root כָּרָה in 2 Kgs 6:23 [and the LXX of Job 40:30: ἐνσποῦνται, “feed”]). Thus, even though these Jewish sources, in particular *b. Baba Batra*, contain kernels of the motif, and one might conjecture that the motif existed in a more complete rendering of the “tradition,” the texts themselves do not juxtapose the killing of Leviathan with a feast in a way that brings them into immediate narrative dialogue. Thus, it is difficult to see the motif operative here. Moreover, the extant manuscripts for most of the supposed “early” texts are of very late date and it is impossible to ascertain their chronological priority.

<sup>92</sup>Note the observation of MacDonald (2008, 195): “the table was also a place for competitive struggles and could also be the place at which shaming or dishonor took place.”

<sup>93</sup>Compare the apt observation by MacDonald (2008, 183), that Jezebel's proclamation of a fast in 1 Kgs 21:9 “is no more than a literary and ironic inversion of the feast.”

<sup>94</sup>Nothing in the story of Ahab (1 Kings 18) or Jehu (2 Kings 9) suggests the celebration of a feast, though both are obviously royal meals. One might suppose that the king rarely ate alone, but we should not assume that every royal meal was a banquet. Indeed, we know of at least one meal that Ahab apparently ate privately (1 Kgs 21:7).

king, Sargon II, Assurbanipal), and four by gods (Yahweh in Isaiah 25, Revelation 19, Baal, Anat, Marduk).<sup>95</sup> One is a wedding feast (Judg 14). Six, or possibly seven of the meals,<sup>96</sup> are cultic in nature: Pharaoh's birthday (Genesis 40), Passover (Exodus 12/Mark 14–16), Amos 6 (*marzēah*), Herod's birthday (Mk 6:21), and Marduk's feast (*Enūma eliš*).<sup>97</sup>

Since the oldest examples from Ur, Ugarit, and Babylon celebrate royal and/or divine military victories, we must place the origins of the motif in such a social and political context.<sup>98</sup> This also is the case with the banquets of Sargon II, Assurbanipal, and Yahweh (Isaiah 25, Revelation 19), and the warfield meal of Sennacherib's soldiers. In fact, all of the cases examined here, save one,<sup>99</sup> are quintessentially victory meals, because they record the celebration of one party over another, even if that *jouissance* is inverted or delayed.

Nevertheless, a few cases constitute creative adaptations. Five of the them (Genesis 37, Amos 6, Daniel 5, Mark 14–16, Judith 12–13) invert the motif's conventions by depicting the feasters as the true villains.<sup>100</sup> Thus, Joseph's

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<sup>95</sup>The literature on food and foodways in the ancient world is vast. For a convenient survey, see Fu and Altmann (2014). Their useful definition of a "feast" underscores the ritual and political aspects of commensal eating and is particularly relevant to the feasts studied here: "A *feast*, then is a central social event oriented toward abundant display and communal consumption with ritualizing tendencies. As localized in specific spaces and times, feasting differs in degree and kind from the daily intake of meals, though it overlaps with the quotidian routines of consumption. In addition, the focus on communal consumption sets feasting apart from individual consumption of food" (15–16).

<sup>96</sup>Moortgat (1949, 139–140) suggests that the feast in Assurbanipal's palace depicts the celebration of the *Akītu*-festival, and this appears to have been accepted by Greer (2007), who views the event as cultic, based on the presence of incense stands and an offering table near the divan, as well as *kalū*-priest on a nearby slab. However, with Albenda (1977), I am less convinced.

<sup>97</sup>Pharaoh's birthday would have celebrated the birth of a god. Birthday celebrations of rulers in the Roman world were regarded as sufficiently cultic to be considered idolatrous by the later rabbis (*b. Avod. Zar.* 1.3) and early church fathers (Origen, *Comm. Matt.* 10.22). On Roman birthday celebrations as religious observances, see Argetsinger (1992). Marduk's feast also celebrates the building of his temple, so it is at least partly cultic.

<sup>98</sup>On the relationship between military victories and banqueting in Assyrian art, see Reade 2005, 5–27; Radner 2011, 53n39. As Collins (2007, 303), observes, it is noteworthy that Herod is first called a king (βασιλεύς) in the feasting narrative (Mk 16:14), though "the Herodians" (οἱ Ἡρώδαιοί) appears earlier (3:6).

<sup>99</sup>Samson's feast celebrates a wedding, though it ignites a military victory. See n104 below.

<sup>100</sup>In line with the theme discovered by MacDonald (2008, 173): "Eating and feasting can signal the end of the ruling dynasty."

brothers, the elite of Israel, Belshazzar, the celebrants calling for Jesus's crucifixion, and Holofernes all find shame in the end. Each of these accounts also casts the feasters as oblivious to the suffering of the victim and unaware of what is in store for them. Joseph's brothers do not accept his foretold prominence, the banqueting aristocracy do not see the "ruin of Joseph" as a sign of their impending exile, Belshazzar does not expect the message to forecast his death, those chanting "crucify" do not believe what Jesus proclaimed, and Holofernes is completely unaware that Judith is duping him. In each case, the revelers are both unaware of the divine plan and integral to it. Regardless of the creative purposes to which an author might employ the motif,<sup>101</sup> its distribution across different meal types, from the quotidian to the divine, demonstrates that the ancients may not have distinguished the various types of consumption events in accordance with contemporary scholarship on feasting and foodways.<sup>102</sup>

There is another element of the motif that requires comment. In most cases, the dining party is a member of the elite, usually a king or god (or both): Pharaoh, Samson, Ahab, Jehu, elites of Israel, Ahasuerus, Belshazzar, Yahweh, Herod, Holofernes, Baal, Anat, Marduk, Sumerian king, Sargon II, Sennacherib's soldiers, and Assurbanipal.<sup>103</sup> This is expected, since extravagant

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<sup>101</sup>Some of the cases also appear to employ a certain degree of intertextuality. I have remarked above on the parallel between the stories of Joseph in the pit and in the prison, and also on how Amos 6 draws on the traditions of Joseph, but there are others. The account of Jesus's passion echoes the story of the Passover in Exodus, but also the pericope of John's beheading. See Janes 2006. Collins (2007, 295–296, 303) sees John's beheading as foreshadowing Jesus's death. She also suggests (309–310) that the account involving John the Baptizer draws upon the feast topos found in Esther. Scholars also have discovered a number of parallels between the book of Esther and the Joseph story, as well as the Exodus pericope. See the survey by Berlin (2001, xxxvi–xli).

<sup>102</sup>See, in particular, the important reservations voiced by Pace (2014, 179), who argues that the current methodological effort to distinguish consumption events (e.g., feasts) from everyday eating practices may not "actually represent the way that ancient peoples conceptualized consumption practices."

<sup>103</sup>The social conventions that govern eating at elite social occasions also inform a number of biblical idioms. Thus, "to eat at someone's table" means to have that person's material or social support (e.g., 2 Sam 9:7, 1 Kgs 2:7, 18:19, 2 Kgs 25:29–30, Jer 52:33, cf. Ob 1:7, Dan 11:26) and to "eat of their delicacies" means to share their attitudes and behavior (Ps 141:4). Those regarded as enemies are, of course, uninvited, but will be forced to drink the "cup of wrath" (Jer 25:15, Ps 75:8, Rev 14:10). The "preparation of a table" also can be done before one's enemies (Ps 23:5). See McKane 1980; MacDonald 2008, 188–190. However, see a possible parallel with a Hittite ritual in which officials must prove their guilt or innocence by drinking from "the rhyton of the deity himself" (Miller 2013, 263). Setting the table improperly likewise can serve as an idiom for a

feasts generally belong to the world of the king and his elite.<sup>104</sup> The common person typically did not feast unless there was a public festival, such as the Passover, and even the account of that celebration serves to illustrate Yahweh's sovereignty. The account of king Ahab, in which he and Elijah both eat after the slaughtering of the prophets, similarly functions to demonstrate Yahweh's ultimate rule. It is this element of the motif that makes the figures of Joseph and Jesus stand out.<sup>105</sup> Neither is a member of the elite, and so neither enjoys elevated status until after he is rescued from death. The epithet "King of the Jews" (Mk 15:26, Matt 27:37, Lk 23:38, John 19:19), posted over Jesus's head, does not become ironic until the resurrection. Moreover, both Joseph and Jesus are victims of jealous misperception. Their portents and claims are mistaken as hubris.<sup>106</sup>

The evidence also warrants a consideration of the degree to which the deceased can be identified with the meal that is eaten. The most obvious case is Anat's cannibalistic gorging.<sup>107</sup> The text leaves no doubt that she feasted not just *over* her enemies, but *on* them. However, this is apparent also in the birds that feast on God's slain enemies (Revelation 17). The bone-chilling

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lack of divine order and a rejection of Yahweh. Thus, Isaiah prophesies that Yahweh will punish with the sword those "who set a table for Fortune and fill cups of mixed wine for Destiny" (Isa 65:11–12). However, when royal feasts proceed in accordance with proper social expectations, and not at the expense of the poor and needy, they signify divine order, and thus, justice and righteousness (Jer 22:15–16).

<sup>104</sup>While Samson belongs to the pre-monarchic period, I include him here, because the text explicitly recognizes his elite status as Judge of Israel (Judg 15:20, 16:31). Nevertheless, I think it plausible that the pre-monarchic setting explains why the author relied on a wedding, rather than military victory, to provide the context for the feast motif.

<sup>105</sup>The birds who feast on the flesh of the enemy in Rev 19:17 also are marked as cosmically significant in that they fly in *μεσοῦράνημα*, "middle-heaven."

<sup>106</sup>On Jesus's blasphemy as a perceived claim of divine status, see Collins (2007, 706). One wonders whether the New Testament authors intended to evoke images of Joseph, as there are a number of other parallels between the two accounts as well. Both stories involve the loss of the sufferer's garment. Though the division of garments in John 19:23 alludes to Ps 21:18 (LXX), it also recalls Joseph being stripped of his tunic by his brothers (Gen 37:23). Both figures also escape death, but are mourned by others who believed them to be dead. In addition, both Reuben and Jacob tear their clothing when they believe Joseph has died. When Jesus dies, the curtain of the temple is torn in two (Gen 37:29, 37:34, Mk 15:38, Matt 27:51). In Mk 14:63, the high priest tears his clothes when Jesus says "I am," after questioned if he was the Messiah. Many such parallels between Jesus and Joseph were espied already in the fourth century CE by Aurelius Ambrosius, *De Ioseph* (= *Corpus scriptorum ecclesiasticorum Latinorum* 32.2, 73–122), who of course, understood their significance quite differently.

<sup>107</sup>See n59 above on the possibility that Baal killed Yam by swallowing him.

image of John's head on a meat platter is certainly also suggestive,<sup>108</sup> as is the storage of Holofernes's head in a food bag.<sup>109</sup> So also is the grim account of Jezebel's death, which Deborah Appler has shown, integrates the language of ritual sacrifice.<sup>110</sup> Indeed, the imagery of feasting is sometimes used in biblical texts to describe a holy war (e.g., Ezek 39:17–20, Rev 19:17–18). Of course, there also are the Eucharist passages identifying Jesus's body and blood with the sacrificial bread and wine (Mk 14:22, Matt 26:26, Lk 22:19, John 6:51–58). Jesus's death too, coinciding as it does with the Passover, similarly invites parallels between Jesus and the sacrificial lamb, even if more so in John than the other Gospels. Such represent the extremes of an already extreme act—victim as meal. Yet, how might we interpret them? Do these acts of anthropophagy, literal or metaphorical, merely place an even greater emphasis on the hatred that seethes through the celebrants' veins? Or do they evidence some conceptual overlap between feasting over one's slain enemies and ritual sacrifice? We have seen how Sennacherib's artists placed the soldiers' slaughter of a ram in apposition to decapitated heads, and how Assurbanipal poured a libation over Teuman's head and posted it on the walls of Nineveh "like an offering."<sup>111</sup> It is also worth noting that though Joseph's brothers do not kill him, they "slaughter" (שָׁחַט) a "young goat" (שְׂעִיר עִזִּים) in his stead as a quasi-substitute, and use its blood to convince their father of his death (Gen 37:31). Elijah's "slaughter" (שָׁחַט) of the prophets similarly evokes the language of sacrifice (1 Kgs 18:40).<sup>112</sup>

Alternatively, since killing one's enemies, especially in a royal or divine context, was not an ethical deliberation in the ancient Near East, but vital to the maintenance of the cosmic order, we may view the motif as conveying the divinity's violent victory over chaos. The Standard of Ur, Marduk's victory over Tiamat and Qingu, Sargon's defeat of the cities of the Zagros,

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<sup>108</sup>Anderson (2008, 132) argues that John is presented as food for the guests. Cf. the account of the sons of Ahab, whose severed heads are put in vessels for carrying or cooking (1 Kgs 10:7); cf. MacDonald 2008, 174. The notion that John's head might serve as the meal was not lost on later generations. See, e.g., an early sixteenth-century CE roundel, presently in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London (no. C. 2377-1910), on which Herodias is shown carving John's head with a knife as if to serve it to Herod.

<sup>109</sup>MacDonald (2008, 215) observes: "The consumer of Judith's beauty is now himself consumed. In Judith then Holofernes is presented as a man with a voracious appetite, whether that concerns food or a beautiful woman."

<sup>110</sup>See Appler 2001; MacDonald 2008, 174.

<sup>111</sup>On the close relation between warfare and ritual slaughter in Mesopotamia, see Bachelot 1991, 118–121; Ataç 2010, 41–43.

<sup>112</sup>One might argue that the texts involving divine feasts constitute sacrificial meals, but the gods order the feasts themselves.

Sennacherib wars in Babylonia, Assurbanipal's quelling of Elamite rebellion, and the battles of Baal and Anat surely illustrate this theme. Moreover, even if some of the examples from the Hebrew Bible contain the language of sacrifice, their victims are never offered to a deity. Thus, we also may read the accounts of Pharaoh, Jehu, Ahasuerus, and Yahweh as restoring order by putting down those who stand in the way of their rule. Jesus's followers too understood his victory over death as heralding a change of the cosmic order (Rom 8:22, 2 Cor 5:17, Col 1:19–20, 2:15), one that will be fulfilled in the eschaton, after God casts Satan, the beast, death, and Hades into the lake of fire, and the birds of middle-heaven feast on the flesh of his enemies (Revelation 19–20).

FIGURES

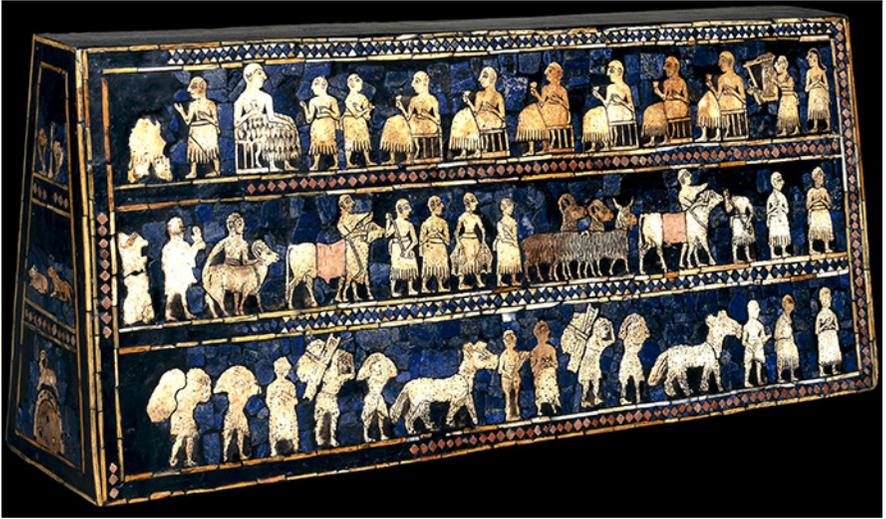
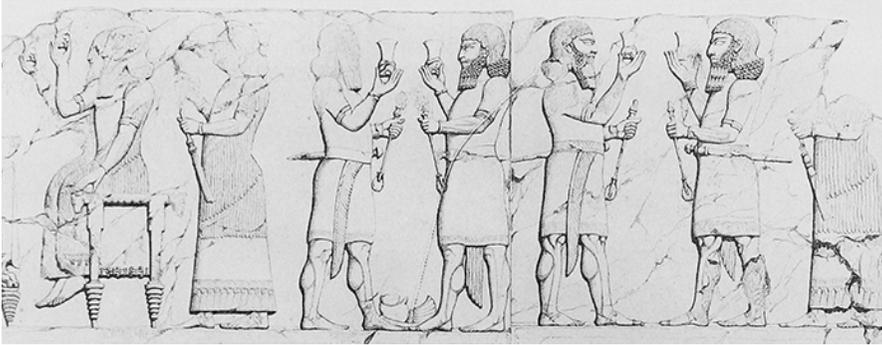


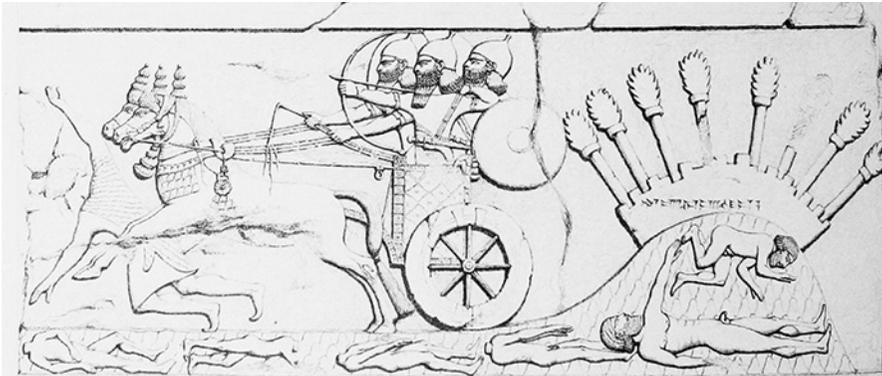
Figure 1. Standard of Ur, "Peaceful Side." Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum.



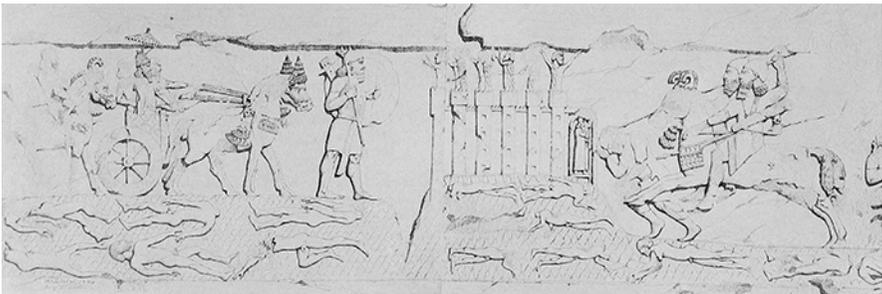
Figure 2. Standard of Ur, "Warfare Side." Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum.



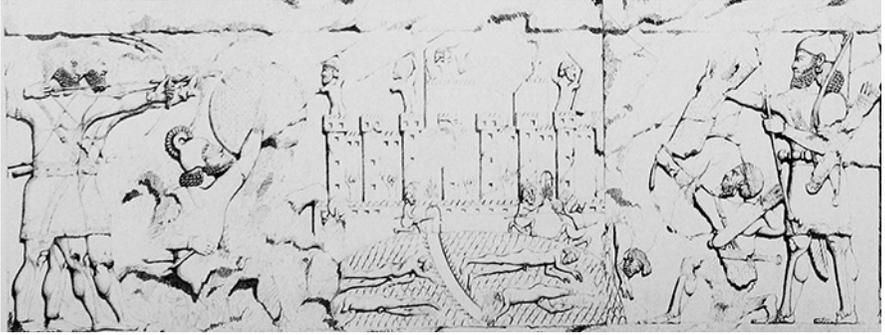
**Figure 3.** Feasters. Room 2, Slabs 18–19, by Flandin.



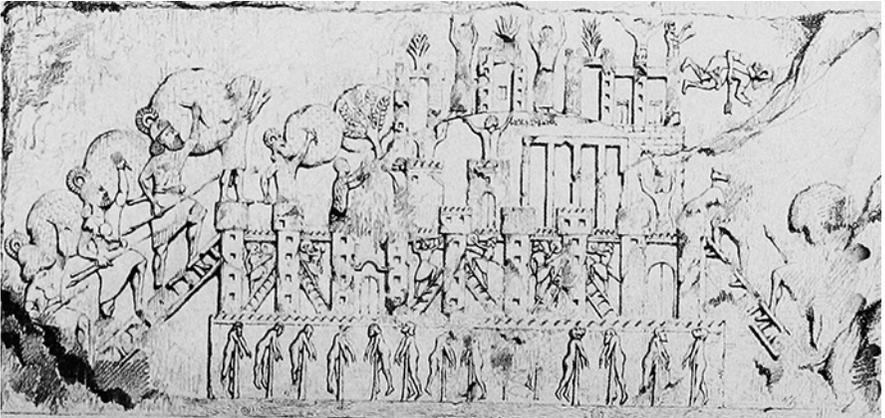
**Figure 4.** Defeat of Bit Bagaya. Room 2, Slab 1 in door H, by Flandin.



**Figure 5.** Defeat of Tikrakka. Room 2, Slabs 16–17, by Flandin.



**Figure 6.** Defeat of Kindau. Room 2, Slabs 14–15, by Flandin.



**Figure 7.** Defeat of Ḥarḥar. Room 2, Slabs 5–7, by Flandin.



**Figure 8.** Sennacherib's Palace. Room 28, Slabs 9–10. Photograph by the author.



**Figure 9.** Ashurbanipal “Garden Party.” Slabs B and C in room S1, courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum.



**Figure 10.** “Garden Party” detail: head of Teuman. Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum.

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