



An Iconographic Exegesis of the Oracles Against the Nations, Isaiah
14:24-24.

By

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Abstract

Iconographic exegesis enables the critical interpretation of the Biblical text through the iconography of the ancient Near East. The Oracles against the Nations are a visually rich and emotive section of Isaiah and has thus far been underrepresented in scholarly discussion. Furthermore, they have not been subjected to the iconographic approach that has been applied to trito-Isaiah. However the literary images employed make the Oracles an apt candidate for iconographic exegesis to reinterpret the text. This study uses the iconography of ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt to analyse and critically read the Oracles against the Nations (Isa 14:24-24). Interpreters have agency in how they view and read art and text, thus Isaiah has been subjected to centuries of varying interpretations because of the societal and cultural effects on the human gaze. This has led to layers of understanding and analysis that can effect the ancient meanings of the text. This thesis uses evidence to understand how the ancients viewed their world through the iconography, thus shedding light onto the original authorial intent in the construction of their narrative with literary images. This work offers reinterpretation of the text through the lens of the iconography, adding layers of analysis beyond the surface level. Some of the most prevalent themes in the Oracles are explored in this thesis including kingship, agriculture, society and culture and warfare and violence.

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*In memory of my Grandparents,
Raymond, Dilwyn, and Nancy*

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Abbreviations

ANET	Pritchard. J.B. (ed.) <i>The Ancient Near East: An Anthology of Texts and Pictures</i> . Oxford: Princeton University Press.
BCE	Before Common Era
c.	Circa.
CB	Cyrus Cylinder Inscription
CE	Common Era
DB	Behistun Inscription
DSk	Inscription on a brick from Susa
Hdt	Herodotus <i>Histories</i>
Heb.	Hebrew

1 Introduction

“As opposed to the scholarly, literary simplification, the iconographic simplification has the advantage of being produced by the ancient Near East itself”

Othmar Keel 1997, 7.

1.1 The Oracles Against the Nations

The Oracles against the Nations are in Isa 14:24-24 and act as an interlude from the prophet's narrative regarding Israel and Judah's present and future.¹ Within the chapters of the Oracles, the author tells of the judgement and punishment of various Nations across the ancient Near East. This includes Assyria, Babylonia, Damascus, Sidon and Tyre, Cush, Egypt, Philistia, Moab, Israel, and Jerusalem itself before a final retribution on the whole world. Through the Oracles against these Nations and the wider world, Isaiah curates an exhibition of YHWH's power, both in geographical reach as well as the concept itself. This extensive narrative within Isaiah enables the author to shape a further message of divine judgement beyond Jerusalem. The Oracles were written during a time when Assyria was the main enemy of Jerusalem. In this way, the Oracles are politically relevant to the period, providing some comment on the political-social world of the time. However, this is from the prophetic viewpoint, thus cannot be taken at face value for historical accuracy. Furthermore, the retribution put forward by the Oracles uses the political tensions of antiquity to demonstrate YHWH's superiority and dominion over everything through the destruction of Jerusalem's real-life enemies. Whilst they form part of the prophetic narrative, the Oracles' focus on the Nations uses images familiar to the contemporary audience, reflecting their world, albeit through the authorial agenda manipulating images to suit the intended textual message. The Oracles flow between past, present, and future punishment, creating a sense of all-encompassing judgement and emphasising the continuing despair of the Nations. Isa 14:24-24 draw on the oracular traditions of the ancient world, reflecting the 'woe oracles' of Isa 5:8-30, condemning sins of various groups such as the self-righteous and liars. Throughout the book, the use of 'woe'

¹ Some demarcate Isa 13-24 as the Oracles; however, this work considers chapters 14:24-24 because this is where the focus of imagery lies. See Beyer 2007.

implies incoming judgment, reflecting the Oracles and judgement of the Nations that represent a challenge to YHWH's sovereignty and thus the coming messianic kingdom that appears as a recurring prophecy throughout Isaiah. Furthermore, within the Oracles, YHWH can be read as challenging the deities of the ancient Near East – in a world already full of gods, YHWH takes a place and matches the existing pantheon in power. Through the Nations' challenge of divine sovereignty, the Oracles demonstrate YHWH's superiority to other gods that cannot protect their Nations and dominion over them, whether the Nations recognise YHWH or not. In this way, Isaiah uses the Oracles to provide comment on the ancient world through his eyes and as a vehicle to communicate YHWH's supremacy through the destruction of other Nations. Furthermore, the Oracle against Jerusalem suggests that Isaiah uses this as a warning to YHWH's people to trust and wait or else be punished for leaving the path laid out for them. Thus, one can suggest the interlude from the wider narrative via the Oracles provides the opportunity to 'zoom out' and extend the Isaian message beyond Jerusalem.

Isaiah's 'Oracles against the Nations' have, thus far, taken a backseat in academic discourse.² One explanation could be that they feel out of place in the wider Isaian narrative – turning away from the messages about YHWH's relationship with Israel and Judah in the present and future, such as the hope of deuterio and tritio Isaiah and story of the suffering servant. Furthermore, they have come across as disjointed and judgemental, diverting scholarly attention to the Isaian messianic prophecies and wider narrative against Jerusalem specifically. The lack of contrast in the Oracles found elsewhere in the book through the typical ebb and flow between the Isaian themes of darkness and light may contribute to why scholarship has tended to shy away from the Oracles through the inability to study this polarity and its complexities. Furthermore, they form only ten of the sixty-six Isaian chapters, sitting almost as their own section within the narrative. In this way, the Oracles appear like an interlude from the main 'plot line' of the wider book surrounding Jerusalem's destruction and 'rebirth'. This may further explain why academic discourse has glossed over the Oracles as they are often treated as individual and separate to Isaiah and the whole

² Kim 2020, 59. Kim's focus on the Oracles within their chapter brings this section into the light of scholarship.

Biblical text, thus removing them from the conversation of these broader narratives. Despite this, the Oracles are significant within the book, being connected linguistically and thematically to the ensuing chapters as well as aiding the interpretation of Isa 1-12 and vice versa. This emphasises the need to study the Oracles in conjunction with the rest of the book as well as their own entity to explore various interpretation of the text. The Oracles are a worthwhile focus for this study because of the potent imagery employed by proto-Isaiah, as well as the connection with the ancient Near Eastern world through the author's partisan commentary on the Nations, offering one view of the historical context that informed the texts. Thus, the attention paid to the Oracles in this work uses ancient iconography as a window to view the text's historical influences, thus offering alternative interpretations of the Isaian narrative.

The focus on the Nations enables the reader to gain insight into the ancient world beyond the prophetic focus on Jerusalem that dominates the rest of the book. However, the world put forward in the text is a polarised view of antiquity, through the eyes of a Hebrew prophet, thus, it is no more reliable as a source than any other ancient text. However, this work has elected to use the Oracles because the ancient world is the centre of the section, providing sufficient material for an iconographic approach using descriptive images. Furthermore, the Oracles employ various images and messages that will benefit from further interpretation, the use of iconography as a microscope to critically interpret the text enables this alternative analysis. This is further emphasised because their structure and themes are rooted in the ancient cultic and war oracle traditions, enabling the reader to gain further insight into Isaiah's historical context. Beyond the historical, the Oracles form a valid articulation of a wrathful YHWH whilst demonstrating the prophetic message of judgement for not trusting, waiting, and following. Thus, the iconographic approach can be used to analyse influences on Isaiah's use of language and description in communicating the textual messages of judgement. This further provides context for Isaiah's construction of a wrathful YHWH using common iconographic motifs and images found in royal articulations of power and domination in the ancient Near East.

The book of Isaiah was produced between the early 7th to early 5th centuries BCE, intrinsically linking it to the wider political, social, and religious context of the ancient

Near East.³ This is further supported through scholarly arguments surrounding the authorship of the book, its divisions (ranging from one to three authors of the book) and thus dating of the individual sections. These partitions between three authors are in no way universally fixed, especially between deutero and trito Isaiah. This includes differing chapter divisions between three authors, arguments for two sections and some believing the book was constructed by a single author. This work follows the arguments for the division into proto Isaiah (chapters 1-39), deutero Isaiah (chapters 40-55) and trito Isaiah (chapters 56-66).⁴ In this way, proto Isaiah was constructed in the 7th century BCE, with deutero and trito-Isaiah following in the late 6th and late 6th-early 5th centuries BCE respectively. Thus, this work follows the argument that the Oracles are a part of proto Isaiah in the 7th century BCE, enabling the text to be placed within its historical context. It is debated whether deutero and trito Isaiah were individuals or schools formed by Isaiah's disciples, however this has little bearing on their dating and creation. No matter how many people were involved in the construction, the argument for multiple authors is not affected because it is based upon the time span of the book as well as variations in writing style, such as vocabulary and content between the three sections of Isaiah. These have formed the basis for the divisions alongside the historical dating of events and individuals referenced within the text. Proto Isaiah uses a combination of prose and verse, including throughout the Oracles; however, the text is weighted on verse to convey the emotions of the text. This contrasts prose which is often used for information or detail, thus suggesting the Oracles were curated to communicate the emotive aspects of judgement rather than any specific or factual information. Through the emphasis on verse, the reader receives the powerful emotions communicated by Isaiah's poetry regarding the despair felt by the Nations at their punishment – the text is full of their hopelessness and transfers it to the audience by placing them in amid the judged world. This plays into the authorial agenda of emphasising and communicating judgement in the Oracles through the use of language, image and structure to clearly convey the prophetic messages of the book.

³ Joachimsen 2020, 176-197. This places the text within the historical world that influenced the author(s) during the composition of the book.

⁴ Beyer 2007, 181. This division is most accepted amongst scholars who agree with the three-author theory.

Isaiah's ministry occurred c.740-690 BCE, witnessing events such as Sennacherib's invasion of Jerusalem in 701 BCE (which features in Isa 36 and has aided the dating of the book). However, the later chapters are placed after Cyrus' subjugation of Babylon in c.539 BCE, even naming Cyrus (c.580/590 BCE-529 BCE) as YHWH's instrument in Isa 45:1. This was written by deuterio Isaiah, emphasising the multiple authors theory through dating of historical events and individuals. Through this method of dating, the book can be placed between early-7th century-early 5th century BCE.⁵ The Oracles themselves were composed c.740-732 BCE. In this way, the Isaian authorship is spread across centuries, written in their time for their contemporary audience with some foretelling. The overtones of Isa 1-39, and especially the Oracles, are enraptured by the forthcoming punishment of Jerusalem and the Nations. The text uses images found in the iconography to communicate this judgement to an audience surrounded by such symbols and wired into understanding the messages of the iconographic record, emphasising the textual objective through these layers of description, interpretation and understanding. Through playing on the fears of the contemporary audiences, authors were able to aptly communicate prophecies of punishment and judgement through the iconographic formulae, adapting visual motifs to suit their intended textual message. The Oracles play on the ancient understanding of their world to cast a wide net of judgement across the major societies in an all-encompassing message of punishment, in line with the authorial intention and prophetic message of the text.

The Oracles lie in the middle of proto-Isaiah's work, interrupting the pre-exilic narrative to widen the aperture of the text and focus on the wider world. Preceding the Oracles comes Isaiah's focus on judgement and hope for Jerusalem specifically, before the narrative shifts to the Nations as a whole. Each chapter within the Oracles focuses on individual Nations, from Babylon and Assyria to Moab and Damascus, dealing with each one individually, suggesting YHWH takes time to tailor the punishment of each Nation. The narrative details their judgement as well as some of the reasons the Nations find themselves facing YHWH's wrath. It is interesting that the Oracles include messages against Assyria considering Isaiah refers to them as YHWH's instruments of Jerusalem's downfall earlier in the book (Isa 7:17), suggesting National

⁵ See Beyer 2007, 182. Here Beyer argues for this dating and explains the methodology.

fortunes could change on a whim depending on the surrounding context and their actions across the timeline. For example, when YHWH needed a weapon, Assyria took on the role, however this does not exclude or protect them from later judgement. Thus, the Oracles' view of Assyria as a victim of YHWH's judgement, contrasts the earlier impression of the Nation as an enactor of YHWH's will. This case of literary manipulation is an instance of authorial agendas controlling the narrative. This communicates YHWH's power and might over all the Nations, even those that do not recognise YHWH as the ultimate deity.

Through Assyria's fall, Isaiah emphasises that YHWH is in supreme control through the decisions over Nations' fortunes and roles on the international playing field. This returns when regarding Babylon's appearance in the Oracles, facing taunts and punishment, when later becoming a divine weapon. However, Babylon's reversal in fortune mirrors that of Assyria – going from victim in the Oracles to aggressor in Isa 39 when YHWH sends them against Jerusalem. Both Assyria and Babylon face a moment of peripeteia, emphasising their fate is in YHWH's hands – these 'weapons' that are sent to destroy the sinful are themselves judged and punished for their iniquity. Following from this narrative respite for Jerusalem to focus on the wider world, the text refocuses onto the capital's rise and fall, leading to the Babylonian attack and eventual exile of the Israelite people resulting in a one-hundred-year gap in the narrative between Isa 39 and 40. After this century-long interval, there are post-exilic messages of hope, the arrival of the servant and the servant's inheritance of YHWH's kingdom. This directly contrasts the heavy, sombre atmosphere of the Oracles and proto-Isaiah, enabling the diametrically opposed emotions to be accentuated through the use and manipulation of images and language to communicate the opposing ideals of darkness and light.

The Oracles appear to be an interlude in Isaiah's narrative, taking the opportunity to 'zoom out' and examine the wider world beyond the microcosm of Jerusalem. After following the hope of the messianic prophecies in the preceding chapters, the Oracles turn the narrative back towards anguish and judgement as the intention of the text. This contrast heightens the tension and distress in the Oracles because it is diametrically opposed to the joy of the messianic kingdom, emphasising that the authorial focal point of the ten chapters is on judgment that later accentuates the joy

of the new Jerusalem. The YHWH we see in Isa 14:24-24 is not the version audiences are ordinarily comfortable with seeing in modern iterations of religion. The warrior YHWH articulated by Isaiah recalls the violent images in Ps 18:7-15, shaking the earth and surrounded by darkness and fire. This is contrary to the God of supreme love and support focused upon by modern religious worship. Whilst there are images in the Hebrew Bible that support this image of YHWH (as in Ruth 2:12 through the idea of wings as protection, supported by the iconographic representations of the faravahar (figure 2.10) and the Egyptian sun disk), the actions within the Oracles do not align with this loving image with which modern audiences are familiar. This demonstrates how YHWH can be used in accordance with a range of intentions and personalities to suit the messages communicated to the audience. Thus, the use of iconography offers an independent lens to the judgmental intention of the text, enabling further interpretation.

Furthermore, Isaiah was written in an illiterate world where the written word did not hold the same power it does today. However, this does not mean it had none. One could suggest, the written word in fact held more power in antiquity because of the gatekeeping surrounding literacy and the status symbol being able to read and write wielded – only elites had access to this education, thus highlighting the societal power literacy and the written word held for ancient peoples. In this way, images were used to communicate messages and ideology to the masses who could not access the literary material, both as physical matter (reliefs, coins, seals) and through descriptions in oral performances. The text follows these oral traditions with Isaiah embellishing the narrative with images. For example, the Oracles use of verse retains the rhythm of spoken word, echoing the practice of poetry as a vehicle for oral narration and memory. The use of formula, themes and enjambment in the text aligns with the characteristics of oral literature as set out by Milman Parry.⁶ Isaian examples of these characteristics include the repeated motif of the shoot, vineyard, and servant as well as the repetition of YÔM YHWH in the text. Through repetition, the composition becomes easier for the bard or storyteller to recall for their audiences (the scenes of putting on armour in the *Iliad* are examples of this repetition). These features create a ‘storybook’ atmosphere for the text, removing the narrative from what one would regard a typical

⁶ Lord 1991, 26.

historical document. Despite this departure, scholars can and should use the Bible as a record of historical events and commentary on ancient society. Despite this, one must wade through the literary and oral techniques to get to the root of the text: the history, thus the books cannot be taken as historical fact, but rather inspired by ancient realities. Furthermore, despite texts being written down, it is entirely possible they were read out for audiences as scripts and performances for further communication – they could be read, memorised, or re-enacted for audiences to ensure the message is more widely received.⁷ One such example was the dead sea scrolls of a written text that would also have been performed in the oral tradition. It is also possible that the text may have been accessed by every stratum of society in all these ways – performance as well as public and private reading because of the accessibility provided by performances.⁸ This demonstrates the versatility of the text (written and spoken) in communicating the authorial message to a variety of audiences at all levels of society. However, in the ancient world, reading could be speaking, suggesting viewing performances and the communication of stories through spoken word could be considered a literary act.⁹ Despite this, it must be considered that the world was still a mostly illiterate one, thus it is likely many relied on verbal retellings of the text. Orality also enabled fluidity, warranting changes to be made by individual performers in response to the audience and their context.¹⁰ These changes could vary in significance, from minute details to whole new scenes that could affect the messages of the piece, but were all inspired by the world around the performer. In this way, iconographic exegesis enables a path back to this tradition, providing a visual postscript to the text that informed the contemporary audience of the original piece.

1.2 Iconographic Exegesis: The Approach

Iconographic exegesis began with Othmar Keel's work with the Psalms and has since expanded beyond this book through work by de Hulster amongst others.¹¹ However, the iconographic approaches to the book have focused on trito Isaiah, seemingly

⁷ Miller 2019, 5-6.

⁸ Miller 2019, 7.

⁹ Miller 2019, 8.

¹⁰ Reece 2019, 115.

¹¹ Keel 1997, de Hulster 2009, 2014, 2015a-b, de Hulster and LeMon 2014, de Hulster and Strawn 2015, de Hulster, Strawn and Bonfiglio 2015, Gansell 2014, LeMon 2014, LeMon 2015a-b, and Müller 2015 have all used iconography in their approaches to the Biblical text.

because of the recurring themes and images condensed into the ten chapters by the third author. However, whilst third Isaiah has strong themes, the Oracles are imbued with motifs that are candidates for iconographic exegesis through the visual language and literary images employed in the section. It is because of these literary images employed by Isaiah, that I have selected the Oracles as the source matter for this work. The Isaian images align with the themes explored in this thesis: kingship, agriculture, society and culture and warfare and violence. These thematic tropes employed in the text reflect scenes in the ancient Near Eastern iconographic language, thus the Oracles lend themselves to the iconographic exegetical approach. Despite this, they have not been interpreted through the iconography in the current scholarship, leaving a gap in academic discourse that this thesis intends to fill.

Literary images wield rhetorical power,¹² creating powerful descriptions that encourage the reader to interpret the text in accordance with their own experiences and context. These images and Isaiah's use of language influence the reader, leading them to specific interpretations and outcomes that best suit the authorial agenda. For example, Tolkien's description of Sauron employs malevolent language to lead the reader to view him as the villain from the beginning. A 'rising spirit' could be interpreted as either good or evil, however Tolkien's use of shadow and black wind in conjunction with this image enable the author to convince readers to interpret the description along with his intention. Through descriptive language, authors offer subliminal messages to guide their reader down the path that they have laid out directing them along a specific narrative to the authors chosen end. In this same way, Isaiah's use of images and language guide the audience to his intended messages, for example a simple tree stump being read as a metaphor for a destroyed city. This authorial handling of literary images distorts the historical accuracy of the text; thus, the application of iconographic exegesis enables the audience to delve beneath the authors embellishment and leading narrative to develop an understanding of the historical undertones that informed the visual world of the text. Furthermore, iconographic exegesis offers an opportunity to discern alternative interpretations that are not overt in the literary narrative and context. Through the iconography, this thesis will explore the wider application of ancient images and their efficacy in discovering

¹² LeMon 2014, 377.

new and alternative interpretations when applied to ancient text, as well as enabling insight into the historical context of literary works.

The images employed by the Biblical texts communicate specific messages and themes through the power they hold over the reader. The images create vivid scenes in the reader's imagination to emphasise and highlight the textual messages. The iconography adds depth and context to these images conjured by the text, enabling readers to interpret the message in new ways through understanding the world in which they were created. Art, and therefore iconography, inspires emotions and prompts the mental stimulation of the audience to consider and interpret the piece they are viewing.¹³ In a similar way, literary images generate emotion and interpretation through the crafted narrative and authorial manipulation of the text to encourage intended reactions from the audience. Both rely on the audience to instigate emotion – the author or artist can guide them to a specific thought or feeling, however it is down to the audience and their individual interpretation that ultimately induces the emotional reaction. This can muddy the waters when interpreting the historicising elements of both image and text, thus the use of both together begins to provide some clarity to the interpretation. The Bible is part of a wide stream of traditions thus one can argue the text draws the rhetorical power of images from the world around it.¹⁴ In this way, the iconographic approach is a valid line of enquiry when studying Biblical texts, demonstrating the thread of consciousness between art and text, between materiality of iconography and illusions conjured in the mind when reading a text. It is important to view art within their cultural, socio-political, and historical contexts.¹⁵

Through taking the various cultural, socio-political and historical contexts into account, one can separate it from our own re-creations of their contexts, affecting their meaning and offering alternatives. In a similar way, the iconography itself enables the reader to conceive of the text within these contexts to gain an understanding of its meaning in the authors world, instead of just our own. Historians must be aware of our own biases that influence the way we view art, separating us from the original intent of the image. These biases can obstruct the viewer from interpreting material in their

¹³ Solso 2003, 15.

¹⁴ Keel 1997, 7.

¹⁵ Bahrani 2003, 80.

original context and the intent behind their creation. Iconography provides lasting monuments to society through which one can get closer to the historical realities of their creators. Through understanding the original context, one can gain a closer understanding of the ancient world through these windows into ancient life. In turn, this sheds light onto the text when using the iconography to critically interpret it. Thus, the study of one benefit the other in a marriage of scholarly approaches.

Iconographic exegesis uses the powerful imagery of the Oracles to offer new interpretations of the text through the lens of ancient iconography. There is apt material within Isa 14:24-24 for this approach, thus this thesis has elected to focus on the ten chapters using this realm of study. Isaiah is a visual poet, thus can benefit from the iconographic approach because they employ imagery from the world around the text to communicate YHWH's word. This is evidenced through existing scholarship on trito Isaiah, leaving the rest of the book open for this thesis and future work to expand on the corpus. Within the Oracles, the use of literary images can be metaphoric (Isa 17:12) or photographic (Isa 17:6), both of which can be subject to iconographic exegesis. Metaphoric images are open to wide-ranging interpretations based on experiences and ideas of audiences. This openness results in varying interpretations based on the context the reader is coming from, as well as their awareness of the text's context. Through the iconography one can gain insight into how the emblematic image was perceived by the author and contemporary audience. Iconography is effective when considering photographic images because they act like snapshots themselves, capturing an event in motion. The photographic descriptions in the text capture the reality of ancient life, thus the iconographic approach provides insight into this same lived reality. This thesis does not delineate between metaphoric and photographic images when using the iconography, instead focusing on the use of iconographic material to interpret the text through the understanding of the ancient world. Images and iconography enable us to put ourselves in the ancient past, transporting us to another time through every glance. As the eye scans the iconography, each detail is viewed along with the whole scene, each enabling a series of small interpretations that inform how the scene is viewed. This same approach applies to texts – as descriptions are introduced and built up, the reader makes multiple small interpretive decisions, guided by the author until they reach the fully realised literary image. In a similar way, one can think of the images in the Oracles as an iceberg – the text is the tip, we cannot

see the layers beneath the water (the authorial influences and historical context). However, through the iconography, one can travel beneath the surface and see the rest of the iceberg, enabling deeper reading of the text as well as contextualising it within its historical context. The Oracles are suited to the iconographic approach because of the extensive descriptive language and iconographic images providing powerful insights into Isaiah's visual world.

Images are part of creative processes within social contexts,¹⁶ suggesting they are products of the society that created them. This extends to their reception, indicating how interpretations of images can mutate over the years and across different societies. However, the fact that images are formulated with specific values and views offers an aperture through which one can interpret the worldview of the society that rendered them. Through the iconographic approach, one can understand Biblical images in the underlying historical context, not otherwise provided within the text.¹⁷ Biblical authors wrote in a world of images that influenced their words and the way they conceived of their society and its surroundings. The Isaian authors were subjected to iconographic images that influenced the text along with their lived experiences. This may explain why the text is replete with description as the author drew on their own conceptions and their audience's knowledgebase to best communicate the intended message of the text. The iconographic approach enables the reader to begin to understand how historical contexts are conveyed through literary images. In this way, iconographic exegesis takes the interpretation of the Biblical text away from the traditional approach – enabling insight into the authorial inspiration and world.

Material evidence can shed light on the cultures and world in which the prophets were writing.¹⁸ Ancient Near Eastern iconography is a valid source in understanding Biblical images and where they came from. This opens the interpretation of language to consider the historical context and authorial intent of the text. Through this approach, one can contrast interpretations which are formed by personal and unconscious decisions formulated by societal ideas. This removes the audience from their own contexts and provides an aperture to how the ancients may have interpreted and

¹⁶ Moorey 2003, 14.

¹⁷ LeMon 2014, 378.

¹⁸ Strawn 2016, 87-116.

received the Biblical text. All interpretations are informed by the individuals own ideas; thus, the use of iconography validates a transportation of the modern audience to the ancient world, removing them from their informing stimuli and permitting interpretation in line with the ancient perspective. Whilst the text alone has a certain adaptability and timelessness, considering the images enables an understanding of the text as a historical source. It is beneficial to consider these images in the reading of the Bible, both for its historical background and religious meaning. Through this approach, one can bring together the worlds of history and Biblical studies, explaining the Hebrew Bible with the help of the ancient Near East.¹⁹ Material and visual evidence generally outnumbers written records, thus providing a much-needed insight into the world in which Isaiah was writing. These images were produced and dispersed more than text, meaning they were encountered more often than inscriptions as well as being more accessible. Furthermore, the Isaian images could be called to mind during performances of the text in line with the oral tradition. In this way, the iconography provided visual reference for the contemporary audience to aid their understanding of the Biblical text, along with their own experiences and views of their world. Consequently, the iconography furnishes modern audiences with the rare opportunity to consider the ancient perspective when interpreting the text. Through its survival, ancient images present material remnants of societal ideology that cannot be accessed outside of visual and written material. Hence, when reinterpreting the text and exploring its history, the iconography yields advantageous information otherwise not accessible, nor considered by modern audiences. Thus, this work adds to the iconographic approach that has thus far been used for the Psalms and trito Isaiah, instead applying the methodology to the Oracles against the Nations.

Ideology forms shared and accepted worldviews to describe, interpret and justify the place of a society in the wider world.²⁰ These are ideas and beliefs about political, economic, social, and cultural activities held by a society. The social and economic interests influence these ideologies and can inform the class system and structure, in turn affecting interpretations of material. This forms part of the culture which represents the common ideas amongst the individuals that formulate a society.²¹

¹⁹ de Hulster et.al. 2014, 20.

²⁰ Ribière 2008, 16.

²¹ Shawcross 1997, 62.

Culture and ideology are 'created' by society leaders (for example kings) and are received by their people through propaganda and official communications. They therefore inform interpretations and ideas of concepts, images, and texts viewed by individuals who are influenced by societal ideologies. This transfers to the interpretation of images and text, someone's ideology as formed by personal beliefs and societal ideas informs their analysis of a given image/text. Furthermore, as kings often commissioned the iconography, the representations were carefully crafted in line with ideological beliefs to communicate specific messages and interpretations.

The ancient Near East was full of images that influenced the writing of the Bible and became their own language. Iconography gives specific material images to Biblical messages,²² validating Isaiah's use of descriptive language and offering background as well as other interpretations. In this way, the iconography gives the immaterial ideas and messages a material form of reference. Therefore, the use of ancient images in conjunction with the Biblical text could be considered a version of an illuminated manuscript or illustrated book. Images are often used to help audiences interpret and understand texts, as evidenced through children's illustrated Bibles that are often gifted to Christian youths and used in infant and junior schools when introducing them to Biblical stories. The iconography can act as an ancient illustration to aid modern audiences interpret the text within its ancient context. As a modern audience, we are often removed from the ancient images that influenced Isaiah and other Biblical texts. Furthermore, we are subjected to thousands of years of varying interpretations imposed on these material and literary images, distorting the text in line with these layers of interpretation over the centuries. Thus, this work uses the ancient iconography to peel back this veneer to reveal the original context and influences of the text. Through using this approach, one can get a deeper understanding of the text by referring to the world the prophets were looking at and writing in. The Isaian narrative is imbued with images as metaphors for judgement and hope, thus the iconography enables an understanding of their background to further interpret Isaiah's use of description and metaphor in the message. Literary images enable the Isaian authors to communicate their message to the audience through a medium and visual narrative they are familiar with, thus ensuring the prophetic meaning is clear to the

²² LeMon 2014, 380.

ancient audience and their context. The Bible is part of a *longue durée* of traditions; taking these into account provides a fuller understanding of the Hebrew Bible.²³ Images are used throughout the ancient Near East to convey certain messages – images are meant to be ‘read’ as they symbolise or simplify a concept within a frame. The images on ancient walls, mountains and miniatures convey messages to the audience, much like the Biblical images selected by the prophets convey messages to the reader. This enabled Empires to broadcast ideology and power to anyone who passed the relief sculpture. For example, the tribute procession relief on the apadana at Persepolis mirrors the lived action of embassies bringing gifts to the Achaemenid king, demonstrating to the visitors the upcoming action, and imbuing the atmosphere with a sense of grandeur and power. In a similar way, the images used within the Bible were used to impart messages and were crafted to suit the narrative through the reflections on the audience’s everyday life. The iconography allows the audience to see the Biblical text through the eyes of the ancient Near East in this *longue durée* of tradition, text, and image. Hence, this work will use the iconographic record to place the text under a microscope for reinterpretation through the ancient material, enabling a move towards understanding the reception of the Oracles by their contemporary audience.

Iconography provides snapshots into the ancient mindset and world, capturing and suspending moments in time. Whilst generations have been able to access them, this was not the intent of the art, instead being created for their contemporary audiences to communicate imperial ideology and commemorate events such as military victories. Nevertheless, many have survived for modern-day scholars and tourists to marvel at and peer through to the ancient world. The artistic agenda in rendering the iconography shapes the modern interpretation of images through the lack of awareness of their original intent and context. The captured moments depicted in the iconography may be historical or symbolic,²⁴ detailing specific events or communicating ideological beliefs. The reliefs could also be a combination of historical and symbolic – commemorating an event in a standardised and symbolic structure, emphasising victories, and asserting dominance. This is evident in the siege of Lachish reliefs and

²³ Keel 1997, 7.

²⁴ Keel 1997, 9.

the battle of Til-Tuba – the action is focused on the domination of the enemy, following the narrative of the royal annals that emphasised the imperial might of the Empire. Despite this, all the iconography disseminated carefully crafted messages from the authorities that create them to the wider world. Through these illustrations, one can see through the eyes of the ancient Near Eastern peoples and their creating societies – they provide insight into their view of the self and ancient world. Isaiah's use of images also comments on the worldview of the author and text. This not only reflects on the creator but also their context – for images and text to be received, they need to be understood by the intended audience, thus reflecting on the wider world and their beliefs and views. Through the manipulation and application of visual language, Isaiah provides apertures for the reader to view the ancient world via their own interpretations. Through this, readers can use the literary images to gain a surface-level understanding of the ancient world through the specific images employed as well as the repeated descriptions such as the vine. However, descriptive language can be more susceptible to interpretation than image, thus the iconographic approach can provide visual references for these interpretations to provide a photographic subtext to the metaphors employed by the author. Therefore, this thesis will use image to interpret the text, contextualising the Oracles through creating the iconographic subtext (or postscript) that enables a new understanding of the text.

Iconographic images are windows to the ancient viewpoint and the way they saw their society and world. This is especially important when looking at unchanging elements such as agriculture – vines and grain do not change matter. Despite the basic functioning of agriculture itself remaining relatively unchained (aside from the mechanisation of processes), the meanings modify along with society – as our gaze changes, so does the landscape we look at. For example, the desolation of agriculture carries with it despair, however the extent to which this anguish is felt depends on the individual contexts within the Isaian narrative and the modern world. Whilst this melancholy extends into modern agricultural societies, it is not often felt to the same degree in urban areas that lack an awareness of the complexities of agrarian life and are reliant on the convenience of supermarkets rather than farmer's shops. This contrasts the awareness of and reliance upon agriculture in the ancient world – this would exacerbate the dejection communicated in the text and image in comparison to the sadness felt by audiences of the 21st century CE. How does one separate their

modern interpretation from the ancient text? By using iconography, we are offered glimpses of the ancient meanings behind these elements and thus the reasoning behind Biblical images. Thus, this work uses the iconography to unveil the influences behind the literary descriptions, enabling reinterpretation. The iconography is almost photographic, creating frozen snapshots of events.²⁵ In this way, the iconography presents these ‘photographs’ of history that are used in this work to analyse and reinterpret the text in line with ancient societal attitudes. These images have impact beyond words and are more widely accessible.²⁶ Although there can be varying interpretations of images around the world, they are language-less and can hold immediate meaning to all peoples, thus making them more accessible. Low literacy levels meant that a visual narrative could record and relay information to all levels of society, including the illiterate king.²⁷ In this way, the aesthetics were not the primary role of ancient iconography, instead they were methods of communication in a largely illiterate world. They disseminated a shared ideology of the society rather than a single artists’ world view – it was collective rather than individual. Thus, the iconography is a beneficial source of evidence when interpreting ancient texts such as the Oracles by shedding light onto the historical context that informed the language and structure of the piece. In this way, iconography provides insights into world views and beliefs of a performative culture – iconography immortalises oral traditions in image.²⁸ Thus, the use of iconography in this work takes advantage of these surviving remnants to inform the reinterpretations offered. Furthermore, image and text don’t always correlate thus the images can provide further messages and interpretations beyond what is offered within the Oracles and wider Biblical narrative. Thus, this work discusses the themes handled within their Biblical context before dealing with the iconographic material. This provides the reader with the opportunity for comparison between the Isaian, Biblical and iconographic images, enabling further interpretation not previously discussed in depth. In some cases, ancient images could be regarded as substitutes for what they are representing rather than simple decoration.²⁹ This is embodied through the conception of *salmu* – images can become the subject rather than just a copy, enabling them to act as a substitute. This is seen through representations of the king

²⁵ Rabaté 1997, 1.

²⁶ Ornan 2005, 8.

²⁷ Braun 2015, 344-359

²⁸ de Hulster 2009, 26-27.

²⁹ Teeter 2015, 328.

on stela placed around empires and in temples, so he is ever present either as a watchful eye over his subjects or paying homage to the divine. Unlike idol statues which are the embodiment of the gods, *salmu* is a stand-in for the represented figures – not the individual themselves. In this way the boundaries between image and reality could be negotiated and blurred.³⁰ This is reflected in the use of literary images in the Oracles, crossing the line between lived experiences (such as famine) and prophetic messages against the Nations – the text uses the contemporary audiences' circumstances to inform the articulation of judgement and communicate it in an understandable manner, thus evoking real and visceral emotion towards a prophetic event. Thus, this work uses the iconography to understand the real-world counterparts of the literary images, reinforcing the line between reality and oracular before once again dismantling this border to offer new interpretations of the text.

As modern audiences, we are separated from the original inspiration and intention of both text and image. This all contributes to a lack of understanding of the ancient Near East and the historical reality behind the Biblical texts. Thus, the iconographic approach used in this thesis brings the text back to the historical realm – demonstrating how Biblical scholars and ancient historians can and should work in conjunction to provide fuller readings and interpretations of texts and images. Through iconographic exegesis, the historian studies interpretations and analyses the layers of meaning beyond the literal presented in the text.³¹ Similarly, interpretations of Isaiah can be separated from the modern agenda, however the timelessness of the text and prophetic messages make interpretations of the text everlasting. Thus, this work uses interpretations informed by the iconography whilst occasionally drawing on modern experiences to demonstrate variation and/or 'timelessness' of the literary images used within the Oracles. Iconography often uses visual signs signifying a subject through motifs, becoming a pictogram rather than a 'photograph', representing concepts rather than likeness. Through these layers, one must study the ancient world to get to the heart of the representation and interpret it within the original context. Similarly, Isaiah uses layers of metaphor and imagery to communicate the message in an articulation

³⁰ Bahrani 2003, 12.

³¹ Angenot 2015, 108.

of the predicted concept. Thus, this work uses both iconography and the Isaian text to analyse and interpret these layers of meaning.

1.3 Cognitive Theory, Viewing, Viewership and Understanding

The relationship between the material brain and the immaterial concepts of the mind are explored through cognitive theory.³² Symbolic representations are part of a wider image system in society in which the brain, symbols and language influence each other. Thus, cognitive theory can provide insights into images, their symbolic meaning, and the world views of the creating societies they reflect. In the cognitive system, cultures and social systems fabricate aesthetics and attitudes towards images.³³ From what is deemed aesthetically pleasing to the types of art that are considered ‘acceptable’, ideas, interpretations, and images are all subject to societal views that can be understood through contemporary evidence. For example, attitudes towards street art have been formed by wider society and has changed over the years depending on the context and artist (such as Banksy), moving to be viewed as a form of artistic expression rather than mere graffiti, although this is not always the case because of the complexity of its understanding. Cultures and social systems construct and influence perception within the human cognitive system – interpretations come from the knowledgebase of the individuals that form the subconscious decision-making process of the gaze. Despite this, interpretations can vary between individuals within a society whilst still being influenced by social constructs. This comes from slight variations in circumstances as well as awareness of other interpretations and experiences. For example, a simple landscape can be interpreted in all manner of ways by the viewer who draws on their experiences and surroundings to inform their gaze. This is evidenced through the interpretations of all the great art of history – for example there are variations on the meaning of Mona Lisa’s enigmatic smile, from a genuine expression to a non-genuine assemblage. Constructs are determined by their symbolic world and language: shaping and being shaped by interactions with the material world. When people interpret text and image, much of the analysis is innate, drawing on

³² Crane 2000, 10.

³³ Bahrani 2003, 151.

experiences and ideals that they are exposed to. In this way, most psychological functioning is unconscious.³⁴ Thus the mind perceives images and symbols through societal influences. This is because micro-decisions are too complex and fast to be registered. Through these processes and decisions, art is viewed and understood impeccably fast.³⁵ This unconscious interpretation means the iconography and text must be contextualised within the ancient world to begin to understand the influences on its contemporary audiences. Therefore, this thesis uses the historical context to aid understanding and interpretation of the iconography before applying it to the Biblical text. Through this approach, I have used evidence to get as close as a modern scholar is able to the possible ancient interpretations of the iconography they encountered, thus enabling reinterpretation of the Oracles against the Nations.

Culture forms a valid impact on the creation and viewing of art through the interpretation of sign systems to form ideas. Through this cultural influence on the formulation of ideas, principles and interpretations, the unconscious micro-decisions made by the brain when reading the Biblical text and viewing ancient iconography are subject to attitudes that surround it. When the audience and creator are separated by time and geography, these unconscious decisions, and thus whole interpretations, can vary. The mind is a product of its society, thus as societies have changed, so have innate perceptions of the world that inform the way images and texts are interpreted. Thus, when we look at ancient iconography, our interpretation of the image is likely to differ from that of the contemporary viewer. In this way, this thesis does important work in enabling the audience to go back to the original reception of the text through using the iconography as a lens for analysis. Therefore, this enables a new variety of interpretations of the text through its historical context in the iconographic approach employed in this work.

Social acts and performances are related to symbolic meanings – societal ideas inform the viewership of images.³⁶ In this way, gaze could affect interpretations depending on the society and beliefs the viewer is coming from. Viewers bring their own cultural conceptions to interpretation, therefore there is no fixed meaning to an image. This

³⁴ Crane 2000, 18.

³⁵ Solso 2003, 1.

³⁶ Morenz 2013, 124.

suggests gaze is a social force that informs interpretation.³⁷ To decipher meanings and reveal various possible interpretations, images must be closely read within their context. In the study of English literature in British schools, students must consider their own interpretations of the text as well as considering various contexts of the poem/book. Therefore, whilst this skill is taught, deeper research is required to apply contextual factors to the interpretations of text; something laypeople are unlikely to do. Thus, this work uses the iconography to enable a reading of the Oracles through the close analysis of image and text within their historical and social contexts to decipher their intended meaning and unveil levels of interpretation.

The Isaian narrative is interpreted in a variety of ways due to the openness of language itself. For example, the homonym ‘beat’ can be interpreted in several ways by individuals – from winning to exhaustion, its meaning depends on the context in which it is used as well as how it is received by the audience. In this way, the reader only needs knowledge of the language to decipher it, creating a narrow field of interpretation through the lack of contextual knowledge.³⁸ Language can be interpreted in a variety of ways depending on the reader and their relationship with the historical context. When an audience is removed from the text, their interpretations are disconnected from the original authorial intent. Due to this distancing from the original intentions, without prior knowledge of historical and social contexts of texts, readers are unable to apply these layers of interpretation to their own reading without further research. However, it can be argued that through the right to look, autonomy is claimed, and the invention of the subject is in the eyes of the beholder.³⁹ In this way, interpretations are dependent on the cogency of the observer and their context that informs their gaze. As modern audiences, we are not wired to read ancient art and literary images because we lack the surrounding context and symbolic understanding that informed their creation. Thus, this work is important in shedding light on this contextual creation of literary images and their iconographic inspirations. Whilst interpretations of any text are personal, in considering the ancient world, this work presents alternative and new interpretations to be contemplated alongside an individual personal reading of the text.

³⁷ Bal 2001, 71; 191.

³⁸ Barthes 1990, 230.

³⁹ Mirzoeff 2011, 1.

Iconographic visuals had their own language system,⁴⁰ using motifs and repeated scenes to communicate the intended message. This material language transfers some of its power to the literary world through motifs and epithets. One example of a repeated motif lies throughout proto Isaiah – the author repeatedly returns to the image of a ‘shoot’ (Isa 11:1; 16:8; 18:5; 27:6; 37:33). This literary image had its own language due to its symbolic meaning and the message of hope it provided in conjunction with the antithesis of the stump. Thus, any reading of a ‘shoot’ is read within the language of fertility, growth, and hope. However, this ‘language’ of the shoot goes beyond Isaiah, appearing in Job to further its interpretation as a metonym for hope and life through the spreading of shoots (Job 8:16 and 14:7) and the end of life/hope through their destruction by fire (Job 15:30). The message of hope attached to the shoot appears again in Ps 128:3 (representing children and thus the future) and Song 4:13 (the use of ‘choicest’ fruits demonstrates the hope for a good future). This is one example of a literary image motif that communicates intended messages beyond the literal through symbolic significance. The use of this image throughout the Bible demonstrates the importance of ‘shoots’ as a symbol of hope and new life in the ancient world, arguably because of the importance of agriculture, thus shoots represent a new yield. This use of repeated images is employed through Homer’s use of epithets in *The Iliad* (‘swift-footed Achilles’ or ‘rosy-fingered dawn’), emphasising the use of this methodology across antiquity. These are also part of their own language system, conjuring up specific images through their use; acting as a shorthand to curate intended images for the audience. In the ancient iconographic system, the repeated use of the trampling motif (see chapter 5.3) demonstrates this individual visual ‘language system’. Through this simple frame, the iconography could communicate its messages of power and domination to the viewer in an effective use of space. The importance of such communication demonstrates that the visual arts are and were not secondary to the texts, instead having their own strategies and structures to communicate specific messages in the sign and visual systems. This is evidenced through the communication of domination in the Behistun relief as equal to the inscription – they are simultaneously expressing different details whilst communicating the same overall message of royal power.

⁴⁰ Root 2003, 28.

Like the ancient viewers, we are keyed into reading images and decoding signs in our societies, viewing, and interpreting images every day. This includes when taking out money to pay for something. The use of the leek (Wales), thistle (Scotland), clover (Ireland) and rose (England) on the reverse of the British pound coin (figure 1.1) are signs in the national iconographic language, acting as metonyms for the countries of the United Kingdom. The message of these metonyms encircled by a crown is also interpreted through the associations of royalty – all four nations are represented as subjects of the royal family. This could be further interpreted as



Figure 1.1 Reverse, British Pound Coin, Mint 2017. Author 2021.

communicating unity because they are ‘bound’ together by the crown. Despite this, these images are meaningless to some communities both within and beyond the intended audiences – images are interpreted through individuals and the agency they hold to understand it within their own contexts. If they are unaware of the national flowers of the British Isles, the iconography on this reverse will hold no significance for the observer, emphasising the importance of contextual knowledge when interpreting images. These encoded images were also used in the ancient world, requiring context and knowledge of the surrounding ideology to read their meaning (figure 1.2). This relief depicts what appears to be a divine hippopotamus hunt, detailing Horus slaying a small animal whilst Isis kneels at the front of the boat. Whilst hippopotamuses did not ordinarily attack humans, they could become violent if provoked.⁴¹ This meant hippopotamus hunting could be dangerous, despite its common occurrence in ancient Egypt. In this way, the first reading of figure 1.2 appears to be an ordinary hunting scene. However, upon further research, one discovers Egyptians confronted hippopotamuses as dangerous animals both in the afterlife as well as regularly whilst alive.⁴² Thus, the hunting of hippopotamuses suggest that the animals were regarded as something that needed to be controlled to

⁴¹ Lewis and Llewellyn-Jones 2018, 435.

⁴² Lewis and Llewellyn-Jones 2018, 436.

quell their destructive forces. Despite the regularity of the hippopotamus hunting scene, upon closer inspection of figure 1.2, the hippopotamus is miniscule in comparison to Horus. But why has the hippopotamus been rendered in this way? In other hunting scenes, they are life-size within the frame, suggesting there is a deeper meaning to the diminishing of the animal at Edfu. This could be to communicate messages of power and control, whilst simultaneously diminishing ideas of destruction. On a symbolic level,

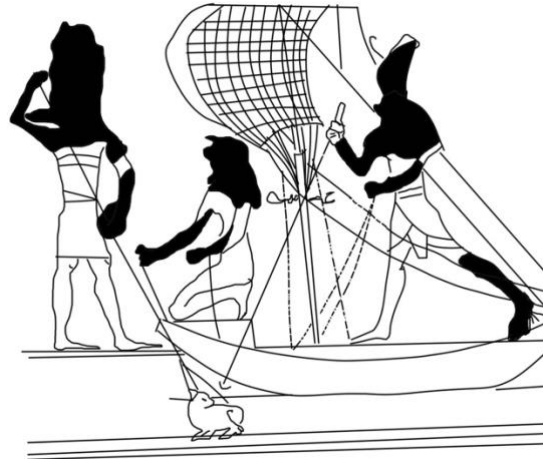


Figure 1.2 Horus kills Set in the form of a hippopotamus. Temple of Horus at Edfu. 237-57 BCE. Author 2021.

hippopotamuses could be representative of rebirth as in other tomb depictions, appearing as apotropaic symbols.⁴³ However, this reading for figure 1.2 is not appropriate – why would rebirth and vitality be rendered as being slain? When considering Job 40:15-24, an alternative and powerful image begins to emerge. Through this description of the ‘Behemoth’, the text creates a sense of strength and power, emphasising the great feat it took to hunt such an animal. There have been varying arguments for the identity of the Behemoth, ranging from hippopotamuses to elephants and a rhinoceros, however the behaviours described seem to align with those of the hippopotamus. This argument is furthered through the iron limbs of Job 40:18 which could refer to Set’s bones in the Egyptian mythological conception of the god in his appearance as a hippopotamus.⁴⁴ In this way, figure 1.2’s animal could be interpreted as a powerful being of destruction, thus the miniaturisation of the figure reduces its negative power in comparison to the positive of the divine slayer. It is only when the viewer realises the animal is the embodiment of Set, Horus’ enemy and God of chaos and violence, that the scene begins to take shape. When observing the relief in line with the sacred texts of Set’s defeat by Horus as revenge for killing his father, Osiris, the narrative of the image becomes clearer. Through the miniaturisation of the hippo, the representation diminishes the severity of the threat posed by Set which is

⁴³ Lewis and Llewellyn-Jones 2018, 437.

⁴⁴ Lewis and Llewellyn-Jones 2018, 439.

further reduced through his slaying by the comparably gigantic Horus. Therefore, in this representation, the hippopotamus Set, the embodiment of chaos, is ready to be popped like a balloon. This demonstrates the importance of societal and historical context when viewing and interpreting image because it can drastically alter the meaning of iconography. This care must also be applied to texts such as the Oracles against the Nations, emphasising the importance of using both text and iconography in conjunction to interpret them within their historical contexts and shape understanding. Despite this, there can be multiple interpretations of motifs as with the hippopotamus symbolising both rebirth and chaos. In these instances, the scene must be viewed as a whole, within its visual and textual context for the observer to dissect the scene, revealing the narrative and leading the audience to the most appropriate interpretation. Hence, there remains a degree of personal interpretation when viewing iconography, even when considering the context. Therefore, ancient iconography cannot be read as a photographic scene because of these encoded messages in their depictions. This work therefore uses the historical context to decode appropriate interpretations of the iconography before applying these results to the Oracles. In this way, the iconography sheds light onto the text, enabling its reinterpretation under the magnifying glass of material evidence.

However, as images have their own language, this can contrast with written descriptions, suggesting they are fundamentally different.⁴⁵ Images and written descriptions are a paradoxical articulation of an image, being essentially the same but simultaneously different. Language can have different meanings for individuals, whereas images of the same thing could have a narrower scope of interpretation. Despite this, language can disseminate information that images cannot, thus deepening meanings and interpretations, albeit differing ones. If image and language are separate entities, they can be used to enable the reinterpretation of one another, adding detail and information otherwise missed. Images have different degrees of interpretation, thus allowing some prerogative when viewing and understanding them.⁴⁶ Viewers can choose how far to interpret an image (even if they are unaware of this choice), thus every glance suggests an unconscious micro-decision. Language can restrict these

⁴⁵ Barthes 1990, 4.

⁴⁶ Barthes 1990, 13.

choices; however, it also highlights important elements that are easily missed in the image alone. This layered interpretation is restricted by the application of language because it guides the reader to the required interpretation. Thus, this work uses both iconography and text to analyse the material based upon the ancient world and the intended messages of the text, revealing a new avenue of interpretation.

Through iconographic exegesis, this work offers new interpretations of the Oracles against the Nations, returning the text to the ancient world. This adds to the corpus of work on this approach by focusing on a new section of the Bible and more specifically Isaiah. Thus, this thesis aims to fill a gap in the current academic discourse through the analysis of literary images through the ancient iconography.

2 *Kingship*

“But true power, the divine right to rule, is something you’re born with”

Avatar: The Last Airbender

2.1 Introduction

The direct Isaian use of kingship within the Oracles is limited, with the word ‘king’ not appearing, despite the centrality of the institution in the ancient world. Isaiah instead draws on the general idea of royal power, or *farr*, communicated through the imperial images circulated of the imperial trappings and the extent of monarchical authority. Through the connected ideas and images employed, Isaiah constructs an overall notion of kingship in the Biblical narrative of Isa 14:24-24 as he prophesies against the nations. The portrayals draw on the iconographic motifs intrinsically connected with the king himself (the throne) or his power (the nations and their tribute), thus framing the theological messages within their ancient contexts.

Ancient Near Eastern kingship was the cornerstone of civilisation – society, peace and justice were impossible without a king in control to uphold them.⁴⁷ Through this establishment and protection of order, the world and society was able to function appropriately. This cosmic order was established at creation and had to be monitored and nurtured to prevent chaos from overwhelming the ordered world. Despite this, chaos could be subdued but never destroyed, therefore the king was constantly fighting chaos in the form of rebellions. In this way, Isaiah’s use of the monarchical institution to represent the nations aligns with the gravity of the position. Kingship was also crucial in cosmic structures (through repelling the chaotic threats to maintain the ordered world) as well as the everyday social and administrative functioning of the

⁴⁷ Frankfort 1978, 3. The king maintained the integration of all significant things with the cosmos. Through the king’s rule, the natural cycles continued, people enjoyed abundance and harmony was maintained – it was through his intervention that nature (and society) was able to function. One vital role of the Pharaoh was the maintenance of *ma’at* (truth/right order), thus the structure that emerged from creation must be cared for on Earth by kings (either as divine viceroys or gods in their own right). See Frankfort 1978, 51.

Empire.⁴⁸ The king had to communicate his ability to establish and maintain this order by repelling chaos through the iconography to the illiterate society. This emphasises the iconographic focus on the king as representative of the gods and a visual metonym for everything that came under the auspices of his power. The paramount responsibility of the king was to preserve order and ensure stability and balance within the Empire.⁴⁹

The ordered world was conceived of being under constant commination; this threat of violence was an underlying aspect of cosmic and political kingship. This violence could come from other human factors or be sent from the divine realm as natural disasters or societal upheaval, thus sending the ordered world out of balance – the king’s role was to quell the chaos and restore the world to its previous state. This importance is stressed in the iconography through figural scales – the king is often shown larger than others to draw the viewers’ attention (figure. 2.1).⁵⁰ Rendering the king on a larger scale articulates his power and authority over the other figures and his prominence in society through the dominating presence in the iconography. This artificial shrinking or crouched positions combined with raising



Figure 2.1 Darius beneath sunshade from the Tripylon doorway, Persepolis. Author 2021.

iconography. This artificial shrinking or crouched positions combined with raising

⁴⁸ Robins 2015, 126. Society circled around the institution of kingship, including establishing order in the real and cosmic realms. The king had to interpret divine will, represent his people to the gods and control the administration of his empire (see Frankfort 1978, 252.) Whilst these images were accompanied by inscriptions constructed by scribes, the images are often most prominent and could convey the required message to all, whereas not everyone (maybe not even the king) could read the inscriptions. See also Leprohon 2015, 313. Kingly images contributed to the imperial self-narrative of a just, wise, and pious ruler (see Brisch 2020, 50.) However, reading royal texts as propaganda is a reductive and stereotypical approach that should be avoided. See Bahrani 2003, 166.

⁴⁹ Hill et.al 2013, 7. The king acted as a ‘middleman’ between the gods and people, a pillar of royal ideology and a foundation for cosmic stability. This maintenance of order was of concern in the ancient Near East, both cosmically and on Earth through the functioning of society and ‘unification’ of lands, for example Upper and Lower Egypt. See also Morris 2013, 33. Kingship was more than a political entity, also commenting on who societies thought of themselves within the ordered world (see Mitchell and Melville 2013, 3.)

⁵⁰ Leprohon 2015, 312. Scale was an effective means of creating focal points, drawing the viewers eye around the scene, and bringing attention to specific aspects to highlight a particular message or individual. Through this, the king was shown to be “unique, powerful and without equal” to demonstrate his ability to protect the nation and that he can exercise outside of the rules that bound the rest of society. See also Leprohon 2015, 323 and Morris 2013, 39-40.

enthroned kings on platforms conform with the articulation of power through scale which is entrenched in ancient iconography. Through this use of scale, the image physically places the king as larger and therefore above his attendants and the visiting delegations. This heightens the king's power and communicates his authority over others in this simple visual approach. Not only does the use of scaling demonstrate this authority, but implies the king was more than an ordinary human because of this scaling (in *Shahnameh*, the hero Rostam is differentiated in part because of his height). One can suggest that the use of scale also brings the king 'closer' to the gods through his height, reflecting his role as enacting their will on earth or as divine himself. When the king is shown with the gods or genies, they are depicted on the same scale to demonstrate they are equals

(figure. 2.2).⁵¹ Through these scenes, the king's power is consolidated and his place as equal to the gods (or just below and acting in their place on Earth) is solidified. The use of scale emphasises the power exchange between the gods and the king and



Figure 2.2 Investiture of Ardashir I, Naqsh-I Rostam, 3rd century CE. Author 2021.

demonstrates their authority over the 'ordinary' person. The investiture scene in figure 2.2 not only indicates the king's divine right to rule as the god's viceroy on Earth, but the use of scale puts the king on the same level as Ahuramazda. This is emphasised through their symmetrical poses, illustrating their close working relationship.

Elsewhere in the Biblical text, scaling is used to convey messages that are the antithesis to the iconography. The story of David and Goliath inverts the interpretation of iconographic scaling through the taller Goliath's defeat by the smaller David.⁵² This victory places the power on David despite physically appearing weaker, as emphasised through the contrast between Goliath's armoured warrior image and David's simple

⁵¹ LeMon 2015a, 286. The gods are depicted as observing and authorising the king's actions. The 'correct' relationship with the divine is articulated through royal legitimacy (see Hill et. al 2013, 20). Furthermore, this use of scaling demonstrates that, whilst the king's legitimacy came from the gods, he could not fully rely on this and had to articulate this through his own actions and charismatic presence (see Hill et. al 2013, 22.)

⁵²Goliath is described as "whose height was six cubits and a span" (1 Sam 17:4).

shepherd accoutrement, thus subverting iconographic power dynamics. Whilst this is a valid interpretation that challenges the symbolic meaning behind the iconographic scaling, one should consider the intention when analysing the symbolism of iconographic and literary images. This text was written to communicate YHWH's power enacted through David, with YHWH being credited for David's victory over Goliath; not David's human capabilities (1 Sam 17:45-47). Thus, the inversion of power dynamics through scale in 1 Sam 17 is used to emphasise how YHWH is greater than any human power and trusting her/him enables humanity to access this. In this way, the interpretation of scaling in the Biblical text is used to highlight the divine messages of the prophetic narrative.

When interpreting the symbolism of iconographic scaling, one should consider that iconographic representations were often created to communicate ideological aspects such as kingly power and authority. Through the royal domination of the scene through the king's scale, they become the focal point of the iconography.⁵³ This paired with positions of subjugation where victims physically make themselves smaller through kneeling or curling up creates a motif to communicate these power relationships through the iconographic language.⁵⁴ This royal power is represented as greater than other human powers or equal to the divine and is communicated simply through the scaling technique by the king appearing as larger than their subjects (figure 2.1) or being of equal size to the gods (figure 2.2). This symbolism can be detected in the Biblical text, as in Isa 6.1 with YHWH being lifted and "his robe filled the temple", thus suggesting a sense of scale to communicate YHWH's extensive power and authority in Isaiah's vision. Through the opposing scales of Isaiah and YHWH, the prophetic narrative conveys the human/divine power dynamic with YHWH at the top of the hierarchy. This grandeur sense of scale applied to YHWH in Isa 6:1 conveys the omnipotent and omnipresent nature of the divine – YHWH fills the space

⁵³ Leprohon 2015, 312. Through drawing the eye to the king, the iconography articulates power through the king's domination of the space, reflecting his domination of his empire. Furthermore, the king's scale that mirrors the divine as in figure 2.2 reflects that the kingly body is "inscribed with the physiognomic omens of kingship" (Bahrani 2003, 142) that are divinely gifted. This furthers the closeness between the king and divine through the king's role as their viceroy on earth. Furthermore, there creates a sense that the king is not bound by the same rules, towering above the rest of humanity (Morris 2013, 40). This could be extended to the presentation of YHWH in Isa 6, where YHWH is not bound by the confines of the human sphere and the same rules that bind Isaiah to the mortal realm.

⁵⁴ This can also be seen through the similarity between postures of fear and worship/admiration (Strawn 2014, 124).

suggesting Isaiah is surrounded by YHWH's power and presence. The application of this scaling in the Biblical text supports the interpretation of the iconography – as YHWH has authority over Isaiah during his commission, so do the kings over their people in the imperial ideology of the ancient Near East. The idea of power and authority communicated through scaling is further emphasised through the space between human and divine powers.⁵⁵ In this way, the use of the iconographic canvas through spatial awareness and scaling communicates ideological messages of royal power and authority derived from the gods and enacted over imperial subjects.

The iconography was part of an imperial programme to circulate images and messages of power and social hierarchy, reflecting the ideas and attitudes of imperial strength.⁵⁶ The idyllic version of kingship is therefore communicated to the whole empire, creating a sense of *Pax Persica* through the visual representations of relations (for example the king raised by the nations (figure 2.4)). Images could easily communicate these ideas to the illiterate audiences in a way that text could not in the ancient world, thus enacting a kind of visual control over subject peoples. The king's immeasurable power is entrenched and consolidated through the dissemination of his names and image through monuments and annals.⁵⁷ This aligns with ideas of *salmu* where the image is a substitute for the king rather than a representation. Therefore, this dissemination can be read as the embodiment of the king being present across the Empire – his power is ever-present and visible to his subjects. Furthermore, the king established legitimate authority to secure his power through ritual and tradition, enabling the control of territory and people in response to social, religious, and

⁵⁵ This is evidenced through ideas that the throne room emphasises the closeness between the king and gods (Radner 2015, 102).

⁵⁶ Root 1979, 1. Art was the art of kings, encoded with specific messages to circulate around the empire. The king depicted in stone and scenes around them, create an idealised version of kingship (Root 1979, 2). These representations depicted the king as the king wanted to be viewed. (Root 1979, 131). Images of the king become an allegory for power, focusing this ideal on the kingly body through a process of hierarchy and differentiation, elevating and separating the king from his officials and subjects. (See Bahrani 2003, 138.) This is furthered through the fact that such art are vital historical sources for royal ideology (see Root 2003, 27.)

⁵⁷ Bahrani 2003, 143. Through this establishment, imperial power becomes immortal through its translation into stone – these images have lasted for thousands of years and will continue to do so. Through this immortalisation of power, the kingly ideal was perpetuated, and the image was imbued with authority and power. Despite this, Mesopotamian kingship focused on responsibility rather than power alone meaning the kings was held responsible for all events. However, if negative outcomes could be traced to the king's council, this could exonerate him from holding ultimate responsibility. (See Scurlock 2013, 172.)

political issues, both human and cosmic.⁵⁸ These dual aspects were of equal importance, emphasising the duality of the king's role. Through this divine authorisation of power, the institution continues from its divine origins, indicating kingship itself was immortal.⁵⁹ This is emphasised through the king's retention of identity after death and the rituals of inauguration following the burial, representing the passing of immortal power from one mortal being to another. Figure 2.3

demonstrates this close relationship with and authorisation from the gods – Shamash floats above the dual image of the king whilst holding the symbolic ring of divinely ordained kingship. This furthers the representation of the divine-king relationship – Shamash presents the ring of power whilst



Figure 2.3 Ashurbanipal II appears twice in front of the sacred tree. Nimrud Throne Room. 865-860 BCE. British Museum. 124531. Author 2021.

the king stands in a position of worship. Through its location behind the royal throne, the messages of divinely ordained power are heightened because of its connection with the literal seat of royal power. Through depictions of the king with deities, he is raised to the cosmic realm, thus communicating his everlasting power that passes from king to king. The genies sprinkling water behind the king also alludes to his divinely ordained power through this act of ritual purification.

2.2 Kingship in the Isaian and Wider Biblical Context

There are over one-hundred-and-fifty references to kingship and related terms in Isaiah alone. This emphasises the importance of the institution in the Biblical text as well as its historical context. The basic 'king' is used as the literal title of an individual in the text as well as a connection with 'kingdoms', highlighting the importance of kings in

⁵⁸ Hill et.al 2013, 3-4; 6. The king signified this "ultimate legitimate authority" through legitimation by the gods. Through their divine attribution and word, the king exerted political authority over the state. The sacred and divine aspects of kingship eclipsed the earthly constraints of power, elevating the office to address cosmic issues in the interests of humanity.

⁵⁹ Hill et.al 2013, 5. This aligns with the view in Kantorowicz 2016 – Kantorowicz argues that the king had a mortal and immortal body – the power was held by mortal individuals whilst the office of kingship was immortal. The ideology of kingship is informed by this idea, the king had human authority with divine legitimacy and supernatural attributes (see Hill et.al 2013, 6).

the functionality and delineation of empires. Despite this, the notion of kingship in the Biblical text is also applied to YHWH through the kingdom of the Lord (1 Chr 13:8), demonstrating the importance of the institution in communicating power and authority over others. The duality of kingship is evident in Ps 2, suggesting current rulers were wicked by turning their backs on YHWH and his anointed. This is later contrasted by the anointed ruler (messiah) who defends against evil, moving to warn kings to be wise. The notion of kingship in Isaiah is intrinsically connected with the messianic prophecy that appears throughout. In this way, Isaian kingship can be read as a 'guidebook' of 'good' and 'bad' kings, foreshadowing and warning about what is to come. This reflects the important role of kings throughout the Biblical text, acting as catalysts for events and actions, leading the reader to the realisation of the messianic prophecy and fulfilment of YHWH's covenant with David. Through this use of kingship, the Biblical version of the institution is demonstrated as lesser than the word of YHWH – they hold less power than YHWH and thus cannot overrule him or his covenants.

The Isaian use of the throne is synonymous with the seat of kingship itself, being used as a substitute for the king (Isa 22:23). This connection between kingship and the throne is demonstrated in Isa 14:9, placing kings on their thrones even when they are in Sheol. The Biblical use of the throne is often positive, thus Isa 14:9 can be interpreted as a continuation of power. However, one can argue through this image, Isaiah emphasises their past titlature whilst simultaneously highlighting their false power when compared with YHWH because they are in Sheol and emphasised through the past tense – they no longer wield that power. In this way, the lack of a throne in Isa 47:1 can be interpreted as a metaphor for Babylon's lack of a king. This can be taken further to symbolise dynasty as in Isa 9:7 and the reference to the peaceful Davidic dynasty (2 Sam 7:16). This throne symbolism can be applied to YHWH and his rulership over the Earth as in Isa 6:3 where YHWH reveals himself to Isaiah whilst enthroned and surrounded by seraphim. The enthronement of YHWH is placed in conjunction with the death of King Uzziah, thus the Isaian text highlights YHWH's might over the human kings – he is eternally enthroned when kings in the human realm are mortal. This idea returns in Rev 7:9-17, the throne is used as a symbol of power

and when applied to YHWH, salvation.⁶⁰ Through the further enthronement of the lamb in Rev 7:9, the text recalls metaphors of the ‘lamb of God’, further highlighting YHWH and Jesus’s place above mortal kings in the cosmic hierarchy. Therefore, the symbolism of the lamb becomes connected to the throne, reflecting the importance of throning in the articulation of power in the ancient world. 1 Kgs 9:5 uses the throne to demonstrate both YHWH’s power and dynasty – the throne is established forever (dynasty) by YHWH. This is furthered by 2 Kgs 19:15, the human king Hezekiah prays, stating YHWH is above all else through the enthronement image, thus highlighting that the mortal king is subservient to YHWH. This is contrasted to the enthroned YHWH in Isa 6, emphasising YHWH’s power over the mortal realm through the connotations of throning as well as physically being ‘high and lifted up’. One can see this further in Ps 29:10 – YHWH is enthroned over the flood, indicating power over creation (primordial flood) as well as control over purification and later salvation. The enthronement psalms (Ps 45; 93; 96; 97; 98; 99) demonstrate the joy of YHWH as king. This demonstrates the throne’s place in the exhibition of power, authority, and kingship in the ancient psyche.

‘Nations’ appear a number of times in Isaiah and the wider Biblical text in a variety of contexts. This can be applied in the positive (Isa 2:2 demonstrates the unity of the nations upon a new Jerusalem and is one of the most famous instances of the nations within Isaiah as they flow to it) and the negative (Isa 34:2 highlights YHWH’s anger against the nations that have gone against him). The Biblical use of the ‘nations’ across the text appears to be shorthand for all peoples, encompassing everyone rather than separating them into cities/empires. This can be seen in Isa 62:2, the nations and their kings all see YHWH’s righteousness; thus, one can argue Isaiah used ‘nations’ as a notion to embrace all people on Earth. In this way, the text communicates the message to all of YHWH’s people, as well as those who historically were not but can be brought under the auspices of his kingdom for theological purposes (for example YHWH sends the Assyrians against Jerusalem and Cyrus is proclaimed as YHWH’s instrument (Isa 45:1)).

⁶⁰ Ryken et. Al 1998, 164. Furthermore, the lamb image indicates that those who sit on the throne are the peoples shepherd, demonstrating the importance of the king in protecting his people by leading them along the ‘correct’ path. (Ryken et. Al 1998, 180).

‘Tribute’ itself appears only twice in Isaiah (Isa 18:7 and 33:18). This illustrates that the notion was not as important to the prophet to communicate as the institute of kingship itself. Isa 18:7 appears to use ‘tribute’ as a message of submission, highlighting the fall of Cush within the Oracles against the Nations. However, the tribute is being brought to YHWH, thus it can be interpreted as a return to YHWH in a positive message of redemption and forgiveness. This idea of ‘loss’ connected with tribute returns in Isa 33:18 through the terror of the one who weighs it. One can argue this symbolises a breakdown of society through the removal of important court positions – if those who weigh the tribute is gone, then there is either no tribute or nothing can be done with what is given. Elsewhere in the Bible, tribute is used in the literal sense when one nation becomes subject to another (2 Kgs 17:3). Ps 68:30 instead uses tribute to demonstrate the sin of lust, taking the Biblical use away from the common literal use of giving tribute to nations and/or YHWH (Num 31:28).

The servant is a main theme in the Isaian narrative and can be applied to YHWH’s people as a congregation (Isa 41:8) or individuals who faithfully follow YHWH (22:20).⁶¹ This returns in the New Testament when Paul calls himself a servant (Rom 1:1). The Isaian use of the servant in the Oracles refers to a faithful individual who will be raised to power (Isa 22:20-21), thus the servant image transforms through the individual devotion demonstrated. This idea returns in the servant song of Isa 42 in which the ardent servant maintains his strength and brings justice to the nations, with Isa 52:13 emphasising the raising action. This links to the raising of the throne, thus one could read these Isaian uses of the servant as a message of reward for steadfast service/respect. Within Isaiah, the servant is employed in several ways – from spreading YHWH’s message and maintaining the covenant relationship to enacting YHWH’s will. Despite this, Isaiah turns against the servant image in Isa 42:18-25, providing an indictment against Israel. This is reflective of the dual meanings of the image as a synonym for society as well as an individual. Furthermore, Isaiah’s suffering servant (52:13-53:12) is one of the most recognisable passages in the book, focusing in on the servant’s agony as he bears the nations sins. In this way, the servant

⁶¹ Beyer 2007, 46. ‘Servant’ (Heb: *‘ebed*) and ‘slave’ are synonymous., appearing approximately 800 times in the Old Testament and 39 in Isaiah.

image forms an important theological message on both sides of Isaiah’s narrative of divine judgement and hope.

2.3 Thrones – 16:5 “a throne will be established in steadfast love and on it will sit in faithfulness”; 19:1 “riding on a swift cloud”; 22:23 “throne of honour”

Thrones were long-established as seats of honour and power in the ancient Near East both in text and image.⁶² This is emphasised through the atlas pose at Persepolis (figure 2.4), demonstrating the “steadfast love” and “faithfulness” in Isa. 16:5 through the peoples raising the enthroned king above them with their fingertips. In this way, the Achaemenid king is elevated on his subject’s support; thus, YHWH is enthroned on recognition and praise.⁶³ A similar idea is articulated in figure 2.5, beneath Pharaoh’s throne are representations of the kneeling nations, hands raised in a gesture of worship/servitude, whilst appearing to hold up the throne with their fingertips. This Persepolis image echoes the Ramesseum, highlighting the importance of the throne as a method of communicating the

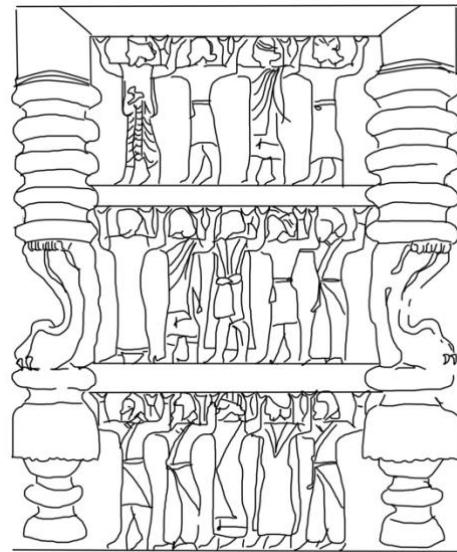


Figure 2.4 Relief, Persepolis, Hall of a Hundred Columns. Western portal, South wall, Eastern doorjamb. Xerxes I (486-465 BCE) and Artaxerxes I (464-424 BCE). Author 2021.

power and authority of the institution of kingship. In these representations of the throne, the incorporation of the personified nations suggests it became a symbol of a unified empire under the auspices of the king who sat on the raised throne. In this way, the throne becomes a visual representation of the empire, literally under the king who rules it. This enables a reinterpretation of Isa 16:5, suggesting the throne of steadfast love and faithfulness is a unified, functional, and peaceful empire under the auspices of the king. This Isaian use of the throne offers an idealised version of empire, reflected

⁶² Hunziker-Kodewald 2015, 170-171. The Hebrew for throne, *kissē*, is borrowed from the Akkadian *kussû* (chair) which in turn was borrowed from Sumerian *giš gu-za*. The throne was part of a long tradition of power symbols, communicating the authority of the institution it represented. This is emphasised through the cosmic stability afforded by the everlasting throne throughout the psalms (Ps 45:1).

⁶³ Keel 1997, 351. Darius himself references this platform in Ps 22, highlighting the symbolism of the use of people under the royal throne (see Root 1979, 160-161.)

by the romanticisation of imperial ideas in the iconographic record of unified rituals and representations. Thus, the throne held up by the nations in the iconography can be interpreted as reflective of the Isaian steadfast love and the king as the embodiment of faithfulness, both to his people and to the gods, as the image of supreme earthly power. Furthermore, the statue of Darius (figure 2.6) uses a version of the atlas pose, pairing the kneeling figures with labels (cartouches) identifying the nations. The upturned palms in these demonstrates of homage can be read as symbolic support.⁶⁴ This highlights the hierarchical order of politics and society, elevating the king to be one of (or close to) the divine pantheon. This is also evident in figure 2.5 through the nation's underneath Pharaoh's throne, suggesting he is elevated further to the divine through public support. Here, they not only raise up the king, but their upturned palms emphasise the message of imperial unity articulated through these enthronement scenes. Furthermore, the connection of this pose with worship emphasises the parallels between the god/worshipper and king/subject relationships, further suggesting the Isaian throne can be read as worship of YHWH and raising of kings to a higher level. In Egypt these co-equal relationships are more closely aligned through the belief that Pharaoh was divine rather than the Mesopotamian view that the king himself was not divine but acted on behalf of the gods.



Figure 2.5 Ramesseum, Thebes. Dynasty 19 (1295-1186 BCE). Author 2021.

⁶⁴ Root 1979, 146. The position assumed appears reminiscent of prayer to the gods. In this way, one can suggest the king-subject relationship reflects that of the god-worshipper.

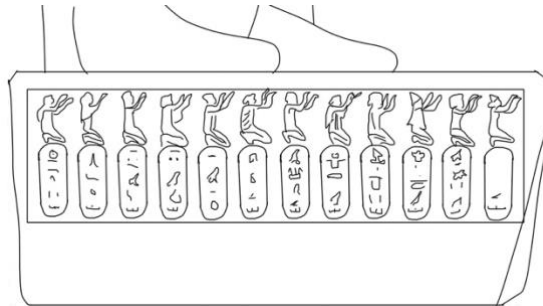


Figure 2.6 Left side of the base of the statue of Darius the Great. Susa. c.518-486 BCE. Author 2021.

However, figure 2.4 was created in the 5th century BCE, but this thesis has dated proto-Isaiah to c.7th century BCE. Using figure 2.4 alone, one cannot know that Isaiah was exposed to this image of harmonious unity when constructing Isa 16:5, despite being an appropriate image for iconographic exegesis. However, this concept of love and support was in the ancient mindset, evidenced by the earlier rendition in figure 2.5, demonstrating that this image was present during Isaiah's time, thus enabling the interpretation of Isa 16:5 as a communication of imperial and/or community support and unity. However, it is unlikely Isaiah would have given Egyptian images credence due to the contemptuous relationship between Nations. Despite this, there may have been some exposure to this images' use in the iconography of imperial support during the Exodus, thus Isaiah's use of such an image inverts the original intent of raising a human king to create an image of divine love and support. The necessity of support in the establishment of faithful communities is clear through the Isaian narrative of the YHWH and worshipper relationship and through these iconographic representations of raised enthroned kings on the fingertips of their subjects.

One can move between texts and images of different dates, tracing the usage and development of ideas and iconographic motifs in antiquity. These images/ideas are influenced by previous articulations of beliefs. Whilst there are variations of images, motifs are adapted and used over time and found their way into the standard iconographic language of the ancient Near East. However, as with modern beliefs, one

must be careful when imposing later ideas onto a text without knowing that these ideas/images were present in the ancient mindset when crafting the text. Historians should be aware of their own biases and move to understand the images' original intent. This imposition of ideas includes later ancient concepts onto a society, such as Achaemenid iconography on Isaiah's Jerusalem, thus one must be careful when using later images in the iconographic approach and consider whether such ideas can also be applied to an earlier society. Furthermore, images have no fixed interpretation because the audience brings their own cultural baggage to their views.⁶⁵ Despite both text and image being products of antiquity, without further evidence one cannot definitively prove that the same ideals were shared by the societies separated by the large temporal gap. Thus, when dealing with material distanced from one another, one must consider tracing them back to find commonalities in ideas to enable iconographic exegesis using later material to offer appropriate interpretations of the Biblical text. However, some perceptions could be deemed universal as they become part of the cognitive system.⁶⁶ In this way, interpretations can be passed down through generations and across societies as they become engrained into the cognitive system through societal influence, as evidenced through the recurrence of motifs across iconographic periods, enabling images to be traced back through time.

The Baal Cycle (ANET 129-35, 138-42) demonstrates the idea of the throne as a symbol of honour through the statement "Yea, overt]urn [the throne of thy] kingship!" (b.III AB C) and reiterating this message later – "[May'st thou be driven from the throne of thy kingship, From the seat of thy do]minion!" (c.III AB B-A). Through this, the throne becomes a symbol of the institution and power held by the king – through overturning the throne, the king's power is also destroyed. The return to the action of driving someone from the throne emphasises the symbolism attached to the seat – driving someone from the throne drives them from power. The later repetition of "thrones of princeship" highlights the role of the throne in establishing power and authority. The importance of the throne as a symbol and seat of power is evident

⁶⁵ Bal 2001, 71. This means care must be taken when using later material in the iconographic approach to create a historical rigorous case for its use through tracing its origins to suggest the image could have been considered by the author.

⁶⁶ Bahrani 2003, 151. Culturally constructed beliefs can become universally excepted ideas and can be understood through other contemporary evidence. In this way, they become part of the cognitive constructs in that society.

through the throne's use in mythological canon such as *Enuma Eliš* (ANET 60, 66-69, 514). This Akkadian creation myth cites the erection of a throne in connection with a pronouncement of the gods' powers and authority (tablet IV, line 1). This is furthered when Marduk is proclaimed king of the gods and given a "sceptre, throne and *vestment*" (tablet IV, line 28-29). The conferral of these royal symbols demonstrates Marduk's investiture and role as king of the gods and thus king of all. Tablet VI, line 53 returns to the idea of a throne as a resting place for king Marduk built by those who serve (the Anunnaki), intrinsically connecting it to the institute of kingship. In this way, the nations underneath the throne in figures 2.4-6 could be considered like the Anunnaki who build Marduk's throne – they both symbolise support of the king. Kingship and the throne are clearly and intrinsically connected throughout the ancient Near Eastern textual mythology, reflected in depictions of enthronement in the iconographic record. This significance of the throne reappears in the Biblical texts and is highlighted in 1 Kgs 10:18 and 2 Chr 9:17-18 through the lavish description of the physical throne. The descriptions indicate the decadence one connects with royalty, conjuring images of an opulent court centred around the personhood of the king, reflected in all the trappings (and symbols) of royalty, including the throne.

The throne room itself emphasised the closeness of the king and the gods.⁶⁷ Thrones raised the king higher than his people, thus elevating him closer to the divine realm, emphasising the closeness of their relationship through their proximity. The king was the god's viceroy on Earth; not a god himself, thus the throne signifies this special relationship. This contrasts with the Egyptian Pharaoh who was believed to be a god as evident through their relationship with a god as a child, such as sitting on their lap or suckling at their breast. This link between royalty and the throne is apparent in tablet VI, line 93 of *Enuma Eliš* through the appearance of the throne before the gods,

⁶⁷ Radner 2015, 102. The Assyrian king was not divine himself but the faithful servant of Assur, the true king (Scurlock 2013, 155.) Egyptian divine birth scenes reinforced the king's divine right to rule, becoming a standard motif in Egyptian royal propaganda (the outer walls Hatshepsut's temple, Dier el-Bahri (accessible to all) and Amenhotep III's birth room, deep inside the Luxor temple (accessible only to priests)) (see Leprohon 2015, 314.) This close relationship was emphasised through depictions of kings surrounded by winged genies or anthropomorphic beings in scenes of sacred rites and life at court (see Bahrani 2017, 233.) Whilst the king is human, he has a divine role as indicated through his depiction in conjunction with the gods, unlike any other human figure (see Baines 2015, 7.)

enabling one to read the connection between the human and divine in the throne itself. One can get a sense of the ritual that accompanied the throne room in figure 2.7. The enthroned king is central to the scene, reflecting his centrality to society. The throne itself is elaborate and placed on a platform, metaphorically and physically raising the king above his subjects and attendants. Through the throne and footstool, no part of the king touches ground, indicating his divinely ordained authority and therefore his place above the ‘ordinary mortals’ of the empire. Thus, the footstool can be interpreted as a symbol of royal power alongside the throne itself.⁶⁸

The footstool is used as a metaphor/symbol for defeated enemies in Ps 110:1, reflecting the idea that it can symbolise royal authority. Thus, one could suggest figures 2.4-6

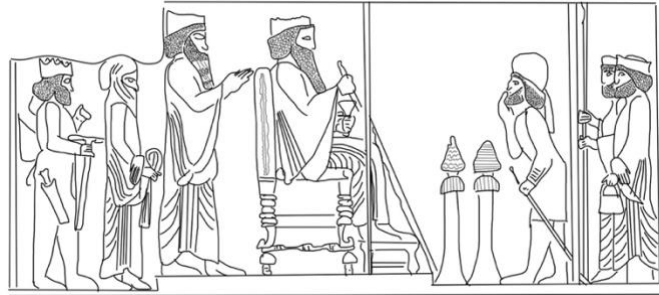


Figure 2.7 Darius I and Xerxes I give audience. Stone relief, Persepolis. National Museum of Iran, Tehran. Author 2021.

could be interpreted as defeated nations lying beneath the king’s feet as they are brought into the empire. The only person who comes close to the king in figure 2.7 is the crown prince, reflecting his status and power as the next ruler in an articulation of the continuation of the dynasty. Furthermore, the importance of the throne as a seat of justice is emphasised in Prov 20:8, emphasising the connection with the throne thus reinforcing the image created in Isa 16:5. Through justice, a society is ‘winnowed of evil’, leaving room for the love and faithfulness attached to the Isaian throne. Through this, one can reinterpret the Isaian material as a hierarchical message. Isa 19:1 physically places the metaphorical throne above all else through the equation with a cloud, thus reinforcing the elevation provided by thrones in the iconographic record. Isa 22:23 reiterates this; the iconography demonstrates the ‘honour’ and therefore authority of the individual sat in the throne through the dispersion of the image. One can use the iconography to reinterpret this Isaian use of the throne because it is the king who resides on one; not the other members of the royal family (figure 2.7), thus demonstrating the inaccessibility of the ‘honour’ referred to in Isa 22:23. In this way, the iconography suggests it is the king who can access the divine through his close

⁶⁸ Sutton 2016, 58. This is emphasised through the Hebrew root word for footstool conveys ‘dominion’. Through this use of the footstool, the king stands on his fallen enemies (see chapter 5.3 on the ‘trampling motif’).

relationship with them (as demonstrated through his physical closeness through the raised throne), thus enabling the Isaian throne to be interpreted as a symbol of the exclusive king-divine relationship through the symbolic use of the throne.

However, Bonfiglio suggests one should interpret Isa 19:1 in line with depictions of a storm god.⁶⁹ Whilst this military image of a cloud chariot is a valid interpretation of Isa 19:1, in line with the images put forth in Zech 9 and Ps 104:3, this is a vision that comes from the interpretation of other Biblical texts and using Isaiah to bolster this. Isa 19:1 does include images of idols shaking in fear when facing YHWH, thus one could suggest these clouds are envisioned as a chariot in line with the seal of Darius (figure 5.18), communicating the warrior god/king image. However, the iconographic throne is used to raise the king closer to the divine realm, thus warranting an interpretation of Isa 19:1 as communicating height and hierarchy through the placement of the throne above others. Furthermore, the argument for the use of storm god imagery when interpreting Isa 19:1 comes from analysing the wider combat images in Zech 9, imposing the interpretations of warriors onto the Isaian narrative through the iconography of chariots. Whilst this is a valid form of interpretation through the idea of chariots as portable thrones (see chapter 5.5), when using the iconography of thrones in audience and presentation scenes, they are used to raise the king above his subjects and closer to the divine. Thus, through the iconography of enthronement, one can interpret the clouds of 19:1 as this enthronement motif of a supported and raised-up king in a communication of authority over his subjects and articulating the kingly relationships with the divine and human realms – as raised up, he exists between the two realms.

The difference in these readings of Isa 19:1 proves the multitude of interpretations that can be offered through iconographic exegesis. Whilst Bonfiglio's approach interprets the text through images of a warrior god/king, this thesis has approached Isa 19:1 through the iconography of enthronement. Both versions are valid approaches to the text and use aspects of royal ideology to articulate their interpretations, showcasing the ambiguity of language and the benefit of iconographic exegesis in offering

⁶⁹ Bonfiglio 2015, 236. Bonfiglio suggests the clouds should be read as YHWH's chariot in line with iconographic representations of storm gods wielding lightning bolts, thus YHWH's arrows are shot forth like lightning (Zech 9:13-14; Ps 104:3).

alternative interpretations. This differentiation may be influenced by the starting points of interpretation, offering different contexts. For example, using Isa 19:1 as a comparison to Zech 9 can bring different images to mind than beginning with the Isaian text because there are preconceived interpretations that are brought from Zechariah to Isaiah. However, the reading of the clouds as chariots from which YHWH shoots arrows could also be linked to their interpretation as a throne, raising YHWH above other powers through the conception of the chariot as a portable throne for use on campaign (see chapter 5.5). In this way, the clouds can be read both as a method of warfare in line with the use of storm god imagery, and the symbolic throne that places YHWH above all others.


The throne was a symbol, being used in person and in image to communicate certain messages about the king himself as well as the institution of kingship. It could symbolise a seat of honour, demonstrate authority and power and even be a metonym for the ruler themselves (2 Sam 3:10).⁷⁰ Esth 3:1 demonstrates the honour of the throne – despite being the antagonist of the book, Haman is honoured by being enthroned above the others. These basic symbols can be furthered to communicate messages about dynastic power.⁷¹ The longevity of the throne image demonstrates its perpetual power such as communicated through the stability of dynasty. This is contrasted by Isa 14:9 associating thrones with the kings through the past tense, limiting their power to the Earthly realm. Despite the positive connotations of the throne image, it can be twisted to symbolise power that does not last beyond the confines of the earthly realm.⁷² This limits the power associated with the throne to Earth, rendering it useless in *Sheol*, thus restricting the power and authority of the symbolic throne (Isa 14:9). This is contrasted to the supernatural characteristics and association of thrones,⁷³

⁷⁰ Hunziker-Kodewald 2015, 165. The throne becomes a symbol of power and authority, stated literally in 1 Kgs 1:46 (Solomon sits on the royal throne”) to the symbolic in 2 Sam 3:10 (“to transfer the kingdom from the house of Saul and set up the throne of David over Israel and over Judah, from Dan to Beersheba. These examples demonstrate the importance of the throne in articulating power and authority as well as indicating the honours attached to rulership. See Llewellyn-Jones 2013, 15-19 for discussion on Achaemenid succession titled ‘A prince among men: gaining the throne’.

⁷¹ Hunziker-Kodewald 2015, 165. Ideas of an eternal throne can establish dynasty as evident in 2 Sam 7:13,16. This image can be transferred to YHWH to demonstrate his power above all (Isa 6:1) and the heavenly throne implies eternal power (Ps 11:4; 103:19).

⁷² Hunziker-Kodewald 2015, 165-166. This idea of power ending after death is contrasted through Egyptian divine kingship where the Pharaoh was tied to the fertility of the Nile in life and death – it was believed his body would suffuse the soil with energy (see Redford 1992, 24.)

⁷³ Caird 1980, 11. Col 1:16 demonstrates this association, placing the thrones firmly within creation, suggesting their importance through their inclusion in the creation of the world.

emphasising the power yielded by the symbol through situating it in a sphere beyond the mortal realm. Isa 19:1 suggests a cosmic throne through the cloud rather than a material throne, demonstrating the limitations of human kingship to Earth through the contrast with divine power that overlooks everything, like clouds overlook the world. The importance of the throne itself is indicated through its prominent role in the *sed* festival where the main celebration is reminiscent of the tribute processions depicted on the apadana reliefs (see section 2.4) – the enthroned king receives pledges of loyalty before paying homage to the divine pantheon himself.⁷⁴ It is on the throne that the king receives his power from the gods and others pledge their loyalty to him. This idea is emphasised through the *sed* festival hieroglyph () being formed of two pavilioned thrones back-to-back, symbolic of the two ‘realms’ of Egypt that is also symbolised through two crowns (Upper and Lower Egypt).⁷⁵ Through this, the throne becomes integral to the king's proclamation of royal power – it formulates a key action in the recognition of his role as divinely-ordained king as well as his self-presentation of legitimacy and supremacy. Therefore, the throne becomes synonymous with royal power through its entwinement with the *sed* festival, celebrating kingship. In this way Isa 16:5 can be interpreted as a celebration of the characteristics of a good king who pays homage to YHWH.

The import of the throne is emphasised through the portable throne in the Assyrian coronation.⁷⁶ It was the coronation that enabled the king to rule; thus, the role of the throne is entangled with power symbols and the visual language of royal authority. The chariot could be interpreted as a portable royal throne (see chapter 5.5), indicating the importance of communicating power and status, including leading or watching battles and hunting. This placed the king above the other soldiers and could stand in

⁷⁴ Frankfort 1978, 83-84. The *sed* festival commemorated the accession as well as the rejuvenation and renewal of the institution of kingship. Using thrones in the festival, unites the realm under Pharaoh who is in turn united with the gods. This is communicated through approaches to the throne by Sobek and princes as well as demonstrations of loyalty before the throne, thus indicating the throne could be read as a synonym for royal power.

⁷⁵ Frankfort 1978, 85. The dual throne emphasises Pharaoh's complete control over Upper and Lower Egypt. This idea is also demonstrated at the coronation, in which the king sits on the four thrones facing the four cardinal points in a proclamation of his sovereignty to the whole world (see Fairman 1958, 84-85).

⁷⁶ Frankfort 1978, 246. The king was transported to the temple on a portable throne where he gave expensive gifts to Assur such as gold bowls of expensive oil and embroidered robes. The portable throne demonstrates the king's authority and its attachment to the journey to the temple demonstrates that he rules as a kind of ‘heir’ of the gods.

as a throne whilst on campaign. The use of the portable throne continued with the Achaemenid king being carried around on a dias.⁷⁷ In this way, there was a continued articulation of the king's power in the peripatetic court as he was made visible to all his subjects whilst enthroned. Whilst the moveable throne enabled the king to communicate his power around the realm, the static throne was also of symbolic value through its connection with the gods. This is demonstrated through the enthronement of the Egyptian crown prince, rising him to the divine realm.⁷⁸ Through this process power is transferred to the crown prince upon his accession to the throne itself. The throne becomes central to the Egyptian perception of divinely ordained royal power and legitimacy through the importance placed on the physical action of raising the crown prince to the throne upon his accession. This is emphasised through the depiction of mythical creatures and minor deities on the vertical struts of throne, raising the king to the cosmic realm.⁷⁹ In this way, the throne emphasises the king's place in the divine and earthly realm, acting as a bridge between the two. This idea places the king above these beings, thus suggesting he 'ranks' above them in the hierarchical order of the cosmos. Figure 2.8 further

demonstrates this relationship through the depiction of the queen worshipping an enthroned cult statue of Ishtar. The throne rests on a lion (another royal symbol), emphasising Ishtar's authority over the human realm. The enthronement of the divine on creatures is also evident in figure 2.9, Ashur and Adad stand upon mythical creatures before human figures. Through this standing 'enthronement' the gods are physically raised above the other figures, emphasising their power



Figure 2.8 Gold stamp seal of Queen Hama, from Tomb 3, Nimrud. Reign of Sargon II (722-705 BCE). Author 2021.

⁷⁷ Root 1979, 160. Sennacherib is said to have taken a portable throne to receive homage from those captured during battle (see Baker 2013, 157.) The Achaemenid ancestry was nomadic, thus the need to move reside in their psyche as well as fulfilled the purpose of ensuring the functionality of imperial lands and putting the king on view (see Llewellyn-Jones 2013, 74-95.)

⁷⁸ Engnell 1967, 5. All those under royal control are transferred to the crown prince who recognise him as the new king and swear allegiance. Through the throne, the crown prince is recognised as king and confirms the rank that he already held in an explicit articulation of his authority.

⁷⁹ Root 1979, 150. Through the appearance of mythical creatures and minor deities on the throne as opposed to nation peoples, one can suggest the king is raised to the divine realm as his role in the maintenance of cosmic order is highlighted.

in conjunction with the royal and divine attributes they wield (ring, staff, axe, and lightning bolts). This demonstrates the symbiotic relationship between royalty and the divine as they interact closely within the scene, with only the divine attributes and mythical thrones to delineate between them. Isa 16:5 and 22:23 can therefore be reinterpreted

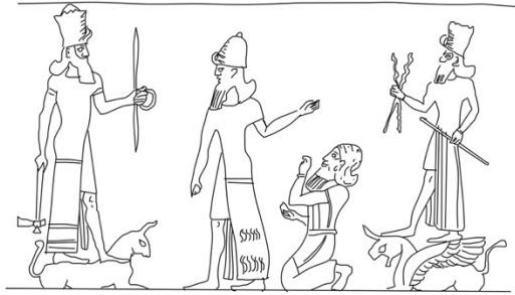


Figure 2.9 Ashur and Adad, Impression C. Author 2021.

through the iconography as symbols of the synergetic relationship between the earthly and divine – YHWH places kings on a throne that he has established in accordance with his vision of the messianic king. However, these positive connotations of the throne can be reversed; thus, the loss of the throne symbolised despair and powerlessness.⁸⁰ This directly contrasts the emotions of Isa 16:5, emphasising the significance of thrones as symbols of the stability and order of the nations. In this way, the throne is an important symbol of kingship and therefore the ordered world because it was the king’s role to maintain order as the gods’ viceroy on Earth.

The idea of “riding on a swift cloud” (Isa 19:1) is supported by descriptions of the Canaanite god Baal/Hadad as ‘rider of the clouds’.⁸¹ This suggests the cumulus act as some kind of chariot, thus can be read as a portable throne. Portable thrones have continued significance through variations in modern-day British monarchy’s state visits, carrying the monarchic image around the nations under the auspices of the crown. Elizabeth I (1558-1603) travelled around the British Isles, either personally (which enabled money to be saved at the behest of the privy council by staying with local elites) or her image through sending portraits to her subjects. This demonstrates the importance of the royal image in articulating and reinforcing their power, reminding their subjects that they are in charge. In this way, Baal rides his throne through the skies from where he can see all beneath him. This separates Baal from the earthly realm, placing in the higher seats of authority both physically through being in

⁸⁰ Baker 2013, 157. The attachment of such powerful emotions with the throne can be seen when El hears of his son, Baal’s death. El gets up from the throne and sits on the footstool, before moving again and sitting on the ground. This reduces El from the symbol of power and glory (throne) to the ground, the bottom of the cosmic hierarchy.

⁸¹ Baker 2013, 83. The idea of the portable throne can be traced to the nomadic roots of the Achaemenids and is evident through the moveable nature of their court. (see Llewellyn-Jones 2013, 74-95)

the sky and metaphorically through the mythic and divine ability to ride clouds. Lam 2:1 and 3:44 inverts this use of the ‘cloud’ instead using it to symbolise a barrier between YHWH and his people, reflecting on and reversing the divine use in Exod 13:21 to guide them out of the desert as a symbol of protection. Thus, the Isaian use of the ‘cloud’ can be interpreted either in the Exodus tradition of love and guidance or that of Lamentations, separating the king/YHWH from the people both physical (a barrier (Lam 3:44)) and reflecting the hierarchical implications of the king/subject and god/worshipper relationships – the lower cannot access the higher much like ordinary people could not access the king. A similar idea is evident in Enuma Elish tablet IV, line 50 (ANET) – Marduk rides a storm-chariot, reflecting the use of chariots as a portable throne, in his role as king of the gods when fighting Tiamat. There are no exemplars of a ‘cloud throne’ in the iconographic record, however figure 2.10 gives a sense of the intended image. This winged sun disk with a seated male figure represents a key Zoroastrian god, Ahuramazda, and appears frequently above the king in Achaemenid iconography as a symbol of divine authority and protection. Iterations of the sun disk itself are evident across the ancient Near East, demonstrating the importance of this ‘throne’ in communicating messages of divine authority. Through these representations, Isa 19:1 gains new meaning, suggesting divine power watching over the mortal realm.

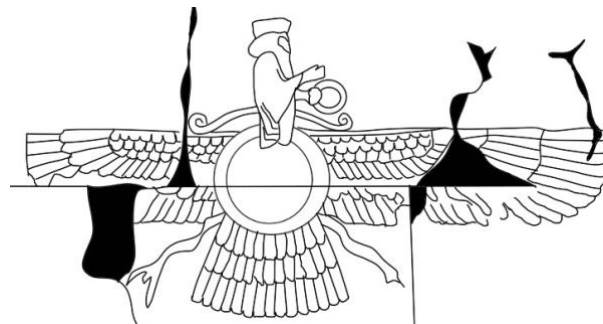


Figure 2.10 Stone carving of Faravahar in Persepolis. Author 2021.

The throne was a vital method of communicating royal power and authority through the physical and metaphorical separation of the king from his subjects. Iconographic renditions of the throne are used in ceremonies/events of significance here the king’s place at the top of the human hierarchical chain is reinforced. These range from tribute processions/receiving audiences (figure 2.7) to the aftermath of battle, receiving booty

from the defeated city (figure 2.11). The throne in figure 2.11 raises Sennacherib a head above the rest, reinforcing the message of his power upon the successful Assyrian siege of Lachish. This is in line with the propagandistic expression of authority found across the ancient world. This superior sizing is reinforced through the action in the relief, Sennacherib is presented with prizes in a lavish depiction that contrasts the disturbing images of warfare elsewhere in the relief. The receipt of war booty itself articulates the destruction of the fallen enemy, their



Figure 2.11 Sennacherib receives booty of Lachish, wall panel 12, room XXXVI, Southwest palace, Nineveh. 700-692 BCE. The British Museum 124911. Author 2021.

treasures (and bodies) become trophies of the king's victory, removing their personhood and identity, reducing them to mere objects. In this way, the throne heightens the sense of total power in these triumphant scenes, identifying the king from the surrounding mass of figures and ultimately attributing the victory to him. The Isaian throne can therefore be reinterpreted as an identifying feature of the messianic king (Isa 16:5; 22:23) through the characteristics attributed to the throne image within the text. This can also apply to Isa 19:1, suggesting the throne of clouds places the YHWH above the Earth which holds up the throne and divine authority (as articulated for royal power in the atlas pose (figure 2.4)). The iconography casts new light on the Isaian use of the throne, elevating its importance within the text and emphasising the messages of power Isaiah communicates for the future messianic king.

2.4 Nations, Peoples and Subjects – 17:12-13 “Ah, the thunder of many peoples’ they thunder like the thundering of the sea! Ah, the roar of the nations; they roar like the roaring of mighty waters! The nations roar like the roaring of many waters, but he will rebuke them, and they will flee far away, chased like chaff on the mountains before the wind and whirling dust before the storm; 18:7 “tribute will be brought to the Lord of hosts”; 20:3 “As my servant Isaiah [...]”

The nations formed an integral part of the imperial structure and hierarchy and were subject to the great king. Not only were they of import to the historical narrative, but also to Isaiah's prophetic message, especially in the Oracles. Within Isa 14:24-24, the nations provide structure to the Isaian narrative, with each chapter issuing messages against specific peoples. Through this structuring, Isaiah communicates YHWH's total rebuke of all nations who go against his word, thus framing the prophetic narrative to include the entire ancient world. This emphasises biblical messages of YHWH's power through the inclusion of the nations subjected to his judgement.

The relationship between the king and his subjects could symbolise the synergetic relationship of the gods and worshippers.⁸² This further associates the king with the gods as through their connection in the iconography. This reflection of the human and divine is evident through the symmetry in figure 2.2 – the god and king reflect one another in an articulation of the kings' divine right to rule. In this way there is a certain camaraderie between the kings and the divine,⁸³ demonstrating their close relationship and thus enabling a comparison between the king/subject and divine/worshipper constructs. Through the equation of the subject nations to worshippers, one gains insight into the functional relationships of the ancient world. This can be read through the royal tribute processions, indicating the process of giving offerings to the gods and transferring it to the gift-giving or taxation given to the king. The extent of the nations is highlighted in the title 'King of the Four Quarters' (CB §20), demonstrating the king's claim of authority over and familiarity with nations beyond the home.⁸⁴ The idea of 'four quarters' encompasses the whole world ($4/4 = 100\%$) thus one can argue that through this title, the king lays claim to everything and ultimate power and control over his empire. This idea is further articulated in Egyptian titlature – 'King of Upper and King of Lower Egypt'; 'The Two Ladies'; 'The Two Lords'.⁸⁵ The King

⁸² Caird 1980, 177. Divine and human sovereignty grew and adapted in parallel with the ideal king closely associated with God through the idealisation of kingship to conform to the standards of divine sovereignty (Caird 1980, 178-182).

⁸³ Llewellyn-Jones 2013, 21. This "reciprocity" is evident in ancient Near Eastern iconography (as demonstrated in figure 2.2-3; 2.7 through the depictions of royalty and divine in the same space on the same level). This is emphasised in DSk – "*Ahuramazda is mine; I am Ahuramazda's*", demonstrating an intimate relationship between these two spheres in the cosmos.

⁸⁴ Ataç 2013, 393-4. This could be taken further to suggest the king aims to bring other nations under the auspices of his empire.

⁸⁵ Frankfort 1978, 21. 'The Two Lords' resembles the eternal enemies, Horus and Seth; thus, the King represents them both in a message of balance. In this way, Egyptian titlature explicitly connects the king to the 'unity' and cooperation of upper and lower Egypt that he champions. Furthermore, his titles

embodies/represents the country (as emphasised through the dual crown of upper and lower Egypt) as well as communicating messages of balance. Through the royal titlature, kings articulated the expanse of their control therefore displaying the power they wielded over their subjects. In this way, the king held sole human authority in the ancient world,⁸⁶ emphasising hierarchical order and enabling a reading of the Isaian use of nations as a synonym for royal power and empire. The relationship between the king and his subjects is depicted as a “cooperative effort of voluntary support of the king by subject people”.⁸⁷ The idea put forward here by Root is supported in the atlas poses across the ancient Near East (figure 2.4-5; 2.9), personified versions of peoples under imperial control lift the enthroned king in an action of support. Such images were designed specifically to communicate the sacred and important relationship between the king and his subjects. The framing of these images puts forward the idea that this is a voluntary action rather than imposed. In this way, the Isaian nations bringing tribute (Isa 18:7) can be interpreted as this ‘voluntary support’ depicted in the iconography.

The rebuke of the nations in Isa 17:12-13 can be read as the royal punishment of rebellious peoples. Punishment in the iconography can be seen in the smiting scene (figure 2.12), communicating the king’s all-conquering power of any who oppose him.⁸⁸ Through these scenes, the king symbolically repels chaos (the nine bows) thus reinforcing his position as the gods’ representative on Earth and his protection of his people from chaotic



Figure 2.12 Relief, Hypostyle Hall, Temple of Ramesses II, Abu Simbel. 1274-1244 BCE. Author 2021.

demonstrate his role in keeping cosmic order and thus his importance in the hierarchical society of establishing structure and maintaining a relationship with the divine realm.

⁸⁶ Frankfort 1978, 52. This can be emphasised through the throne – only the king (and perhaps the Crown Prince) could sit in the royal throne from which they would enact their power and authority. Whilst kings had access to royal councils/advisors, ultimate responsibility fell to him as the god’s satrap on Earth.

⁸⁷ Root 1979, 131. This idea is prevalent in the apadana reliefs of tribute procession as well as the enthroned king raised up by the nations at Persepolis.

⁸⁸ Leprohon 2015, 312. Nine represented entirety in the ancient world, thus the nine bows represent the complete destruction of all of Egypt’s enemies (see Sutton 2016, 61.)

outside forces. Through representations of peoples in the nine bows of figure 2.12, royal military might is expressed in a message against ‘all nations’ because of the adaptability and universality of the motif itself. The temple of Ramesses II is filled with the Pharaoh’s victories against peoples, demonstrating the importance of articulating royal military power in the iconographic record to communicate royal dominance over the nations. The rendering of groups of ‘enemies’ articulates the total power over peoples enacted by the king as he prepares to strike them all down. This is emphasised through the artistic scaling of figures – Ramesses towers above the kneeling representations of the nations. The combination of genuine scaling (even if they were standing the peoples would not equal Ramesses in height) and the kneeling, the iconography accentuates the aura of royal power and authority. In this way, Isa 17:12-13 can be interpreted through the iconography as this universal ‘smiting’ of rebellious subjects. The king’s victories appear in an array of places,⁸⁹ detailing his triumphs in battle for all to see, widening the reception of the message of royal power. These victories were rendered in both image and text through relief sculpture and the royal annals, establishing kingship and communicating the rhetoric of authority to a wider audience beyond the court. Through the wide dissemination of these images, all the peoples under the auspices of the empire are subject to iconographic messages of kingly authority and might at the behest of the divine. These can be literal depictions of battle or symbolic, including the zoomorphism of the king’s enemies,⁹⁰ emphasising their danger and threat to the ordered world. Through the process of zoomorphism, the subordination and weakness of the king’s enemies is emphasised. Furthermore, this creates a parallel between depictions of military conquests and hunting trips, aligning the king’s prowess in both spheres. Through the royal subjugation of the wild, the iconography communicates the kings’ ability to subdue the chaotic and dangerous forces of the world that threaten order in conjunction with the cosmic subjugation by the gods. The prevalence of images of royal domination over peoples indicates the importance in communicating this authority to subject nations. Through the

⁸⁹ Leprohon 2015, 314. It was of vital importance to the kings to communicate their achievements and consolidate their power and position.

⁹⁰ Strawn 2015d, 71. The animals could be domestic and depicted as decapitated or butchered or they could be wild, dangerous, and hunted. This can be taken further through the Egyptian Pharaoh’s ownership of wild animals as pets as a display of royal power. Egypt and Mesopotamia legitimised royal power through the collection and presentation of animals. (see Chan and Metzler 2014, 198-199; 203; 205.)

iconography of imperial military domination, Isa 17:12-13 can be interpreted as these dynamic articulations of king/subject relations.

The comparison of the nations to chaff demonstrates their insignificance in this part of the Isaian narrative. Figure 2.13 demonstrates the winnowing process in which workers throw the threshed grain into the air, enabling the chaff to be blown away in the wind, thus separating it from the edible grain (see chapter 3.4).

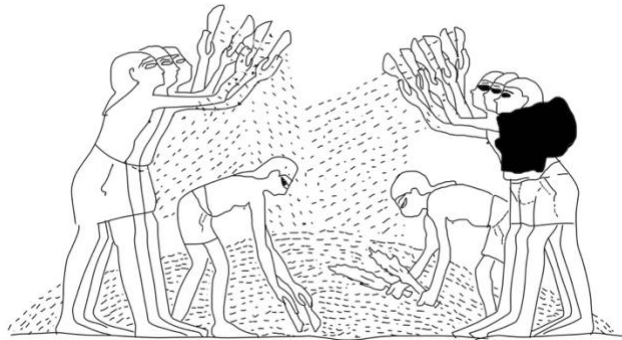


Figure 2.13 gives a sense of the chaff blowing away through the finite detail as it is thrown up and specks rain down again. Through this iconography, Isa 17:12-13 can be read as the nations' insignificance to YHWH's power through the ease of his rebuke as well as their irrelevance because of the rebuke itself – they are the immaterial to YHWH's vision because they strayed from the path.

Figure 2.13 Tomb painting: Sheikh 'abd el-Qurna. Tomb of Nakht. 18th Dynasty, 1570-1345 BCE. Author 2021.

Tributes and gift-giving were common practices in the ancient Near East and can be traced in the Biblical text (Isa 18:7; Isa 60). Tribute could take two forms: a tax or a gift,⁹¹ thus the Isaian tribute could be interpreted as either a gift of allegiance and appreciation or a 'tax' to ensure YHWH's continued protection. It is likely tribute was presented to the king in a ceremonial event (like the presentation on the apadana) with a specific protocol, placing the tribute processions into the iconographic and physical language of power and authority in the ancient world.



Figure 2.14 Stela in the tomb of Amenemone. Saqqara. late 18th Dynasty. Author 2021.

⁹¹ Root 1979, 227-228. The tax could be a regular payment or one-off under a specific treaty. This formed the economic base of power and was often monetary or precious raw materials. On the other hand, the gift was a symbol of gratitude and allegiance, praising the king for his role and power. These gifts were more symbolic and luxury items intended to please the king rather than restock the imperial coffers.

Figure 2.14 demonstrates one iteration of a form of tribute in which lines of people bring gifts to the seated figures. The use of scaling in figure 2.14 reflects the greater importance of those receiving tribute through their massive scale compared to the smaller tribute bearers on the right. In this way, Isa 18:7 gains new importance through the emphasis on the place of honour assigned to YHWH and through the inference of the nation's adulation to him through tribute. Gift-giving was a way of paying homage to a respected person (2 Kgs 17:4 demonstrates Hoshea's disloyalty through not providing tribute to Assyria),⁹² in a propagandistic articulation of national unity and hierarchical order indicating power

over others. In this way, the Apadana reliefs (figure 2.15) demonstrate a "hegemonic embrace played out as a national family",⁹³ illustrating the importance of gift-giving in representations of empire in communicating the unified



Figure 2.15 Lydian tribute delegation. East Stairs, Southern Part, Apadana. Persepolis. c.530-486 BCE. Author 2021.

conception of empire in the iconography. In this way, the apadana demonstrates an idealised depiction of the imperial structure. Isa 18:7 can therefore be read through the iconography, bringing forth messages of familial care/affection – the nations are YHWH's children. The Apadana reliefs depict the nations of the empire streaming (Isa 66:12) to Persepolis to give tribute to the Achaemenid king. The hand-holding image on the far right of figure 2.15 can be interpreted in several ways, from a symbol of unity to that of control and coercion.⁹⁴ The rendering of the handholding could suggest the control of the usher over the ambassador through the appearance that their

⁹² Baker 2013, 82. An Aramaic inscription (c.733-727 BCE) states "My father, Pana[muwa, son of Ba]rsur, brought a gift to the king of Assyria" indicating a precedent for gift-giving/tribute in the ancient Near East. This is emphasised by Thutmose II (fifteenth century) receiving tribute from Cush as well as 2 Kgs 5:15 reference to giving presents. During the reigns of Hatshepsut and Thutmose III, one can find depictions of foreign peoples bringing gifts to Pharaoh on wall paintings in tombs of Theban officials. However, these Egyptian 'tribute processions; seem to be related to trade rather than militarily imposed. (see Root 1979, 240; 248)

⁹³ Root 2003, 55. Through the nations coming from across the empire, the apadana depicts the extent of the king's power as they come to pay homage to him. This is emphasised through the bookending of the reliefs by the lion and bull motif, an insignia of royal power (Root 2003, 236).

⁹⁴ Root 1979, 267-271. However, there is also an association with religious scenes, therefore one can suggest the use of this image elevates the king to divine status by reflecting renditions of worshippers paying homage to the gods. Furthermore, in the Egyptian canon, the holding of hands appears when the deceased are led to have their souls weighed.

wrist is being held rather than the hand itself. This suggests a more forceful reading of the motif and suggesting the Isaian tribute could be interpreted as an enforced act as opposed to a willing notion of honour. However, this can be reinterpreted as a position of guidance towards the king, returning to the peaceful unification intended to be portrayed. In this way, one can suggest the tribute procession can be read as a ceremony that determines the continued relationship between the king and subject nation, much like the weighing of the soul determines the continuation of the deceased journey in the afterlife. Isa 18:7 can be reinterpreted through the iconography depending on the reading of the hand holding motif. If this is interpreted as a peaceful and unifying image, the Isaian tribute procession becomes a message of joyful support of YHWH. However, if the contrary view is taken, Isa 18:7 transforms into a message of intimidation, suggesting tribute is given under duress. Furthermore, each delegation depicted on the apadana is distinguished through their national dress and the gifts they bring, creating a sense of universal power and unity as they all march towards the king led by an Achaemenid representative. Through these portrayals, the apadana uses the tribute procession to articulate the king's authority over the nations streaming towards him. In using the apadana iconography as a lens, Isa 18:7 can thusly be interpreted as an articulation of YHWH's all-encompassing power because of the tribute brought to him by all the nations.

The iconographic record often depicts attendants or 'servants' stood behind the king, servicing him by fanning or holding parasols as well as holding a variety of implements. Figure 2.16 is one example of this appearance in the iconographic audience scene. In this panel, Shalmaneser III stands before



Figure 2.16 Detail from the Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser III. 825 BCE. Nimrud. British Museum 118885. Author 2021.

a bowing embassy with attendants holding parasols and other paraphernalia to take care of the king and ensure his comfort whilst simultaneously articulating his superiority and power over others in the scene. Their placement behind the king symbolises their subservient role through the provision of services during an audience scene. However, in figure 2.16 the attendants are the same size as Shalmaneser III himself, suggesting one could argue they are on a similar level

because of their proximity to him and comparable scale. This accessibility (and visibility) could suggest the attendants can influence the king in the running, maintenance, and expansion of the empire. The scaling of figure 2.16 is unusual, breaking away from the convention of representing the king as larger to focus the viewers' attention on him. This use of scaling is evident in figure 2.1, the attendants are diminutive when compared to the king, thus they can blend into the background as the eye is drawn to royal power as the king literally dominates the space. In this way, the attendants are demonstrated as holding lesser power despite their physical proximity to the king, which suggests whilst they had access to him, their level of influence and power was minute. In this way, Isa 20:3 can be read as Isaiah's proximity to YHWH as his messenger whilst simultaneously emphasising the prophet's subservience to YHWH's greater power. Through the iconography, Isa 20:3 suggests that the Biblical servant should be read more like an attendant, suiting the king's (or YHWH's) personal needs. However, through this servant's nakedness, the image becomes less private and instead focuses on a general service to YHWH to enact his will, as well as lowering the servants status further. This contrasts with the more caring and intimate relationship of the servants with the king depicted in the iconography through their attentive provision of amenities.

2.5 Conclusion

Ancient Near Eastern kingship was prominent because of the power associated with and contained in the institution. The trappings of royalty could all be used as symbols of this imperial power through their application to the king, dynasty, and investiture process. Almost every piece in the iconographic record contains or is related to king and/or his court, emphasising the pertinence of the establishment in the ancient mindset. Power emanated from the king, with all victories and decisions being attributed to him in his role as the gods' viceroy on earth, maintaining order against the constant threat of chaos. The appearance of the king in the iconography further accentuates how his authority saturated society, holding him ultimately responsible for its functioning. The iconography enables these references to be understood and demonstrates how kings wanted their power to be communicated and received, informing our interpretation of the text. Kingship in Isaiah can effectively be

reinterpreted through the iconographic record, offering context to the broad images employed in the Oracles against the Nations. The iconography adds depth and offers alternative interpretations to the limited Isaian use of kingship within the Oracles. This restrained use of kingship by Isaiah is unusual when prophesying against the nations because of the import placed on the institution in ancient society. This is furthered through the symbolic position of kings as metonyms for their empires/countries/cities. Thus, one can suggest Isaiah's scant use of kingship can be interpreted as a deeper theological message – kings are inferior to YHWH's power and will fall along with their nations as predicted in Isa 14:24-24.

3 *Agriculture*

“If agriculture goes wrong, nothing else will have a chance to go right”

M.S. Swaminathan

3.1 Introduction

Agricultural images appear throughout Isaiah as metaphors for life and YHWH’s actions against or for humanity. The prevalence of agriculture in society is reflected through the heavy use of images and metaphors in texts across the ancient Near East. In the Isaian context, the ripening grape metaphor and vine images can be interpreted as YHWH’s pruning of the people of earth – he is removing the dead and obstructive vines (sin) from the fruitful.⁹⁵ In this way, the refuse becomes a metaphor for the sinful and those who stray from YHWH’s path and the remaining vines are YHWH’s people. According to the Gezer calendar, the month after the grain harvest was delineated for the pruning of vines, suggesting this removal process was of importance to the ancient life cycle thus, the metaphoric Biblical pruning can be read as a necessary step in YHWH’s care of the world. YHWH is often compared to a farmer, both in line with their tender care and cultivation as well as destruction, demonstrating the prominence of agriculture in the ancient world as well as the two-sided aspects of agrarian life. John 15:1-2 demonstrates the effective pruning to ensure abundance and fertility of the vine – through destruction, more fruit can be yielded. Isaiah’s use of these images provides insight into the viticulture of the ancient Near East because they draw on the agrarian reality that surrounded the author(s). Isa 5:6 demonstrates the importance of pruning through the imagery of briars and thorns taking over because of the lack of pruning. The prevalence of these images and metaphors reflects the centrality of agrarian life in the ancient world, without this many people would have starved.⁹⁶ The

⁹⁵ Baker 2013, 81. The pruning of unproductive shoots and irrelevant leaves and branches were removed to enable the fruit to access as many nutrients as possible through the reduction of diverted matter, allowing them to achieve best growth.

⁹⁶ Baker 2013, 105. Farmers were the backbone of society, indicating the importance and reliance on agrarian success (see also Walsh 2000, 44). Agricultural images often used to describe a lover in Akkadian poems (“The chief gardener of the pleasure-garden”) emphasising the erotic nature that can be evoked by agricultural images outside of the Biblical tradition as well as withing (ploughing fields is a common metaphor employed in literature). Women are also compared to agriculture – Ptah-Hotep

reliance on agriculture means they lived on a knife's edge, in constant danger from disruption from a variety of threats that could reduce or decimate their crops. Any natural disaster, from flooding to locusts and other pests, could ruin the fields and thus, livelihoods and food production for the year. Furthermore, crops were also in danger from invading forces trampling them and using them to feed themselves during the invasion. This demonstrates the vulnerability of agriculture despite the ancient reliance upon it for survival. This is contrasted in the Song of Songs where love and consummation take place in a vineyard, suggesting an erotic nature and interpretation of agricultural images. This indicates the importance of agriculture in the continual circle of life through the connotations with fertility and abundance. Furthermore, 1 Kgs 21:1-16 demonstrates the coveted position of vineyards and their importance to farmers through Naboth's refusal to give King Ahab his vineyard. This demonstrates that vineyards could be a status symbol and reinforced their importance to dynastic lines.

1 Sam 8:14-17 exemplifies the import of agrarian life through his fixation on the consequences of a new king on agriculture through taking a percentage of produce to feed himself and his officials. This is furthered in Deut 20:6, allowing those who have planted a vineyard to return home from war to look after the crops as well as the parable of the sower in Mt 13:1-9, using agricultural images to communicate the differences between those who trust and wait in YHWH and those who abandon their faith. Furthering the significance of agriculture, Deut 20:6 places it higher on the scale of societal importance than warfare, the activity that protects agrarian land from invaders, emphasising how vital agriculture was to survival and the functioning of society. The eminence of agriculture in the ancient world is also demonstrated through invading forces attacking crops and the ability to use them to end the battle (2 Kgs 18:31-32) through the provision of sustenance in exchange for surrender. Water, grain, wine, and oil formed the basics of human life,⁹⁷ accentuating the reliance of civilisation on agriculture through the production of these basic foods. Life was dependent on the

states he loves his wife because "she is a profitable field for her lord". Furthermore, letters from the king of Byblos, Rib-Hadda found in Armana include a proverb that compares women to a field four times. (see Baker 2013, 25.)

⁹⁷ Botica 2013, 109. The annual cycle of rites was associated with Baal's life to appease them, enabling the continuation of the seasons and thus production and harvest. In appeasing the gods, the basics of life were provided in abundance, facing off desolation. Water, ears of barley, goats and sheep were the basis of agricultural life.

land and ability to grow crops – they worked the land to survive and existence revolved around the ability to provide food and could overturn in an instant. The pressures of living in an agrarian society imbued every aspect of society in the ancient world,⁹⁸ informing work and social actions as indicated in the Gezar calendar, as well as the activities and work required in the fields and vineyards. Agrarian life was reliant on water supply and the inundations of the Nile, Tigris and Euphrates enabled water to be carried to crops through irrigation channels.⁹⁹ This enabled more sustainable arable land to encourage settlements and the expansion of civilisation through the provision of fertile territory. Ezek 17:5-8 emphasises the importance of abundant water and fertile soil in good vine growth, indicating the importance of the floods in ensuring the continued fertility of the land. Whilst these inundations were vital to crop growth, it contributed to the delicate line of agricultural vulnerability the ancients lived on – if there was too little or too much water, crops could dry up or flood, destroying the yield. There was likely a tense mood whilst waiting for the harvest and how much fruit would be yielded because of this vulnerability. In this way, the harvests were celebrated with great feasting and joy. This is also seen in Gen 40:10, the blossoming vine connotes fertility and abundance.

Fields and vineyards were key markers of settlement in the ancient world because of the requirement to provide sustenance and building materials. This could lead to territorial behaviour over land because of its importance in providing survival essentials. The parable of the vineyard (Mark 12:1-12) demonstrates the importance of having land and the ability to grow produce – the tenants beat and kill any who come from the owner to claim fruits so they can keep the land and yields. The violent acts to maintain access to the crops and the continued yields demonstrates the high stakes surrounding agricultural success and ownership. This further highlights the power and status attached to land ownership through the renting of land rather than the owners working it themselves, suggesting the status acquired from ownership was

⁹⁸ Savard et. Al 2014, 5. Food had a public and private role, permeating all life in society. Without food, society cannot develop. Small farmers relied on grain and animal husbandry and paid a tax to a central government. In these alluvial cultures, this agriculture was based on rivers and inundations, giving the soil a certain dependability of yield (see Walsh 2000, 25).

⁹⁹ Walsh 2000, 22-24. The Nile inundation was more predictable than the Mesopotamian rivers, however if there was too much or too little rainfall/flooding, that years' crops were in danger of desolation. These inundations made the ground silty, making the ground perfect for vine growth (clay, silk, and sand). However, dew could save plants during the dry seasons. (see Ryken et. al 1998, 429;728.)

more important to the elites who could use it as an articulation of power and method of control whilst others laboured the land in exchange for produce. However, this was not always the case, in owning land, the ancients were able to have a sustainable lifestyle,¹⁰⁰ providing for their families through their crops and trading proportions of their yields for other essentials or crops to diversify their diets. However, this also depended on the whims of nature as well as unforeseeable accidents such as invasion. This demonstrates the calibre of agriculture in the ancient world, reflected by the vast amount of agricultural imagery employed in the Oracles against the Nations and the Bible as a whole.

3.2 Agriculture in the Isaian and wider Biblical Context

Agricultural images are a common occurrence in the Biblical text, relating metaphors to the wider social and cultural contexts. Through this use, Biblical messages are intrinsically tied to the broader world as well as inter-connecting books within the text. Within Isaiah, agricultural images form recurring motifs, tying the book together and formulating continuous references and interpretations in the reader's mind. Hos 9:2 reflects the Isaian inversion of agricultural images to symbolise desolation – contrary to the usual stance of agriculture as symbolic of a pastoral idyll. The image in Hos 9:2 is the antonym of Joel 2:24, demonstrating the Biblical inclination towards agricultural images to convey messages of destruction and punishment as well as preservation and prosperity.

One of the most significant images within Isaiah, was that of the vineyard, recurring multiple times throughout the book, extending to the wider Hebrew Bible and New Testament. This image is often found in Isaiah, stressing the importance placed on the metaphor by the prophet. This was a versatile image, being manipulated to suit the message – from abandonment and desolation to fruitfulness, the vine (and wine production) metaphors and parables were employed to articulate a variety of messages. Isa 5:1-7 dedicates itself to the metaphor of the destroyed vineyard, becoming an allegory for Isaiah's message of judgement. The vine is often used in this way as a

¹⁰⁰ Waters 2015, 6. Agriculture structured life with the seasonal tasks required to maximise yield. Whilst this was labour intensive, they could mostly rely on themselves for survival.

metaphor of the Israelites (Ps 80:8-18 uses the vine as an extended metaphor after the Egyptian exile). Isa 5:1-7 uses this metaphor to demonstrate the corruption of the Israelites because the vine “yielded wild grapes”, highlighting they are outside the ordered and controlled world of creation. Through this connotation, Isaiah’s message of YHWH’s heartbreak is emphasised because of the time and labour put into vineyards (Lev 25:3) leading to wild grapes despite YHWH’s love. Through the descriptive destruction of the vineyard in Isa 5, the prophet communicates his message of YHWH’s judgement on Israel for corruption, foreshadowing the later Assyrian and Babylonian invasions which will destroy Israel as YHWH’s weapons to destroy the vineyard. This reversal of fortune due to corruption is emphasised through the paronomasia in Isa 5:7 - “and he looked for justice, but behold bloodshed; for righteousness, but behold, an outcry!”. The Hebrew for justice (*mišpat*) and bloodshed (*mišpah*) as well as righteousness (*tsedeqah*) and outcry (*tse’aqah*) demonstrate this paronomasia – contrasting the positive and negative, creating a confusing amalgamation of ideas and reflecting the disorientation caused by the punishment. This idea of the cultivated vine becoming and being taken over by the wild is furthered in Isa 7:23 – echoing the fall from grace to desolation. These images of wilderness reclaiming the ordered can be argued to symbolise self-imposed destruction (production of wild grapes) or external combatants destroying the civilised (briars and thorns). The removal of hedges in Isa 5:5 could be symbolic of YHWH’s removal of leaders as punishment. The violent vineyard image returns at the end of the book (Isa 63:2-3) with the disturbing image of popping heads like grapes in a winepress. Isaiah’s use of red-stained garments and the winepress provides a clear interpretation of the violence, enabling a visceral response from the reader. Ezek 19:12 further the wrathful attachment to bare and plucked vineyards, demonstrating the versatility of the vineyard metaphor. This idea of unproductive and bare vineyards as punishment is evident in Joel 1:7 – a swarm of locusts destroys the vineyard and fig tree. These are symbols of YHWH’s provision of prosperity and peace; through their destruction by pests, Joel demonstrates the loss of safety before YÔM YHWH – echoing the message of punishment in Isaiah. Num 20:5 demonstrates the wickedness attached to the lack of vineyards (and other agriculture), emphasising the pessimistic symbols employed by Isaiah through the wild, unproductive, and bare vineyards. Neh 5 demonstrates the importance placed on the vineyards through the reluctance to sell them to survive, going further to emphasise this importance through their destruction

by attacking forces (Neh 9:25). The negative images of wild or destroyed vines are contrasted by fruitful imagery such as in Hos 10:1, connecting the fruitful city (vine) to the prosperity of society itself. This is reminiscent of the joyful vineyard under YHWH's protection of Isa 27:2-6. Biblical uses of gleanings are reminiscent of the Isaian remnant, giving a sense of hope for regrowth and rejuvenation – through the vine gleanings, one can interpret messages of anticipation for the New Jerusalem. The idea of the attachment of YHWH's protection to vineyards is emphasised in 1 Kgs 4:25, through the metaphor of the vine as a haven. Eccels 2:4 demonstrates this idea of the safety of the vine through its attribution to settlement and construction. Ezek 19:10 furthers the idea of safety through the vineyard's attachment to motherhood, connoting love and care that is needed both to grow the vineyard and from the mother to her children.

Isaiah furthers the use of agricultural images through the threshing motif as metaphors for divine punishment and the removal of sin. Beyond the Oracles against the Nations, Isaiah's use of threshing occur mainly in the pre-exilic text, with only one instance appearing after the Babylonian exile. The judgemental tone within the Oracles (and Isa 27:12) highlights the separation of the grain and chaff, representing the separation of the sinful from the good. Isa 28:27-28 reinterprets the contemptuous threshing metaphor, instead inferring a more personalised attack through the rod (v.27) and suggests an end to such punishment because threshing is not eternal (v.28). This deepens the interpretation of the threshing motif as judgement and punishment; however, Isaiah returns to this image in Isa 41:15 and inverts the metaphor to turn the punished into a threshing sledge themselves, making them the enactor of punishment rather than the punished. The attachment of the threshing floor with violence occurs throughout the Biblical text. 2 Kgs 13:7 connects the threshed chaff to Jehoahaz's army after their destruction at the hands of the king of Syria. A similar use appears in Am 1:3 and Hab 3:12 referring to threshed nations as a metaphor for their destruction in war. The violence continues in Jer 51:33, personifying a city and comparing it to a trodden threshing floor, heightening the vicious narrative connected to the threshing motif. 2 Sam 24:18-25 inverts the violent connotations of threshing, instead suggesting it was of religious importance through David's construction of an altar there. This story is reiterated in 1 Chr 21:18-28, further emphasising the importance of the threshing floor in ancient society. This is exacerbated in 2 Chr 18:9 through the

attribution of the threshing floor with thrones and an audience scene, focusing royal power on this agricultural apparatus. Ruth 3 further demonstrates the importance of the threshing floor in the scripture through the attachment with Ruth's redemption, suggesting it becomes a place of religious significance and purity.

Isaiah refers to a root more than any other Biblical book, crafting the image to symbolise the ancestral 'root' of the problem as well as ideas surrounding a remnant and hope for the future. Isa 11:1, 10; 27:6 and 37:3 refers to the image of a 'root' to communicate the beginnings of dynasty and the stability (through roots growing) and fruitfulness brought along with it, an image reiterated in 2 Kgs 19:30, demonstrating the Biblical predisposition to reuse images throughout the text. However, Isaiah also uses this image to articulate deep-set sin and punishment through the idea of rotten roots, recalling the phrase 'rotten to the core'. The Isaian use of the root demonstrates the versatility of agricultural images within the scripture that could be manipulated to convey specific chosen messages within the context. Deut 29:18 furthers the iniquitous root imagery through the idea that the root produces toxic fruit, placing the blame for sin firmly on it. This can symbolise leaders as the pillars that hold society together or ancestors from who generations grow. Job 14:8 inverts this image – even though the root grows old, there is still hope that it can blossom once again. This is contrasted later in the book by Job 18:16 suggesting the complete withering of roots and branches, indicating the duality of agricultural images in the Bible. The positive twist on the 'root' used by Isaiah is also evidenced in Prov 12:3; 12 where it is linked to righteousness and this immovability is emphasised – the virtuous cannot be outdone by the wicked.

3.3 Abundance and Joy vs. Desolation – 14:30 “I will kill your root with famine”; 14:31 “For smoke comes out the north”15:6 “the waters of Nimrim are a desolation; the grass is withered, the vegetation fails, the greenery is no more”; 15:7 “Therefore the abundance they have gained and what they have laid up they carry away”; 16:10 “And joy and gladness are taken away from the fruitful field, and in the vineyards no songs are sung”; 16:8 “For the fields of Heshbon languish, and the vine of Sibmah [...] have struck down its branches”; 17:10 “plant pleasant plants and sow the vine-branch of a stranger”; 24:7 “The wine mourns, the vine languishes, all the merry-hearted sigh”

Abundance and desolation contrast one another within the text, demonstrating the extremes of nature and their effect on the survival and everyday life in the ancient world. They are two sides of the same coin, thus they must be taken into consideration alongside each other, appraising the interplay between the two components. Abundance is celebrated for its providence whilst there is a palpable fear of desolation. These images emphasise the reliance on agriculture and nature in the ancient world. The Oracles against the Nations have a heavy emphasis on images of desolation rather than abundance and the joy brought with it, in line with the judgmental agenda of the Isaian narrative. One can suggest this heightens the tension within the text and the prophet’s message of the destruction of those who do not follow YHWH’s path. The attribution of YHWH’s whim, judgement, and love with effects on agrarian life illustrates the reliance on cultivation. Isa 14:30 illustrates this through sending famine to “kill your root”, reflecting the risks of famine when the weather turned against the farmers. Gen 41:27-36 cultivates these ideas through the contrast of seven years of abundance and seven years of famine, later demonstrating the effects of famine (Gen 42). Moreover, famine is implied during the pestilence of the livestock, killing them all (Ex 9:1-7).

The Aššur region was a ‘natural breadbasket’ with good soil,¹⁰¹ meaning it could produce abundant crops to feed the area as well as provide for the King’s table. The main crops of this region were barley and wheat, key items in the everyday diets of ancient peoples. The upper and middle registers of the Uruk (Warka) vase demonstrates the abundant crops being transported in baskets, bowls, and amphorae to Inanna/Ishtar, demonstrating how abundance was offered and fed to the gods as well as feed the people themselves (figure 3.1). This



Figure 3.1 Uruk Vase, upper register detail. 3000-2900 BCE. Uruk, Southern Mesopotamia. Author 2021.

illustrates Isa 15:7, carrying the abundance away from the field to the table. The transportation of grapes from the vineyard to the winepress could be done by carrying baskets in arms or on the back of donkeys (Am 8:1-2; Gen 49:11). This is further seen through the woven baskets in the *Iliad* 18:534-7. Throughout transportation, the grapes had to be handled carefully to prevent breakage and the development of organisms.¹⁰² In this way, treading was begun as soon as possible, once either the treading floor was full, or the vines were stripped. One can see this transportation further in figure 3.2, servants are laden with crops and produce to feed Mereruka in the afterlife; these depictions of offerings became the real. These images enable us to interpret Isa 15:7 beyond the simple act of carrying the crops away from the field for threshing, pressing, and distribution. Through the iconography of carrying baskets and bowls of offerings to gods and elites across the ancient Near East, one can now interpret Isa 15:7 as communicating offerings to a king or YHWH through their transportation away from the ordinary. Through this transportation, the crops become imbued with symbolism,

¹⁰¹ Radner 2015, 10. Ploughing loosens the soil ready for seeding (thrown or planting more carefully), this was labour intensive but vital to the income of the region through trade as well as providing food. (See Baker 2013)

¹⁰² Walsh 2000, 178. This development of organisms could begin the fermentation process before they reach the wine press. The process of harvest to treading was rapid because of the fragility of the grapes and the need to press the juices before fermentation develops. Straw could be used for animal food (Gen 24:25, 32; Judg 19:19) or could be used to make ceramics or bricks (Ex 5) (see Ryken et al 1998, 2757).

moving from normal sustenance to an offering of life. The abundance of crops ensures that all would be fed after this process and that the transportation of food to gods and important peoples was sufficient to ensure their protection and appeasement.

Deut 32:14 demonstrates the abundance that can be yielded from agriculture and animal husbandry to create luscious banquets. Figure 3.3 demonstrates this abundance through the pile of crops at a funerary banquet.

This guarantees Mentuwoser will receive food in the afterlife as well as a reassurance that he will be honoured and remembered. The vertical pile of food demonstrates an array of produce, highlighting the abundance of agrarian life, from meat reserved for elites to the standard barley and wheat to make bread. The use of funeral banquets and offerings are key in



Figure 3.2 Tomb of Mereruka, Saqqara. 6th Dynasty. Author 2021.

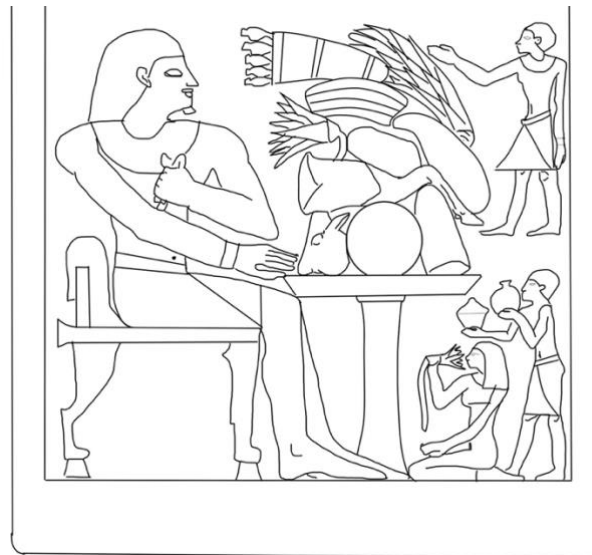


Figure 3.3 Lower half Stela of the Steward Mentuwoser, sitting at a funeral banquet. c.1944 BCE. Middle Kingdom. Abydos. Met Museum, 12.184. Author 2021.

the iconographic articulation of abundance, explaining their regular appearance. This also provides the opportunity to display the range of produce that was cultivated (and reared) in the ancient world. Figure 3.4 pairs the pile of food with the tasks and processes that led to their growth, harvest, and display at the funerary banquets and offering tables. The portrayal of every step from seeding through the harvest to threshing and winnowing enhances the joy attached to the offerings in the top left. Considering this, Isa 15:7 becomes imbued with the intense labour preceding the abundance that is carried away. However, these depictions of banqueting are aristocratic, coming from royal or elite tombs, thus this does not represent the ordinary experience of food consumption. In this way, the ordinary farmer would access what

remained after the crops were offered to gods, royalty, or elites. In this way, the iconography enables a reinterpretation of Isa 15:7 as the process of moving produce to give to elites and gods rather than to their own homes. Images of abundance are furthered through the comparison of Israel to crops (Jer 2:2-3) – YHWH's love goes into creating and 'growing'

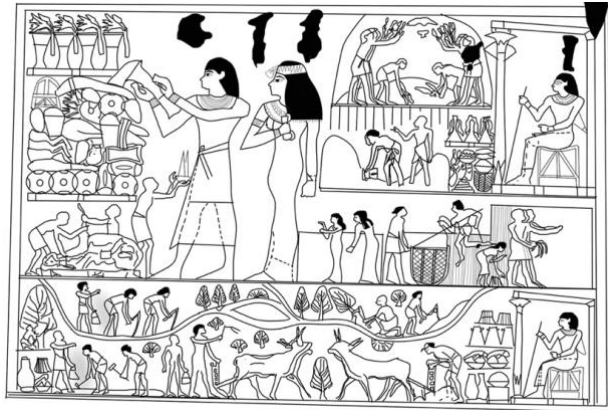


Figure 3.4 East Wall, South Side of Nakht's Offering Chapel. Thebes. 1410-1370 BCE. New Kingdom. Met Museum 15.5.19b Author 2021.

Israel; those that 'eat' (destroy and attack) it will incur his wrath. One can see the care that goes into creating such hearty yields in Nakht's offering chapel (figure 3.4), emphasising YHWH's work, and reinforcing the need to protect the yield. The amount of care put into caring for crops the import of agriculture, thus farmers would be keen to protect their food and livelihood. Abundance is also connected to fertility as demonstrated by Ezek 19:10, explicitly connecting the mother with blossoming vines and abundant water. This idea is evident in figure 3.5 where the goddess forms the trunk of the tree whilst presenting food and drink to the figures before her. One can argue this represents fertility and life through the goddess' attribution with the tree and presenting life-giving products to the kneeling people – the goddess gives life through these products and represents on-going life itself



Figure 3.5 Papyrus of Nesi-pa-ka-shuty. Louvre E1740. Author 2021.

through the embodiment of the tree. This enables us to reinterpret Isaiah's use of abundance as messages of fertility and life, suggesting a cycle of growth and harvest, thus proposing the continued favourable weather and conditions for bountiful harvests. Abundance goes beyond cultivation and applies also to animal husbandry as indicated in Job 1:3; 42:12, listing Job's vast number of animals and accrediting his greatness

to this (figure 3.6). This image of a line of donkeys demonstrates the importance of animal husbandry, both to help with threshing and harvesting but also as an image of wealth. One can use this image to visualise the enormous number of animals owned by Job, as well as demonstrate the extensive amount of power required to farm large areas of land through ploughing, threshing and transportation of goods. The importance of animals in the contribution to agriculture is highlighted in Gen 49:11 highlights the use of animals for transportation of wine (grapes) from the vineyard. One can suggest wealth and power was further connected with the number of animals and amount of land owned, emphasising the message in Job 1:3; 42:12. Figure 3.7 further emphasises the importance of animals, the lean figure leads his oxen; despite clearly needing nourishment himself, his animals are cared for and not harmed because of their usefulness as transportation and threshers. Images of animal abundance offers alternative interpretations for the text, suggesting this can be represented in a variety of ways, both cultivated produce and animals. The iconography stresses the importance of animals in articulations of power and the practicalities of agriculture. Thus, Isaiah's abundant image reveals sub-interpretations of the wider agrarian lifestyle of the ancient world beyond the traditional images of crops. Despite this, the lean herdsman depicted in figure 3.7 hints at desolation rather than abundance – his ribs are clearly visible, and his limbs are profoundly thinner than the figure on the left. This suggests the herdsman does not have and cannot access the abundance depicted in other tomb reliefs of offerings and funerary banquets, contrasting workers with the rich elites. Through this image of malnutrition appearing in an elite tomb, one can suggest this individual was offered as a contrast, emphasising Ukhhotep's power – he accesses the food and controls those who do not. Despite this subversion of the theme of abundance, agriculture is further connected to joy as demonstrated through festivals and celebrations attached to harvests throughout the agricultural year. Deut 6:11 attaches a vineyard to a good life along with a house and cistern, demonstrating the joy that can arise from fruitful labour and supply of produce. Ps 126:5 expedites the

connections of joy with agriculture and harvest – “Those who sow in tears shall reap with shouts of joy!” manifests the celebration attached to the harvesting season.

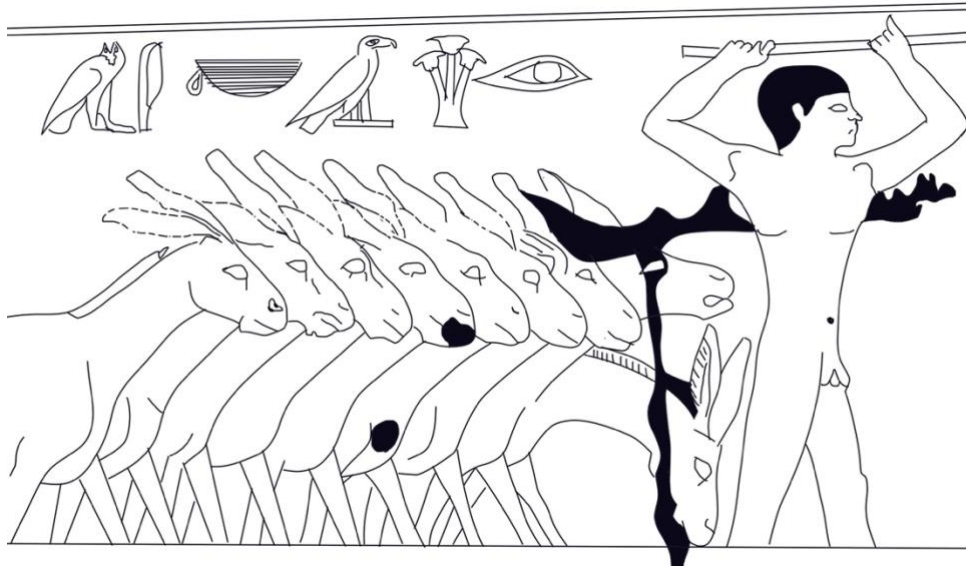


Figure 3.6 Relief from tomb of Mereruka, Saqqara. 6th Dynasty. Author 2021.

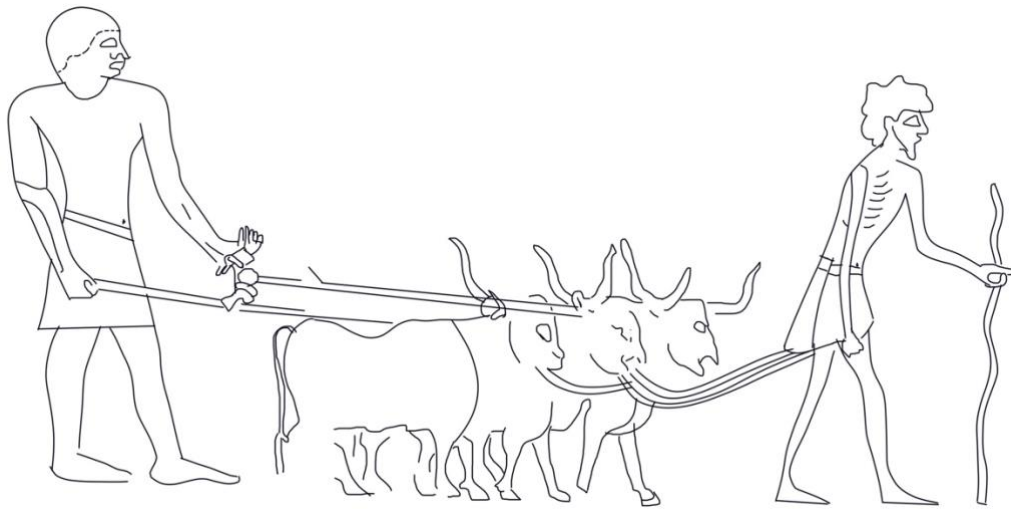


Figure 3.7 Relief from tomb-chapel of Ukhhotep II (B2), Meir. 12th Dynasty. Author 2021.

The abundant iconography is diametrically opposed to Isaiah’s language of desolation, thus offering a contrast when reading the text. Desolation is often associated with deserts, demonic power, and resistance against YHWH.¹⁰³ Desolation is described in

¹⁰³ Caird 1980, 149. The attachment of the lifeless and evil to desolate and abandoned places is evident in Luke 11:24 – “When the unclean spirit has gone out of a person, it passes through waterless places seeking rest”. The lack of water highlights the desolation because there cannot be agriculture where there cannot be a water supply and/or irrigation, attaching the ‘unclean spirit’ to such a place furthers

Isa 13:20-22, highlighting the inability of human habitation, leaving the dry and desolate land to the wild animals after its abandonment by humanity. Similar images are used later, as in Isa 34:13-15, furthering the images of wild animals taking over as a symbol of desolation – the human is overrun and taken back by nature. The idea of evil lying in desolate places is furthered in Mark 1:13 where Satan lies in the wilderness. This also has connotations of drought and famine which gave a brutal threshold to Israelite farmers. Unlike Egypt and Mesopotamia, ancient Israel lacked reliable water supplies meaning the small farmer's livelihood was reliant on dry farming,¹⁰⁴ this meant there was a constant danger of falling into famine and desolation. Low and varied rainfall combined with the few water courses resulted in a dangerous balancing act in agriculture. This diminished crop yields and could lead to widespread death through lack of food and dispersion of the population to find food elsewhere. In the Biblical text, famine is also implied through the image of an empty winepress and empty threshing floors (2 Kgs 6:27). The dangers represented by the paucity of water are indicated in 1 Kgs 18:5 – Obadiah must search the land to find water and grass for the horses and mules. This can be caused by YHWH as demonstrated in Jonah 4:7 through sending a worm to destroy the plant that he gave Jonah. Thus, one can suggest desolation becomes a punishment from YHWH for their lack of understanding and lack of labour and love. Furthermore, one can argue that desolation comes from the human dismissal of the natural providence of the land – Jer 2:12-13 demonstrates a turn away from the natural (fountains) to the constructed (cisterns) despite the failures of the manufactured. However, rain is often used as a metaphor for divine grace in the bible, the rains come from the heavens (Deut 11:11) and bless the earth, thus allowing for crops to grow to allow the land to be occupied and its people to survive. This contrast emphasises how a lack of water represents physical and spiritual desolation.

In the event of an attack, vineyards and fields are the first to be destroyed, thus leading to current and future desolation. Once they are destroyed, it will take another three to

the symbolism of desolation as a demonic/evil power: the evil spirit is desolate compared to the fruitful, good spirit following YHWH's path.

¹⁰⁴ Walsh 2000, 26. Average rainfalls across Israel varied greatly, Jerusalem had approximately 550mm per year; Mount Carmel 800-900mm per year; Upper Galilee had 1000-1100mm per year and Eilat had approximately 15mm per year. Desolation can further come from famine or crops being eaten and used by the enemy during invasions or nomadic raiding parties. (see Baker 2013, 49.)

four years for new vines to become fruitful.¹⁰⁵ A sixth century Athenian law states the punishment for destroying a vineyard was death, the same as robbing a temple, treason, and murder, elevating agriculture to the high status held by temples and equating the severity of its destruction with the reprehensible crimes. This is furthered in Deut 23:25 where it is stated you cannot cut your neighbour's corn. To prevent the desolation of vineyards, walls and watchtowers were constructed to keep out animals and hostiles and give a viewing point to keep watch on the area. Judg 6:3-6 demonstrates these attacks on crops and vineyards – the Israelite crops were constantly being destroyed by others who came “like locusts”. This furthers the correlation between the enemy and pests, both of which can devastate crops that are key to survival, thus leading to desolation. Not only would this devastate the crop yield, but also require vast amounts of labour, care, and love to resolve.¹⁰⁶ The amount of work put into vineyards demonstrates their connection with settlements and indicates some economic stability which in turn brought joy, celebration, and relaxation through the assurance of survival as well as the intoxication brought by wine. The destruction of the vineyard can also extend to those that produce bad fruit (Isa 5:5-7) because it is unusable despite producing fruit. These ideas of desolation are furthered through active destruction of agriculture and vineyards. Ps 80:12-13 depicts a combination of abandonment (v.12 – “Why then have you broken down its walls,”) leading to active destruction by nature (v.13 – “The boar from the forest ravages it, and all that move in the field feed on it.”). In this way, desolation results from a combination of human inaction and abandonment and the active movement of nature, taking back the constructed. Young olive trees had high mortality rates through desiccation, pests, disease, and accidents.¹⁰⁷ This extends to wider agricultural products through pests and other unavoidable natural interventions. Song 2:15 highlights this arbitration despite human care. Human guardianship enables the vineyard to blossom; however, nature (the foxes) still finds a way to destroy the crop, leading to desolation anyway. These ideas become even more prevalent when considering the connection between the

¹⁰⁵ Walsh 2000, 123. Through this destruction, the invading forces cut off the inhabitant's food supply, thus weakening their morale.

¹⁰⁶ Walsh 2000, 250. They became part of the economic regimen of daily life and features heavily in the metaphoric language of ancient Near Eastern literature.

¹⁰⁷ Foxhall 2007, 99. Desiccation was the most common form of mortality however pests and disease could also destroy young olive trees. Despite this, accidents could devastate the olive groves – livestock or invading armies could trample the cuttings, spoiling future yields.

Achaemenid king and the vine,¹⁰⁸ thus one can read the destruction of the vineyards and production of bad fruit as an omen against kingship or an articulation of ‘bad kings’. Hdt 1.108 references a prophetic dream of the Median king in which a vine grows from his daughter’s genitalia, indicating he would be overthrown by the unborn son (Cyrus II). In this way, the vine is symbolic of future royal strength, authority, and power. One can interpret the inversion of these strong images of the king and vine in the Isaian narrative as the reversal or removal of royal power/strength.

There is an obvious lack of iconography surrounding images and landscapes of desolation and destruction. This is unusual due to the rich language applied to these themes in literature, suggesting there was an ability to put them into metaphor and description, yet they are not depicted in the iconographic record. At first, one may suggest this be because there was a sincere want to depict only the abundant as a message of power, however even if this was the case, one would expect depictions of desolate lands of the enemies after their subjugation. Where the treatment of the enemy is depicted, it focuses on the human punishment rather than the natural (see chapter 5.7). This is paradoxical because through the destruction of land and crops, the human cannot survive without the ability to provide food and security fertile land provided for the hope for future yields. The ancients could create abundant and city landscapes in image so why do they not depict desolation? This could perhaps be because they placed more importance on the physical human effects of military success (displacement, decapitation, impalement, abuse) rather than the natural destruction which held delayed effects for any who remained. If this is the case, why then are there vivid descriptions of such devastation in the texts? Sennacherib’s annals highlight this kind of destruction,¹⁰⁹ demonstrating these images were clearly a part of the ancient mindset; it’s appearance in the Biblical texts emphasises its place in the ancient psyche. This is evident through Tiglath-Pileser I’s statement, “Their orchards I cut down”,

¹⁰⁸ Llewellyn-Jones 2013, 95. Ordinarily the vineyard was associated with the king as a symbol of “fecundity and strength”.

¹⁰⁹ Talbot 1862, 140. Sennacherib’s second year “*The smaller towns, without number, I destroyed, overthrew, and reduced to ruins*”; “[...] *with fire I utterly destroyed it*” Page 142 “*The cities of Marupishti and Akkupardu, his royal residences, and thirty-four smaller cities of their jurisdiction, I took and destroyed, and burnt them with fire*” Sennacherib’s third year Page 146 “[...] *I destroyed entirely, and carried away their spoil*” “*The cities of Altaku and Tamna I utterly destroyed, and carried away their spoil*” Page 150 “*Once more I destroyed his cities and reduced them to ruins*” Page 152 “*I destroyed them and burnt them with fire*” Page 154 “*I took and destroyed the city of Ukku [...] I carried away from them all their inhabitants, mules, oxen, and sheep, and I destroyed and burnt their cities*”.

emphasising the deprivation of food needed for the inhabitants to maintain a defence. This is furthered by Shalmaneser III stating “I uprooted his harvest, cut down his gardens”, furthering the Assyrian royal precedent of attacking harvests and fields during an invasion to endanger the defenders through starvation. These appearances in the literary record suggests the agricultural destruction was regarded as equally important by the conquerors in the defeat and subjugation of enemy peoples. Perhaps it was more important to rulers to communicate power through human domination in the iconographic record rather than natural destruction ensuring they received a land-tax. This could be explained through the clarity of message communicated through the human consequences of battles rather than the somewhat ambiguous rendition provided by landscapes. When destruction is depicted, it is inextricably linked to artificial human structures, such as the destruction of the Arab camp (figure 3.8), indicating that there was a conscious effort to translate these activities into art, however this did not extend to the wider landscape. This destruction of the Arab camp indicates the desolation that will come from the burning tents, abuse and people being dragged away. However, this is the destruction in progress; not the aftermath showing the desolate land left to return to the wild as suggested in Isa 13:22, emphasising the desolation left behind after an attack and desertion. Here Isaiah depicts the palaces (symbols of power, authority, and settlement) returning to the scavengers of the wild (hyenas and jackals), demonstrating the breakdown of society and power. Furthermore, the burning of the camp enables the reinterpretation of Isa 14:31, the smoke suggests a burning city or camp in the distance with the wind blowing the smoke away. This is the closest representation to desolation of the land available beyond images of starving people (figure 3.7 and 3.9). Through these representations of lean figures, one gains a sense of the wider desolation that caused figures to lose weight. Figure 3.9 demonstrates this human desolation through the many lean bodies heightening the sense of famine and thus devastation. The amount of people depicted here suggests widespread agricultural desolation leading to famine and thus the human consequences of starvation, malnutrition and even death. Regarding the images surrounding desolation, or the lack of, iconographic exegesis is not as useful an approach as it is in other areas. Whilst we can use images of abundance to contrast the desolation, the absence of precise images leaves gaps in this exegetical approach.

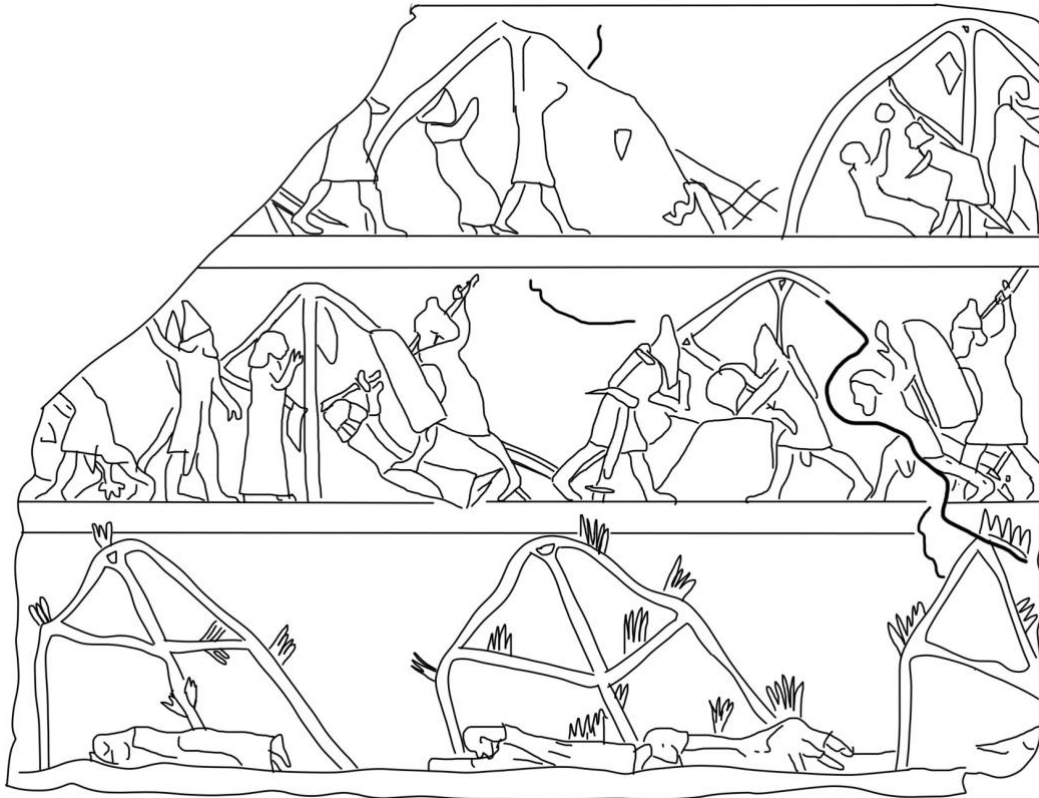


Figure 3.8 Assyrian soldiers destroy Arab encampment and assault people. Gypsum relief. Ashurbanipal. Neo-Assyrian. 645-635 BCE. Nineveh. British Museum 124927. Author 2021.

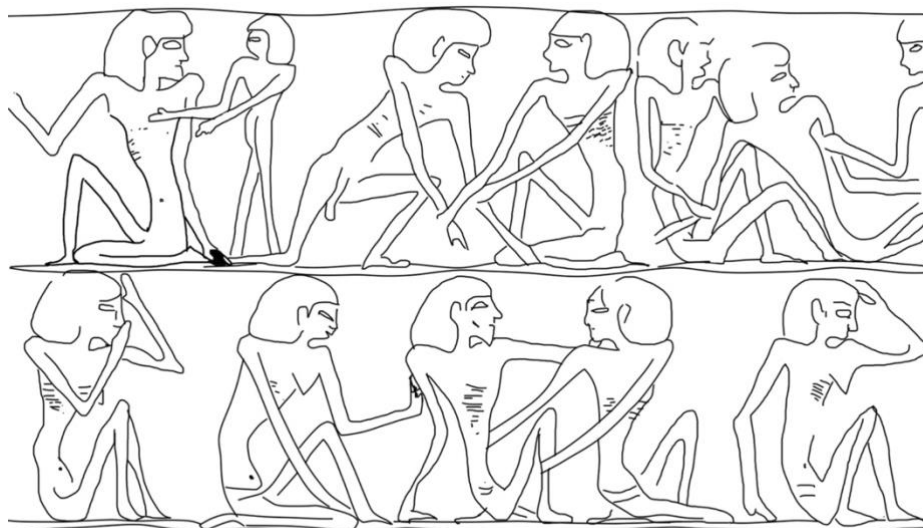


Figure 3.9 Famine relief, Unas Causeway. C.2236 BCE. Author 2021.

Abundance brings joy; desolation brings fear and disaster. This joy is felt through the iconography with connotations of abundance, the piles of food and postures of thanksgiving demonstrate the exultation and exuberance that came with a bountiful harvest. One can still feel this joy when thinking of harvests. In the modern day, annual harvest festivals held in communities around the world continues this sense of exuberance. These celebrations recall the jubilation felt after a good harvest in the ancient world. The iconography surrounding the abundant yields reinforces this exultation through poses of thanksgiving and offerings to gods and the dead, demonstrating the excess available for suitable offerings. These images are contrasted by descriptions of desolation within the Bible as well as inscriptions of the ancient Near East, however there are no comparable images for this theme. The lack of iconography of desolation implies there was a fear of displaying the idea of failed harvests and empty fields and vineyards, however this cannot be true because they do not shy away from these images in inscriptions. One could argue that the concept of *salmu* may affect the depictions, perhaps there was a fear of rendering desolation in image because it could become the lived reality. The iconography of agricultural and city landscapes as well as those amid conflict demonstrates there was an awareness and ability to render these views in relief, suggesting it was a conscious decision to avoid representing desolate topography in the iconographic record. Isaiah's language of desolation is intense – the descriptive language brings forth vivid images of an abandoned wasteland from the reader's imagination; yet the iconographic record supplies no equivalent to provide a baseline to jump from or context from which Isaiah drew inspiration. Whilst the scintillating images one can conjure formulate valid responses to the text, they will all differ from one another because of our unconscious micro-decisions formulated, in part, by the society we are brought up in, effecting every individual interpretation of the image. Where iconographic exegesis provides windows to the ancient world through using such images to interpret the text, grounding it in its historical context, this approach is limited when interpreting Isaiah's use of language of natural devastation because of the absence of visual evidence.

3.4 Harvest and Production – 16:9 “the vine of Sibmah [...] over the summer fruit and your harvest”; 16:10 “no treader treads out wine in the presses”; 17:5-6 “when the reaper gathers standing corn and his arm harvests the ears, and as when one gleans the ears of corn in the Valley of Rephaim. Gleanings will be left in it, as when an olive tree is beaten – two or three berries in the top of the highest bough, four or five on the branches of a fruit tree.”; 18:4-5 “heat of harvest. For below the harvest, when the blossom is over, and the flower becomes a ripening grape, he cuts off the shoots with pruning-hooks, and the spreading branches he lops off and clears away”; 21:10 “O my threshed and winnowed one”; 23:3 “your revenue was the grain of Shihor, the harvest of the Nile”; 24:13 “as when an olive tree is beaten, as at the gleaning when the grape harvest is done”

The agrarian calendar was filled by the many activities required throughout the year to ensure abundant harvests. Lev 26:5 demonstrates this continuous cycle of labour – threshing turns to grape harvest, turns to sowing. Agriculture is defined by the human control of nature through this cycle. However, Jer 2:21 demonstrates the thin line between ordered agriculture and wild, becoming a metaphor for the people who stray from YHWH’s path.

Vineyards were a cause of monarchic pride in the Assyrian annals.¹¹⁰ Assurbanipal II was credited with building vineyards in Calah and Sennacherib’s reliefs were filled with vines, emphasising their pride and importance. The production and use of wine revolved around the King in Assyria and Babylon, emphasising its importance to society. Wine shaped the culture of Israel; it resembled the human control of food through cultivation,¹¹¹ becoming representative of power and domination in the visual metaphoric language. Wine supplements grain production when there is no grain whilst diversifying diets and adding energy. The importance of viticulture is emphasised through Noah’s planting of a vineyard once off the ark (Gen 9:20). The

¹¹⁰ Walsh 2000, 24. The Nimrud wine lists record wine rations for male and female court officials in eight-century Calah, demonstrating it was reserved for the elite and heavily controlled. Assyrian kings boasted about planting gardens as a place for relaxation and worship (see Baker 2013, 16).

¹¹¹ Walsh 2000, 11. The evidence of horticulture indicates a settlement because of the extensive time it takes for initial fruition to begin (it takes ten years for a full harvest from vines, the male life expectancy was 30-45 years of age meaning one sixth of a man’s life was spent waiting for harvest). When considering olive oil, the produce can be used as food as well as lamp fuel.

planting of vines and trees represent the sedentary life of farmer as an investment in the next generation (1 Kgs 21:3). This emphasises how the use of planting shoots was more effective than seeds because farmers would already have a yield to work with from their father and thus use to their advantage in producing more crops. Jer 2:21 inverts this through YHWH's use of a seed to plant a vine that later becomes wild. YHWH's choice of the seed as opposed to a shoot suggests the seed is superior, however, the vine becomes wild, thus one can suggest that this emphasises the idea that seeds are not a practical means of viticulture because it leads to a 'degenerate' crop. This importance spread to the wider ancient Near East, Egypt ran royal vineyards in the Delta, as evident on elite tomb reliefs



Figure 3.10 Grape harvest scene, painted wall relief. Tomb of Petosiris, Tuna el-Gebel. Fourth-century BCE. Author 2021.

(figure 3.10).¹¹² Vineyards and wine were state owned in Egypt and reserved for the elite, emphasising the status attached to the beverage and its production through land ownership. In this way, the reliefs didn't represent the life of the average Egyptian. The idea of royal owned vineyards is seen in 1 Chr 27:27 – the vineyards are watched over by Shimei the Ramathite, one of King David's officers. Uzziah also owns vineyards that other work as described in 2 Chr 26:10. The appearance of scenes like this harvest in elite tombs such as of Petosiris (high priest of Thoth) demonstrates their significance in society through the equation with those in the higher echelons of society. This relief takes the viewer from the vineyard proper on the far right, through the transportation of produce via baskets to the treading floor, thus illustrating the entire process from harvest to wine production. To get to this point, vineyards were grown from cuttings rather than seeds, needing extensive care such as pruning,¹¹³ ensuring healthy and bountiful growth. Once the grapes became usable, they were

¹¹² Walsh 2000, 21. This is also evident across the Near East; the Samaria Ostraca (eighth century accounts of trade of wine and oil) do not state any names suggesting the vineyards could have been under royal control (see Walsh 2000, 44;51-59).

¹¹³ Baker 2013, 25-26. This was intensive and had to be done for several seasons before the grapes were usable (three to four years for the initial growth but then yielded usable crops annually (see Walsh, 2000, 99.))

carried to a winepress and trodden to release juices before fermenting in jars. Like vines, olive trees were also grown from both rooted and unrooted cuttings, needing extensive care to grow over many years before coming to fruition. Before the pruning even began, laborious digging took place, emphasising the arduous process behind growing these essential crops. This care encourages growth and removes unproductive or dead branches and parts,¹¹⁴ diverting nutrients to the fruit to ensure the best possible yield. In pruning vines and trees, farmers were able to enhance growth and create larger crop yields. This in turn boosted trade (Israelite wine amphorae have been discovered in eastern Mediterranean sites) and income as well as providing food, wine, and oil for the community. This therefore enables greater production of by-products such as wine to be sold or exchanged for other crops such as grain. Isa 18:5 demonstrates the pruning process, highlighting the importance of discarding unproductive branches. Whilst pruning vines does not appear in the iconographic record, one can interpret the violent connotations through the smiting scenes (see chapter 5), thus one can reinterpret Isa 18:5 as an act brutality through the association of a powerful strike of the pruning hook with the weapons used by Pharaoh's and soldiers in the smiting images. In this way, Isa 18:5 can be interpreted as a metaphor for YHWH's punishment of the sinful and those who turn from him.

Viticulture provided relief from the difficulties and strain of farming in a dry land with a long summer.¹¹⁵ This could lead to droughts, thus the liquid and food provided by the hardy vine provided relief through its yields and its ability to survive the long, hot summers. However, farmers faced a difficult harvest because grapes and olives were ready at the same time in the agricultural calendar,¹¹⁶ due to their ability to ripen in the dry and hot summers. If these tasks were left too long, coming yields could be reduced thus impacting the provision of daily basics. Deut 11:14 highlights the seasonal rains,

¹¹⁴ Foxhall 2007, 124. The Gezar calendar sets aside two months for pruning, diverting the nutrients to fruit rather than wood or leaves. Pruning is done in both winter and summer, allowing proper light to reach the fruit. However, farmers could also prune healthy shoots to plant and grow more vines. Vines grown in this way were more likely to be fruitful than those grown from a seed. See also Walsh 2000, 38; 44; 101.

¹¹⁵ Walsh 2000, 257. Israel was semi-arid with little access to water like the Nile in Egypt and Tigris and Euphrates in Mesopotamia.

¹¹⁶ Foxhall 2007, 126. Olives were hardier than grapes, thus they could survive the rains of the new agricultural year, nor would they rot easily if left on the trees for the two-month harvesting period (late September to November). This was also the time to sow arable crops, meaning there was a massive labour force to complete all the farm tasks in time. (see Walsh 2000, 39.)

allowing time to gather in crops in their time before the rains come and ruin them. This co-occurrence is emphasised in Isa 24:13, connecting the beating of olive trees and the grape harvest. Despite this, the iconography focuses on the grape harvest (figure 3.11), with the olive trees rarely appearing. One can suggest this places greater importance on the grape vines than the olive trees. However, this iconography is linked with royalty or elites, thus it can be



Figure 3.11 Viticulture relief in three registers. Hall, Front wall, Right, Tomb of Khaemouaset. Thebes/Dira Abu El-Naga, Luxor. New Kingdom, 18th Dynasty. Author 2021.

suggested that vines are emphasised because of this association whereas the olive tree, and thus oil, are more mundane thus they are not a priority to depict – wine demonstrates status; oil does not. Through the iconography, Isa 24:13 can be interpreted as marking the end of the harvest season; the iconography emphasises Isaiah’s use of the vineyard over the olive trees. There were ways around this simultaneous harvest – olives do not spoil or rot quickly, thus their harvest could be spread over several months and delayed, prioritising the more delicate grapes. Despite this, if the fruit is left too long the quality and quantity of future yields may deteriorate, suggesting farmers had to balance this risk with those of the vineyard. On the other hand, grapes would rot and fall off sooner than olives, allowing pests to invade, thus it is likely farmers and landowners prioritised the grape harvest and treading over the olive harvest. Grapes were harvested by cutting the cluster from the vine.¹¹⁷ Figure 3.11 demonstrates this harvest in the top right, indicating the intensity of labour and enabling a reinterpretation of Isa 16:9 and 24:13 to stress the assiduous work required to, not only harvest the grapes, but to get to usable harvests. Olives could be harvested in many ways, all of which were labour and time intensive. Trees could be beaten to make the olives fall on the ground before being picked up/collected. Another method was to pick the olives from the tree directly or wait for them to fall on their own. To speed up collection, cloth or linen could be placed beneath the trees before scooping

¹¹⁷ Walsh 2000, 171. The grape was connected to the branch through the peduncle which would be cut with a pruning hook or other piece of equipment to sever the cluster from the vine.

them up, however this could be expensive and thus not sustainable. One of which was beating the trees to knock the fruit down (Isa 24:13), thus one can interpret Isa 17:6 as a metaphor for punishment of the sinful and nations who do not follow YHWH. However, the olive harvest does not appear in the iconographic record of the ancient Near East, limiting how effective iconographic exegesis to this specific reference. However, one can find representations from ancient Greece (figure 3.12) to gain an understanding of the beating process and thus aiding interpretation. In this way, the previous interpretation of Isa 17:6 is emphasised,

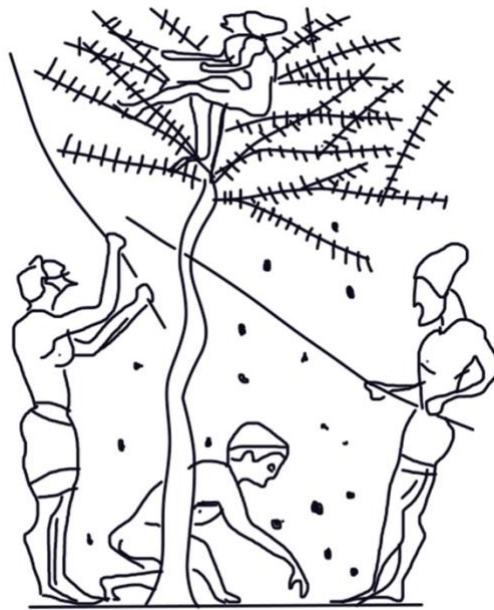


Figure 3.12 Black Figure Amphora, The Antimenes Painter. 520 BCE, Archaic Greece. British Museum: 1837,0609.42. Author 2021.

long sticks pummel the tree creating a violent image despite the pastoral environment. Isa 16:9-10 inverts viticultural images to communicate the culmination of the grape harvest. The iconography enables the text to be interpreted as the despair of vineyard owners that the work has come to an end for the agricultural year, however one could suggest it would provide a brief break from the intense labour for the farmers before the next season begins. Another interpretation offered through the iconography is the permanent denouement of agriculture – the appearance of such activities on tomb walls demonstrates their centrality to society to be associated with individuals in death. If these activities have terminated, one can suggest the settlement has been abandoned and left barren.

Isa 17:5-6 and 24:13 demonstrate the process of gleaning and oftentimes this can be interpreted as the faithful remnant who will set up a new Jerusalem, however gleanings were also left for practical reasons. Lev 19:10 states that the poor and landless can enter vineyards to pick the gleanings from the harvest. It is deemed inappropriate to not leave any gleanings for those who cannot grow their own, either through being landless or financial ability. Judg 8:2 emphasises the quality of grapes through the comparison of a harvest in Abiezer to the mere gleanings of Ephraim. Despite this, taking more than the gleanings was not accepted. The idea of leaving behind some

produce is emphasised in Jer 49:9, equating harvesters with thieves.¹¹⁸ Deut 24:21 sets out who the gleanings should be left for, highlighting the important charity behind not stripping the vines completely for the landless and poor to access. This is emphasised in Lev 19:10 going further to disallow the collection of fallen grapes, on top of leaving some on the vine for others, as ordered by YHWH. Despite this order, it is likely fallen grapes would have been left anyway because of the fruit's delicate skin meaning they would have been unsuitable for making wine. Furthermore, these fallen fruit would have been left for the pests, thus one can argue that by leaving the fallen grapes for the poor and sojourner, Lev 19:10 lowers them to the status of and equates them with pests. Mark 2:23 demonstrates this access to crops for the landless and wanderers through the disciples picking corn as they travelled through a field. Whilst gleanings are not highlighted in the iconographic record, they can be read in renderings of harvests as in figure 3.13. Whilst this does not directly portray gleanings being left, the figure has left a handful of grain out of the way of their hand-scythe, thus it can be suggested these are left as in Isa 17:5. Through Isaiah's image of the gleanings left at the top of the olive trees, there is an inversion of the charitable image connected to gleanings elsewhere in the scripture; they are out of reach without equipment or without climbing the tree itself, making it harder for the needy to collect the remaining yield thus subverting the charity of leaving them in the first place. Figure 3.12 suggests these gleanings left high in the tree, however, also demonstrates a 'loophole' to reach the remaining fruit – they climb the tree itself. Though this iconography, Isa 17:6 can be reinterpreted – instead of leaving a remnant or unreachable produce for the needy, the gleanings are now attainable; the remnant and thus new Jerusalem is within reach and the landless and poor can obtain fruit to feed themselves.

¹¹⁸ Walsh 2000,174-175. Both harvesters and thieves can only take what they can carry, meaning remaining fruit was left because of the practicality of transportation. However, there was also a social and ethical rationale for leaving behind gleanings.



Figure 3.13 Section from Book of the Dead of Kerqun, frame 2. Papyrus. Ptolemaic period. British Museum EA9911,2. Author 2021.

Isa 16:10 indicates the process of wine production through a treading press. This image returns as a metaphor in Isa 63:3 for YHWH's anger. The use of 'blood' of grapes in this context is literally the grape juice running from the treading floor to the collection vat but symbolises the blood of the sinful who are trodden by righteousness. The same use of the wine press metaphor appears in Lam 1:15 – YHWH tramples on the daughter of Judah as if in a wine press, thus equating the sinful with grapes and their blood with wine. This equation can be seen through the Last Supper and Eucharist, substituting wine for Jesus' blood. In this way, wine can be interpreted as a vital product in the ancient world like the blood is the life force of the body. In this way, Isa 16:10 can therefore be interpreted as the end of life because the treading has stopped – the life force of the agrarian world has terminated. The treading had to be gentle enough to not break the pips, so they do not enter the juice.¹¹⁹ Treading was an effective way of getting the juice from grapes and the only improvement necessary was hygiene. It is probable that small farmers and vintners involved family and friends in the harvest and treading process.¹²⁰ These people were also involved in the treading process and had to adhere to strict rules whilst pressing the grapes – Virgil states those on the floor must have clean feet, not eat nor drink whilst in the press nor continuously climb in and out. The iconographic record reflects the importance of treading grapes to create wine through the representations beyond the basic grape harvest as in figure 3.14 – the

¹¹⁹ Walsh 2000, 145-149. This involved a flat floor with a carved channel leading to a collection vat, transporting the juice through gravity. Oftentimes, the winepress was cut into the bedrock (this means it is difficult to date them in the archaeological record).

¹²⁰ Walsh 2000, 179-180. Matt 20:1-16 suggests the use of hired hands in the harvest and this is furthered in the *Iliad* 18:537 depicting boys and girls harvesting vines.

scene moves from the vineyard to the pressing process. This figure also demonstrates the amount of work put into wine production through the entire process including fourteen figures, suggesting this was a community and family operation. Isa 16:10 can be reinterpreted through the iconography, either it represents a period of rest for these people after the harvest or it symbolises the end of a settlement and organised life in the area through the image that these fourteen figures will tread no more. Wine was an important liquid in the ancient Near East, emphasising why it appears so regularly in the tombs of elites and officials. Figure 3.15 depicts close-up detail of the grape juice flowing from the treading floor into the collection vat before being collected in amphorae depicted above. Like figure 3.14 and 3.10, one can sense the importance of this process to the ancient world through the amount of people involved with one treading floor. This reinforces the interpretation of the text as indicating settlement through renderings of whole communities and families involved in the grape harvest and wine production. Thus, the iconography enables the Isaian references to be read as a unified work towards a common goal and the provision of necessities.

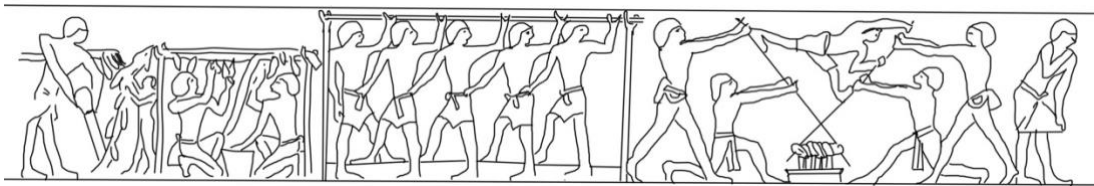


Figure 3.14 Grape processing scene, East Wall, tomb of Ptahhotep, Saqqara. c.2400 BCE. Author 2021.

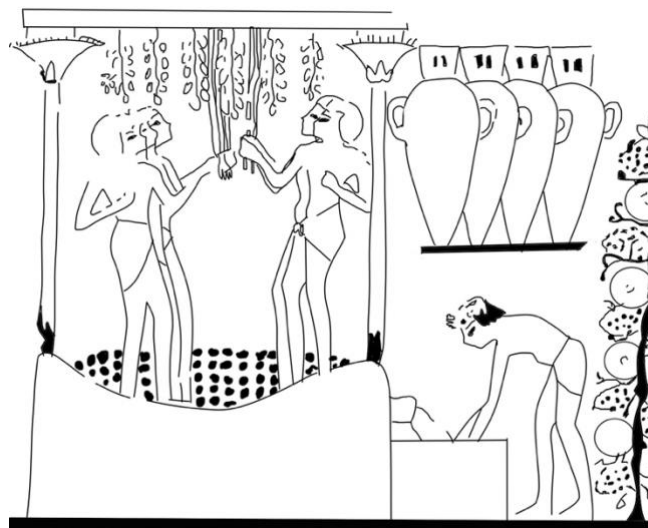


Figure 3.15 Tomb of Nakht, Thebes, c.1400 BCE. Author 2021.

The harvesting of grain involved various steps, including reaping (Isa 17:5), threshing and winnowing (Isa 21:10). Every stage required extensive amounts of labour; however, this isn't always communicated in the text, thus the iconography enables the intensity of labour to be visualised and communicated. Threshing separates the grain from the husk, preparing the crops for distribution and consumption.¹²¹ This separation through cutting can be read as a metaphor for the conquered people referred to in Isa 21:10. Am 1:3 furthers the image of threshing as a metaphor for punishment for turning against YHWH. The threshed product is thrown into the air with a winnowing fork to allow the husks to blow away, separating it from the grain. The use of the wind means threshing was often done at night to take advantage of these evening gales. This

can be interpreted as the removal of sin. The harvest of barley and wheat was vital for survival, providing food for the year (figure 3.16).¹²² However, because of the dependence on such grains, their devastation could bring about desolation. Farmers had to ensure they



Figure 3.16 Tomb painting, Dier el Medina. Tomb of Sennedjem (number 1), east wall. 19th Dynasty, c.1345-1200 BCE. Author 2021.

diversified their yields as much as possible to ensure at least one crop survived if weather changed, meaning farmers grew and thus traded and exchanged a variety of crops to provide for their families and survives. This importance is emphasised through the involvement of every member of society as demonstrated by the female figures collecting the harvested grain in figure 3.16. This idea is enhanced through Sennedjem's tomb being a family burial along with his wife, recognising the familial

¹²¹ Baker 2013, 103. The threshing floor involves driving animals with a wooden sledge with 'teeth' made of flint over the crops, battering the grain to separate it from the husk (see Whittaker 2000, 62.) Donkeys were often used for threshing and are stereotyped as wayward and greedy, as emphasised through depictions of them eating whilst threshing (see Baker 2013, 11). Despite this, it has been suggested that animals were fed some harvest before beginning the threshing process to enable them to accomplish the toil required (see McHugh 2019, 208-225.) Oxen were best suited to pulling the threshing sledge because of their strength (see Waters 2015, 3.)

¹²² Walsh 2000, 252. The crops could be traded for other goods such as food, drink and even tools to ensure the continued labour that brought about successful and abundant harvests. Because threshing was an annual event, it was a social, community event for the family, friends, and neighbours (see Ryken et al 1998, 2915). The threshing floor can be interpreted as a symbol for death but, conversely, can represent renewed life – the old crop 'dies' when it is trodden, leading to renewed life in the form of the good crop separated from the husk/chaff (see Crosswhite and Crosswhite 1984, 49.)

and community aspects of ancient production. Through the iconography, Isa 17:5 can be reinterpreted as a vast operation involving every member of the household and community rather than the textual implication of the solo farmer ('his') – the reaper can now be anyone. Not only this, but the verse can now be interpreted as involving a team of individuals to reap and gather in the harvest rather than one as seemingly implied in the text. Once the physical harvest was over, the produce had to be threshed to make it edible and tradeable. Joel 2:24 demonstrates the abundance attached to threshing floors full of grain, emphasising the import and centrality of grain, and thus threshing in the survival of peoples in the ancient Near East. One can interpret the importance of the threshing floor through 2 Sam 24:15-25, David buys a threshing floor and oxen to build an altar upon it to appease YHWH and the angel to end the pestilence and calamity that was sent in retribution. 1 Kgs 22:10 emphasises this importance through the placement of thrones on the threshing floor, demonstrating the power this installation had during the harvest and for survival in the ancient Near East. Furthermore, the misuse of threshing floors is punished by YHWH as demonstrated in Hos 9:1-2, accentuating the significance of threshing floors in society and the moral depravity of their misuse. For those producing large yields, a threshing floor would be more effective, reducing the intensity of labour by transferring it to oxen or donkeys.¹²³ The grain is trodden on by animals and/or animals pulling a threshing sledge ('teeth' dragged across the crop to separate the grain and husk). This creates a violent image,

lending the activity to metaphors of violence and judgement elsewhere in the Biblical texts (Isa 21:10; Am 1:3; Isa 41:15). Figure 3.17 demonstrates the process of threshing with a team of animals, emphasising the sheer



force required to complete the process. This is emphasised in figure 3.18 – almost a dozen

Figure 3.17 Representation of a threshing floor. Tomb of Amennakht (number 266), Dier el Medina, West Thebes. 19th Dynasty (1345-1200 BCE). Author 2021.

donkeys work in tandem to thresh the grain. This also demonstrates the belief in all

¹²³ Ryken et.al 1998, 2914. Sheaves of grain were placed on the threshing floor, a large and flat expanse of hard ground.

benefiting from agrarian life as the donkeys' graze on the produce as they thresh. This can be taken further and suggest the force exerted by the animals to properly thresh the grain. Furthermore, the iconography indicates the human involvement in this process, sometimes leading the animals (figure 3.17 and 3.18) but also sat or stood on a threshing sledge to weigh it down, pushing the flint 'teeth' into the crops to encourage the separation of the grain (figure 3.19). Despite this, some grains were too delicate to be threshed in this way (Isa 28:27-28), needing to be beaten with rods, thus they were threshed by hand. Threshing can also be done by hand by beating the crop, like olive trees (Ruth 2:17), relying on human labour rather than using animal strength. This hand-beating was suitable for small quantities of grain, enabling these farmers to save space by not requiring a threshing floor. Whilst there is no iconographic representation of hand threshing, one can visualise this action through representations of reaping (figure 3.16). However, it is possible the figure on the right of figure 3.17 could be hand threshing alongside the team of oxen with a scythe, indicating the more physical aspects of this process as opposed to leading a team of animals. After threshing, the crop had to be winnowed, separating the chaff from the usable product. Representations of winnowing once again suggest the collaborative nature of the task through teams of people winnowing simultaneously (figure 3.20). There is a sense of culmination in this scene through the disappearing figure on the right, taking the final winnowed product away. Despite the figural action depicted, it is not abundantly clear what the winnowing does to the crop in this scene. Figure 3.21 fills this gap; one can see the chaff flying away in the wind once the produce was thrown into the air with winnowing forks. Thus, the iconography enables an interpretation of winnowing as YHWH's removal of useless material/people from society.

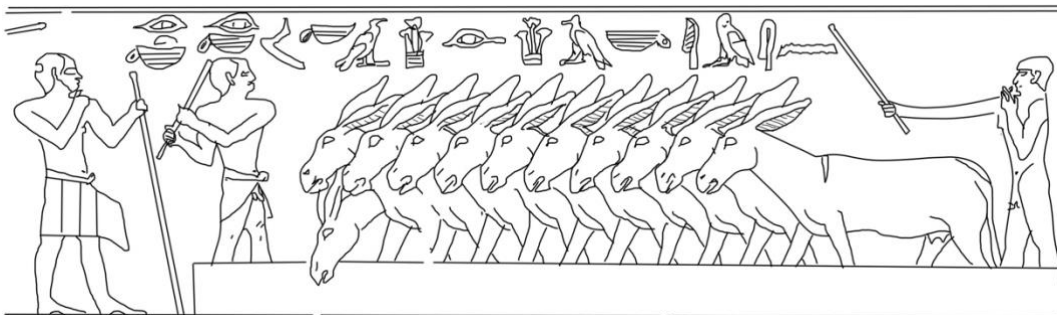


Figure 3.18 Group of donkeys threshing. Chapel, East wall, North section, second register from the bottom, tomb of Ti, Saqqara. Old Kingdom, Late Dynasty 5. Author 2021.



Figure 3.19 Seal impression from Arslantepe. Author 2021.



Figure 3.20 Winnowing Scene, Tomb of Petosiris. Late-4th Century BCE. Author 2021.

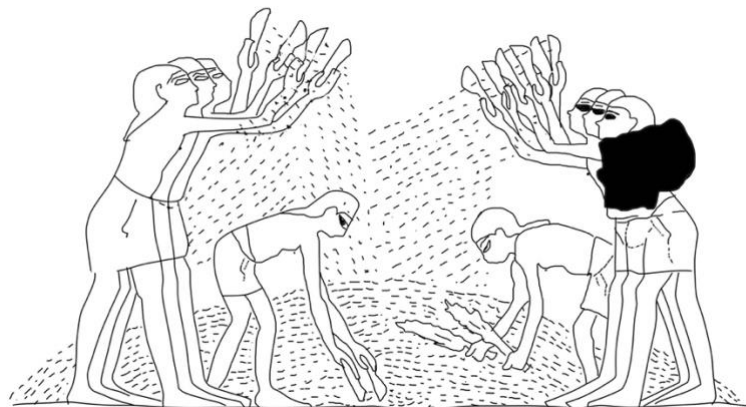


Figure 3.21 Tomb painting: Sheikh 'abd el-Qurna. Tomb of Nakht. 18th Dynasty, 1570-1345 BCE. Author 2021.

Isa 21:10 can thus be reinterpreted through the iconography – ‘threshed’ can be interpreted as violent through the connotations of the threshing sledge and trampling by massive teams of animals, thus the text becomes an image of punishment. However, the hand-threshing figure, whilst still somewhat violent because of the nature of the activity, creates a sense of attentive care because there is no ‘middle-man’ between the farmer and crop. In this way, Isa 21:10 can be interpreted as personalised punishment and/or punishment for their betterment. One can suggest that Isaiah uses the threshing image to indicate punishment because of the brutal connotations however, the iconography of threshing and winnowing demonstrate the product is always better after the process, thus the metaphor implies that despite there being punishment, the ‘threshed and winnowed one’ comes out better afterwards. Furthermore, scenes of winnowing in iconography enable a reinterpretation of Isa 21:10, becoming an image of rejuvenated life with the sinful (chaff) being blown away and separated from the good (grain).

3.5 Conclusion

The use of agrarian imagery in the text emphasises its import to ancient life, forming joys and fears, structuring calendars, and social lives. Through using these images, Isaiah demonstrates awareness of his audience’s experience with the natural world, using and twisting them to best suit his message. Through the iconography, these messages become more apparent, bringing them to life and inserting the text into the historical realm. This not only provides context to the book but enables deeper and alternative interpretations of Isaiah’s message, offering glimpses into the lives of the ancient farmer.

Isaiah’s extensive use of negative imagery reinforces the message of YHWH’s wrath on those who do not follow him or stray from his path – the desolation or bad harvests are punishment for sinful behaviour. Despite this use, there are gaps in the iconography, avoiding depictions of famine or any kind of agricultural ruin. Because of this, one must use images of abundance to compare these images. In this way, iconographic exegesis is limited in its usefulness when it comes to abstract concepts of desolation.

Harvest and production imagery is more common, from the very beginnings of the agricultural cycle (ploughing and sowing) through to the crop harvest and creation of by-products. This demonstrates the importance of agrarian life through the conscious decisions to depict these events, especially in tombs indicating the gravity of agriculture in ancient societies. These connected agrarian activities with the elites who would not have physically contributed to the processes but drew status and power from land ownership as well as the promise of eternal providence through their depiction on tomb walls. Through the attribution of these scenes with the elites, it is unclear whether they represent the lived reality of agrarian life, however they still enable critical interpretations of the Biblical text through the images and actions rendered in stone or papyrus.

4 *Society and Culture*

“Cultural differences should not separate us from each other, but rather cultural diversity brings a collective strength that can benefit all of humanity”

Robert Alan

4.1 Introduction

Society and culture form conventions and ideas that influence the way art is viewed and created. Many events were and can still be accompanied by a sense of ceremony and performance,¹²⁴ shaped by social and cultural values. Authorial experiences shape texts, thus the Oracles against the Nations feature references to the Isaian society and culture. By using these references, the textual messages were speaking to the very people experiencing them in their everyday lives, enabling understanding through the imagery employed by the author. In the iconographic record, societal events were not often depicted however there are references to court life and general lamentation that give some insight into the text. Throughout the Oracles against the Nations, Isaiah uses society as the locus of pain and suffering from YHWH’s judgement, through detailing the human consequences. In this way, the societies became a key character in the narrative, one who the reader comes to know through the events and practices that are overturned or appear because of their judgement by YHWH. Throughout the Bible, authors use societal practices and events to communicate their messages. This is because the narrative concerns the outcomes and events of society considering YHWH’s word, will and actions as a catalyst or response to humanity. The iconographic approach can provide context and demonstrate the positives of society as well as common events and experiences also referred to in the text. Where the text goes further, the iconography can be used to offer a ‘starting point’ to the narratives ‘finish line’, thus guiding the reader down various paths of interpretation to reach the fallen Nations.

¹²⁴ Baines 2015, 4. Festivals and funerals both involved ceremony and performance to express emotion (such as lament or singing with joy) and follow specific rites that were required for the specific event.

4.2 Society and Culture in the Isaian and Biblical Context

Isaiah consistently refers to social and cultural activities, enabling the text to be interpreted by the contemporary audience. Through curating narratives to communicate religious messages around societal and cultural values and practices, the text appears to be closer to home for the Isaian audience. They can place themselves in the situation – it could be their lamentation, feast or presentation to rulers or gods. These themes are evident throughout the biblical text, commenting on contemporary society and using it as a vehicle to convey the prophetic messages.

Within the Oracles, Isaiah's use of appearances focuses on a lack of hair and clothing, or humility and suffering through the sackcloth. Jer 48:37 conveys forcible shaving, attaching baldness with violence or society-wide lamentation. Baldness relates to shame as in Ezek 7:18, suggesting tones of humiliation should be considered when engaging with the Isaian text. However, the most common use of baldness in the Bible refers to lamentation (Am 8:10). In this way, baldness in the Oracles fit in with the wider theme in the Bible, drawing on the realities of grief and mourning to demonstrate the emotion of individuals and societies in response to textual events enacted by YHWH and humans. Throughout the Biblical texts, sackcloth is used to convey messages of humility and emotional turmoil. The earliest reference is in Gen 37:34 where Jacob/Israel covers his lions in sackcloth as he mourns for Joseph. This creates a sense of physical pain to emphasise the emotional torment of grief. Sackcloth is alternatively used to suggest humility, with individuals donning the 'garment' to beg for forgiveness and repent (1 Kgs 20:31-32; Joel 1:13) or go before YHWH (2 Kgs 19:1). When sackcloth is paired with earth or ashes, one can interpret this within the context of lament through the visuals of pouring dust on the head during mourning (Neh 9:1; Esth 4:1). Sackcloth could be interpreted as representative of a fall from power or grace as in Job 16:15. Through this verse, Job's suffering and 'fall' are highlighted by the wearing of sackcloth. This idea is also evidenced in Isa 3:24, contrasting sackcloth with 'rich robes' to highlight the extent of a fall from grace by showcasing diametrically opposed garments.

Lamentation features regularly throughout the Bible with images of wailing. This idea of suffering is furthered through metaphors of labour as in Isa 13:8. The image of labour is one of the most evocative images of a female YHWH in the Hebrew Bible.¹²⁵ Ps 48:6 demonstrates the use of labour to demonstrate pain through the simile employed. These images appear commonly in Isaiah, creating visceral images for the suffering the prophet foretells in the narrative (Isa 13:8; 21:3; 23:4; 42:14; 45:10; 54:1; 65:23; 66:7). The Biblical use of this image emphasises the pain communicated through the cries and anguish employed, transferring the torment of labour onto specific events and for prophesied futures. Gen 50:10 demonstrates lamentation in the context of a funeral as Joseph is given leave from Pharaoh to bury his father. 2 Sam 1:17-27 enables some insight into the emotions David feels during his lamentation for Saul and Jonathan. David's speech includes statements regarding a lack of life-giving material such as rain and uses militaristic images to call upon images of the fallen soldier. 2 Sam 1:18 states this lamentation should be taught to the people of Judah, thus demonstrating the importance of ritual lamentation in the ancient world. This can be applied to mourning individual members of the family or wider society, as well as the loss of a city or institution. Isa 3:26 personifies the city gates to lament the fall of Jerusalem after it is judged by YHWH. Through the personification, Isaiah demonstrates the import of lamentation as a procedure to process a change in status and irreversible effect on a life or many lives. The technique to emphasise the gravity of lamentation and the fall of a city through personification returns in Jer 14:2, this time the entire city of Judah is personified with her gates and people doing the lamentation. This occurs in response to a drought and thus famine, offering an alternative explanation for instances of lamentation in the Biblical text – they are not mourning the loss of a person or institution, rather the loss of a core pillar of survival and using it as a way of humbling themselves before YHWH. This is also seen in Joel 1:13 where sackcloth and lamentation are used to aid the repentance. This society-wide mourning appears in Esth 4:3, stating that all the lands under the king's power were involved in the lamentation. This verse also pairs lamentation with sackcloth and ashes, furthering the interpretation of this garment as a symbol of loss and suffering.

¹²⁵ Klingbeil 2014, 139. The groaning, gasping, and panting that are culturally commonplace during childbirth elicits fear, pain, and panic. Labour pains are a symbol of physical and mental distress (Isa 13:8; 26:17-18). In the epic of Gilgamesh, Ishtar “*screamed like a woman giving birth, the Mistress of the gods wailed*” (see Baker 2013, 90.)

Ps 35:14 suggests lamentation was a full body experience through references to being bowed down in mourning, connoting the emotional turmoil felt in moments of grief (Jer 4:8). The Biblical text also suggests that the removal of lamentation was a punishment as in Jer 16:4-6. This emphasises the importance of ritual lamentation in the process of grieving – to be denied this as well as the denial of burial was a proclamation of shame on the deceased.

Throughout the text, banquets are associated with royalty, their celebrations and demonstrations of wealth and power (Gen 40:20; Mark 6:21). The size of these events is demonstrated in the parable of the great banquet (Luke 14:12-24), the poor of the city and those on the highways are invited to fill the banquet hall after the guests make excuses to avoid attendance. The Biblical banquet demonstrates both joy and gladness, as well as embodying sin. This ‘sinful’ aspect is demonstrated in Am 6:4-7, the indulgence in lavish banquets is condemned in this ‘woe oracle’, prophesying their exile and the ending of revelry. Banquets are also used in the text as a mode of worship or honouring YHWH (Exod 10:9). This falls under the umbrella of celebration, becoming a conveyance for prayer and demonstration of veneration. Exod 12:14 moves this from the unique event of Exod 10:9, to become a repetitive festival of exaltation to be marked by a feast. Isaiah’s references to a lack of food and wine indicates a famine. This is a common punishment in the Hebrew Bible and caused devastation across the targeted society. In the ancient world, agriculture was important to survival and a famine posed a real threat to ancient peoples (see chapter 3). The theme of famine returns in Lam 4:8, detailing the skin shrinking against the bones and becoming dry. In Lam 4:3-4, even infants are starving for lack of milk, emphasising the universal impact of famine on this society. Jer 14:18 demonstrates famine as a sickness, providing connotations of a total attack like an illness on the body. Furthermore, because of this ‘sickness’ the Biblical texts put forward images of fainting people from hunger in Isa 51:20. This verse demonstrates the quantity of people effected by famine and attributes this to YHWH’s wrath, emphasising the devastation and emphasising this was a punishment for the peoples’ sins.

The effects of intoxication appear in the ancient Near Eastern texts as well as the Bible. For example, the Ugaritic text KTU 1.114, lines 3-4 and 16 state that El consumes wine until they are drunk. This continues until El is so drunk that they land in their

own excrement and appears dead (line 21). This also occurs in 1 Sam 25:37, using a stone to demonstrate the aftereffects of wine and the reaction to hearing the tales of the wine-induced self. This lack of understanding reappears in Hos 4:11, as they turn away from the Lord. This ‘moral blindness’ is a common effect of intoxication in the Bible, employed in Isa 5:12 and Am 6:6. In Isa 5:12, they are focused on the wine and music, so they do not see what YHWH does and has done for them. Am 6:6 appears as a ‘woe oracle’ towards those drink and do not grieve for others or ruin – their preoccupation with luxury creates the idea of sinfulness. Throughout the Biblical text, wine is used as a catalyst for downfalls through the sinful act and making a fool of oneself as in Prov 20:1. This is furthered through the financial consequences detailed in Prov 21:17. In these situations, wine and intoxication have caused the people to turn away from YHWH, warranting judgement as in the Isaian Oracles. Therefore, it is interesting that the theme of a cup of wrath is used in Ps 75 and Jer 25:15-38. This turns the cause of wrath against itself, inverting the image from scenes of joy and gladness whilst drinking to the suffering following YHWH’s wrath. This transposition creates a sense of unease through the association of something that is typically used for celebration with punishment and suffering – they are exposed to YHWH’s judgement. This idea of being exposed is also used in Gen 9:21, through the intoxication, Noah lies uncovered and at the mercy of the elements, much like the sinners are exposed to YHWH’s cup of wrath. However, Isa 29:9 suggests it is not the effects of wine that are sinful but the consumption of wine itself – staggering and drunkenness are acceptable if it is in awe and astonishment. 1 Kgs 16:9 demonstrates the dangers of intoxication because it was an enabling factor for Zimri to kill King Asa and usurp the throne, highlighting the cause of any coming judgment. Prov 23:32 uses snake similes to represent the consequences of wine and intoxication. Through the application of the serpent and adder, the reader’s attention is drawn to the negative aspects of drinking through the association with the serpent in the fall of Gen 3. Lev 10:9 goes a step further, resorting to the instructive ‘drink no wine’ and following up with the threat of death, rather than simply warning through the portrayal of the consequences as elsewhere in the Biblical text.

4.3 Appearances – 15:2-3 “On every head is baldness; every beard is shorn; in the streets they wear sackcloth”; 20:2-3 “Go and loose the sackcloth from your waist and take off your sandals from your feet’, and he did so, walking naked and barefoot. Then the Lord said, “As my servant Isaiah has walked naked and barefoot for three years as a sign and a portent against Egypt and Cush”; 20:4 “naked and barefoot, with buttocks uncovered, the nakedness of Egypt”; 22:12-14 “[...] weeping and mourning, for baldness and wearing sackcloth”; 22:21 “I will clothe him with your robe, and will bind your sash on him”

One could argue the difference between ‘nakedness’ and ‘nudity’ gives an element of subtlety between the openness and idealised nudity in art and innocent reality of ‘nakedness’.¹²⁶ Nakedness was initially considered innocent; however, it has come to symbolise shame, defeat, and punishment.¹²⁷ This demonstrates the move from an understanding of nakedness as a symbol of the natural in evolution to a politicised notion subject to varying connotations and feelings.¹²⁸ This demonstrates the complexity of societal relationships with nakedness. In this chapter, I will be using both ‘nudity’ and ‘nakedness’ interchangeably, in line with semantic practices. Despite this complexity between the naturalist and politicised views, nakedness has often featured in religions over time.¹²⁹ Nakedness could be interpreted as bringing the

¹²⁶ Carr-Gomm 2010, 7. Nakedness has Old English roots whilst nudity is founded upon the Norman French. Therefore, nudity appears public where that is all that people see, whereas nakedness is private and being seen for who they really are. However, the differentiation between the two is optional, with many people using them interchangeably and not recognising this subtle distinction (see Carr-Gomm 2010, 8).

¹²⁷ Baker 2013, 90. Nakedness could also illustrate the poor conditions of captives and exiles (see Williamson 2020, 300.) In religious beliefs, nakedness could simultaneously shamefulness and lust to be conquered as well as innocence, lack of shame and denial of the body (see Carr-Gomm 2010, 11). In the political realm, nudity can symbolise the paradox of power and vulnerability (see Carr-Gomm 2010, 11).

¹²⁸ Carr-Gomm 2010, 8. Nakedness appears to be accepted in some forms but not others, and this varies across societies. In some instances, it can be interpreted as vulnerability but under specific circumstances could be interpreted as powerful as an act of protest and/or empowerment through the idea of having nothing to hide (see Carr-Gomm 2010, 12). Nakedness can symbolise freedom and create a sense of being ‘care-free’ in a world where existence is defined by the clothed life (see Carr-Gomm 2010, 48).

¹²⁹ Carr-Gomm 2010, 9. This can be evidenced through the appearance of nude god and goddess statues such as the ‘Venuses’ of Willendorf and Malta. Furthermore, the conceived link of nudity and witchcraft is also suggestive of the use of nakedness in practices of religion and belief (see Carr-Gomm 2010, 26). This contrasts some religious beliefs that encourage moral modesty (see Carr-Gomm 2010, 27).

human closer to the divine.¹³⁰ For example, 2 Sam 6 details David dancing before the ark before giving burnt offerings. Michal mocks David in 2 Sam 6:20 for dancing nude in this way, demonstrating a rebuttal of naked dancing as homage and reducing it to be “vulgar”. David retorts this in 2 Sam 6:21-22, stating he was chosen above others by YHWH and will go on to do more to honour YHWH. Furthermore, he argues that the servants Michal debases him to will hold him in honour. This suggests that nudity is held to be embarrassing and for the poor by Michal, but in performing this action,

David honours YHWH and will be held in great esteem by his people. In the iconography, depictions of fully nude worshippers are rare, however figure 4.1 shows a musician in sheer dress in front of Horus. This semi nudity when appearing before the gods to appease them with music can suggest the full nudity in Isa 20:2-4 can be interpreted as a method of pleasing YHWH. In Christian belief, the body is made in YHWH’s image whilst simultaneously being the focus and cause of human suffering.¹³¹ In this way, the body



Figure 4.1 Painted wooden stele of Zedhon-suantankh. 19th-20th Dynasties. Louvre. Author 2021.

enables experience as well as suffering, becoming a continuous paradox of temple and prison, highlighting the bodies place as YHWH’s creation and site of divine punishment. Figure 4.2 demonstrates a nude goddess on the left looking over the scene. The body of the deity is clearly human in form, further suggesting that the conception of the mortal body was based upon ideas of the deified form. This is emphasised through the depiction of clothed mortal humans processing to the right, reflecting the form of the naked goddess. This enables Isa 20:2-4 to be read as a return to creation in Gen 2:22-25, showing no shame in their nakedness as that was how Adam and Eve came into the world. Furthermore, the idea of the body as the locus for suffering can be interpreted in figure 4.3. Here, naked prisoners are punished by clothed winged

¹³⁰ Carr-Gomm 2010, 72. In Judaism this happens through ecstatic dancing, baptism, and prophecy (see Carr-Gomm 2010, 73).

¹³¹ Carr-Gomm 2010, 10. Pope John Paul II argued that the body made the invisible (spiritual and divine) visible, enabling the material world to access the mysteries of YHWH (see Carr-Gomm 2010, 86).

demons. The naked figures are pushed down, trampled, and bent. The contrast between the clothed, demonic punishers and naked, human sufferers emphasises the chasm between the two and enables a focus on the bodies as the site of torment. In this way, Isaiah's use of nakedness could be interpreted as demonstrating this punishment and suffering of the people through the display of the naked body. Through Isaiah's nakedness as a warning to Cush and Egypt, the iconography enables a reinterpretation of the text, suggesting the warning was not about a generic fall from grace and wealth, but instead a sign of bodily and emotional punishment that will revert them to the beginnings of society.

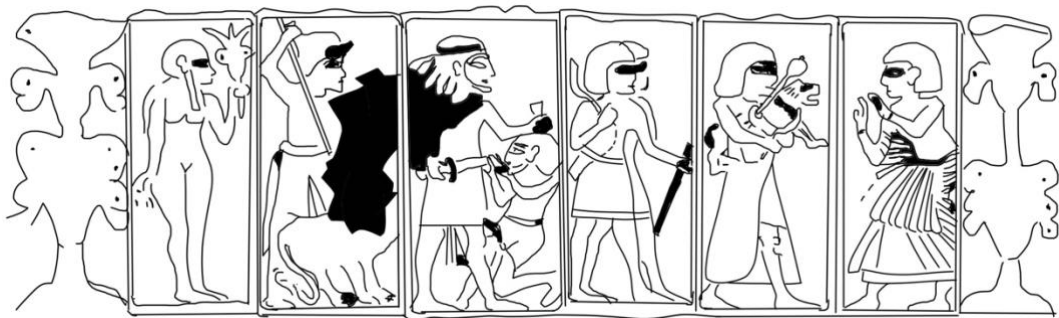


Figure 4.2 Ivory panel, Ugarit. 1400-1350 BCE. Damascus. Author 2021.



Figure 4.3 Marble cylinder seal. Ur, late Akkadian period. c.2200 BCE. Author 2021.

However, it is sometimes unclear if this meant full nudity or if a covering was included in this understanding of nakedness.¹³² The partially nude ‘Venus de Milo’ (figure 4.4) further demonstrates this idea of a covering. Modern descriptions of the sculpture indicate she is ‘semi-nude’; however, this could be down to modern interpretations of nakedness. The existence of ‘fully-nude’ sculptures indicate there was an understanding of nakedness but how much needed to be uncovered for it to be considered a nude? In artistic interpretations of Genesis, Adam and Eve are traditionally shown with fig leaves covering their genitalia as in Gen 3:7. The addition of the fig leaves for modesty in the text occurs after they have eaten from the tree of knowledge, thus one can argue nudity only became taboo after the original sin. This can also be seen in Job 1:21, demonstrating nudity as the natural state of humanity – he was born naked and shall die that way. In this way, nakedness was humanities original state and forces the reader to question attitudes towards nudity in their society and the undeserved anathema that surrounds it.

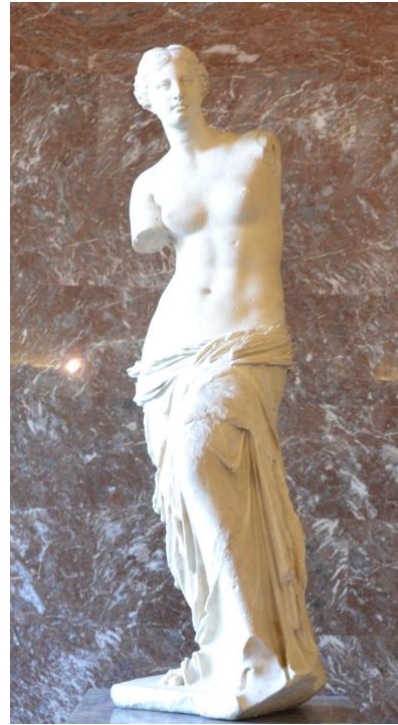


Figure 4.4 Venus de Milo. Hellenistic period c.150 BCE. Louvre. LL 299, Ma 399. Photography by Author, 2014.

A lack of clothing can indicate low social status or degradation, punishment, and humiliation.¹³³ This is evident through the naked bodies that are trampled upon in the trampling motif (see chapter 5.3). This nudity places the fallen enemies in contrast with the fully or partially clothed victors, degrading them further to articulate their loss of individual identity and personhood through the process of defeat and trampling.

¹³² Carr-Gomm 2010, 73. David wears a loincloth whereas Isaiah seems to be completely naked as evidenced through the line “walked naked and barefoot”.

¹³³ Bloch-Smith 2014, 2. Gen 3:9-10 suggests shame in nakedness, but this is contrasted by Gen 2:25 where nudity is shameless. This can be interpreted as a change because of the shame of eating from the tree of knowledge Gen 3:8-12). In this way, clothing communicates wealth (see Gansell 2014, 61.) A Hebrew ostracoon from 7th century Uza included a threat “You shall be stripped naked in judgement” (see Baker 2013, 90). Nakedness was reserved for the poor, prisoners, dancing girls, indicating how clothing can indicate status. Furthermore, the dead descending to the underworld were nude, suggesting a return to the purity of birth. (See Baker 2013, 158.)

Figure 4.5 demonstrates the contrast between naked prisoners and the clothed victors.

In this instance, scale is not used to demonstrate power (as with the king), instead relying on clothing, or lack thereof, to communicate the capability and personhood of figures. The Assyrian soldiers are identifiable by their armour and helmets, whereas the naked prisoners lack any discerning features, thus removing their

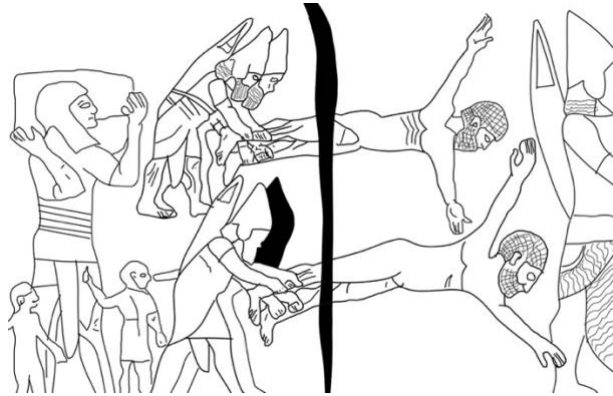


Figure 4.5 Gypsum wall panel relief. Prisoners from Lachish. Sennacherib. 700-692 BCE. British Museum. 124909. Author 2021.

identity to become merely a prisoner (see also figure 5.5). This enables a reinterpretation of the Isaian nakedness in Isa 20:2-4, suggesting Isaiah removes his identity through the removal of his clothes. This can be used to suggest that Isaiah separates himself from the sinful society that the nakedness is warning – he becomes an individual entity carrying YHWH’s word. In a similar way, the removal of sandals can be interpreted as a removal of social status.¹³⁴ Figure 4.6 demonstrates this lack of footwear in relation to a prisoner in fetters. This is not to say, every barefoot individual in the iconography is a prisoner, however it can indicate a low status because they are directly walking in the dust and mire of the streets. This enables a reinterpretation of Isa 20:2-4, suggesting walking barefoot symbolised a fall in status to walk in the dirt, furthering the portent against Egypt and Cush. In



Figure 4.6 Relief from Khorsabad, Hall VIII, 18. Sargon II (721-205 BCE). Author 2021.

contrast, clothes and ornamentation were used to demonstrate an individual’s wealth and power.¹³⁵ However, this stark contrast may not be the only way of understanding

¹³⁴ Sutton 2016, 59. This could be furthered to symbolise humiliation as indicated through the removal of a guard’s shoe as punishment for abandoning duty in a Hittite text (see Baker 2013, 90.)

¹³⁵ Carr-Gomm 2010, 12. This is opposed to the Greek view that raised the nude figure to represent the ideal body, framing those in power to be like the gods. This contrast may explain the ambiguous view

nudity in the ancient world. It can be argued that nakedness be interpreted as humility as evident through David in 2 Sam 6:20-23.¹³⁶ Thus, one can suggest that nakedness was deemed acceptable depending on the context – if chosen in an act of piety and humility, nudity was justifiable, however outside of this, it appears to be frowned upon. This is furthered through the requirement to be naked during baptism, suggesting that nudity in specific religious events was not only deemed appropriate but necessary. These ideas of admissible contexts for nudity carry through to modern societies, questioning when, where and how nakedness is deemed agreeable and autonomy over these choices. In Isa 20:2-3; 4, the context of Isaiah's nakedness is wrapped up in instructions and signs from YHWH. This suggests it can be interpreted as humility and piety through carrying the message of Egypt and Cush's coming judgement – Isaiah bares himself in service of YHWH. However, one could argue that Isaiah's actions are a symbol of rebellion against the sinful human powers and influences. In this way, one can argue that nudity can be read as celebration and dissent.¹³⁷ Nude rebellion has long taken place, for example Lady Godiva (10/11th century CE) to the modern day 'Naked Athena' in the 2020 Portland protests.¹³⁸ Whilst the events of naked rebellions are not depicted in the iconography, we see naked prisoners in the aftermath of battles (figure 4.7). Here three male naked figures are fettered and marched away from a burning city. This may suggest the nude figures were surviving soldiers as they are the only figures who are bound in the image. In this way, the Isaian nakedness can be interpreted as a rebellion against the 'sinful' society he is protesting through walking barefoot and naked.

of nudity in Christian belief, drawing from the Greek idealisation of the nude and the Judaic views of clothing and power (see Carr-Gomm 2019, 12).

¹³⁶ Carr-Gomm 2010, 73. This argued when nakedness is used in recognition of humanities place in the world and arguable 'nothingness' in comparison to the divine. This reminds us of the Buddhist 'naked awareness' (an emptiness that underlies reality).

¹³⁷ Carr-Gomm 2010, 174. This could take the form of individuals claiming their right to exist whilst facing erasure or oppression.

¹³⁸ Carr-Gomm 2010, 133. Nudity connotes vulnerability, however in the protest contexts, it comes to be a powerful symbol of courage, openness, and honesty. Through the naked rebellion, the human condition is exposed, allowing an open and powerful political message.

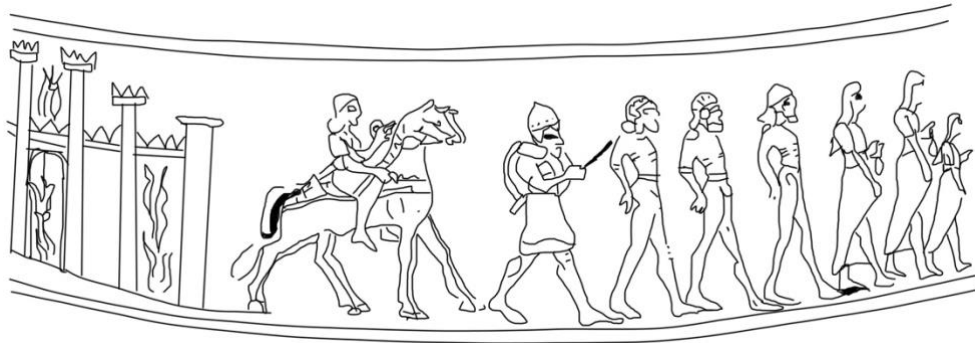


Figure 4.7 Relief from bronze gate, Tell Balawat. Shalmaneser II. 858-824 BCE. British Museum. Author 2021.

Nude female figures can have connections to sexuality, fertility, and childbearing (figure 4.8).¹³⁹ These kinds of statues can be found in burials, temples and in the domestic sphere and are often concerned with fertility and assuring both mother and child remain safe during birth. The appearance of a child alongside the nude figure emphasises the promise of future children communicated by the statue. Through the ‘Venus de Milo’, the idea that a semi-naked figure has been interpreted as an embodiment of ideal beauty, furthers interpretations of nudity as a positive and shameless symbol. This idea of nudity and fertility is also evident in British and European folk traditions, although this extends to the land; not just the human, going further to extend to love magic (which promises future fertility).¹⁴⁰ Despite this, the requirements for such rituals were specific (such as the time of day, month, week, or year), threatening to cause the opposite effect if performed incorrectly. This reflects the complicated relationship and understanding of societies with

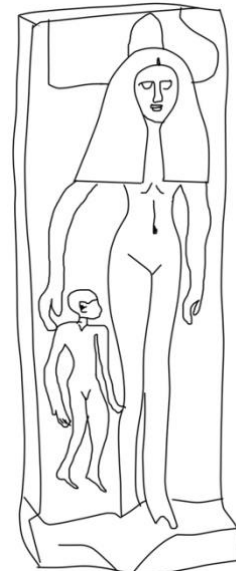


Figure 4.8 Fertility figurine. 19th-20th Dynasty. British Museum. Author 2021.

¹³⁹ Robins 2015, 133. If nude figures are depicted in conjunction with a bed, it can signify sex, emphasising the connotations of fertility, sexuality, and childbearing. This is emphasised through baked clay votive beds that include nude women facing forward and/or playing the lute. Through the sexual nature of the image, the figures are related to safe childbirth and/or rebirth.

¹⁴⁰ Carr-Gomm 2010, 38. In love magic, rituals performed at midnight on specific days whilst naked resulted in dreaming about or seeing the face of a future husband. Through their naked bodies performing these rituals, there is the promise of future fertility through childbirth but there could be immediate results for the lands fertility through their actions (including urination). It was also suggested that menstruating women who walked nude before sunrise through the crops could make harmful things fall from the crops. However, if not done at the correct time this could cause the crops to wither (see Carr-Gomm 2010, 40).

nudity through the pre-requisites that had to be met for it to be deemed ‘acceptable’.

However, fertility is only associated with the female body (figure 4.9) and the bearing of children. This depiction of Mother Earth features three children/foetuses and two heads coming from her shoulders with the sign for a swaddling band or cow’s uterus flanking her on either side. This emphasizes ideas of fertility and the female body. In modern vernacular, societies often refer to ‘Mother Nature’ when referring to the menstrual cycle, even featuring in prominent advertisements for feminine hygiene products. This idea of fertility and the female body is also evident in Astyages’ dream where vines grow



Figure 4.9 Clay relief. Larsa Period, c.1960-1860 BCE. Baghdad. Author 2021.

from his daughters genitalia as an omen about her child. Thus, nakedness can be interpreted as signs or omens of fertility, however in Isa 20:2-3 refers explicitly to Isaiah’s nakedness, thus the iconography does not enable a reinterpretation here. However, the nudity of Isa 20:4 is more ambiguous, referring to a whole group in society. Thus, the iconography may suggest that despite this omen against Egypt there is a glimmer of hope through the association of nakedness and fertility – despite being punished, they have the ability to grow again.

The idea of wearing a sackcloth marks emotional struggle and pain or could be interpreted as a symbol of low status. Despite this, grief could be demonstrated through wearing sackcloth.¹⁴¹ This could also be interpreted as an act of humility as in 2 Kgs 19:1-2 where Hezekiah and officials appears to lament through the tearing of clothes and wearing of sackcloth, however it can be interpreted as him debasing and humbling himself before YHWH. These ideas have continued, through the wearing of coarse material in media representations. For example, *Monty Python’s Life of Brian* depicts

¹⁴¹ Baker 2013, 76. Isa 15:3. The combination of sackcloth and wailing emphasise the use of this garment as a symbol for mourning and lamentation. Grief is felt internally and expressed outwardly through a variety of movements to emphasise the internal pain – the sackcloth represents this and causes the wearer to appear dishevelled and as if they have momentarily lost status through their grief. Sackcloth itself was coarse and caused chafing, emphasising the pain of loss - a text from the time of Nabonidus states the removal of fine clothes humiliated oneself before the gods (see Baker 2013, 94).

the titular character in a sackcloth-esque garment as he carries the cross, before being stripped upon the crucifixion.

The importance of clothing as a means of identity is emphasised through the clothing of idol statues as a step in its enlivenment – without clothes, the statue could not become the god (figure 4.10).¹⁴²

The looting of divine statues displaced the gods from their own cities, leaving them and their people unprotected. In this depiction, each statue is dressed and adorned with ornaments and props specific to them. Through

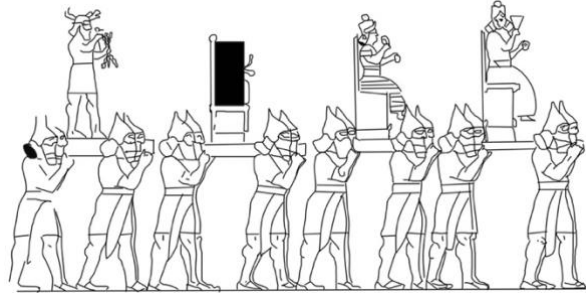


Figure 4.10 Looting foreign divine statues. Wall relief, Nimrud. Tiglath-Pileser III. Author 2021.

these identifiers, they were enlivened and able to come to the human realm, emphasising the importance of clothing as an identifier and articulation of life. Dress is a way to articulate an individual's personality to the world.¹⁴³ The *lubuštu*-ceremony was when the gods were clothed, and this was directed by the Neo-Assyrian kings.¹⁴⁴ This emphasises the importance of clothing the statue in the process of their worship. In this way, the iconography enables an interpretation of Isa 22:21 as an enlivening and identifying aspect of individuals, thus the sash symbolises the transference of life and identity from one figure to another. Dress can be used to include and exclude people from groups including political hierarchy, gendered ideas, and personal beliefs.¹⁴⁵ This leads to judgement on a base visual level, forming ideas based on self-preservation rather than the group or individual's society and culture. This is evident through Greek representations of the enemy in their own

¹⁴² Neumann 2017, 3. Divine dress was fundamental to the articulation of a god's appearance on earth (see Neumann 2017, 4). This dress was polychromatic and was laden with precious and semi-precious gems. The gods would also be depicted welding hand-held accessories. There are some surviving blue bears fragments from Egypt and a winged-figure plaque inlay from Nimrud and Nineveh that indicate these once lavish enlivened idols of the gods (see Neumann 2017, 5).

¹⁴³ McFerrin 2017, 144. Not everyone understands this is the same way because of various social and cultural backgrounds

¹⁴⁴ Neumann 2017, 12. A letter from the priest Raši-ili sent a letter to the king regarding the scheduling of the ceremony. Furthermore, Sargon II's inscriptions refer to the *lubāru*-garment as the 'divine wardrobe'. By describing these garments in this way, they are connected to divine status.

¹⁴⁵ McFerrin 2017, 145. This can lead to little differentiation between the individual and their own presentation based upon pre-conceived notion of another group. For example, the Greek notion of Persian dress by Aeschylus who constructs his version of Persian identity around the dress. See more on the Greek response to Persian clothing in Llewellyn-Jones 2013, 62.

iconography (figure 4.11). The Persians are rendered clothed with trousers, contrasting the Greek heroic nude. In this lekythos, Xenophanes plays with Achaemenid images to create a fantastical scene.¹⁴⁶ These ideas of self-preservation and the difference in understanding is furthered through Roman art moving away from heroic nudity to show powerful clothed individuals, leaving the nude to the enemy and sometimes divinities. In this way, Isa 22:21 can



be interpreted as a transference of identity and the self-preservation of

Figure 4.11 Detail from the Xenophanes lekythos of hunting scenes. Author 2021.

culture through the passing on of clothing. Dress can mark identity for the viewer as well as reinforce it for the wearer.¹⁴⁷ In a similar way, it could mark royal power and its transfer as in the investiture, emphasising the importance of clothing in articulating identity, status and enabling individuals to portray and/or hide certain aspects of themselves. One part of the Achaemenid investiture involved the new king being dressed in symbolic clothing.¹⁴⁸ This demonstrates the importance of clothing as a marker of the king's identity and transition from crown prince to king. During the investiture, the new king was clothed in Cyrus' robe before the imperial garb as a symbol of the transition of power by calling on the ancestral heritage of the dynasty. Isa 22:21 can thus be interpreted as a symbolic transference of power throughout the dynasty, enabling continuation. One could suggest this recalls YHWH's covenant with

¹⁴⁶ Llewellyn-Jones 2017, 773-775. This lekythos takes inspiration from the Persian royal hunt in the *paradisos*. Fourth-century Greeks were familiar with the Persian practices that influenced this image. Some figures are labelled with traditional Achaemenid names, whilst others are Greek, creating an amalgamation of the two cultures within the scene.

¹⁴⁷ McFerrin 2017, 156. The choice of clothing would make the wearer aware of the difference between that occasion and everyday life. For example, a jewelled doublet versus a plain one for a Tudor English nobleman and a riding outfit versus a courtly robe for the Achaemenid Persian.

¹⁴⁸ Llewellyn-Jones 2013, 14. This, along with the taking of a new name, eating specific foods, and drinking ritual liquor, enabled the king to take on a new 'body'. The king was dressed twice, one in the humble clothing of Cyrus the Great to remind him of the nomadic origins. The second dressing was in line with his royal *farr*, the clothing of a king. Cyrus' robe is a symbol of royal authority, and the royal clothing is received by the king during the investiture to be worn thereafter. The common male dress involved an outer robe that fell between the knee and ankle and could be unisex (see Baker 2013, 33, 94-95.)

David (2 Sam 7), in which ideas of familial lines and dynasty are articulated in the Biblical text, through the passing of power to the children. The sash mentioned in Isa 22:21 could refer to the belted court robe of the Achaemenids (figure 4.12).¹⁴⁹ In this way, the iconography enables a reading of Isa 22:21 as a transference of power and the taking of a new body as imperial power is gained. This is reinforced through the phrase “commit your authority to his hand”, demonstrating the importance of clothing in communicating power and authority and its transference between individuals. This interpretation can go further as in Gen 37:3-4. Here by giving Joseph a multi-coloured coat Jacob/Israel raises him above his brothers as a symbol of his love. In the ancient Near East, there was not a policy of primogeniture thus a gift such as the multi-coloured coat could be seen as Jacob/Israel selecting his heir, as the ancient kings would choose any son to be crown prince.

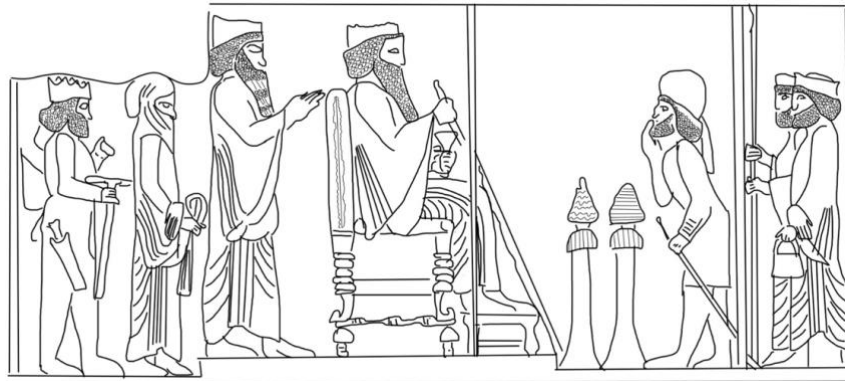


Figure 4.12 Darius I and Xerxes I give audience. Stone relief, Persepolis. National Museum of Iran, Tehran. Author 2021.

¹⁴⁹ Llewellyn-Jones 2013, 63. This court robe was made from a square of linen or wool that was belted over baggy trousers. This is often what the king wears in the iconography, however it is unclear if this was their everyday wear.

Hair and baldness could mark an individual's status, from specific haircuts to shaved heads,¹⁵⁰ appearances can be read as social signals. It has often been suggested that beardless males were eunuchs (figure 4.13).¹⁵¹ Some argue this depiction could be a beardless youth, however given the place of eunuchs as attendants, this is also a likely option given the lack of beard and wielding of a sash and jar of oil or ointment. Eunuchs were unable to grow beards because they were castrated before puberty, thus when beardless figures appear in the iconography one must consider the possibility of eunuchs in the context. In this way, images of court scenes are likely to include them because eunuchs were key features of the Persian court and took on a range of roles.¹⁵² In this way, the eunuch contrasts the ideas of baldness or beardlessness as a lack of power because of the influence they held in the Achaemenid courts. Despite this, hair and beards were considered important to achieve all-encompassing elite power (such as the King). This is attested in the story of Artoxares'

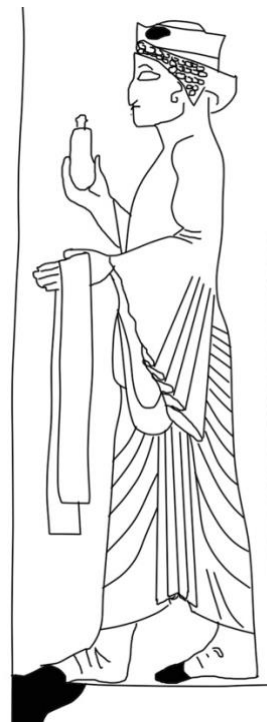


Figure 4.13 Eunuch or beardless youth. Persepolis. Author 2021.

attempted coup, in which he acquired a fake beard due to his inability to grow one because he was a eunuch. Only by assuming a beard, could Artoxares begin to attempt the usurpation, emphasising the importance of hair in communicating the ability to rule and hold that divinely given power. In this way, the iconography enables a reinterpretation of Isa 15:2-3, suggesting that a lack of hair does not necessarily connote a lack of power because of the position of eunuchs. However, in the Isaian text the beards are shorn, suggesting beards are removed – they were once there but

¹⁵⁰ Baker 2013, 23. Hammurabi's laws state "If a barber shaves off the hair-lock of a slave not belonging to him without the consent of the slaves' owner, they shall cut off the barber's hand". This demonstrates the importance of hair and baldness in the ancient world and the communication of social status.

¹⁵¹ Ornan 2005, 137. Beards had different popular styles depending on the geographic area, for example Israel and Syria preferred a pointed goatee, Assyrians favoured full, bushy beards whilst Egyptians are often depicted as clean-shaven except for a band beard (see Baker 2013, 43.) Shaving beards was an insult and could be interpreted as prisoner (see Baker 2013, 45.)

¹⁵² Tougher 2008, 7-9. They could be personal attendants and even administrative or military generals. Some were also servants in private homes as well as taking on other professions. Eunuchs originated in the East with stories attributing their creation to the Persian or Assyrian Queen Atossa or Assyrian queen Semiramis. In Achaemenid courts, eunuchs held the trust of elites and could have great influence as personal attendants and agents.

the active shaving has left them beardless. In this way, one can suggest that Isaiah's intent was to demonstrate a removal of power because, unlike eunuchs who never had a beard, the transition from bearded to beardless marks a change in status and loss of power. This idea of baldness as a lack of power is seen through the rendering of non-elite males in Egyptian art, contrasting the well-groomed elite (figure 4.14).¹⁵³ In this stela, one can see three bald figures bringing offerings to a well-



Figure 4.14 Lower half of stela in tomb of Amenemone. Saqqara, late 18th Dynasty. Author 2021.

groomed couple. The use of hair combined with scaling suggesting that the smaller, bald figures are of a lesser status than the larger, groomed couple. One can suggest through these representations that the offerings are being brought to the deceased and their family by other members of society. In this way, one can suggest Isa 15:2-3 can be interpreted as a change of status, from the well-groomed elite to the poorer bald.

The importance of hair and beards is emphasised through the idea that wigs and hair pieces were used and woven into hair in the Achaemenid period.¹⁵⁴ Beyond the symbolism of power and status, hair could also demonstrate and individuals' health.¹⁵⁵ In the iconography, the king's hair and beard are often portrayed as luscious and well-maintained, thus communicating his strength and power (figure 4.15). Both Sargon II and Sennacherib wear carefully coiffed hair and beards in this symbol the



Figure 4.15 Sargon II and Sennacherib. Dur Sharrukin. 710 BCE. Author 2021.

¹⁵³ Robins 2015, 125. Elite Egyptian males were depicted as physically perfect and well-groomed, emphasising their status through their physical attractiveness (see Robins 2015, 131) This contrasts the disrespect associated with shaving someone's head (Isa 7:20). The Achaemenid beard could be referent to health and vitality (see Llewellyn-Jones 2013, 56).

¹⁵⁴ Llewellyn-Jones 2013, 58. Hair was significant, with elite men growing long and thick hair to symbolise their social status and women's hair forming an aspect upon which their beauty was judged.

¹⁵⁵ Llewellyn-Jones 2013, 58. If hair was poor, it could suggest the individual was suffering from a disease or uncleanness. Furthermore, their treatment of hair, such as tearing it, could symbolise an emotional state such as grief.

transference of power through the passing of the staff. In this way, their grooming and length of beard demonstrate their virility and ability to rule. This heightens the sense of power, status, and authority because a strong monarch has long been associated with health and vitality. The iconographic hair is carefully constructed in curls, furthering the royal image of power. In this way, the hair and beard were a sign of ancient Near Eastern manhood, explaining the pride taken in their appearance.¹⁵⁶ Thus, the iconography enables an interpretation of Isa 15:2-3 along the lines of a loss of power and ‘manhood’ through the shaving of beards and baldness. Furthermore, this lack of hair in Isaiah afflicts ‘every head’, thus the iconography can enable an interpretation that every individual in society suffers a loss of power to bring them all to the same level. Despite these connotations of power and powerlessness attached to hair, people would shave their head during periods of mourning (see chapter 4.4).¹⁵⁷ One could suggest through the mourning process, the individual life or groups lives are upturned, and their lack of agency is highlighted through their despair after losing a loved one or city. In this way, Isa 15:2-3 could be interpreted as an upheaval in society through the levelling of peoples through everyone being affected. This could also enable an interpretation of the text as society-wide mourning through this shaving of heads.

Overall, the iconography offers insight into the self-presentation of peoples in the ancient Near East that can shed light onto the Isaian text. In this way, the iconography enables further interpretation of the text and offering a variety of paths the reader can take when interpreting Isaiah. Despite this, the iconography does not reflect Isaiah’s use of sackcloth, suggesting that although this was common practice in the ancient world, it was not deemed essential to mark in the iconographic record. In this way, the iconographic approach is helpful for gaining insight into general self-presentation through clothing and hair, however, cannot be used alone to interpret Isaiah’s use of appearances in the Oracles against the Nations.

¹⁵⁶ Llewellyn-Jones 2013, 58-59. It is likely hairdressers carefully styled the hair and oils were often applied to the king’s hair. The beard itself as the symbol of manhood, was the focus of oaths and blessings but could also carry shame if it were attacked as this became a metonym for an attack on the whole individual.

¹⁵⁷ Gansell 2014, 59. Deut 21:12 demonstrates this shaving for mourning through the captive women being allowed to mourn their fathers after being taken as wives. This is furthered in Isa 15:2, expressing total baldness and shaving through the wailing and lamentation.

4.4 Lament – 14:31 “Wail, O gate; cry out, O city; melt in fear”; 15:2 “[...] to weep [...] Moab wails”; 15:4 “armed men of Moab cry aloud”; 15:4 “his soul trembles”; 15:5 “they go up weeping”; 15:8 “her wailing reaches to Eglaim; her wailing reaches to Beer-elim”; 16:7 “Therefore the Moabites wail, they wail together for Moab. Lament and grieve for the raisin cakes of Kir Hareseth”; 16:9 “Therefore I weep with the weeping of Jazer [...] I drench you with my tears”; 16:10 “no cheers are raised”; 19:8-9 “The fishermen will mourn and lament, all who cast a hook in the Nile; and they will languish who spread nets on the water. The workers in combed flax will be in despair, and the weavers of white cotton.”; 19:20 “When they cry to the Lord”; 21:3-4 “Therefore my loins are filled with anguish; pangs have seized me, like the pangs of a woman in labour; I am bowed down so that I cannot hear; I am dismayed so that I cannot see. “My heart staggers; horror has appalled me”; 22:4 “let me weep bitter tears; do not labour to comfort me concerning the destruction of the daughter of my people”; 24:17 “Terror and the pit and the snare”; 24:18 “He who flees at the sound of the terror shall fall into the pit, and he who climbs out of the pit shall be caught in the snare.”

Lament was a method of honouring the dead and expressing the emotion of the living.¹⁵⁸ The lamentation of the ancient world was powerful and expressed outwardly, being involved in ceremonies of mourning. One description of lament is a ‘fervent expression of private pain’,¹⁵⁹ emphasising the inundation of emotion expressed and felt at times of grief. This can be interpreted through Mary’s weeping in John 20:11. ‘Wept’ appears more dramatic and sorrowful than ‘cried’, emphasising the deep and visceral pain felt in grief and loss. One could argue that lament symbolises a breakdown following on from a trigger.¹⁶⁰ In this way, lamentation appears when

¹⁵⁸ Suter 2008, 4. This could be an acceptance, forgiveness or even vengeance depending on the circumstances of the death. In its official form, lamentation was often left to women.

¹⁵⁹ Harasta and Brock 2009, 3-5. Definitions of lament are shaped by cultural conceptions (see further on cognitive theory in Introduction of this thesis). Lament can be argued to be an emotion going beyond the limits of human behaviour (see Klein 2009, 15.)

¹⁶⁰ Lakkis 2009, 170. The instigating event triggers a chain of events that ultimately leads to and results in suffering and lamentation. This could be the loss of a loved one or a disaster that effects wider society such as the destruction of temples or cities.

individuals or groups have lost their agency and ability to give life meaning.¹⁶¹ Furthermore, it could be used to attract the gods' attention, directing them to human suffering to coax them to relieve it, as well as encouraging agricultural fertility and human prosperity (figure 4.16).¹⁶²

This seal impression shows a kneeling figure in a posture of respect and worship before the gods who stand atop of creatures. This stance appears like the poses of lamentation in the ancient world through the raised arm and kneeling. In



Figure 4.16 Impression C, seal of Tukulti Ninurta I. 1243-1207 BCE. Used on *Vasal Treaties of Esarhaddon* (680-669 BCE). Author 2021.

this way, the ideas of mourning and the invocation of the gods are connected in the ancient Near East. Matt 5:4 suggests mourning, and thus lament, was an honourable act, thus it can be interpreted as a necessary process to ensure the living are not sinful (Rev 18:7-8 suggests the lack of mourning incurs YHWH's wrath). Lamentation marked a move in life – the end of one 'era' and the beginning of another.¹⁶³ In this way, lament marked a change; this need not be limited by binary definitions of life and death, merely a loss of something that had been. One example of this understanding is in tarot where the 'death card' marks a change, for example becoming an adult. Thus, one could argue lamentation need not be interpreted as a response to death, but a reaction to any level of loss and suffering. This is demonstrated through the lament after the destruction of a temple or city.¹⁶⁴ Luke 23:28 implies that the 'daughters of Jerusalem' should weep for their own situations that are to come, reinforcing the interpretation of lament as a demarcation of change. In this way, lament could be a reaction to divinely caused suffering.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶¹ Klein 2009, 16. Through lamenting, the individual or group faces the event that cannot be ignored by protesting it despite their lack of agency. However, through lament, the helpless could be re-empowered, giving the oppressed a voice as in Deut 24:15 (see Lakkis 2009, 172).

¹⁶² Bachvarova 2008, 18. Emesal laments led by *gala* priests could be used to mourn specific occasions/events and soothe angry gods. In this way the *gala* priests adopted the female powers of lamentation through their official role as a political and social unit.

¹⁶³ Klein 2009, 19. After the lament, life cannot go on in the same way as before the incident.

¹⁶⁴ Holm 2005, 260. The destruction of such structures warrants lament because they marked a significant social and cultural loss to the community. Laments could also be used to mourn the death of the god Dumuzi.

¹⁶⁵ Lakkis 2009, 169. In ancient Israelite tradition, lament could be the final chance to appeal to the divine for help and/or forgiveness. In this way, lament could 'reactivate' the divine in a call for their intervention.

Lamentation could be a gendered ritual as evident in epic and ritual (figure 4.17). In this depiction, women are the only ones lamenting through holding their heads and bowing down. Through their positions, the iconography creates a sense of emotional torment as they kneel and look up to the gods, crying out in pain from their loss. For example, the *taptara*-women in Hittite ritual were a professional mourning group that circled or processed whilst wailing.¹⁶⁶ Furthermore, the three laments for Hector in the *Iliad* are all performed by women (Andromache, Hecabe and Helen).¹⁶⁷ In this way,



Figure 4.17 Tomb painting, Abd el Qurna. Tomb of Userhet (no 51). 19th Dynasty. Author 2021.

the texts suggests that female lamentation is the only kind that is recognised in official ceremonies. Despite this, male lament does occur in ancient text, such as Achilles' lament of Patroclus and David's lament for Saul and Jonathan in 2 Sam 1. It also appears in the iconographic record (figure 4.18), suggesting that male lamentation was not unique. This iconographic representation shows the extent to which lamentation can be experienced and practiced with a large group of men all raising their hands and piling on top of one another amid their emotion. Despite these depictions of single-sex lamentation, there are instances of combined lamentation (figure 4.19). Here, two women stand at the deceased's head, one cradles his head (probably the mother) as the other raises her arms in front of her face. Two men approach from the left with arms raised in an expression of lamentation. This articulation of dual-sex lamentation moved the act into a domestic sphere as one can suggest this is the deceased's immediate family coming together to mourn. Despite this, the sexes are still separated.

¹⁶⁶ Rutherford 2008, 60-62. The *taptara*-women were probably not linked to the deceased and may have been used for several reasons. It was believed that the ritual could be dangerous or polluting, thus having a group separated from the wider community protected them all. Furthermore, they may have been used for their expertise in the matter.

¹⁶⁷ Perckell 2008, 96. These three laments are the only in the text that appear in a formal ceremony.

The females are closer to the body and interacting with it, suggesting that is the focus of their attention. On the other hand, the male figures are depicted processing in, suggesting they are not present for the entire ritual lamentation, rather entering later to pay their respects. Through the iconography, Isaiah's use of weeping, wailing, mourning, lamenting, and crying aloud become



Figure 4.18 Limestone relief, Saqqara, Tomb of Horemheb. 1345-1318 BCE. Leiden, Rijksmuseum. Author 2021.

all-encompassing because of the involvement of everyone in a group. This enables the reader to interpret the text as lamentation and pain on every stratum of society, emphasising that grief and suffering do not discriminate. Despite Isaiah's separation of groups in the narrative (Moab (Isa 15:2), fishermen and weavers (Isa 19:8-9)), the iconography enables this to be interpreted as large-scale lamentation, beyond the individual groups.

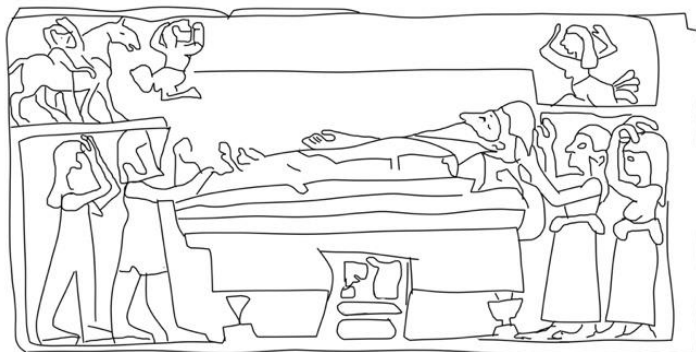


Figure 4.19 The Memphis Stela, Saqqara. 27th Dynasty. Ägyptisches Museum und Papyryssammlung, Author 2021.

Lamentation involved specific actions such as tearing clothes, throwing dust on the head, crouching, and fasting.¹⁶⁸ This could even result in full or partial nakedness as in

¹⁶⁸ Keel 1997, 319. This is evident in Ps 35:13-14, indicating these actions of grief and lament. The corporeality of grief in the ancient world makes it more visceral than the quiet, stoic silence we are often faced with in the modern era through the idea of 'being strong' for others. When Il hears of Baal's death the reaction is cited "with a stone he scratches vicisions on [his] skin, with a razor he cuts his cheeks and chin." (see Baker 2013, 76.)

the female figures on the Memphis stela (figure 4.19). Women are clothed from the waist down, baring their chests during their expressions of grief as they interact with the deceased. The idea of sitting on the ground signifies a pose of despair as demonstrated in the Judea Capta coins (figure 4.20).¹⁶⁹ To mark the Roman victory over the Jewish rebellion, this coin depicts a figure sat with their head in their hands at the foot of a palm tree. This posture of defeat reflects the kneeling of lamentation – figures are lowering themselves into the dust as they face a change in



Figure 4.20 Reverse of the Judea Capta sesterce of Vespasian. 71 CE. Author 2021.

circumstances and loss of someone/something. This idea of being in the dust as a symbol of defeat appears in the trampling motif (see chapter 5.3). In this way, Isaiah's use of struggle and lament can be interpreted as a reversal of fortunes resulting in despair and defeat. This sense of distress is evident in figure 4.21. The figures are all lamenting as they are taken prisoner and marched away to join the others after an Assyrian attack on an enemy town. One can see the distress as they appear to tear their hair in an expression of the grief they feel after losing their home (and likely loved ones). In this way, the iconography enables an interpretation of the text regarding the visceral emotion felt during these moments of lamentation and struggle.

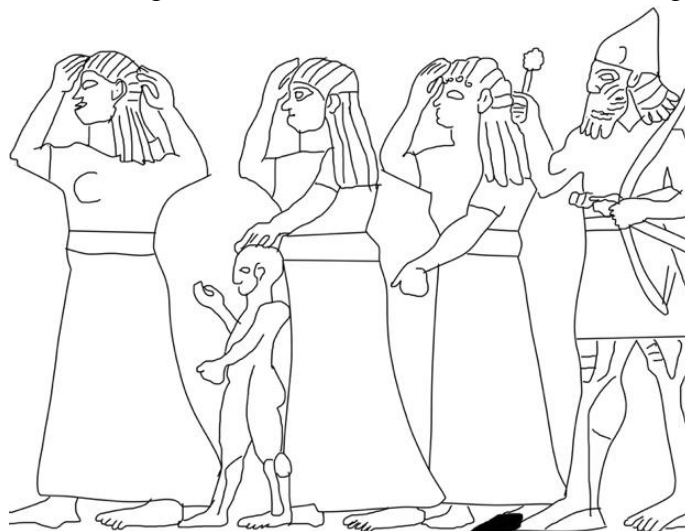


Figure 4.21 Lamenting prisoners are marched away. Neo-Assyrian, Ashurnasirpal II. 865-860 BCE. Nimrud. British Museum. 124552. Author 2021.

¹⁶⁹ Baker 2013, 24. In the epic of Gilgamesh, after the flood Utnapishtim states “Consequently I crouched, I sat down, I wept” – indicating the lament and despair felt at the destruction left behind by the flood.

The iconographic record puts visuals to Isaiah's words, enabling the reader to contemplate the deep pain of the experiences articulate in text and image. Whilst Isaiah's narrative stirs up strong images and emotions, the iconography adds to this depth of emotion and offers new interpretations regarding the practice of lamentation and the extent to which this effected Isaiah's contemporary audience and society. Thus, considering the iconography when reading the Oracles against the Nations enable the reader to understand the ancient practices and conjure images of outwardly expressed grief. The visual record contextualises Isaiah's strong literary images for audiences that have not experienced or witnessed this pain, acting as a vehicle for interpretation and understanding.

4.5 Feasting and Entertainment – 16:11 “my inner parts moan like a lyre for Moab”; 17:4 “the fat of his flesh will grow lean”; 18:3 “When a trumpet is blown, hear!”; 19:14 “and they will make Egypt stagger in all its deeds, as a drunken man staggers in his vomit”; 21:5 “They prepare the table, they spread the rugs, they eat, they drink. Arise, O princes”; 22:13 “and behold, joy and gladness, killing oxen and slaughtering sheep, eating flesh, and drinking wine. ‘Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.’”; 23:16 “Take a harp; go about the city, O forgotten prostitute! Make a sweet melody; sing many songs, that you may be remembered”; 23:17 “[...] will prostitute herself [...]”; 24:8-9 “The mirth of the tambourines is stilled, the noise of the jubilant has ceased, the mirth of the lyre is stilled. No more do they drink wine with singing; strong drink is bitter to those who drink it”; 24:11 ““There is an outcry in the street for lack of wine; all joy has grown dark; the gladness of the earth is banished”; 24:14 “They lift up their voices, they sing for joy”; 24:20 “The earth staggers like a drunken man; it sways like a hut”

Joy was expressed in a variety of ways in the Biblical text, creating lively scenes of celebration. Banquets were used for celebration and entertainment in the ancient world,

including demonstrations of power.¹⁷⁰ Esth 1:1-8 details the events of King Ahasuerus' banquets held to showcase his power and wealth. The elaborate preparation and presentation of these events could be used to demonstrate power and wealth. Royalty and elites would sponsor and organise banquets honouring victories and other special occasions.¹⁷¹ Banquets involved vast amounts of food and drink as demonstrated in



in Ashurbanipal II's banquet stela celebrating the dedication of *Figure 4.22 Banquet scene of Ashurbanipal. Neo Assyrian. 645-635 BCE. Nineveh. British Museum 124920. Author 2021.*

Calah palace. Banquets could range from small events with the king's immediate family to lavish occasions with thousands of attendees.¹⁷² Furthermore, banquets and drinking were for all genders as demonstrated by the banqueting royal couple (figure 4.22). In this relief Ashurbanipal reclines with the Queen seated next to him as they both drink from wine bowls. This relief demonstrates an intimate banquet with just the king and queen attended by servants as they celebrate the defeat of the Elamite Teumman (evidenced through his severed head in a neighbouring tree). This co-gendered banquet is also seen in a funerary stela from Dascyleium, where a reclining man is with a seated, veiled woman in Persian dress, as they drink and are attended by two servants (figure 4.23). This depiction is even more intimate, featuring only the feasting couple and two attendants. In



Figure 4.23 Detail of a funerary stela from Dascyleium. 540-330 BCE. Author 2021.

¹⁷⁰ Baker 2013, 28. In an Ugaritic myth, the god Kothar-wa-Hasis arrived and “they arrange a chair, and he sits to the right of Mighty Baal, while [the gods] ate and drank”. This emphasises the importance of banqueting in celebration and the power demonstrated through seating arrangements. (see Baker 2013, 91.) Through the celebration, banquets involved increased drinking (see Walsh 2000, 227.)

¹⁷¹ Baker 2013, 101. This reflects the divine use of banquets – Marduk is honoured with a banquet (involving wine, beer, liquor, and food) for defeating Tiamat in the creation story, *Enuma Eliš*. However, ‘banquets’ could function on the smaller, domestic scale as well as a grander one (see Walsh 2000, 225.)

¹⁷² Brosius 2010, 150. Iconographic banquets enabled the depiction of the king and his court. Banqueting in such a lavish way was a courtly activity. Iconographic representations enabled the royal couple to be depicted together in a motif of Persian art.

this rendition, the woman appears to be sat on the man's couch instead of a separate throne as in figure 4.22. Through the iconography, Isa 21:5 can be interpreted as separate groups – 'they' can refer to both the attendants in these scenes and the dining couple who recline and sit. This creates a sense of separation in the text, suggesting not everyone benefits from these banquets and entertainment. Therefore, the iconography enables a reinterpretation of the text to indicate the preparation for battle was not universal, instead focused on the 'Princes' and not the common soldiers.

The idea of drinking together can be read as demonstrations of trust (figure 4.24).¹⁷³

Here Mereruka's overweight brother is drinking from a bowl lifted to him by an attendant. Mereruka's brother must trust the attendant to ensure his drink is safe as well as his own safety from choking as he drinks. In this way, Isa 19:14, 21:5, 22:13, 24:9, 24:11 and 24:20 should all be considered in line ideas of trust. Thus, the iconography enables a reinterpretation of the drunkenness as trusting those around them to ensure their safety as they were able to become inebriated around them. Furthermore, the lack of wine (Isa 24:11) demonstrates a lack of trust, in contrast to the



Figure 4.24 Mastaba of Mereruka. Old Kingdom. 6th Dynasty. Saqqara. Author 2021.

communal drinking of Isa 22:13 in preparation to go to battle together in a quintessential trusting relationship. However, *Athenaeus'*, *Dinner of the Sophists* 4.145a suggests the king was separated by a veil through which he could see his guests, but not vice versa (translated by Llewellyn-Jones 2013, 160). This separation demonstrates the social hierarchy and creates a microcosm of this societal ladder in the banquet (figure 4.25). In this depiction, the attendants and entertainers are separated from the banqueters using clothing versus nudity and chairs versus kneeling. In this way, one can reinterpret the Isaian banquets as elitist separation of peoples rather than a unifying factor. Thus, Isa 24:11 is emphasised as a punishment through

¹⁷³ Walsh 2000, 253. Wine encouraged social interaction through lowered inhibitions. Pliny, *Natural History* 14.28.141 – “in wine there is truth”

taking away the luxuries the elites used as a mechanism of separation. This is further emphasised through the seating plans cited in *Xenophon*, *Cyropaedia* 8.4.1.3-5 with the most trusted individuals being sat closest to Cyrus. In this way, their physical proximity to the king reflects their relationship and importance in the court and wider society. This reappears in the parable of the wedding feast in Luke 14:7-11. Here the reader is encouraged to begin seated at the lowest place of honour to be invited to sit higher up rather than vice versa to avoid the shame of being moved to a lower position. This demonstrates the importance of seating arrangements as reinforcing hierarchy in these microcosms of societal groups. Furthermore, banquets can be read as demonstrations of relationships between the host and their guests for other attendants to witness. Banquets could also form parts of religious celebration and include offerings of food and drink to the gods based upon local diets (figure 4.26). One example of this is fish, which was an important element of the ancient Israelite diet and formed part of the supplies offered to Mesopotamian gods.¹⁷⁴ In this depiction, baskets of food are brought before Ishtar in an offering from the crop yield. This use of food as offering was left for Ishtar and other gods in the form of the idols to feast upon in a divine banquet. This iconography enables a reinterpretation of the Isaian banquet as a method of paying homage to YHWH as in the story of the golden calf (Exod 32). Thus, the joy and gladness felt at such events can be interpreted as being directed towards YHWH, rather than the events themselves.



Figure 4.25 Painting from tomb-chapel of Nebamun, c.1350 BCE. Thebes. Author 2021.

¹⁷⁴ Baker 2013, 85. The importance of fish in the ancient world is emphasised through Esarhaddon's deportation of skilled workers from Egypt, including fishermen as well as the appearance of fish on Hebrew seal impressions. Furthermore, the prophecies of Nefertiti indicate empty rivers and thus desolation.

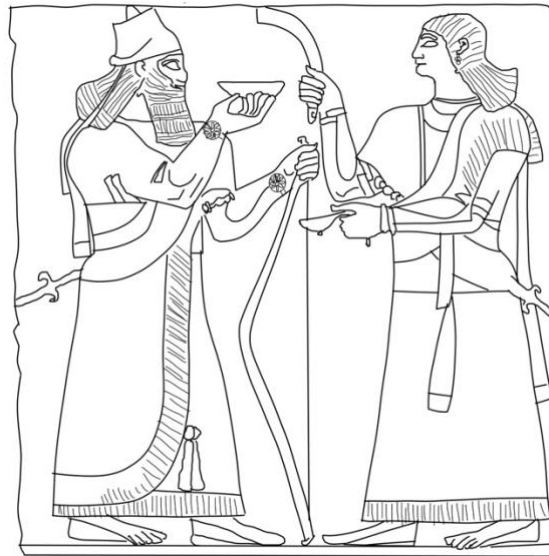


Figure 4.26 Assyrian Relief panel, c. 883-859 BCE. Nimrud. Gypsum alabaster. 32.143.4. Met Museum. Author 2021.

Wine was popular with the Assyrians, reflected by drinking and rhytons appearing in many depictions throughout the ancient Near East (figure 4.27). The use of bowls for distribution suggests wine was a communal beverage, decanted from a main source. These bowls were sometimes depicted alongside animal skins, such as sheep or goat used for transportation.¹⁷⁵ Upon serving, wine was mixed with water when poured into ceramic vessels for distribution.¹⁷⁶ Throughout a banquet, wine provided refreshment whilst also aiding digestion.¹⁷⁷ The iconography enables a reinterpretation of Isaiah's use of drinking and drunkenness as a group activity. Thus, the outcomes and punishments of such behaviour can be seen as on society rather than individual victims, emphasising YHWH's judgement on the Nations throughout the Oracles. The long process of the production and transportation of the wine made it an expensive luxury, retained for the king and his court and the gods.¹⁷⁸ This is emphasised through Isaiah's

¹⁷⁵ Radner 2015, 1. To transport this along the Tigris, the skins were bound together with logs to create a raft so they could leave Aššur.

¹⁷⁶ Radner 2015, 38. This may have been because an individual would drink approximately one pint of wine during a banquet (see Radner 2015, 38).

¹⁷⁷ Walsh 2000, 221. It could also be used to suppress appetite and provided some vitamins for the consumer.

¹⁷⁸ Walsh 2000, 24. Vine growing, grape-picking, treading, and pressing grapes and filling wine jars all go into the long process of winemaking as well as involving many people in the process (see de Hulster 2009.) In this way, the vine was revered in the ancient world – the vine was an object of esteem and wonder in ancient Israel, highlighting its importance in society (see Walsh 2000, 249.)

use of the vine metaphor throughout the text to draw parallels with YHWH's care of humanity and what happens if they sin (Isa 5:1-7). Isaiah demonstrates the farmer's (YHWH) tender care and love for the vineyard, however it yields 'wild grapes' leading to its destruction. This can be read as YHWH's punishment of the nations in response to their sin (the 'wild grapes'). Furthermore, wine was important in ritual meals for the gods,¹⁷⁹ demonstrating its value, importance, and status within Assyrian society. Exod 29:40 demonstrates wine was given as an offering alongside lamb, flour, and oil. This is reiterated in Lev 23:13, suggesting this combination and amounts of offerings were standard in the ancient world. Wine was a prestigious drink, reserved for the king, elites, and officials.¹⁸⁰ This esteem and expense meant little was used by the average person, making wine a refreshment of the Imperial courts and elite.¹⁸¹ Despite this, ancient Israelite farmers also drank wine from their yield or exchanged crops for wine and vice versa – they could not afford water to brew beer, nor could they focus on one crop, growing vines for wine diversified their yield.¹⁸² One can sometimes see a lotus flower depicted on drinking vessels, suggesting they may have been added to the wine for a hallucinogenic effect.¹⁸³ Beer was also a popular drink in the ancient Near East and would be used at banquets along with wine.¹⁸⁴ However, drunkenness was condemned in the Bible.¹⁸⁵ Prov 20:1 emphasises this through the personification of

¹⁷⁹ Radner 2015, 59. Wine could also be poured as a libation to the gods along with offerings of grain and meat. In using a luxury item, it proves the provider of the offering (oftentimes the king) was powerful and wealthy. This also emphasises the importance of appeasing the gods in the ancient world, ensuring they had the correct food and drink would thus mean they would support the land. The wine is used to cheer humans and the gods.

¹⁸⁰ Walsh 2000, 25. Prestige could be recognised through royal vineyard production or in the ability to import wine. Gen. 40:9-10 emphasises the prestige associated with wine through the cupbearer's dream of an appearing vine and squeezing grapes into Pharaoh's cup.

¹⁸¹ Walsh 2000, 25. Beer was the cheaper alternative; farmers largely drank beer from their barley harvest whereas elite and royal banquets would have utilised wine and beer.

¹⁸² Walsh 2000, 26. they could not afford water to brew beer, nor could they only focus on growing grain – wine did not require added liquid and was made from pressing grapes. This all came from their lack of access to water like the alluvial Egypt and Mesopotamia.

¹⁸³ Bergman 2015, 48. Lotus shaped collars were linked to rebirth and regeneration with Osiris. Thus, the addition of lotus flowers to the wine could be to blur the lines of reality to enable the living to become closer with the dead ancestors (see Bergman 2015, 48).

¹⁸⁴ Baker 2013, 97. Beer had a sexual nuance as demonstrated in Sumerian texts – "*Her vuvla is sweet like her beer – and her beer is sweet*" and "*pleasure – it is beer; discomfort – it is an expedition*"

¹⁸⁵ Baker 2013, 28. Furthermore the 'Instruction of Ani' (c.1100 BCE) states "Don't indulge in drinking beer, lest you utter evil speech". Gen 19:31-35 uses drunkenness under cosmic duress to communicate the negatives of drunkenness through Lot's intoxication making him unaware of his daughter's incest. Drunkenness is also clear in Ben-hadad's demise (1 Kgs 20:16).

wine as a mocker. In this way, Isaiah's use of drunkenness emphasises the sin of the Nation's leading to their judgement by YHWH.



Figure 4.27 Uruk Vase, upper register detail. 3000-2900 BCE. Uruk, Southern Mesopotamia. Author 2021.

Through feasts and banquets, ideas of social hierarchy and division were perpetuated, however this could also manifest as social balance.¹⁸⁶ They were key events of social interaction in the ancient world and could be used for discussion and celebration. However, they could also play a part in religious ceremonies as evidenced in the feasting after worshipping the golden calf in Exod 32.¹⁸⁷ Feasts were often accompanied by music performances and dancing (figures 4.28-29). Music was a



Figure 4.28 Relief, Nineveh. Assurbanipal. 668-626 BCE. Author 2021.

¹⁸⁶ Stephenson 2016, 61. Competition and solidarity often come hand in hand, much like the dividing and uniting consequences of ancient feasting. This can be read through the place settings – guests were seated according to their social hierarchy and relationship with the host (Stephenson 2016, 65). This hierarchical seating contrasts that at Roman games where seats were filled no matter an individual's status (Stephenson 2016, 68).

¹⁸⁷ Pregill 2020, 79-80. The people initiate the idea of the golden calf as a god – they go to Aaron and worship with feasting and celebration. However, Aaron is the one who sets up the altar despite not applying the term 'gpd' to the figure. Thus there are various arguments for who to 'blame'. Furthermore, Exod 32:6 demonstrates a connection between feasting and idolatry which is one of the worst sins (see Pregill 2020, 171).

key form of entertainment in the ancient world, played at events and banquets and used for worship as in Ps 150:1-6. Tambourines, harps, trumpets, and horns were popular in ancient Near Eastern culture.¹⁸⁸ Horns were easily made and imported, forming a popular instrument in ancient society.¹⁸⁹ The trumpet is synonymous with the horn in the Biblical text (Judg 7:16; Exod 19:13; Ps 81:3). This is indicative of the prevalence of the trumpet when it replaced the horn.¹⁹⁰ Harps and lyres are well-known throughout Mesopotamia and Egypt.¹⁹¹ Isa 14:11 demonstrates the luxuriousness of the harp is associated with the pomp that is taken down to Sheol. These depictions of musicians and dancers demonstrate the kinds of entertaining provided at banquets. This enables a reinterpretation of Isa 16:11, 18:3, 23:16, 4:8-9 and 24:14 as hired entertainment to be enjoyed at a banquet. The use of music in Isaiah contrasts the joyous connotations in the iconography, inverting the image in Isa 16:11 to symbolise pain and loss with



Figure 4.29 Relief, Amarna. Southern tombs, tomb no 1. Entrance wall, right side. Amenophis IV. 1377-1358 BCE. Author 2021.

the trumpet when it replaced the horn.¹⁹⁰ Harps and lyres are well-known throughout Mesopotamia and Egypt.¹⁹¹ Isa 14:11 demonstrates the luxuriousness of the harp is associated with the pomp that is taken down to Sheol. These depictions of musicians and dancers demonstrate the kinds of entertaining provided at banquets. This enables a reinterpretation of Isa 16:11, 18:3, 23:16, 4:8-9 and 24:14 as hired entertainment to be enjoyed at a banquet. The use of music in Isaiah contrasts the joyous connotations in the iconography, inverting the image in Isa 16:11 to symbolise pain and loss with

¹⁸⁸ Keel 1997, 340-346. Tambourines were typically played by women, however when they appear in military scenes, men take on this role. Cymbals came to grow in popularity; however, tambourines remain the most widely depicted. These instruments appear frequently in the Biblical texts and the ancient iconography, suggesting they were of import to social and cultural events in the ancient world celebrations. Singing and the playing of instruments were used to please YHWH – the use of music in modern worship attests the import of music in worship. Through music, one can find connection with the divine and show their dedication and care.

¹⁸⁹ Keel 1997, 341-342. The horn was so popular that it has survived to be used in synagogue services, even appearing on synagogue capitals and in mosaics. This is, in part, because the horn's place in the temple service diminished and removed, allowing for its use in the synagogue. The trumpet or ram's horn could be used to announce YHWH's appearance and summon worshippers; however, these positive uses of the instrument are contrasted with the warning of approaching enemies.

¹⁹⁰ Keel 1997, 342. The trumpet may have originated in Egypt, being attested from the middle of the 3rd millennium BCE. In the New Kingdom, the trumpet was used by the army as a signal, reflected in the continued use of trumpets/bugles in military bands and as signals to the modern day. Furthermore, Ramesses II and III used trumpets for military exploits and on state occasions. However, this is overturned in Num 10:8 where this instrument becomes the entitlement of the priests, firmly moving the trumpet from the previously military context of the Egyptian use to the religious praise evidenced in the Biblical text.

¹⁹¹ Keel 1997, 346. These are attested from the 3rd millennium BCE and originated in southern Mesopotamia. The earthly lyre can be used to symbolise 'pomp and majesty' whilst the Sheol lyre symbolises foolishness (see Hunziker-Rodewald 2015, 169).

the lyre. This transference of a joyous event (music) to the fall of a Nation emphasises the extent of the fall through the dichotomy of references. Isa 16:11 and 24:8-9 are opposed to 24:14, demonstrating the chasm between joy and sorrow articulated throughout the Oracles and enabling a reinterpretation of the text to highlight the extent of the Nations' punishment.

Through the provision of entertainment, hosts could demonstrate their economic and social prowess. The importance of banquets in the visual language of societal hierarchy is evident through the commonality of the banqueting relief, such as on the Demetrias tombstones (figure 4.30).¹⁹² This Hellenised banquet scene depicts a reclining man in Persian dress. Through the banquet scenes, an individual could articulate their power and status through the ability to host banquets and be served.



Figure 4.30 Relief *naikos stele*. Hellenistic. Author 2021.

In these representations, figures are set apart by their postures and clothing (the deceased and often richer are finely draped and lounge on a couch whilst servants are less finely dressed (or naked) and stand around the scene). Thus, the Isaian narrative can be interpreted as reinforcing the societal separation of the classes, contributing to the reasons the Nations are punished by YHWH. The importance of banqueting and food itself is also attested through the offerings depicted in Egyptian tomb reliefs (figure 4.31). Through these offerings of food both in stone and life, the dead were able to transition from the human realm.¹⁹³ In this way, banquets were used as a vehicle for a transference of matter and soul, as well as the continued memory for the living

¹⁹² Stamatopoulou 2016, 440-441, 443. This could be to frame the deceased in a comforting scene of domestic life. The scenes are standardised in their formation, regardless of the deceased individual and their ethnicity. Furthermore, they emphasise the familial setting and interaction between couples, drawing away from a specified interior and instead focusing on the comfortable setting (see Stamatopoulou 2016, 442).

¹⁹³ Robins 2016, 118. Through the offering of this food (that became the food of the gods), the deceased could go to the celestial realm and become divine themselves. If this movement did not take place, they were trapped in the backwards human realm. Through the consumption of this divine food, the dead were welcomed to the divine community. However, the continued offering of ritual meals kept the dead as part of the continued live community.

and an act of greeting to the afterlife. Through the iconography, the Isaian banquet can be interpreted as moments of transference from celebration to sorrow because of their punishment by YHWH.

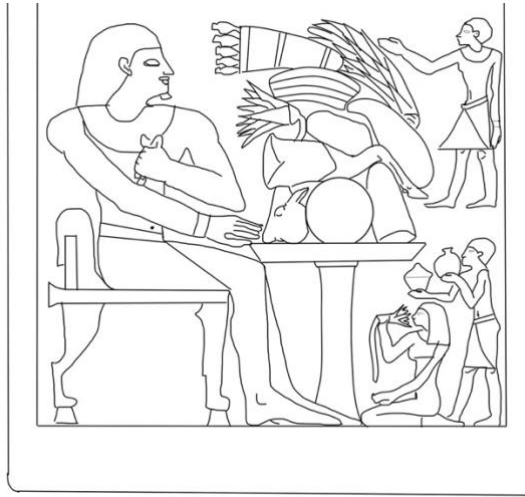


Figure 4.31 Lower half Stela of the Steward Mentuwyser, sitting at a funeral banquet. c.1944 BCE. Middle Kingdom. Abydos. Met Museum, 12.184. Author 2021.

Despite the references to banqueting in Isaiah, the prophet also refers to growing lean, suggesting a lack of food or even famine (Isa 17:4). Isaiah goes on to refer to a lack of wine, also inferring a famine that takes away joy (Isa 24:11). Famine was of concern in the ancient world, often caused by a lack of rainfall resulting in less crops, causing widespread death, sickness, and the dispersal of the population.¹⁹⁴ Sieges caused a lack of agricultural products coming into the city.¹⁹⁵ Thus, this could lead to citizens starving and losing weight (figure 4.32). Ezek 4:16 demonstrates this rationing through bread by weight and water by measure. The text emphasises the anxiety and horror this aroused from the population. Rationing has long been used by societies in times of struggle such as famine and war. On the Home Front, ration books were

¹⁹⁴ Baker 2013, 49. Isa 9:20 emphasises the impact of famine during a siege and the way this can overturn society, including cannibalism (a curse for breaking the covenant in Deut 28:53-57). This is also seen in a pyramid text from x.2375-2345 BCE in a metaphoric articulation of cannibalism (see Baker 2013, 56). The idea of famine as punishment is also seen in the Assyrian flood story (see Baker 2013, 56).

¹⁹⁵ Eph'al 2009, 58. However, this meant they ate a lot of meat from what was within their walls, an unusual thing outside of festivals. However, as this disappeared, the food shortages would mean there was less to go around, and substitutes had to be found.

assigned to families during the First World War, assigning amounts and restricting foodstuffs for the population leading to reduced-calorie diets. However, life on the battlefield also faced rationing, restricting quantities whilst aiming to fulfil the calorie requirement for soldiers.¹⁹⁶

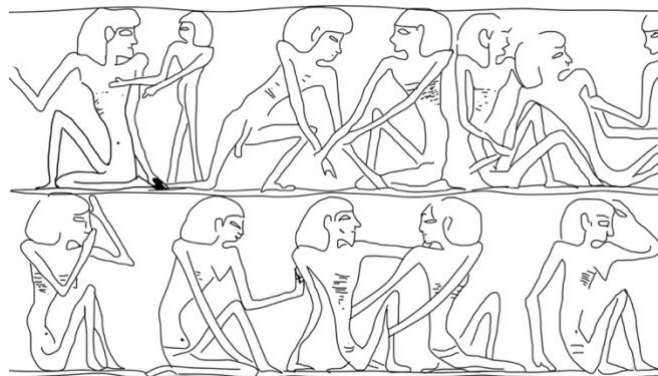


Figure 4.32 Limestone relief, Saqqara. Causeway of the pyramid of Unis. 5th Dynasty. Author 2021.

This reduced intake and limited food supply, effects bodily functioning and

nutrition. The importance of agriculture and the devastation of famine is emphasised in the plagues of Egypt in Exodus. Ex 9:1-7 details the death of the livestock, including herds and flocks which could influence food accessibility. Furthermore, Ex 10:15 details the destruction of crops and nature because of the swarm of locusts ('Not a green thing remained, neither tree nor plant of the field.'). Throughout Ex 7-11, the plagues are sent against Egypt with a mindful avoidance of YHWH's people. This reinforces the idea of famine as punishment from YHWH because of its targeted attack on Pharaoh and his people for refusing to let Moses lead the Israelites out of Egypt. This idea has been reinforced through modern media such as the 1998 film *The Prince of Egypt*. In the sequence regarding the plagues and accompanying song, lyrics such as 'I send the pestilence and plague [...] upon your cattle, on your sheep, upon your oxen in your field' and 'I send the locusts on a wind [...] until there's nothing left of green' emphasise the annihilation of the Egyptian food sources and its impact on society. This destructive language combined with 'thus saith the Lord' demonstrate the plagues are punishment from YHWH, as emphasised through the vivid animation of emotional turmoil and physical pain as the plagues rain down on the people. Through the iconography of lean people who are barely skin, and bones offers a contrast to the banquets of Isaiah. Through this contrast, one can interpret Isa 24:11 as a lack of all provisions, leading to the distress, anxiety, and illness of famine.

¹⁹⁶ Richardson 2015, 5. In 1917, the calorie figures ranging from 4,038 to 4,714 across countries, were an ideal but it is unclear and unlikely that these were meant. Over the course of the war, rations were reduced and changed, reflecting the food shortages of individual armies and home fronts. See more in Richardson 2015.

The iconography provides context for the Isaian use of feasting and entertainment, offering contrast to the images of pain and support for those of abundance and joy. Where Isaiah refers to the despairing uses of entertainment and lack of provisions, iconography is not reliable because these events are not depicted, thus limiting the iconographic approach. Despite this, invaluable insight is gained through using the iconography as a lens to interpret feasting and entertainment in the Oracles through the ability to compare and contrast the images and text – the absence of what is depicted in the iconography in the narrative speaks volumes about what has been lost due to the Nations' punishment.

4.6 Conclusion

Society and culture form the locus of the Isaian message in the Oracles against the Nations – Isa 14:24-24 is literally about YHWH's judgement and punishment of societies. Isaiah uses a variety of events and situations to communicate his message to the contemporary audience, using the world around them to ensure their understanding. Through the iconography, the text gains deeper meaning and alternative interpretations are offered to give a miscellany of messages. The literary images employed by Isaiah reflect societal conventions, some of which can be traced in the iconography. Despite that, some of the Isaian descriptions cannot be obviously seen in the iconographic record, suggesting that whilst they were common occurrences in the lived reality of the ancient Near East, they were not considered important enough or appropriate to record in the official records. In this way, the iconography can enable an understanding of some parts of the text and offer interpretations, however it cannot be solely relied upon for the entirety of Isaiah's societal and cultural references.

5 Warfare and Violence

“In war, the first casualty is truth”

Terry Hayes, *I Am Pilgrim*

5.1 Introduction

Warfare and violence have long been used in iconographic records to suit the leadership’s propaganda and the Ancient Near East is no different. This type of iconography is used to stimulate awe and fear at the grotesque acts depicted.¹⁹⁷ These depictions were a terror tactic most effectively used by the Assyrians through rendering the dead and captured enemy bodies and displaying them for their empire to see. Images of warfare and violence (including hunting scenes) emphasise their role in the imperial propaganda of power and articulation of empire building, domination, and hierarchy. However, motifs of violent actions develop over time in the ancient Near East, moving from the brutality of Assyrian art to a more unified image under the Achaemenid administration. There are three types of violence that form part of the iconographic language – potential, kinetic and resultative.¹⁹⁸ The most used versions were potential and resultative, forcing the viewer to imagine the violent act. Potential violence implies the impending action such as a pulled bow string or raised axe. Kinetic depictions show the moment a figure enacts violence, placing the viewer amid the action. Resultative demonstrates the outcome of violence, leaving the viewer to imagine what led to this point. Throughout the Oracles against the Nations, Isaiah uses images related to warfare and weaponry to emphasise YHWH’s judgement against the

¹⁹⁷ LeMon 2014, 385. The treatment of the enemy body was chief in the politics of power (see Bahrani 2008, 16). The depictions of acts of violence and references in inscriptions moralises these actions as responses to rebellion, sin, and wickedness (see Crouch and Hays 2020, 145-158.) However, Root 1979, 131 demonstrates the contrast to this demonstration of “imperial ethos and hierarchy”, stressing Achaemenid representations of the elevated king demonstrates a co-operative and voluntary support of the king (in stark contrast to LeMon’s account of trampling as a motif of terror and subjugation).

¹⁹⁸ LeMon 2014, 385-386. Potential violence represents figures poised to kill, injure or maim. Resultative violence can be articulated as bodies littering the floor, prisoners being taken, and inhabitants being deported as well as more grotesque depictions of torture, impalement, and decapitation (see Til-Tuba reliefs, British Museum including the banquet scene of Ashurbanipal – note the decapitated head of Teumman hanging in the tree as the king feasts) see Nadali 2018, 234-243; Goldstein and Weissert 2018, 244-274.

Nations. One such example is Isa 19:2 (“And I will stir up Egyptians against Egyptians, and they will fight, each other against another and each against his neighbour, city against city, kingdom against kingdom”) demonstrating YHWH’s direct involvement in their destruction – YHWH makes them fight and destroy one another.

5.2 Warfare and Violence in the Isaian and Wider Biblical Context

Isaiah uses some of the most images connected to warfare and violence in the Biblical text. This is reflective of proto-Isaiah’s message of judgement leading up to the exile, using violent images to emphasise the punishment and disparaging narrative of Isa 1-39. Militaristic images decline in the post-exilic period, indicative of the prophet’s shift towards hope, the message of a new Jerusalem and coming messianic kingdom. Despite this, the entirety of the book contains references to warfare and violence through descriptive and metaphoric devices to communicate the ‘light versus dark’ themes that pervade the text, highlighting the prophetic ebb and flow between judgement and hope.

The Isaian use of the trampling motif articulates messages of divine judgement and punishment, themes that are reflected in the rest of the scripture as warnings against sinful behaviour. The nature of the trampling action itself is a violent one and is still used in film in the modern day to communicate degradation. The Biblical text enhances the savagery of the trampling act and, through attachment to natural structures such as mountains, advocates divine justice being enacted through YHWH’s trampling of peoples. Throughout the scripture, the transference of trampling to nature demonstrates this articulation of divine justice (2 Kgs 14:9 transfers the act to wild beasts; Isa 14:25 has mountains trample the Assyrians; Hab 3:15 refers to the sea itself being trampled by horses; Matt 7:6 states dogs and pigs trample the holy). Furthermore, this reduces the punished to be considered worse than the wild, plummeting them to the bottom of the ‘Great Chain of Being’. Despite these examples, many Biblical trampling references are placed in the human realm – people are trampled by or on behalf of kings and/or YHWH by human enactors. This creates the clearest articulation of violent punishment because the literary images do not leave much room for varying interpretations, creating the scene in vivid detail.

Weaponry appears often in the scripture, covering a range of instruments. Images of the bow are frequently used throughout the Biblical texts, both in literal military contexts and on the symbolic level. The bent bow (Isa 5:28) symbolises impending attack and can be transferred to YHWH to demonstrate the coming judgement, a main theme in proto-Isaiah and especially the Oracles against the Nations. Every instance of the 'rod' image within Isaiah capitalises on the wider antagonistic interpretation of the implement as an agent of wrathful punishment. In this way, this image becomes a synonym for divine justice, being used against nations and peoples who go against YHWH and act sinfully. The rod is used against the human and natural in an allegorical image to communicate the main message of judgement in proto-Isaiah, the only section in which 'rod' appears, emphasising the critical overtones of Isa 1-39 through the restriction of this image to the early text, suggesting it does not have a place in the more hopeful narrative of Isa 40-66. Prov 23:14 introduces what would now be considered a peculiar attitude of using the rod to beat as a way of saving the soul, thus inverting the typical negative image of beating with a rod. Song 5:14 describes the groom's arms as rods, further connecting the apparatus with the arm, indicating the phrase 'arm of justice', returning the violent tones of the image. Ezek 7:10-11 furthers the violent image of the rod through the idea of the rod as an embodiment of wickedness and pride as a result of violence and sin. Esth 1:6 can be argued to connect rods to power through their appearance in the luxuriant banquet, however the surrounding context takes them away from one's assumptions of violence. Ps 23:4 opposes the traditional interpretation of the rod as an instrument of wrath, instead encompassing ideals of protection and safety. This could be reflective of the wielders view of the rod – they use it to protect their own people whilst enacting their wrath on others (as in the smiting of the nine bows by Pharaoh). Biblical images of the rod can also be interpreted as communicating authority (Prov 29:15 uses the rod as a symbol of royal wisdom). This symbolism of power and authority is furthered through the Biblical use of 'staff'. The Isaian use of this image articulates such authority as a weapon but also as a simple symbol of power, reflecting its use in Exodus where the staff is the embodiment of YHWH's power.

Biblical uses of the shield symbolise YHWH's love and protection, this is particularly evident in the Psalms. However, the broken and 'defiled' shield of 2 Sam 1:21 can be

interpreted as the disintegration of royal power and authority, emphasising its weakness in comparison to the strength of YHWH's protection. Despite this, the Isaian use of the shield is intrinsically connected with images of warfare and is used solely to articulate the preparation for and enactment of battle. In this way, Isaiah turns away from traditional uses of the metaphoric shield image, preferring to use them literally to communicate the message of impending judgement through YHWH's manipulation of armies against Jerusalem.

Horses are a versatile image in the Bible, appearing in a variety of settings, from pastoral to battle as demonstrated throughout Isaiah. They are frequently used to articulate the force of the army (Isa 5:28; 1 Sam 13:5) but can also symbolise status and power (Isa 2:7; Esth 6:9). Eccles 10:7 furthers the attribution of horses as symbols of power through upturning the societal order – slaves ride horses and princes walk in a mockery of traditional social hierarchies. Through this reversal of fortune, Eccles 10:7 uses horses as a symbol of power through the presentation of power imbalance. The Isaian use of horses opposes the human and divine, highlighting the difference between YHWH and the human kings (Isa 31:1-3). Ps 32:9 demonstrates the inversion of the power attributed to horses in the Isaian context (Isa 2:7) through using untrained horses as symbols of those who stray from YHWH's path. Ps 33:17 continues the inversion of traditional connections to the horse image through demonstrating the horse (and thus kings) as false power in comparison to YHWH.

'Yoke' creates an interesting intersection between the agricultural and military spheres. Its biblical use often symbolises the 'yoke' of oppression and ownership being applied or removed in an act of punishment or liberation (Gen 27:40; Num 25:3). 1 Kgs 12:11 uses the yoke to symbolise continued and emphasised punishment, thus indicating there is no release from their chastisement because they are yoked to it – they literally cannot escape it. In its Isaian context, 'yoke' is often used to demonstrate the destruction of nations who held power over others through the lightening and removal of the yoke (Isa 58:6). Contrasting this, Isa 58:9 demonstrates how the yoke prevents peoples from experiencing the full glory of YHWH, thus removing this impediment enables the peoples to move away from 'darkness'. This idea is emphasised in Isa 47:6 through the indictment of other nations strengthening their yoke on peoples given to

them by YHWH, they are bringing about their coming punishment through their subjugation of other peoples.

Siege images only appear in the Hebrew Bible, not the New Testament. Isaiah is one of the books in which it features most prominently, with Ezek and Jer favouring the image above other books. The Isaian use of the siege image is rooted in the literal besieging of a city. Thus, the siege image itself carries symbolic value rather than the Isaian manipulation of the image imparting metaphoric readings of the literary construct. In this way, sieges can mark historical events in Isaiah (Isa 29 references Sennacherib's siege of Jerusalem (Annals of Sennacherib, Col III:18-30)). However, their appearance in the Biblical narrative can be interpreted as punishment from YHWH, in line with the prophetic messages of the text. Despite this, the effects of a siege are used throughout the Bible to enhance the terror associated with such events and the break-down of society (Deut 28:53-57) during and after the attack. The after-effects of such action can lead to desertion of peoples and places – an image which appears most frequently in Isaiah (for example Isa 32:14; 27:10). The image of the deserted city reclaimed by nature or void of life is symbolic of an existence without meaning and demonstrates the judgement Isaiah warns the reader about if they do not follow YHWH's path.

5.3 The 'trampling motif' – 14:25 “mountains trample him underfoot”; 16:4 “tramples underfoot”; 22:5 “trampling and confusion”

The trampling motif is an image of triumph,¹⁹⁹ demonstrating power and dominance over the fallen enemy an emphasising their defeat through the contrast to the victorious 'trampler'. The image can be expanded to symbolise judgement of the crushed as in DB §1.11-14 where Darius articulates slander against Gaumata, accompanying the trampling in the relief, reinforcing its associations with military victory and imperial

¹⁹⁹ Ryken et. Al 1998, 3010. The triumphant stance suggests power over those being crushed (see Ryken et. Al 1998, 3043.) The idea of trampling as judgement is seen through Proctor's line in Act IV of *The Crucible* by Arthur Miller – “*I am not worth the dust on the feet of them that hang!*” demonstrating the idea of worthlessness evoked by trampling. However, the passive feet here, reduces the significance of this worthlessness. These ideas of trampling are furthered in Isa 3:15 – “*What do you mean by crushing my people, by grinding the faces of the poor?*” – thus demonstrating the use of the trampling motif in the Oracles is a continuation of the image from earlier in the book, influenced by the iconographic language surrounding Isaiah as he wrote.

dominance. This is furthered in 2 Kgs 9:33, the judged Jezebel is trampled into the dirt, reducing her to nothing. The word ‘trampled’ connotes destruction when one links this to the grapes crushed under feet to make wine, the grapes must be destroyed to release their juices, like the people are destroyed in the face of mighty armies and YHWH’s power (see chapter 3.4). There are three instances of the widely used trampling motif within the Oracles of the Nations. This ‘trampling trope’ appears 38 times in the Hebrew Bible (13 of which appear in Isa) and 6 times in the New Testament, suggesting the prevalence of the trampling motif in society and its place in the human psyche.²⁰⁰ The royal trampling motif can be interpreted in Ps 91:13 with the leonine attachment to royal power (the lion hunt reliefs of Ashurbanipal (British Museum 124881) emphasise the king’s power through his ability to subdue lions (representing the chaotic world)). However, this motif can be inverted to demonstrate YHWH’s judgement as in Ps 68:30. The people who ‘lust after tribute’ could be suggested to be the kings who demanded tribute payments from their subjects as an insurance that they will not be attacked – the kings ‘lust’ after the power that tribute connotes. Through this association with the trampling motif, Ps 68:30 inverts the iconographic record depicting these kings trampling on their foes and depicts them as trampled by YHWH’s power. This is furthered by Ps 57:3 suggesting trampling had negative connotations for the trampler rather than the trampled. The idea of divine justice evoked in Ps 57:3 emphasises the message in Isa 14:25 – those who trampled on their enemies will fall and be trampled on themselves. Isa 14:25 uses the natural image of mountains to highlight just how far the Assyrians have fallen (they are now beneath the mountains; beneath the very dirt they walk on) and that this trampling comes from YHWH’s power. Isa 16:4 suggests this motif was an intentional action by ancient near eastern kings to display their dominance over their enemies. Isa 22:5 demonstrates YHWH’s own use of the trampling motif, suggesting it conveyed a powerful message and image for the ancient audiences. This is long attested, appearing in Luke 21:24 demonstrates the timelessness of this motif in iconography and the human consciousness. The image created in Luke suggests an army storming into Jerusalem and reducing it to dust – they will trample over the city and destroy it. Dan

²⁰⁰ Trampling appears in a variety of contexts in the Bible and appears frequently in the Psalms. Ps 56:2 evokes the images of trampling by the enemy “*my enemies trample on me all day long*”, reflecting Isa 16:4 – the trampling is done by a human foe who can and will be destroyed. The idea of day long trampling evokes the idea of an army trampling over the bodies of the fallen as they advance. Ps 56:2 also implies never-ending pain and subjugation through the day-long trampling image.

8:7 suggests the powerlessness of the trampled – “And the ram had no power to stand before him, but he cast him down to the ground and trampled on him.”²⁰¹ This emphasises the power of the figure trampling the subdued in the iconography and the incapacitation of the defeated, conveying the official propagandistic message of divinely ordained royal power. The trampling of the poor is seen as a sin that cannot be rebuked in Am 2:7, reflecting the ideas of social justice used throughout Isaiah. Trampling is an act of disdain and is used in Am 2:7 to separate classes, continuing the Isaian message of sinful social injustice. This alienates the warrior-king figures in the iconography as evildoers who will not find forgiveness. It is clear the kings never thought of this act as sinful themselves, choosing to use trampling images to demonstrate and glorify their victories and emphasise their vast power. Zech 10:5 and Joel 2:7 expands on this trope suggesting the trampling was not the sole prerogative of the king as the iconography would suggest but every soldier would trample down the enemy during battle as they surged forward through the lines. The idea of an army marching in ordered formation emphasises the idea that they all march together thus they all trample on the fallen. This image continues to elicit powerful emotions to a modern audience – the phrase ‘walked all over’ connotes subjugation and mistreatment in modern western societies. In the iconography of the ancient near east this phrase is literal – the fallen enemy are walked all over by the victorious.

The image of a victorious king trampling on his enemies is a common motif in the iconographic language of the ancient Near East. This conveys the message of the King’s power and ability to keep chaos at bay – something that concerned ancient peoples in their conception of the universe and the threat chaotic forces posed to the ordered world. However, this iconographic trope was not limited to the human realm – kings could be depicted standing on enemies, human and animal alike, and the gods could also take on this posture in the cosmic battle of order and chaos (figure 5.1). Despite this, the animals depicted could sometimes be argued to represent the human threat to emphasise their subordination as weak and hunted or wild and dangerous but

²⁰¹ Dan 8:7. The use of animal imagery heightens the powerlessness of the trampled. Deut 14:3-21 suggests rams can be eaten thus the use of this animal demonstrates that these animals are hunted and slaughtered for food; emphasising its powerlessness. Goats were also used as sacrifices and for purification (see Lewis and Llewellyn-Jones 2018, 56-74.) thus the use of the ram furthers ideas of passivity and powerlessness – it cannot fight back like it cannot fight being a sacrifice.

ultimately defeated.²⁰² Figures 5.2-3 demonstrates this with wild animals being held back and stood on in both the human and cosmological spheres. The similarity of these seals demonstrates that this trope communicates a very clear message of power and places the king in the sphere of the gods. In contrast to this, in instances where the king is subject to zoomorphism, they become fierce, mythical creatures capable of subduing chaos represented through the trampled enemies (figure 5.4). This enables us to read instances of trampling in Isaiah as battles to maintain order, by trampling on the nations YHWH defeats the chaos they have caused. Furthermore, the use of animals warrants the interpretation of the motif in Isaiah as debasing the nations to animal status – they are not even human after their subjugation by YHWH.



Figure 5.1 Babylonian Cylinder Seal of a warrior God. Author 2021.



Figure 5.2 Assyrian Cylinder seal. 9th-8th centuries BCE. Berlin VA 693. Author 2021.



Figure 5.3 Chalcedony Cylinder Seal, Neo-Assyrian. 9th-7th centuries BCE. British Museum (89023). Author 2021.

²⁰² Strawn 2015d, 71. Zoomorphism is employed so that enemies become weak or wild animals that are hunted for food or sport. Through debasing the enemy to these animals, they are powerless in the face of the king/god who is trampling on them.

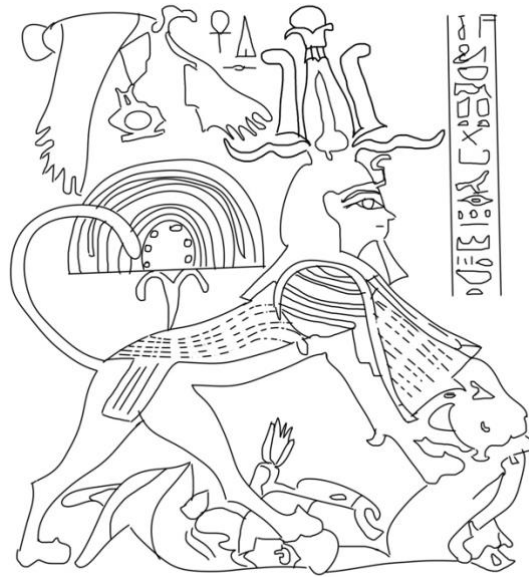


Figure 5.4 Tutankhamun in the form of a sphinx tramples on his enemies. Detail from Sandal chest from Tutankhamun's tomb. 14th century BCE. Author 2021.

The Narmer Palette (figure 5.5) demonstrates the idea of trampling as an act of violent subjugation. The king stands over fallen enemies as he prepares to strike another in the 'smiting pose'. The image of potential violence, combined with the twisted and fearful bodies of the subjugated enemies below, suggests Isaiah's use of the trampling motif in 22:5 can be interpreted as YHWH subjugating the people of Jerusalem for not following his path. Kings are depicted trampling enemies under their feet as well as chariots (figure 5.6) in depictions of warfare.

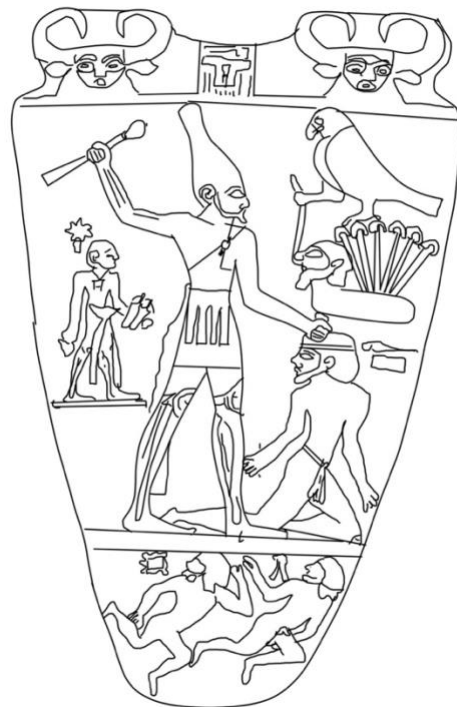


Figure 5.5 The Narmer Palette. Side B. c.3100 BCE. Temple of Horus, Nekhen (Hierakonpolis). Egyptian Museum, Cairo. Author 2021.

violence in the trampling motif demonstrates how the enemies came to be subjugated,

whilst leaving the violent action itself to the imagination of the observer thus, heightening the terror communicated. This combined with the mountain of victims before the chariot creates a sense of never-ending judgement and subjugation, heightening the imperial power communicated through the iconography. This terror is apparent in figure 5.7 where Libyans flee from Ramesses III as he yields a bow and spear whilst stepping on his fallen foes. Ramesses is on a much larger scale than his enemies to set them apart,²⁰³ drawing the audiences focus to the enacting Ramesses over the subjugated Libyans. In placing images such as this on temple walls, the king is symbolically and magically protecting the sacred ground,²⁰⁴ in line with the ancient conception of the royal role in shielding the created, ordered world from chaotic forces. The placement on the outer temple walls also means this relief would have been highly accessible to the public – everyone could access the outside walls, however, as one goes further into the temples access becomes more restricted. This suggests these trampling images were tactically placed where they could be seen by everyone to convey the message of Pharaoh’s protection to his people and his power to his enemies – a simultaneous message of safety and terror, a sign of protection and a warning. In light of the iconography, Isaiah’s use of the trampling motif can be reinterpreted as resultative violence, leaving the finite details of preceding events that engineered this act of subjugation to the imagination of the reader. One can also suggest that the use of figural dimension in the iconography furthers ideas in Isaiah surrounding YHWH’s power, setting him apart from the trampled nations. In this way, the instances of the trampling motif in the Oracles reinforces YHWH’s superiority over the kings and fortifies the continued message throughout the book that trusting in YHWH is the road to salvation.

²⁰³ Roth 2015, 155. Ramesses is larger than the Libyans, therefore he becomes the focal point. In doing this, his power is emphasised and brings attention to his ability to repel chaos (see Leprohon 2015, 312.)

²⁰⁴ Leprohon 2015, 313. The temple symbolises the primordial mound of creation whilst outside the walls becomes the waters of chaos. Placing the Pharaoh on the temple walls places him between the mound and water, protecting the ordered world from chaos and evil (see Wilkinson 2000, 57.)

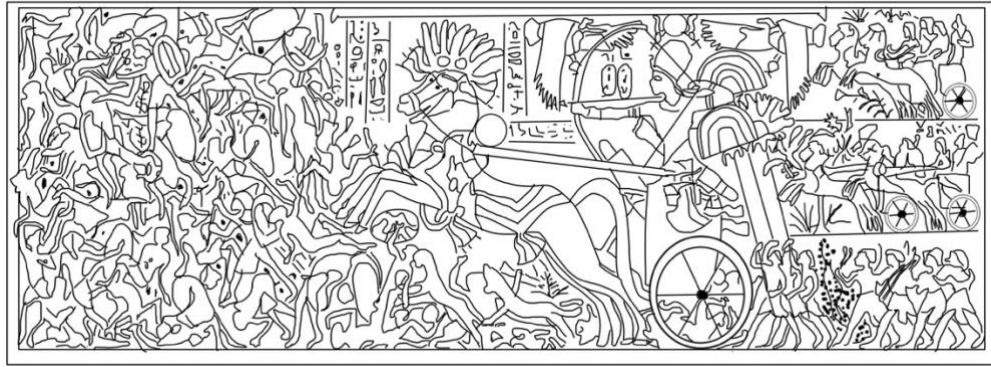


Figure 5.6 Painted wooden chest from the tomb of Tutankhamun. c.1323 BCE. Image from Archaeology Magazine Archive. Author 2021.



Figure 5.7 Ramesses III fighting Libyans. Karnak, Temple of Ramesses III, forecourt of Amon temple. C.1197-1165 BCE. Author 2021.

The trampled enemies are often foreigners, as depicted in figure 5.8. The Behistun relief also labels every character through accompanying inscription as well as identifying dress/accessories. This reinforces the King's role as Ahuramazda's viceroy on Earth by subduing chaos, such as rebellions. The trilingual inscription exemplifies Darius' kingly power and vilifies the 'other' through their association with *drauga* (the lie). In this way, foreigners play a cosmic role in representing the necessary chaos outside of the ordered world.²⁰⁵ The iconography pitches the king against other

²⁰⁵ Roth 2015, 156. This creates a strong sense of 'otherness' in the iconographic convention of trampling, creating the idea of 'my way or the highway' – if peoples did not follow the king, they would be subdued and crushed beneath his feet.

peoples, alienating them in the diametrically opposed constructs of chaos and order that permeates ancient Near Eastern iconography. Thus, it was important that the king be effective at subduing this chaos and bringing it to heel to protect his empire and its people. Isa 22:5 therefore suggests that the people of Jerusalem have not trusted in YHWH and followed the path he set out for them leading to their subjugation. This enables the interpretation of Isaiah’s use of trampling as YHWH’s protection of his people from the chaotic powers that threaten them from outside and punishment for anyone who threatens the ordered world by not following His word; by following *drauga*. In this way, YHWH’s people could be considered the ‘rebellious’ peoples depicted in the Behistun relief, enabling an interpretation of judgement and punishment.

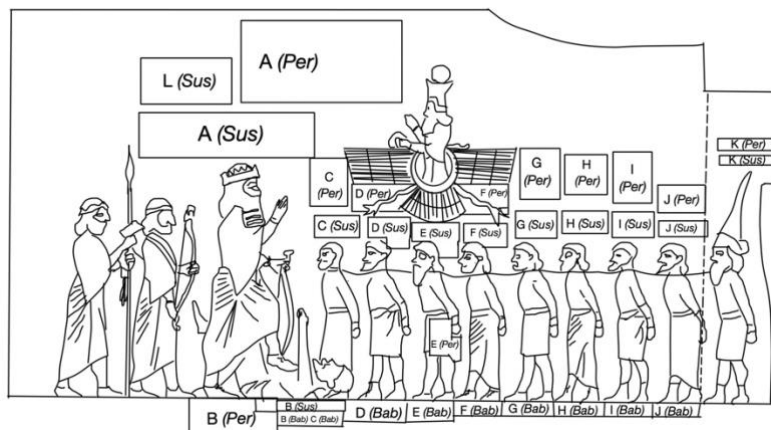


Figure 5.8 Behistun Relief, Kermanshah Province. Darius I. c.520 BCE. Author 2021.

Occasionally enemies are trampled by an inactive figure, placing the depiction firmly in resultative violence – there is no direct recognition of the violence enacted to bring the subdued beneath the figures’ feet. Figure 5.9 demonstrates this lack of direct recognition – the warrior figure yields a bow and axe whilst stepping on the fallen, illustrating the end of an unseen sequence of actions that have lead to this scene. This hints at the violent act however, the axe is held down instead of above the head (as in the smiting scenes) and the bow is held backward in a relaxed stance of victory. This is contradicted by figure 5.10, demonstrating one of the most common royal motifs in the Egyptian iconographic tradition, the smiting pose. By combining this with the trampling motif the action becomes even more aggressive, creating a sense of movement – the Pharaoh stands on the enemies he has killed as he surges forward in

a photographic representation of a idealised moment in a battle. In contrast, by facing the bow towards himself in figure 5.9, the warrior assumes a non-aggressive pose – the threat of arrows being loosed is reduced through the relaxed attitude of the warrior. By side-lining the violent act and focusing on the resultative violence, the relief draws attention to the trampling action and the subjugated figures rather than the actions that lead to this situation. By standing on them, the warrior is literally trampling them into the dust and mire, as in Mic 7:10. Throughout the Hebrew Bible, mire is used in instances of people being cast out – a fall from power or grace to be like the mud they once walked on. Job 30:19 uses mire to emphasise what happens when YHWH casts you out, highlighting the degradation of peoples in the iconography. The use of ‘mire’ and ‘dust’ exacerbates the trampling

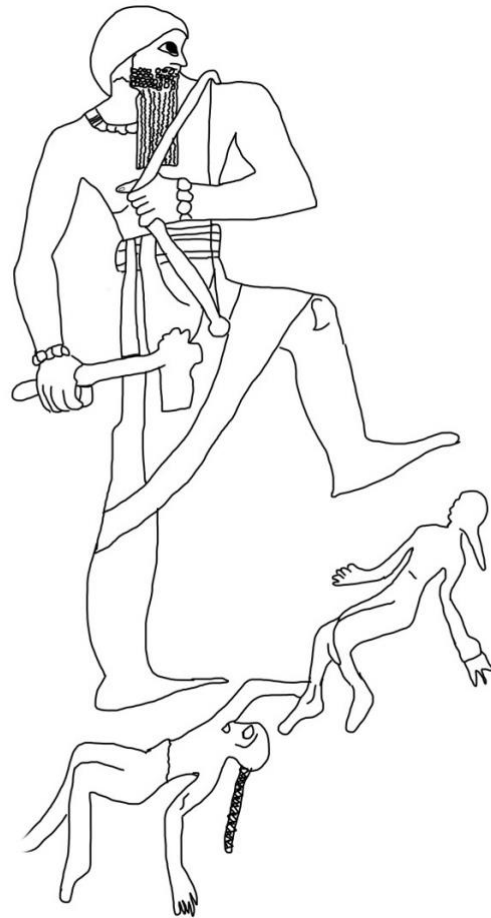


Figure 5.9 Rock relief at Derbend I Gawr, Qara Dagh mountain range c.2090 BCE. Author 2021.

image by reinforcing the idea that they are being trodden into the ground, degrading the fallen and equating them to mire and dust. By treating the fallen like the dirty streets, they are reduced to dirt themselves – they lose their personhood as they are walked upon. This enables a reinterpretation of Isa 14:25 as the nations become the dust underneath the mountains as they are trampled on; the inaction of the mountains is emphasised through figure 5.9, suggesting that the violence is over – the inanimate mountain is trampling on the enemy with no aggressive figures in sight. Thus, the trampled lose their identity because of equations with dust and mire, reducing them to

lesser than human on the ‘Great Chain of Being’ (Divine Order) which places inanimate objects such as dirt at the lowest level.



Figure 5.10 Relief of Ramesses II, Abu Simbel Hall of Columns, c.1301-1234 BCE. Author 2021.

Thus far, this thesis has offered a variety of ways to read the trampling motif. Whilst these are valid interpretations, the central idea to the trampling motif is that of subjugation and submission to a higher power. This is evidenced through this motif's appearance in battle and victory scenes (figures 5.1, 5.8, 5.10-11), where the trampled are shown as defeated enemies. The messages conveyed by this iconography is that of the king's power over the defeated nations/rebels who are then subsumed into imperial territories. This doesn't comply with a loss of identity through labels and clothing enabling some identification, for example figure 5.8 communicates a more intense message of subjugation through the identification of individuals, using this to emphasise Darius' power over them. A fall from power is difficult to read into all instances of the trampling motif because without identifiers of a named individuals (for example, the depiction of a kneeling King Jehu (figure 2.16)). This means there is no previous state for comparison with this trampled fallen condition. Despite these readings being valid forms of interpretation when using the iconography to reinterpret

the text, the central meaning of this image is that of subjugation. This message can be read in all instances of the trampling motif in a universal understanding of the image.

Subjugation is defined as ‘bringing someone/something under domination or control’, an important reading of the prophetic narrative of Isa 14:24-24 as YHWH brings the Nations under his control. The subjugation of Assyria in Isa 14:25 is not the only time they are brought under YHWH’s domain as seen in Isa 10:5-34 where they are YHWH’s instrument; not target. Thus, the messages of subjugation conveyed by the trampling motif can be read alongside Assyria’s previous state to communicate a fall from grace, however this is not the central message, instead focusing on YHWH’s domination and control over humanity and treating them in accordance with their actions and relationship with YHWH’s divinity. Thus, ideas of subjugation are ever present in the text, both in a co-operative and peaceful manner as well as a violent one. The iconographic articulation of subjugation is focused on violence as demonstrated by the trampling motif, physically placing subjects under the king to communicate their theoretical place under his authority in the imperial hierarchy. This demonstrates the centrality of subjugation to this image over ideas of falls from power or loss of identity because of the universality of the motif and message of subjugation – anyone could be subjected to trampling, as anyone could be brought under the king’s control.

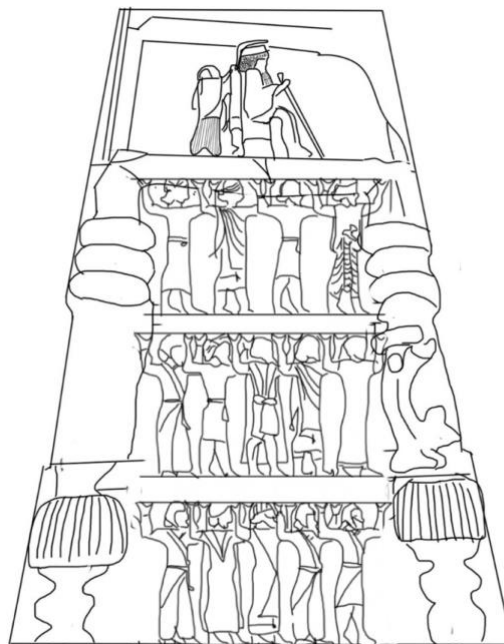
Oftentimes the figure trampling on the enemy is a king or god in the process of fighting or executing prisoners. However, sometimes kings were not shown in the process of a violent act, separating them from the action. Despite this, the victory still belongs to them thus they stand on their fallen enemies. Figure 5.11 demonstrates this idea through Naram-sin standing on a fallen foe. In this representation, Naram-sin is not depicted taking part in an all-out battle but stands victorious above his soldiers and the fallen as he leads his army up the mountain to battle the Lullubi. In



Figure 5.11 Detail of Victory stele of Naram-sin, c.2250 BCE. Author 2021.

this way, Isa 16:4 suggests that it will be the kings, who claimed their victories and did the trampling action in the iconography, that will be trampled themselves in an ironic twist on their official propaganda. Through the iconography, the attribution of victory lies firmly at the feet of the king as ultimate representative for the invading forces rather than the army itself. In this way, the iconographic evidence warrants a revision to the interpretation of the Biblical use of this motif – even when YHWH is not directly involved in the trampling and defeat of the Nations, the victory still belongs to him.

However, ‘trampling’ connotes something beneath feet, leaving the word open to a variety of interpretations. In this way, one could argue that the atlas poses in Achaemenid iconography could also be used to explore this idea. Figure 5.12 depicts people of the nations’ effortlessly lifting the king above them, using only their fingertips.²⁰⁶ This rendering of the atlas pose creates an almost joyous atmosphere of dignified cooperation between the subjects and the king in a reciprocal relationship – in return for tribute and loyalty to the king, they will be protected from other forces. This departs from the violent tone of Isa 14:25, 16:4 and 22:5



because these people are not subjugated but depicted as an integral part of the empire. This is fitting with the ‘*Pax*

Figure 5.12 Artaxerxes I seated on a throne and held up by people of the Nations. Hall of Hundred Columns, Persepolis. 464-424 BCE. Author 2021.

Persica’ created in Achaemenid art – a peaceful and co-operative world in which everyone plays their part. How in keeping this was with the lived reality is debated. This iconographic message was placed at Persepolis to be encountered by people bringing tribute to the king from across the empire, widening its audience. Thus, it was created as a propagandistic piece carefully selected to communicate the idea of

²⁰⁶ Root 1979, 153. This appears like a solely bureaucratic relationship, contrasting the reality which simultaneously founded the relationship through military action and threat of subjugation.

unity. In this instance iconography offers an alternative interpretation of Isa 16:4 and 22:5, however, within their violent and chaotic contexts, this interpretation is too peaceful and united to be the intended message.

Ancient Near Eastern iconography demonstrates the world in which Isaiah was writing in – he would have seen images of Kings trampling on their enemies and felt the terror they evoked. Iconographic exegesis here enables us to understand the visceral emotions the idea of trampling elicited to its ancient audience and the connotations such an action held to ancient cultures. Considering the iconographic language heightens the impact of the Biblical trampling motif and facilitates interpretations of the images created beyond the text itself. Through applying ancient near eastern iconography of trampling, the reader can understand the visual context that surrounded the author(s) and the interplay between text and image.

5.4 Archery and the bow – 21:15 “For they have fled [...] from the bent bow”; 21:17 “remainder of the archers”; 22:2-3 “without the bow they were captured”

Archery is often applied to fighting and hunting in ancient Near Eastern iconography, from battle scenes to hunting, divine violence to symbols of power and dominion. ‘Archer’ and related words appear one-hundred-and-forty-three times throughout Bible (only three of these from the New Testament), demonstrating its prominence in the ancient mindset. ‘Archer’ is often used as a symbol of YHWH’s anger and judgment.²⁰⁷ Job 16:13 uses the archer image to demonstrate Job’s reaction to his treatment by YHWH, weathering attack after attack in an unrelenting assault of judgement upon him. Lam 2:4 and Lam 3:12-13 the bent bow creates an image of potential violence; YHWH is preparing to strike. This leaves the full extent of the violence to the readers imagination, emphasising the terror felt at the sight of bent bows and the violence they promise. By highlighting the archers instead of another

²⁰⁷ Ryken et. Al 1998, 183. The image of a bent bow symbolises preparation for battle through the bending to string the bow as well as pulling the string to loose an arrow. Jer 50:9 – “[...] *Their arrows are like a skilled warrior who does not return empty-handed.*” – the simile used demonstrates the highly skilled nature of the archers YHWH brings against Babylon. This is enhanced through 1 Kgs 22, highlighting human vulnerability – no matter how protected they think they are YHWH’s judgement is inevitable.

form of warfare, the arrows become like YHWH's anger attacking Babylon from the heavens. In contrast, the image of a broken bow can symbolise peace as in Ps 46:9.²⁰⁸ Here the broken weapons become unusable, thus in breaking them YHWH brings an end to conflict. By breaking a bow, it is ineffective and cannot be used to wage war – in this way it is a symbol of peacetime. This powerful image demonstrates that power can be broken, instead becoming a message of hope for those subjugated by other powers and a threat for those who wield these weapons. A relief of Ashurbanipal depicts an Elamite archer being forced to break his bow (British Museum 124941). This reinforces the idea that a broken bow resembles the end of conflict and peace through the lack of weapons after the battle. However, one could suggest that the bow has broken from over-use because of the preceding battle – this implies a very intense conflict because of the main employment of the strong, long-lasting composite bow rather than the simple bow. The composite bow was stronger with a tighter bow string, leading to a more powerful weapon with a one-hundred-and-twenty metre range, than the simple bow with a sixty-metre range. This was because they were reinforced with horn, adding compressive strength, and sinew, giving the bow tensile strength.²⁰⁹ The image of a broken bow is also used in the Bible as a metaphor for the destruction of a civilisation, for example Jer 49:35 “I will break the bow of Elam” and Hos 1:5 “I will break the bow of Israel”. This suggests that the bow is the backbone of society – it is used to provide (through hunting) and protect and/or attack (through warfare). Isa 21:15 uses the image of a bent bow as a metaphor for battle and the approaching enemy. When a bow is bent, the string is pulled back ready to loose an arrow, thus creating an image of intense battle and a sky darkened by arrows. Isa 21:17 highlights the popularity of archery as a fighting style by singling them out to represent the people of Kedar. Not only this, but archers also signify a strong fighting and defensive force

²⁰⁸ Ryken et. Al 1998, 183. Ps 46 is a hymn celebrating Zion as a special city to which YHWH has pledged himself and through the city, he will bless the world by bringing an end to conflict between the nations. The theme of broken weapons reappears in Ps 76:3 – YHWH has already protected Zion by breaking the weapons of war and has prevented any further violence and brought peace to Zion. This is furthered in 1 Sam 2:4 highlighting YHWH's power in Hannah's prayer; in breaking the bows of the mighty YHWH does what no one else can do and brought peace. The image of destroyed weapons appears once again in Ezek 39:9 by turning the weapons that once threatened destruction into fuel for seven years, the symbolic power held by these weapons is destroyed.

²⁰⁹ Trimm 2017, 529-535. Composite bows could be shaped in a simple arc, B-shaped or triangular (twice as strong as the simple bow). Composite bows could be smaller because their structure means they retain strength for longer than the larger, simple bow. Because of the strength of the composite bow, the archer needed to master the finger-hook technique just to draw back the string, demonstrating how this was a highly skilled profession. (see Zutterman 2003, 119-165.). See also Dean 2017, 40-41.

– if the archers are not there, they cannot defend their homeland. Armies were often only referred to by archers,²¹⁰ emphasising their importance and popularity as a form of combat. A similar idea is evident in Jer 50:29. Pairing the archer image with that of surrounding the city suggests an army rather than a contingent of archers. This demonstrates how these soldiers can be used as a metaphor for the wider military campaign. Isa 22:2-3 demonstrates the bow's place in traditional battle and capture by inverting the image to stress the cowardice of Jerusalem's leaders – they were captured without battle. Archery enables fighting from a distance and a sudden, silent, and an almost indefensible attack; thus, it is the perfect metaphor for divine justice because an arrow can strike suddenly and is difficult to defend against.²¹¹ It can be suggested that the archer image connected to divine justice demonstrates the specificity of the judgement from the gods, through the distance, speed and precision associated with the weapon. Archers were used effectively in military tactical decisions with techniques such as the so-called 'Parthian shot' in which a horse-rider turned their upper body to shoot behind.²¹² This was a well-developed technique to provide an advantage against the enemy through surprise and skill.

Archery is often associated with the divine warrior motif (figure 5.13). This is evident, not only in the Hebrew Bible, but also in the mythological stories of the ancient Near East.²¹³ The archer image in the Baal Cycle and Enûma Eliš demonstrate the importance placed on this type of combat – the important battle uses the bow as the primary weapon rather than a mace. The use of the bow in these mythological tales of

²¹⁰ Trimm 2017, 537. In SAA 4.280r5 Ashurbanipal uses archers to mean the whole army – “*He has mustered archers in Elam and is coming*”. This demonstrates the extent of the army (through reference to Elam) and emphasises the prestige and import placed on archers as a metonym for the entire army.

²¹¹ Ryken et. Al 1998, 205-206. Ps 64:7 – “*But God shoots his arrow at them; they are wounded suddenly.*” – the arrow comes from YHWH himself to strike down those whose words are like arrows, harming others. Arrows can also be shot at great speed; thus, one can suggest it is symbolic of the swiftness of divine justice and YHWH's judgement. The piercing action of an arrow is also very precise – a skilled archer can strike the smallest of targets, including through holes in armour if worn.

²¹² Zutterman 2003, 141. At a gallop, shooting behind means the air flow aids the arrow's flight rather than against the air resistance. This technique was used in hunting as well as battle, however, was not useful against enemy infantry because foot-soldiers cannot pursue mounted cavalry. See Drews 2004, 88-89. See also Rostovtzeff 1943, 174-187.

²¹³ Bonfiglio 2015, 227. The Baal Cycle - “His bow he has ta'en in his hand” (IV AB+RŠ 319, Ginsberg 2011, 132). Enûma Eliš – “He constructed a bow, marked it as his weapon [...] Bow and quiver he hung at his side” (Tablet IV 35-38, Speiser 2011, 29.)

creation suggests its importance in maintaining the ordered world. Thus, the king uses his bow to hunt animals of chaos as well as in battle scenes – he uses the bow to maintain order and drive away chaos, thus reflecting the divine warrior in the mythological background to the ancient Near East. Archery finds its way into the legendary culture of the ancient Near East, demonstrating its significance to ancient life, hunting and warfare. The importance of the bow and thus the archer image is highlighted through the presentation of a bow from the gods to the king (figure 5.14). This furthers the image of archery and arrows as a form of divine justice and reinforces the belief of a divine right to rule – the king is chosen by the gods as their viceroy on earth. By handing over his weapon and an instrument of judgement to the king, the god is giving the king the power to enact his will on the subjects. The iconographic record also depicts gods fighting above the king – he fights for and with them (figure 5.15 demonstrates the deity pulling back his bow in an image of potential violence). The use of the bow as the divine weapon of choice

reinforces its place as a symbol of power and judgement. This intrinsic link with divinity is evident in figure 5.16, depicting Set guiding Thut-mose III's aim with the bow in an intimate posture of care and protection. This suggests it was a weapon of divine warfare and reinforces the idea of the Pharaoh's divine right to rule. The gods



Figure 5.13 Relief. Nimrud, Ashurbanipal II (883-859 BCE). British Museum. Author 2021.

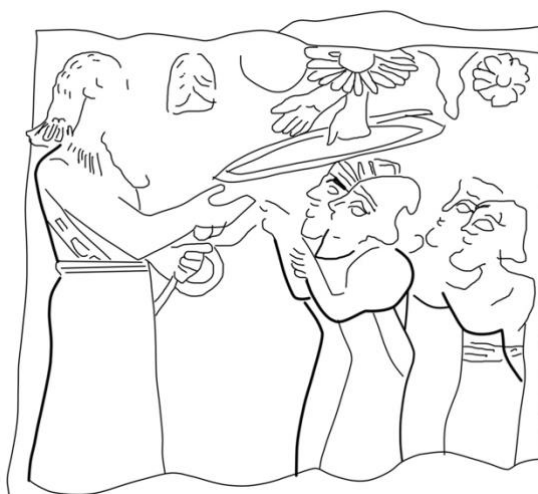


Figure 5.14 Obelisk relief, h 30 cm. Nineveh. 11th-10th centuries BCE. British Museum 118898. Author 2021.

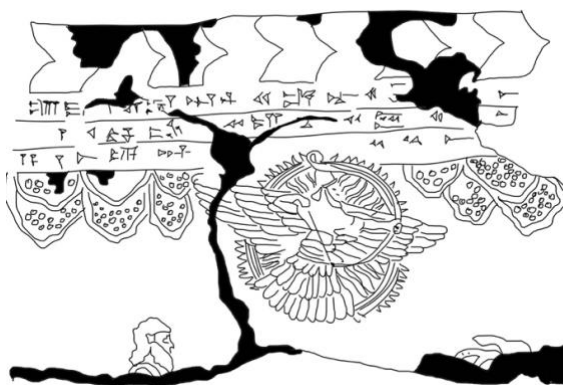


Figure 5.15 Enamelled seal, h. 28cm. Assur. Tukulti-Ninurta II (888-884 BCE). British Museum 115706. Author 2021.

guide the Pharaoh in the cosmological war against chaos and aid in their battle against enemy threats. Figure 5.16 appears like a ‘training scenario’ suggesting the gods help the Pharaoh in his preparation for battle.

This is contrasted with figure 5.17 where the gods are literally behind the Pharaoh in the midst of battle, supporting him, in the dynamic pose of potential violence. By combining the gods’ guidance with the sense of a moving chariot, the iconography reinforces the king and divine relationship and their teamwork on both the cosmological and human

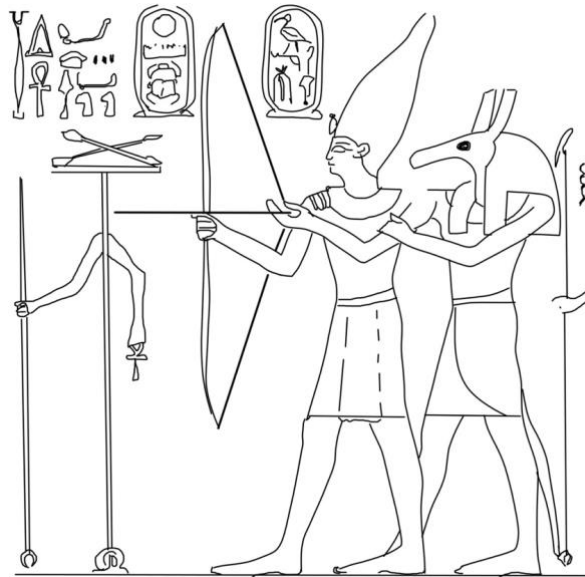


Figure 5.16 Relief, Karnak. Thut-mose III. 1502-1448 BCE. Author 2021.

battlefields. By using the archer image to demonstrate this relationship (instead of hand-to-hand weaponry such as swords or axes, or other distance weapons such as spears), the importance and power of the bow is emphasised and communicated to the wider audience. Consequently the iconography provides a re-interpretation of the text, the use of the archer image in Isaiah can be understood as an act of divine justice either direct from YHWH or through an earthly figure. The iconography demonstrates the close relationship between gods and the king, thus one can suggest Isaiah’s use of the bow demonstrates YHWH’s closeness to his people as their protector.

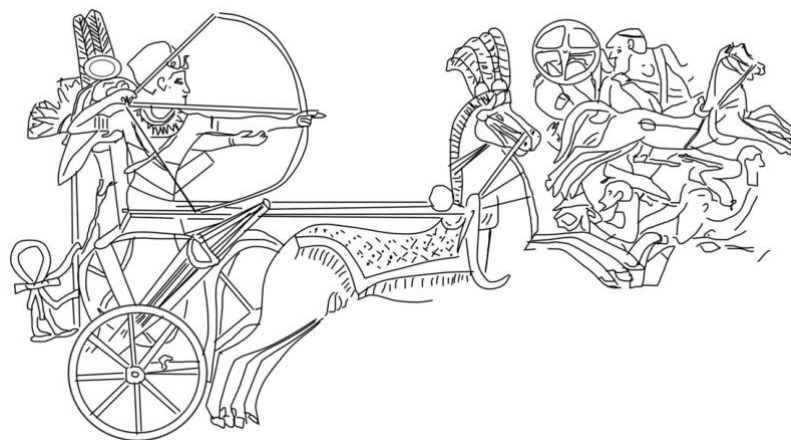


Figure 5.17 Wood covered with linen and stucco, h 86cm. Thebes, tomb of Thutmose IV (1422-1413 BCE). Cairo. Author 2021.

Rulers often prided themselves on their archery skills,²¹⁴ this is reflected through its appearance on royal seals as an official articulation of the king's power (figure 5.18).

Through its appearance on a seal, the archer king is tied with royal authority – the image is literally used as the king's seal of approval. Furthermore, it becomes an enunciation of the

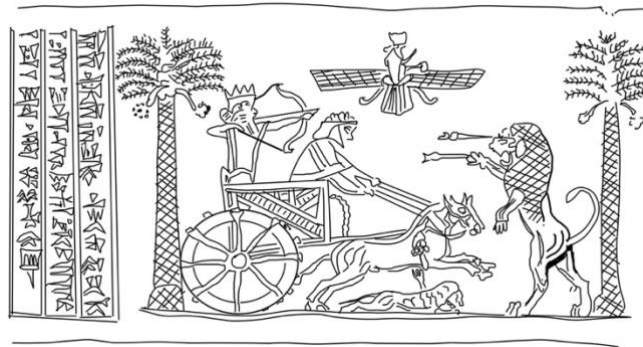


Figure 5.18 Seal of Darius I. Thebes. 6th-5th century BCE. 89132, British Museum. Author 2021.

king's identity through the seal as a signature. It is significant they are depicted with this rather than a sword, suggesting a higher value was placed on archery skills. The use of the hunting archer on this seal demonstrates Darius' capabilities as warrior-king, protecting his empire from outside threats, both cosmological and earthly. By communicating this message on a seal, the image is moveable – it can reach every corner of the empire to be read and understood by all his subjects who come across it.

This increases access to this iconographic message through the use of miniature art rather than a static, monumental relief. The trilingual inscription on figure 5.18 exemplifies the iconographic message of power through the recitation "I [am] Dairus, the [Great] King". Pairing this inscription with the hunting image demonstrates the place of the warrior-king image in the iconographic language of power and thus protection of his people. One can also see this on figure 5.19, the archer figure on



Figure 5.19 Type 1 archer coin. Late 6th/early 5th century BCE. Author 2021.

²¹⁴ Trimm 2017, 531. Kings often wield the bow in hunting scenes and in instances they are involved in battle. Amenhotep II boasts of his skills through an account about testing 300 bows to find the best (see Trimm 2017, 295). Ashurbanipal equates archery skills with courage (see Trimm 2017, 302-3). This reinforces his ability to be a good king – he has great martial prowess, and he learnt the required military skills when he was young. Bows were a high-status weapon (See Trimm 2017, 533.) thus they were frequently linked with kingship and the virtues the king must show as divinely chosen individuals. The popularity of the archer image is reflected in its prominence in the Persepolis Fortification Seals (see Bonfiglio 2015, 231.) For more on the bow as a symbol of the king's military and hunting prowess see Root 1979, 164.

coins circulated around the empire and beyond thanks to the prolific trade systems in place. This enables the message of the King's skills as warrior and hunter to reach subjects, allies and enemies alike – saturating society with their iconographic messages. The desire to communicate the royal skills of hunter and warrior is a timeless motif, reaching into the Sasanian period (figure 5.20). This emphasises the importance of the king's role as hunter, warrior and defender, clearly communicated through the use of the bow. Therefore, Isaiah's text gains deeper meaning when the iconographic record is taken into consideration – the use of archers and bows becomes an image of YHWH's protective power rather than wrathful judgement. Through these demonstrations of martial prowess, one can interpret the text as a demonstration of YHWH's superiority to the other gods/kings.



Figure 5.20 Plate with king hunting rams, c. mid-5th-mid-6th century CE. Sasanian. Iran (Qazvin?). Silver, mercury gilding, niello inlay. Met Museum 34.33. Author 2021.

Many representations of the bow in the iconographic record place it firmly in a battle or hunting context, reflecting Isa 21:15 through the bent bow, demonstrating its readiness to shoot. Occasionally there are representations of archers 'at ease' (figure 5.21). The bow is over the shoulder, indicating no preparation to fight. However, in contrast to facing the bow towards you (figure 5.9), there is an air of tension in figure 5.21 – a sense of anticipation; at any moment the archer could launch into action. In

this way, the iconographic corpus suggests the use of the archer image can simultaneously be interpreted as a violent action and a threat whilst appearing peaceful.

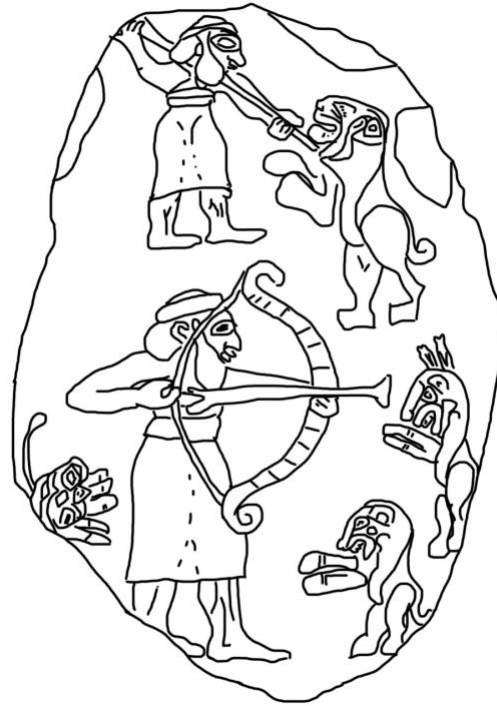


Figure 5.21 Assyrian archer. Louvre AO 19877. Author 2021.

Royal archers can be depicted with very few others and little action around them, (figure 5.22). Figure 5.22 does not use the warrior or hunter-king image to demonstrate hunting skills but rather the ability to bring the enemy (as represented by the lion) into captivity.²¹⁵ This enables the sole focus to lie on the royal archer and his prey – emphasising his mastery of the bow without the distraction of other figures and action. Despite this, there are renderings of archers in the midst of the action (figure 5.23), forming a moment in a series of panels detailing a wider event such as a lion-hunt. This dynamic scene highlights the king's role as archer through the bent bow and action of pulling back the string in an posture of preparation and aggression. In this figure, the depictions of arrows already piercing the lions' bodies (both the rearing lion being

²¹⁵ Couturaud 2020, 111. In demonstrating this ability, the image circulates the idea of king as protector of civilisation from chaos (as represented by the lion). These images therefore take on a cosmological component rather than a snapshot of a lived event, emphasising the use of the hunter-image in the iconographic corpus and language of power.

spear and the fallen beneath the chariot's wheels) demonstrates the fast-paced intensity of the hunt and the ability of the king as an archer to loose arrows and hit his targets in keeping with this pace. The king uses a bow rather than another weapon (such as a spear like the attendants behind him), thus suggesting the bow was considered more important than other weaponry. Thus, the bow can be read as an elite weapon in the iconography and the Biblical narrative, suggesting the Isaian use of the bow symbolises divine power. Another interpretation could suggest



the scale indicates their importance in the military tactics of the ancient Near East. This is emphasised through figure 5.24 representing line after line of archers poised to shoot in the epic siege of Lachish. This highlights their overwhelming power and the domination of archers in the military ranks. This conjures up images of skies full of arrows, blocking out the light and thus inspiring terror. These iconographic motifs encourage an interpretation of the text as describing the chaos of battle, creating images of the lived experience of being caught by enemy projectiles. Thus, the Isaian archers can be read as symbolic of YHWH's domination and overwhelming power, reflecting the might of archery in the iconography.



Figure 5.23 Lion hunt reliefs. Wall panel 14, room C, North Palace, Nineveh. 645-635 BCE. British Museum 124867. Author 2021.

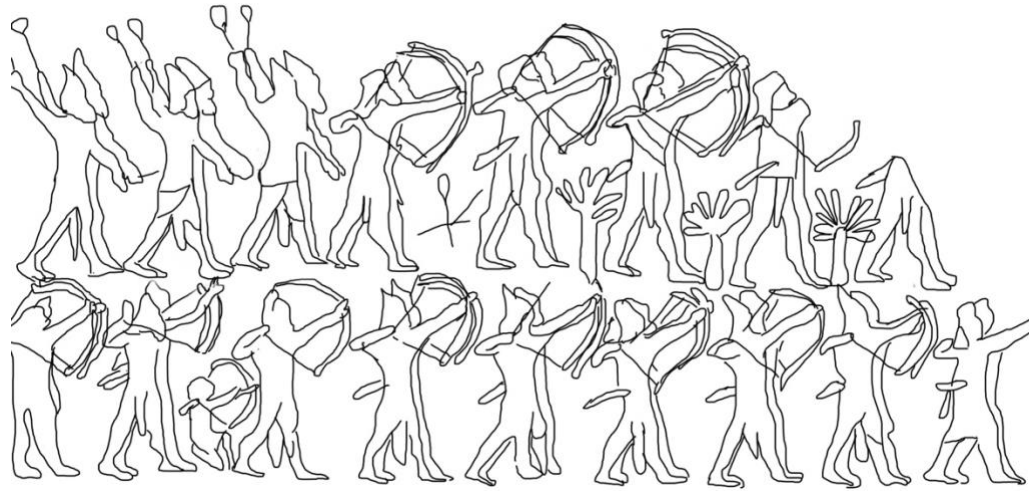


Figure 5.24 Archers at the beginning of the siege of Lachish. Nineveh. Sennacherib. Neo-Assyrian. 700-692 BCE. British Museum 124904. Author 2021.

The bow and archery was an integral part of the ancient Near Eastern military life-blood, as emphasised by its extensive representations in the iconographic records from Mesopotamia to Egypt. The repeated embodiment of this activity, both human and divine, indicates its role as a symbol of power, dominance and authority, thus these depictions communicate the royal propagandistic messages of divine authority and military prowess. The iconography adds deeper meaning and further understanding of the text through its exploration of interpretations of the archer motif and its meaning in varying contexts, from symbols of divine judgement and kingly power to its reversal to exemplify messages of peace.

5.5 Weaponry and Equipment – 14:29 “the rod that struck you is broken”; 21:5 “oil the shield”; 21:7 “When he sees riders, horsemen in pairs [...] riders on camels”; 21:9 “here come riders, horsemen in pairs”; 22:6 “[...] chariots and horsemen and Kir uncovered the shield”

In iconography, men are often associated with or wield weapons or tools,²¹⁶ to demonstrate their strength and masculinity in a reinforcement of gender roles through

²¹⁶ Bloch-Smith 2014, 1. Females are traditionally linked with music, food, and children – reflecting their roles as wives and mothers. Associating male figures with tools and weapons emphasises their masculinity in line with traditional beliefs associated with gender constructs. This is emphasised

the accoutrement attached to figures and their surrounding contexts such as battlefields or the home. This is especially the case in depictions of the king who must uphold the role of warrior and hero in protecting his society from the ever-present chaos that threatens the order of creation. The Oracles use many images of weaponry and related equipment in a variety of different contexts. Isa 14:29 suggests the fall of previously violent, militant civilisations through the use of the rod as a metaphor for Assyria – the rod is broken like Assyria will be following their judgement by YHWH. Isa 21:7 demonstrates the preparation for battle – it is a command to the princes from YHWH through the prophet to defend their lands. Isa 21:7 and 21:9 highlight the importance of the cavalry in ancient Near Eastern military tactics – Isaiah’s use of horsemen as the sign for the watchman to look for demonstrates this. This also evokes images of dust clouds kicked up from the galloping horses. The importance of cavalry is furthered in Isa 22:6 through the remark on chariots, a method of transport commonly found in the iconographic record.

The chariot (Isa 22:6) is a prevalent image in the Bible (approximately one-hundred-and-fifty references), and can be interpreted as a royal throne,²¹⁷ a moveable stand on which the king can oversee the battle (figure 5.23). By placing himself on a chariot, above the rest of his soldiers, the king demonstrates his authority when he is not able to articulate this through throning. 2 Kgs 9:21 enhances this idea of chariots as a symbol of authority – Joram and Ahaziah go to meet Jehu in their chariots. Through using chariots rather than another mode of transportation, rulers articulate their military prowess as well as their kingly power to any subjects who see them. This is exacerbated in 2 Kgs 9:28 where Ahaziah is killed by Jehu and then carried back in state in his chariot to be buried in his ancestral tomb. The use of the chariot demonstrates his kingly power until the moment he is laid to rest. The throne was a symbol of authority and power.²¹⁸ Ex 12:29 demonstrates the association of the throne with the dynastic power of Pharaoh. The heir is already sat on the throne, emphasising

through the Elamite culture’s use of the bow as a symbol of manhood and a warrior’s identity (see Root 1979, 165.)

²¹⁷ Keel 1997, 238. The use of the chariot in battle scenes may imply the victory was because of the chariot – it carried the king and standards of the gods into battle like a portable throne and all the symbolic power that goes with it (see Keel 1997, 238).

²¹⁸ Hunziker-Kodewald 2015, 165. The throne is where kings receive audiences, demonstrating their power to any who come before them. The chariot acts as this portable throne in battle (Dean 2017, 44.) In this way, chariots become a symbol of unsurpassable power (see LeMon 2014, 384.)

his birth right to rule using the enthroning image. 2 Sam 3:10 furthers this image of the throne as a symbol of power. Through the distinction of throne and house, this verse emphasises the change in power – Saul has lost the throne; thus, he has lost the kingly power. 1 Kgs 1:46 demonstrates the dynastic power of David’s line, the power associated with it is passed down from David to Solomon through the image of being seated on the throne. Through linking these ideals with the chariot, its appearance in hunting and battle scenes demonstrates the King’s authority over his army and the conquered peoples. This idea is demonstrated in 2 Chron 18:34 – the King of Israel sat in his chariot until his dying breath thus illustrating it’s symbolism as a seat of power – he was king and held all the power that comes with that until he died. 1 Sam 8:11-12 demonstrates the chariot as a symbol of power – Samuel tells of a king that will take the people’s sons to drive his chariots and to equip them. The power that comes with having many chariots and the ability to conquer lands demonstrates the authority and dominance attached to the image of a chariot. The importance of the chariot is furthered through the

idea it represents a temple,²¹⁹ emphasising their importance in the iconographic language of power and the relationship between the king and divine. This is furthered through offerings being made to chariots (figure 5.25). Thus one

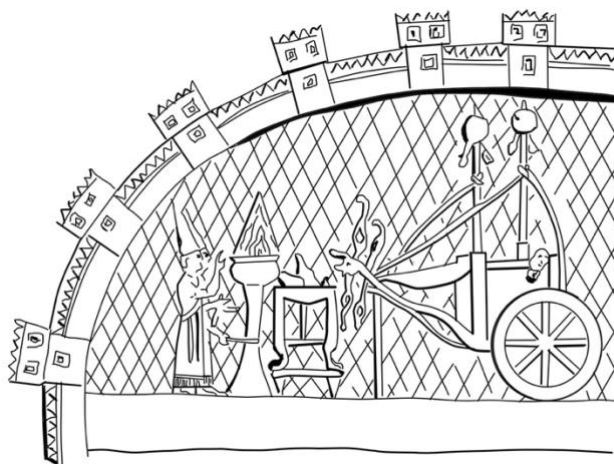


Figure 5.25 Sacrifice/offerings being made to a chariot. Relief. Nineveh. Sennacherib. 704-681 BCE. Author 2021.

can suggest chariots had a cosmic role, representing the presence and support of divine beings on the battlefield. The offering to a standard-chariot also suggests they could act as a transportable cult-statue to be used when on campaign and visiting an actual temple was impossible. Through this iconography, one can suggest Isa 22:6 can be interpreted as a symbol of royal and divine authority as Elam goes into battle.

²¹⁹ Keel 1996, 238. The chariot transferred the grandeur of the throne and temple onto the king whilst in battle. This further emphasises the king’s authority as he oversees the battle from this platform. This idea is also seen through the chariots of cloud (Ps 104:3) as a manifestation of YHWH’s power and glory, linking to ideas of YHWH as divine warrior against sin. (see Ryken et al 1998, 367.) In this way, the chariot can be interpreted as a symbol of power (see Ryken et al 1998, 505.)

The chariot was superior and effective on the plains but not on the hills,²²⁰ thus one can suggest that whilst they were a powerful symbol and ‘weapon’ they also had their faults. This dual nature is further demonstrated by Absalom’s use of chariots in a coup against David in 2 Sam 15:1. Here Absalom gathers chariots and horses to assemble a power base in preparation for his coup against David. By using symbols of kingly power against the king, Absalom demonstrates his pride in comparison to David’s humility – he assumes power before he has overthrown David. The symbol of the chariot could be inverted but it could be destroyed, demonstrating the idea that YHWH’s power was greater than that of human kings and the military power they possess and boast about.²²¹ Judg 4:15 inverts the image of chariots as a symbol of power by their destruction through YHWH’s judgement. Through leaving his chariot and fleeing on foot, Sisera symbolically loses his power as commander (in place of the King in battle) – he gives up his platform of authority in the face of YHWH’s wrath. Ex 14:30-31 further demonstrates this idea – YHWH destroys the Egyptian forces in saving the Israelites – their power demonstrated through their chariots was not enough to save them from YHWH’s judgement. This contrasts the ancient Near Eastern idea of chariots as a power symbol that evokes terror as demonstrated by its use in the iconographic representations of battles and its appearance as a royal method of transportation. In light of this, the use of chariots in Isa 22:6 can be interpreted as this reversal of power – Elam is fated to fail and be destroyed like the chariots on the hills and in Ex 14:30-31. The use of the iconographic record demonstrates the special place of chariots as a portable throne and symbol of authority, thus Isa 22:6 can be interpreted as Elam’s demonstration of power. Despite this, considering the practical realities of chariotry and other Biblical text can suggest an alternative interpretation of limitation and destruction in the face of YHWH’s greater power on his own chariot of clouds (Ps 104:3).

²²⁰ Ryken et. al 1998, 139. This dual nature of the chariot as superior but also restricted is demonstrated in Ex 14:25 – “*clogging their chariot wheels so that they drove heavily*”. The unfavourable conditions (rain and mud as sent by YHWH) rendered the chariots ineffective, thus inverting the image of power they present in the iconographic record.

²²¹ The chariot therefore becomes a hindrance to Sisera, becoming a symbol of a loss of power as opposed to the connotations of thrones (when viewing the chariot as a portable version). See Ryken et al 1998, 1371.

The staff was a symbol of authority,²²² thus Isaiah's use of a broken rod in 14:29 suggests the authority of Assyria's king has been shattered. Gen 49:10 links the staff with the king's power and body, demonstrating its place as a symbol of authority. The idea of the staff as a symbol of power can be interpreted throughout Exod. 7 – Moses uses the staff of YHWH to perform his miracles. Exod 7:12 furthers this Aaron's staff serpent defeats the others, demonstrating YHWH's power over others. Isa 9:4 refers to "rod of the oppressor", emphasising the use of this biblical



Figure 5.26 Sargon II and Sennacherib. Dur Sharrukin. 710 BCE. Author 2021.

metaphor as a symbol of power and authority. Elite men (and especially the king) were often depicted with a straight scepter (figure 5.26 and 5.27). This reinforces the idea that the broken rod of Isaiah 14:29 is a metaphor for the end of Assyrian power and domination. This idea is furthered through the smiting scene and the power communicated through maces, sceptres and sickles – these scenes depict the king as all-conquering and powerful.²²³ In depicting the Pharaoh in this smiting stance with the nine bows, he executes all threats to his kingdom – he is represented as more powerful than everything else. He uses a weapon (rod) to defeat his enemies and implement his dominion over them (figure 5.28). Here the pictorial message shows a 'rod' or staff being used to punish a prisoner and push him to work harder. The rod here functions like a whip, striking the prisoner's back. In using this iconographic

²²² Josephson 2015, 65. Kings are often depicted holding a staff in audience scenes (British Museum C.225.1 – Xerxes holds a staff as he sits on his throne.) See also Robins 2015, 120-140. The rod, along with the ring, are signs of divinity and righteousness as well as law and legal surveillance over building activities (Wagner-Durand 2020, 35.) For further commentary on the importance of the staff as a symbol of power when the king appears in state see Root 1979.

²²³ Leprohon 2015, 312. The execution is left to the Pharaoh as a symbol of his role in ending the enemy powerbase. The use of the nine bows (a visual representation of the Pharaoh's enemies and chaos) in these smiting scenes demonstrates the Pharaoh's destruction of chaos, in keeping with his role of protecting the ordered world (see Wilkinson 1994). In depicting the Pharaoh in this smiting stance with the nine bows, he executes all threats to his kingdom – he is represented as more powerful than everything else.

message, one can read Isa 14:29 as a fragmentation and end of power of the Nations that once imprisoned and conquered YHWH's people. Considering the iconography of staffs/rods, Isa 14:29 suggests the implement used by the nations to enforce their power and punish their foes has been broken, symbolising their ability to consolidate power through torture and execution is no more. Furthermore, a broken weapon (for example the metal from swords) could be used to reinforce other weapons or agricultural equipment,²²⁴ thus Isaiah's use of a broken rod need not be interpreted as an end to power, but a development – power passes from one to another, much like the repurposing of broken weapons.

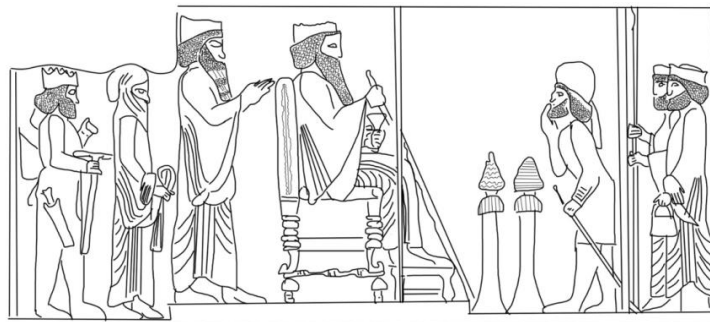


Figure 5.27 Darius I and Xerxes I give audience. Stone relief, Persepolis. National Museum of Iran, Tehran. Author 2021.

²²⁴ Baker 2013, 17. Repurposing weapons protected resources, especially those that were more difficult to come by. The transformation of materials from the military context to the domestic highlights the inter-dependence of these sectors – the military protects the domestic which in turn supplies the military – the broken sword becomes a plough to furrow the land for planting. However, these broken weapons didn't always leave the military context, spears could become small weapons as well as sickles for cutting grape vines as in Isa 18:5.



Figure 5.28 Relief. Nineveh. Palace of Sennacherib, Room 33. 704-681 BCE. British Museum 124801. Author 2021.

Shields in ancient Near Eastern warfare could be used as a ‘portable wall’.²²⁵ The idea of shields as a portable wall is demonstrated in occasions across ancient warfare where shields formed a protective barrier around camps or contingents or troops (for example the Roman *testudo*). This reflects the protective quality of shields – they shelter warriors when they cannot seek refuge behind the safety of a fort wall. However, the use of ‘buckler’ in Ps 91:4 can be interpreted as less defensive, acting as another form of attack.²²⁶ This is emphasised through the fact they could be used to make a ‘wall’ around an encampment (figure 5.29).²²⁷ This transforms the ‘portable wall’ into a stationary, temporary structure, acting as fortress walls for the peripatetic military camp. Shields were the fundamental defensive equipment for the ancient near eastern soldier,²²⁸ protecting the army from incoming projectiles such as arrows. Figure 5.30

²²⁵ Keel 1997, 222. This idea is evident in Ps 91:4 – “*He will cover you with his pinions, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness is a shield and buckler*” – YHWH becomes like a shield, protecting his people. The metaphor of YHWH as shield is also demonstrated in Chris Tomlin’s song *Amazing Grace (My Chains Are Gone)* from a 2006 album, stating “*He will my shield and portion be*”. In this way, the image of YHWH as a protective shield for his people has continued until the modern day, with the song being covered by Pentatonix in 2020.

²²⁶ Bucklers were small, circular shields that could be used to parry sword blows and be used to swing at your foe as another attack apart from the sword. This use of the buckler is where the phrase ‘swashbuckler’ comes from – they would attack with the sword (swash) and follow with the buckler whilst their opponent was busy defending against the sword strike (see *Online Etymology Dictionary* - <https://www.etymonline.com>).

²²⁷ Trimm 2017, 543. This was an easy way to set up a defensive system around a portable camp. Whilst the defensive capabilities of this kind of wall are not total, it provides some protection in an emergency. See Trimm 2017, 493.

²²⁸ Trimm 2017, 543. Shields not only acted as a form of defence from projectiles and attacks, but they could also be used to identify each other (see Trimm 2017, 126.) Shields could be used by the person

demonstrates how shields formed a protective wall for archers, suggesting the army was made up of teams like this thus demonstrating the effective military tactics of ancient Near Eastern armies. The shield bearer is a position of trust, thus one could suggest the role as protector and their close proximity to other appears intimate.²²⁹ The shield-bearer is also attested in chariotry, allowing the archer to focus on repetitive attacks without having to stop for defence. In light of this, Isa 21:5 and 22:6 can be interpreted as a vital part of battle preparation – without the shields, the invading army would be unable to defend themselves from counter-attack, either whilst on the battlefield or protecting their encampments. The iconography stresses the shield as a defensive piece of equipment for individual/small groups of soldiers as well as the army as a whole. Through the iconography one can suggest Isa 21:5/22:6 demonstrates the lack of formal defence of a campaigning army – they do not have the safety of city walls or fortresses thus they use shields to provide some protection and simulate formal defensive structures.

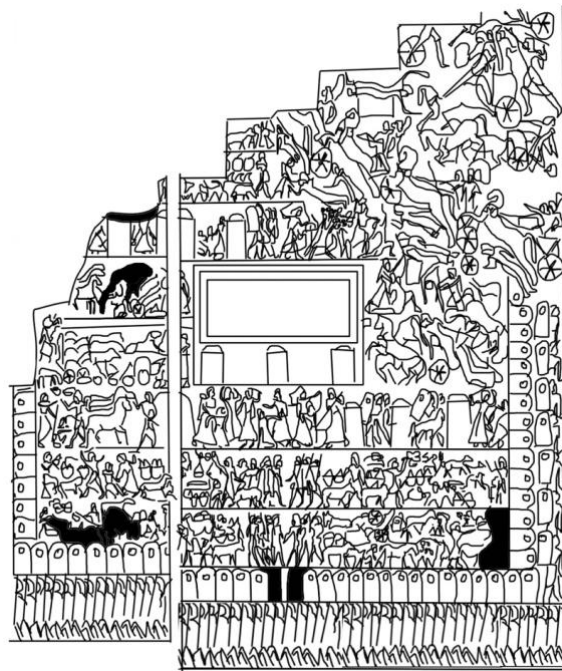


Figure 5.29 Egyptian camp. Relief of Ramesses II at the Ramesseum. Author 2021.

they are defending (personal), or larger shields could protect a pair/group, with one shield-bearer and others attacking.

²²⁹ Keel 1997, 222. This image of the shield-bearer can be interpreted as YHWH's protection (see Ryken et al 1998, 19.) This emphasises YHWH's protection for those that trust him. 'Trust' can also be interpreted as 'wait', thus those who wait for YHWH will be protected in the day of judgement.



Figure 5.30 Relief. H.91 cm. Nimrud, central palace of Tiglath-pileser III (745-727 BCE). Author 2021.

The image of oiling the shield in Isa 21:5 and uncovering it in 22:6 creates an image of preparation for battle. Figure 5.31 demonstrates the use of shields in the midst of battle, emphasising their importance as a form of protection. By singling out the action of oiling the shield, Isaiah demonstrates the importance placed on the shield in ancient near eastern military tactics. Figure 5.30-31 show the different uses of shields, from groups to individual use, the shield was employed as a protective barrier between the carrier and the enemy. The shield in figure 5.30 is likely to have been used during a siege due to its large size, thus contrasting with the smaller version in figure 5.31 for hand-to-hand combat.²³⁰ Some have interpreted Isa 17:10 “rock of your refuge” to be a metaphor for YHWH as a shield.²³¹ Through the connotations of safety of ‘refuge’ and shield, one can suggest the Isaian use of shields is synonymous with YHWH’s protection. 2 Sam 1:21 contrasts the image of oiling the shield in Isaiah by using the lack of oiling. By contrasting the image of a shield no longer being oiled to the iconographic record where the shield is in the middle of action, as emphasised by Isa 21:5, one can interpret this as a metaphor for Saul’s death. Appraising the iconographic

²³⁰ Ryken et. Al 1998, 194. The different types of shields suggest they were an essential part of a soldier’s equipment, providing effective defence in a variety of situations and best protect those who stand behind it.

²³¹ Ryken et. Al 1998, 195. This demonstrates how shields became a type of portable ‘safe haven’ to protect soldiers from the enemy when they cannot retreat to a literal “rock of refuge” or encampment. 2 Sam. 23:3 refers to “*the Rock of Israel*” emphasising the idea of ‘rocks’ as a place of safety and shelter thanks to YHWH’s love and protection.

record furthers the images created by Isaiah, connecting the shield inextricably with battle.

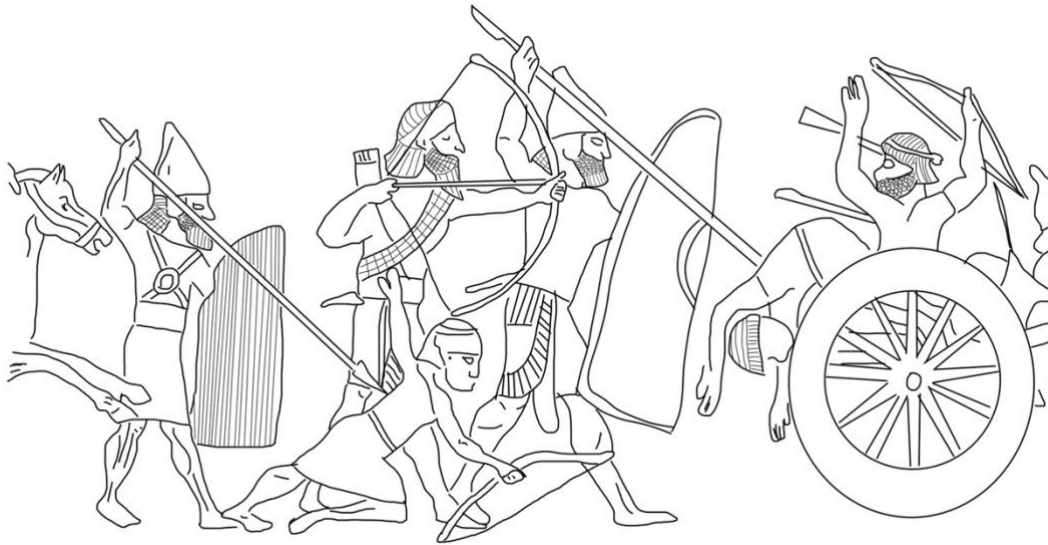


Figure 5.31 Detail from Til-Tuba reliefs. Ashurbanipal. Neo-Assyrian. 660-650 BCE. Nineveh. British Museum 124801, b. Author 2021.

Isaiah's use of horses could refer to the role of horsemen as scouts before full armies were committed to a campaign.²³² When a watchman sees the horses, they know an attack is impending through the use of scouts prior to invasions. However, they also formed part of the main military force as part of the cavalry or to drive chariots; their stampede would be deadly for any fleeing or fighting. In this way, the sighting of horsemen could be the site of a full army approaching; this creates a sense of impending doom through Isaiah's words. Horses were symbolic of an army's power,²³³ thus depictions emphasised victories and their dominance both in battle and wider society. One example is the use of hoofbeats and stampedes in the Biblical text to refer to the fear and impending doom felt at an approaching battle (Jer 47:2-7). Horses formed a massive force in these ancient armies, from chariots to mounted cavalry – the more horses in an army, the more charging force and power it had. This number

²³² Trimm 2017, 196. Scouting the enemy forces enables kings and commanders to determine how many soldiers to send if it was worth sending a massive force at all. Scouts were vital to military tactics and planning and horses enabled them to relay information quickly.

²³³ Trimm 2017, 221. Horses were highly valuable and became more commonly used in battle as numbers increased (see Trimm 2017, 229.) Horses were used for pulling chariots, requiring lots of training before they were ready to go into battle. (see Dean 2017, 43 and Trimm 2017, 223.) One can suggest that they were highly regarded and prized because of the effort put in to preparing horses for battle. Horses formed a massive force in these ancient armies, from chariots to mounted cavalry – the more horses in an army, the more charging force and power it had. This number of horses would have made a commotion that could be heard from far away – this instilled fear in those they were approaching.

of horses would have made a commotion that could be heard from far away – this instilled fear in those they were approaching. The sound of hoofbeats and stampedes are often referred to in the Biblical text in the context of fear. Jer 47:2-7 demonstrates the fear (*'wail'*) felt at the sound of an approaching army. The Assyrian's learned horsemanship from the people of the steppes who mastered it in the first millenium.²³⁴

Isaiah's use of pairs is reflected in figures 5.32 one rider shoots whilst the other controls both horses. This suggests a formidable approaching force – they could continue shooting whilst in complete control of their advance. Figure 5.33 depicts the use of horsemen in pairs, this time they both yield spears as they gallop into the enemy ranks. Later, under the reign of Sennacherib and beyond, cavalry were able to shoot arrows alone from horseback.²³⁵ Isaiah continues, referencing the use of camels instead of horses by some ancient near eastern societies in the reliefs. Often those riding camels in the iconographic record are the enemy (figure 5.34).²³⁶ It can be suggested that Isaiah's use of camels demonstrates the range of threats facing Jerusalem and the use of any cavalry in ancient near eastern warfare, no matter the resources available.



Figure 5.32 Assyrian Cavalry from Assurnasirpal II. British Museum 124544. Author 2021.

The dynamism of the cavalry in iconographic representations furthers the speed and ferocity attached to war horses, and the skill of ancient archers in a demonstration of their military prowess, striking terror into the heart of their foes. This permits the suggestion that Isaiah's use of horses and cavlary is aware of these messages when selecting the images employed. Thus one can read these instances within the Oracles

²³⁴ Trimm 2017, 233. Part of their riding style meant that saddles and stirrups were not used, like across the ancient Near East (see Trimm 2017, 229.) Their skill as horsemen is reflected in their nomadic roots; aspects of this lifestyle were carried on through the peripatetic nature of the court. (see Llewellyn-Jones 2013).

²³⁵ Trimm 2017, 234. The Parthian shot demonstrated great skill required to control the horse and shoot the bow simultaneously. See Zutterman 2003, 119-165; Drews 2004.

²³⁶ Trimm 2017, 237. Hdt 1.80 tell us Cyrus used camels in Anatolia –The camels led the charge against Croesus, followed by the infantry and then the horse cavalry. Herodotus argues the use of camels in leading the charge was because horses fear camels so Croesus' horses would flee at the sight (and smell) of them.

as articulations of the pre-battle terror instilled by the sighting/hearing of horses on the horizon.



Figure 5.33 Cavalry under Tiglath-pileser III using spears. British Museum 118907. Author 2021.

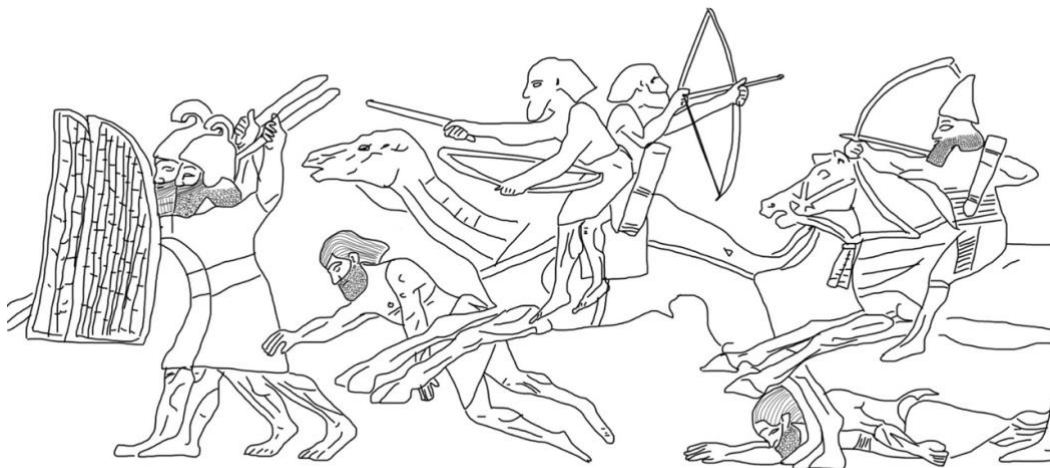


Figure 5.34 Assyrian relief of Arab camels. British Museum 124926. Author 2021.

Isaiah's use of weaponry and military equipment reflects the iconographic record of the ancient Near East. The emphasis placed in the text on these tactics demonstrates their importance in the ancient Near East's presentation and view of themselves, highlighting the importance of warfare in their self-presentation. The use of these weapons put across messages of power to communicate the dominance of various empires through time in their own minds. The iconography enables these messages to be read in Isaiah outside the literal interpretations of the images created within the text, providing context to the visual world Isaiah lived and wrote in.

5.6 Siege warfare – 15.2-3 “on the housetops and in the squares everyone wails and melts in tears”; 21:2 “lay siege, O Media”; 21:6 “Go set a watchman”; 21:8 “Upon a watchtower”; 21:11-12 “Watchman, what time of the night?”; 22:1 “What do you mean that you have gone up, all of you, to the housetops”; 22:5 “battering down of walls”; 23:13 “They erected their siege towers”; 24:12 “the gates are battered into ruins”

Sieges were common in the military landscape of the ancient Near East, with weaker states often resorting to this in attempts to survive against an empire by ‘waiting it out’.²³⁷ For the attacking armies, it could be effective because it involved cutting off the barraged city from any outside resources for the duration of the siege – this made it difficult for those inside, living off only what they could get within their walls. Ancient Near Eastern reliefs record the techniques employed during a siege such as scaling walls, tunnelling and breaching gates and walls.²³⁸ However, the reliefs appear to be standardised, meaning details about specific battles are difficult to glean despite panels being titled and referring to specific events (such as Lachish). The conquered were at the mercy of the conquerors; many were massacred.²³⁹ For the conquered, death could come in a brutal way, from impaling to decapitation – the outlook for those in the city if the walls were broken through was bleak. Sieges targeted societies at their heart, focusing on centres of civilisation and administration – by taking the cities, the surrounding areas would fall. Isaiah uses related images to evoke the overall portrayal of a siege in the text. In this case, the iconography can provide interpretations of these related images to link them more explicitly in the modern mind with the clear articulation of siege warfare in the ancient psyche.

²³⁷ Trimm 2017, 238. Sieges were the typical way of fighting in the ancient near east, barraging a city for months. Sieges were employed across the ancient Near East, both geographically and temporally, being used across Mesopotamia, especially by Assyrian Kings as well as the New Kingdom Pharaohs in Egypt (see Trimm 2017, 240-251).

²³⁸ Eph’al 2009, 25. Ladders appear to be favoured over siege engines (see Trimm 2017, 241.) however when considering the representation of sieges in relief, one must be aware the details are not drawn to scale, with soldiers appearing to be taller than walls or siege engines.

²³⁹ Keel 1997, 103. Inhabitants of cities, and those defeated in battle, were often slaughtered and if they survived, deported, and mistreated.

Sieges were an effective way to wear an army down without an all-out battle, avoiding hand-to-hand fighting in the open plains. By trapping people in a city, they were only able to access what lay inside their walls, whilst simultaneously facing daily assaults from the sieging army. Their resources inside the city could make or break them; deciding if they survived or not. Inhabitants would need access to food and water, thus they were reliant on stores and wells because sieges prevented any trade and resources from entering the city through the blockade of the attacking army surrounding the city. There was also the threat of disease within the besieged city – if this was to enter (through contaminated water, overcrowding, malnutrition and poor sanitation),²⁴⁰ the chances of survival were greatly reduced. Meanwhile, the sieging army were able to live off the land, giving them the advantage of resource access. Despite this, they still faced difficulties regarding the transportation of foodstuffs, even if living off the land and water supply if there was no fresh water in the area.²⁴¹ If these resources ran out or if there was no or little access to it then the defenders stood more of a chance of outlasting the besiegers. The attacking army had to defend on all sides whilst maintaining the siege.²⁴² Figure 5.35 demonstrates the attacked fighting from their

²⁴⁰ Eph'al 2009, 66. This was made easier because inhabitants had to slaughter their livestock early into the siege because there was not enough food in the stores (see Eph'al 2009, 58). This all contributes to the spread of disease and horrible conditions within the city during a siege. However, disease could still pass through the attackers (see Eph'al 2009, 67).

²⁴¹ Eph'al 2009, 106. Because sieges could last months on end, access to resources was vital. An army marches on its stomach – this phrase encapsulates the importance of food and water during military campaigns and thus during the siege.

²⁴² Eph'al 2009, 106. Besiegers were attacked by the defenders as they tried to break through the walls. Simultaneously there was the threat of attack from other forces outside – allies of the besieged city could come to their defense and distract the attackers from their advance and battering of the city.

walls down on the besiegers. If the seiging army could break through, fighting off the defensive tactics and barrages of projectiles and other weapons, or wait long enough for citites to run out of resources, they could take the city. The iconography demonstrates the chaos of siege warfare and the desperation of the inhabitants – it is a literal fight for survival. A re-reading of Isaiah creates this tense atmosphere when considering siege warfare, heightneing the ‘doomsday’ emotions articulated throughout the Oracles.



Figure 5.35 Ramesses III besieging a city. Author 2021.

The easiest and fastest way to enter a city was via assault ladders (figures 5.36).²⁴³ The ease of their manufacture, transportation and use meant that ladders were an effective means of waging siege warfare. Despite this, the use of ladders relied on getting the angle right – too steep and it would be too difficult to climb or easily knocked over; too shallow and the ladder may not reach the top. Assyrians climb ladders whilst

²⁴³ Eph'al 2009, 69. Ladders were a simple tactic and required few resources and less time to make than more advanced machines such as battering rams. Ladders were often effective because the thickness of city walls could be difficult to break through. For example, Lachish's outer wall was approximately three metres (nine feet) thick with an inner wall of six metres (nineteen feet); Khorsabad's wall was fourteen metres (forty-five feet) thick and twelve metres (thirty-eight feet) high and Nineveh had a wall of twenty-three metres (seventy-five feet) thick (see Baker 2013, 21.)

holding onto shields and weapons (figure 5.37) whereas Egyptians hold the ladder with both hands with axes hanging from their waists.²⁴⁴ This demonstrates the different styles of warfare across the ancient world, whilst also highlighting the import of siege warfare and ladders. Joel 2:7-9 furthers the images created in Isaiah and the iconographic record, creating images of swarms of soldiers scaling city walls, ready to start fighting as soon as they reach the top of the wall. A similar idea is in 2 Sam 22:30. Ladders could be used to scale the walls and streams of soldiers could breach the walls in this way. Figure 5.37 demonstrates this effective use of ladders with three soldiers all climbing with spear aloft and bows drawn – a terrifying throng approaching the defenders.



Figure 5.36 Ramesses II's siege of Dapur. Author 2021.

²⁴⁴ Eph'al 2009, 71-2. This can be read to determine the frequency of siege warfare – the Assyrian style suggests a highly trained, practiced force whereas the Egyptians (because they use their hands) may imply they had less practice/training in scaling walls. Trimm 2017, 240 argues Egyptian siege towers functioned like a moveable open-walled ladder but recognises ladders far out-numbered siege engines (Trimm 2017, 241), emphasising the development of different technologies for scaling walls. Trimm goes on to suggest those ascending the ladders were protected by archers from the defending city's attacks (Trimm 2017, 257).

Soldiers tunnel under the wall whilst holding shields above to protect from attack.

Soldiers scale the walls with an assault ladder.



Figure 5.37 Capture of the Elamite city of Hamanu. Neo-Assyrian. Ashurbanipal. 645-635 BCE. North Palace Nineveh. British Museum 124931. Author 2021.

Another tactic used during sieges was tunnelling. This compromised the wall from beneath and was often used alongside other efforts higher up the wall. By removing wall foundations, the strength of the wall was undermined thus making efforts via batterams easier. They could also be used as another access point into the city for the attackers.²⁴⁵

Figure 5.38 depicts a soldier digging underneath the city wall with a dagger whilst others scale the walls. This suggests tunneling was not a method to be used by itself, instead acting as a supplement to other methods of entrance such as ladders. Figure 5.39 demonstrates other ways of tunnelling: a pair of soldiers removes stones from the bottom of the wall and another pair attack the wall with crowbars, damaging the integrity of the wall. As



Figure 5.38 Ashurnasirpal II attack on enemy town. Neo-Assyrian. 865-860 BCE. Nimrud. British Museum 124552. Author 2021.

opposed to the digging action in figure 5.38, the use of crowbars appears more violent through the prying apart of the wall, whereas the removal of bricks seems more careful through the back-breaking and time-consuming work this required. The tunneling in figure 5.39 suggests the work was done to compromise the integrity of the wall, amplifying the damage caused by battering rams and attacking the city on multiple fronts. To attack the wall from above ground required protection from defensive action taken from within the city. This is demonstrated by figure 5.37 where soldiers hold shields above their heads as they use daggers to breach the wall. This demonstrates the chaos of a siege and the frantic defensive manoeuvres employed as the attackers come from a variety of angles. The frequency of the depiction of tunnelling in siege scenes suggests it was an effective tactic employed. However, it is always depicted in

²⁴⁵ Eph'al 2009, 76; 80. Tunnelling was difficult to defend against because the city inhabitants could not know when or where the attacking soldiers would appear from their tunnels. Trimm 2017, 245 details the difficulty behind tunnelling with a Hittite account of many failures in trying to enter the city through going beneath the walls (see Trimm 2017, 245). This is contrasted with the Assyrian confidence in tunneling, suggesting it was a crucial means to enter the city (Trimm 2017, 285-286).

conjunction with other approaches to attack, suggesting it was an integral part of a system of assault rather than a single-tactic approach. By sabotaging the walls structural integrity, tunnelling not only allowed access to the city but also aided attack via battering rams which could then break through the weakened wall. However, there were methods of defence against tunnels as demonstrated by figure 5.37 also demonstrates the use of moats as a layer of defence from tunnelling.²⁴⁶



Figure 5.39 Ashurnasirpal II besieging a city by a river. Neo-Assyrian. 865-860 BCE. Nimrud. British Museum. 124554. Author 2021.

One of the most common methods of siege warfare was the use of battering rams. These were made of wood with a metal pole to be driven into city walls to destabilise them and instill fear in the inhabitants.²⁴⁷ In order for these rams to be used (figure 5.40), a ramp had to be constructed to push them up to the walls, the archaeological remains at Lachish and attested in 2 Kgs 19:32. This involved gathering materials from the surrounding area and piling them to form a ramp whilst under attack from the city defenders. It has been suggested that because of the threat of assault from within the city and the inability to carry shields and stones, this construction was undertaken at

²⁴⁶ Eph'al 2009, 80-1. Tunnels could be filled with wasps or smoke by defenders to drive the attackers away. However, whilst effective, because the tunnels could be difficult to locate from within the city, these tactics were not always possible. Another form of defence was a moat of water however there are reports that they could dig beneath the moat to bypass this defence.

²⁴⁷ Eph'al 2009, 82. The use of battering rams is attested, not only in the iconographic record but also Ezek 21:22 (“[...] to set up battering rams, to open the mouth with murder [...]”). This highlights these as the main tactic employed by ancient near eastern kings during sieges. However, battering rams were complex pieces of machinery, meaning their construction took longer than the simple ladder. Beyond this, their size made them easy targets.

night.²⁴⁸ Ramps were a common tactic employed in ancient near eastern sieges as furthered in Sun Tzu, *Art of War* 3.4-9 – “to pile up earthen ramps against the walls an additional three months will be needed”. This indicates how long sieges could last – construction of a vital component could take three months alone. Defence against these ramps relied on the thickness of city walls rather than their materials, thus they could be destroyed within a matter of days.²⁴⁹ This made it an effective siege tactic – bringing the walls down would allow floods of soldiers to enter the city and conquer its people, whereas tunnelling and assault ladders would only enable a limited number of attackers to move on the defenders. Once the wall was breached, soldiers could use the ramps to march into the city (figure 5.41), thus demonstrating the vast number that could enter at once when compared with the soldiers attacking in figure 5.37. Whilst the operation of the battering rams was

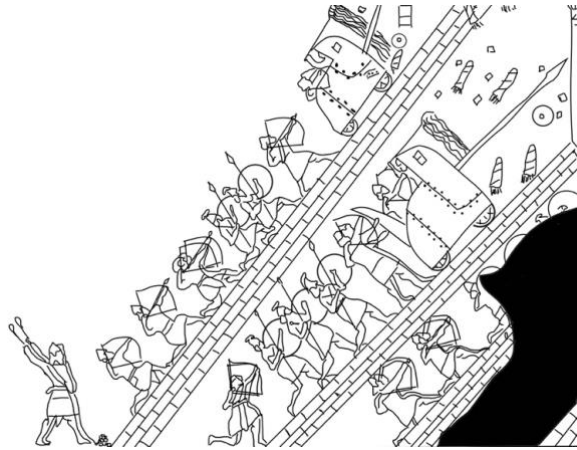


Figure 5.40 Relief of Siege of Lachish. Nineveh. Sennacherib. Neo-Assyrian. c.700-692 BCE. British Museum 124907. Author 2021.

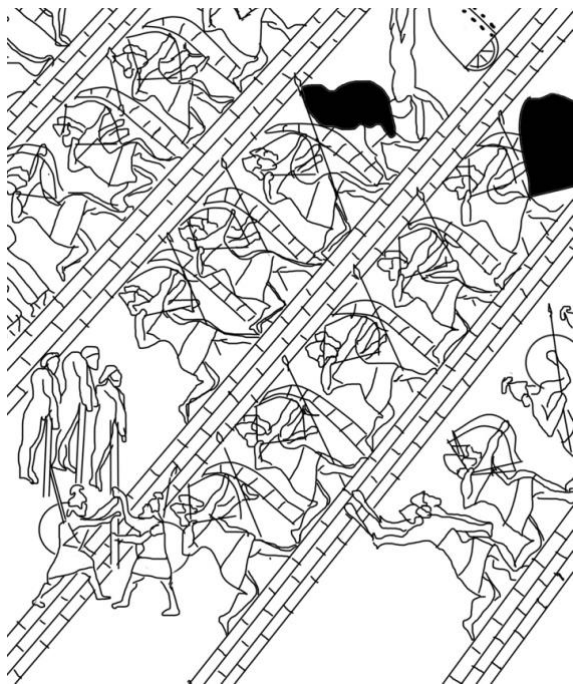


Figure 5.41 Relief of Siege of Lachish. Nineveh. Sennacherib. Neo-Assyrian. c.700-692 BCE. British Museum 124904. Author 2021.

²⁴⁸ Eph'al 2009, 87. The use of siege ramps is further attested in Ezek 21:22 “[...] to cast up mounds, to build siege towers”. The Victory Stele of Piye also refers to the use of ramps to elevate the ground to reach the walls (see Trimm 2017, 162.)

²⁴⁹ Eph'al 2009, 90-93. Counter-ramps were constructed within the city walls to fill in the gap that would be caused by the battering rams in a defensive manoeuvre attempting to prevent the besiegers entering the city. Siege ramps had to reach the top of the walls to be effective (see Trimm 2017, 248). In this way, counter ramps could be built simultaneously to support the wall and fill in gaps caused by the battering rams once rolled up the besieging ramp.

fairly simple, their defence was not – teams of archers had to constantly protect it from the defenders who would use flaming torches amongst other things (figure 5.42).²⁵⁰ One method of defence was the use of siege towers – these were built to provide a high platform for archers to attack from to protect the battering rams and infantry. Figure 5.43 depicts a siege tower alongside a battering ram, demonstrating how these towers were able to aid in defending the infantry soldiers directly assaulting the wall.

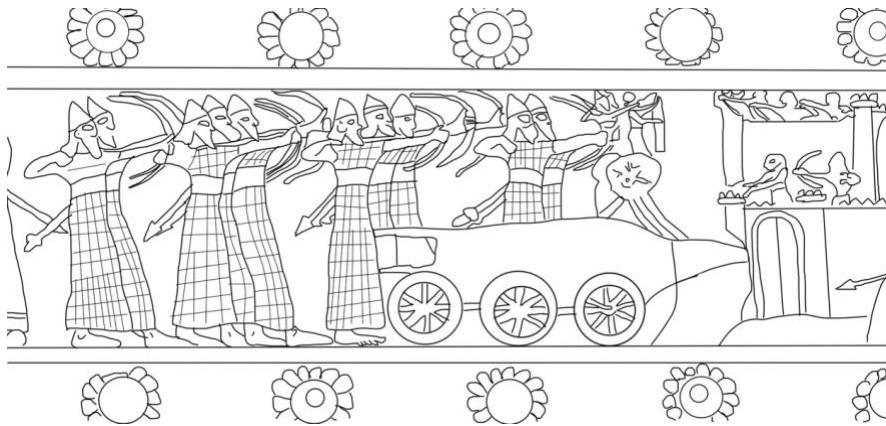


Figure 5.42 Shalmaneser III attacks a city. British Museum 124658 (band 4) of Balawat Gates. Author 2021.

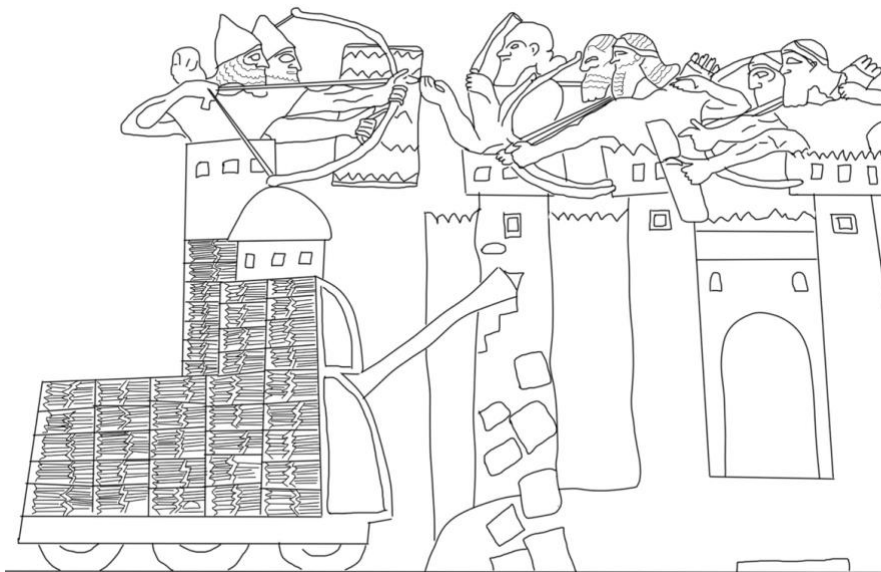


Figure 5.43 Assyrian siege by Ashurnasirpal II. British Museum 124535. Author 2021.

²⁵⁰ Eph'al 2009, 91. Defenders would also use chains to hook into the ram to topple it however, the attackers could counter this through their own use of hooks to anchor it to the ground (see Trimm 2017, 252.)

The iconography of these siege tactics (ladders, tunnelling and battering rams) furthers the images created in the text, adding detail and context to what Isaiah leaves unsaid. Through the iconography, one can understand the functionality of a siege and thus appreciate the subtle messages of chaos and fear articulated in the text. Considering the messages and images put forth by the iconographic record, the text gains new life and meaning. The application of these images to the text provides the reader with information overlooked by Isaiah, adding deeper meaning and enhancing the visual language employed by the text.

Isaiah's use of 'watchtowers' may be referring to the towers depicted in siege scenes from which defenders reign arrows and other assault down on the attackers. Figure 5.44 depicts towers within the city from which inhabitants watch and fight. One figure appears to be wielding a dagger and attacking another figure whilst the other three stand in positions of supplication – praying to the gods or begging the attackers for mercy. From their positions, the figures can see the battle below and the enemy preparations – they can see what is coming. The towers give height meaning vast areas of land can be seen from the top, suggesting they were ideal for keeping watch. An approaching army would kick up vast amounts of dust and make a significant clangour, thus these towers enables defenders to spot the incoming threat and prepare for the onslaught to come. Furthermore, the sight of an incoming army would instil terror in the inhabitants, contributing to the palpable tension and thick atmosphere of impending battle. The iconography provides an explanation for the use of watchtowers and a visual representation of Isaiah's words. The word 'watchtower' itself conjures up a certain image based on media representations (Weathertop and the warning becons of Gondor from the Lord of the Rings trilogy), however the text leaves much to be desired in forming its own visual langugae surrounding watchtowers. Through applying the iconography to these references, one can get an ancient view of the watchtower rather than our original, modern-day interpretations as influenced by our wider society.

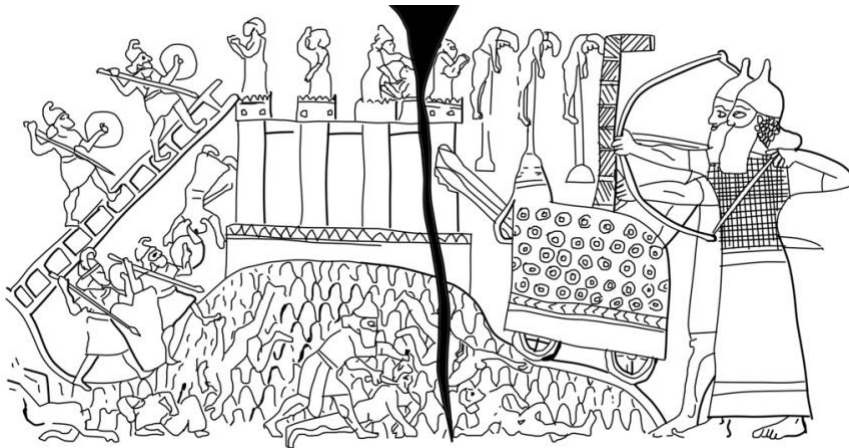


Figure 5.44 Relief. Nimrud, central palace of Tiglath-pileser III (745-727 BCE). British Museum 118903; 1115634. Author 2021.

Isaiah's use of housetops in 15:2-3 and 22:1 suggests a useless attempt to save themselves from the attackers. However, figure 5.45 demonstrates how the attackers can also make their way onto the roofs – the soldiers sack the temple of Muzazir in Uratu.²⁵¹ Sacking (and looting) reinforced their subjugation and provides the king with trophies to boast his power in iconography and annals. This reinforces the idea that the inhabitants' action in going to the housetops to escape is meaningless – they can and will be captured anyway because they are not the only ones who can reach the housetops. In this way, the iconography provides a double reading of Isa 22:1 – the housetop is a place of escape but simultaneously it is not safe. Housetops provide an immediate escape from the streets however, not only can inhabitants be followed but they also trap themselves on their roofs – they have eluded the immediate danger, only to delay their ultimate capture or death.

²⁵¹ Keel 1997, 106. Sacking the city came in hand with its capture; once the walls were breached and the soldiers had access to the city, they would cause destruction and chaos as they looted whatever they could for victory parades. This reinforced their subjugation and provided the king with trophies to boast his power in iconography and annals.

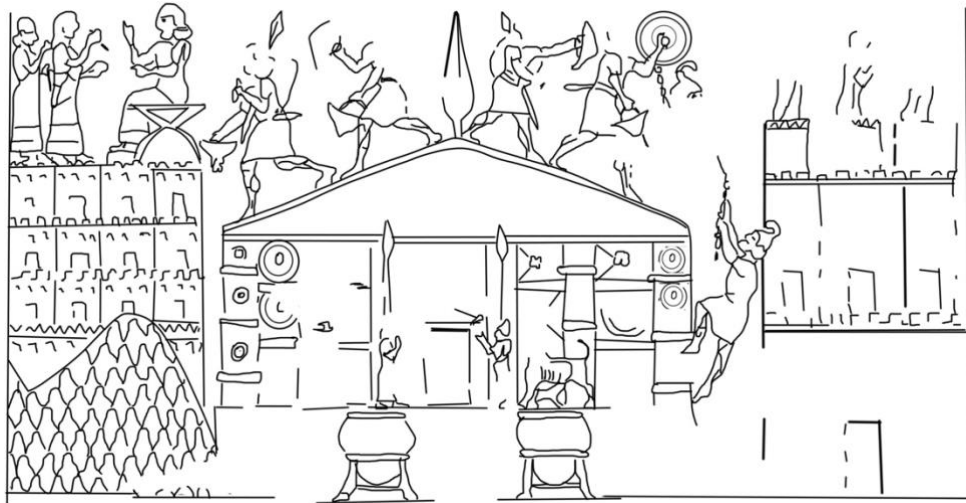


Figure 5.45 Relief. Khorsabad. Sargon II (721-705 BCE). Author 2021.

Sieges were an effective method of warfare in the ancient Near East and was often represented in the iconographic record. The various approaches to siege warfare are immortalised in the palaces of Assyria and Egypt – commemorating their narratives about the sieges depicted. Thus the iconography enables Isaiah’s reader to understand the threat of his words and the lived reality of siege warfare. The chaotic, gruesome, terrifying images recorded on the walls demonstrate the context and knowledge Isaiah and his people lived in. The iconography creates parameters for the text to exist within, providing examples of siege tactics and setting out the landscape Isaiah speaks about but disregards the description and detail.

5.7 Victims and Battle Aftermath – 14:25 “and his yoke shall depart from them, and his burden from their shoulder”; 15:5 “fugitives flee to Zoar”; 15:9 “For the waters of Dibon are full of blood”; 16:3-4 “do not reveal the fugitive”; 17:1-2 “Damascus will cease to be a city and will become a heap of ruins. The cities of Aroer are deserted”; 17:3 “The fortress will disappear from Ephraim”; 17:9 “[...] their strong cities will be like the deserted places of the wooded heights and the hilltops”; 22:2-3 “Your slain are not slain with the sword or dead in battle [...] All of you who were found were captured”; 24:22 “prisoners in a pit”

This treatment of conquered peoples was often depicted in the iconographic record, acting like a warning to others who oppose the conquering force. This is further

demonstrated in Ps 44:11's reference to "sheep for the slaughter". Here the victims are likened to the sheep, debasing them and removing their identity in this articulation of coming death, whilst continuing to point out the deportation of the survivors. This demonstrates the harsh treatment of defeated peoples that imbues the iconographic record and Isaiah as a whole. The treatment of victims and the aftermath of battles delineated throughout the Oracles highlights these harsh treatments, but focuses its main attention on their capture rather than torture and death. Whilst death and destruction is considered (Isa 15:9; 17:1-3), Isaiah's focal point is on capture and subjugation as a form of ongoing punishment and pain, lasting longer than the immediacy of death. This may be to demonstrate the nations fall and subjugation at the hands of YHWH rather than their complete destruction, emphasising YHWH's power to subdue the nations and maintain control over them.

One of the most common outcomes for defeated peoples in the iconographic record was death, as demonstrated in Isa 15:9. Figure 5.46 evokes a similar idea to the text –

the river is full of bodies (human and animal) as Assyrian soldiers advance and kill even more, adding to the pile up of dead in the water. This idea is furthered in figure 5.47, emphasising the human toll of battle. These images are the closest to 'rivers of blood' in the iconographic record. Waterways were vital to civilisation in the ancient Near East.²⁵² Water itself is a necessity for life; without access



Figure 5.46 Detail from Til-Tuba reliefs. Ashurbanipal. Neo-Assyrian. 660-650 BCE. Nineveh. British Museum 124801, c. Author 2021.

to this, humans cannot hope to survive. By filling these rivers with bodies, the water becomes contaminated and thus undrinkable, demonstrating the complete destruction caused by ancient near eastern warfare. This extends the aftermath of battle,

²⁵² Willis 2017, 107. From trade to irrigation; enlivening idol statues to supplying drinking water – life and society was possible because of the waterways. The annual inundations of the Nile, Tigris and Euphrates fertilised the surrounding land, enabling agriculture. This in turn facilitated life (through the provision of food) and more products to trade via the very same rivers. Water made civilisation possible.

contaminating the water prevents anyone in the area from recovering their way of life once the invaders have left (if anyone remains). Through discarding bodies in this way, the attacking nation ensures they destroy any chance of life carrying on after they have conquered the city. By filling the key to life with death, the usual connotations of water and what it meant to its ancient audience are reversed, the ideas themselves become polluted like the water. This delivers the message of complete devastation and subjugation – the conquerors have destroyed life, both life itself and the potential for further life through water. In light of the iconography, the text becomes more visceral as the reader is provided with a visual interpretation of the vivid image employed in Isa 15:9. One can find ‘rivers of blood’ difficult to comprehend in their lived reality, thus the iconography furnishes them with snapshots of this image in the ancient world and mind to encapsulate the gruesome landscapes that were scarred by battle. A lack of burial was also an abhorrant idea in the ancient world, being scandalous and disrespectful.²⁵³ It was believed that the burial gave the soul peace and enabled them to return to Sheol, whilst the living remembers them through offerings of food, drink, and prayer. The lack of burial in the context of war is highlighted in the Myth of Erra and Isham where a man buries his son but has no one to bury him. The abhorrence of death without burial is further demonstrated through curses against those who break laws to be left without burial. Isa 5:25 refers to bodies as ‘refuse’, highlighting the scandal and disrespect attached to a lack of burial. Thus the iconographic language demonstrates the disrespect for enemy dead in Isa 15:9.

²⁵³ Baker 2013, 29-30. A lack of burial was seen as an uncivilised act, the Sumerian ‘Marriage of Martu’ states an uncivilised man will not be buried upon his death. A Middle-Assyrian law states a woman who self-induces an abortion will be impaled and not buried. This attitude viewing lack of burial as a punishment is exacerbated through Esarhaddon’s statement in his Vassal-Treaties against his enemies (see Pritchard 2011, 213-226) “*May Ninurta... fill the plain with your corpses, give your flesh to eagles and vultures to feed upon, may the earth not receive your body for burial, may the bellies of dogs and pigs be your burial place*” (ANET 534-41. Pritchard 2011, 221.)



Figure 5.47 Relief, Nineveh. Southwest palace of Ashurbanipal. 668-626 BCE. Author 2021.

Isaiah also alludes to fugitives (15:5; 16:3-4), demonstrating the displacement suffered by many after war. A typical policy of the Assyrians after conquering people was to deport them (figure 5.48) as in 2 Kgs 24-25. By removing people from their homeland, they broke up their society and removed their power. This is different to being a fugitive – these deported people are often escorted by soldiers and are not fleeing but forced to leave. There are moments in the



Figure 5.48 Prisoners from Lachish. Gypsum relief. Sennacherib. Neo-Assyrian. 700-692 BCE. Nineveh. British Museum 124908. Author 2021.

iconographic record that imply people have fled and are in hiding (figure 5.49). Fugitives could be seen as undergoing personal exile.²⁵⁴ Being a fugitive and harbouring them was deemed right in Deut 23:15-16, stating you should look after a slave who escapes to you. Despite this, the Eshnunna collection states that someone

²⁵⁴ Westbrook 2008, 318. Many fugitives had to become mercenaries, highlighting their isolation – because they have fled, they have no place in society; like mercenaries they have no home. However, not all chose this path. Being a fugitive meant they faced the risk of extradition (Westbrook 2008, 320.). This reflects the knife's age these displaced people lived on – they could choose to flee or risk staying and be forced out.

harbouring vagrants could be charged with theft if they do not return or report them.²⁵⁵ This demonstrates the disagreement and difficulty regarding the fugitive situation in the ancient Near East. The iconography highlights the isolation of fugitives and the dire situations people found themselves in the



Figure 5.49 Detail from Sennacherib's campaign in Babylonia. Nineveh, 630-620BCE. Author 2021.

conquered land. Consequently, the text can be read as highlighting this sense of loss through deportation or fleeing – through forcing the people to be removed or remove themselves from their homeland, the conquerors removes their agency and identity.

Other people faced imprisonment (14:25; 22:2-3; 24:22). The combination of the agricultural image with the war/slavery image in Isa 14:25 through ‘yoke’ creates the idea that those imprisoned (and put to slavery) were like animals. This idea of prisoners being led like animals is evident in figure 5.50. The use of ‘yoke’ was a common biblical metaphor for heavy service.²⁵⁶ Ploughing and pulling were heavy duty and the strongest animals were used because of the heavy service required (see chapter 3). Through the use of the yoke metaphor, Isaiah emphasises the heavy work enforced on the imprisoned. Simultaneously, this metaphor could be used for liberation if the yoke is broken, signalling a freedom from subjugation. The prisoners are bound and led forward and are almost dragging the chariot behind them like the

²⁵⁵ Wright 2009, 308. This contrasting view to the Biblical text is also demonstrated in Hammurabi's kidnapping law states someone caught with a fugitive slave in their house could be put to death §15-20. (Wright 2009, 199). These laws against helping displaced peoples isolates them even further, placing at the very lowest echelons of society.

²⁵⁶ Baker 2013, 50. A yoke joined a pair of draft animals at the shoulders to pull a plough in unison. Yokes could also be employed to join pairs of people in slavery or imprisonment. The yoke was also used by Assyrian kings to demonstrate their rule over others and explain what happened to those who refused their ‘yoke’ (rule) – “*I imposed the heavy yoke of my rule upon them*” (see Brinkman 1980, 262-263.)

horses. They are also stripped as an act of humiliation, debasing them to animal levels. However Isa 14:25 reverts this image, removing the burden and yoke from the imprisoned. In this way, Isaiah creates the idea that those who were the prison guards have become the imprisoned themselves because YHWH has released his people from their chains. Here, the iconography provides an image of Isa 14:25, demonstrating the reversal of the yoke image – by depicting them before the yoke is removed, the iconography reveals the dramatic change in status that this basic switch enacts.



Figure 5.50 Ivory carving, l. 13cm. Megiddo. 1350-1150 BCE. Jerusalem, Palestine Museum 38780. Author 2021.

The use of cisterns as prisons (Isa 24:22) is made clear throughout the Bible – Zech 9:11 and Lam 3:53 and is suggested in Ps 107:10 through the use of darkness.²⁵⁷ Jer 38:6 demonstrates that the cisterns were dried out but still muddy – creating a swamp into which the prisoners were thrown and sank. This was an effective prison using pre-existing infrastructure as demonstrated by Joseph’s brothers contemplating throwing him into a pit (Gen 37:20-29) and into which he is later thrown (Gen 40:15; 41:14). The use of a cistern for this purpose is mentioned directly as a prison for Jeremiah (Jer 38:7-13) however, he is able to escape from this with the help of ‘Ebed-melech. Isa 22:2-3 demonstrates the capture of leaders, invoking images similar to figure 5.51 with the captured at the mercy of the victorious king – they are made powerless. This idea of imprisonment is often associated with being bound – tying the hands back so they

²⁵⁷ Keel 1997, 69. This creates the sense that escape was unachievable. Cisterns and pits were deep and impossible to climb out of. Not only this, but prisoners were often bound in iron chains, furthering their desolation and the hopelessness of escape. They were dark and damp, creating a miserable environment for any thrown down there. This idea of being thrown down into a pit has connotations of being thrown into Sheol (underworld) – by being thrown into a cistern, they are being thrown to their deaths, into non-existence.

cannot cause harm and puts them in an uncomfortable position, heightening their pain. This is demonstrated in figure 5.52, the captives are all tied in a variety of ways to demonstrate their submission. This removes their ability to act and thus draw a weapon – their ability to fight back is removed. In capturing the survivors, the victorious armies leave nothing behind and ensure the people cannot take back their land. The iconography of imprisonment stresses the captives subjugation and inability to resist, warranting a re-reading of the oracles use of imprisonment as a message of this annihilation of resistance. Through its appearance in the oracles, this can therefore be interpreted as the nations' reversal of fortune – they have become prisoners to YHWH like they imprisoned others at the height of their power.

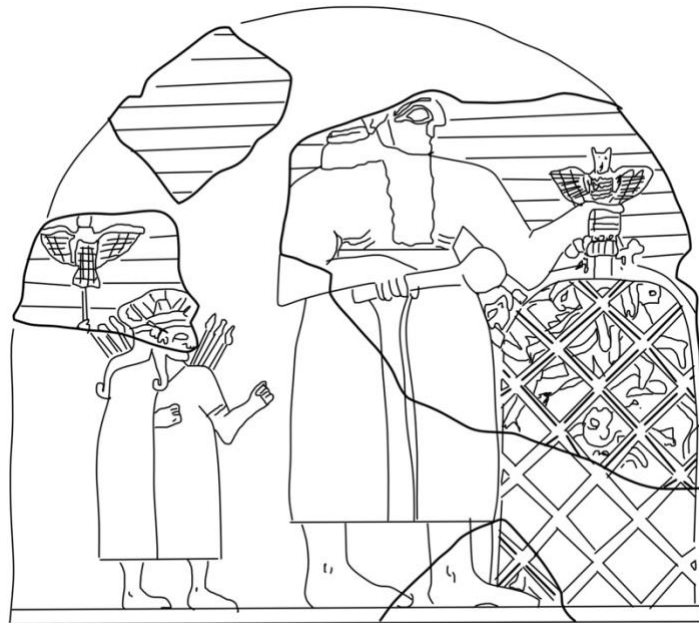


Figure 5.51 Fragment of Eannatum's stela of victory from Telloh. Reconstruction from fragments. Author 2021.

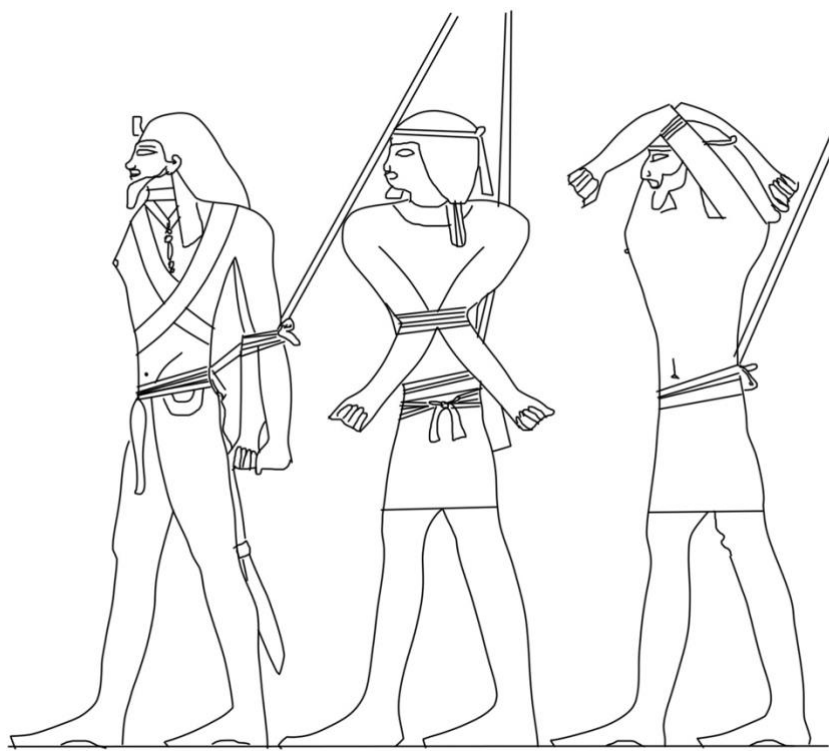


Figure 5.52 Libyan, Nubian, and Asiatic captives, Mortuary temple of Sahure at Abu Sir. Author 2021.

The fugitive situation, deportation, imprisonment and death all led to deserted places (Isa 17:1-2; 17:3; 17:9). Isaiah's use of this image demonstrates the removal of all life after a city has been conquered. Figure 5.53 demonstrates the process of this desertion – the camp is burned to the ground and its people are abused and dragged away. Without seeing it, one knows the scene immediately after this is one of absolute destruction. The lower register depicts shells of tents falling to the ground as flames flicker around them. Through this, the iconography demonstrates the complete devastation left behind after a battle. This destruction of royal cities was a common act of aggression.²⁵⁸ Using the deserted city image creates a finale to the other actions in the battle aftermath. The Isaian use of these images means we are presented with an end point; the city has been so torn apart and wrecked that there is nothing left – it is deserted. The iconography provides a heightened sense of desertion and desolation when reading Isa 17, emphasising the despair in Isaiah's words and providing the

²⁵⁸ Baker 2013, 74. Shamashi-Adad V destroyed several cities and towns, demonstrating how kings used the destruction of cities to establish and communicate their power.

reader with a basis for the images created and used in these verses. Isa 17 demonstrates the end product of the desertion but glosses over images of the process beyond those already discussed. In this way, the iconography provides a vivid account of the reality of this destruction, adding detail to the textual account.

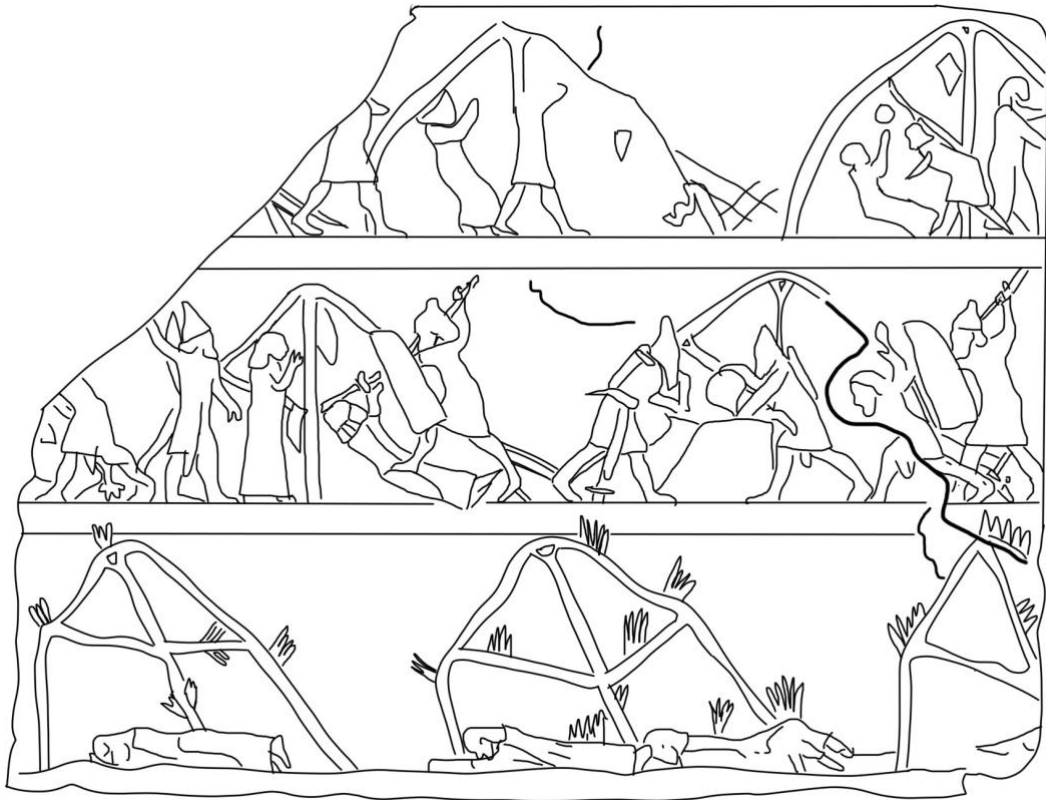


Figure 5.53 Assyrian soldiers destroy Arab encampment and assault people. Gypsum Relief. Ashurbanipal. Neo-Assyrian. 645-635 BCE. Nineveh. British Museum 124927. Author 2021.

The treatment of victims and the aftermath of battle all lead to the end point of desertion. The iconography supports the biblical images created by Isaiah and fills in the details, demonstrating the real experience of those conquered by ancient Near Eastern powers. In this way, the iconography provides a deeper understanding of the text by exemplifying the visual world in which Isaiah was writing and articulating the fear felt in the face of an invading army.

5.8 Conclusion

Isaiah's use of warfare images draws on the world and events surrounding him. The iconographic record uses these same or similar images to put across messages of domination and terror. Kings used these to communicate their power through immortalising their military victories and tactics on the walls of their tombs and palaces. However, these are not perfect iterations of what actually happened; they are an edited version in line with the royal propaganda and beliefs surrounding kingship. The use of war images in this section reinforces the idea of the messages put forward by ancient Near Eastern kings are reversed onto them by YHWH. The iconography enables the images used by Isaiah to be understood within their context and enable the reader to have a more visceral experience. Through considering the iconography, the text gains deeper meaning and one can gain understanding about the surrounding society through this application.

6 Conclusion

“Iconography, good iconography, strives to convey invisible reality in a visible form”

Peter Pearson

In the *longue durée* of Biblical studies, iconography has only recently come to play a part in the scholarly process of interpretation and still requires attention. This thesis has shown iconographic exegesis is a valid approach to the Biblical text, including Isaiah’s Oracles against the Nations because of the extensive use of literary images that can also be found in the iconographic record. In instances where texts are imbued with strong images as in the prophetic texts, iconography adds levels of detail one is unable to reach without it, through the illustration of the textual content. This deepens interpretation and furthers understanding of the texts. Furthermore, the use of ancient iconography provides alternative interpretations beyond what is traditionally offered from the text alone. This delivers a fuller experience for the audience and rounds out the text as a historical source as well as religious text. The approach used in this thesis has demonstrated that Biblical studies and ancient history can come together to develop an inter-disciplinary approach to the interpretation of the Bible. Throughout the themes dealt with in this work, literary images have drawn on the iconography to help the Isaian authors formulate the narrative messages and communicate them to the contemporary audience. Using the iconographic material within the text, the authors used a language all peoples of the ancient world could speak. Images were universal in a world of many languages and an illiterate one, thus they could communicate with any viewer. Using these as inspiration for the text, the authors were aware of this universality and co-opted the images for their own narratives to ensure their audiences understood the religious messages they were communicating. In so doing, the text gained the timelessness of art as well its openness to interpretation. Both iconography and text draw on the real world experiences of the author(s) and their contemporary audience in order to effectively communicate the narrative messages. Since its creation, the Oracles and iconography have been subjected to layers of interpretation by ever-changing audiences, moving them from their original inspiration and intent. In this way, using the ancient images to critically interpret the Oracles has enabled an

understanding of the historical context as well as a variety of interpretations that may have been understood in the ancient world.

Iconographic exegesis has proven a useful tool to interpret images within the themes explored in this thesis. It has had most success regarding kingship (chapter 2) and warfare and violence (chapter 5) due to their vivid imagery in the text and their prominence in the iconographic record. The importance of warfare and kingship to Imperial conceptions of the self and power explains their significance in the ancient world and thus the appearance in the iconography. Ancient Near Eastern kingdoms articulated their power through the image of the king and the ideology that surrounded him. This was consolidated through the iconography of warfare, depicting victorious kings and their soldiers in an articulation of their dominance over other societies and cities in the ancient world. Because of the regularity of these images in the ancient Near Eastern iconographic record, there is much relevant material that can be used to critically interpret the Biblical text, adding depth, understanding, and enabling analysis. Despite this, the iconography is one-sided, like most history, it is written by the victors. In this way, the record is created in line with societal ideas, thus adding layers of interpretation in accordance with propagandistic practices.

However, iconographic exegesis does have its limitations as a scholarly approach, for example in dealing with the Biblical use of agriculture (chapter 3) and some restricted use when interpreting images of society and culture (chapter 4). This can be where the iconographic record is not replete with examples of literary images employed by the author(s). Specific examples of this dealt with in this thesis include agricultural desolation and the grief-imposed wearing of sackcloth during lamentation. This suggests these images, whilst drawn from the Isaian surroundings and real-world practices, were not deemed material important enough to be recorded in the iconography. This could be a dismissal of their importance or role in the communication of cultural ideas or something more sinister – a fear to render desolation or else it would become true. Thus, the lack of specific iconographic material leaves these references open to interpretation and one must look at historicising evidence beyond the iconography to aid interpretation and understanding of the Biblical text. In these contexts, iconographic exegesis could be used as a supplement to alternative methods of interpretation for the surrounding ideas (such as

harvests, malnourished figures, and lamentation) to draw connections and provide comment on wider agricultural and societal practice but cannot be its focus.

In concentrating on the Oracles, this thesis has directed its efforts towards one of the most visually rich sections of Isaiah. Through the amount of literary description included by proto-Isaiah, iconographic exegesis adds depth of understanding to an under-studied portion of the Bible, as well as offering alternative interpretations to previous avenues of scholarly attention. Through the iconography, this thesis has explored what inspired literary images and critically interpreted the text through the lens of the ancient world. Whilst the linchpin of this work has been the Oracles against the Nations, the wider context of the themes discussed in the Bible have also provided insight into the Biblical conception of literary images and formulation of messages, offering further interpretations when considered with the Oracles and the iconography. This thesis has begun to fill the gap in academic approaches to Isaiah through focusing on the Oracles which have oft been ignored and dismissed in scholarship, despite including bountiful material for investigation.

This work has demonstrated the validity of iconographic exegesis as an approach to the Biblical text as an interpretive method and providing context for the audience. The Bible has been used as a historical source alongside the iconography in an interdisciplinary approach to the text – using both the lived history and religious messages to critically interpret the Oracles. Through this methodology, the text can be interpreted through the eyes of its contemporary audience, apart from the thousands of years of interpretations that have thus far shaped modern understanding of its meaning. Through these images that have survived, scholars are able to gain an understanding of the ancient conception of the world – thus it is a suitable lens through which to interpret ancient texts such as the Hebrew Bible. Thus, the iconographic approach could also be applied to poetry such as the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, as well as the Near Eastern texts – *Gilgamesh* and *Enûma Eliš*. The study of the ancient world and their iconography can help separate the micro decisions modern audiences make when reading and viewing text and art. Through connecting ancient material and applying their creating contexts, one can see various interpretations from the ancient perspective to contrast and inform their own in the modern world.

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