

‘Off with their heads!’ The imagery of the head in the trilogy of Psalms 108–110 (Part 1)

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Abstract

A social-scientific analysis of the word ‘head’ in Psalms 108–110 indicates from another theme (war) and perspective (honour), how the imagery of the head communicates warfare, develops and establishes a connection between Psalms 108–110. In this two-part article, this is established by indicating in the first article that the imagery of the head can be considered as part of warfare imagery. The value system of honour and shame as expressions of the function and purpose of the warfare imagery is made through a social-scientific analysis of the head. The iconography of different ancient Near Eastern contexts is used as an extra-textual source to elucidate the concept of the head as an aspect of warfare imagery, expressed through honour and shame. Part two (the second article) of this article examines and applies the use of the imagery of the head in Psalms 108–110 by integrating the deductions made in this first part of this article. This helps to indicate the development and connection between Psalms 108–110 through the imagery of the head.

Key words

War; head; honour; Psalms 108–110; iconography

1. Introduction

In the ancient Near East the head was seen as the most important physical part of a person and the seat of all human intelligence (Walvoord 1960:261), while the heart, or the body parts near it, was the seat of affection. The word “head” was used to represent the total person, as it was seen as representing the whole body (Gen 49:26; Prov 10:6; Unger, 1957:461) and by extension

therefore became a powerful image to describe a person's honour (Pilch & Malina 2000:100–101).¹ 'Off with their heads!' is the famous line spoken by the Queen of Hearts in Lewis Carroll's fantasy novel (1993:54). By this phrase she overcomes any resistance, whether she is right or wrong, and instils fear in her enemies with a display of her absolute power. In Psalms 108–110 the head is used in a similar way as an image to convey fear, power, shame and honour. War and honour are almost inseparable terms in the Old Testament, according to Olyan (2011:19). Even violence² that is done to one another without the cause of war must be understood in terms of honour and shame³ in the ancient Near Eastern and Mediterranean worlds. In the Book of Psalms three psalms that reflect this notion of war and honour are Psalms 108, 109 and 110.⁴ All three of these psalms use imagery

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- 1 The twenty-first century produced a great deal of research on the topic of the head and the brain in the fields of neurosciences and psychology. The popularity of the theme resulted in numerous secular books, for example, Daniel Freeman and Jason Freeman' (2010) *Use your head. The inside track on the way we think*. Even the connection between the head and faith has become a significant topic, as seen in Stephan Joubert's (2016) book *Verander jou kop, verander jou lewe. Die skakel tussen jou brein en jou geloof*. Most of the focus for this type of research falls on how the head or rather the brain works (the inside of the head), but the outside of the head, the physical appearance of the head was not forgotten. Plastic surgeons and cosmetic companies make millions in transforming people's physical appearance. In the sociology of science the head is also becoming one of the primary fields of research again in the new field of the 'sociology of neuroscience' (Von Scheve 2012:255–256). The sociology of science "as part of the larger interdisciplinary endeavour of science and technology studies is concerned with the social and cultural embeddedness of the production of scientific knowledge and with its ramifications on various areas of society, for example institutions, politics, markets, organizations, and social relationships" (Von Scheve 2012:255–256).
 - 2 In the ancient Near Eastern and Mediterranean worlds violence was seen as a way to coerce others in a way that is not necessarily supported or approved by normal social norms (Malina & Pilch, 2006:405).
 - 3 Honour and shame were seen as primary or core values in the ancient Near East and Mediterranean worlds (Pilch & Malina 2000:xix).
 - 4 The field of canonical-critical research has developed greatly over the last few decades. In the Psalms the focus has primarily shifted as a result of this research towards identifying the interrelatedness between different Psalms and identifying relationships between smaller collections within the bigger collections of Psalms. For a further discussion of this field and contributions made to the study of the Psalms see the work of deClaisé-Walford (1997:1–14; 2014:1–11), deClaisé-Walford, Jacobson and LaNeel Tanner (2014:21–38), Hossfeld and Zenger (2008; 2011), Howard (1997:1–18) and Zenger (1998; 2010). One of these smaller collections regarded as a cohesive unit is Ps 108–110. They are identified as a collection mainly because of their superscription formulas that identify them as Psalms by, or rather for, David (cf. Eybers 1978:32; Gawrisch 1981:8, 16; West, 1981:440 footnote 4; Burden & Prinsloo, 1987:13). In studying the

related to the head and a development can be traced from one psalm to the next. The head imagery and its development can help to reveal why Psalms 108, 109 and 110 can be seen as a trilogy dealing with war and honour. This article will undertake a social-scientific analysis of these texts relating to the head and the associated imagery in order to provide the socio-critical grounds that indicate how these psalms communicate ideas about warfare and how this imagery of the head develops and establishes a connection between Psalms 108 to 110.⁵

2. Methodological considerations

Warfare is communicated through adoption of the imagery of the head as war language in Psalms 108–110. In this imagery the concepts of honour and shame become a strong interrelated theme.⁶ In this article the imagery of the head is examined through a social-scientific analysis of the term ‘head’ in Psalms 108–110 not only to indicate how the imagery communicates notions of warfare and honour, but also how it establishes and develops a connection between Psalms 108, 109 and 110. These features are established firstly by indicating that the imagery of the head can be considered as part of warfare imagery (war language and imagery). The warfare imagery (of head) communicates a specific purpose and function;

interrelatedness of these three Psalms, one could conclude that other contexts and themes also contribute to the unity of Ps 108–110.

- 5 In the process of studying a text from a social-critical perspective one needs to formulate exegetical questions. A list of such questions is provided by Elliott (1993:72–74) that can be used to study any biblical text (Old and New Testament). These questions aid the interpreter to study a text within a specific time period or culture. Each question is of such a nature that it can contribute towards formulating more or other exegetical questions or serve as a starting point for discussion. For a discussion on social-scientific criticism as part of the communication process and the factors in this method that contribute to the communication process see Gottwald (1987:26–31) and Elliott (1993:7, 70).
- 6 The primary values of honour and shame are associated with New Testament studies, but one must not ignore these values when it comes to the Old Testament and specifically in the context of war (Olyan 2011:20). According to Elliott (1993:43; see also Esler [2006] on this topic): “Social models are ‘maps’ that organize selected prominent features of the social terrain such as patterns of typical social behaviour (...), social groupings (...), processes of social interaction (...), and the like. Such models alert the social traveller to typical and recurrent patterns of everyday social life in given times and places.” Honour as a frequent theme of war is linked to an understanding head as a dominant interrelated theme in Ps 108–110.

therefore secondly a social-scientific analysis is made of head imagery from the perspective of honour and shame (part of an inter-textual analysis). Using Elliott's (1993:72–74) guideline about asking an exegetical question to determine the social aspects in a text, the following question is asked: How is the social situation of warfare understood through the use of the imagery of the head from the perspective of honour and shame? To gain a better perspective on the warfare imagery from the perspective of honour and shame connected to the head, the iconography⁷ of different ancient Near Eastern contexts is used as an extra-textual source to elucidate the concept of the head in war. In the second, more narrowly focused article, examines and applies the use of the imagery of the head in Psalms 108–110 by integrating the deductions made in this first part of this article. This helps to indicate the development and connection between Psalms 108–110 through the imagery of the head.

3. Warfare language and imagery, and the function of honour and shame

The occurrence of warfare (military) language or imagery is not unusual in the Old Testament. The imagery can communicate anything from attack to protection, imprisonment to defeat, victory or domination (Brueggemann 2008:525–526). Most of the imagery establishes either honour or shame for God, a specific person or individual or group. Honour is mostly conveyed through imagery of military protection. The king in this imagery typically represents the nation or group. Imprisonment imagery establishes who gains honour and who is being shamed through the imagery of being imprisoned. The imagery brings to mind an array of different responses for the one or group being shamed. Anything from sympathy, justice, injustice and the question of whether the person was imprisoned and accused falsely or should be freed from his or her captives (Meier 2008:320–323). Concepts

7 The article by Kruger (1989:54–55) evaluates iconography as a form of non-verbal communication. Keel and Uehlinger (1998:395–396) stress the need to look at iconography within a specific historical timeframe and also a specific era, yet one must also take into consideration that iconography can be viewed as being “more-cross-cultural than the verbal world” (Keel & Uehlinger 1998:395; see also Wyatt, 2001:29). Evans (2015:21) concurs, adding that “even if the time period differs considerably, it becomes apparent that no text is a discrete entity on its own” The social-historical and political contexts play an important role in the interpretation of the images (Evans 2015:21).

that intensify the imagery of protection are refuge and honour, while for imprisonment it would be concepts such as dishonour, shame, superiority and humiliation. All of these concepts are presented through the imagery that is used for the individual (God, king or soldier) as the victor, victim or as the enemy or prisoner (Seevers 2013:75). This warfare imagery of Psalms 108–110 becomes an important part of the message that is communicated through the imagery.

Language and imagery concerning related to warfare are in many instances overlooked, especially when it comes to the character and the significance of these images relating to primary values⁸ such as honour and shame⁹ in ancient Near Eastern and Mediterranean societies (Hobbs 1995:263). Kelle (2008:829) states that, in studying Old Testament wisdom, poetry and writings, the imagery of ancient warfare conveys both “practical elements” and “ideological aspects” of warfare.

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- 8 The way in which human behaviour is directed and its worth is shown is called a value. The purpose or way in which a person conducts himself or herself in any way is a value. The way in which human behaviour is conducted and displayed in every culture is confined within these values. A value is given meaning within the different cultural contexts and their institutions. Therefore certain values take on a primary function and can be defined as primary or core values, while others as secondary or peripheral values. The first are the values that are expected from every human being and that must be expressed within all exchanges and relations. Honour and shame must be understood as core values. Certain actions that are expected in human conduct are specific to a situation; these are the secondary values, which also protect and maintain the core values. If the secondary value fails in this task, the core value could be harmed (Pilch & Malina 2000:xv–xxi). Within the context of war, domination and defeat (or victory) will serve as secondary values toward the core value of honour and shame (Pilch & Malina 2000:45–49).
- 9 The core values of honour and shame must be viewed as among of the essential values in the ancient Near Eastern and Mediterranean worlds’ social institutions of politics, the economy, religion and culture (*familia*). The ancient Near Eastern and Mediterranean peoples were mostly group orientated and therefore values such as honour and shame were evaluated within this group or family (or society as a bigger group). Therefore the group could decide if a person brings honour to that group (positive) or shame (negative) (Van Eck, 1995:165–168). To gain honour or to have a claim to honour needed to be confirmed by the group or the community. If a person shames his or her group, that person loses his or her claim to that honour and could even be shunned or ostracised from the group. To be shamed was seen as negative, but to have a sense of shame was a positive value that showed that you (mainly women) are concerned with your own and your group’s honour (Pilch & Malina 2000:106–107). If one was shamed it meant that your group was also shamed; therefore if one is a representative of a group and are shamed, then the entire group is shamed. In war this meant that if a king or a soldier was captured and shamed, the entire nation was shamed (Van Eck, 1995:166). As Israel was God’s people, if they were captured or defeated in battle, this was seen as God leaving them, shaming the entire nation (Pilch & Malina 2000:106–112; cf. Malina 2001:27–57; DeSilva 2008:287–300; Crook 2009:591–611).

3.1 Groups of warfare in war language and imagery

Kelle (2008:829) has pointed out that warfare imagery can be understood mainly on a practical and ideological level. On the practical level the imagery is concerned with the implements of warfare, such as weaponry and armour. The weaponry is understood as the offensive implements of warfare and the armour as the defensive implements of warfare. When it comes to the conceptions of warfare itself, then one is concerned with the ideological aspects of warfare, such as the notion of enemies, victory, domination and defeat (Kelle 2008:829). Regarding the practical elements and the ideological aspect one can identify three groups of images or symbols in the language and imagery of warfare. The *first* group is that of warriors and enemies; these can be human or divine. The *second* group is that of the experiences of warfare; these could be the experiences of individuals or groups, and could describe the entire battle from start to end. The *third* group is that of the implements of warfare, which describe the weaponry and armour. Depending on the specific text and its context, if one or more of these groups are present, one could speak of the presence of war language (Kelle 2008:829). These three groups of warfare images could also be understood as the three activities of warfare, which Hobbs (1995:260) identifies as: warfare (experiences of warfare), personnel (warriors and enemies) and weaponry (implements of warfare). Hobbs (1995:266–267) argues that “in an honour-based society the war language and imagery is a specific metaphor that emphasis outward symbols of honour (armour), aggressive weapons, obedience to one’s commander and suffering for a noble cause, has special significance in a society...”¹⁰

3.2 Defeat and domination as ideological aspects of warfare

Defeat and domination are aspects of the ideological dimension of warfare and they are also indicators of the core values of honour and shame. Therefore one needs to understand the function of defeat and domination as secondary values. To be defeated in warfare is to be shamed, but if one

10 Hobbs (1995:266–267) interprets warfare imagery from the perspective of honour and shame, and therefore the imagery must be viewed from the perspective of the group that needs to evaluate the behaviour of the person and group in the public context. In times of war the other group is viewed as the enemy and “fixed boundary control would play an important part as well as heroic suffering (male characteristics).”

defeats another (group or nation) then one gains honour. The amount of honour gained is relative to the nation that has been defeated. Literal or emotional failure can also be viewed as being defeated by another (Ford 2000:45). To be defeated is to become a person that who does not exist. Symbolically (physically or metaphorically) to be defeated can be shown when the victor takes specific actions towards the defeated to indicate their shame and dishonouring. This is done in war to indicate the newly reduced status of the person, group or nation that has been defeated. In this process the victor gains honour and the defeated is shamed. Physical actions performed on the bodies of the defeated were a frequent way to demonstrate this, although such actions varied from nation to nation. Similarities between the Egyptians, Assyrians, Babylonians and Persians were notable. The influence of these nations on Israel's approach towards their defeated enemies must not be ignored.

The consequences for the defeated group were that their social, cultural and religious status was destroyed. One of the actions to indicate that a group was defeated was to send them into exile, destroying the family and kingship boundaries of that nation (Ford 2000:45–46). The way the defeated were treated as prisoners also contributed to the shaming process. These actions included being imprisoned, fettered, placed in the stocks, put in the dark (darkness was associated with malicious powers), removing the clothing, shaving the head, stepping on the head or the decapitation of a person's head (authority was situated in a person's head), scourging, or placing a ring in the nose (Ford 2000:46; cf. Finney 2010:31–58). By doing this the defeated are shamed, but also placed in a state of permanent impurity that shamed the person even further (Ford 2000:45–46). The victor often disgraced the defeated further by making sure that the dietary laws of the defeated could not be observed. Non-physical actions to shame the defeated included verbal abuse in the form of mockery, gloating, curses (a curse was seen as a withdrawal of divine vitality and strength), and expressions of malicious glee (Ford 2000:46; cf. Wright 2009:433–473).

Domination was seen as a way to force sanction of power onto the defeated to gain the core value of honour. The actions listed above that described how the defeated were shamed are also relevant here. Popular ways to demonstrate domination were through physical force, pain, violent expulsion and death. Domination has only one purpose and that

is to gain and demonstrate power and honour. This is done primarily by subjecting others to one's own will (Pilch & Malina 2000:48–49). Images that demonstrate these actions, for example, show how the body of the defeated person is tortured by the placing of the victor's feet on the head of the defeated (Ps 110:1). Domination meant that the defeated individual, group or nation was subjected to the power of the victor (Pilch & Malina 2000:158).

4. A socio-scientific and contextual interpretation of head imagery

'Head' appears to be one of the key terms used in the language and imagery in Psalms 108–110. It is therefore necessary to investigate the meaning and use of the image of the head on a socio-scientific level (as part of an intertextual analysis) to gain a better understanding of the interpretation and use of the term in an ancient Near Eastern social context.

The Hebrew word used for 'head' in Psalms 108, 109 and 110 is *שׂאֵר*.¹¹ The hands and feet¹² refer to activities of power. To be put 'under the feet of' someone means to be subject to that person, or to be under that person's control (2 Sam 22:39; 1 Kgs 5:3; Ps 8:6; 18:38; 47:3; 110:1; Mal 4:3; Matt 22:44; Mk 12:36; Rom 16:20; 1 Cor 15:25, 27; Eph 1:22; Heb 2:8; Rev 12:1). To put one's foot on the neck of a person is to indicate their total defeat and absolute control over them (Josh 10:24). The neck holds up a person's honour, which is associated with the head-face (Isa 3:16), and it is a channel of life because one's breath passes through one's neck (Pilch & Malina 2000:100–101). The one being trampled on is being dishonoured. It becomes clear that the hands-feet play in integral part on the head, as the hands and feet can

11 Holladay (1988:329) translates *שׂאֵר* as head, hear of the head, top, beginning (the beginning of a month or year), choicest, chief or leader, total amount, branch (of a river) or company (of soldiers). For an extensive discussion on the meaning and use of head, see the works of Jenni and Westermann (1984:701–714) and Beuken (2004:248–249). In the LXX translations of Ps 108, 109 and 110, *שׂאֵר* is translated as *κεφαλή*. It is used 291 times in the LXX, also denoting the head as part of the body (Dahmen 2004:259). It is translated as the head of a person, beast or idol and can also be translated as point, limit or top (Schlier 1965:675).

12 The hands, head and feet are part of the secondary values and they play an enormous role in the primary (core) values of honour and shame (Pilch & Malina 2000:98). There are three distinct human behaviours connected with the human body: hands-feet are associated with purposeful activity; eyes-heart with emotion infused thought; and mouth-ears with self-expressive speech (Pilch & Malina 2000:98–99).

be used to take or give honour, because a person's honour is associated with the head-face (Isa 3:16), while the neck is a channel of life because one's breath passes through it (Pilch & Malina 2000:100–101). Being trampled on the head or neck, or to be beheaded, is to be dishonoured or shamed (negative). The mouth-ears as a secondary value were seen as part of the head and face. The value associated with the mouth and ears is an aspect of the purity laws. The purity of the mouth was guarded in two ways. The first was by censoring that which comes into the mouth, specifically food (must be clean and pure). The second was censoring that which goes out of the mouth, namely speech. The ears were analogous to the mouth in that what one permits to enter should be consonant with the established cosmology, meaning it must be within the bounds of what is pure and impure.¹³

The head was seen as the most important physical part of a person and the seat of all human intelligence (Walvoord 1960:261).¹⁴ According to Unger (1957:461), the head was generally thought to be the seat of intelligence, while the heart, or the body parts near it, was the site of affection (secondary value of eyes and heart) (Gen 3:15; Ps 3:3; Eccles 2:14). The word 'head' was used to represent the total person; the head was seen as standing for the whole body (Gen 49:26; Prov 10:6), and therefore if the head is shamed the whole body is shamed. The head represented life itself (Dan 1:10; 1 Sam 28:2), hence the strong connection to honour and shame (Unger 1957:461; Pop 1958:222). Since the head is a metaphor, blessing or calamity, honour or dishonour, joy or sorrow are often depicted as falling upon the head (Walvoord 1960:261). The head was bowed in worshipping God (Gen 24:26; Ex 4:31), as a token of respect (Gen 43:28), and in situations of shame or humiliation (Ps 109:25). In grief the head was covered up (2 Sam 15:30), shorn (Job 1:20), sprinkled with dust (Josh 7:6; Job 2:12) or the hands placed on it (2 Sam 13:19; Jer 2:37). Priests and Nazarites were forbidden

13 In Ps 109:2 the mouth and tongue convey a military image of destruction. The mouth and tongue are used to destroy the image of the person praying the psalm. Thus the mouth and tongue become metaphors for war and are not associated here with the traditional interpretation of being aspects of the purity laws. The mouth and tongue can be seen as an extension of the imagery associated with the head in Ps 109 as part of the war imagery used to bring dishonour and shame. In Ps 109:30 the mouth is used again, not in the context of war but rather to bring praise.

14 Palmer (1974:508–509) is of the opinion that the head must not be understood as the seat of intellect, but as the source of life. Therefore all the associations made with the head must be understood in the context of life: if one were to lower the 'head', it was to grant life, to cover the head was to mourn the loss of life.

to shave their heads (Lev 21:5, 10; Num 6:5). Lepers' heads were uncovered (Lev 13:45) as a sign of impurity or uncleanness – to touch them would make a person unclean. A woman's head must be covered in public (Gen 24:65; 1 Cor 11:5), as this is seen as positive expression of shame (it brings honour to her group). The heads of criminals and enemies slain in war were often cut off (Judg 5:26; 1 Sam 17:51, 57; 31:9; Matt 14:10) or trampled on to bring dishonour and shame to them (Ps 108:13; 110:1), their group and nation (Unger 1957:461).

5. Iconography of head

To elucidate the concept of the head as it is used as an implement of warfare to demonstrate the ideological aspects of defeat and domination as secondary values of the core values of honour and shame, one needs to evaluate iconography as a form of non-verbal communication in different ancient Near Eastern contexts as an extra-textual source.¹⁵ Iconography as a form of non-verbal communication can be evaluated according to the following criteria set out by Kruger (1989:54–55): accompaniment, intensification, or substitution. The imagery as non-verbal communication can accompany verbal (or written) communication, or it can intensify it or act as a substitute for it. To elucidate the concept of the head in its use in the imagery of warfare in other contexts (different civilizations and traditions), the iconography is used to accompany and intensify the war imagery of the head in Psalms 108–110.

5.1 Egyptian context

Illustrations of the head being trampled on as a sign of defeat and domination in Egyptian iconography are not unusual. In a limestone relief from Luxor (from the period of Ramses III around the eleventh century B.C.E.) one can observe Egyptian soldiers using their defensive shields in their left hands to protect their heads from a possible missile (rocks or arrows) attack coming from above (Hossfeld & Zenger 2005:101). The head was seen as the site of a person's honour, and therefore to be beheaded or to be trampled on in war

15 Seevers (2013:76) explains the importance of comparing different neighbouring nations (Egypt, Assyria, Babylon and Persia) military practices, weaponry and strategies when studying Israelite warfare practices. The iconographies of these nations are especially helpful in this regard.

was a way to be shamed (negative) or dishonoured. In the palette of Narmer the image of the king can be seen showing him trampling on the enemy. The pharaoh is shown as the conqueror and occupier of the foreign land. The trampling of one's enemy comes from the mythological idea of victory over the forces of chaos. The sovereignty of deities was also symbolized by the lower part of the deities' feet (Keel 1978:293, 297).



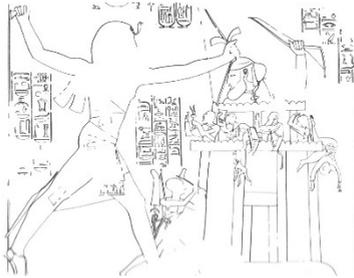
Relief: Abu Simbel (hall of columns of the great rock temple),
Ramses II around 1301–1234 B.C.E. (Keel 1978:297)

In most of the depictions it is the pharaoh who is performing the action of trampling on the enemy's head (Keel 1978:297). In the above image an Egyptian warrior is seen performing the action, bringing shame and dishonour onto his enemy by trampling upon his head.



Relief: Amenophis II as the young Pharaoh sitting on the lap of his (wet) nurse.
(Rienecker 1967:423; Keel 1978:254)

The full-bearded Nubians and Asiatics are placed beneath the young pharaoh's feet as his footstool. This demonstrates that the pharaoh is shown or rather represented in advance as a mighty king and ruler, defeating his enemies and making them literally his footstool (Keel 1978:253). The heads and whole bodies of the Nubians and Asiatics are being trampled on to display the honour of the king and their defeat and domination (subjugation). A similar depiction can be seen in a plating from a tomb in *Abd el Qurna*, around 1400 B.C.E. (Hossfeld & Zenger 2011:148; also Keel 1978:255). In that image the pharaoh is sitting on the right-hand side of the Egyptian god's lap and is depicted with his feet resting on a footstool filled with the bodies of his enemies (Hossfeld & Zenger 2011:148). The message of honour and victory for the king and defeat and domination for the enemies is conveyed.



Relief: Beit el-Wali, Ramses II, around 1301–1234 B.C.E. (Keel 1978:102)

In the Egyptian representation above, the pharaoh is depicted with his hand on the head of the enemy, showing his dominance. The image displays the storming of Syro-Palestinian cities. The army itself plays a minor role in the image as the pharaoh's triumph over his enemies is depicted by the defeated city (Keel 1978:102).¹⁶

16 A similar image can be seen in the relief at Maghara (Sinai) with *Sekhemkhet* (third king of the third Dynasty, around 2650–2600 B.C.E.). On the relief victory is shown with the shattering of the enemies' heads by the Egyptian king. The image of the shattering heads illustrates the kings' dominance and power by shaming the defeated enemy. The same display of power can be observed in the next image. A variation on the imagery portraying the shattering of the head is the image at Ostrakon of Ramses III (around 1197–1165 B.C.E.). In that image the head is being held by the king, showing his dominance, and he runs his sword through him. The head, a symbol of life, is held

5.2 Babylonian context

In the Babylonian context the king or his men in battle would place their feet on the heads or bodies of the enemies. This was a sign of victory and domination. It was part of the depiction of warfare and seen as a way to put fear in the enemy armies (Lay 1982:332). This is illustrated in the image below, where the defeated enemy is being trampled on and the head is being struck by a weapon. As the head represents the body, this is a display of total dominance over the enemy.



Fragment of a stela from Babylon, 1st Dynasty, around 1800–1500 B.C.E.
(Lay 1982: 332)

5.3 In the Context of Mesopotamia (Including Assyrian Context)

The Assyrian king Sennacherib (705–681 B.C.E.) is shown in the Nineveh relief, discovered in the palace of the king. On the relief the king is sitting on his throne. His footstool displays his royalty and before him his victory over the city of Lachish (near Jerusalem in Judah) is displayed as the spoils of the city are brought to him.

up, while the life of the head is taken away. The image becomes a display of the king's dominance and power over the defeated enemy (Keel 1978:293–294).



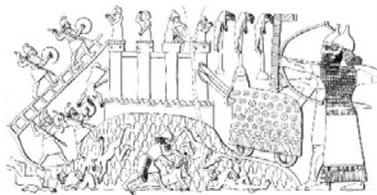
Relief: Sennacherib, king of Assyria, on his nemedu-throne (Wilson 2012)

Pointed beards and clothing indicate that twelve Judean prisoners are displayed in three registers as carvings on the side panel of Sennacherib's throne. He is sitting on their heads and bodies as a display of his victory and dominance over them at the battle of Lachish, around 700 B.C.E. The bottom two registers of the throne show the seat and the third register shows the support for the armrest. Four Judeans are symbolised in each register (Dahood 1970:114).

In multiple images Assyrian warriors are displayed cutting off the heads of their enemies. This is done to show their dominance and power over their enemies, as well as to show that the enemy has been defeated. In most of these images the head of the enemy is kept in an upright position, awaiting execution. In this process the enemy is shamed and stripped of all honour. Bodies of the enemy on spikes show further humiliation, dominance and power over the enemy. This is also a minatory demonstration of power to all other nations not to challenge the power of Assyria (Keel 1978:102–103, 296).

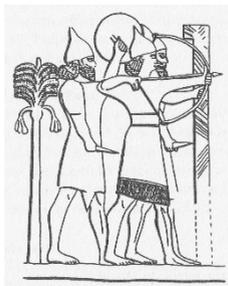


Ivory: Ugarit, around 1400–1350 B.C.E. (Keel 1978:296)



Basalt statue, Babylon (palace of Nebuchadnezzar II), around 604–562 B.C.E. (Keel 1978:102)

In the image below an Assyrian general is protected by two soldiers. Each soldier has a shield. The one has a long shield that protects the entire body, the other a small round shield that is used to protect the head. The long shield is bent at the top providing more protection for the head (Hossfeld & Zenger 2005:101).



Relief from the palace of Nimrud, from the period of Tiglath-pileser, around the 8th century B.C.E. (Hossfeld & Zenger, 2005:101)

6. Conclusion

The first part of this two-part article shows that different forms of military or warfare language and imagery are related to the core values of honour and shame in ancient Near Eastern and Mediterranean society (worlds). The imagery of warfare draws on both the practical elements (weaponry and armour) as well as the ideological aspects (conceptions of enemies, victory and defeat) of warfare, acting as indicators of the social value of honour and shame, especially in the concepts of defeat and domination. The head of a person was seen as the symbol of authority; shaving the head, stepping on the head or the decapitation of a person's head is an absolute symbol of shaming and removing that person's honour and publicly disgracing him or her. As the head was seen as the most important physical part of a person, the seat of all human intelligence and representing the total person (the whole body), it became an easy target (to dishonour) to display one's power and dominance (to gain honour).

The iconography of different ancient Near Eastern and Mediterranean contexts illustrated the use of the concept of the head in the language and imagery of warfare as further expressed through the concepts of honour and shame. This was seen in the Egyptian, Babylonian and Mesopotamian (including the Assyrian) contexts as part of the imagery of protection and domination, where the enemy is beheaded or trampled on as a way to be shamed (negative) or dishonoured, and to give honour to the victor. In this context the command of the Queen of Hearts "Off with their heads!" becomes an appropriate battle cry for those displaying their power and dominance over their defeated victims. Part two of this article examines and applies the use of the imagery of the head in Psalms 108–110 by integrating the deductions made in this first part of this article. This will help to indicate the thread of the imagery of the head running through Psalms 108–110 and the way it is developed.

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