

SHORT NOTES

THE MEANING OF THE PHRASE *wn³spt³ l-qbrtyk bšlw^m* IN 2 KINGS XXII 20

In 2 Kings xxii 20, the oracle of Huldah concerning Jerusalem and its inhabitants ends with a promise directed to King Josiah personally. The divine message, imparted by the prophetess, reads as follows: "Therefore, behold, I will gather you to your fathers (*hny³ spk³ l-²btyk*), and you shall be gathered to your grave (*wn³spt³ l-qbrtyk*) in peace, and your eyes shall not see all the evil which I will bring upon this place" (*Revised Standard Version*). This prophecy can be compared with the actual report of Josiah's death in 2 Kings xxiii 29-30a. There it is stated that Pharaoh Neco, having advanced from Egypt, slew Josiah at Megiddo when he saw him. *V.* 30a reads: "And his servants carried him dead in a chariot from Megiddo, and brought him to Jerusalem, and buried him in his own tomb" (*RSV*). The question arising here is whether the prophetic oracle tallies with the actual report of Josiah's death and burial. Stated differently, can the events described in 2 Kings xxiii 29-30a be taken as the fulfilment of Huldah's prophecy?

Scholars do not agree on this point. On the one hand, F.M. Cross, R.D. Nelson, M. Rose and S.L. McKenzie, among others, believe that in the prophecy Josiah is promised a death *bšlw^m* i.e. a peaceful death.¹ Consequently, these scholars find a discrepancy between Huldah's prophecy in xxii 20 and the account of Josiah's death in xxiii 29. W. Dietrich, H.-D. Hoffmann, A.D.H. Mayes and I.W. Provan, on the other hand, are of the opinion that the oracle presents an accurate prediction of the events described in xxiii 29. They claim that in 2 Kings xxii 20 *bšlw^m* refers not to the manner of Josiah's death but to the circumstances of his burial.² Hoffmann and Provan in particular have pointed out that the phrase to which *bšlw^m*, is attached, i.e. *wn³spt³ l-qbrtyk*, is a reference to Josiah's burial. In their opinion, *hny³ spk³ l-²btyk* and *wn³spt³ l-qbrtyk* in xxii 20 must have different meanings because otherwise these phrases would be tautologous. Thus, whereas *hny³ spk³ l-²btyk* is a reference to Josiah's death, *wn³spt³ l-qbrtyk* is a reference to his burial.

Some fifty years ago B. Alfrink arrived at the same conclusion in an article on the meaning of the expression *n³sp³ l-⁵myw*.³ I believe this view still holds true. However, Alfrink, Hoffmann and Provan have not clearly indicated what could have prompted the author of *v.* 20 to write down

the unique phrase *wn'spt 'l-qbrtyk*. It is the aim of this note to fill this lacuna.

Before discussing the meaning of the phrase *wn'spt 'l-qbrtyk* we must determine the meaning of the expression preceding it in *v. 20, 'sp X 'l-'btyw*. This expression is closely related to the expression *n'sp 'l-'btyw* which is found in Judg. ii 10, the only differences being the conjugation of the verb and the preposition used. By way of Judg. ii 10, 2 Kings xxii 20 can be linked with the expression *n'sp 'l-'myw*, which is recurrent in Pentateuchal sources.⁴ This expression must originally have referred to the union of the deceased with his ancestors in the afterlife, as can be inferred from Gen. xxv 8, 9 and xxv 29.⁵ Where *n'sp 'l-'myw* is not accompanied by other death/burial formulae, as in Num. xx 24, xxvii 13 and xxxi 2, the expression refers to dying as such. The expressions of Judg. ii 10 and 2 Kings xxii 20 must be taken as similar "general euphemisms for death" (Provan [n. 2], p. 149, n. 53). The active form *'spk* (Qal participle) used in 2 Kings xxii 20 may be due to the fixed formula for prophetic announcements *lkn hnyy* + participle, which occurs several times in the books of Kings (see Dietrich [n. 2], pp. 9-21).

The above-mentioned expressions all make explicit reference to the kin or clan to which the deceased is gathered. Such a reference is notably lacking in the expression under examination here, *n'sp 'l-qbrtyw*. This strongly suggests that it has an origin different from *'sp X 'l-'btyw*.⁶ Alfrink rightly pointed to a few passages in Samuel, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, where *'sp* occurs in connection with interment, and is followed by the root *qbr* ([n. 3], p. 120). In these passages *'sp* refers to the gathering of the *'smwt*, the bones of the deceased, as preceding the burial. Whereas 2 Sam. xxi 13 and Jer. viii 1, 2 make explicit reference to the *'smwt*, Jer. xxv 33 and Ezek. xxix 5 have only *n'sp*, "one is gathered," which may be elliptical for: the various parts of the body, the *'smwt*, are gathered. *wn'spt* in 2 Kings xxii 20 may likewise be understood as a concise reference to the gathering of the bones.

An argument in favour of this interpretation of *wn'spt* lies in the fact that in three of the four instances mentioned, i.e. in 2 Sam. xxi 13, Jer. xxv 33 and Ezek. xxix 5, references to the gathering of the body occur in connection with violent death. It can be concluded from these texts that in case of a violent death it is by no means a matter of course that the body is integrally buried. Thus, in Jer. xxv 33 Jeremiah announces that those who will be slain by YHWH will remain ungathered and unburied. In all probability, this prophecy is a true reflection

of the harsh reality of warfare as existing in Jeremiah's days. Against this background the purport of Huldah's promise to Josiah becomes clear: although Josiah will suffer a violent death, he will not meet the dreadful fate of being left unburied.

Since in the passages mentioned above the verbs denoting gathering and burying have analogous forms, one would expect to find also in xxii 20 *wnqbrt* buy analogy with *wn'spt*. The author of xxii 20 may have departed from this fixed pattern in order to establish a link with the burial notice in xxiii 30a, where it is stated that Josiah is buried *bqbrtw*, i.e. in his grave.⁷ Throughout the books of Kings three kings are explicitly reported to have been buried *bqbrtw*. Significantly, these kings all died a violent death.⁸ By using the construction *'l-qbrtyk*, the author probably intended to hint at the impending violent death of Josiah, as he did by using the verb *n'sp*.

As stated above, the expression *bšlw* is best regarded as a reference to the circumstances of Josiah's burial. According to Provan, what is promised here is that Josiah will be buried "in time of peace," that is, before the disasters of 597 and 586 B.C., announced in *v.* 20b, will come to pass ([n. 2] p. 149).

To sum up, the expression *wn'spt 'l-qbrtyk bšlw* states that Josiah will be buried in peaceful circumstances, but it also implies that he will die in a violent way. Thus the wording of the oracle in *v.* 20 is geared to the account of Josiah's death in xxiii 29-30a. In all likelihood, both passages were written by the same author.

Since *v.* 20b refers to the fall of Jerusalem, *v.* 20 as a whole must have an exilic date. There is, however, some reason to assume that the salvation oracle to Josiah as such was not the invention of an exilic author. In its present shape, the oracle is marked by a peculiar ambivalence. The introduction in *v.* 19 unambiguously qualifies it as a salvation oracle, intended to exclude Josiah's fate from the fate of the inhabitants of Jerusalem who are bound to experience YHWH's wrath. However, if taken at face value, the message of *v.* 20a does not seem to indicate much salvation. The promise given to Josiah that he will enter his grave in peace can only be considered a message of comfort against the background of Jerusalem's coming destruction. In a situation of doom and judgement an orderly burial may count as a special favour. Thus, in 1 Kings xiv 13 Ahijah prophesies that Jeroboam's son will be the only one of the Israelite king's relatives who will be buried, because he is the only one in Jeroboam's house in whom YHWH has found anything good (Hoffmann [n. 2], p. 184). Even so, this does not

alter the fact that in 2 Kings xxii 20 it is difficult to conceive of an original salvation oracle prophesying Josiah's death, let alone his death on the battle-field. Moreover, one is driven to ask in what way the present oracle in v. 20 could have induced Josiah subsequently to commit himself so strongly to YHWH's case and carry out a cultic reform. Thus it seems likely that the present oracle has replaced an earlier oracle that promised salvation much less ambiguously than the present one. However, the question of the original form of the oracle is a complex one, which goes beyond the scope of this short note.

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¹ F.M. Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1973), p. 286; R.D. Nelson, *The Double Redaction of the Deuteronomistic History* (Sheffield, 1981), pp. 6-9; M. Rose, "Bemerkungen zum historischen Fundament des Josia-Bildes in II Reg 22f.," *ZAW* 89 (1977), 50-63; M.A. O'Brien, *The Deuteronomistic History Hypothesis: A Reassessment* (Fribourg and Göttingen, 1989), pp. 244-9; S.L. McKenzie, *The Trouble with Kings*, *SVT* 42 (Leiden, 1992), pp. 111-12, 143-4.

² W. Dietrich, *Prophezie und Geschichte: Eine redaktionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung zum deuteronomistischen Geschichtswerk* (Göttingen, 1972), pp. 55-8; H.-D. Hoffmann, *Reform und Reformen: Untersuchungen zu einem Grundthema der deuteronomistischen Geschichtsschreibung* (Zürich, 1980), pp. 181-7; A.D.H. Mayes, *The Story of Israel between Settlement and Exile*, (London, 1983), pp. 128-30; I.W. Provan, *Hezekiah and the Books of Kings* (Berlin and New York, 1988), pp. 147-9.

³ "L'Expression *n'sp 'l-myw*," *OTS* 5 (1943), pp. 118-31 (especially 119-20).

⁴ Gen. xxviii 8-9, 17, xxxv 29, xlvi 29, 33; Num. xx 24 (cf. xx 26), xxvii 13, xxxi 2; Deut. xxxii 50 (2).

⁵ In Gen. xxv 8, 9 and xxxv 29 the expression *n'sp 'l-myw* follows the death formula (*mwf*), but precedes the burial formula (*qbr*). See Alfrink (n. 3), p. 128; N.J. Tromp, *Primitive Conceptions of Death and the Nether World in the Old Testament* (Rome, 1969), p. 168; K.-J. Illman, *Old Testament Formulas about Death* (Åbo, 1979), pp. 43-4, K. Spronk, *Beatific Afterlife in Ancient Israel and the Ancient Near East* (Kevelaer and Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1986), p. 240.

⁶ The LXX (*kaige*-revision) seems to confirm this view. It renders *'spk 'l-btyk* as *προστίθημί σε πρὸς τοὺς πατέρας σου*. Forms of the verb *προστίθημι* have also been used in the renderings of Gen. xxv 8, xxxv 29, xlvi 29, 33; Num. xx 24, 26, xxvii 13, xxxi 2; Deut. xxxii 50; Judg. ii 10. Significantly, the Greek translators of 2 Kings xxii 20 did not choose *προστίθημι* for rendering *'sp* in the phrase *wn'sp 'l-qbrtyk*. They preferred to use the more neutral *συνάγω*, and accordingly translated *συναχθήσῃ εἰς τὸν τάφον σου*. This rendering is in keeping with 2 Sam. xxi 13 (LXX 2 Reigns xxi 13) and Ezek. xxix 5 (cf. Jer. ix 21), because in these passages *συνάγω* is used to refer to the gathering of the bones.

⁷ LXX B and LXX L render singular forms. Reading *qbrtk* in analogy with LXX B and LXX L would bring about exact correspondence with MT xxiii 30a, where the term used to designate the tomb is *qbrth*. On the other hand, text-critical support for reading a singular form in 2 Kings xxii 20 is not strong. In the parallel version of Chronicles, both the MT and the LXX (probably attesting the "Old Greek") maintain the plural. Moreover, the fact that the plural form does not tally with the singular in

2 Kings xxiii 30a may indicate that it is the original reading in xxii 20. Therefore, I am inclined to follow the MT and read the plural form *qbrtyk* in 2 Kings xxii 20. It is the reference to the grave as such which provides the link between 2 Kings xxii 20a and xxiii 30a, irrespective of the terms used. The feminine plural *qbrwt* in xxii 20 may refer to a family-tomb, which includes several rooms (see *HAL*, p. 996).

⁸ Ahaziah (2 Kings ixc 28, 29); Amon (xxi 23, 26); Josiah (xxiii 29, 30). 2 Kings ix 28, 29 may have been modelled upon xxiii 29, 30.

A NEW SUGGESTION REGARDING 2 SAMUEL XXIII 7

"David's last words" (2 Sam. xxiii 1-7), the poem which has occupied both ancient and modern biblical exegetes,¹ concludes with two difficult verses:

ūbēlyyyā'al kēqōš mūnād kullāham
kā-lō' bēyād yiqqāhū
wē'īs yigga' bāhem yimmālē' barzel
wē'ēs hānūt
ūbā'ēs šārōp yisšārēpū baššābet

I will discuss the final term: *baššābet*. The understanding of the term I wish to propose may shed light on the entire context. The term presents a number of difficulties: neither its lexical significance nor its function in the context is clear. In fact, it appears superfluous. Since the days of Wellhausen and Driver, it has commonly been regarded as a misplaced gloss originally referring to *yšb bšbt* in verse 8.² Others have sought to resolve the problem by suggesting alternative readings.³ The ancient exegetes, however, and with them a number of the moderns, laboured to explicate the term—in its present form and context—according to one of its recognized semantic overtones. Some consider the term to be derived from $\sqrt{yšb}$ and interpret accordingly: "they shall be burned in their place";⁴ others derive it from $\sqrt{šbt}$ and interpret the verse as referring either to utter destruction⁵ or to cessation of activity, rest.⁶ These interpretations are, I believe, forced. As opposed to these attitudes, I wish to take a different path and propose a new lexical understanding of the term. This suggestion came about as a result of research concerning a certain Midrash, which I have discussed in a separate lexical investigation.⁷ In that Midrash as well we find the word *bšbt*, and there too it is awkward and seems, *prima facie*, superfluous. I shall begin the discussion with this Midrash (*Bereshit Rabba* XXIX 2, on Gen. vi 8, "But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord"):