

# “THE EXCREMENTAL VISION”: THE DOOMED PRIESTS OF DOOM IN ISAIAH 28\*

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The poetry of Isaiah ben-Amoz, the doyen of classical Israelite prophecy, rushes mincingly with rococo alliteration, melodic refrains, and rhetorical repetition. Its very elegance, however, sometimes bars rather than facilitates understanding. This has in particular bedevilled exegetes of the refrain found in Isa 28:10, 13—*šaw lāšāw šaw lāšāw qaw lāqāw qaw lāqāw zē<sup>c</sup>ēr šām zē<sup>c</sup>ēr šām*.

The import of this formulation for the broader literary context seems opaque. And even its relationship to the verses immediately adjoining can at best be termed translucent. Thus, Isa 28:1-4 pronounce doom on “the crown of the pride of the drunkards of Ephraim”; the succeeding verses predict a time when Yhwh will be “the crown of beauty” for the “remnant of his people”. Thereafter comes a transition: “These, too, have staggered because of wine”, and Isaiah accuses priests and prophets of inebriation and solipsistic “seeing”. He convicts them, in effect, of hallucinations—of mediating visions not from Yhwh, but from their wine. Indeed, their tables are a congestion of excrement and vomit (vv. 7f.).

The relationship between 28:1-6 and vv. 7ff. is complex, and not especially direct. Both deal with drunkards, in one way or another “consumed” (vv. 4, 7). But the object of the prophecy is different in each case. In vv. 1ff., the Ephramite upper classes are the target; after v. 6, the leading lights of Jerusalem stray onstage. And the concerns expressed in the indictment change radically in vv. 7ff. At any rate, v. 9 asks, “Whom does he teach knowledge?” Then comes the refrain in question here (v. 10).

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In general, pre-modern commentators seem to have read v. 10 as a simple continuation of the prophet's direct discourse. Through the first part of this century, renditions tended to follow AV, whose "precept *must be* upon precept . . . line upon line" differs only slightly from the late Greek translations.<sup>1</sup> This approach to the text reflects the bias of Protestant readers of the 16th to 19th centuries: it implies an unfavorable view of *precepts* in Israel's religion; it thus presupposes that equation of all "demanded" works with ritual works that lies at the heart of the Protestant reading of Paul. Little wonder, then, that the ecumenical atmosphere of modern biblical scholarship has fostered other, less parochial readings of the text.

Perhaps most fruitful among the proposals so far advanced has been that which sees in MT *šw* and *qw* the Hebrew letters *šade* and *qop*. Montgomery appears to have been the first to develop this thesis. Building on Duhm's insight that the syllables did not reflect normal usage, but were onomatopoeic, he concluded that *šw* and *qw* were old variant names for letters; they were, he claimed, constructed on analogy to the letter names *taw* and *waw* (Montgomery, 1912, pp. 141–142; cf. Duhm, 1892, pp. 174–175).<sup>2</sup> *šade* and *qop* adjoin one another in just the same order in the alphabet. So Montgomery described the refrain in Isa 28:10, 13 as possibly "a pedagogic by-word taken from the schoolmaster's instruction in teaching the alphabet" (p. 142).

In Duhm's construction (in which the passage mimicked burbling—presumably based on the Syriac *šwy* and *qwy*), it was a logical inference that the verse reflected mockery of Isaiah by his listeners. This inference was also applied to Montgomery's alphabetic reconstruction. Procksch (1930, p. 354) and Kennett (1933, p. 12) claimed that Isaiah's antagonists here likened the prophet to a schoolmaster teaching children their ABC's. Driver adopted the same view in his Schweich Lectures on Semitic writing (1954, pp. 89f.; cf. 1968). This exegesis reached its most developed form in a study written by W. W. Hallo (1958). Hallo took the syllabic representation of the Ugaritic abecedarium in cuneiform (where the letter *q* appears as *qu*) to confirm that letter names were in point in Isa 28:10, 13. He rejected Kennett's vocalizations (*šu*, *qu*) in favor of those Montgomery had

1. G reads *šar* for *šaw*, rendering *thlipsis*, elsewhere in the dodekapropheton confined almost completely to the root *šwr*. G takes *qaw* as "hope" only here, in Isa 28:10, 13, and, mirroring the direct allusion in MT, again in 28:17. Note that AV's Protestant bias is not in evidence here.

2. Procksch (1930, p. 354) cites Wellhausen as having arrived at a similar conclusion. He may have done so before Montgomery; Montgomery's work seems, however, to have been independent.

proposed, although evidently arriving at his vocalizations independently (he does not cite Montgomery). Nevertheless, he followed Kennett in the construction of the passage: in v. 9, the targets of Isaiah's diatribe (vv. 7-8) break in; they complain that the prophet treats them as mere tykes. "Whom does he teach knowledge, to whom explain report? Those (just) weaned from milk? Those (just) passed from the breasts?" 28:10 then compares Isaiah's rebukes to elementary instruction in literacy. This position has attracted a substantial following.<sup>3</sup>

Alongside Montgomery's alphabetic explication of the refrain in Isa 28:10, 13, a second line of exegesis has developed. First mooted by van Selms (1973), it takes *šw lšw šw lšw qw lqw qw lqw z<sup>c</sup>yr šm z<sup>c</sup>yr šm* as a series of transcribed Assyrian imperatives. This approach has been adapted by Lemaire, who weds it to that of a school writing exercise (1981, pp. 38f.). Roberts (1983, p. 22) builds a more elaborate edifice: he links the reference to a people of "bewildering tongue" in Isa 33:19 to the Assyrians, who spoke Aramaic (2 Kgs 18:26). 33:19, then, would allude to the refrain in 28:10, 13, and to the "other tongue" of 28:11. This suggestion permits us to construe the phrase, *qw-qw*-nation (Isa 18:2, 7), as another reference to Assyria, related to the appearance of *qw* in Isaiah 28. Assyrians talk nonsense, and Isaiah mocks them for it. The strength of Roberts' interpretation is that it bundles together disparate, difficult texts.

For all their advantages, neither the alphabetic nor the Assyrian interpretation of the problematic refrain has helped integrate it into its context. That the refrain remains in either reading a collection of nonsense is not surprising: in the continuation, Isaiah complains that the word of Yhwh has become nothing more than nonsense to the Israelites (28:12-13). But neither interpretation adequately explains why the nonsense takes precisely *this* form. Of what possible relevance are Assyrian commands to "depart", or to "listen, slave!"? Alternatively, wouldn't adversion to the abecedary be a complete non-sequitur?

Proponents of both interpretations circumvent this obstacle by their claim that, in 28:9-10, it is Isaiah's antagonists who speak. These depraved and unedified wags parody the prophet as a pedant. But consider the context: Is Isaiah's prophecy as simplistic as a lesson in the alphabet? Is it as pedantic as instruction in Assyrian? Does the context in fact exhibit any features that might rightly be called didactic?

3. See, with variations and reservations, Driver (1968), Pfeifer (1972), Kaiser (1974, pp. 245f.), Demsky (1977, p. 16), Irwin (1977, pp. 22f.), and Wildberger (1978, pp. 1059f.). Pfeifer's view, that the oracle demands a school setting, may have an antecedent in Klostermann (1908, pp. 214-218), unavailable to me.

These are problematic issues on either reading. Essentially, the Assyrian proposal dovetails with 28:11—Yhwh or Isaiah speaks in an alien tongue. But the the accusation (v. 9) that the prophet's hearers are being treated as toddlers rings untrue: instruction in Assyrian is complex business (see further Meluggin, 1974, p. 305). Conversely, the alphabetic hypothesis seems to square well with the latter accusation (v. 9), although one might rightly doubt whether instruction in literacy began at weaning in Israelite culture. But does teaching the alphabet involve the use of an "alien" or "altered" tongue? Further, neither v. 9 nor v. 11 (or 12 or 13) indicates a shift of speaker. How are we to know when Isaiah leaves off speaking and the opponents begin, or when the prophet resumes? Neither reading of the refrain renders the passage rational either in terms of content or in terms of form.

Duhm's notion that the text is somehow antiphonal has played through subsequent scholarship without an adequate grounding in the evidence. It has been retained because admittedly uncertain understandings of our refrain demand its retention. What the exegeses of the refrain do not explain is why it, in its present form, is particularly apt. They do not shed light on the unity of the passage. Quite the reverse, their proponents tend precisely to decontextualize it.<sup>4</sup> Yet v. 7 clearly provides a transition from vv. 1–6 to what follows. And vv. 14ff. declare Yhwh's judgment for the depravity cited in vv. 7f., 11–13. Connections across the segments include wine (vv. 1, 7), intoxicants (or intoxication, vv. 1, 3, 7), the consumption of the intoxicated (vv. 4, 7), seeing/seers (vv. 4, 7), the sweeping floodwaters (vv. 2, 15, 17, 18), trampling of the intoxicated (vv. 3, 18), the murderous hail (vv. 2, 17), and the agricultural imagery of vv. 1, 4, 24–28. Formally, then, the integrity of chapter 28 seems organic. The passage must be taken as a whole. And, though attractive as solutions to the local problems of 28:10, 13, the Assyrian and alphabetic interpretations of the refrain ultimately fail to shed light on the whole.

One proponent only of the alphabetic solution has attempted to remedy some of this deficiency—R. H. Kennett. Kennett was no doubt concerned that Isaiah's opponents chose the letters *šade* and *qop* to suggest that Isaiah was acting schoolmarmish. After all, the order of the alphabet was relatively fixed in ancient Israel. We have numerous abecedaries, mainly

4. Compare Driver (1968), Kaiser (1974, p. 244), and Wildberger (1978, pp. 1059f.), breaking v. 7 (or v. 8!) off from what precedes. Kaiser calls v. 7 redactional. But Isaiah's (or even a redactor's) passing from an oracle about destroyed Ephraim to an attack on officials in Jerusalem is no different from Amos' juxtaposition of oracles against foreigners with oracles against Israel (Amos 1:1ff.); see below.

on ceramic surfaces. Those that are partial range often through the letter *he*. But rarely, if at all, do abecedaries that proceed past the fifth letter end without completing the sequence to *taw*.<sup>5</sup> Thus, one expects a send-up of an elementary reading lesson to start with <sup>3</sup>*alep* and end with the letters close to it. The choice of *šade* and *qop*, elsewhere not brought into contrast, would be, modestly speaking, idiosyncratic.<sup>6</sup>

Kennett’s response to this problem was in fact more cogent than the alphabetic interpretation itself. He suggested that *šw* and *qw* were chosen for their resemblance to *šô<sup>3</sup>â* and *qî<sup>3</sup>*, the words for the “excrement” and “vomit” that fill the priests’ and prophets’ tables in v. 8 (Kennett, 1933, p. 12). The explanation rings with the timbre of truth. But it does not confirm the alphabetic interpretation. Indeed, it militates against taking v. 10 as a caricature of Isaiah. There is no reason to link Isaiah to the excrescences of v. 8: so the double-entendre lacks force. Rather, the *priests* and *prophets* produce the excreta of v. 8, filling their tables with it. The wordplay in v. 10 would make most sense, that is, if it served to accuse the priests of coprophilia.

Kennett’s notion that the refrain of 28:10, 13 alludes to the excrement of v. 8 was anticipated in antiquity. In 28:13, Theodotion renders *šw* and *qw* explicitly as *deisalia* and *emetos* respectively; Sam., less precisely, reads *tbt<sup>3</sup>* and *tywb<sup>3</sup>*. More recently, Tur-Sinai (Torczyner) reached the same conclusion.<sup>7</sup> In support of his view he adduced Jer 25:27, where the imperative of *qy<sup>3</sup>* is written without the final <sup>3</sup>*alep*—*qyw*; and he read *qw-qw* in Isa 18:2, 7 as “repudiated, detested”, deriving it from *qy<sup>3</sup>*. Tur-Sinai also discerned a scatological reference in Isa 30:22 (where *š<sup>3</sup>* is parallel to *dwh*), and, perhaps with excessive zeal, in 2 Sam 16:7. It should be added, in its only other occurrence, the word *šw* has a decidedly negative connotation (Hos 5:11). It is associated with rot and decay (5:12), and could well represent manure.

5. A possible exception is the text found in Hoftijzer, van der Kooij, *et al.* (1976, p. 267), reading <sup>3</sup>*bgdzh*. This is peculiar in its omission of *h* and *w*, which, although used as matres in Aramaic, also remain in use as consonants. On abecedaries, more generally, see Demsky (1977, pp. 16f.), Degen (1978, though the text published there is somewhat less than certain), and Lemaire (1981, pp. 7–33, with extensive bibliography). Note that when builders use alphabetic sequences to match stones in monumental buildings, they start always with <sup>3</sup>*alep*.

6. *qop* elsewhere is used as an abbreviation for *qdš*. *šade* seems to serve no similar role. There is no comparison, either, to the English expression, “mind one’s p’s and q’s”, which is based on potential graphic confusion.

7. See Torczyner (Tur-Sinai) in Ben-Iehuda, n.d., 11.5407, n. 2; 12.5819f., n. 2, with citations of earlier work by himself and Geiger.

Tur-Sinai's proposal does more to clarify the text of Isaiah 28 than any other modern hypothesis. The chapter sets out with a lament, over "the crown of the pride of the drunkards of Ephraim", "the withered diadem of its glorious beauty, which is on the head of the valley of oils/luxury, of those smitten by wine". This crown will be trampled underfoot by the Assyrians (vv. 1-4). To all appearances, a conventional concessive oracle of weal—for the chastened survivors (cf. 14:1-3; 17:7f.; 18:7; 19:16-25; 23:17)—then completes the sub-unit (vv. 5f.). As a whole, therefore, the sally against Samaria in 28:1-6 functions as a sort of oracle against a foreign nation. If one removes the "Isaianic apocalypse" (chaps. 24-27) as intrusive, 28:1-6 relates to Isaiah's oracles against the nations (chaps. 13-23) much as Amos' perfunctory assault on Judah (2:4f.) relates to *his* other oracles against the nations (1:3-2:3). Isa 28:1-6, like Amos 2:4f., is the last in a series of oracles condemning neighbors. Insofar as it focusses on a neighbor felt to be closely related to the audience, it serves as a sort of bridge from execration texts to an indictment of the prophet's immediate listeners.<sup>8</sup>

At this point, attention shifts to the "priest and prophet": these "also erred through wine", "in seeing" (cf. Pope, 1972, p. 196; Irwin, 1977, pp. 14-20, reading "excrement" and "drinking", *hr<sup>2</sup>* and *rwh*, respectively); they "staggered" in judgment (v. 7). "All (their) tables are filled with vomit, excrement with no space to spare" (v. 8). The succeeding question "Whom does he teach knowledge . . ." cannot take Isaiah as its subject. The subject is Yhwh: he is asked for oracles in v. 7; he provides them in v. 9 (*yôreh*).<sup>9</sup> The drunken priests have, it seems, been seeking oracles, or visions (*r<sup>2</sup>h*, v. 7). This accounts for the verbal play in the use of *hzh* and *hzw* as terms for the priests' covenant with Death/Mot: *hzh* also means "to divine, have visions". Thus, v. 18 states that the priests' covenant with Sheol will not endure, but at the same time that their vision (*hzw*) of Sheol (or of inquiring?) will not come true (*qwm*). The play on the language of divination corroborates the inference that v. 7 caricatures soothsayers at work.

This construction of v. 7 finds additional confirmation in the last stichs of v. 9. Whom is Yhwh instructing? Babies, just now "passed from the breasts"—who, like the drunken priests of vv. 7-8, cannot exercise

8. See above, n. 4. The rhetorical pattern employed by Amos (without an oracle of weal for a "remnant") may have suggested the literary arrangement of the first Isaiah's compositions. However, in the chapter in point, the implication is compositional unity.

9. The object of this verb, *dē'ā*, normally denotes divine or supernatural knowledge: I Sam 2:3; Ps 73:11; Job 36:4; perhaps in pl. in Isa 33:6 (in Jer 3:15, read with G, *r<sup>2</sup>h*). It is therefore suitable in an oracular context.

control over their bodily functions This is the palpable implication of the sequence from v. 9 (infants) to v. 10 (excreta). The question, in short, is whether Yhwh is supposed to be teaching infants instead of grown men. The refrain of v. 10 develops the answer. It is a caricature, not of Isaiah, but of his targets. They believe that Yhwh responds to their divination (v. 7) with directions relating, as Tur-Sinai saw, to ordure and vomit. Isaiah lampoons them, most likely, as confusing the word of Yhwh with babyisms for such substances. Thus, they are like babies, and the words they use for the ordure with which they concern themselves are the words of little children. Comparison with English euphemisms (such as “wee-wee”) suggests that herein lies some of the reason for the repetition in the refrain.

For “*ṣaw* with *ṣaw*, *ṣaw* with *ṣaw*,  
 “*qaw* with *qaw*, *qaw* with *qaw*,  
 “a mite here and a mite there,”  
 for with “kidding” lip and an altered tongue he speaks to this people,  
 to whom he has said, “This is the respite; give respite to the weary; this is the  
 relief,” but they consent not to hear.  
 So the word of Yhwh has become for them,  
 “*ṣaw* with *ṣaw*, *ṣaw* with *ṣaw*,  
 “*qaw* with *qaw*, *qaw* with *qaw*,  
 “a mite here and a mite there,”  
 so that they would go and tumble over backward, and be broken and  
 snared and caught.

(vv. 10-13)<sup>10</sup>

Seeing the priests filling tables with excretions, Isaiah asks whether Yhwh is in fact instructing untrained babes. Sacred instruction (*tôrâ*) has been

10. On the use of “respite”, compare esp. 2 Sam 14:17. Mic 2:6-11, a text concerning intoxicants and prophecy, also insinuates a confusion among the Israelites of alcohol with *m<sup>e</sup>nûhâ*. The context links the term as Micah means it with a reenactment of the Conquest (2:12f.), rhetorically figured as Yhwh leading sheep from Edom (and Adam) into the land. This links the term to the “rest-motif” of Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Samuel (esp. 2 Sam 7:1) and Chronicles. Though the meaning is not perfectly clear, the general sense in Samuel and Isaiah seems to be that of comfort and the resolution of a difficult situation (so that the possession of the land can be enjoyed in peace). Note further in v. 9 the double object of the verb *ybyn*, which takes as its object in early literature only the topic being understood, and which takes a person being instructed as its object only in Isa 40:14; Ps 119:27, 34, 73, 125, 144, 169; Dan 10:14; Neh 8:7, 9. The verb means “to explain” also in Dan 8:16; Job 6:24, with *l-*, “to”, + person. *wry* (C) and *lmd* (D) often take the double object. It may be that Isa 28:9 construes *byn* (C) on analogy with them. Equally peculiar in v. 9 are the forms *gmwly mhlb* and *ṭyqy mšdym*, where MT indicates construct before the preposition, “from”. Again, the meaning, if not the nuance, is sufficiently clear.

misunderstood as a collection of babyisms, evoking excretion (esp. vv. 10–11). Yhwh's commandments (*mšwh*) and "line of judgment" (see v. 17—"I shall make justice the [plumb]line" with the play on the letters *qof* and *šade* in the words *qaw*, "line", and *šēdāqā*) have been perverted. They are transformed from instructions that might have engendered stability into befoulment. Thus, for all their sophistication, the cultic officials of the temple have regressed to the pre-linguistic stage. The succeeding verse aptly calls them "men of *lāšôn*", "folly" (cf. *lšw*; on *lšwn*, cf. Prov. 20:1; 29:8), *môšēlim* ("ruling", but also "making riddles"; note the comparability of *mēlišā* with *māšāl* in Hab 2:6; Prov. 1:6) in Jerusalem.<sup>11</sup> The text refers simultaneously to their ineducability and to their interpretation of Yhwh's teachings, his commands, as infantile nonsense (*lšwn*) with scatological overtones.

Isaiah's satire works at several levels. He portrays the drunken priests as carrying out the priestly responsibility of sorting substances into different categories (*qw lqw*, etc., "a mite here and a mite there"). The Jerusalem temple establishment saw the differentiation of the sacred from the profane (as Lev. 10:1; 11:47; 20:25; Ezek 22:26; 42:20) as its own private cosmogonic occupation (Gen 1:4, 6, 7, 14, 18).<sup>12</sup> Isaiah thus accuses them not of overmuch concern with precepts, but with a fixation on ritual, as distinct from moral (Isa 6:7), purity. This is a critique at home among all the literary prophets of the 8th-7th centuries, Isaiah included (as 29:13; see Halpern, 1983).<sup>13</sup> Here it is unusually graphic: Isaiah equates his colleagues' rituals, apparently characterized by alcohol-induced ecstasy, with infantile lack of control.

In Israel, ordure was a threat to ritual purity. The legislation on the subject in the Temple Scroll is well known. In older materials, Zech 3:3–4 concretizes the guilt from which a high priest must be shrived in the form

11. The wordplay here is noted already in Irwin (1977, pp. 22–25). Note the further play *šōt šōtēp* in v. 15, and the deliberate ambiguity of the latter part of the verse—"We have made duplicity our shelter," or, "We have made a treacherous shelter," or, "We have made a false god our shelter" (cf. Amos 2:4).

12. The distribution of the verb *bdl* is telling in this respect. P employs it seventeen times, Ezra six, Chr four, and Ezekiel and Trito-Isaiah three each. It appears once in 1 Kings (8:53) and five times in Deuteronomy. Of the Deuteronomic occurrences, three (4:41; 19:2, 7) relate to the cities of refuge, as does the only use of the verb in Joshua (16:9). Of forty overall occurrences, thirty appear in identifiably temple-linked sources; that does not count Deuteronomy, Third Isaiah, or 1 Kings 8!

13. On the issues involved, see further my "'Brisker Pipes than Poetry'. The Development of Israelite Monotheism", forthcoming in J. A. Neusner, B. Levine and M. Haran, eds., *Judaic Perspectives on Ancient Israel*.

of *cacata* (feculent) garb. Jehu profanes the Baal-temple in Samaria by converting it into a latrine (2 Kgs 10:27).<sup>14</sup> Most clearly, Deut 23:14 enjoins the conscript to carry a trowel in his kit; with it he is to dig a hole outside the camp, and afterward to cover his waste. Under no circumstances may he defecate in the camp, "for Yhwh your god walks about amid your camp" (see further Josephus, *Bell. Jud.* 2.148f. on the Essene interpretation of this regulation). Israel associated ordure with sin and even bloodguilt (e.g., Isa 4:4; the use of the word, *gillûlîm*, for icons; for a comparable fixation in Luther, see Brown, 1968). Isaiah's accusation of ritualism is the more devastating insofar as it equates temple ritual with sorting dung.

Isaiah's barbs, thus, hit home at several levels. But there is one ideational complex in which his bizarre assemblage of images and ideas finds coherence. In 28:15, Isaiah accuses the priests and prophets of claiming "a covenant with Mot/Death" and "a compact" with Sheol. Death will hide them, they think, in the netherworld, when disaster sweeps the country (cf. the comparable motif, e.g., in Job 14:13). Yhwh, however, will sweep away their shelter with his hail, and annul their "compact with Sheol" (cf. the same motif, e.g., in Amos 9:2). Isaiah seems to envision their keep as a crypt: "for the bed [in the wall of a bench tomb] is too short to stretch oneself out on, and the (?) shroud is too narrow to wrap oneself in" (vv. 16–20). That the image in these verses is one of entombment is not certain. But the "bed" or "bench" with its accompanying "covering" is in the context of the netherworld best imagined as such an installation. Job 17:13 uses the same root ( $\gamma\gamma^{\epsilon}$ ) to denote a corpse's repose, or perhaps its litter. The root appears again in connection with the underworld in Ps 139:8 and Isa 14:11 (where the shroud, which covers a corpse from above, is termed a *mksh*, "covering"; cf. 28:20 *mskh*). Other possible interpretations—excepting only the divans of a funerary society (see just below)—would not hang together with the current of thought in the rest of the passage.

Understanding the "bed" of v. 20 as the technical term for a funerary bench enhances the focus and the vividness of the oracle. It does not, however, radically alter the sense. This is clear throughout: not even the

14. On the temple, see Yadin, 1973.

The argument that the temple lay outside Samaria, on the analogy of Hiram's and Solomon's temples (p. 58) leaves the complex close to town; the analogy to Ramat Rahel, a private capital, like Jezreel, is inappropriate. 1 Kgs 16:32 is to be taken more literally than Yadin allows. Note further that defecation was a private matter in Israel (Judg 3:24; 1 Sam 24:3), as in Egypt (Herodotus 2.36f.). This expresses a societal revulsion toward it.

underworld is sturdy and wide enough to save Jerusalem's "rulers" from exposure to Yhwh's wrath. Though sepultured comfortably, in the very bosom of the earth, they will remain vulnerable. As in the valley of Gibeon (v. 21; Josh 10:11), Yhwh's hail will irresistibly demolish all their shelters. The "sweeping scourge" (cf. 2 Sam 5:20; Isa 28:21, "Mt. Perazim") will carry those hidden in the shelters to the ground—sweeping the fugitives from their beds—and they will be trampled.

Isaiah 28 thus berates Jerusalem's priests for dabbling in drunkenness, excretion and death. Pope has already remarked that its collocation of these elements resembles that of RS 24.258 (*Ugaritica* V 545–551), a Ugaritic text describing El's *marziḥu* (1972, p. 196). In this fragment, a drunken El is accused of having "fallen in his faeces and his urine, like one who has descended to the Underworld" (lines 20–22: the reading is the only one plausible). The *marzēāḥ* in Israel is likewise associated with heavy drinking (Amos 6:6f.; Jer 16:5, 7) and with death (Jer 16:5f.; Amos 6:3, 6). Amos portrays the participants as "stretched out on their divans" (6:4, 7). If one toposes in order to become an "imitator of the dead", as in classical Chinese New Year's ritual, then the divans of the funerary society in effect become counterparts of the benches of a tomb. Amos' funerary feast also entails the use of *šmny*, "oils" (6:6), like those of Samaria in Isa 28:1, 4. The only other passage to use *šmn* in the plural in a comparable sense (Isa 25:6; cf. Cant. 1:3; 4:10) likewise links it to heavy drinking and to Death/Mot. It also uses the same word for "shroud", *massēkā* (// *lōṭ*) that comes into play in Isa 28:20: this text contraindicates the emendation of Isa 28:20, *mskh*, to *mksh*, "covering" (as Isa 14:11).

In all, it is a likely inference that Isaiah ridicules his priestly colleagues, rightly or not, as participants in the ancestral cult. This theme is one to which he reverts in 29:4f., in what may be a continuation of the same rhetorical unit. Recently, Xella (1980) has demonstrated that in Mesopotamian and Egyptian speculation concerning the afterlife, the dead who were not remembered among the living were doomed to a diet of coprolite. This insight casts light particularly on 2 Kgs 18:18f. (Isa 36:1f.), where an Assyrian officer speaks of the defenders of Jerusalem as those doomed "to eat their stools and drink their urine": the reference is not just to conditions of famine, but to an eventual death without surviving descendants. Here is the explanation for the character of a vision quite as scatological as anything found in Swift or even Rabelais. A "covenant with Mot/Death", viewed negatively, implies some connection with *egesta*. Perhaps the voracious appetite of Mot/Death and of the dead (as Isa 5:14; Hab 2:5; Prov. 27:20; 30:15f.; CTA 5 i 14–22) has something to do with this image. In any event, Isaiah 28 explicitly links the stupor and the ordure of inebriated priests to an ecstatic "compact (vision) with

Death” or with “Sheol”. The logical home of this complex is in the ancestral or funerary cult.

In sum, the satirical complex which Isaiah begins in 28:1ff. resonates with accusation on accusation. The priests Isaiah attacks have perverted Yhwh’s commands into babyisms for foul excretions. They can exert no self-control, but mistake drunken hallucinations for revelation. They cannot even control their bodily functions—they are like infants. Finally, they are vainly committed to worshipping Mot/Death, a false and unavailing shelter against Yhwh’s consuming wrath. They will be swept away and trampled, just as the drunkards of Ephraim were (see above, and 5:11–14 after 5:1–7). Incidentally, this was also the fate of human remains left on the benches of Israelite crypts, probably when the identity of the interred was no longer recalled, or when decay had robbed the skeleton of its flesh. The priests are doomed, thus, to the indignities of the anonymous; they are not vouchsafed the immortality in the netherworld that they evidently hoped to attain.

It remains a possibility that, at another level, the refrain of Isa 28:10, 13 parrots the alphabetic sequence, *ṣade-qop*, as Montgomery suggested. More likely, the refrain plays on the polyphony of these two letters, each of which sometimes served to represent the proto-Semitic phoneme /ḏ/ (see Halpern, 1986). This is the source of the *ṣade* in the word *ṣō`ā*, “excrement”, so that a young child might well confuse the initial sound of that word with that of the word “vomit” (/q/). Indeed, the same paronomastic principle would account for the expression *qw-qw-* people in Isa 18:2, 7. Playing on the word for “spew” (*qy`*), the phrase may burlesque an Aramaic accent: in Old Aramaic, proto-Semitic /ḏ/ was realized as something approaching /q/ or /ḡ/, not, as in Hebrew, as /š/. The book of Jonah repeatedly puns on the term “spew” in connection with an oracle against Nineveh (Halpern and Friedman, 1981, pp. 85f.). Assyria may be *qw-qw*, thus, in Isa 18:2, 7 (though a link to Damascus [17:1], or even Que, is not to be ruled out), just as she may be the “*qw* (line) of judgment” in chapter 28. In short, for the refrain in Isa 28:10, 13, phonetic play is a more likely explanation than is alphabetic play.

Regardless of how the issue of phonetic or alphabetic play is resolved, 28:9–13 must be taken as a continuation of Isaiah’s assault on Jerusalem’s temple establishment for drunken ecstasy, malfeasance, and reliance on the dark powers of the underworld, who stand under Yhwh’s ban (as Isa 8:19; 19:3, etc.). The text is a canard, or at best a caricature of that establishment, probably related to Hezekiah’s cultic reforms. Unfortunately, contrary to the drift of scholarship on the passage, Isaiah’s “opponents” remain mute. They are not afforded an opportunity to respond in Isaiah 28.

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