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When Death Lost Its Throne

Sovereignty, Agency, and Personification across Ugaritic, Jewish, Islamic, European, and Mexican Traditions

Daniel J. Grace

Independent Researcher, Australia

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9259-8032>

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Abstract

This article compares the status, agency, and sovereignty of personified Death in Ugaritic, Jewish, Islamic, European, and Mexican traditions. It does not argue for a direct genealogical line from the Ugaritic deity Mot to the later Angel of Death, the Grim Reaper, or Santa Muerte. Instead, it asks how different religious and cultural systems configure Death when ultimate authority is located in different ways. In the Ugaritic Baal Cycle, Mot functions as Death personified within the divine order. Biblical literature preserves cognate Semitic vocabulary and vivid imagery of Death and Sheol while placing destructive agency under YHWH. The destroyer of Exodus and the sword-bearing messenger of the Davidic census traditions therefore represent death-dealing agency under command rather than the survival of an autonomous death-god. Rabbinic literature develops the *malakh ha-mavet* into a narratively vivid but subordinate figure, while Qur'an 32:11 presents *malak al-mawt* as an entrusted agent who takes human beings before their return to God. Later Islamicate traditions attach the name Azrael to this office, although the Qur'an itself does not do so. Medieval and early modern European death imagery, especially the *Danse Macabre* and the later Grim Reaper, demonstrates that personification can persist without deification. Contemporary Santa Muerte devotion shows another configuration in which skeletal Death becomes a devotional folk-saint figure. The article argues that sovereignty, agency, and personification provide the most useful comparative categories. Across these traditions, personified Death is configured in different ways rather than moving along a single historical line. The comparison is therefore best understood as theological and cultural reclassification, not as the biography of one supernatural being.

Keywords: Mot; Ugarit; Baal Cycle; death personification; *māwet*; Angel of Death; *malakh ha-mavet*; *malak al-mawt*; Azrael; Grim Reaper; Santa Muerte; monotheism; religious transformation; mortality.

1. Introduction

Death has rarely remained a merely biological fact in religious imagination. Across cultures it has been represented as a place, a power, a divine being, an enemy, a messenger, a skeleton, and even a devotional figure. These forms are not interchangeable, and they should not be placed into a single unbroken genealogy. Yet their recurrence raises a historical and theological question: what happens to personified Death when a religious system can no longer permit Death to possess independent divine sovereignty?

The Late Bronze Age texts from Ugarit provide a striking point of departure. In the Baal Cycle, Mot belongs to the divine world and personifies Death with a vividness unmatched by a merely abstract noun. His conflict with Baal places mortality, barrenness, divine rivalry, and the fragility of life within a mythic drama. The later Hebrew Bible emerged in a related West Semitic linguistic and cultural environment, but its theological ordering is increasingly different. Death remains powerful, and poetic texts may still portray Death or Sheol as hungry, devouring, or active. Yet destructive power is subordinated to YHWH. In narrative, a destroyer may strike; an angel may wield a sword over Jerusalem; but the agent acts under command.

This article argues that the most significant comparative issue is not the disappearance of personification but the changing location of authority. Mot represents Death within a polytheistic divine order. The biblical destroyer and destroying angel represent death-dealing agency under divine

sovereignty. Rabbinic literature gives a subordinate death-agent greater narrative personality in the *malakh ha-mavet*. The Qur'an identifies *malak al-mawt*, the Angel of Death, as an entrusted agent, while later Islamic traditions elaborate the figure and attach the name Azrael. European visual culture gives Death a body in skeletal and harvesting imagery, and modern Santa Muerte devotion presents a skeletal figure approached through petition and ritual. These are distinct configurations, not stages in a single line of descent.

The argument is deliberately comparative rather than genealogical. It does not claim that Mot became the biblical destroyer, that the destroyer became the Talmudic Angel of Death, or that the Angel of Death became the Grim Reaper or Santa Muerte. Such a chain would collapse distinct texts, periods, languages, and religious systems. The more defensible question concerns status: what authority does personified Death possess in each theological world?

Mark S. Smith's work on Ugaritic religion and the emergence of biblical monotheism is foundational for this approach because it locates Israelite religious development within a broader West Semitic environment without reducing Israelite theology to disguised Ugaritic mythology (Smith 2001). John Day similarly examines both assimilation and rejection in the relationship between Yahwism and Canaanite deities, including the underworld sphere and Mot (Day 2000). The present study builds upon this scholarship while extending the comparison into rabbinic, Islamic, medieval European, and contemporary Mexican material.

Its central thesis is that personification persists even when Death's sovereignty is denied, delegated, or differently construed across distinct traditions. The comparison therefore asks how sovereignty, agency, and personification are combined in each setting. Death may lose the throne while repeatedly retaining, or regaining, a face.

2. Methodology and Scope: Comparison without Genealogy

Comparative work across more than three millennia requires methodological restraint. Similarity does not by itself establish descent, borrowing, or identity. Death figures are especially vulnerable to overcomparison because mortality is universal and because personification is a recurrent human strategy for representing invisible forces. A skeletal figure, an angelic messenger, and an ancient deity may all be associated with death while belonging to entirely different conceptual systems.

Three analytical categories are therefore kept separate throughout this study: personification, agency, and sovereignty. Personification concerns whether death is represented as if it possesses personal identity or action. Agency concerns whether a supernatural being performs or administers death. Sovereignty concerns whether the figure possesses ultimate authority over death or acts under a higher power. These categories make it possible to distinguish Mot, who participates in the Ugaritic divine order, from a biblical or Qur'anic messenger whose authority is delegated.

The study also distinguishes linguistic continuity from theological continuity. Ugaritic *mt*, conventionally vocalized Mot when referring to the deity, Hebrew *māwet*, and Arabic *mawt* belong to the same Semitic root family associated with dying and death. This relationship is linguistically important, but it does not establish that Hebrew or Arabic speakers preserved worship of the Ugaritic god. A word can survive while the theological status attached to that word changes radically.

A similar chronological distinction is necessary between primary texts and their reception histories. Exodus 12:23 refers to 'the destroyer' but does not use the later technical expression 'Angel of Death.' The Babylonian Talmud develops a recurring Angel of Death figure in a different literary environment.

Qur'an 32:11 names the office *malak al-mawt* but does not call the angel Azrael. Later exegetical, folkloric, mystical, and literary traditions elaborate the figure further. These layers are compared without collapsing them into one continuous identity. Biblical references in this article follow the New King James Version unless otherwise noted; Qur'an 32:11 is cited from Mustafa Khattab's *The Clear Quran* (2016, 1st ed., 2nd printing).

Finally, the Grim Reaper and Santa Muerte are treated comparatively rather than as evidence of direct Near Eastern survival. Their inclusion serves a different purpose: they demonstrate that the loss of divine status does not end the human impulse to embody Death. The persistence of personification after deification has disappeared is itself historically significant.

3. Mot in the Ugaritic Baal Cycle: Death in the Divine World

The archives excavated at Ras Shamra, ancient Ugarit, transformed modern knowledge of Late Bronze Age West Semitic religion. Among the most important texts is the Baal Cycle, preserved in alphabetic cuneiform tablets and conventionally catalogued in the KTU/CAT system. Mark S. Smith's editions and commentaries remain foundational for KTU 1.1-1.4 (Smith 1994; Smith and Pitard 2009), while Nicolas Wyatt's *Religious Texts from Ugarit* provides an accessible scholarly translation of the wider mythological corpus, including the Mot material in KTU 1.5-1.6 (Wyatt 2002).

Mot occupies a distinctive position in the Baal Cycle. His name is the Northwest Semitic word for death, but within the mythic narrative Death is not merely an abstraction. Mot belongs to the divine world and is addressed and portrayed as a personal being. His conflict with Baal is concentrated in KTU 1.5-1.6. Baal, the storm-god associated with rain and fertility, encounters in Mot a power associated with death, the underworld, and the cessation of life-giving conditions (Wyatt 2002, KTU 1.5-1.6).

The contrast between Baal and Mot has often been read in relation to the agricultural rhythms of the Levant. Such interpretations should be handled carefully. Mot should not be reduced to a simple 'god of summer,' and the Baal Cycle should not be forced into a rigid universal pattern of a dying-and-rising vegetation god. Nevertheless, the narrative clearly connects Baal's fortunes with the conditions of fertility and barrenness. In an agrarian society dependent upon seasonal rainfall, the absence of the storm-god could carry ecological consequences far beyond the fate of one deity.

Mot's most memorable literary characteristic is his appetite. In KTU 1.5 i, Mot describes an appetite like that of a lion and presents himself as a devouring power; in KTU 1.5 ii 2-7 his mouth is imagined on a cosmic scale as Baal descends into his insides. The imagery of mouth, throat, eating, and swallowing portrays Death as consuming rather than merely occurring (Wyatt 2002, KTU 1.5 i 15-25; 1.5 ii 2-7). The details of the text remain philologically difficult in places, but the broader symbolism is clear: disappearance is given bodily form through the appetite of Death.

This imagery helps explain why later biblical language about the appetite of Sheol and Death attracts comparative attention. The comparison does not prove that every biblical swallowing metaphor is a covert reference to Mot. Rather, it shows that West Semitic cultures possessed a durable imaginative vocabulary in which death and the underworld could be represented as hungry and expansive.

The violent confrontation between Anat and Mot further complicates the picture. KTU 1.6 ii 30-37 depicts Anat seizing Mot, cutting him, winnowing him, burning him, grinding him, and scattering or sowing him in imagery drawn from agricultural processing. Mot is nevertheless not permanently eliminated; the cycle later returns him to confrontation with Baal. El's dream of restored fertility in KTU 1.6 iii 2-9 signals Baal's return to life, while the later conflict in KTU 1.6 vi shows that Death has not

disappeared from the mythic world (Wyatt 2002, KTU 1.6 ii 30-37; 1.6 iii 2-9; 1.6 vi). The narrative therefore dramatizes recurrent tension between life-giving and death-dealing powers rather than a final abolition of mortality.

This is the first major point in the article's comparison. At Ugarit, Death possesses a place within the divine order. Mot is not simply an angel commissioned by a higher god to remove human souls. He is a divine personification whose identity is inseparable from Death itself. The later monotheistic problem will be how such a power can be retained imaginatively while being denied independent sovereignty.

4. Mot and Māwet: Reclassifying Death in the Hebrew Bible

The relationship between Ugaritic religion and the Hebrew Bible must be described in terms of both continuity and transformation. Smith emphasizes the broader West Semitic structures within which Israelite concepts of divinity developed, while Day examines the ways Yahwism assimilated, displaced, or rejected functions associated with Canaanite deities (Smith 2001; Day 2000). Death provides a particularly revealing case.

The Hebrew noun *māwet* is cognate with Ugaritic *mt* and Arabic *mawt*. In most biblical contexts it simply means death. The cognate relationship is significant for historical linguistics, but it is not evidence that biblical writers continued to recognize Mot as an independent deity. What is more important for the present argument is the survival of imagery in which Death or the underworld can behave as though it possesses appetite and agency.

Isaiah 5:14 portrays Sheol as enlarging itself and opening its mouth without limit, while Proverbs 27:20 describes Sheol and Abaddon as never satisfied (Isa. 5:14; Prov. 27:20 NKJV). Such texts personify the underworld without requiring the conclusion that their authors worshiped a death-god. Personification can survive deification.

Isaiah 25:8 provides an even more striking theological reversal: YHWH 'will swallow up death forever' (Isa. 25:8 NKJV). The devouring imagery has been inverted. Instead of Death consuming life without limit, Death itself becomes the object of divine victory. Later Christian interpretation intensifies this reversal: Paul calls death 'the last enemy' to be destroyed and reuses the Isaianic victory language in his resurrection argument (1 Cor. 15:26, 54-55 NKJV).

The difference in sovereignty is decisive. In the Ugaritic divine world, Mot participates as a divine power. In biblical monotheistic rhetoric, Death may remain terrifying and may still be poetically personified, but Death has no final independent throne. The governing theological question is no longer which deity controls a particular cosmic domain. The question becomes how every domain, including death, is placed under YHWH.

This process should not be described as an instantaneous historical event or as a simple evolutionary ladder. Israelite religion developed over time, and the term 'monotheism' itself requires careful historical use (Smith 2001). The important point is theological rather than linear: as exclusive and universal claims about YHWH become stronger, an autonomous god of Death becomes increasingly incompatible with that theological order. The imagery can remain while the rank changes.

5. The Destroyer and the Sword-Bearing Messenger

The Passover narrative offers an important example of death-dealing agency under constraint. Exodus 12:23 states that YHWH will not permit 'the destroyer' to enter the blood-marked houses and

strike them (Exod. 12:23 NKJV). The Hebrew term derives from a verb of destroying or ruining. Later interpreters have often associated this figure with the Angel of Death, but the text itself does not use that later title. That distinction should be preserved.

The narrative is nevertheless significant because the destructive agent is explicitly constrained. The destroyer does not possess unrestricted jurisdiction. YHWH determines the boundary within which destructive power may operate. The passage therefore presents death-dealing agency without independent sovereignty.

The census narratives in 2 Samuel 24 and 1 Chronicles 21 make the agent more visibly angelic. Pestilence falls upon Israel, and a supernatural messenger appears as the instrument of judgment. David sees the angel striking the people in 2 Samuel 24:15-17, while 1 Chronicles 21:14-16 portrays the angel standing between earth and heaven with a drawn sword extended over Jerusalem. The agent's terror is matched by obedience: when God commands the destruction to stop, the angel's action stops (1 Chron. 21:27 NKJV).

This image crystallizes the theological shift. The angel's sword can destroy, but the sword cannot choose its own sovereignty. The messenger possesses enormous agency but no independent throne. A function once represented through a divine personification can be reclassified as an office within the administration of the one God.

This is why a direct formula such as 'Mot became the Angel of Death' is historically inadequate. What can be compared more securely is the status of death-related agency. Mot personifies Death as a divine being. The biblical destroyer and destroying angel enact death under command. The similarity of function is real; the ontology is different.

6. Malakh ha-Mavet: Death Becomes a Rabbinic Character

Rabbinic literature develops the figure of the Angel of Death far beyond the sparse biblical narratives. The Babylonian Talmud uses the expression *malakh ha-mavet* and includes stories in which the Angel of Death speaks, waits, encounters resistance, and interacts with sages. These narratives do not restore Death to divine status. Rather, they make a subordinated death-agent narratively personal. The discussion here follows the William Davidson digital edition of the Koren Noé Talmud, with English translation and commentary by Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz.

Moed Katan 28a provides a revealing cluster of stories concerning death, righteous sages, and the Angel of Death. The passage depicts sages confronting the approach of death and emphasizes preparation, Torah study, and the limits of human life within a moral and theological order (Babylonian Talmud, Moed Katan 28a, William Davidson/Koren-Steinsaltz edition). The narrative details differ from cosmic myth: the Angel of Death is an agent within a hierarchy, not a rival divine sovereign.

The same folio includes stories in which the Angel of Death becomes a character who can be addressed, delayed, or encountered through narrative devices. The point is not to reconstruct a literal mechanism of dying but to observe how rabbinic storytelling gives mortality a personal agent while retaining divine supremacy (Babylonian Talmud, Moed Katan 28a). The inevitability of death is not denied; it is placed within a structured moral world.

The primary evidence remains the Talmud itself, read here through the William Davidson digital edition of the Koren Noé Talmud. Its English translation and explanatory material by Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz help clarify the compressed language and cultural assumptions of the passage. The stories are

best read as rabbinic narratives shaped by concerns about Torah, righteousness, preparation, merit, and the limits of human life rather than as straightforward descriptions of the mechanics of dying.

The development is nevertheless important for the history of personification. Mot overwhelms through cosmic appetite. The rabbinic Angel of Death may need strategy. Death has become less cosmologically sovereign and more narratively familiar. The agent can be addressed, delayed, or encountered in a manner that makes mortality intelligible within a moral and theological order.

This transformation may be described as the domestication of personified Death, provided the term is used carefully. Death remains frightening and unavoidable, but personification allows it to enter dialogue. An abstraction cannot knock at a door, wait for a sage to finish studying, or grant time for preparation. A personified messenger can.

7. Malak al-Mawt, Azrael, and Islamicate Reception

Qur'an 32:11 provides a particularly clear formulation: malak al-mawt, the Angel of Death, is charged with taking human beings before their return to God. Mustafa Khattab translates the verse as referring to the Angel of Death 'who is in charge of you,' followed by the return of human beings to their Lord (Qur'an 32:11, trans. Mustafa Khattab). The verse therefore identifies both agency and delegation.

The wording is significant for the article's comparative framework. The Angel of Death possesses a defined function, yet that function is embedded in a hierarchy of divine sovereignty. The figure administers death as an entrusted office rather than possessing independent jurisdiction over mortality.

The Qur'an does not call this angel Azrael. That distinction is essential because modern popular accounts frequently treat 'Azrael' as though it were the Qur'anic name. It is not. The personal name belongs to the wider reception history of the Angel of Death in later Islamicate tradition.

The history of Azrael belongs to the reception history of the Angel of Death rather than to the wording of Qur'an 32:11 itself. Dunja Rašić's *Azrael: Encounters with the Angel of Death in Islamicate Thought and Culture* documents the later literary, theological, artistic, and mystical development of the figure across Islamicate traditions (Rašić 2026). This material should not be retrojected into the Qur'an: the scriptural text names the office, while later traditions provide much of the name, biography, and elaboration.

Later exegetical and narrative traditions expanded the concise Qur'anic reference in diverse ways. For the present comparison, the important distinction is between the Qur'anic office of malak al-mawt and the later reception of a named and increasingly characterized Azrael. Treating these as separate historical layers avoids using later tradition as though it were part of the Qur'anic wording itself.

The distinction between office and name also clarifies the larger comparative argument. Ugaritic Mot possesses identity and function together: he is Death personified. Qur'anic malak al-mawt possesses a function defined by relation to a superior authority. Later tradition gives the office a personal name and increasingly elaborate characteristics. The narrative personality grows while sovereignty remains delegated.

The linguistic comparison is equally suggestive. Ugaritic mt, Hebrew mawet, and Arabic mawt share the ancient Semitic root associated with death. Hebrew malakh ha-mavet and Arabic malak al-mawt both form expressions meaning 'Angel of Death.' The linguistic continuity is genuine, but it should be interpreted as shared Semitic vocabulary rather than as proof of an uninterrupted cultic lineage. The word survived. The theology changed.

8. The Grim Reaper: Personification without Deification

The Grim Reaper belongs to a different historical and cultural world. He is not a biblical or Qur'anic angel, and the familiar hooded skeleton with a scythe should not be treated as the direct descendant of Mot or Azrael. His importance for this study is comparative: he demonstrates that even after death had been subordinated within monotheistic theology, European culture continued to give Death a recognizable body.

Medieval and early modern Europe developed extensive visual and literary traditions of personified Death. The Danse Macabre became a major fifteenth-century motif across Europe, combining text, image, dialogue, and social satire to confront viewers with the universality of mortality (Davidson and Oosterwijk 2021; Dickason 2021, 207-232). Guy Marchant's Parisian printed tradition is an important witness. The Metropolitan Museum of Art preserves a 1490 woodcut titled Dance of Death, published by Marchant, as well as a 1490 printed Chorea ab eximio Macabre associated with his press (Metropolitan Museum of Art, object nos. 62.650.619 and 29.1.1-.5).

It is tempting to explain the Grim Reaper entirely as a product of the Black Death, but that formulation is too simple. European personifications of Death have a deeper history, and the familiar Reaper iconography developed gradually. The later Middle Ages nevertheless intensified attention to mortality, judgment, memento mori, and the leveling of social rank. Scholarship on the Dance of Death places the motif within a broader religious and cultural setting rather than reducing it to a single epidemic cause (Dickason 2021, 207-232; Davidson and Oosterwijk 2021).

The skeleton is an especially effective symbol because it represents mortality stripped of social distinction. The scythe adds agricultural imagery: lives are 'reaped' as grain is harvested. Such symbolism has obvious resonance in Christian eschatological and biblical harvest imagery, even though the Grim Reaper himself is not a formally defined biblical angel.

The distinction between personification and deity is crucial. A skeletal Death in art does not imply a revived European cult of a death-god. Death has regained a body without regaining divine sovereignty. The Grim Reaper is therefore a clear example of personification surviving after deification has disappeared.

9. Santa Muerte: When Personified Death Becomes Devotional

Santa Muerte introduces a different configuration of personified Death. Commonly depicted as a female skeletal figure in robes and frequently carrying a scythe, globe, scales, or other objects, Santa Muerte is a contemporary Mexican and transnational folk-saint figure associated by devotees with protection, healing, prosperity, love, justice, and other practical concerns. She is not an officially canonized saint of the Roman Catholic Church, and her devotional world belongs to the complex field of lived and popular religion (Chesnut 2025, chs. 1-7).

R. Andrew Chesnut's *Devoted to Death: Santa Muerte, the Skeleton Saint*, now in its third edition, remains a major academic study of the movement (Chesnut 2025). Its structure itself reflects the range of devotional functions attributed to Santa Muerte, with chapters devoted to beliefs and practices, protection, love, prosperity, healing, and law and justice. These categories describe devotional practice; they should not be collapsed into the article's analytical vocabulary of sovereignty and agency.

Santa Muerte should not be presented as a survival of Mot or as the final evolutionary form of the Angel of Death. Her historical background is shaped by Mexican religious history, Catholic imagery,

European death symbolism, popular devotional practice, and modern social conditions (Chesnut 2025, chs. 1-2). The comparison is useful because it shows a distinct case in which skeletal Death moves from representation into petition, not because it demonstrates direct descent from ancient Near Eastern religion.

The Grim Reaper usually reminds the viewer that death is inevitable. Santa Muerte may be addressed by devotees as a figure who can hear requests. The same skeletal symbolism therefore operates differently. In one setting it functions primarily as *memento mori* and cultural personification; in another it becomes the center of a devotional relationship.

This configuration adds a relational dimension to the comparison. Santa Muerte devotion does not recreate the Ugaritic ontology of an autonomous death-god, nor should devotees' own understandings be forced into the categories of 'sovereignty' or 'divinity.' What can be said more cautiously is that personified Death becomes an object of petition and ritual relationship in a contemporary folk-devotional setting (Chesnut 2025, chs. 2-7).

10. Why Do Humans Personify Death?

The persistence of personified Death across unrelated or only indirectly connected traditions suggests that the phenomenon cannot be explained solely by textual borrowing. Several recurrent functions help explain why cultures repeatedly give Death a face.

First, personification makes an invisible transition imaginable. Human beings observe dying bodies, corpses, burial, and decay, but 'death' as a transition remains conceptually difficult to picture. A personified figure supplies form. Mot has a mouth. A biblical angel has a sword. The Talmudic Angel of Death can speak. Azrael acquires a name. The Grim Reaper has a skeleton and scythe. Santa Muerte stands before devotees as an image that can be addressed.

Second, personification gives death agency. Religious and narrative language frequently describes death as coming, taking, striking, calling, reaping, or gathering. Such verbs transform an impersonal event into an action. The resulting stories can then address questions of timing, justice, divine permission, and human preparation.

Third, personification makes death narratively negotiable. No one can negotiate with mortality as an abstraction. A personified death-agent, however, can be delayed in a story, asked for time, resisted, or approached through ritual. Rabbinic narratives make particularly clear use of this possibility. The stories do not eliminate mortality; they place it inside a moral world.

Fourth, personification can support theological hierarchy. Monotheistic traditions face a conceptual problem if Death is treated as a power rivaling God. An angelic office solves that problem by preserving agency while denying sovereignty. The messenger can remain terrifying without becoming divine.

Fifth, personification gives grief narrative structure. Even modern secular speech commonly says that death 'took' someone or 'came' unexpectedly. Such language does not necessarily imply literal belief in a supernatural being. It does, however, reveal the persistence of agency-language when human beings attempt to narrate loss.

Finally, personification can make Death defeatable within religious hope. A power represented as an enemy can be conquered. Anat's violence against Mot (KTU 1.6 ii 30-37), Isaiah's image of death being swallowed (Isa. 25:8), and Paul's description of death as the last enemy (1 Cor. 15:26) all use

personified or quasi-personified language to make ultimate victory imaginable. The same literary capacity that makes Death frightening also makes it possible to dramatize Death's defeat.

11. Sovereignty, Agency, and the Loss of Death's Throne

The evidence considered here can now be organized around the three analytical categories introduced earlier: personification, agency, and sovereignty.

In the Ugaritic world these categories converge in Mot, where Death itself participates in the divine order. In the Hebrew Bible, by contrast, death-related imagery remains powerful while sovereignty is concentrated in YHWH: the destroyer may strike and the angel may wield a sword, but both act within divine command. Agency survives while independent sovereignty does not.

Rabbinic Judaism gives the subordinate malakh ha-mavet greater narrative texture, while Qur'an 32:11 presents malak al-mawt as an entrusted agent and later Islamicate traditions elaborate the figure under the name Azrael. In both settings, personification can intensify without restoring Death to the status of a rival divine power.

European and Mexican materials display different configurations again. The Grim Reaper gives Death a recognizable body without deification, while Santa Muerte places skeletal Death within devotional relationships. These cases demonstrate the persistence and adaptability of personification rather than a single historical line of descent.

The comparison therefore concerns changing configurations of authority, not an evolutionary ladder. The phrase 'when Death lost its throne' names the denial of autonomous sovereignty to Death within strong monotheistic systems; it does not claim that one identifiable deity was literally transformed into later angels, images, or devotional figures.

12. Conclusion

Personified Death does not move through these traditions as one supernatural being with an uninterrupted biography. What persists is the human tendency to render mortality intelligible through figures whose status changes with the theological and cultural worlds that produce them.

At Ugarit, Mot belongs to the divine order. Biblical and Qur'anic traditions retain death-dealing agency while locating ultimate authority in God; rabbinic and later Islamicate traditions make that subordinate agency more narratively vivid. European culture embodies Death without deifying it, while Santa Muerte places skeletal Death within contemporary devotion.

The differences are the point: Mot stands among gods; the biblical messenger obeys; the rabbinic Angel speaks and waits; the Qur'anic Angel is entrusted; the Grim Reaper appears without worship; and Santa Muerte is petitioned without recreating the Ugaritic pantheon.

The lost throne is therefore a change in status, not a genealogy. Death may appear as divine power, subordinated agent, narrated character, visualized presence, or devotional figure, while the recurrent impulse to give mortality a face remains.

Death lost its throne.

It did not lose its face.

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Author Note

Daniel J. Grace is an independent researcher whose work focuses on biblical studies, Christian theology, early Christianity, religion and society, and the relationship between ancient religious texts and contemporary theological questions. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9259-8032>.

Research and Editorial Disclosure

This article is a comparative historical-theological study based on primary religious texts and published secondary scholarship. Digital research tools were used for source discovery and language/structural editing; the author is responsible for the argument, interpretation, source selection, and final text.