Overview:

Ritual acts that might be described as violent are not uncommon in texts of the Hebrew Bible. Nehemiah pulls out the beard hair of his opponents (Nehemiah 13); Shimi stones and curses King David as David flees Jerusalem (2 Samuel 16); the corpses of the murderers of Eshbaal are disfigured and displayed publicly (2 Samuel 4); Moses burns the Golden Calf, grinds it up, mixes what is left of it with water, and makes the people drink it (Exodus 32). Most would agree that such acts embody violence, yet as manifestations of ritual violence, they are rarely if ever theorized by biblical scholars. The purpose of this symposium is to explore ritual violence in the Hebrew Bible collectively and to contribute in a significant way to its theorization. As we seek to theorize biblical representations of ritual violence, questions to be considered include: What constitutes a violent act in a ritual setting? What ends might ritual violence accomplish? Who and what are the targets of ritual violence? The gender dimensions of ritual violence, manifestations of ritual violence in wartime, calculated acts of violence against the non-living (corpses, ritual objects such as inscribed stelae or cultic icons) and the larger ancient West Asian context of representations of ritual violence in the Hebrew Bible will be subjects of interest to our speakers, who engage theory from the social sciences, cognitive science, and other disciplines. The symposium is free and all are welcome to attend.


Schedule of Events

SUNDAY, MAY 5
Rhode Island Hall, 60 George Street, room 108 (on the campus green)

12:55—Welcome (Saul M. Olyan)

1:00-1:45—"What Ends Might Ritual Violence Accomplish? The Case of Rechab and Baanah in 2 Sam 4" Debra Scoggins Ballentine, Assistant Professor, Rutgers University

1:45-2:30—"Dispossessing Nations: Population Growth, Scarcity and Genocide in Ancient Israel and Twentieth-Century Rwanda" Tracy Lemos, Assistant Professor, University of Western Ontario

2:30-3:00—Coffee break

3:00-3:45—"Between Politics and Mythology: Josiah’s Assault on Bethel in 2 Kgs 23:15-20" Mark Leuchter, Associate Professor, Temple University

3:45-4:30—"Strategic Violence Against Ritual Objects: Perspectives from the Cognitive Science of Religion" Nathaniel Levow, Associate Professor, University of Montana

4:30-5:15—"‘The Traffic in Women’: Exchange, Ritual Sacrifice, and War" Susan Niditch, Professor, Amherst College

MONDAY, MAY 6
Brown University Faculty Club, 1 Magee Street, Conference Room, 3rd floor (just off the campus green)

8:30-9:15—"The Instrumental Dimensions of Ritual Violence Against Corpses in Biblical Texts" Saul M. Olyan, Professor, Brown University

9:15-10:30—"Generating Communitas in War-Related Ritual Acts" Rüdiger Schmitt, Professor, Westfälische Wilhelms Universität Münster

10:30-11:00—Coffee Break

11:00-11:45—"Urbicide: The Ritualized Killing of Cities in the Ancient Near Eastern Warfare" Jacob Wright, Associate Professor, Emory University

11:45-12:30—Discussion

12:30—Symposium Ends