

Jehoiakim's So-called "Donkey Burial" (Jer 22:19): More Observations on This Puzzling Passage

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Abstract

A variety of suggestions have been advanced to unravel the obscure picture of a "donkey burial" in Jer 22:19, such as taking it as (1) representative of the broad category of a "non-burial", (2) regarding the image as a metaphor signifying the bestial way Jehoiakim's dead body will be treated, (3) explaining the pronouncement in Jer 22:19 as an example of the disgraceful manner in which a corpse could be dealt with during a siege when circumstances hardly permit any other way of interment, or (4) deeming what was prophesied about Jehoiakim's corpse as an example of grave desecration. The purpose of this contribution is not to offer another solution, but to illustrate that, apart from the specific reference to "an ass's burial", all the other motifs associated with this image in Jer 22:19 draw on a common ancient Near Eastern literary repertoire, as is especially attested in curse catalogues and royal inscriptions.

Keywords: symbolic inversion; mourning rituals; non-burial; corpse abuse

Introduction¹

18. Therefore thus says the Lord concerning Jehoiakim, the son of Josiah, king of Judah:

‘They shall not mourn (תֵּדוּ, *qal*) for him,

“Ah (׳יָהּ), my brother”! or “Ah (׳יָהּ), sister!”²

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 - 2 The MT phrases “Ah, sister” and “Ah, his majesty” (at the end of v. 18) are not attested in the LXX. However, Jahnou (1923, 86) holds that there is no need to doubt the authenticity of the designation

They shall not mourn (פָּד, *qal*) for him,

“Ah, lord”! or “Ah, his majesty”!

19. With the burial of a donkey (קְבֹרַת הַמֹּרֶק) he shall be buried (קָבַד, *niph'al*),

drawn (צָרַד, *qal* inf. abs.) and cast forth (הִפִּיל, *hiph'il* inf. abs.)³

beyond the gates of Jerusalem.’

Thus runs the prophecy against Jehoiakim and the fate foreseen for his physical remains after death. But how should the reference to the “burial of a donkey” (v. 19) be interpreted and in what way does this image relate to the immediately preceding (the absence of mourning rituals upon a death, v. 18) and subsequent pronouncements (the afterlife of the dead body, v. 19)? The mystery surrounding Jehoiakim’s death has, amongst other things, already been a topic of discussion in two previous articles for this journal (Smit 1994; Begg 1996). Begg’s contribution is an excellent example of the history of exegesis on this prophetic proclamation in Josephan, rabbinic, and patristic traditions, whilst Smit surveys the treatment of the same episode from an inner-biblical point of view. My aim is to extend the interpretative horizon regarding this declaration further by also bringing into play relevant ancient Near Eastern evidence, especially data from curse catalogues and royal inscriptions.

In the context of the Hebrew Bible, notices on the death of a given person usually start off by announcing the passing away of that individual, followed by an allusion to the mourning process and appropriate rituals to guarantee a decent burial at a specific location. Compare, for example, the death announcement of Samuel (1 Sam 25:1):

Samuel died and the whole Israel assembled and *mourned* (פָּד, *qal*) for him. They *buried* (קָבַד, *qal*) him in his house at Ramah.

Or the death and burial notice of the man of God (1 Kgs 13:29-30), which is a bit more extensive, containing some extra details regarding the process:

The prophet picked up the corpse of the man of God, laid it on the donkey and brought it back to the city of the old prophet to *mourn* (פָּד, *qal*) and to *bury* (קָבַד, *qal*) him. He put his body *in his own grave*, they *mourned* (פָּד, *qal*) over him: ‘Ah (וַיִּי), my brother (אָחִי)!’

“Ah, sister” in combination with “Ah, my brother”, since “Weh-Bruder-und-weh-Schwester-klagen” klingt im Hebräischen wie eine feststehende Wendung.”

3 I sincerely thank Tamar Zewi (University of Haifa), who assisted me in translating the two absolute infinitives.

Jehoiakim's death announcement is clearly the direct opposite of such an appropriate burial practice: *no* mourning, *no* sign of the customary cry of woe (יָהִי), *but* the subjection of the corpse to the “burial of an ass”, which implies to be “dragged off” and be “cast forth” “beyond the gates of Jerusalem” (Jer 22:19).

Different Versions of Jehoiakim's Death

Attempts to make sense of this obscure allusion to Jehoiakim's “donkey burial” are hampered by the fact that there are different versions of the circumstances surrounding his death. Besides Jer 22:19, Jer 36:30 is another prophetic text also reporting on the fate of Jehoiakim's dead body (נבלה). It announces: “And his dead body will be cast out (חָלַץ, *hoph'al*) to the heat by day and the frost by night.” Two things are significant in this pronouncement: (1) like Jer 22:19, it uses a similar term concerning the fate of Jehoiakim's body: it is “cast out” (חָלַץ, *hoph'al*); and (2), as in Jer 22:19, it reveals something about the exposure of the dead body: it is to be cast out “to the heat by day and the frost by night”.⁴ The sequence “heat and frost” occurs only once more elsewhere (Gen 31:40) and it most probably suggests “to be exposed to extreme weather conditions”.

Besides the mentioned two prophetic texts, other narrative texts (e.g., Deuteronomistic and Chronistic sources), as well as later retellings (like that of Josephus) also present varying aspects of Jehoiakim's death and the events associated with it.

The Deuteronomistic Version (2 Kgs 24:1–6)

Although the political events prior to Jehoiakim's death are elaborated on (the attack of Nebuchadnezzar on Jerusalem, Jehoiakim's servitude and rebellion, v. 1; the raiding of Chaldean, Aramaic, Moabite and Ammonite bands, v. 2), nothing is said about his death or his place of burial.⁵ The usual stereotypical formula “And the rest of the deeds of Jehoiakim and all that he accomplished, are they not written in the scroll with the records of the kings of Judah?” (2 Kgs 24:5) is succeeded by a concise reference to Jehoiakim's death and the identification of his successor: “And Jehoiakim lay down (שָׁכַב) with his fathers⁶ and Jehoiachin, his son, reigned in his place” (2 Kgs 24:6). In line with various instances in Deuteronomistic and Chronistic royal records, one would have expected that the death notice “lay down with the fathers” (2 Kgs 24:6) be followed by a reference to the burial ceremony and an indication of the site of the king's burial place (קבר),

4 For the dependence of Jer 36:30 on Jer 22:18–19, see Schmid (2015, 66).

5 Höffken speculates that Jehoiakim died during this siege (2005, 204, fn. 29). Lipschits (2002, 2), on the other hand, maintains that “he died a natural death even before the Babylonian army reached Jerusalem and that he was buried in his forefathers' burial tomb”.

6 The phrase “to lie down (שָׁכַב) with the fathers” is most probably to be associated with “kings whose deaths were peaceful or natural and who were succeeded by their sons” (Thomas 2014, 102). For other treatments of this expression, see also Wenning (2006) and Steuernagel and Schulze (2008).

qal/niph'al, plus exact location: “in [ב]”). Examples of this pattern “lay down with the fathers” followed by the phrase “and he was buried in” abound (e.g., 1 Kgs 11:43; 1 Kgs 14:31; 1 Kgs 15:8; 1 Kgs 15:24; 2 Kgs 8:24; 2 Kgs 10:35; 2 Kgs 13:9; 2 Chr 9:31; 2 Chr 12:16; 2 Chr 13:23; 2 Chr 21:1, and elsewhere).⁷ It appears, however, that, in the case of Jehoiakim, this latter element (locus of burial place) is for some (ideological?) reason suppressed by the Deuteronomistic author. It is interesting to note that LXX L 2 Kgs 24:6 (like LXX BL 2 Chr 36:8) adds a specific location: “in the garden of Oza (Uzzah)”.⁸ This “extra” detail may be explained as a way “to compound his (Jehoiakim’s: PAK) villainous biblical character” (Stavrakopoulou 2006, 3) in line with the reprobates Manasseh and Amon, about whom similar announcements are made (2 Kgs 21:18 and 2 Kgs 21:26, respectively).

The Chronistic Version (2 Chr 36:5–8)

The Chronist is very brief in his report on Jehoiakim’s reign (2 Chr 36:5–8). Whilst 2 Kgs 24:6 reports that Jehoiakim “lay down (שכב) with his fathers”, 2 Chr 36 gives the impression that he was taken into exile to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar and that he remained there for the rest of his life (Japhet 2003, 502).⁹ No information, however, is provided about his death. About his fate the text just reports in a concise statement: “Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came up against him, bound him in bronze chains to take him to Babylon” (v. 6).¹⁰ “Binding in chains” was a well-known strategy in ancient Near Eastern war tactics. Compare, for example, what Sargon II did to the Hittites:

Tarḫunazi, ihrem Herrscher, desgleichen seinen Kämpfern legte ich in eiserne Fesseln an und brachte seine Frau, seine Söhne (und) seine Töchter zusammen mit 5000 Gefangenen von seinen Kriegern in meine Stadt Assur.¹¹

Captive king Ašuḫli, too, suffered the same fate at the hands of Esarhaddon. His lot was, however, even worse, because besides being bound in chains (in a public sphere, the city gate), he also had to face the humiliation of appearing in the company of vicious and filthy animals (Zawadzki 2014, 771). The text runs:

7 See also the paragraph “The Death and Burial Notices” in Thomas (2014, 102–213).

8 Begg and Spilsbury (2005, 238); Suriano (2010, 94).

9 “Demnach sind die beiden Berichte, 2 Kön 24, 1–6 und 2 Chr 36, 5–8 also nicht komplementär, sondern geben zwei grundsätzlich verschiedene Vorstellungen von Jojakims Schicksal wieder” (Japhet 2003, 502).

10 Another text reporting briefly on Jehoiakim’s destiny is Dan 1:1–2 and again nothing is said of his death: “In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah in his hand, along with some of the vessels of the house of God.” For the dependence of this pronouncement on 2 Chr 36:6ff., see Koch (2005, 27–31).

11 The Annals: Lines 211–213; Fuchs (1994, 324).

Arzâ, das längs des ‘Baches von Ägypten’ gelegen ist, plünderte ich; seinen König Asuhili schlug ich in Fesseln und führte ihn nach Assyrien. Neben einem Tore im Mittelpunkt von Ninive liess ich sie mit einem Bären, einem Hunde und einem Schweine gebunden dasitzen.¹²

Josephus’ Version

In his retelling of the history of the Bible (*Ant.* 1–11), Josephus describes the end of Jehoiakim in *Ant.* 10:96–97. In his understanding of the events, the misfortune befalling Jehoiakim’s corpse is seen as the fulfilment of the prophetic predictions in Jer 22:19/36:30.¹³ Josephus, though, also presents extra information not attested in the MT, namely that (1) Nebuchadnezzar was not a reliable treaty partner in the siege of Jerusalem (*Ant.* 10:96), and (2) that during this encounter it was actually Nebuchadnezzar who gave the instruction that Jehoiakim be killed and his dead body be cast before the walls (*Ant.* 10:97; Begg 1996, 14). In MT Jer 22:19/36:30, however, the identity of the agent behind the violent actions committed against the dead body of Jehoiakim is not revealed. Josephus’ presentation of what happened reads as follows:

96. When, not long afterwards, the king of the Babylonians campaigned against him, Joakeim, in his fright at the things predicted by this prophet, admitted him. [He did this], thinking that he would suffer nothing terrible, seeing that he was neither shutting out nor making war on [the invader]. 97. But when he set out to him, the Babylonian did not keep his pledges. Rather, he killed those of the Hierosolymites who were most fit and outstandingly handsome, along with King Joakeim, *whom he commanded to be tossed out unburied in front of the walls* (Begg and Spilsbury 2005, 238; my emphasis).¹⁴

Understandably, the mystery of Jehoiakim’s end and how the meaning of the specific allusion to his “donkey burial” is to be interpreted still intrigues scholars. Solutions advanced are, for example, the following: (1) to take the reference as expressive of the broad category of a “non-burial”;¹⁵ (2) to view the expression as a metaphor, in other words, the handling of Jehoiakim’s dead body is to be equated with the dishonourable

12 For more examples of this public humiliation of war victims, see May (2014, 100–104).

13 Begg and Spilsbury (2005, 238); see also Höffken (2005, 204).

14 The Haggadic version (containing legends from the Mishnah, Talmud, and Midrash) is even more imaginative, attempting to reconcile the contradictory traditions in 2 Kgs 24:6, 2 Chr 36:6, and Jer 22:19: “Nebuchadnezzar took Jehoiakim in fetters to all the cities of Judah, then he slew him, and, his rage still unabated, threw his corpse to the dogs after having stuck it into the carcass of an ass” (Ginzberg 1954, 285).

15 This is a solution already suggested in the Middle Ages by David Kimchi (d. 1235; see Schur 2008, 63) and still supported in later times, for example, by Scholz (1880, 259), Holladay (1986, 598), and more recently Way (2011, 195). Along the same lines, others explain the image as illustrative of the literary device oxymoron, like Watson (1984, 313): “In other words, he (Jehoiakim: PAK) won’t even be buried ... The expression ‘a donkey’s funeral’ ... is oxymoron, since the two words are contradictory.” See also Lundbom (2004, 144): “The expression here is oxymoronic ... for as the verse goes on to state, dead asses receive no burial.”

way the carcass of a dead ass is dealt with;¹⁶ (3) to explain the pronouncement as an example of how corpses are treated when the circumstances of war/siege allow no other option;¹⁷ and (4) to regard the declaration as an instance of the desecration of graves.¹⁸

It is, however, not my objective in this contribution to opt for one of these proposals, or to add yet another one. The aim is rather to present a few more additional observations that may assist in gaining a better understanding of this problematic passage. What I hope to illustrate is that by taking recourse to literary strategies and motifs especially attested in ancient Near Eastern curse catalogues and in royal annals, one may be in a better position to gain a clearer comprehension of the context and importance of the image. The following facets of the “ritual constellation”¹⁹ in Jer 22:18–19 will be elaborated on: (1) the refusal of fitting mourning rituals (v. 18); (2) the denial of burial (v. 19a); (3) the dishonourable treatment of the corpse (v. 19b); and (4) the disposal of the dead body beyond the city gate (v. 19c). As a point of departure, I will illustrate that the curses contained in Jer 22:18–19 are presented in terms of the well-known ancient Near Eastern literary pattern of symbolic inversion: proper and fitting expectations in case of death and burial are inverted and replaced by rituals directly violating the accepted norms. Accordingly, it appears that the image of a “donkey burial” could hardly be employed to reconstruct a possible historical reality, as is sometimes proposed. It is more likely that the image serves a rhetorical purpose, namely to exemplify the dreadful consequences meted out to a transgressor (in this case, Jehoiakim) who fails to adhere to conduct expected of kings.

The Refusal of Suitable Mourning Rituals and the Notion of a *Mundus Inversus*

As noted, the first aspect of importance in understanding the “ritual constellation” in Jer 22:18–19 is the fact that it is cast in terms of a literary *topos* often attested in ancient

16 “Das >Eselsbegräbnis< deutet auf eine Behandlung des Leichnams des Königs wie den eines Tieres hin” (Fischer 2005, 664); see also earlier Weiser (1981, 191). In the same vein, see Olyan’s recent suggestion (2014) which regards Jehoiakim’s disgraceful interment as “a ritual act of reclassification”.

17 See, for example, Seitz (1989, 117), who connects the pronouncement with the occupation of Jerusalem (598/7 B.C.E.). Because of the siege, “there will be the kind of hurried burial normally reserved for animals. His (Jehoiakim’s: PAK) body will have to be hauled out beyond the city walls, with actual interment left to others. It is a burial reserved for one caught up in a military disaster ...”

18 Cf. Rudolph (1968, 141); see also earlier Giesebrecht (1907, 124) who speculates: “Möglich, dass wirklich ein ordentliches Begräbnis des Jojak. stattfand, aber später, bei der Eroberung sei es unter Jojachin, sei es unter Sedekia eine Schändung der Grabstätte des Königs seitens der Chaldäer erfolgte.” The post-mortem abuse of someone’s remains (especially the bones) is a well-known phenomenon in Assyrian royal inscriptions; for examples, see Kruger (2017). However, this possibility is ruled out here (Jer 22:19), since if this was the case, the text would have been more explicit about it (Holladay 1986, 598).

19 For this designation, see Olyan (2017).

Near Eastern literary genres, namely that of symbolic inversion (*mundus inversus*).²⁰ The anthropologist Babcock characterises this literary stratagem as follows: “‘Symbolic inversion’ may be broadly defined as any act of expressive behaviour which inverts, contradicts, abrogates, or in some fashion presents an alternative to commonly held cultural codes, values, and norms, be they linguistic, literary or artistic, religious, or social and political” (Babcock 1978, 1). In other words, symbolic inversion refers to a cultural code of conduct that overturns behaviour that is customary or normative in a given context. This literary device is employed for different literary, religious, and socio-political means, of which the most efficacious application may be the representation of a world where existing power relationships are inverted, a place where “die Ersten werden die Letzten sein”.²¹ This is exactly how Jehoiakim’s predicament is portrayed: everything befalling his corpse is a violation of what is normative in that given (royal) context, namely (1) the denial of mourning rites versus proper adherence to what is normal in those circumstances; (2) shameful treatment of the corpse *vis-à-vis* the proper respect one would have expected in that specific (royal) context; and (3) disposal of the body in an outside domain (“beyond the gates of Jerusalem”), versus proper interment of the body within the fold of the community.

Concerning the denial of the observance of the customary mourning rituals (Jer 22:18): as in the case of 1 Kgs 13:29 referred to above, the rule in this respect would have been the performance of suitable mourning rituals (טפד, *qal*), accompanied by the traditional funeral expression of woe, “Ah (הוי) lord/majesty.” Jehoiakim’s predicted plight is clearly the direct inverse of the anticipated norm of conduct: *no* mourning rituals (טפד לא) and *no* funeral cry (הוי לא).²² This inverted pattern is also elsewhere popular in the Book of Jeremiah:

They shall die of deadly diseases. They shall *not be lamented, neither shall they be buried*. They shall be as dung upon the surface of the ground. (Jer 16:4)

20 For examples from a wide array of ancient Near Eastern literary genres in which this literary feature is represented, see Kruger (2009).

21 The title of the earliest contribution that deals with the existence of this phenomenon in ancient Near Eastern literature (Luria 1929).

22 Although Foreman (2011) does not use the label “symbolic inversion” in the understanding of Jehoiakim’s plight, his explanation is in line with it. He claims: “Initially, the expression may not appear to be metaphorical. If the oracle simply said that the king would be buried just as a donkey is buried, the comparison would be a literal one, and thus not metaphorical. However, the second half of the verse makes it clear that the king will actually *not* be buried (a conceptual anomaly: his burial will be a non-burial), but will be dragged out beyond the gates of Jerusalem. Additionally, the assertion that none shall lament Jehoiakim’s death (v. 18) is part of the explanation of what is meant by ‘he shall receive the burial of a donkey’ (v. 19). Thus, what is in view is more than simply the *manner* in which a donkey is interred” (Foreman 2011, 111, fn 15).

Both the great and the small shall die in this land: they shall *not be buried, they shall not be mourned*. (Jer 16:6)

Those slain by the Lord shall be at that day from one end of the earth unto the other: *they shall not be lamented, neither gathered, nor buried*. They shall be as dung upon surface of the ground. (Jer 25:33)

Denial of a Proper Burial

The second part of this ritual constellation (“with the burial of an ass קבורת [המור] he shall be buried”, Jer 22:19a) touches on the dilemma of the body after death if it is not interred in the correct ceremonial manner. In order to grasp the gravity of what is predicted here, I will link up with the following summary by Kühn (2009, 484–485) in order to make some remarks on what the lack of a proper burial fundamentally implied in the ancient Near Eastern world in general and for the scenario in Jer 22:19 in particular:

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.

Different aspects are of importance in this summary: (1) the fact that a person could for some or other reason be punished and denied an appropriate burial; (2) the reality that the corpse or its remains (the bones) could be posthumously abused; and (3) the consequences attached to the fate of non-burial.

The curse pertaining to the denial of burial is a pervasive theme in a variety of ancient Near Eastern literary genres: legal codes,²³ wisdom,²⁴ witchcraft series Maqlû,²⁵ epic

23 A woman who inflicts an abortion on her foetus, is, for example, threatened with the following punishment (Middle Assyrian Laws [KAV 1 VII 91–97]): “If a woman on her own accord drops that which is in her ... they shall impale her and leave her unburied” (Westenholz 1970, 30).

24 Compare a threat in a Sumerian wisdom proverb that reads, “A man who does not worship his god is thrown into the desert, his body is not buried, his son does not provide his ghost with drinking water through his libation pipe” (Alster 1997, 316); see also Mansen (2015, 70).

25 In the Maqlû incantations and rituals the evil magic of the witch was counteracted by not burying her, allowing fire and/or animals to destroy her corpse (Abusch 2015, 4).

literature (Gilgamesh),²⁶ laments (Ps 79:2–3),²⁷ etc. It is, however, especially in ancient Near Eastern curse catalogues where this threat is especially pertinent. The following examples are cases in point:

They shall not be lamented, neither shall they be buried. They shall be as dung upon the surface of the ground. (Jer 16:4)

Die Erde möge eure Leichen nicht aufnehmen, im Bauch der Hunde und der Schweine möge eure *Grabstätte* sein.²⁸

Similarly, compare the curse formula directed at the culprits who dared to disturb the graves of two high officials in the time of Ashurbanipal, Balṭaya and Nabû-šarru-ušur:

May the dogs tear apart his corpse as it lies unburied.²⁹

A similar curse-like wish is exhibited 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! (Borger 1996, 219)³⁰

The predicament of a non-burial is likewise often found in curses on Babylonian *kudurrus* (boundary stones). Three aspects are of significance in these pronouncements in case the stipulations of the contract are not carried out: (1) that the corpse of the transgressor will not receive a proper burial; (2) that the corpse will be treated disgracefully (like the body of Jehoiakim in Jer 22:19); and (3) the disastrous consequences the destiny of non-burial will have in the afterlife. Compare the following

26 Enkidu, for instance, saw in the netherworld the juxtaposition of the honoured versus the abandoned dead (those left unburied): “‘Did you see the one who was killed in battle?’ ‘[I saw (him).] His father and his mother honour his memory and his wife [weeps] over [(him)].’ ‘Did you see the one who whose corpse was left lying in the open countryside?’ ‘I saw (him). His ghost (*etemmu*; PAK) does not lie at rest in the Netherworld’” (Tablet X11, lines 148–151; translation by George 2003, 735).

27 “They have given the corpses of your servants to the birds of the sky for food, the flesh of your faithful followers to the beasts of the earth. They have poured out their blood like water around Jerusalem and there is no one to bury (בָּרַק, *qal*) them” (Ps 79:2–3).

28 This threat comes from *The Vassal Treaties of Esarhaddon*, Par 56:483–484; the translation is by Borger (1982, 172).

29 Texts K 211r:31 and K 2729r:31, respectively. For the translation, cf. Kataja and Whiting (1995, 26, 28); for other similar examples, see Peterson (2012, 244–247).

30 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; Borger 1996, 219).

examples with regard to the categories (1–3) listed. Regarding (1), compare the following curse:

Sein Leichnam soll hinfallen, einen, der ihn begräbt, soll er nicht bekommen. (NAI 3: Rs.VI52–55; see Paulus 2013, 657)

Category (2) is represented by the following threat:

Marduk, der grosse Herr, ... soll ihn [b]öse anblicken ... und seinen Leichnam hinwerfen. (U 32: I'1'–I'3'; Paulus 2013, 827)

Concerning (3), see the following curse:

Sein Leichnam soll nicht in der Erde begraben werden, [sein Totengeist] soll nicht bei den Totengeistern seiner Familie ankommen. (MAI I 1:VI21–22; Paulus 2013:435)³¹

Abuse of the Corpse

The reference to a “donkey burial” in Jer 22:19 is followed by a description of corpse violation. Jehoiakim’s dead body is to be subjected to two rude actions: “It will be drawn (סָחַב, *qal* inf. abs.) and cast forth (לָשַׁל, *hiph‘il* inf. abs.)” Concerning this abusive handling of a dead body, a distinction should be drawn between two sub-categories of “non-burial”, namely “non-burial” in the sense of the “abandonment of the corpse” and “anti-burial” as a “violation of the corpse and/or exposure of its remains”.³² With respect to the former (“non-burial in the sense of abandonment of the corpse”), the Hebrew Bible abounds with instances of this type of bodily mistreatment, of which the most prominent stereotypical phrases may be: “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, etc.), or “to be devoured by dogs” (1 Kgs 14:11; 1 Kgs 16:4; 1 Kgs 21:19, 23–24; 2 Kgs 9:36, etc.).

The label “anti-burial” (“violation of the corpse and/or exposure of the remains”), on the other hand, is not merely a decision of non-interment or desertion of the corpse, but a deliberate choice to posthumously violate the dead body or its remains (the bones).³³ From time immemorial “the symbolic dimensions of violence and killing did not end

31 In like manner, compare also the fate of the graves and remains of the Elamite kings who rebelled against Assyria in the time of Ashurbanipal (Prism A VI 70–76//F V 49–54) and the afterlife consequences that such deeds could have for those affected: “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).

32 For the categorisations “non-burial” versus “anti-burial”, see Hays (2011, 161).

33 In the classical world the technical description *poena post mortem* (“punishment after death”) is used. For examples, see Varner (2001).

with death” (Kyle 1998, 13). The manner in which corpses were treated “remained one of the means by which men could hurt, humiliate or honour one another, express contempt or respect” (Parker 1983, 46). In the ancient Near East these actions could take on different forms, such as attacks on the eyes, nose, mouth, ears,³⁴ but it could even be more severe like maltreating the bodily remains of the deceased, the bones (Kruger 2017). All these manifestations of violence contain some element of discontent with the victim’s behaviour.

But back to Jer 22:19, where two terms are employed to portray the post-mortem defilement of Jehoiakim’s dead body: it “is dragged off (סָחַב, *qal* inf. abs.) and cast (שָׁלַח, *hiph’al* inf. abs.)” beyond the gates of Jerusalem. Both these actions are also elsewhere associated with corpse defilement. In Jer 15:3, dogs are specified as the subjects of the act of “dragging off (סָחַב)” the dead body.³⁵ It is, however, especially the second term (שָׁלַח, *hiph’al/hoph’al*) which is frequently employed to signal the post-mortem disrespectful dumping of a corpse in an unfavourable location. The following may be cited as cases in point:

He (Joshua: PAK) hung the king of Ai on a tree until evening. At sunset Joshua demanded that his corpse be taken down from the tree. They cast (שָׁלַח, *hiph’al*) it at the entrance of the city gate ... (Josh 8:29; see also Josh 10:27)

They took Absalom and cast (שָׁלַח, *hiph’al*) him into a large pit in the forest. (2 Sam 18:17)

He (Jehu: PAK) said to Bidkar, his officer: ‘Take him (Joram: PAK) up and cast (שָׁלַח, *hiph’al*) him on the portion of ground of Nabot, the Jezreelite.’ (2 Kgs 9:25)

All the kings of the nations, all of them lie in splendour,
each one in his own tomb (lit.: בית; “house”).

But you are cast away (שָׁלַח, *hoph’al*) from your grave,
like a loathed shoot ... (Isa 14:18–19)³⁶

The people to whom they are prophesying will be cast (שָׁלַח, *hoph’al*) in the streets of Jerusalem because of famine and the sword and there will be no one to bury them. (Jer 14:16)

34 For different examples of the dishonourable treatment of the corpse, see Gass (2013), who gathers examples of skinning, impalement, decapitation, blinding, separation of body parts, etc., especially from Assyrian royal inscriptions. For impalement as an extreme form of public punishment, see Radner (2015).

35 For dogs as devourers of corpses in the ancient Near East, see Heimpel (1975, 495).

36 According to Olyan (2006), this scene suggests that the tyrant was indeed buried, but that his dead body was then exhumed and exposed. For a similar explanation, see Schöpflin (2002, 310). More preferable, however, is De Jong’s suggestion (2007, 141) that this is not a case of disinterment, but of corpse violation and defilement.

They took Uriah from Egypt and brought him to king Jehoiakim. He struck him down with the sword and *cast* (גלש, *hiph 'il*) his dead body into the graves of the common people. (Jer 26:23)

There are many dead bodies – they are *cast* (גלש, *hiph 'il*) everywhere. (Amos 8:3)

In view of these examples, it is obvious that the act of “casting”/“dumping” (גלש, *hiph 'il/hoph 'al*) a dead body into an undesirable place does not signify a detached deed. On the contrary, the action points to definite negative connotations, symbolising “the abandonment of an item with which one can or does not want to deal” (Cogan 1968, 133).³⁷

Dishonourable conduct in dealing with corpses, like the cases mentioned in the Hebrew Bible, is also known from Assyrian royal inscriptions. One such example, reminiscent of the way that Jehoiakim’s body is handled (Jer 22:19), is reported in the inscriptions of Ashurbanipal. This specific passage (Prism B III 82–85) relates to the Mannean king Aḫšēri, who opposed Ashurbanipal’s rule. The particulars of Aḫšēri’s death are not mentioned; the passage just recounts that his death was a divine action in the form of a rebellion by his people and what finally happened with his corpse (Price 2015, 238–239):

Den Aḫšēri, der meine Herrschaft nicht fürchtete, überantworteten Assur und Ištar den Händen seiner Diener. Die Leute seines Landes zettelten einen Aufruhr gegen ihn an. *Auf die Strasse seiner Stadt warfen sie seine Leiche.* (Emphasis is mine; translation is by Borger 1996, 221)³⁸

A related example of corpse violation is likewise encountered in *The Vassal Treaties of Esarhaddon*. We know that what is stipulated in the curse catalogues is most often a mirror reflection of what happened in real life (Kruger 2010). In this regard, compare the kind of corpse abuse a potential transgressor has to reckon with when violating treaty stipulations:

... eurer jungen Frauen und ... eurer jungen Männer mögen vor euren Augen Hunde und Schweine auf den Plätzen von Assur hin und herschleifen. (Par 56:481–483; translation is by Borger 1982, 172)³⁹

37 See also the discussion by Malul (1990, 100–106) on the semantics of the root גלש.

38 A similar episode is recounted about a certain Kudurru in Letter 469 during the reign of Sîn-šarru-iškun: “Als [wir ...], haben wir den [L]eichnam von Kudurru durch die Strassen geze[r]t und seine Söhne aus Uruk vertrieben” (Jursa 2007, 127).

39 Parpola and Watanabe (1988, 49) have a slightly different translation: “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.”

Something similar is found in the description of Achilles' mutilation of Hector's body in the Iliad of Homer (Book 22:396–398):

Denn er durchbohrte ihm hinten an beiden Füßen und Sehnen
Zwischen Knöchel und Ferse, durchzog sie mit Rindsleder-Riemen,
Band am Wagen sie fest und liess den Kopf dabei schleifen.
(Lampe 1979, 466; see also Zimmermann 2015, 6–7)

Mention was made above of the disrespectful way the physical remains, the bones, were treated. A related episode is depicted in Cambyses' sacrilegious handling of Amasis' mummy, on which Herodotus (3.16) reports as follows:

Danach ließ er ihn schlagen, ihm die Haare ausreißen, ihn mit Stacheln durchbohren und auf jede erdenkliche Art misshandeln. Man schlug die Leiche bis zur Ermüdung; sie war einbalsamiert und hielt es aus ohne zu zerfallen. (...) Dann befahl Kambyses, sie zu verbrennen. (Zimmermann 2015, 10)

Disposal of the Dead Body Beyond the City Gate

The final part of Jer 22:19 goes on to describe the last destination of Jehoiakim's desecrated corpse: "beyond the gates of Jerusalem". One of the greatest worries in the ancient Near East was that the body or its remains would end up in a locality away from home. Compare in this respect the concern of Sennacherib in the text *The Sin of Sargon* about the wrong his father (Sargon) could have committed, since his father was slain in an enemy country and not buried in a proper manner in his own house. Sennacherib's fear is reported 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 house⁴⁰ oc[curred] to my mind ..." (Lines 7'–9'; the translation is by Livingstone 1989, 77)

According to royal tradition, the burial place of the Judean kings was in Jerusalem (Wenning 1997, 92–93; Wright 1987, 118).⁴¹ If the announcement is then made that Jehoiakim's corpse will end up "outside the gates of Jerusalem" (Jer 22:19), is this a type of a "Gegenbild" to label him as a bad/illegitimate ruler? This notice is to be compared with the burial announcement of the Babylonian "usurper" King Ea-mukin-

40 The grave was seen as the contact point between the living and the dead. If there is no grave, this essentially means the destruction of identity and the loss of connection with the ancestors and the living. See, for example, Hauser (2012, 17): "Das Grab, in das die Toten während der Bestattungsriten gelegt wurden, war demnach der Ort, an dem der Kontakt zu den Tötegeistern der Ahnen hergestellt wurde."

41 For a selection of texts illustrating this custom, see Kamlah (2009, 285, fn. 104).

zeri, who ruled for only three months. His burial was actually a “non-burial”, or a burial not suitable for royalty. The chronicle reports: “Ea-mukin-zeri, the usurper, son of Hashmar, ruled for three months. He was buried in the swamp of Bit-Hashmar” (Chronicle 18: 5–6; Grayson 1975, 143). Since kings were buried in palaces, “a swamp is certainly an ignominious place for anyone to be buried” (Grayson 1975, 41).⁴²

Besides the disgrace of a king having to be interred in “an outside domain”, there may likewise be an extra symbolic dimension attached to this predicament, namely “to be thrown outside the city wall” constitutes in reality “to be deemed rubbish”.⁴³ We know that garbage dumps would ideally be located in a desolate part of a town or city or outside it. Jeremiah (19:2) is, for example, instructed to “go out to the valley of Ben-Hinnom, which is at the entrance of the Potsherd Gate (שַׁעַר הַהַרְסוֹת)”. The designation “Potsherd Gate” may signify that potters whose workshops were in the vicinity of this Jerusalem gate dumped their broken vessels/trash outside the city.⁴⁴

Compare, similarly, a Mesopotamian medical text where the refuse dump (*tubkinnu*) is likewise paired with an uncultivated, uninhabited field (*nidûtu*): “he (the demon) seized him in an abandoned field or a refuse dump” (Greenfield and Shafer 1983, 125).⁴⁵ In the same manner one may speculate that the discarding of the human remains of Babylonian rebels outside the city walls in the time of Ashurbanipal may in fact suggest that they were by the same token deemed as waste, unworthy of burial. Prism A IV 77–85 reports:

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* (my emphasis; the translation is by Borger 1996, 235).⁴⁶

42 See, however, the criticism Beaulieu (1988) has of this explanation.

43 For examples of the disposal of human remains like rubbish in the classical world, see Lindenlauf (2001).

44 See Thompson (1980, 448). For the identification of the Potsherd Gate (שַׁעַר הַהַרְסוֹת) with the Dung Gate (שַׁעַר הָאִשָּׁפָה; Neh 2:13; 3:13–14; 12:31), see Otto (1995, 388) and Holladay (1986, 539).

45 Regarding the final resting place of Jehoiakim’s body (“beyond the gates of Jerusalem”), cf. the explanations by Schreiner: “man wirft ihn wie ein verendetes Tier auf den Schindanger vor der Stadt” (Schreiner 1981, 131); and Weiser: “wie man einen Esel nicht begräbt, sondern den Kadaver ausserhalb der Stadt auf den Schindanger oder im freien Feld einfach hinwerft, wo er verwest und den Aastieren zur Beute wird, so wird man auch mit des Königs Leichnam verfahren” (Weiser 1981, 191).

46 See also Varner’s view on the symbolism behind the disposal of corpses in the Tiber in ancient Rome (Varner 2001, 59): “The disposal of mutilated corpses in the Tiber was an important part of the posthumous abuse intended to publicly deny proper burial and remove the polluted body from society.”

Conclusion

Whether the allusion to “a donkey burial” has a bearing on actual historical circumstances (a real case of non-interment occasioned by a specific war scenario), or whether the image serves a rhetorical/hyperbolic function in order to intensify the magnitude of a given horrific scene is difficult, if not impossible, to determine.⁴⁷ What comes to the fore, though, is (1) that besides the specific reference to “a donkey burial” in this passage, all other motifs associated with this image draw on a common ancient Near Eastern literary repertoire of tropes, as is especially attested in curse catalogues and royal inscriptions, and (2) that there is, stylistically speaking, a definite progression in the presentation of symbolic elements of the ritual constellation in Jer 22:18–19: from the denial of mourning rituals (v. 18), to reprehensible corpse defilement (v. 19a–b), to the eventual dumping of the corpse as a piece of rubbish in a no-man’s land (“beyond the gates of Jerusalem”, v. 19c). This last action (removal of the polluted body from the community) actually represents the ultimate culmination of all the preceding emblematic deeds.

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47 See also Fischer’s conclusion on this passage: “Die Formulierungen von V 19 sind weitgehend singulär, sodass der genaue Sinn nicht leicht zu bestimmen ist” (Fischer 2005, 664).

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