

BURNING THE BONES OF THE DEAD AS A WAR ATROCITY: A NOTE ON AMOS 2:1

Paul A. Kruger

Department of Ancient Studies

University of Stellenbosch

E-mail: pak@sun.ac.za

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ABSTRACT

This short note discusses the nature and significance of the war crime “burning the bones of the dead” referred to in Amos 2:1. A lack of historical data as far as the Hebrew Bible is concerned inhibits a more precise understanding of this serious accusation. After the presentation of a variety of examples from ancient Near Eastern sources (particularly from Assyrian war records) relating to the violation of the remains of the dead, especially the bones, it is now possible to gain a clearer picture of the severity of the crime in Amos. “Burning the bones” was conceived to be the complete annihilation of the memory of a dead person. Accordingly, a relationship between the living and the spirit of the dead is no longer possible, an aspect so essential in the life world of the ancient Near Eastern peoples.

INTRODUCTION

The Oracles Against the Nations (Amos 1:3–2:16)¹ alludes to a wide spectrum of war crimes: those directed against existing structures (“setting fire to the palace/city wall”: 1:4, 7, 10, 12, 2:2), some against a community of people (“deportation”: 1:5, 6, 9),² others against living individuals such as pregnant women and their unborn babies (“ripping open pregnant women”: 1:13),³ and lastly also an offense committed against those who have already passed away (“burning the bones”: 2:1). The purpose of this short note is to elucidate the nature of this last act of cruelty that the text reports so succinctly:

¹ For the different opinions on the redactional growth of this literary complex, cf. Hadjiev (2009:41–53) and Fischer (2002:27–29). See also Wöhrle (2006:93–102), who regards Amos 1:3–8; 13–15; 2:1–3; 6–8 and 13–16 as the basic layer (*Grundbestand*).

² See Mayer (2004).

³ See Kruger (2016).

because he (Moab: PAK) burned to (לִ)⁴ lime
the bones of the king of Edom (Amos 2:1).

As in the case of the earlier example about the “ripping open pregnant women” (Amos 1:13),⁵ opinions diverge on whether the allusion to the burning of bones (Amos 2:1) refers to a historical reality or whether it perhaps serves another (propagandistic/rhetorical?) aim. There are supporters of both these positions. For doubt about the historicity of the pronouncement, consider the claim of Fritz (1987:32) who, in view of the gravity of the crime, is very sceptical about its historical reliability:

Historisch ist die (*sic*) genannte Tat nicht zu verifizieren. Es scheint zweifelhaft, ob sie überhaupt ereignet hat, da es sich um die Verletzung der allgemeinen Norm handelt, auch im Krieg das Recht des Toten auf ungestörte Ruhe zu wahren.⁶

On the other hand, compare those like Wolff (1969:197–198), who maintains that this report could be authentic and suggests a plausible historical setting. According to him, this incident most probably refers to events in Amos’ recent past when the Moabites not only burned the bones of the king of Edom, but indulged in an even more atrocious act, namely producing lime from the burnt bones to paint houses. This explanation is in line with the Targum’s understanding of the purpose of this action: “and used them for plaster on his house” (Cathcart and Gordon 1989:78). More

⁴ Some regard the preposition לִ as signifying *purpose*: “burned for lime”; see, e.g., Paul (1991:72). It is, however, more probable to understand the לִ as indicating the *end result* of the process, viz., “to lime.” For the preposition לִ in this function, cf. 2 Kgs 23:15: “crush (דָּקַק; *hip ‘il*) to dust (לַעֲפָר)”. See below.

⁵ Michel (2006:146), for example, argues that the “ripping open of pregnant women” (Amos 1:13; see also 2 Kgs 8:12 and Hos 14:1) is to be taken as historically reliable (“ältere Kriegspraktiken der syro-palästinischen Staatenwelt”), whilst others, like Tuor-Kurth (2010:117), regard the same reference as “feindliche Stereotypen” in order to stress impiety.

⁶ Along the same lines, cf. the observation by Schütte (2011:529): “Der Moabspruch ist am wenigsten historisch ergiebig. Das Sakrileg der gestörten Totenruhe fällt aus der Reihe der vorhergehenden Anklagen. Es gibt keine weiteren Informationen über das Ereignis.”

plausible, however, is the opinion that the “burned to lime” does not signify the usage of the burnt bones. It is rather a metaphor signifying the complete annihilation of identity.⁷

Even though the authenticity of the bone burning in Amos 2:1 cannot be factually verified, there is no reason to doubt its historical credibility. Enough comparative evidence (especially from Assyrian war records) could be advanced to gain a clearer appreciation of the harshness of such a crime, particularly concerning the symbolism of the bones of a dead person.⁸

THE ABUSE OF THE DEAD BODY AND THE DESECRATION OF BONES AS A BRUTAL ACT OF WAR

How serious the mistreatment of the remains of a dead person was conceived to be in the life world of ancient Near Eastern peoples may be seen from the following statement by Kühn (2009:484–485):

Das fehlende Begräbnis bzw. ein Vernichten des Leichnams oder der Gebeine galt als schlimmste Bestrafung des Verstorbenen. Nicht nur war die Ruhe des Toten bei den Familiennahmen verunmöglicht, auch sein Gedenken bzw. die Aufrechterhaltung seines Namens war nicht gegeben. Denn das Grab eines Verstorbenen war der erste Haftpunkt für ein bleibendes Andenken unter den Hinterbliebenen. Der Tote war somit durch ein fehlendes Begräbnis sowohl aus dem diesseitigen als auch aus dem jenseitigen Familienverband ausgeschlossen. Dieser Ausschluss bedeutete erst den eigentlichen Tod.

⁷ Cf., e.g., Fischer (2002:57): “Der Zusatz „zu Kalk“ zeigt m.E. weniger den Weitergebrauch des gewonnen Materials an. Er ist vielmehr Sinnbild für die Vernichtung des Leichnams und seine Reduzierung zur völligen Wesenslosigkeit”; see also Jeremias (1995:16).

⁸ Some scholars draw attention to the similarities between this act in Amos and Assyrian war practices; see, e.g., Crouch (2009:107–108) and Paul (1991:72, fn. 270), but they could have provided many more references.

According to this summary, there were various disrespectful ways of treating the corporeal remains of a dead person, from violation of the dead body and non-burial to the harshest form of abuse – destruction of the bones.⁹ Mutilation of the corpse and the crime of non-burial are widely attested in the ancient Near East. The Hebrew Bible often makes mention of this fate: to be “eaten by the birds of heaven/the wild animals” (Deut 28:26; 1 Sam 17:44; Jer 7:33; 16:4; 34:20; Ezek 29:5; 39:4), or “dogs” (1 Kgs 14:11; 1 Kgs 16:4; 1 Kgs 21:19, 23–24; 2 Kgs 9:36).¹⁰ In other ancient Near Eastern sources, similarly, the maltreatment of the remains of the dead was a common theme, especially in the treaty curses. Compare, for example, the nature of the following imprecations in *Esarhaddon’s succession treaty*:

May Ninurta, the foremost among the gods, fell you with his fierce arrow;
may he fill the plain with your blood and feed your flesh to the eagle and
the vulture.¹¹

May dogs and swine eat your flesh ...¹²

Before your very eyes may dogs and swine drag the *teats* of your young
women and the *penises* of your young men to and fro in the squares of
Assur; may the earth not receive your corpses but may your burial place
be in the belly of a dog or a pig.¹³

⁹ See, e.g., Olyan (2005:603–607) who classifies the different ways of treating the remains of the dead, especially as far as the Hebrew Bible is concerned, as a “hierarchy of burial types”, from the most desirable to the least: burial in the family tomb; burial in a substitute for the family tomb; burial in someone else’s family tomb; dishonourable forms of burial like throwing the corpse into a cave, or dragging the body around; and lastly, the most undesirable: nonburial, including mutilation of the corpse by birds and beasts. Hays (2011:161), however, subdivides the non-burial type into two categories, viz. “non-burial” in the sense of the abandonment of the corpse and “anti-burial” which is defined as “violation of the corpse and/or exposure of the remains”.

¹⁰ See Kühn (2009:484, nr. 14); for other curses relating to non-burial, see Hillers (1964:68–69); see also Barrick (2002:179, fn. 25) and Stavrakopoulou, especially the paragraph “Dealing with the dead” (Stavrakopoulou 2010b:71–76).

¹¹ Par. 41, 425–427; see Parpola and Watanabe (1988:46).

¹² Par. 47, 451; see Parpola and Watanabe (1988:46–48).

¹³ Par. 56, 481–484; see Parpola and Watanabe (1988:49).

This reminds one of a similar threat in *The Iliad* of Homer, Book 13, lines 231–234:

Then in answer Poseidon the earthshaker addressed him:
 ‘Idomeneus, let the man who on this day deliberately
 shirks the battle never return to his home from Troy,
 but let him remain here and become the plaything of dogs.’¹⁴

A similar horrible fate reverberates in the Assyrian accounts of war. Compare the following measures meted out by Ashurbanipal to Babylonian rebels (Prism A IV 75–76). It records:

Hunde, Schweine, *Schakale*/Geier, Adler, die Vögel des Himmels und die Fische der Wassertiefe liess ich ihr zerstückeltes Fleisch fressen (Borger 1996:235).¹⁵

Another way of treating the dead was to display their bodies in public in the most dishonourable way, as in Josh 8:29 and 10:26, where it is said that the dead “were hung on a tree” (תלה על עץ). Elsewhere in Hebrew Bible תלה (“hang”) appears without the qualification “on a tree” (e.g. 2 Sam 4:12; 21:12).¹⁶ On other occasions, again, it is explicitly stated that this deed is performed at a public place (“at the city gate/public square”; Josh 8:29; 2 Sam 21:12).

¹⁴ The translation is by Verity (2011:205). For other examples, see also Rollinger (2004a:397).

¹⁵ See also in the same context (Prism A IV 77–85) the following notice: “Nachdem ich diese Handlungen durchgeführt und das Herz der grossen Götter, meiner Herren, beruhigt hatte, habe ich die Leichen der Leute, die Era ... niedergestreckt hatte und die durch Mangel und Hunger das Leben verloren hatten, die Reste des Frasses der Hunde und der Schweine, welche die Strassen versperrten und die Plätze füllten – ihre Gebeine (habe ich) aus Babel, Kutha und Sippar entfernt und ausserhalb (der Stadtmauern) hingeworfen”; Borger (1996:235).

¹⁶ Another passage in the same vein which is difficult to make sense of is Lam 5:12, where it is said that “princes are hung (תלה; *nip'al*) by (ב) their hands.” See the commentary of Berges (2002:290). Impaling was likewise a popular punishment in the Assyrian empire, especially in the reign of Ashurnasirpal. For examples, cf. Rollinger (2004b:140, fn. 18). For staking as punishment in Egypt, see Renate Müller-Wollermann (2012:149). For the most gruesome act of “hanging someone upside-down”, not attested in Syro-Palestine or Mesopotamia, see Müller (2002:1227).

In other Assyrian texts too the most horrible ways of violating a corpse are encountered. For example, Ashurbanipal's annals report that the corpse of the Babylonian ruler, Nabûbêlšumâti, after being preserved in salt, is transported to Assyria and desecrated in public (Prism A VII 16–50):

Seine Leiche gab ich nicht zur Beerdigung frei, ich machte ihn noch toter als zuvor. Seinen Kopf schlug ich ab und hängte ihn an den Nacken des Nabûqātīšabat, des *simmagir* Šamašsumukīns, des feindlichen Bruders, welcher mit ihm ausgezogen war, um Elam (mit mir) zu verfeinden (Prism A VII 45–50; translation by Borger 1996:243; see also Abusch 2002:233).

The terror and humiliation associated with the fate of non-burial, and the absolute fear such an eventuality evokes, is particularly well expressed in another text. In *The Sin of Sargon* Sennacherib wonders about the wrong his father Sargon could have committed, since he (his father) was slain in enemy country and not buried in a proper manner in his own house. It reports Sennacherib's concern as follows: "While thus [reverently] pondering [in my heart] over the deeds of the gods, the death of Sargon, [my father, who was slain in the enemy country] and who was not interred in his house oc[curred] to my mind ..."¹⁷

The same worry about the denial of burial and the detrimental consequence it could have is also echoed in the Gilgamesh epic (Tablet X11, lines 146–153).¹⁸ This passage recounts a conversation between Gilgamesh and his friend, Enkidu. It concerns the nature of life in the netherworld, especially of those who had not been properly interred. Such fate destines the dead spirit to wander about aimlessly and to be deprived of the indispensable ancestral offerings and care:

'Did you see the one who [died] a natural death?' '[I saw (him).]

He lies drinking clear water on the beds of the [gods].

'Did you see the one who was killed in battle?' '[I saw (him).]

¹⁷ Lines 7²–9²; the translation is by Livingstone (1989:77); see also Fuchs (2009:86, fn. 55).

¹⁸ For the literary connection between this passage and the Sargon episode referred to above, see Frahm (1999).

His father and his mother honour his memory and his wife [weeps] over [(him).]’

‘Did you see the one whose corpse was left lying in the open countryside?’ ‘I saw (him).

His ghost (*eṭemmu*; PAK) does not lie at rest in the Netherworld.’

‘Did you see the one whose ghost has no provider of funerary offerings?’

‘I saw (him).

He eats the scrapings from the pot (and) crusts of bread that are thrown away in the street.’ (Translation by George 2003:735; see also Hauser 2012:18; Maul 2005:42 and Malul 1992:57)

But back to Amos 2:1, where two aspects relating to the dead body are of significance: (1) its burning, and (2) the reference to specific body parts (the bones). “Burning the body” is conceived to be the harshest punishment that could be meted out to war victims, since “burning the body makes it impossible to give the dead person proper burial rites, with the consequence that its ghost cannot go to the netherworld” (Abusch 2002:229).¹⁹ The brutality of burning war victims is most often associated with the Neo-Assyrian king, Assurnasirpal II.²⁰ Compare, for example, the following passage describing the capture of the city of Tēla (A.0.101.1 i 113–ii 1), where the action of “burning” is alluded to several times:

I approached the city of Tēla. The city was well fortified; it was surrounded by three walls. The people put their trust in their strong walls and their large number of troops and did not come down to me (i 115). They did not submit to me. In strife and conflict I besieged (and)

¹⁹ See also Richardson (2007:197, fn. 34): “burning by fire secured not only the physical death of enemies, but also pursued their destruction into the afterlife by making burial impossible”; see also Hauser’s opinion about the burning of the enemy (2012:17–18): “es (war) ... die grösste Strafe die assyrische Könige über aufständische Städte verhängen konnten ...” For burning as punishment of enemies in Egypt, see Leahy, (1984). For a discussion of burning the body, probably as punishment for political rebellion, see Hays (2011:222–232), with special reference to Isa 30:33.

²⁰ For a list of texts recording this brutality, see Abusch (2002:230, fn. 32).

conquered the city. I felled 3,000 of their fighting men with the sword. I carried off prisoners, possessions, oxen, (and) cattle from them. I burnt many captives from them. I captured many troops alive: from some I cut off their arms (and) hands; from others I cut off their noses, ears, (and) *extremities*. I gouged out the eyes of many troops. I made one pile of the living (and) one of heads. I hung their heads on trees around the city (ii 1). I burnt their adolescent boys and girls. I razed, destroyed, burnt, (and) consumed the city (Grayson 1991:201).

The Hebrew Bible reports one such case where during war the bodies of Saul and his sons were burnt by the inhabitants of Jabesh-Gilead and their bones buried afterwards (1 Sam 31:12–13). What is significant about this incident is the fact that the burning was not performed by an enemy army, as was expected. It was Saul’s own men who did it. Accordingly, this deed is most probably to be seen as a “salutary” action (Olyan 2014:20), as a measure “um ihre Leichen einer weiteren Schändung zu entziehen” (Herles 2011:61, fn. 3).²¹ This act by Saul’s men reminds one of another event connected with king Marduk-apla-iddina, who fled before Sennacherib and took along with him “the gods of his whole land, with the bones of his fathers from their tombs” to prevent their bones to be dispersed (Nebi Yunus inscription, OIP 2, 85 Col. VIb: 8–10; Luckenbill, 1924:85; Suriano 2010:66 and Hauser 2012:17).²²

²¹ Cremation was rather the traditional burial practice of Phoenician culture; cf. e.g., Kamlah (2009:289); Bloch-Smith (1992:52); Biénkowski (1982) and Aubet (2010). See also Olyan (1996:215, fn. 45), who explains the reason for the deed committed by the people of Jabesh-Gilead (1 Sam 31) as the condition of the bodies. Bloch-Smith (1992:54, fn. 3), again, speculates that the Gileadites could have been Phoenicians who practised cremation.

²² A similar curse-like wish is evident in a prayer by Ashurbanipal (Prism A II 116–117) addressed to the gods Ashur and Ishtar regarding the Lydian king, Gyges. Ashurbanipal prays: “Vor seinen Feind möge sein Leichnam hingeworfen werden und man möge seine Gebeine wegführen!” Apparently his prayer was instantly answered, because it is reported: “So wie ich Assur angefleht hatte, erfüllte es sich: vor seinen Feind wurde sein Leichnam hingeworfen und man führte seine Gebeine fort” (Prism A II 117–118). The translation is by Borger (1996:219).

Another aspect to make sense of in Amos 2:1 is the explicit reference to “bones”. That this part of the human body is of central cultural and religious importance has already been seen in the examples referred to above. Apart from the Saul account (1 Sam 31:12–13; see also 2 Sam 21:12–14), the Hebrew Bible makes mention of a few other cases, such as the one reported from the time of Josiah (2 Kgs 23:17–18). There it is said that the bones of the deceased are protected, because the person in question was righteous (“a man of God”; v. 17). Regarding his bones the instruction is given: “let no one move (נָע; *hip ‘il*) his bones (v. 18).”²³ This explicit order not to “move” the bones is preceded by a directly opposite treatment of bones, viz. “to take (לָקַח) them from the tombs and burn (שָׂרַף) them” (v. 16). No clue is supplied regarding the origin of the bones in this context or the motivation for burning them (Barrick 2002:173).²⁴

Josiah’s act is reminiscent of a passage elsewhere (Jer 8:1–2) where a similar announcement is made about the desecration of bones of the kings of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, viz., that they “be brought out (צָא; *hip ‘il*) of their tombs” and “be spread out (שָׂטַח) before the sun and the moon and all the host of heaven which they loved and served”. According to Theuer (2000:476, fn. 217) this action has a clear ironic undertone:

Zugleich kommt in der Passage eine deutliche Ironie zum Ausdruck: da die Knochen der Verehrer gerade den Himmelskörpern, die sie verehrt hatten, ausgesetzt wurden, entspricht die Strafe genau ihrem Vergehen, der kultischen Verehrung von Sonne, Mond und Sternen; dabei wird die Vergeblichkeit der Gestirnsverehrung dadurch herausgestellt, dass die Himmelskörper, deren Verehrung das Leben dieser Menschen bestimmte, sich nun nicht um deren Schicksal auf der Erde kümmern.

²³ For a discussion of this passage, see Barrick (2002: 173–181); for a more recent survey, cf. Pietsch (2013:431–442).

²⁴ Olyan (2014:21) suggests: “It is, however, possible that the text assumes that the afterlife of those whose bones are disinterred and abused would be disturbed in one or more ways, and it probably envisions such acts as bringing shame on the surviving community.”

As noted above, the bones of a dead person were of special social-religious importance too in Mesopotamia. The bones were thought of as *materialiter* connected with the *eṭemmu* (“spirit of the dead”). Hence the survival of the *eṭemmu* seems unimaginable without the physical remains, the bones (*eṣmetu*).²⁵ This also explains why special care was taken to preserve the bones of the familial dead, since “it was *eṭemmu* ... from whom aid was requested with prayer and funerary offerings” (Scurlock 1995:1892).²⁶

Apart from the examples in Assyrian sources referred to above, mention could also be made of other cases about disinterred bones and their desecration. An especially gruesome episode is recounted in Prism B VI 97–VII 2, where Ashurbanipal boasts about forcing the sons of Nabûšumēreš, the dead governor of Gambulu (Nippur), to take their father’s bones from his grave, bring them to Nineveh and grind them at the city gate (for public display). The text runs as follows:

... die Gebeine des Nabûšumēreš, die man aus Gambulu nach Assyrien mitgenommen hatte, selbige Gebeine liess ich von seinen Söhnen gegenüber dem Tor des Stadtzentrums von Nineve zermalmen” (Borger 1996:228).²⁷

²⁵ See Selz (2006:87, fn. 6). See also Steinert (2012:301–302): “Nur wenn der Leichnam in der Erde ... bestattet wurde, kann der *eṭemmu* in die Unterwelt aufgenommen werden, den erwünschten Aufenthaltsort der Totengeister.” Or in the words of Scurlock (1995:1892): “... when the body ceased to exist, so did the potentially harmful *eṭemmu* ...” See also Groneberg (1990:250).

²⁶ Along the same lines, cf. the viewpoint of Hockmann, who also stresses the close relationship between the *eṭemmu* and the bones of a person. He claims (2010:14): “Ohne die Knochen hatte der Totengeist keine materielle Verortung im Diesseits und gleichseitig konnten die Lebenden ihren Anspruch auf das Land nicht geltend machen, in denen ihre Ahnen lebten.” See also the summary by Steinert (2012:334), who holds “dass der Zusammenhalt zwischen Leichnam/Knochen und *eṭemmu* deshalb notwendig war, weil er die Versorgung des Toten mit Nahrung ermöglichte und die Ruhe/Zufriedenheit des *eṭemmu* sicherstellte.” In the same vein, see Hauser (2012:19): “Beide Sphären, Grab und Jenseits, Körper und Geist, bleiben aber innig verbunden. Denn eine Störung der Gebeine im Grab, wird offenbar vom Geist im Jenseits registriert.”

²⁷ See also Steinert (2012:333, fn. 138); Abusch (2002:234) and Fuchs (2009:87, fn. 57). For a possible visual depiction of this brutality, see Scene 4 in the Southwest Palace, Room

Just as horrible was what the same king (Ashurbanipal) did with the graves and remains of the Elamite kings who rebelled against Assyria (Prism A VI 70–76//F V 49–54). As in the Gilgamesh epic referred to above, the text explains the miserable consequences of bone violation: (1) such a deed means restlessness for the spirit of the dead; and (2) it implies deprivation of the care by the living, an aspect so essential in keeping the memory of the dead alive:

Die Grabstätten ihrer früheren und späteren Könige, welche Ištar, meine Herrin, nicht fürchteten und die Könige, meine Väter, beunruhigten, verwüstete und zerstörte ich, zeigte sie dem (Sonnengott) Šamaš. Ihre Gebeine nahm ich mit nach Assyrien. Ihren Geistern legte ich Ruhelosigkeit auf. Totenopfer und Wasserspenden versagte ich ihnen (Borger 1996:241; see also Abusch 2002:233).

It is therefore quite understandable why people were so afraid of their tombs being desecrated and their bones being displaced or destroyed. In an attempt to safeguard victims against such an eventuality, curses were often invoked against those who might dare to disturb their interred remains (Hachlili 2005; see also Theis 2014). Several instances of this funerary inscription genre are attested throughout the ancient Near East. As a very fine example one might consider the following tomb inscription of Queen Yaba of Nimrud, the wife of Tiglath-Pileser III (c.744–727 BCE):

XXXIII, of Ashurbanipal in Nineveh (Kaelin 1999:14–15, 59). Cf. in the same manner a curse in *Esarhaddon's succession treaty* (Par 47, Line 445f.), where the source of this extreme form of violence is not the enemy, as might be expected, but as in the case of the dead governor of Nippur referred to above, members of his own household: “instead of grain may your sons and your daughters grind your bones ...”; the translation is by Parpola and Watanabe (1988:46). Another parallel is a threat in the curse section of a Hittite oath military officers had to swear: “Wie man diese Bierwürze mit dem Mahlstein zermahlt und sie mit Wasser vermischt, kocht und zerquetscht, so sollen den, der diese Eide übertritt und dem König, der Königin, den Söhnen des Königs und dem Land Hatti Böses zufügt, diese Eide ergreifen und seine Knochen ebenso zermahlen und ihn ebenso schmoren und ebenso zerquetschen, und es soll auf ein schlimmes Ende hinauslaufen!” (Vs. II: 21–28; Oettinger 1976:11).

Wer (immer) künftig – sei es eine Königin, oder Konkubinen, Geliebte des Königs, die mich von meinem Grab entfernen will, oder wer jemand anderes darin begraben will, oder wer seine Hände nach meinem Schmuck ausstreckt mit niederen Beweggründen, wer das Siegel des Grabes öffnet: Oben im Sonnenlicht soll sein Totengeist durstig durch die Aussenbezirke laufen. Unter in der Unterwelt soll er beim Wasserspenden erstklassiges Bier, Wein und *upuntu*-Mehl ... nicht erhalten ... Die grossen Götter der Unterwelt mögen ihm als *ziqīqu*-Geist Ruhelosigkeit auferlegen für alle Zeit (Hauser 2008:147).

CONCLUSION

Against this backdrop we may now return to the announcement of the bone burning in Amos 2:1. In view of the evidence presented from a number of ancient Near Eastern contexts, it is possible to gain a more precise sense of the severity of the act described. What the Moabites are accused of towards the Edomites is much more serious than might at first meet the eye. “Burning the bones” (and one may assume that it happened in the case of Amos 2:1 after the bones had been disinterred) spells the complete annihilation of the memory of a dead person. A relationship between the living and the spirit of the one already dead is thus no longer possible. Add to this the fact that it is not the bones of an ordinary person that are at stake, but those of the king (“the king of Edom” – Amos 2:1), who plays such a pivotal role in the religious worldview of ancient Near Eastern societies. In the words of Stavrakopoulou, such a deed “(particularly among the elites of a society) can often represent a strike against the political fabric of the living community” (Stavrakopoulou 2010a:82).

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