In 2 Kings xxi 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 (hnnv 'spk 'l-'btyk), and you shall be gathered to your grave (wn'spt '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 xxi 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 xxi 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 bšlwm i.e. a peaceful death. Consequently, these scholars find a discrepancy between Huldah's prophecy in xxi 20 and the account of Josiah's death in xxi 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 xxi 29. They claim that in 2 Kings xxi 20 bšlwm refers not to the manner of Josiah's death but to the circumstances of his burial. Hoffmann and Provan in particular have pointed out that the phrase to which bšlwm, is attached, i.e. wn'spt 'l-qbrtyk, is a reference to Josiah's burial. In their opinion, hnnv 'spk 'l-'btyk and wn'spt 'l-qbrtyk in xxi 20 must have different meanings because otherwise these phrases would be tautologous. Thus, whereas hnnv 'spk 'l-'btyk is a reference to Josiah's death, wn'spt '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 n'sp 'l-'myw. 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 \textit{wn'spt ʿl-qbrtyk}. It is the aim of this note to fill this lacuna.

Before discussing the meaning of the phrase \textit{wn'spt ʿl-qbrtyk} we must determine the meaning of the expression preceding it in v. 20, \textit{ʾsp ʿl-ḥtyw}. This expression is closely related to the expression \textit{nʾsp ʿl-ḥtyw} 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 \textit{nʾsp ʿl-ʾmyw}, which is recurrent in Pentateuchal sources. 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. Where \textit{nʾsp ʿl-ʾmyw} 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 \textit{ʾspk} (Qal participle) used in 2 Kings xxii 20 may be due to the fixed formula for prophetic announcements \textit{ʾlkny} + 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, \textit{nʾsp ʿl-qbrtyw}. This strongly suggests that it has an origin different from \textit{ʾsp ʿl-ḥtyw}. Alfrink rightly pointed to a few passages in Samuel, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, where \textit{ʾsp} occurs in connection with interment, and is followed by the root \textit{qbr} ([n. 3], p. 120). In these passages \textit{ʾsp} refers to the gathering of the \textit{ʾsmwt}, the bones of the deceased, as preceding the burial. Whereas 2 Sam. xxi 13 and Jer. viii 1, 2 make explicit reference to the \textit{ʾsmwt}, Jer. xxv 33 and Ezek. xxix 5 have only \textit{nʾsp}, “one is gathered,” which may be elliptical for: the various parts of the body, the \textit{ʾsmwt}, are gathered. \textit{wnʾspʾ} 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 \textit{wnʾspʾ} 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-qḥryk, 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 bšlem 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-qḥryk bšlem 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 battlefield. 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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4 Gen. xxviii 8-9, 17, xxxv 29, xlviii 29, 33; Num. xx 24 (cf. xx 26), xxvii 13, xxi 2; Deut. xxi 50 (2).


6 The LXX (kaige-revision) seems to confirm this view. It renders ἐκτός ἀπὸ τοὺς πατέρας σου. Forms of the verb προστίθημι have also been used in the renderings of Gen. xxviii 8, xxxv 29, xlviii 29, 33; Num. xx 24, 26, xxi 13, xxi 2; Deut. xxi 50; Judg. ii 10. Significantly, the Greek translators of 2 Kings xxii 20 did not choose προστίθημι for rendering ἐκτός in the phrase ἐκτός ἀπὸ τοὺς πατέρας σου. This rendering is in keeping with 2 Sam. xxi 13 (LXX 2 Reigns xxi 13) and Ezek. xxix 5 (cf. Jer. vii 24), 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 qbrk in analogy with LXX B and LXX L would bring about exact correspondence with MT xxxiii 30a, where the term used to designate the tomb is qbrk. On the other hand, text-critical support for reading a singular form in 2 Kings xxxii 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 qbrwl in xxii 20 may refer to a family-tomb, which includes several rooms (see HAL, p. 996).

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 exegetae,1 concludes with two difficult verses:

übëliyya'at keqqës mūnād kullāhām
ki-lo bēyād yiqqāhū
wē'ēs yiggāl bāhēm yimmālē barzel
wē'ēs hānū
ūba'ēs sārip yisšarepā bašēbet

I will discuss the final term: bašēbet. 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 yāb bēt in verse 8.2 Others have sought to resolve the problem by suggesting alternative readings.3 The ancient exegetae, 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 yāb and interpret accordingly: “they shall be burned in their place”;4 others derive it from yēb 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 bēt, 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”):