

DEATH CULT IMAGERY IN ISAIAH 57*

by

THEODORE J. LEWIS

University of Georgia, Athens GA 30602

Modern critical scholarship has not come to a consensus with regard to the compositional units of Isaiah 56:9–57:13. The theories are many, ranging from scholars such as Ewald, Volz and Westermann who would divide the pericope into as many as four self-contained compositional units, to scholars such as James Smart (1965, p. 238) who suggested that 56:9–12 “may well have been the introduction to [57:1–13] originally.” Likewise, Paul Hanson (1979, pp. 186ff) argues for a unified pericope blaming the “indefensible massive surgery of the text” on the “old prejudice tracing back to Duhm that judgment and salvation words never appear together in original prophetic units.”

Modern scholarship has not done much better when it comes to ascertaining the people who are being addressed, with suggestions ranging from pre-exilic to post-exilic times. What is clear is that Isaiah 56:9–57:2 is a stinging attack upon the leaders of Israel. The leaders, who were supposed to be watchmen (*šōpîm*) looking out for enemies, were in reality blind men (56:10). A trained sheep dog barks at the approach of danger, but Israel’s leaders are “mute dogs” unable to bark (56:10). Those who are supposed to have their eyes open (*hōzîm*)¹ lie around sleeping, only rousing to gorge themselves with food (56:11) and guzzle beer as they sing their drinking songs (56:12; cf. 28:7ff).²

* I would like to thank Douglas Groppe and Baruch Halpern for their critical reading of the manuscript.

1. Reading *hōzîm* with IQIsa^a rather than MT’s *hōzîm* which is a *hapax legomenon* in Hebrew. *haḏā* is common in Arabic with the meaning “to talk irrationally, rave, be delirious,” (cf. Syr *hdy*) but it is much easier to see a simple graphic confusion between *h* and *ḥ*. Such a reading fits nicely with the expression *yād ḥāzîṭ* in verse 8 (see below).

2. Verse 12 is absent from the LXX, a sure sign that we are dealing with a later addition. It would be quite unlikely for a scribe to omit such a popular drinking song. Perhaps it was added on analogy to Isaiah 28:7ff which specifically attacks corrupt prophets and priests. Cf. also IQIsa^a’s secondary harmonization of *ʿeqqēhāh* to *niqqah* to agree with the plural *nisbēʿāh*.

The collocation of feasting and “seeing” (*hzh*) which we have here is paralleled in Isaiah 28 which B. Halpern (1986, pp. 114–119) has also placed in the context of the ancestral or funerary cult.

The vocabulary used in this indictment, such as “watchmen” (*šōpîm*)³ and “seers” (*hōzîm*), strongly suggests that false prophets are being singled out in this denunciation. (Note the denigrating parallelism watchmen/dogs/seers/dogs.) Yet *šōpîm* has connotations wide enough to encompass leaders in general and this, together with the use of “shepherds” (*rō'îm*)⁴ in verse 11, suggests that the author is most likely attacking political, and perhaps even priestly,⁵ leaders along with the false prophets.

The result of such negligent leadership is the death of the righteous (57:1–2). In language reminiscent of the Suffering Servant (cf. 53:2–4, 8–9),⁶ the author repeatedly describes how the righteous die without anyone noticing. The author twice uses the idiom that the righteous “are gathered” (*ne'ēsap*) to express their death (they are not simply “taken away” as some translations render). It is clear to see, especially from the parallel term *ābād* (“the righteous one *perishes*”), that we have a shortened form of the idiom *ne'ēsap 'el 'ammāyw*, “a person is gathered to his kin” (see below, p. 276).

The reward of the righteous is that they enter the grave in peace (57:2).⁷ The author seems to be consciously contrasting the peaceful rest of the righteous in their biers (the word *miškāb* means both bed and grave [see below]) with the reclining slumber (*šōkēbîm*) of the false prophets (56:10).

Here we come to a definite break from the author’s diatribe against the leaders’ dereliction of duty. 57:3–13 is a tirade against the wicked who are also hard to identify. Is the prophet, as many commentators assume, using *wē'attem* (“But, as for you”) to turn his attention to the people⁸ or, as others have posited, is he still addressing the community

3. *šōpeh* is used figuratively of the prophets in Hosea 9:8, Jeremiah 6:17, Ezekiel 3:17, 33:7, (cf. Isaiah 52:8). The prophet was to act as one who watches so that the covenant will be kept (cf. the use of *sph* [with Yahweh as subject] in a covenant context in Genesis 31:49–50).

4. *rō'eh* commonly refers metaphorically to the king, yet comes to designate the civil leaders in general in the exilic and post-exilic community (Hanson, 1979, p. 196). Cf. LXX’s *ponēroi* (= *rā'îm*).

5. This is the view of P. D. Hanson (1979, p. 196) who notes that the term *kēlābîm*, “dogs,” is used to denounce both civil and religious figures (see D. W. Thomas, [1969]). Once again, one should refer to Isaiah 28 which specifically mentions priests and prophets. On further parallels between Isaiah 28 and our passage see below.

6. See Smart (1965, p. 240) and Hanson (1979, p. 197).

7. Hanson (1979, p. 192k) notes that *yābō' šālôm* is elliptical for *yābō' 'el 'ābōtēkā bēšālôm* (cf. Genesis 15:15).

8. See, for example, J. Muilenburg (1956, pp. 664–665) who states that “they are not the Samaritans (Duhm, Marti, Skinner), or the pre-exilic community (Ewald, Volz, et al.), or

leaders?⁹ In either case, the author equates their actions with Canaanite paganism.

It is common to find commentators documenting the use of fertility imagery in Isaiah 57:3–10. After all, the prophet begins the tirade by denouncing the unfaithful as “offspring of an adulterer and a whore”¹⁰ (57:3). The rest of the pericope is then shown to be replete with the sexual imagery of a harlot engaged in her trade. Marvin Pope’s translation (1977, p. 580), for example, explicitly points out the phallic symbols as well as the stripping and mounting of the bed by the “whoring adulteress” who, even when she is weary, never says “enough.” Likewise, Paul Hanson (1979, pp. 186–202) uses vivid language to describe the oracle which “compares the temple . . . to a gigantic bed of prostitution, a brothel on Mt. Zion.” Even verse 9b “You sent your envoys down to Sheol” emphasizes the extremes to which the untiring whore would go.¹¹

A handful of scholars have recognized that there are “allusions to necromancy,” to use McKenzie’s words (1968, p. 158), in verse 9. Muilenburg (1956, p. 668), following Feldmann, mentions that the notion that this verse implies sending envoys “to consult the gods of the underworld . . . goes as far back as Cyril of Alexandria (cf. *Vulg., et humiliata es usque ad infernos*.)” Older commentators suggested that there were references to ancestor worship in verse 8 but this has been rejected by modern commentators who emphasize the sexual imagery.¹² G. C. Heider (1985, pp. 379–382) sees the cult of Molek, which he associates with the cult of the dead, in verses 5 and 9, especially in light of “the explicit chthonic destination of the envoys.”

Yet no one to my knowledge has attempted to reconcile this death imagery with the sexual imagery. Those commentators who recognized

the goddess in exile (Feldmann), but the inhabitants of Jerusalem who had yielded to the attraction of the Canaanite cult.”

9. See, for example, P. Hanson (1979, p. 189) who says that 56:9–57:2 is “an attack on the leaders of the community by the prophetic group” and “someone within that same group expanded that composition with the addition of 57:3–13.” “The cult of community leaders is bitterly attacked by equating it with paganism (57:3–11).”

10. Reading *wēzōnāh* with the LXX and most commentators. M. Pope’s (1977, p. 580) translation “whoring adulteress” would be attractive, especially in light of the second feminine singular suffixes in verse 6ff., if it did not necessitate repointing *mēnāʿepet* to *mēnāʿepet*.

11. Hanson (1979, p. 200).

12. J. Muilenburg (1956, p. 667) and J. D. Smart (1965, p. 242) both assume a public cult here and thus reject the notion of ancestor worship due to its connection with a household cult. As is apparent in verse 6 (see below), the cult of the dead was not restricted to the household. The door and doorpost in verse 8 are not those of a local household (see below).

death imagery restricted it solely to one or two verses and saw it merely as a switch in metaphor from sexual imagery to death imagery and then back to sexual imagery. Perhaps being influenced by the metaphor of Israel as the unfaithful harlot found elsewhere in the prophetic corpus,¹³ no scholar attempted to integrate the death imagery into what the author was trying to achieve in his overall composition. This is what I propose to attempt in the present paper. By building on the work of W. H. Irwin, I hope to show that there is much more death imagery here than has been recognized and that the author skillfully intertwined sexual imagery and death imagery.

Scholars have unanimously pointed out that the author traces the wanton behavior described in these verses back to the whorish ancestry mentioned in verse 3. As C. Stuhlmueller (1968, p. 381) notes, "children manifest what their parents put into them." Thus the wicked who are being castigated by the prophet are bearing the fruit of their upbringing as in Ezekiel 16. They are offspring of an adulterer and a whore and thus, true to character, they act wantonly. But most scholars have failed to pay adequate attention to the fact that the unfaithful are also called "sons of an *ʿōnēnāh*" in the parallel phrase of the same verse (vs. 3). What is the meaning of this parallel phrase? I would suggest that it has to do with the realm of the dead.

Isaiah 57:3 is usually translated:

"But you, draw near hither,
Sons of a sorceress,
Offspring of the adulterer and the harlot." (RSV)

Scholars have, for the most part, skipped over the mention of "sons of a sorceress" (*bēnē ʿōnēnāh*) in their hurry to show how the metaphor of the harlot is extended in the verses that follow. No consensus has been reached with regard to the etymology of *ʿōnēn*/*ʿōnēnāh* (*mēʿōnēn*) which has usually been translated "soothsayer" ("*Wahrsager*") or "sorceress." G. B. Gray (1912, p. 54) has stated the alternatives which have been proposed:

. . . it has been variously explained from *ʿnn*, a cloud, hence rain-producers [or those who divine by interpreting the clouds; cf. W. Baumgartner (1967-1983, p. 811)], from *ʿyn*, the eye, hence persons who exercise the power of the evil eye, a power widely believed in and dreaded down to the present day in Palestine; from the Arabic *ḡunnat*, a twang, the hum of insects, hence diviners as the interpreters of such sounds, or as

13. E.g., Hosea 1 and 3; Isaiah 1:21; Jeremiah 2:1ff, 20ff; 3:6-10; Ezekiel 16 and 23.

delivering their instructions with such sounds, or 'singing' their spells; and from Arabic *ʿanna*, to appear, hence dealers in phenomena.¹⁴

To this list could be added *ʿnn* "to recite (music/charms)" ["to chant or sing a magical text"?] as proposed by W. F. Albright (1968, p. 122, n. 30).¹⁵

Of these possibilities, Arabic *ʿanna* (suggested already by J. Wellhausen [1927, p. 204]) is the most appealing. It occurs in Arabic meaning "to appear (to or before)"; "to take shape, to form, arise, spring up."¹⁶ In Sabaeen it occurs with the meaning "to manifest one's self (of a deity)" (Biella, 1982, p. 374). *ʿōnēn* in Hebrew, as a D factitive, could then mean "to cause to appear" and be used to describe a type of divination involving the raising of spirits or apparitions.¹⁷ In this light it is interesting to note that *mēʿōnēn* is used in close connection with those who consult the dead in Deuteronomy 18:10–11 and 2 Kings 21:6 (= 2 Chr 33:6).¹⁸

Thus the metaphor being used here is two-faced. There is only one woman (*parallelismus membrorum*; cf. 2 f. sg. suffix in verses 6ff.) but she has two faces: that of a conjurer (female necromancer) and that of a harlot. The suggestion that *ʿōnēnāh* in our present passage (57:3) refers to raising spirits of the dead is given further support by the use of death imagery elsewhere in the pericope to which we now turn. The abundant death terminology in the rest of this passage has gone largely unnoticed.

The crux of the pericope is the expression *bēhallēqē nahal ḥelqēk* in verse 6 which has traditionally been rendered "with the smooth stones of the wady is your portion." Scholars have seen here a reference to some

14. Compare also J. Gray (1964, p. 707) and W. Baumgartner (1983, p. 811).

15. Albright's discussion of this word comes in the context of explaining the expression *ʿnn ʾaṭrt* in Ugaritic which he translates "a play-boy of Athirat." For a discussion of the occurrence of *ʿnn* in Ugaritic and the various attempts at interpretation see P. J. van Zijl (1972, pp. 22, 102–104).

16. E. W. Lane (1863–1893, p. 2162); H. Wehr (1976, p. 647); A. de Biberstein-Kazimirski (1960, p. 377). F. M. Cross (1973, pp. 165–166 n. 86, cf. p. 153 n. 30) is of the opinion that "in Arabic the meaning of the verb 'to appear' and the nouns in the sense 'apparition, phenomenon' are most easily explained as denominative, i.e., secondarily derived from the meaning 'cloud, cloud bank.'"

17. *ʿōnēn* meaning "to cause to appear," "to raise spirits," has already been recognized by KB, p. 721 and A. K. Irvine as quoted by J. C. Biella (1982, p. 374). E. F. de Ward (1977, p. 9) also notes the possibility of *mēʿōnēn* being "the one who causes spirits to materialise."

18. One might also mention that in Arabic (Lane, 1863–1893, p. 2166a) *al-ʿananu* "signifies also [particularly] Death's opposing itself . . . occurring in a tradition of Saṭeḥ [the Diviner]."

type of idolatrous practice. Yet they have been totally bewildered in attempting to say anything more about what type of cult the “smooth stones” signified. A feeling of perplexity had come to characterize responses to this verse until a new understanding came with the proposal of W. H. Irwin (1967). His solution (identifying *hallēqê* with Ugaritic *hlq*) is as simple as it is brilliant. One of the best known phrases of the Baal cycle describes the death of Baal with the following words:

mīta ʿalʿiyānu baʿlu Dead is Mighty Baal
ḥaliqa zubūlu baʿlu ʿarši Perished is the Prince, the Lord of the Earth.

hlq is clearly parallel to *mt*, “to die” (cf. Akk *ḥalāqu*, “to disappear, to perish;” Eth *ḥalqa* “to come to an end; to perish, disappear;” Arb *ḥaliqa* “to be old, worn out;” Deir ʿAllā *hlq* “to perish”). The positing of the root *hlq* meaning “to die, perish” for biblical Hebrew is not new (Dahood, 1964, p. 408; 1965, pp. 35, 73, 99, 207). Yet, prior to Irwin’s exposition, no one saw its relevance for Isaiah 57:6. The present context with its heavy use of paronomasia would strengthen the possibility of a lesser known form of *hlq* being used to play on *ḥelqēk* (“your portion”). Irwin has also pointed out the use of Canaanite imagery and vocabulary used throughout the passage. Thus it should not be surprising to find a key to our passage in Ugaritic *hlq*.¹⁹

Irwin’s translation, “the dead of the wady (*naḥal*),” provides a smooth transition from the previous verse which describes the slaughter of children in the wadies (*nēḥālīm*). Irwin goes on to portray the wady as the traditional place of burial. He reminds us that the wady Kidron is identified as a common graveyard in 2 Kings 23:6 (cf. Jer 31:40; Job 21:33) and that the valley of Ben-Hinnom is the site of child sacrifice (2 Kings 23:10).²⁰ Compare also a Hebrew inscription from a tomb in the wady Kidron which N. Avigad (1955) has read as *ḥdr bktp ḥsr* “(Tomb)-chamber in the side (or slope) of the rock (or mountain).”²¹

19. In addition to the vocabulary Irwin cites, compare also the expression *taʿārikū lāšōn* in 57:4 with a proposed restoration in CTA 5.2.3 [*yaʿarrik li]šāna li-kabkabīma* (see below). So Ginsberg (1969, p. 138), Cassuto (1975, p. 155), Cross (1973, p. 117) and Coogan (1978, p. 107).

20. At the ASOR section of the 1985 SBL/AAR annual meeting in Anaheim, CA, C. A. Kennedy, in a paper entitled “Isaiah 57:5–6: Tombs in the Rocks,” argued that *nḥl* can designate graves or tombs cut into the sides of rock. He suggested the translation “among the dead of the (rock-cut) tomb is your portion” (cf. *KB*, p. 649a s.v. *nḥl* 1, 3).

21. See also the attractive suggestion of D. Ussishkin (1969) who restores *ḥsr[ḥ]* and translates “a burial-chamber in the side of the rock-cut burial-chamber” or “a burial-chamber in the side of the rock-cut tomb.” For additional connections between tombs and wadis see Avigad (1954).

The resulting translation of Isaiah 57:6 therefore reflects opposition by adherents of Yahwism to death cults in ancient Israel.²²

Among the departed (*ḥāliqê*)²³ of the wady is your portion (*ḥelqêk*), they,²⁴ they are your lot.

Even to them have you poured libations,
and brought offerings.

Verses 7–11 extend the metaphor of the adulterous and whorish ancestry (*zera^c mēnā²ēp wēzōnāh*) mentioned in verse 3. Yet, just as the whore is paralleled by the conjurer in verse 3, so the language in verse 7–11 intertwines both death cult and sexual imagery. The sexual imagery has been noted by all commentators. The harlot's bed (*miškāb*) is referred to in verses 7 and 8. The mention of both the *zikkārōn* and the *yad* in verse 8 are taken by many to refer to "an indecent (phallic) symbol" (NAB). The expression *yād ḥāzīt*, "you gazed upon the *yād*," was certainly meant to allude back to the *ḥōzīm*, "seers," in 56:10. The perfumes and oils of verse 9 are said to be characteristic of the harlot's trade. Finally, the expression "as far as Sheol" in the last half of verse 9 has been described as "a hyperbolic restatement . . . to emphasize the extremes to which the whore Israel is willing to go to please the foreign sovereign" (Hanson, 1979, p. 200). Verses 10–11 are then said to describe the untiring harlot who is false to Yahweh.

The author's artistry in mixing metaphors can be seen upon closer examination. The key word *miškāb* ("bed of the harlot") is central to the passage occurring once in verse 7 and twice in verse 8. It is reminiscent of Ezekiel's *miškab dōdīm*, "bed of love" (23:17). Hanson (1979, p. 200) notes the shocking language we have here where the temple is compared to "a gigantic bed of prostitution, a brothel upon Mt. Zion." Yet, at the same time, Hanson is well aware that "one does not go up to a bed to sacrifice" (vs. 7). This difficulty is erased when we realize that the key word *miškāb* also occurs in verse 2 with the meaning of "grave, bier"! The use of *miškāb* as "tomb" is well represented in Northwest Semitic.²⁵

22. Irwin (1967, pp. 39–40) vacillates when it comes to articulating the cult of the dead in view here because he shares the opinion of many that "our evidence for a cult of the dead in Israel is doubtful." See the author's recent dissertation (1986) forthcoming in the *Harvard Semitic Monographs*.

23. It is best to revocalize MT's *ḥallēqê* as *ḥāliqê* or the like.

24. Note IQIsa^a's *šmh hmh*.

25. Cf. Ezek 32:25; 2 Chr 16:14; and *DISO*, p. 170. Also note the expression *iškb mškyby ʿimyk ḥlq* "you will lie down on your eternal bed (= the funerary bench) to die" in Deir ʿAllā II, 11. See Hackett (1984, p. 67) and Hoftijzer and van der Kooij (1976, pp. 233–234). Finally, compare the harlot's lodgings which are described as *mškyby ḥšk*, "beds of

Likewise, both *zikkārôn* and *yad* (vs. 8), in addition to meaning "indecent symbol" can also mean "memorial, monument," perhaps here signifying a royal mortuary stela of some sort. The *zikkārôn* is placed outside the doorpost (*mēzūzāh*) which also figures in the death cult passage in Ezekiel 43:8 where it refers to the *royal* palace.²⁶

The mention of a pact (*wattikrot* [*bērît*] *lāk mēhem*, "you made a pact with them") in verse 8 is also noteworthy. The immediate antecedent for the object ("them") seems to refer back to the dead ancestors in verse 6. This is all the more intriguing in light of the "covenant with death and Sheol" (*kāratnū bērit ʿet-māwet wēʿim šēʾōl ʿāsīnū hōzeh*) occurring in Isaiah 28:15, 18.²⁷ The use of the terms *hōzeh* and *hāzūt* in Isaiah 28:15, 18 to designate "pacts" (// *bērît*) is also fascinating in light of *yād hāzūt* in 57:8 (cf. also *hōzīm* in 56:10).

If we are correct in seeing allusions to death-cult imagery elsewhere in verse 8, then perhaps the phrase *kî mēʾittî gillît wattaʿālî* in 8b, which is traditionally rendered "for, (deserting) me, you have uncovered (your bed), you have gone up (to it)," should be translated, "you tried to discover (oracles) from me (by) bringing up (spirits)." In view of the context, this would also be a reference to cults of the dead where the people turned away from Yahweh (*mēʾittî*) by seeking oracles and secrets from the dead (compare the use of *gly* in Amos 3:7). B. Halpern has suggested to me (personal communication) that perhaps we are dealing with forced paronomasia here. The author is deliberately ambiguous with the choice of the root *gly*, once again mixing the imagery of the harlot climbing into bed with that of conjuring spirits from the underworld.

darkness" in Fragment 184 from Qumran Cave 4, a passage replete with underworld imagery (Allegro, 1968, p. 82-84).

26. On the use of the root *zkr* in cults of the dead see Lewis (1986, pp. 36, 196-198). Note in particular the expression *šuma zakāru*, the invocation of the name, which was one of the most important essential services done on behalf of the deceased in the Mesopotamian cult of the dead. See M. Bayliss (1973, p. 117). Compare, for example, the following Assyrian text: *šumka itti eṭemmē azkur šumka itti kispī azkur*, "I have invoked your name with the spirits of the dead (of my family), I have invoked your name with the funerary offerings" (CAD E, 400a).

Compare also the invoking of the name (*hazkîr šem*) in Absalom's erection of his *maššebet* in 2 Samuel 18:18, as well as in the Hadad inscription from Zinjirli (KAI 214. 16, 21) which tells of Panammu entreating his sons, who will sit on the throne after his death, to "invoke the name of Hadad and Panammu" (*wyzkr ʾšm hdd . . . pnmw*).

27. B. Halpern (1986, pp. 117-119) has already pointed out much of the rich funerary imagery in Isaiah 28 including the use of *maššāʿ* as a technical term for a funerary bench. He also noted the pun on "seeing."

All of this affects the way we treat verse 9. Is the oil and perfume referring to the cosmetics of the harlot or do they refer to the perfumes used at the time of burial? The word translated "perfume," *riquah* occurs only here, but the root occurs often enough so that the meaning is not in doubt. The root *rqh* is used of perfumes and various spice mixtures including those used at the time of burial (cf. 2 Chr 16:14). In other words, perhaps the mention of "lavishing oil on the king (*mlk*)" could be a word-play referring not merely to the harlot's perfume but to the anointing of the dead king and/or his funerary stela. Compare the collocation of harlotry (*zēnūt*) and a royal death cult ritual (*pigrē malkēhem*) in Ezekiel 43:7-9.²⁸

If we are correct in seeing death imagery used throughout this pericope, then the mention in verse 9 of sending envoys "down even to the netherworld" (*wattašpīlī ʿad šēʾôl*) must not be taken as an exaggeration of the extremes to which the harlot would go. The death metaphor is better served by seeing the envoys going to the denizens of the netherworld to seek favors. Compare especially the characteristic use of *špl* here and in other underworld contexts (Isa 29:4; RS 34.126.22 = *KTU* 1.161.22).

Coming to verse 11 we find Yahweh formulating his indictment with a question: "Whom did you dread and fear so that you were false?" In the past scholars have pointed out that fear of the foreign gods was one of the motives driving Israel to a life of harlotry. Others, such as F. Delitzsch (1889, p. 376), stated that "it was of men—only mortal men, with no real power—that Israel was so needlessly afraid." Yet it seems much more reasonable to set this verse also in the context of the cult of the dead we have been describing. It makes much better sense to say that it is the shades of the dead whom they dread and fear. If the dead were not accorded the proper services, such as invocation, libation and funerary offerings,²⁹ they might act malevolently. Once again one can look to the Mesopotamian sphere, especially in incantation literature, where there are numerous examples of placating of the dead.³⁰ This

28. A less attractive alternative suggested by S. Ackerman in a paper given at the 1987 SBL annual meeting in Boston would be to see a reference here to a "mulk-offering" tying into the child sacrifice mentioned in 57:5.

29. I am using here examples of the essential services (*šuma zakāru, mē naqû, kispa kasāpu*) found in the Mesopotamian cult of the dead. See Bayliss (1973, p. 116).

30. See Bayliss (1973, pp. 117-118) who argues that the ghosts of the dead are essentially malevolent. For a more balanced approach which also stresses the favorable disposition of the shades see Skaist (1980).

approach would also fit in nicely with the last half of verse 11 where Yahweh says, "Me you did not remember (*wē'ōtī lō' zākart*).³¹

Next, consider the troublesome *hapax legomenon qibbūšayik* in verse 13. Commentators struggling with this word have either emended the text to *šiqqušayik* "your abominations" (so McKenzie [1968, p. 157] who calls *qibbūš* a "non-word"), translated elliptically "let your collection (of idols) deliver you," or guessed at a meaning such as "your idol-clusters." In view of the death imagery in the preceding verses it seems likely that the "gathered ones" referred to are the dead ancestors alluded to earlier.³² In other words, the verse could be rendered, "When you cry out, will your dead (those who have "been gathered" and from whom you are seeking favors) deliver you?" The suggestion that the root *qbš* can be used in this sense similar to the use of the synonym ³*sp* in the common idiom *ne'ēsap 'el 'ammāyw*, "he was gathered to his kin" finds support in the Ugaritic Funerary Text (RS 34.126.2–3 = *KTU* 1.161.2–3) where *qbš ddn (qabūšī* "the 'gathered ones' of the Didanu tribe") is parallel to *rp' 'arš* ("the 'heroes' [Rephaim] of the underworld").³³ Both terms for "joining" one's ancestors in the underworld are expressive of a clan solidarity which was strengthened and promoted by cults of the dead which were practiced in Ugarit and ancient Israel despite normative Yahwistic efforts to the contrary.

In light of the above treatment it is worthwhile to reconsider the imagery behind two earlier verses. In verse 4, immediately after the description of the impure ancestry as "offspring of a conjurer//harlot," the author addresses the questions:

<i>'al-mî tit'annāgû</i>	Of whom are you making sport,
<i>'al-mî tarhîbû peh</i>	At whom are you making faces,
<i>ta'ārîkû lāšôn</i>	And sticking out your tongue? (RSV, JB translations)

A perusal of any modern translation of these three lines leaves one with the impression that they refer solely to a mocking attitude. Yet, is it a mere coincidence that the author chose expressions which are very much at home in the arena of the god Mot ("Death") swallowing up Baal? Compare the well-known fearful description of Mot in *CTA* 5.2.2–4:

31. See above (footnote 26) on the use of *zkr* in the context of the cult of the dead.

32. This has also been recognized by M. Pope (private communication to Heider [1985, 381 n. 759]).

33. For further treatment of RS 34.126 including bibliography on new collations see the author's dissertation, pp. 2, 10–12, 257–258. See also Watson (1984) on the word-pair ³*sp* // *qbš*. Finally, compare the expression *yi'tasip rašpu* "Reshep gathered to himself (Kirta's descendents)" in *CTA* 14.1.18–19.

šapatu li-²arši šapatu li-šamēmi One lip to the earth, one lip to heaven,
 [ya²arrik li]šāna³⁴ li-kabkabīma (Mot) stretched out his tongue to the
 stars.

ya^crub ba^lu ba-kabidihu Baal entered his innards,
ba-pīhu yarid He descended into his mouth.

Similarly, note the description of Sheol in Isaiah 5:14:

hirhībāh šē²ōl napšāh Sheol expands its gullet,
pā^cārā pīhā liblī hōq Opens its mouth beyond measure.

and in Habakkuk 2:5:

²āšer hirhīb kiš²ōl napšō Who expands his gullet wide as Sheol,
hū² kammāwet wēlō² yišbā^c Like insatiable Death (Mot).³⁵

In light of these parallels the three questions cited above can be translated more accurately:

^cal-mī tit^cannāgū Over whom do you delight (at the prospect
 of eating),

^cal-mī tarhībū peh Over whom do you open wide your mouth,
ta²ārikū lāšōn And stretch out your tongue?

The imagery here is not merely one of jeering or “making sport of” as *tit^cannāgū* is usually translated. Rather, it is the picture of Mot salivating and licking his lips with anticipated delight as he is about to satisfy once again his voracious appetite. *tarhībū peh* does not refer to “making faces,” and (*ta²ārikū lāšōn*) is not just a reference to “sticking out the tongue” in mockery. In light of the death imagery used throughout the pericope the author was certainly exploiting the story of Mot’s opening his mouth wide to swallow up Baal and stretching out his tongue so as not to miss a morsel (cf. also *hirhābt miškābēk* in vs. 8).

The second verse which requires further analysis is verse 5, of which the first half has usually been translated something like:

You who burn with lust among the oaks,
 under every green tree;

There are problems with this traditional understanding. In the first place, the word for “oaks” is usually written *‘ēlīm* עֵלִים not *‘ēlīm* עֵלִים as we have in our text here. Such defective writing hardly presents an insurmountable problem! Yet together with the readings from the versions (which all read either “idols” or “gods”), the translation “oaks,

34. See footnote 19 for this reconstruction.

35. Cf. Proverbs 1:12; 27:20; 30:15b-16; Psalm 141:7. Cross (1973, p. 117) already discovered many of these passages in his reconstruction of CTA 5.2.2-4.

terebinths" is called into question. This has led several scholars to abandon any reference to the famous terebinths and to translate "growing passionate with the El's."³⁶ This is certainly on the right track, but it would be a mistake to see a reference to the Canaanite god El here. I have pointed out elsewhere (Lewis, 1986, pp. 41, 67–69, 190, 221–222, 263–264) that the word for "god" (*ilu*, ^ʔ*ēlōhīm*) is commonly used to refer to departed ancestors.³⁷

Secondly, the word translated "burn with lust," *nēhāmīm*, is also not without its difficulties. Those who translate it "burning with lust" are, of course, taking the problematical *nēhāmīm* as a Niphal participle of the geminate root *hmm*, "to be warm, hot." Yet the Niphal of this verb occurs only here. Furthermore, the Greek word used to translate *nēhāmīm* is *parakalein* which normally translates the root *nhm*.³⁸ Thus it is suggested that we are dealing with those who are "comforting themselves (*nihāmīm*; the root *nhm* most commonly occurs in the N stem) with the dead spirits," i.e., a reference to a cult of the dead. Those who translated *nēhāmīm* as from the root *hmm* were certainly influenced by the fertility associations of the terebinths.

The second half of verse 5 in the MT is also intriguing. Yet something is amiss here. G. C. Heider (1985, p. 381) has already pointed out that we have a "breakdown of the usual D[euteronomic] usage, which always (save once) accompanies the phrase ["under every spreading tree"] with some form of 'on every high hill.'" Nowhere else does the expression ^ʕ*raʕānān* occur parallel to any of the words for terebinth. I would suggest the following history of this reading: (a) The original A line referred to

36. Hanson (1979, pp. 190, 192o). J. Muilenburg (1956, p. 665) followed Montgomery who translated the phrase "are concupiscent with the El's."

37. In *CTA* 6 *ilm* occurs along with three other terms (^ʔ*ilnym*, *rpʔm*, and *mtm*) as designations of the deceased, all of which correlate nicely with the use of divine determinatives (*il*) preceding royal names on the Ugaritic King List (*KTU* 1.113). The dead Samuel is called an ^ʔ*ēlōhīm* in 1 Samuel 28:13. One could also compare the use of *ilu* in the Akkadian *Ersatznamen*, the numerous parallels between *ilānu* and *ešemmu*, "spirits," the use of ^ʔ*ilm* to refer to the deceased at Pyrgi and the Hittite *Totenrituale* in which the dead king "becomes a god" upon death. In short, upon death a ruler was grouped with his deceased ancestors and was referred to as an *ilu* (or like cognate). These *ilu*'s were not worshipped in the same way that El or Baal were and we find no elaborate cult attempting to make them into high gods. Yet, I do not mean to imply that "becoming an *ilu*" was nothing more than an idiom for dying. Referring to the deceased as an *ilu* was an attempt to describe some type of transcendent character, perhaps what we might call preternatural.

38. It is tantalizing to note that *parakalein* also occurs in Greek meaning "to invoke." Such a meaning (invoking the ancestral shades) would be very attractive for the present context, yet *nhm* in Hebrew no where else has such a connotation.

comforting oneself with the ancestral shades. This was paralleled by Yahweh's statement, "In light of these things shall I be comforted" (misplaced by a later scribe at the end of verse 6). This makes for a remarkably close parallelism (complete with chiasmic arrangement, alliteration and phonologically balanced lines):

~~*hanniḥāmîm bāʿēlîm*
haʿal ʿēlleh ʿennāḥēm~~

Furthermore, in its present position in the MT (at the end of verse 6) this phrase is out of place prosodically. There are other tricola in this poem (56:11; 57:3, 4, 8, 13), but they are always in some way parallel to the preceding lines and never enjambment (run-on) as in the end of verse 6. (b) *bāʿēlîm* was misunderstood as *bāʿēlîm* leading to the insertion of the gloss concerning the spreading tree (*ʿēš raʿānān*). Of course, this reconstruction is conjectural and in the end (especially if *ʿēš raʿānān* is retained as original) all we may be able to say safely is that perhaps the author was again deliberately ambiguous with his choice of *ʿēlîm* meaning both the fertile oaks and the ancestral shades.

The following translation reflects the above analysis:

ISAIAH 56:9–57:13

56:9 All you beasts of the field, come to eat
All you beasts in the forest.

:10 My* watchmen are all blind,
They lack knowledge.

*Reading *šōpay*

They are all mute dogs,
They cannot bark;

The seers* recline,
They love to slumber.

*Reading *ḥōzîm* with
IQIsa^a

:11 Dogs, gluttons!
They never have enough.

And they are the shepherds!

They have no understanding.
They all turn to their own way,
Each seeks his own gain.

:12 "Come, let me get some wine,
Let us guzzle beer;

Tomorrow will be like today,
Or even better yet."

- 57:1 The righteous one perishes,
But no one takes it to heart;

Devout men are "gathered" (= they die),
But no one gives it a thought.

? ? (the righteous one) is "gathered,"

- :2 The just one enters (the grave) in peace.

They rest on their biers (*miškāb*),
Those who walk uprightly.

- :3 But you, draw near,
You sons of a **conjurer** (*ʿōnēnāh*)
Offspring of an adulterer and a **whore** (*zōnāh**)

*with LXX

- :4 Over whom do you delight (at the prospect of
eating),
Over whom do you open wide your mouth,
And stretch out your tongue?

Are you not children of sin,
The offspring of lies.

- :5 Comforting yourselves with the dead spirits,
In light of these things, should I be comforted? (*< vs. 6c*)

.....

Slaughtering your children in the wadis (*nēḥālīm*),
Under the rocky cliffs.

- :6 Among the dead (*ḥāliqê*) of the wady (*naḥal*) is your portion
(*ḥelqēk*),
They, they are your lot.

Even to them have you poured libations,
And brought offerings.

.....

- :7 On a high and lofty mountain
You have placed your bed/grave (*miškāb*).

There too you have gone up
To offer sacrifice.

- :8 Behind the door and the doorpost
You have put your indecent symbol/mortuary stela (*zikkārôn*).

You tried to discover (oracles) from me (by) bringing up (spirits),
 You have made wide your bed/grave (*miškāb*).

You have made a pact for yourself with them (the dead of vs. 6),
 You have loved their bed/grave (*miškāb*),
 You have gazed on the indecent symbol/mortuary stela (*yād*).

:9 You lavished oil on the (dead?) king,
 You multiplied your perfumes.

You sent your envoys afar,
 You sent them down to Sheol.

:10 You were wearied by your travel,
 But you did not say, "It is hopeless."

You found new strength (*ḥayyat yādēk*),
 So that you did not weaken.

:11 Whom did you dread and fear
 So that you were false?

You did not remember (*zkr*) me,
 You did not give me any thought.

Was I to remain silent forever,
 So that you would not have me to fear?

:12 I will tell of your "righteousness,"
 Your deeds will not help you.

:13 When you cry out, will your dead (*qibbûṣayik*) deliver you?³⁹
 The wind will carry all of them away,
 A breeze shall take them.

But he who takes refuge in me will inherit (*nḥl*) the land (*ʿeres*),
 He will possess my holy mountain.

In conclusion, the translation of this pericope which I am tentatively proposing tries to render the mixed imagery which our author is utilizing. The prophet indicts the corrupt leaders by employing two metaphors which he sets out in parallelism at the beginning of his tirade in verse 3 ("sons of a conjurer"// "offspring of a harlot"). He then not only extends these metaphors, but intertwines them throughout the rest of the pericope down to verse 13 (verses 5 and 8 remain problematical), skillfully using double entendres.

39. An implied question seems better than the usual jussive translation.

Yet the most important question remains to be answered. What is the nature of the ritual being attacked here? While there is so very little data to work with, I would suggest the following. In spite of the close connections between fertility and death, I do not see the two combined on the ritual level underlying this text. The death imagery is overpowering. The ritual being described is that of a cult of the dead where offerings and libations were being brought to the deceased (vs. 6). Perhaps the command to "draw near" (*qirbû*) given to the wicked offspring (sons of the conjurer//harlot) in verse 3 was an invitation to some sort of banquet of death. Perhaps there was an allusion in verse 4 to Mot's banquet of death which stood as a negative counterpart to the banquet of life in Isaiah 55:1-5.⁴⁰

The few hints we can see in verses 8 and 9 would suggest some sort of royal death cult. The *zikkārôn* and *yād* might be a reference to a royal mortuary stela of some sort. Compare once again the collocation of the *zikkārôn* and the *mēzûzāh* which are also present in the death cult passage in Ezekiel 43:8. In Ezekiel 43:8 the *mēzûzāh* does refer to the royal palace. If I am correct in seeing in verse 9 a reference to lavishing oil on the dead king, this too would support a royal cult of the dead.

The metaphor of the harlot becomes such a stock idea that it seems that it is merely metaphorical here. Compare a similar usage in Leviticus 20:6 which describes H's contempt for anyone "playing the harlot after necromancers or mediums" (*hannepeš ʿāšer tipneh ʿel hāʿōbōt wēʿel hayyiddēʿōnīm liznôt ʿahārêhem*.) Likewise Ezekiel 43:7-9 describes the death cult there (*pigrê malkêhem*) as harlotry (*zēnût*).⁴¹

Nevertheless, while the underlying ritual behind Isaiah 57:3-13 may not have entailed both death cults and prostitution, this is not to detract from their mixing on the metaphorical level. Indeed, such a mixing was so frequent that it became proverbial:

[Wisdom] will save you from the harlot,

.....

Who has forgotten the covenant (*bērît*) of her God;

For her house leads down to death,

her paths to the spirits of the dead (*rēpāʿīm*).⁴²

40. Compare also the banquet in Isaiah 25:6-8 where Yahweh swallows Death (Mot).

41. For a full exposition of these passages and others concerning cults of the dead in ancient Israel as well as Ugarit see Lewis (1986).

42. Proverbs 2:16-18. I owe thanks to Michael Fox for reminding me of this proverb. Compare also Fragment 184 in Allegro (1968, pp. 82-84) which describes the harlot as residing in the "tents of the underworld" (*bʿhly dwmh*). (Compare the expression *ʿhly mwt*

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Albright, W. F. 1968. *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan*. Winona Lake.
- Allegro, J. M. 1968. *Qumran Cave 4. Discoveries in the Judean Desert V*. Oxford.
- Avigad, N. 1954. *Ancient Monuments in the Kidron Valley*. Jerusalem.
- . 1955. "The Second Tomb-Inscription of the Royal Steward." *Israel Exploration Journal* 5:163–166.
- Baumgartner, W. 1967–1983. *Hebräisches und aramäisches Lexikon zum Alten Testament*. Leiden.
- Bayliss, M. 1973. "The Cult of Dead Kin in Assyria and Babylonia." *Iraq* 35:115–125.
- Biberstein-Kazimirski, A. de. 1960. *Dictionnaire arabe-français*. Paris.
- Biella, J. C. 1982. *Dictionary of Old South Arabic: Sabaean Dialect*. Chico.
- Cassuto, U. *Biblical and Oriental Studies 2: Bible and Ancient Oriental Texts*. Jerusalem.
- Coogan, M. D. 1978. *Stories from Ancient Canaan*. Philadelphia.
- Cross, F. M. 1973. *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic*. Cambridge.
- Dahood, M. 1964. "Hebrew-Ugaritic Lexicography II." *Biblica* 45:393–412.
- . 1965. *Psalms I*. Garden City.
- Delitzsch, F. 1889. *Isaiah*. Grand Rapids.
- Ginsberg, H. L. 1968. "Ugaritic Myths, Epics, and Legends." *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*³, pp. 129–155. Ed. J. Pritchard. Princeton.
- Gray, G. B. 1912. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Isaiah I–XXVII*. Edinburgh.
- Gray, J. 1964. *I & II Kings*. Philadelphia.
- Hackett, J. 1984. *The Balaam Text from Deir 'Allā*. Chico, CA.
- Halpern, B. 1986. "'The Excremental Vision': The Doomed Priests of Doom in Isaiah 28." *Hebrew Annual Review* 10:109–121.
- Hanson, P. 1979. *The Dawn of Apocalyptic: The Historical and Sociological Roots of Jewish Apocalyptic Eschatology*. Philadelphia.
- Heider, G. C. 1985. *The Cult of Molek: A Reassessment*. Sheffield.
- Hoftijzer, J. and G. van der Kooij. 1976. *Aramaic Texts from Deir 'Allā*. Leiden.

"tents of death" in Schuller, 1986, pp. 136–137.) "Her ways are the ways of death" (*drkyh drky mwt*) and "her gates are the gates of death" (*š'ryh š'ry mwt*).

- Irwin, W. H. 1967. "The Smooth Stones of the Wady"? Isaiah 57,6." *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 29:31-40.
- Lane, E. W. 1863-1893. *Arabic-English Lexicon*. London.
- Lewis, T. J. 1986. *Cults of the Dead in Ancient Israel and Ugarit*. Cambridge. (Forthcoming, *Harvard Semitic Monographs*.)
- McKenzie, J. L. 1968. *Second Isaiah*. Garden City.
- Muilenburg, J. 1956. *Isaiah*. New York.
- Pope, M. 1977. *Song of Songs*. Garden City.
- Schuller, E. M. 1986. *Non-Canonical Psalms from Qumran: A Pseudepigraphic Collection*. Atlanta.
- Skaist, A. 1980. "The Ancestor Cult and Succession in Mesopotamia." *Death in Mesopotamia*, pp. 123-128. Ed. B. Alster. Copenhagen.
- Smart, J. 1965. *History and Theology in Second Isaiah*. Philadelphia.
- Stuhlmüller, C. 1968. *Deutero-Isaiah. Jerome Biblical Commentary*. Eds. R. E. Brown, J. A. Fitzmyer, and R. E. Murphy. Englewood Cliffs.
- Thomas, D. W. 1969. "Kelebh 'Dog'; Its Origin and Some Usages of It in the O.T." *Vetus Testamentum* 10:410-427.
- Ussishkin, D. 1969. "On the Shorter Inscription from the Tomb of the Royal Steward." *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 196:16-22.
- van Zijl, P. J. 1972. *Baal: A Study of Texts in Connexion with Baal in the Ugaritic Texts*. Neukirchen-Vluyn.
- Ward, E. F. de. 1977. "Superstition and Judgment: Archaic Methods of Finding a Verdict." *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 89:1-19.
- Watson, W. G. E. 1984. "The Hebrew Word-pair sp // qbs ." *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 96:426-434.
- Wehr, H. 1976. *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*. Ed. J. M. Cowan. Ithaca.
- Wellhausen, J. 1927. *Reste arabischen Heidentums*. Berlin.

ABBREVIATIONS:

- CAD = A. Leo Oppenheim (1956-) *The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of Chicago*
- CTA = A. Herdner (1963) *Corpus des tablettes en cunéiformes alphabétiques*
- DISO = C. Jean and J. Hoftijzer (1965) *Dictionnaire des inscriptions sémitiques de l'ouest*
- JB = *The Jerusalem Bible*
- KAI = H. Donner and W. Röllig (1971) *Kanaanäische und aramäische Inschriften*
- KB = L. Koehler and W. Baumgartner (1968) *Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti Libros*
- KTU = M. Dietrich, O. Loretz and J. Sammartin (1976) *Die keilalphabetischen Texte aus Ugarit*