

## **Abstract**

Uncertain terminology, versional differences and the juxtaposition of multiple images for Jehoiachin combine to render Jer 22:28–30 an interpretive quagmire. The article proposes to ameliorate this confusion through the emendation of the first word of v. 28, *ha 'æʂæb*. The emended text reveals a coherent oracle, drawing on a consistent and well-established nexus of concepts associated with the consequences for vassal disloyalty.

## **Keywords**

Jeremiah; Jehoiachin; loyalty oaths; corpse desecration; deportation

## **1. Introduction**

To say that every word and phrase in Jer 22:28–30 has been questioned in meaning or legitimacy (or both) is little exaggeration. The root of the problems in these verses is the first word of v. 28, *ha 'æʂæb*. It is the contention of the present article that a minor emendation, from *ha 'æʂæb* to *ha 'æʂæm*, significantly ameliorates the situation.

The following presents an annotated text, indicating relevant textual issues and their significance, and then proceeds to a discussion of the proposed emendation and its interpretive implications. The emended text reveals a coherent oracle, drawing on a consistent and well-established nexus of concepts associated with the consequences for vassal disloyalty.

## 2. Annotated Text<sup>1</sup>

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† With thanks to C.B. Hays and J. Stökl for their productive comments and to the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation for supporting the underlying research. Errors, naturally, remain my own.

<sup>1</sup> The base text is that of *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*; versional variations are recorded in the notes. Commentators referred to in notes and discussion are Leslie C. Allen, *Jeremiah*, OTL (London: Westminster John Knox, 2008); John Bright, *Jeremiah*, AB 21 (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1965); Robert P. Carroll, *Jeremiah*, OTL (London: SCM, 1986); Peter C. Craigie, Page H. Kelley and Joel F. Drinkard, *Jeremiah 1–25*, WBC 26 (Dallas, Tex.: Word, 1991); Bernard Duhm, *Jeremia*, KHC (Leipzig: Mohr Siebeck, 1901); Georg Fischer, *Jeremia 1–25*, HThKAT (Freiburg: Herder, 2005); William L. Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia, Penn.: Fortress, 1986); J. Gerald Janzen, *Studies in the Text of Jeremiah*, HSM 6 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973); Jack R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah*, AB 21B (New York, N.Y.: Doubleday, 2004); William McKane, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Jeremiah*, vol. 1, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1986); J. Schreiner, *Jeremia*, NEchtB 9 (Würzburg: Echter Verlag, 1981); Louis Stulman, *Jeremiah*, AOTC (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 2005); J.A. Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, NICOT (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1980); Wilhelm Rudolph, *Jeremia*, HAT (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1947); Winifried Thiel, *Die deuteronomistische Redaktion von Jeremia 1–25*, WMANT 41 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1973); Paul Volz, *Der Prophet Jeremia*, KAT (Leipzig: Scholl, 1922); Artur Weiser, *Das Buch Jeremia*, ATD 20/21 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1966).

28 *ha 'æʃæb<sup>2</sup> nibzæh nāpûš<sup>3</sup> hā 'iš hazzæh<sup>4</sup> kânyāhû 'im-k<sup>e</sup>lî 'ên hepæš bô<sup>5</sup>*

*maddû<sup>a</sup> ' hû<sup>a</sup>lû hû ' w<sup>e</sup>zar 'ô<sup>6</sup> w<sup>e</sup>hušl<sup>e</sup>kû 'al-hā'āræš 'ašær lo '-yādā 'û<sup>7</sup>*

29 'æræš 'æræš 'āræš<sup>8</sup> šim 'î d<sup>e</sup>bar-yhwh

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<sup>2</sup> *'æʃæb* is a *hapax legomenon* of unclear meaning, variously rendered by other ancient versions and subsequent commentators. The usual derivation is from *'šb* II (so BDB and DCH; HALOT *'šb* I), “to shape,” whence both the common translation “pot” (Allen; Bright; Carroll; Lundbom; JPS; NJB; NRSV; HALOT; also the “Gefäß” of Fischer, Rudolph, Schreiner, Weißer and “Gerät” of Volz) as well as the alternative “image (of god),” i.e., “idol” (McKane; DCH; also Thompson, “figurehead”; Holladay, NEB, “puppet”). Amongst the versions only the Vulgate gives “pot” (*vas*); preference for it is based on synonymous parallelism with *k<sup>e</sup>lî* “vessel” and the influence of Jer 19; 48:12. Representation of *'æʃæb* is lacking from the Septuagint, though it uses nine morphemes to render v. 28a, mirroring the nine morphemes of MT (if *hā 'iš hazzæh* is erroneous), which perhaps suggests compensation at the morpheme level rather than a shorter *Vorlage* (see Andrew G. Shead, *The Open Book and the Sealed Book* [JSOTSup 347; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2002], 257–258). MT and deriving translations understand the *h* prefix as interrogative *he*, but neither Septuagint, Peshitta nor Targum translate as a question. The three-fold interrogative series with *h–'m–mdw* appears also at Jer 2:14, 31; 8:4–5; 14:19; 49:1; the pattern normally implies “no” answers to the first two questions (unless couched in the negative), with the third providing an explanation. In v. 28 this pattern would produce an anomalous protestation of Jehoiachin’s deportation; though the extant book favours the deportees, there is no sense that they or their king have been punished unjustly. (Hence Carroll’s claim that “MT’s interrogative form may be rhetorical or require the answer ‘yes’,” 440.) Most commentators also note that, if the lines are intended as questions, no answers are provided by the extant text.

<sup>3</sup> The Septuagint and Peshitta lack representation of *nāpûš*; it is present in 4QJer<sup>c</sup>, which generally resembles MT more than LXX (unlike 4QJer<sup>b,d</sup>, which unfortunately do not preserve this passage). Derivation is from *nps* “to shatter” or *pws* “to scatter.” Aquila and Targum represent with variations on “to scatter” whereas Rashi and Kimchi prefer “to shatter,” which is followed by most modern commentators in keeping with the pot imagery.

<sup>4</sup> The Septuagint lacks representation of *hā 'iš hazzæh*. Its presence in MT and other versions is usually attributed to a duplication from v. 30, though occasionally (Janzen, Lundbom) to haplography in LXX.

<sup>5</sup> The meaning of *k<sup>e</sup>lî 'ên hepæš bô* is disputed insofar as the vessel-driven imagery pressures *hepæš* toward “utility” or “usefulness,” though the dominant sense is more “pleasure, delight, joy.” The phrase occurs also in Jer 48:38 and Hos 8:8, where it is similarly translated using the imagery of the broken pot. Context vies against *k<sup>e</sup>lî* “vessel” in all three instances. See Discussion.

<sup>6</sup> *hû ' w<sup>e</sup>zar 'ô* is lacking in LXX, which has correspondingly singular verbs in contrast to MT’s plurals; as with *hā 'iš hazzæh*, its presence in MT is usually attributed to influence from v. 30, where the dynastic element is more apparent.

<sup>7</sup> Though present in the Septuagint, *'ašær lo '-yādā 'û* is questioned (Duhm, Thiel) as inappropriate to the pot imagery preceding, whilst McKane worries about its occurrence in deuteronom(ist)ic literature. See Discussion.

<sup>8</sup> The Septuagint represents two rather than three iterations of *'æræš*, but cf. threefold repetitions in Jer 7:4; Isa 6:3; Ezek 21:32 [Eng 21:27]. As it stands *'æræš* is the grammatical addressee of the following feminine singular imperative *šim 'î*, though interpreters tend to assume that the actual addressee is the same as the masculine plural imperative *kitbû* in v. 30. Similarity to repetitive incantation formulations (*maqlû*) was suggested by J. Hermann (“Zu Jer 22<sup>29</sup>; 7<sub>4</sub>,” ZAW 62 [1950]: 321–322).

<sup>30</sup> *koh 'āmar yhw*<sup>9</sup>

*kitbū 'æt-hā 'iš hazzæh 'arîrî<sup>10</sup> gæbær lo '-yišlah b<sup>e</sup>yāmâw<sup>11</sup>*

*kî lo 'yišlah 'iš yošeb 'al-kisse 'dāwid ūmošel 'ôd bihûdâ*

### 3. Discussion

That the three verses of Jer 22:28–30 should be taken together is suggested by their (probable) poetic structure in the midst of (clear) prose on either side and by the reasonably consistent appearance of section markers of one sort or another in the manuscript traditions, though the parameters of the unit leave something to be desired. Internally, the shifts from impersonal (v. 28) to vocative and feminine singular imperative (v. 29) to masculine plural imperative (v. 30) have raised questions about the intended speaker(s) and audience of the passage. Ambiguity between poetry and prose and shifts in address, however, are so common in Jeremiah as to hardly merit comment. Complicating and attracting attention to this particular triplet are its concentration of uncertain terminology and numerous differences amongst the versions, which go beyond the typically expansionist tendencies of MT compared to LXX. Underlying the confusion of

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<sup>9</sup> *koh 'āmar yhw* is lacking in the Septuagint and, insofar as it is repetitive of the sense of *šim 'i d<sup>e</sup>bar-yhw*, is commonly deleted or ignored. Note the similar duplication in Jer 21:11–12; Ezek 21:3 (Eng 20:47).

<sup>10</sup> The meaning of *'arîrî* is disputed, in part because the meaning “childless” (cf. Gen 15:2) contradicts biblical and Babylonian evidence that Jehoichin was not (thus commentators’ denials that “childless” means what it seems to mean, e.g., Carroll; Craigie, Kelley and Drinkard; Fischer; Schreiner; Stulman; Thompson) and in part because v. 30b implies that the issue has to do with the royal succession rather than barrenness as such. Septuagint renders “banished” (*ekkērukton*), whence G.R. Driver proposed “disgraced” or “proscribed,” with reference also to Peshitta (“Linguistic and Textual Problems: Jeremiah,” *JQR* 28 [1937]: 115); he is followed more recently by Carroll and McKane, the latter on the grounds that the reference to Jehoiachin’s offspring in v. 30b was itself prompted by the interpretation of *'arîrî* as meaning “childless” and is thus irrelevant for determining its actual or original meaning. Holladay notes that Septuagint otherwise consistently renders *'arîrî* as *ateknos*, suggesting that it had something other than *'arîrî* in its *Vorlage*, whilst Peshitta represents both variants. See Discussion.

<sup>11</sup> Septuagint lacks *gæbær lo '-yišlah b<sup>e</sup>yāmâw*. Widely regarded as an intrusion (in part due to the conception of v. 30 as depicting a census-list scenario, in which Jehoichin is registered as *'arîrî*; thus Bright deems it “not appropriate,” 140 and Carroll “unsuitable,” 439), but Thiel and McKane retain as poetic parallel to *hā 'iš hazzæh 'arîrî*, preferring v. 30b as the expansion. Allen (developing Holladay) is the only commentator to note the gendered significance of *gæbær* (“Jehoiachin could be written off as a failure in terms of his manhood,” 254). Holladay fairly points out that this is not the most obvious term for a glossator (otherwise the passage uses *'iš*) and prefers to keep both clauses, noting the similar parallel in Jer 23:9.

the whole is the apparent juxtaposition of multiple images for the king whose fate is in the prophet's sight, Jehoiachin.

It is the contention of the present article that the root of the problems in these verses is the assumption that the first word of v. 28, *hā'əṣəb*, is correct. With the exception of LXX, all the ancient versions attest to its presence; equally, they are all clearly baffled by it. Peshitta and Targum give "contemptible" (*bsyr*); McKane suggests that they have read *ṣb* as "idol," as much later was done by Rashi and Kimchi. Aquila renders it "what is gained by toil" (*diaponēma*), from the same root but with different results. Vulgate comes up with *vas*, inherited in the dominant modern rendering of "pot" or "vessel." The word is in the extant Hebrew Bible a *hapax legomenon* and the evidence of the versions is that it was no more familiar to Jeremiah's ancient readers than it is to its modern ones. The various attempts at rendering it suggest that all have resorted to deduction, assuming that the word must be somehow related to the root *ṣb*, "to shape, form, fashion," and putting forward educated guesses on that basis. The word is absent entirely from LXX, leading some commentators to suggest omitting it as an MT expansion (Bright, Thompson). That all the other ancient witnesses read *h'ṣb* at the start of v. 28 is in any case clear. Whether *h'ṣb* constitutes an expansionary elaboration on an earlier LXX or not, the extant MT constitutes a *crux interpretum*; we are well beyond the era of wanton deletion as a means of resolving difficulties in MT Jeremiah. The MT preserves a text which has yet to be given a convincing explanation; the following is an attempt to provide one.

Given the failure of any commentator from antiquity to the present to produce a convincing explanation either of *h'ṣb* or its significance within the passage, it seems justified to ask if the source of these major interpretive difficulties is not in fact a minor

scribal error, namely, the interchange of *b* and *m*.<sup>12</sup> These letters are similar both graphically and phonologically and are amongst the most frequent graphic interchanges in the square script.<sup>13</sup> If this is the cause of the confusion, v. 28 ought to begin with *h* ‘š*m*, not *h* ‘š*b*. That this error was extant prior to the Common Era is indicated by the appearance of *h* ‘š*b* in 4QJer<sup>c</sup>, not to mention the universality of the versional difficulties.<sup>14</sup>

The interpretive implications of such an emendation are promising. No longer must we reckon with an unknown *hapax legomenon*; we are safely in the territory of an extremely common noun: ‘*ašæm*, “bone(s), skeleton, bodily frame” (‘*ašæm* I).<sup>15</sup> If Jehoiachin’s is the body in question, its description as *nibzæh* and *nāpûš* also begins to make sense: he is threatened with one of the most horrifying fates in the ancient world, the desecration of his corpse and denial of a proper burial. His body will be scorned (*nibzæh*),

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<sup>12</sup> The following constitutes a contextual emendation, Tov’s first type of conjectural emendation (Emanuel Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Bible* [3rd edn.; Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 2012], 327–340). For a recent defence of conjectural emendation, see Ryan Wettlaufer, “Unseen Variants,” in *Editing the Bible: Assessing the Task Past and Present*, ed. John S. Kloppenborg and Judith H. Newman (Atlanta, Ga.: Society of Biblical Literature, 2012): 171–193; on its history and the caution thereby inspired, John Van Seters, *The Edited Bible* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 113–130.

<sup>13</sup> Tov, *Textual Criticism*, 230–231.

<sup>14</sup> 4QJer<sup>c</sup> dates to the latter part of the first century BCE, whilst LXX Jeremiah is usually dated to the second; this perhaps suggests a date between them for the error’s introduction (see Andrew Shead, “Jeremiah,” in *T&T Clark Companion to the Septuagint*, ed. James A. Aitken [London: Bloomsbury, 2015]: 472–473; Eugene Ulrich et al, *Qumran Cave 4.X: The Prophets* [DJD 15; Oxford: Clarendon, 1997], 182). Tov, with regard to the versions, observes that “Almost all words for which scholars have suggested emendations are considered difficult in some way, and they must have been equally difficult for the ancient translators” (*Textual Criticism*, 331 n. 7). Cf. Martin L. West, *Textual Criticism and Editorial Technique Applicable to Greek and Latin Texts* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1973), 59 (“Sometimes one sees a conjecture dismissed simply on the ground that all the manuscripts agree in a different reading. As if they could not agree in a false reading, and as if it were not in the very nature of a conjecture that it departs from them!”) and Wettlaufer, “Unseen Variants”: 180 (“a particular reading’s dominance of the extant manuscript base does not necessarily imply its originality, even if that dominance is complete”). Albrektson’s remarks are salutary: ‘the task of the scholar cannot properly be restricted to weighing the existing variants, as there are cases where a corruption is so old that it is found in all extant manuscripts and translations, and then there is no way out except by conjectural emendation’ (Bertil Albrektson, *Text, Translation, Theology: Selected Essays on the Hebrew Bible*, SOTSMS [Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2010], 82).

<sup>15</sup> “Bones” occur somewhat more often in the plural (‘*ašāmîm* or ‘*ašāmôt*), but Jer 50:17; Lam 4:7–8; Psa 102:6; 139:15; Prov 15:30; 16:24; Job 2:5; 19:20; 30:30 indicate that the grammatical singular may have a plural significance (hence “skeleton, bodily frame”). Its use in several other passages may also be taken as signifying more than a single bone (Exod 12:46; Num 9:12; Job 21:23; cf. the kinship language of Gen 2:23; 29:14; 2Sam 5:1 par. 1Chr 1:11; 19:12–13).

his remains broken and scattered (*nāpûš*, playing on both *npš* “to shatter” and *pwš* “to scatter”).<sup>16</sup>

The force of such a threat should not be underestimated. The denial of proper burial is a recurring theme of ancient Near Eastern literature, especially in the context of curses invoked against treaty- and oath-breakers.<sup>17</sup> Most famous, perhaps, is 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.”<sup>18</sup> Elsewhere, Esarhaddon declares that—having forbidden the burial of the corpses—he “let the vultures eat the unburied bodies of their [his enemies’] warriors,” whilst Assurbanipal implores: “May his corpse be cast before his enemy and may they bring me his bones.”<sup>19</sup> The enactment of such threats was a well-established component of ancient Near Eastern warfare.

In threatening Jehoiachin with the desecration and dispersal of his body, v. 28 draws on a widespread perception of the importance of proper burial and the dishonour attending the deceased for whom this is not undertaken. In context, the threat is especially appropriate: the invocation of such curses against a vassal who had betrayed his master’s oath is precisely the fate that Jehoiachin would have faced during his brief tenure as king of Judah, as he inherited the consequences of his father’s earlier rebellion. The expectation that non- or anti-burial would be amongst the consequences of Judah’s destruction at the hands of the Babylonians—punishment for their disloyalty to Babylon overlaid with

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<sup>16</sup> See n. 3, above.

<sup>17</sup> Christopher B. Hays, *Death in the Iron Age II and in First Isaiah*, FAT 79 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 11–132; 151; 161; 248; Francesca Stavrakopoulou, “Gog’s Grave and the Use and Abuse of Corpses in Ezekiel 39:11–20,” *JBL* 129 (2010): 67–76; C.L. Crouch, *Israel and the Assyrians*, ANEM 8 (Atlanta, Ga.: Society of Biblical Literature, 2014), 59–61; 111–112; on military use, C.L. Crouch, *War and Ethics in the Ancient Near East*, BZAW 407 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2009).

<sup>18</sup> SAA 2 6 425–427.

<sup>19</sup> Erle Leichty, *The Royal Inscriptions of Esarhaddon, King of Assyria (680–669 BC)*, RINAP 4 (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2011), Esarhaddon 1 v 6; cf. Esarhaddon 1019 16; Rykle Borger, *Beiträge zum Inschriftenwerk Assurbanipals* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1996), A ii 116–117, with fulfilment in A ii 117–118.

punishment for their disloyalty to YHWH—is evident in several other passages in Jeremiah.<sup>20</sup>

That the threat of non- or anti-burial for a rebellious king is in view in v. 28aα is confirmed by the reference in v. 28aβ to royal military failure: the king is the weapon which gives no joy. In lieu of the interpretation of *kēlî* as “vessel” or “implement” (the result of a confluence of uncertainty about *ha‘ašæb* and widespread interpretive reliance on Jeremiah 19 in order to explain the resulting pot imagery), the noun should be understood in its other common meaning, “weaponry.”<sup>21</sup> Thus, “a weapon in which there is no delight.”

The use of the same phrase in Jer 48:38 and Hos 8:8 suggests that to read *kēlî* in its military meaning is appropriate. Like Jer 22:28, both of these other passages usually translate “vessel”; thus Jer 48:37–38: “On all the housetops of Moab and in the squares there is nothing but lamentation; for I have broken Moab like a vessel that no one wants, says the LORD” and Hos 8:8: “Israel is swallowed up; now they are among the nations as a useless vessel” (NRSV). Though the translations are standard, the military contexts of both passages vie against *kēlî* as “vessel.” Jeremiah 48:37–39 is a clear description of the military destruction of Moab, whilst Hos 8:7–10 depicts Israel’s collapse in the face of its enemies. Both passages make better sense if *kēlî* is recognised as weaponry. Thus, though commentators on Jer 22:28 frequently point to these passages to explain its awkward “pot” and “vessel” imagery, the reasoning is precariously circular.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Jer 7:33; 8:1–3; 19:7; 34:20; cf. also 15:3; 16:4; 50:17 and the inversion in 31:40. On Jer 7:32–8:3 see Francesca Stavrakopoulou, *The Land of Our Fathers*, LHBOTS 473 (London: T&T Clark, 2010), 109–112.

<sup>21</sup> The word appears with both meanings in Jeremiah: “vessel(s)” in Jer 14:3; 18:4; 19:11; 27:16, 18–19, 21; 28:3, 6; 32:14; 40:10; 48:11–12; 52:18, 20 and “weapon(s)” in 21:4; 22:7; 50:25; 51:20. It is rendered “vessel” in 25:34 and 48:38, but the military contexts there also favour “weapon” (as perhaps does 51:34). Jer 46:19 and 49:29 are ambiguous. In other oracles concerning kings (21:4; 22:7) its use in reference to military weaponry is unquestioned.

<sup>22</sup> Jer 48:37–38 is likely also influenced by 48:11–12, which uses an image of undisturbed wine to depict an unsuspecting Moab.



The effect of this reading is a focus on one of the central royal functions, defence of the realm, and identification of the cause of Jehoiachin's post-mortem humiliation as a consequence of his failure in this quarter. Rather than successfully protecting his kingdom from invaders, the king and his weapon prove impotent. Given the close association of the king's weaponry with the provision of YHWH (Pss 18:33–40; 89:20–27; 144:2), this military failure may be plausibly unpacked as due to the withdrawal of divine favour.

The image of the humiliated king continues in v. 28b, though it is frequently considered suspect (so Duhm, Thiel). Initially this is because *hû' w<sup>e</sup>zar 'ô* is lacking in Septuagint, which has (correspondingly) singular verbs, in contrast to MT's plurals. As with *hā 'iš hazzæh* in v. 28a, these variations are usually attributed to influence from v. 30, in which the dynastic element of Jehoiachin's problems are more overt. Rather than merely being deemed a pedantic but tolerable expansion of a reference to Jehoiachin being “thrown out, expelled” (*hûtal*) and “thrown down, cast out” (*hušlak*) of the land, however, the sense of the phrase—as a more or less explicit reference to exile—is considered fundamentally inappropriate to the preceding pot imagery and therefore rejected.

Once the pot imagery is abandoned, however, the incongruity is resolved. The body of Jehoiachin (and those of his children, in the MT) is tossed out upon the earth without care, in an act of non- or anti-burial.<sup>23</sup> If *'ašær lo' -yādā 'û* is allowed to stand, the image is reinforced; the final repose of Jehoiachin's body is in an unknown or unmarked location. The image's multivalence—the possibilities of simultaneously interpreting the text as a reiteration of the demeaning dispersal of the king's bones and in reference to his expulsion from the land—is perhaps deliberate. Deportation is a well-known trope in ancient curse material and was an ordinary means of punishment for rebellion; the denial of burial in the

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<sup>23</sup> This significance for the verbs is noted by Stavropoulou, *Land of Our Fathers*, 112 n. 31. See also Hays, *Death in the Iron Age II*, 210 on the fate envisioned for the tyrant of Isa 14.

homeland would have compounded the territorial affront of defeat.<sup>24</sup> The combination of deportation with corpse desecration in a depiction of a rebellious king's fate would also be a natural one if drawn from this tradition.<sup>25</sup> The threefold repetition of *'aræs* is a plaintive lamentation for the lost land, evoking the power of the spoken word and recalling the land as witness, in a reminder of the oath whose betrayal is the basis for the king's punishment at both divine and Babylonian hand.<sup>26</sup>

The significance of the extra-territorial element is closely related to the issue of corpse desecration, insofar as the offensiveness of the latter is connected to ideas about the rites and rituals required by the dead of the living, especially the deceased's children. These rituals depended on the interment of the body at a known and accessible location and were rendered impossible if the body was not buried, as for instance in the case of death on the battlefield.<sup>27</sup> The dissolution of the family as a result of deportation would have equally impeded mortuary practices meant to be carried out by the deceased's family.<sup>28</sup>

The other reason that a man's offspring might be incapable of conducting mortuary rituals, of course, is that these children do not exist—either because they were never born or because they have since died.<sup>29</sup> In the biblical context concerns about the implications of childlessness for the memory of the deceased and his fate in the afterlife are attested in

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<sup>24</sup> Stavrakopoulou, *Land of Our Fathers*, 8–18; also 112 n. 31, which draws particular attention to the use of disinterment imagery in v. 26 and v. 28 in conjunction with the address to the land in v. 29.

<sup>25</sup> Crouch, *War and Ethics*, 35–64; 119–155.

<sup>26</sup> On the power of speech see Tarah Van De Wiele, “‘Cast Them Out for Their Many Crimes!’: Reading the Retributive Psalmist in Light of Ancient Near Eastern Legal Culture” (Ph.D. diss., University of Nottingham 2016); for the land as witness, e.g., Isa 1:2; 34:1; Jer 6:19; Mic 1:2; 1Sam 17:46.

<sup>27</sup> Thus, for example, Esarhaddon's consternation at his father's (Sargon II) death on the battlefield and the failure to recover his body for burial (SAA 3 33). More generally see Amélie Kuhrt, *The Ancient Near East c. 3000–330 BC, Volume II* [London: Routledge, 1995], 525–526; Jo Ann Scurlock, “Death and the Afterlife in Ancient Mesopotamian Thought,” in *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East*, vol. 3, ed. Jack M. Sasson [Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1995]: 1883–1893).

<sup>28</sup> Hays, *Death in the Iron Age II*, esp. 133–201; Stavrakopoulou, *Land of Our Fathers*, 18–25; 112–120.

<sup>29</sup> Or been killed; see Hays, *Death in the Iron Age II*, 211 on Isa 14:21.

the memorial built by Absalom in 2Sam 18:18 and the alternative arrangements for the eunuch in Isa 56:3–5.<sup>30</sup> Verse 30 explores this element of the king’s post-mortem humiliation in its declaration that he has failed to procreate: this is a man who will be called *ʿârîrî*, “childless.”

This enigmatic term appears otherwise only in Gen 15:2; Lev 20:20, 21; and Sir 16:3–4. The first and the last of these are the strongest evidence for the rendering of *ʿârîrî* as “childless”: Abra(ha)m protests that his lack of (direct and legitimate?) descendants render a man who is not his son his heir, whilst Ben Sira weighs up the relative merits of apostate progeny versus childlessness. Leviticus 20:20–21 concerns prohibited sexual relationships, for which the consequence is that the man and woman involved will be *ʿârîrîm*. The particularities of these passages suggests that the term signifies something beyond a simple lack of offspring. Examined more closely, each of these five appearances of *ʿârîrî* suggest that the existence—or lack thereof—of children is related in some way to the social standing of the childless individual or couple. The particular resonances involving shame or dishonour are in keeping with its derivation from *ʿrr*, “to strip (oneself), make (oneself) bare, demolish”; the verbs to which it is closely related (*ʿrh*, *ʿwr*) provide terms for nudity and exposure. Shame and humiliation for the people and places thus described are barely submerged implications in all these various manifestations.<sup>31</sup>

With respect to *ʿârîrî* these connotations are most obvious in Lev 20:20–21, where it occurs in a chapter occupied with behavioural requirements for membership in the community. The section provides a lengthy list of offences which result in eviction from the community; this may be achieved by putting the offender to death (20:2, 9–16), but also by banishment (“cut off from the[ir] people,” 20:5, 6, 17, 18). In each case, the law

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<sup>30</sup> Jer 31:15–17 may reflect similar concerns; see Stavrakopoulou, *Land of Our Fathers*, 94–96.

<sup>31</sup> Note also the near homophone *ʿrr*, “to curse,” which may have reinforced such connotations.

articulates punishment with reference to social consequences. Leviticus 20:20–21 comes toward the end of the sequence, decreeing a status of *ʿrîrîm* as the appropriate consequence for incest between a man and his aunt or his sister-in-law. The chapter’s otherwise single-minded focus on the social implications of the crimes it lists suggests that to be decreed *ʿrîrî* does not signify a socially neutral lack of progeny but a procreative deficiency indicative of the couple’s social marginalisation. This is not a childlessness with which other members of the community might have sympathy; it reflects and stems from the couple’s appalling behaviour. The crime may not warrant eviction or death, but the couple are consigned to the margins of society, with childlessness a signal of their reduced social status. In an observation that resonates with the use of the term in Jer 28:30, Milgrom suggests that the person decreed *nîkrât* (“cut off”) is excised from the lineage in both directions—prevented from joining his ancestors as well as from continuing the line with progeny—whilst the person decreed *ʿrîrî* is, at least nominally, permitted to join his ancestors; this is, however, to no effect, because he has no son to perform the rites for the dead.<sup>32</sup>

Abram’s protestation to YHWH in Gen 15:2–3 similarly relies on an antithesis between blessing and childlessness; the reward which YHWH promises is inconceivable in the absence of children. Childlessness constitutes curse, just as—in the more familiar formulation—blessing constitutes progeny as numerous as the stars in the sky (Gen 15:5). That childlessness has implications for social standing is confirmed by the use of *ʿebed*, “servant, slave” to describe the existing heir to Abram’s house; the term identifies the objectionableness of the heir in terms of his lowly social status.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 17–22*, AB 3A (New York, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1964), 1757–1758.

<sup>33</sup> The meaning of Gen 15:2b (*ûben-mešeq bêti hû’ dammešeq ʿlî ʿezer*) is not at all clear, although in the present context the suggestion of *DCH* to interpret *ben-mešeq bêti* as “*the son of the libation of my grave...i.e., the one who pours libations for me as my heir*” is provocative (*italics original*). For discussion of other possibilities, see H. Seebass, “Gen 15<sub>2b</sub>,” *ZAW* 75 (1963): 317–319; Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, WBC 1 (Nashville, Tenn.: Word, 1987), 327–328.

Ben Sira 16:3–4 likewise confirms that *ʿrîrî* is replete with the social significations of infertility. The verses employ the term in the midst of a pair of comparisons: “the death of one who is childless [is better] than whoever has many unjust children and better than the latter end of the proud; a city will become populous through a solitary childless person who fears the LORD but through a clan of traitors it becomes desolate...”<sup>34</sup> In both verses the rhetorical value of the comparisons relies on the detriment of childlessness to a person’s social standing; however shameful such childlessness is, it would still be better than these alternatives.

To threaten—real or effective—childlessness was thus matter of significant social resonance. This is unpacked in v 30’s reiterative explanations: Jehoiachin is a man whose masculinity will fail him (lit. “a male who will not succeed in his days”), whose semen will fail at its one essential task, to produce the next man to lead the kingdom (“from his seed will not arise a man to sit upon the throne of David or rule any longer in Judah”).<sup>35</sup> The use of the specifically masculine term for “man,” *geber*, underscores that the declaration of the king as *ʿrîrî* is a result of his failure to behave as a man ought.<sup>36</sup> In v. 28 this was manifest in his inability to find joy with his military weapon; in v. 30 it is manifest in his inability to succeed with the only other one of importance that he possessed. Indeed, the former may simultaneously function as a euphemism for the latter.

Destruction of the family line, especially the royal dynasty, is also in keeping with the section’s echoes of curses associated with loyalty oaths and consequences for their betrayal. The annihilation of a king’s current and future progeny is a recurring theme in the

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<sup>34</sup> Translation according to B.H. Parker and M.G. Abegg ([www.bensira.org](http://www.bensira.org)).

<sup>35</sup> On childless and masculinity see Corrine L. Carvalho, “Sex and the Single Prophet: Marital Status and Gender in Jeremiah and Ezekiel,” in *Prophets Male and Female*, ed. J. Stökl and C.L. Carvalho, AIL 15 (Atlanta, Ga.: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013), 237–267.

<sup>36</sup> The tendency to follow Septuagint and delete *geber lō’-yišlah b’yāmâw* is again largely a result of perceived incoherence in the passage’s imagery, as the plausibility of an elaborative description of the king’s shortcomings in the context of a purported census scenario is doubted (so Duhm, Thiel). Though one or more of the phrases in v. 30 may represent developments in MT, none are incongruous with the thrust of the text.

course texts associated with loyalty oaths.<sup>37</sup> Thus, in the case of any disloyalty of Assurbanipal: “May Zarpanitu, who grants name and seed, destroy your name and your seed from the land.”<sup>38</sup> A less lethal but equally effective destruction of the royal family could also be achieved through the deportation of royal offspring, kept as hostages at the overlord’s court; given the known offspring of Jehoiachin, this is perhaps the sense in which v. 30 was ultimately read, whether or not it was thus originally intended.

#### 4. Revised Translation<sup>39</sup>

<sup>28</sup> [This man] Coniah is a scorned, broken body; a weapon without joy.<sup>40</sup> Why else would he [they] be thrown out [he and his seed] and cast out upon the earth [which he (they) do not know]?

<sup>29</sup> O land! O land! O land! Hear the word of YHWH!

<sup>30</sup> [Thus says YHWH:] Record this man shamed-by-childlessness, [a man whose masculinity will fail him in his lifetime]: for no man will come forth from his semen to sit upon the throne of David, nor rule any longer in Judah.

#### 5. Conclusions

For all the trouble that Jer 22:28–30 has caused interpreters, its difficulties are much reduced if we read *h ‘šm* for *h ‘šb* at the beginning of v. 28. The exegete inclined to resist emendation may protest that the advantages produced by this change fly in the face of the

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<sup>37</sup> Ann Marie Kitz, “Curses and Cursing in the Ancient Near East,” *Religion Compass* 1 (2007): 621; Ann Marie Kitz, *Cursed Are You!* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2014), 142; 205–207 (“in order to eliminate a dynasty successfully, one must eliminate any and all things connected with it,” 206); 233; cf. 253 on implications for mortuary cult; Crouch, *Israel and the Assyrians*, 51–51; 115–116.

<sup>38</sup> SAA 2 no. 6 435–436; cf. Gary Beckman, *Hittite Diplomatic Texts*, SBLWAW 7 (Atlanta, Ga.: Society of Biblical Literature, 1996), no. 18B §9.

<sup>39</sup> Brackets indicate versional variations.

<sup>40</sup> Or, if the interrogatives are used: “Is (this man) Coniah a scorned, broken body? A weapon without joy?”

principle of *lectio difficilior*: the extant text is the more difficult, so it should be retained.

Yet such a principle cannot be applied mechanically. To quote Albrektson:

There are cases where a *lectio difficilior* may be more difficult simply because it is wrong...to make it a principle never to allow conjectures means *either* to presuppose that no corruption is early enough to be present in all extant Old Testament texts (which is absurd) *or* to prefer deliberately what is almost certainly wrong to what is probably right (which seems a strange choice).<sup>41</sup>

Though emendation should not be employed as a lazy solution for awkward texts, the interpretive gains in this instance—at the price of a minor emendation on the basis of a common interchange—lean in its favour. Rather than a confused combination of images, vv. 28–30 cohere around an established nexus of concepts, all intimately associated with a vassal king’s punishment for disloyalty to his sovereign: corpse desecration and non- or anti-burial, defeat and deportation, and destruction of lineage and dominion. Jehoiachin is faced with the consequences of his father’s disloyalty to the Babylonian king. His wrath—underwritten by YHWH, who has his own punishment for disloyalty to enforce—is the seal on Jehoiachin’s fate.

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<sup>41</sup> Albrektson, *Text, Translation, Theology*, 79, 83.