

David's curse of Joab (2 Sam 3:29) and the social significance of *mḥzyq bplk*

M. Malul - University of Haifa

[David's curse of Joab in 2 Sam 3:29 employs a series of conceptually related expressions with a common basic theme: all refer to a person's status as outcast from civilized society and relegated to the sphere of outlawry, both in this life and in the afterlife. In the context of this common theme, the expression *mḥzyq bplk* is to be understood as designating a man as effeminate (whether psychologically or physiologically) and, being unable to father offspring, he was not only dubbed socially a misfit and pushed to the fringes of society, but his spirit too was doomed –for lack of descendants on earth to provide for its needs in the afterlife– to eternal suffering, being forced to wander hungrily and miserably in waste places among other social outcasts. Much of the external evidence cited in this study occurs in the form of curses appended to political treaties and other types of legal documents which threaten the violator of the conditions with dire consequences. Since Abner's murder by Joab had in fact direct bearing on a political treaty recently concluded between Abner and David, the significance of the curse becomes clearer].

When the news of Abner's treacherous murder by Joab reached David, the latter did his utmost to dissociate himself from the deed and any hint of complicity in it¹. This David did by solemnly uttering a dire curse upon Joab and his house and by conducting a meticulous rite of mourning².

David's curse of Joab consists of two parts: (1) that the murder blood will rest on the head of Joab and on his father's house³, and (2) that his house will never be free of certain categories of people, understood to be of the lowest and most loathsome strata of society. In this article we are interested in elucidating the meaning and significance of the latter part of David's curse⁴.

1. For David's possible complicity in the death of both Abner and Ish-boshet (Eshbaal), see recently J. VanderKam, "Davidic Complicity in the Death of Abner and Eshbaal", *JBL* 99 (1980): 521-539 and more references there. It is our belief that David indeed more than acquiesced to these murders and he even seems to have had a direct hand in them. Joab, and the two assassins in the case of Ish-bosheth, seem to have only been David's instruments in executing his plans, as well as his later scapegoats. It is our intention to publish in the future a study of David's possible involvement even in the death of Saul and his sons on the Gilboa mountain.

2. A recurring pattern in the stories about David is his engagement in elaborate ceremonies of mourning whenever the news of the death of someone allegedly dear to him is brought to him. The classic case is the death of Saul and his sons. See also his mourning over the death of Absalom (2 Sam 19: 1-5). A very prominent element in these ceremonies is David's profuse weeping (cf. *ʿd dvd hgdyt* "until David exceeded" 1 Sam 20: 41). David appears to the reader as a prodigious weeper, and it would seem hard to find in the OT a greater one. This seems to have been one of his effective tactics in allaying any suspicion as to his possible direct or indirect involvement in the murders. See in particular the people's response to David's mourning Abner's death in 2 Sam. 3: 36f.: "And all the people took notice of it, and it pleased them... For all the people and all Israel understood that day that it was not of the king to slay Abner the son of Ner". For the possible formal and legal significance of this acquittal of David, see our study "Law in the Narratives. A Study of the Expressions *hkyrw* and *wyytb lʿynyhm* in II Sam 3: 36", *JNSL* 17 (1991) (forthcoming).

3. Cf. 1 Kgs 2: 32-33. For this expression see K. Koch, "Der Spruch 'sein Blut bleibe auf seinem Haupt' und die israelitische Auffassung vom vergossenen Blut", *VT* 12 (1962): 396-416; and earlier G. Reventlow, "Sein Blut komme über sein Haupt", *VT* 10 (1960): 311-327.

4. For recent attempts to interpret the curse, and especially to elucidate the meaning of the expression *mḥzyq bplk*, see S. W. Holloway, "Distaff, Crutch or Chain Gang: The Curse of the House of Joab in 2 Samuel III 29", *VT* 37 (1987): 370-375; S. C. Layton, "A Chain of Gang in 2 Samuel III 29? A Rejoinder", *VT* 39 (1989): 81-86; see also K. van der Toorn, *Sin and Sanction in Israel and Mesopotamia*, SSN 22 (Assen/Maastricht: Van Gorcum, 1985) 84.

The second part of David's curse consists of the following five expressions, each referring to some negative and therefore abhorrent status of a person in life and society:⁵ *zb* "gonorrheal",⁶ *mšr*^c "leper"⁷, *mḥzyq bplk* "one who holds the spindle",⁸ *npl bḥrb* "one who falls by the sword", and *ḥsr lḥm* "one who lacks bread". The literal meaning of each of these expressions is quite clear and poses no specific exegetical problems, beyond, for example, such difficulties as identifying the exact physical or medical nature of the *šr*^c-disease, commonly taken to be leprosy⁹, or the exact form, color and weight of the *plk* "spindle". Such difficulties, however, are immaterial to an attempt to elucidate the religious, symbolic and sociological significance of these expressions and to understand their meaning in the curse as a whole¹⁰.

Except for *plk*, all the other expressions occur elsewhere in the OT, also in the context of curses¹¹. *mḥzyq bplk* is unique. The word *bplk* itself is attested in the OT in one more place only: Prov 31:19¹². The strangeness of this expression is manifest also in the context of the present curse. Even upon a cursory reading, focusing on the literal level, one is struck by the apparent lack of any conceptual relation between the *mḥzyq bplk*-expression and the others. What could possibly be the relation between "one who holds the spindle" and one afflicted with gonorrhea, a leper, or "one who lacks bread"?¹³ Of course, it could very well be that David is uttering here a series of the most dire curses he could think of, without necessarily selecting those that happen to be somehow conceptually related. Yet beside the fact that curses

5. That these expressions denote social statuses, in the sense that persons designated by them belonged to strictly defined –and from the point of view of society quite inferior– social statuses, will become clear as the discussion progresses.

6. *KB*³ 255b; see also van der Toorn, *Sin and Sanction*, 31f., 76.

7. For leprosy in the OT and the ANE see the summary of evidence by Th. Seidl, "šara'at, šārūa', m^ešora^c", *TWAT* VI (1987ff.): 1127-1133 and extensive bibliography there; see also G. J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, NICOT (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1979), 194ff.; van der Toorn, *Sin and Sanction*, 72ff.; and for ancient Mesopotamia see J. V. Kinnier Wilson, "Leprosy in Ancient Mesopotamia", *RA* 60 (1966): 47-58; R. D. Biggs, "Lepra", *RLA* 6 (1980ff.): 605; K. Watanabe, *ASJ* 6 (1984): 109ff.

8. For a different translation and understanding of this expression see the following discussion.

9. See n. 7 above; and especially Kinnier Wilson's attempt to identify the disease of leprosy in certain descriptions of symptoms in Akkadian texts, *RA* 60: 49ff.; cf. n. 74 below.

10. See also below section IIB and n. 61.

11. For a curse of leprosy see the case of Gehazi in 2 Kgs 5: 27; cf. also Deut 28:27, 35 which seems also to refer to various types of leprous diseases; see M. Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic School* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972), 117f., 121. As to the possibility that the story in Daniel 5 about King Nebuchadnezzar's being afflicted with madness and living in the steppe like a wild ass (5: 2) reflects the tradition about Nabonidus's being afflicted with leprosy (*šḥn' b'ys'* –Prayer of Nabonidus 2,6), see Weinfeld, 121 n. 2 and bibliography there; cf. D. R. Hillers, *Treaty-Curses and the Old Testament Prophets*, *Biblica et Orientalia* 16 (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1964), 16 n. 14; H. M. Y. Gevariahu, "The Prayer of Nabonidus From the Dead Sea Scrolls", in *Studies in the Dead Sea Scrolls*, ed J. Liver (Jerusalem: Kiryat Sepher, 1957), 12-23 (Hebrew). Gonorrhea occurs elsewhere in conjunction with leprosy: Lev 22:4; Num 5:2. These contexts and other evidence to be presented below point to some conceptual relation between the two; see in detail below. Cases of dying by the sword and of hunger and want are very frequent in the OT (and in external sources): see, e.g., Jer 14:15ff.; 18:21; Ezek 14:21; Lam 4:9 and more—all juxtaposing the two. For the meaning of this juxtaposition see the discussion below.

12. This word has, of course, nothing to do with the word *plk* "district" evinced frequently in Nehemiah 3, which recently has been interpreted on the basis of Akkadian *pilku* II to mean "work-duty"... "tax in the form of conscripted labor" (A. Demsky, "Pelekh in Nehemiah 3", *IEJ* 33 [1983]: 243f.; for Akk. *pilku* II see *AHW* 863b). This meaning has recently also been applied to *plk* in 2 Sam 3:29 by Holloway, a suggestion effectively rejected by Layton (see for both n. 4, above); see in detail below.

13. Cf. a similar remark by V. Aptowitz, "Rabbinische Parallelen und Aufschlüsse zu Septuaginta und Vulgata", *ZAW* 29 (1909): 247, and also by Holloway, *VT* 37: 371, who, however, sees the meaning of this expression followed here (as "a reference to women's art", see below) to be "out of place among the badly evil designs of its fellow curses..."; cf. also van der Toorn, *Sin and Sanction*, 84.

in the ANE, including the OT, do not seem to have been haphazard, but rather to form patterns with some underlying common theme¹⁴, one has the feeling that somehow all these expressions in David's curse were drawn together because they must refer to basically one and the same theme¹⁵. The question would then be what the meaning of the *mhzyc bplk* expression could possibly be in the context of this unified theme.

Our working hypothesis, then, is that the coupling together of all the expressions in David's curse is not accidental, for all are somehow conceptually related to each other, and that the whole curse addresses one common basic theme to be elucidated below.

Whereas the general meaning of the expression *mhzyc bplk* has already been noted by previous scholars, who also used much of the same evidence summarized below¹⁶, no one –Holloway's remark notwithstanding (see n.13 above)– has applied the criterion of common theme underlying all the expressions to explain their juxtaposition in David's curse, and particularly to arrive at the significance of the *mhzyc bplk*-expression. A few more pieces of unrecognized evidence, both ancient Near Eastern and rabbinical, combined with the above criterion, enable one to dig deeper into the basic meaning and social significance of the *mhzyc bplk*-expression and into its conceptual relation with the others. Also, one has to bear in mind the observation made already in the literature that David's curse of Joab should be understood in the context of treaty-curses, threatening the treaty violator; for Joab was indeed such a violator –with respect to the treaty between David and Abner (2 Sam 3:12-21)¹⁷.

I. THE MEANING AND SIGNIFICANCE OF *mhzyc bplk*

Basically, two interpretations have been suggested:

A. "One who holds the *plk*" means one who holds or leans on a crutch to help him walk because of some leg disease he suffers from, or because of old age¹⁸. This would apparently put this expression on the same level as those denoting the diseases of gonorrhea and leprosy, but not the other expressions. Also, a leg disease does not seem to be as severe as leprosy, considering the latter's seriousness in terms of the

14. This statement will be amply demonstrated below, for it is essential to our understanding of David's curse of Joab. The basic theme underlying David's curse, as well as other related themes, are the subject of a book, currently at an advanced stage of preparation, provisionally titled *Prevention of Burial in the OT and the ANE – The Legal Background of a Common Curse* (hereafter *Prevention of Burial*). The present article summarizes some of the conclusions of this book. For patterns of curses in the ANE see Weinfeld's extensive discussion in *Deuteronomy*, 116ff.; see further below.

15. Cf. Holloway's remark quoted in n. 13, above.

16. See most recently Layton's note in *VT* 39: 81-86.

17. See H. M. Y. Gevariahu, "The Treaty Between David and Abner and the Fate of the Chief of Staff, Joab", in *Samuel Yeivin's Book*, ed S. Avramsky, Y. Aharoni, H. M. Y. Gevariahu, and B. Luria (Jerusalem: Kiryat Sepher, 1970), 140-156, esp. 141f., 145ff. (Hebrew). The banquet given by David to Abner and his men (v. 20) is most probably the customary meal held on the occasion of ratifying a treaty (see also Gen 31:46; Ex 24:11).

18. This is based on the LXX's reading; cf. also the *Talmud* (*b. Sanh.* 48:2) and the medieval commentators, particularly Rashi. Aquila, cited apud H. P. Smith, *Samuel*, ICC (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1899), 281, read *one blind*, "perhaps because a blind man feels his way with his staff". (For the place of blindness in David's curse, see below). Among the modern scholars holding this view, see O. Thenius, *Die Bücher Samuels* (Leipzig: Hirzel, 1898), 133, who, however, wavers between this interpretation and the other presented below (Thenius also mentions the possibility that a holder of a crutch could be a blind); H. W. Hertzberg, *I & II Samuel. A Commentary*, OTL (London: SCM Press, 1964), 256; F. Stoltz, *Das erste und zweite Buch Samuel*, Zürcher Bibelkommentare: Altes Testament 9 (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1981), 198, 201; M. Z. Segal, *The Book of Samuel* (Jerusalem: Kiryat Sepher, 1971), 252 (Hebrew); *KB³*, 881a; N. H. Tur-Sinai, *The Language and the Book*, 3 vols. (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1954), 1.78 (Hebrew) and others (see also the references apud Holloway [n. 4, above]: 374 n. 4).

leper's place and status in society¹⁹. This interpretation, therefore, is not congruent with the dire significance of the curse as a whole²⁰.

B. The second interpretation is based on understanding the word *plk* as denoting a spindle, the tool commonly used by *women* for weaving clothes²¹, and consequently becoming one of the typical symbols of femininity²². Thus "one who holds the spindle" is one who apparently engages in womanly tasks, thereby bringing disgrace upon himself and his house²³.

Unlike the first interpretation, the second has the benefit of several other examples in the OT and elsewhere of curses and descriptions of men becoming and behaving like women: Isa 19:16; Jer 50:37; 51:30; Nah 3:13; see also the indicative verses Judg 4:9 and 9:53f.²⁴.

It has also been noted by scholars that the *mhzzyq bplk*-curse with this interpretation is paralleled by similar curses in treaties and other documents in the ANE, where the violator is threatened that his manhood will be taken away from him²⁵, and instead he will be given the spindle, mirror and other characteristic womanly objects, thus becoming like a woman²⁶. It is also to be noted that such symbols of

19. For the dire significance of leprosy see below. For leg diseases see the case of Asa in 1 Kgs 15:23; 2 Chr 16:12, which is specifically connected by the Talmudic passage referred to above with the *mhzzyq bplk*-expression. The case of Asa has also recently been interpreted as referring to some venereal disease (*zwb* "gonorrhoea"; "leg" = euphemism for private parts); see van der Toorn, *Sin and Sanction*, 76, 84f. This, however, would not fit our verse where an actual leg disease is expected, if *plk* is to be interpreted as a crutch.

20. See also Holloway's objections to this interpretation *VT* 37: 371.

21. See Prov 31:19 and cf. Exod 35:25-26.

22. Cf. Layton, *VT* 39: 84; and see in general H. A. Hoffner, "Symbols of Masculinity and Femininity – Their Use in Ancient Near Eastern Sympathetic Magic Rituals", *JBL* 86 (1966): 326-334. For the spindle as a feminine symbol see pp. 329ff.; for David's curse see p. 332.

23. See Nowack apud Hertzberg, *I & II Samuel*, 256, n. a.; A. B. Ehrlich, *Randglossen zur hebräischen Bibel* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1910), 3.281; P. R. Ackroyd, *The Second Book of Samuel*, CBC (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 45, 47; Hillers, *Treaty-Curses*, 67-68; and the recent notes by Holloway and Layton, citing much evidence and literature. A third interpretation has recently been suggested by Holloway: *plk*, on the basis of Akk. *pilku* II, means "work-duty, corvée", and thus Joab is cursed in that his house will be condemned to the corvée (see n. 12 above). This interpretation has been effectively rejected by Layton, and so it need not detain us here. A fourth interpretation is that by Aptowitzer (n. 13 above) who, basing himself on an aggadic passage (*Tanh.* ed. Buber, *Toledot* 7), understands the holding of the spindle as a symbol of poverty, which is also reflected in the *Targum mtqyp b'gr*.

24. Note that in all these verses only one aspect of becoming like a woman is emphasized –that of being inflicted with fear like women. According to Hoffner, masculinity in ancient times "was measured by two criteria: (1) ...prowess in battle, and (2) ...ability to sire children" (*JBL* 86: 327). The first criterion is reflected –negatively– in the above-cited verses. It does not seem to be the main meaning underlying the curse under discussion; see below.

25. Symbolized by the breaking of his bow and arrow; see in Hoffner's article *passim*. See, e.g., one of the curses in the treaty between Ashur-nirari V and Mati'ilu of Arpad (see *ANET*, 533b): "May Ishtar... take away their bow (and) cause their [steri]lity!" For the breaking of the bow in the OT see, e.g., 1 Sam 2:4; Jer 49:35; Hos 1:5. For the bow and arrows as symbols of masculinity and virility in the ancient world (including Greece and Rome), see Hoffner, *JBL* 86: 329ff.; see Ps 127:4-5 and there the significant association between the bow and arrow and a person's fertility, for which see below.

26. See, e.g., D. J. Wiseman, *The Vassal-Treaties of Esarhaddon* (London: British School of Archaeology, 1958) (hereafter *VTE*), lines 616f. and especially the Hittite "Soldiers' Oath" in *ANET*, 354a second paragraph, where an arrow is broken and a spindle and mirror are placed in the hands of the soldiers (cf. Hoffner: 331f.). For other cases of curses threatening the violator that his masculinity will be turned into femininity, see e.g. *CT* 35, 19 K.5234:4: [*zkrüss*] *unu sinnišāniš tušalli[k]* "She (Ishtar) will turn them from men into women", and more examples in *CAD* S, 286 s.v. *sinnišāniš*. See also lines V 9-10 from the treaty between Ashur-nirari V and Mati'ilu (*ANET*, 533b): "...may Mati'ilu become a prostitute, his soldiers women, may they receive [a gift] in the square of their cities like any prostitute". See in general Hillers, *Treaty-Curses*, 66-68. In the text cited by H. Güterbock in *ZA* 44 (1938): 120ff., lines 10ff. (especially 16-18), the spindle is mentioned, with a hint of ridicule, in reference to feminine traits (see also notes on pp. 128f. and 129f. and see pp. 132f.).

femininity (and others of masculinity) were employed in magical rituals –both of the “black” and “white” types –for causing or curing sexual impotence²⁷.

From the viewpoint of the sheer amount of evidence available the second interpretation appears thus closer to the truth, although the conceptual relation between a curse of becoming effeminate and the curses of leprosy, falling by the sword and lacking bread is as vague as that between the latter and a curse of suffering from some leg disease and having to lean on a crutch. Also, becoming effeminate and engaging in womanly tasks does not seem –at least at first glance– as severe, for example, as being leprous or falling by the sword²⁸. Or does it?

The common curse of becoming effeminate can be understood as referring to two states: psychological and physiological. The biblical references cited above seem to emphasize the psychological –and temporal– aspect of such a state. The same picture obtains in similar curses in ancient Near Eastern texts. However, there is enough evidence to show that the condition referred to by such curses might be more than the temporary psychological one of being afflicted with fear like women. It could be sexual impotence –whether psychologically or physiologically based– or other sexual abnormalities, including such physiological conditions as being asexual, androgynous, or even castrated²⁹.

In the OB treaty between Abba-AN of Yamkhad and Yarimlim of Alalakh³⁰ the violator of the treaty is threatened in the following way (lines 19-20): “*Ištar assinnam parauram ina birkišu litebbi* “May Ishtar spread on his knees (= private parts) the *assinnu* and the *parauru*”. This may mean that Ishtar will turn the violator into a woman in the physical sense, since the *assinnu* (and probably also the *parauru*) seems to have been a eunuch, or at least a person with strong effeminate tendencies³¹. The curses quoted in the *CAD* s.v. *sinnišāniš*³² may be similarly understood.

Note that it is Ishtar, the goddess of war and love, who is usually in charge of this curse and she is depicted in ancient Near Eastern literature as the one responsible for turning men into women and vice-versa. In an OB hymn to this goddess she is depicted as the one who grants and deprives one of his virility, manliness and the like³³:

27. See Hoffner, *JBL* 86: esp. p. 331. See, e.g., E. Ebeling, *Tod und Leben nach der Vorstellungen der Babylonier* (Berlin und Leipzig: Walter de Gruyter, 1931) (hereafter *TuL*), 76: 5-6 where the spindle is mentioned besides the comb and hair clasp. These and other women's effects were usually given to the demoness Lamashtu to exorcize her (see, e.g., *RA* 18: 167:28; *ZA* 16: 174:40; 192:28f. and the references cited by Layton, *VT* 39: 86 n. 17); cf. also the Sumerian passages quoted in *The Sumerian Dictionary of the University Museum of the University of Pennsylvania*, ed. Å. W. Sjöberg (Philadelphia: The University Museum, 1984), 64-65 s.v. bala A.

28. It should be said at the outset that the apparently male-chauvinist connotations of this curse are completely off the mark. As will be shown below, the negative and threatening aspect of this curse does not derive from the view that womanly tasks are inherently inferior or that being a woman is inferior to being a man. Such views might have existed in Israelite society (see, e.g., the verses cited above, esp. *Judg* 4:9 and 9:53-54), but they are not reflected in this curse. See below.

29. Hoffner specifically emphasizes the aspect of depriving a man of his sexual potency and virility involved in these curses, which is affected by means of sympathetic magic rituals; see *JBL* 86: 326-334 passim. For the possible existence in ancient Mesopotamia of physical sexual deficiencies, see J. Bottéro-H. Petschow, “Homosexualität”, *RLA* 4 (1975): 464f. and the remarks below.

30. D.J. Wiseman, *The Alalakh Tablets* (London: British Institute of Archaeology at Ankara, 1953), n. 1.

31. For the effeminate character of the *assinnu*, who sometimes engaged in homosexual relations, see *CAD* A/2, 341f. and esp. the passage from the Epic of Erra to be quoted below (see also n. 37 below); for the *parauru* see *AHW*, 833a s.v. and 834b s.v. *parrû* I. Another way of reading this line, which, however, leads to the same sense, is that suggested by A. Shaffer (in a seminar on the Alalakh Tablets held at the Hebrew University in 1975), who sees in the first two signs of the word *pa-ra-û-ra-am* a scribal error of dittography (*pa* in Old Babylonian cursive could resemble *û* and thus we would twice have the sequence *û-ra*), and so to be deleted, leaving us with the signs *û-ra-am*. The latter he derives from the word *ûru* “vulva”, and the whole curse would then run as follows: “May Ishtar (who creates) *assinnu*(s) imprint a vulva on his private parts!”

32. *CAD* S, 286a.

33. Å.W. Sjöberg, “in-nin ša-gur₄-ra. A Hymn to Goddess Inanna by the en-Priestess Enheduanna”, *ZA* 65 (1975): 190f. lines 120, 125.

1.120: *zīkaram ana sinništim sinniš ana zīkarim turrum kūmma Ištar*

"To turn a man into a woman and a woman into a man is yours, Ishtar."

1.125: *dūtam baštam šēda[m]amassam māhāzam wuddūm kūmma Ištar*

"To assign virility, vigor, guardian angels (vitality), good fairies (productivity) and cult-places is yours, Ishtar."³⁴

In a passage in the Erra Epic Tablet IV 52-60³⁵ Ishtar's activities on behalf of her city Uruk are described, as well as her relation to some specific classes of persons, such as the prostitutes and hierodules. In lines 55f. two types of persons are mentioned (the *kurgarrū* and the *assinnu*) whom she is said to have turned into women: *zīkrūssunu uterru ana sin[nišūt]* "(She) changed them from men into women."

Moreover and more important, Ishtar is depicted in ancient Near Eastern literature as in charge of a whole retinue of (cult?) personnel, the main characteristic of all is that each seems to have suffered from some sexual deviation. Not only is she in charge of various kinds of prostitutes and hierodules³⁶, but also of such gay people as the *assinnu*, who seems to have been a (eunuch?) male-prostitute engaging in homosexual relations³⁷; the *sinnišānu* "effeminate person" (woman-like), who is equated in a lexical list with the *assinnu*, and thus seems to have also been a type of male-prostitute³⁸; the *kurgarrū*, a dancer and singer

34. See Sjöberg's remarks on pp. 223ff. and several more passages on Ishtar's role in changing the sexes are quoted there; see also the citations in Hillers, *Treaty-Curses*, 66f. For the significance of the word *dātu* "virility" for the theme of this article see below.

35. For an edition of this epic see L. Cagni, *L'epopea di Erra*, Studi Semitici 34 (Rome: Istituto di Studi del Vicino Oriente, Università di Roma, 1969); see also idem, *The Poem of Erra*, SANE 1/3 (Malibu: Undena Publications, 1977) and an English translation there (pp. 26-61).

36. The *harimtu/harmatu*, *šamḥ/katu*, *qadištu*, *kezertu*, etc.; see the Epic of Erra IV 52; the Epic of Gilgamesh VI 165f.; see the Akkadian dictionaries s.v.; cf. Bottéro-Petschow, *RIA* 4: 463ff. Ishtar herself is sometimes depicted as a harlot; see, e.g., *BE* 31, 12 (for which see the summary in M. Malul, "susapinnu - The Mesopotamian Paranymp and His Role", *JESHO* 32 [1989]: 245f.); *SBH*, n. 56 + n. 155:49-59 (see Malul, *ibid*: 249); see in general T. Jacobsen, *The Treasures of Darkness. A History of Mesopotamian Religion* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1976), 139f.; cf. E. Reiner, *JNES* 33: 224:3, where Ishtar(?) See Reiner's remarks on pp. 233f.) is depicted both as a harlot (*harimtu*) and as having large breasts (see p. 233); in line 4 the goddess is depicted as having a beard in Babylon. For bearded women see the omens *CT* 35, 5:124; *CT* 29, 48:4 and more cited in *CAD* Z, 126a; for bearded Ishtar see *ibid* section b.

37. See n. 31 above and in general Bottéro-Petschow, *RIA* 4: 463f.; B. Meissner, *Assyriologische Studien*, MVAG 12/3 (Berlin: Wolf Peiser Verlag, 1907), 151-156 Ch. XXI "Homosexualität bei den Assyren"; cf. A.L. Oppenheim, *OrNS* 19 (1950): 135 n. 1. For the homosexual nature of the *assinnu* see the *šumma ālu*-omen *CT* 39 45:32: *šumma awilum ana assinni tihhi* "If a man has sexual intercourse with an *assinnu*"; cf. also 44:15 where a man is described as having a strong desire to have homosexual relations, in the manner of an *assinnu* (Bottéro-Petschow: 464a 13). Note that the Sumerian ideogram of the word *assinnu* is ur-sal which means literally "a female dog" (see Oppenheim, *loc. cit.*). Is there any parallelism between this "female dog" (a male homosexual who permits sexual intercourse per anus, in the manner of a dog?) and the "dog" mentioned in Deut 23:19 next to the prostitute? (A verbal communication by J. H. Tigay).

38. For the lexical list see *MSL* 12, 226:3: [lú].ur-sal: [as]-sin-nu: sin-niš- a^c [nu]. For the activities of the *sinnišānu* see the popular saying in W.G. Lambert, *Babylonian Wisdom Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon 1960) (hereafter *BWL*), 218: rv. iv 3-6: "When the *sinnišānu* entered the alehouse (*bīt aštammī*, see below) and lifted his hand, he said: 'Let us, you (= Ishtar) and I, (divide) half and half the wages of the *anzanīnu*'. Note first the mention of the *bīt aštammī* "alehouse, tavern" which seems to have been a place of orgies and lewd behaviour, and is specifically connected with Ishtar (see *CAD* A/2 s.v.; see Malul, *JESHO* 32: 250, 252f and *passim*). For the *bīt aštammī* as a typical place frequented by harlots see Jacobsen, *JNES* 12: 184f. n. 68; idem, *Treasures of Darkness*, 139f.; for a similar institution in Hittite Anatolia see H.A. Hoffner, "The *Arzana* House", in *Anatolian Studies Presented to Hans Gustav Güterbock on the Occasion of His 65th Birthday*, ed. K. Bittel, Ph. J. Houwink ten Cate, and E. Reiner (Istanbul: Nederlands Instituut voor het Nabije Oosten, 1974), 113-121. *Middle Assyrian Laws* 14 deals with the case of a married woman committing adultery in the alehouse; cf. the remark of G.R. Driver & J.C. Miles, *The Middle Assyrian Laws* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1935), 462. Nothing is known of the *anzanīnu*, translated by Lambert as "matchmaker", except that he might also have been a person of similar character to those frequenting a place like the alehouse (see Malul, *JESHO* 32: 243f. and there the juxtaposition of this character with the *susapinnu* "paranymp", who was also related to Ishtar and is also surrounded sometimes by the same strong aura of lewd behavior; see Malul: 255ff. and *passim*). Against the background of the foregoing the wages mentioned in this saying must have been equivalent to a harlot's pay (see Deut 23:19 and n. 37 above).

who is also said to have been turned into a woman by Ishtar (Erra IV 55f.)³⁹; the *kulu'u*, another member in the cult of Ishtar who is also mentioned next to the *assinnu* and like the latter also seems to have been effeminate⁴⁰; and others⁴¹. The common meeting place of this company was the *bīt aštammi* "the alehouse, tavern", which is always connected with Ishtar⁴². Ishtar herself is described sometimes as being bisexual and in certain texts she is depicted as having a beard⁴³.

All the foregoing evidence points clearly to the possibility of understanding the reference to Ishtar's changing the sexes as being literal, and not just as reflecting "changing of roles of women and men in the cult ceremonies" of the goddess⁴⁴; for all the above members in the cult of Ishtar do not seem to be merely transvestite actors, but people with clear sexual deficiencies and preferences⁴⁵. In the cases of treaty-curses, this changing of sex may mean actual sexual impotence, as maintained by Hoffner, whether caused by the power of the curse itself or by sympathetic magic rituals. When such curses are directed against the violator's house, they may be understood as calling upon Ishtar to cause the birth of sexually abnormal and defective persons among the violator's family members.

Now it is of much interest to note that the Sumerian-Akkadian lexical series *lú = ša*⁴⁶ lists in one breath such sexually deviant people together with the expression *nāš pilakki* "he who holds the spindle"⁴⁷. Since this lexical list is organized according to a thematic principle⁴⁸, it is clear that in the eyes of the compiler of the list, *nāš pilakki* is of the same order as, say, the *assinnu*, and both seem to have been

39. On the *kurgarrū*, who is also frequently mentioned next to the *assinnu*, and both are related to the cult of Ishtar, see CAD K, 557ff.; Bottéro-Petschow, *RLA* 4: 463ff.; W.H. Ph. Römer, *Sumerische 'Königshymnen' der Isin-Zeit* (Leiden: Brill, 1965), 166; and earlier B. Landsberger, *WZKM* 56 (1960): 120 n. 31, who understood the *kurgarrūs* to be "(kastierte) Tempelgauler"; see also S. Parpola's remark in *Letters from Assyrian Scholars to the Kings Asarhaddon and Assurbanipal*, AOAT 5/1-2 (Kevelaer: Butzon and Bercker; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchner Verlag, 1970, 1983), II.316 and n. 574.

40. See CAD K, 529a and especially the passage from a MB letter *AJO* 10: 3: 21: *Ninurta-tukulti-Aššur ša taqbū kulu'u lā zikaru šū* "Ninurta-tukulti-Ashshur, about whom you said: 'He is a *kulu'u*, not a man!"; see Oppenheim, *OrNS* 19: 132ff. It is interesting to note that Hieronimus renders the term *qdš* in the Book of Kings (e.g., 1 Kgs 14:24; 15:12; 22:47; 2 Kgs 23:7) by *effeminatus* and in his interpretation of Hos 4:14 he relates it to Roman *gallus*, which denotes men who castrated themselves for the goddess Athys and spent their time in the company of women; for bibliography and discussion see M.I. Gruber, "The *Qadeš* in the Book of Kings and in Other Sources", *Tarbiz* 52 (1983): 173 n. 25 (Hebrew). Also Parpola (n. 39 above) sees a clear parallelism between the *kurgarrūs* and the Roman *galli*.

41. See the list of these and others mentioned by Bottéro-Petschow, *RLA* 4: 463ff.

42. See n. 38 above.

43. See n. 36 above and Hoffner, *JBL* 86: 333 n. 54 and references there to other such bisexual goddesses.

44. Thus Sjöberg, *ZA* 65: 226.

45. Cf. Bottéro-Petschow, 463ff.; van der Toorn, *Sin and Sanction*, 84. There may have been, of course, cases of simple transvestism as attested perhaps in Deut 22:5; see the texts quoted by Sjöberg on pp. 224f. and the text *SRT* 36:21-25 quoted by D. Reisman, *Two Neo-Sumerian Royal Hymns* (Ph.D. dissertation; University of Pennsylvania, 1969), 195: "... the maidens dress their left sides in the manner of young men,... the young men dress their right sides in the manner of maidens."

46. Published in *MSL* 12. This list deals with various professions and social classes and statuses in ancient Mesopotamian society. See A. Cavigneaux, "Lexikalische Listen", *RLA* 6 (1980-83):628-630.

47. See *MSL* 12, 102:217; 135:198a. See also the text *ABRT* 1, 55 i 10 quoted in CAD K, 558a where several of Ishtar's cult personnel sit before her, including the *kurgarrūs*, who are said to be carrying the spindle (cf. Bottéro-Petschow, *RLA* 4: 465). Note also that a certain insect (wood wasp?) is called *pilak Ištar* "the spindle of Ishtar" (*MSL* 8/2, 170:306; 173:41), thus explicitly connecting this symbol with Ishtar too, which is not surprising in view of the variegated character of this goddess as bisexual, bearded, prostitute, etc. (see in general Jacobsen, *Treasures of Darkness*, 135ff). In *ABL* 45 the *pilakku* is mentioned in a context of an orgiastic ritual in the cult of Ishtar. See the discussion of this text by Parpola, *Letters from Assyrian Scholars*, I.262-263, n. 308 (text and translation), II.315-316 (discussion).

48. For the principles according to which the various Sumerian-Akkadian lists are organized see M. Civil, "Lexicography", *Sumerological Studies in Honor of Thorkild Jacobsen on His Seventieth Birthday*, ed. S.J. Lieberman, AS 20 (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1975), 123-136, esp. 125f.; Cavigneaux, *RLA* 6:609-641; for thematically organized lists see pp. 626ff.

persons known for some specific sexual abnormality or defect. Knowing the *pilakku* to have been a characteristic womanly symbol⁴⁹, combined with the above evidence pertaining to curses of effeminacy, as well as with the close conjunction of this title with titles of other clearly effeminate persons such as the *assinnu* and *kurgarrû*, one may conclude that the *nāš pilakki* was an effeminate person, who might also have engaged in homosexual relations⁵⁰. Also, his being recorded in a list of officially recognized statuses would place him on the level of a person belonging to a socially recognized class of persons of special sexual characteristics and preferences⁵¹. Finally, it is quite probable that the spindle was an official or conventional symbol of such persons, which they carried, or were expected to carry, in a certain fashion so as to be recognized by their kind and/or by those needing their services⁵².

On the basis of the foregoing, the expression *mḥzyq bplk* in David's curse may be interpreted as referring to a person with certain sexual deficiencies and preferences; and David thus wishes that Joab's house will never fail to produce such publicly recognized abnormal persons, who apparently will bring disgrace on it.

It is interesting that a passage in the *Jerusalem Talmud* (y. *Qidd.* 1.7:16) seems to be aware of this meaning of the expression *mḥzyq bplk*. In its interpretation of the whole curse as coming into effect in David's own house (thus also in *b. Sanh.* 48:2), the expression *mḥzyq bplk* is related to Joash, who is said to have died as a result of being sexually molested by the enemy in the manner of women!⁵³.

This interpretation of the expression *mḥzyq bplk* as referring to a declared effeminate person still does not clarify the entire picture, nor does it provide an answer as to the possible common denominator between this expression and the others in David's curse. We still do not know what is the relation, if any, between being effeminate or sexually deviant and being leprous and the like. To elucidate this relationship we must look into the other expressions and try to decipher their underlying derived meaning.

49. See above and Hoffner, *JBL* 86:326-334, passim; Bottéro-Petschow, *RLA* 4:465.

50. See the passage from the *Jerusalem Talmud* quoted in n. 53 below.

51. Cf. Bottéro-Petschow, *RLA* 4: 465ff. on classes of such abnormal people with all possible sexual deviations and their ambiguous place in society.

52. This is clearly borne out by several entries preceding the entry *nāš pilakki* in *MSL* 12, 135:198a. Thus lines 183-193a list the *assinnu*, and the following lines read as follows (only the Akkadian column is quoted): (194) *ša katra labšu* "he who is wrapped in mourning rags", (195) *aguhhu* "(the wearer of the) sash", (196) *ša ḥarimti* "(the sash) of a harlot", (197) *ša erinna labšu* "he who wears the *erinnu*-garment", (198) *nāš šibirri* "he who carries a staff/scepter". It is clear that what we have here is a list of conventional and recognized insignia of certain classes of people. Of interest is the occurrence in this list of the *aguhhu* "the sash", which could also belong to a harlot. Elsewhere in Akkadian literature this item of clothing is typically related to Ishtar; moreover, it carries the unmistakable transferred meaning of an item of sexual attractiveness (see *CAD* A, 156f. discussion section)! Also the entry in line 194 "he who is wrapped in mourning rags" seems to fit nicely in the context, as will be demonstrated below concerning the significance of concepts from the realm of death in the context of David's curse. The place of the entry in line 197 here is not clear, but the entry in line 198 may refer to the custom of certain classes of people to carry a weapon as a status insignia. This is true of the *susapinnu* "paranymph" who carried a *patru* "dagger" (see Malul, *JESHO* 32: 244ff. and passim), and, with particular significance to our theme, of the *kurgarrû* (see the text Langdon, *BL* 194:16f. quoted in *CAD* K, 558a bilingual section, where the *kurgarrû* using his *patru* stands in parallelism to the shepherd with his *šibirru* "staff", cf. Oppenheim, *OrNS* 19: 135 n. 1). Note also the line following the lines which mention the *assinnu* and the *kurgarrû* in the *Erra* Epic (IV 57); it lists the following: *nāš patri nāš naglabi quppè u šurt[i]* "the dagger-carrier, the razor-carrier, carriers of knives and flint blades", all participating in the cult of Ishtar.

53. "One who holds the spindle" applies to Joash: "Thus they executed judgments on Joash" (2 Chr 24:24). R. Ishmael taught, "This teaches that they set up against him sadists, who had never known a woman in their lives, and they inflicted suffering on him as they inflict suffering on a woman". (English translation according to J. Neusner, *The Talmud of the Land of Israel* [Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1984], 26.98-99). In the *Babylonian Talmud*, it will be remembered, it was interpreted as referring to holding the crutch by a person suffering from some leg disease; see above.

II. THE MEANING AND SIGNIFICANCE OF *zb wmsr^c, npl bħrb, AND ħsr lhm*

Again, on the literal level, the various components of David's curse are quite clear and pose no difficulty of interpretation. The question then centers on their derived meaning and significance in the framework of the dire curse against Joab's house. We shall take each expression at a time, starting with *npl bħrb* "he who falls by the sword".

A. *npl bħrb*. In our forthcoming study *Prevention of Burial*⁵⁴ much evidence has been collected and analyzed pertaining to the treatment of, and attitudes toward, the dead in the OT and the ANE and their significance for the dead's fate in the afterlife. The evidence clearly shows that the spirit of a dead person, whose body was left unburied, or even fed to beasts of prey, was doomed to eternal suffering: it was denied access to final rest and peace among the ancestral spirits, and was forced to wander and restlessly roam waste places among other outcast persons and entities. The most significant text is a curse appended to one of the MB boundary stones (the so-called *kudurrus*) which runs as follows:

šalamtašu ina erseti ayiqqeber etemmašu ana etim kimtišu ayisniq

"May his corpse not be buried in the earth (and) may (consequently) his spirit not join the spirits of his family!"⁵⁵

Another significant text is that reporting the conversation between Gilgamesh and the ghost of Enkidu, his friend, who had come up from the netherworld. Tablet 12 lines 151ff. run as follows:

ša šalamtašu ina šeri nadât tāmur ātama[r]

etemmašu ina ersetim ul šali[l]

ša etemmašu pāqida lā išû tāmur ātamar

šukkulat diqāri kusīpāt akali ša ina sūqi nadâ ikkal

"Have you seen him whose corpse was cast on the steppe (without burial)?" "I have seen (him), his spirit does not rest in the netherworld".

"Have you seen the spirit of him who has no one to care (for him)?" "I have seen,

"he eats scraps of food from the pots (and) bread-crumbs that are thrown away into the street."

The most common candidates for prevention of burial with its attendant dire effects upon the dead person's spirits were the corpses of dead enemies, who sometimes are said to be deliberately denied burial and fed to the beasts of the steppe. The inscriptions of the Neo-Assyrian kings abound with references to such cruel treatment of dead enemies fallen in wars⁵⁶. The OT is replete with references to corpses of dead enemies strewn in the streets or the steppe and desert and fed to beasts of prey, either as a description of such treatment of the dead (see Ps 72:2-4) or in the framework of curses⁵⁷. That the spirits of those fallen in wars were doomed to eternal suffering is reflected in some Akkadian rituals intended to free a seized person from spirits of dead people who suffered various fates, including those killed in wars. Such, for

54. See n. 14 above.

55. *MDP* 6 pl. 10 VI 21f. See also the funerary inscription of *Ešmun'azar* line 8: 'l ykn lm mškb 'l rp'm w'l yqbr bqbr w'l ykn lm bn wr' "May they not have a resting-place with the shades and may they not be buried in a grave and may they not have son and seed!"; and also the inscription of *Tabnit* 7-8, and see for both S. Gevirtz, "West-Semitic Curses and the Problem of the Origins of Hebrew Law", *VT* 11 (1961): 148ff. For the coupling of prevention of burial and its attendant effects of the loss of rest among the shades (cf. Prov 21:16) with the lack of seed and progeny and its significance see further below.

56. See in the collection of royal inscriptions by L.W. King & E.A.W. Budge, *The Annals of the Kings of Assyria*, I (London: British Museum, 1902) (hereafter *AKA*), passim.

57. For a sample and discussion see Hillers, *Treaty-Curses*, 68-69; see also Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy*, 131ff. Details in our forthcoming *Prevention of Burial*.

example, is the following ritual which lists various types of spirits who might have seized the sick person: [*lū etemmu kimtiya u*] *salātiya lū etemmu ša ina dīkti dīku* [*lū etemmu murtapp*] *īdu* “whether you are the spirit of my family and relations, or the spirit of (a person) who was killed in battle, or a roving spirit...”⁵⁸ Interesting also is the following diagnosis occurring in a medical text: *ša ina ^škakki dīku ina namê nadû šabissu* “a (spirit) of a person killed by a weapon (i.e., in battle) (and) discarded on the steppe is seizing him”⁵⁹.

npl bhrb “he who falls by the sword (in battle!)” must then be interpreted in the light of this common custom of denying burial to soldiers fallen in war which then affected the dead person’s spirit⁶⁰.

B. *zb wmswr*^c. First, the common juxtaposition of these two terms in the OT should be noted. Although medically speaking they referred to two distinct diseases, religiously and socially speaking, they seem to have borne the same gravity in the eyes of the ancients⁶¹. According to Num 5:2ff., both the gonorrhea sufferer and the leper (as well as the *īm’ Inpš* “the mourner”⁶²) are to be sent out of the camp, for both are considered equally defiled and dangerous to the purity and holiness of the congregation.

The leper, according to the available biblical evidence, seems to have been the archetypical social outcast in biblical times. Besides the above verses from Num 5, according to which the leper is said to be chased out of the camp, other passages in the OT show him to be relegated to the outside sphere from the point of view of the inside society. According to the story of Miriam’s denunciation of Moses in Num 12:1ff., having been afflicted by leprosy as a divine punishment, Miriam is quarantined outside the camp for seven days. According to 2 Kgs 7:3, the four lepers stay outside the gates of the city. And, finally, King Uziah is said to have been quarantined in the *byt hlpšyt* for the rest of his life after being afflicted by leprosy (2 Kgs 15:5; 2 Chr 26:21)⁶³.

The ritual that the leper had to undergo in order to be readmitted into society (Lev 14:1-32) also reflects his status as a typical outcast from society. The most interesting feature of this ritual would seem to be the act of sending away to the *šdh* “steppe, desert”⁶⁴ a bird, supposedly carrying the defiling disease away to the desert, the place of diseases and other unclean entities. This ritual recalls of course the ritual of sending the goat to the desert *‘z’zl*, again supposedly carrying off the sins of the Israelites to the waste places (Lev 16:21ff.)⁶⁵. A similar ritual is performed in the case of an object or a house contaminated by

58. Ebeling, *TuL*, 141:10f.

59. R.C. Thompson, *Assyrian Medical Texts* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1923) (hereafter *AMT*), 103:4. Cf. also *CT* 23, 15:8 (see Ebeling, *TuL*, 147f.) and see *CAD* K s.v. *kakku* for more references.

60. Note in particular the functional parallelism between *npl bhrb* and the expressions with *kakku* “weapon” cited above; and see also the previous note.

61. This is why the exact medical definition of these diseases, especially the so-called “leprosy”, is immaterial to our purpose. It might well have been the case that the ancients, being medically unable to see and draw exact distinctions, grouped together several skin diseases and identified them as one disease –that which is commonly called today “leprosy”. On the other hand, even when they do draw distinctions between various skin and other diseases (see the various terms for leprosy and skin diseases in general in Akkadian: *saḥaršubbū*, *epqu*, *garābu*, and in the OT the terms *grb*, *šhyn*, etc.; see the list compiled by van der Toorn, *Sin and Sanction*, 194 n. 224), their attitude toward these ailments puts all of them on the same level as socially and religiously equally abhorrent; cf. van der Toorn’s remarks, 30f., 72ff.

62. For the conceptual relation between the leper and leprosy and the realm of death and its significance for the present study, see below.

63. For the significance of *byt hlpšyt* for our thesis, especially as a term denoting the netherworld according to Ugaritic evidence, see below. For the idea of rejection from society reflected in the king’s situation, see below nn. 74, 102.

64. For the terms for steppe, desert (*šdh*, *mabr*) in the OT and their conceptual significance in biblical society, see the remarks in Malul, *JSOT* 46: 102f. and 119 n. 51 and references there to parallel Akkadian terms and bibliography; cf. also our remarks in n. 104 below concerning Joab’s fate as a treaty violator who was buried in the desert.

65. Cf. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, 208f. 233ff. and more bibliography there. It is interesting to note that in an Akkadian ritual (referred to by van der Toorn, *Sin and Sanction*, 30 and 170 n. 271) the leper himself serves as a scapegoat, carrying away the sins of another person. This is to be compared with another such purifying ritual, in which the sins and afflictions are symbolically loaded on an *assinnu* who is then driven out of the city gate! (*KAR* 42: 29ff. quoted in *CAD* A/2, 341b).

leprosy (Lev 14:33ff.). The contaminated bricks, or the whole house in severe cases, are said to be carried out of the city/camp to an unclean place⁶⁶.

The leper's status as a social outcast in biblical times⁶⁷, even in the strict legal sense of the term, is also reflected in the terminology used to describe his readmittance into *civilized* society: the verb 'sp "to gather". Miriam is said to have been "gathered" into the camp after seven days of quarantine. The Syrian high commander Na'aman was sent by his king to Elisha to "be gathered out of his leprosy" (2 Kgs 5: 3, 6, 7, 11).

Now the verb 'sp is used elsewhere in the OT in contexts which endow it with clear legal-technical meaning. The most significant verse would seem to be Ps 27:10: "For my father and mother deserted me (*'zbnwy*), but God will adopt me" (lit. "will gather me [*y'spny*]"). The theme of exposure of children by their parents and the adoption of foundlings by strangers has been thoroughly discussed in a recent article, where other evidence is also presented⁶⁸. Note in this context the Talmudical term for an adopted foundling, *'swpy*, lit. "the gathered one"⁶⁹.

Another interesting biblical context where the verb 'sp seems to function in a clear legal-technical meaning is 2 Sam 11:27, which reports David's taking Bath-sheba as his wife after her husband's death. The expression used is "and he gathered her (*wayya'aspāh*) into his house (so that she became his wife)". Finally, the formula "to be gathered to one's kin, ancestors (*'m*)" in the Pentateuch should be noted here. In our study *Prevention of Burial* we extensively discuss this formula (and others) and reach the conclusion that it denoted the joining of one's spirit after death with the ancestral spirits. This joining with one's ancestors⁷⁰ becomes significant in view of the possibility of being denied that privilege through prevention of burial and/or being fed to beasts of prey, in which case one's spirit is doomed to roam restlessly the waste places, the steppe and desert, much like an outcast leper! The underlying conceptual connection between the fate of the leper and the "one who falls by the sword" now becomes clearer.

Turning to the Mesopotamian evidence, this connection is even more salient. A quite frequent pattern in the curses appended to boundary stones and other cuneiform documents is the juxtaposition of

66. Note that King Nabonidus who dwelt in Tema in the Arabian desert for ten years is said to have been afflicted by leprosy, and this is taken by some scholars as the reason for the king's retreat to the desert settlement. See n. 11 above and bibliography there.

67. See Kinnier Wilson who even defines leprosy as an "excommunication disease", *RA* 60: 49f.; cf. van der Toorn, *Sin and Sanction*, 30f., 72ff.; and Watanabe, *ASJ* 6: 114f. for ancient Mesopotamia; see also n. 74 below and references there to descriptions of lepers as *sakpu* "rejected". For a general study of leprosy as an excommunication-disease throughout history in various parts of the world, see M.A. Wheatly, *Leprosy - A Disease Apart: A Historical and Cross Cultural Analysis of Stigma* (Ph.D. dissertation; Carleton University, 1985), esp. Chs. 6 and 7 on pp. 137-225.

68. See M. Malul, "Adoption of Foundlings in the OT and Mesopotamian Documents. A Study of Some Legal Metaphors in Ezekiel 16.1-7", *JSOT* 46 (1990):97-126.

69. E.g., *b.Qidd.* 70:1; 73 passim. Quite interesting in this context is H. Gunkel's suggested emendation of Ps 2:7: "I shall gather you (*'ōsip'kā*) to my bosom", identifying here a symbolic act of adoption (see *KB*³ 72a and *BH*³ to verse; H. Gunkel, *Die Psalmen*⁵ [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1968], 7, 11; cf. earlier N.H. Torczyner [Tur-Sinai], cited apud Gunkel, who had suggested reading *hēq* "bosom" instead of *hoq* "law" [see also his *The Language and the Book* (n. 18 above), 118f.]). Although one cannot prove the correctness of this emendation, it is of interest to refer to sources recording acts of adoption performed on the adoptor's bosom or lap; see, e.g., Ruth 4:16; Gen 48:5; cf. Num 11:12; Sam 12:3; Isa 49:22. See in general M. Malul, "Studies in Biblical Legal Symbolism - A Discussion of the Terms *kānāph*, *hēq*, and *hōsen/hesen*, Their Meaning and Legal Usage in the Bible and the Ancient Near East", *Shnaton* 9 (1985): 191-210 (Hebrew), and references there to parallel Akkadian terminology.

70. Cf. the Akkadian curse cited above.

the curse of prevention of burial and feeding the dead to beasts of prey and the curse of leprosy⁷¹. For example, the curses which immediately precede the curse of prevention of burial quoted above from the *kudurru MDP 6*, pl. 10 VI 21f. run as follows (lines 14-20): "May his body be covered with leprosy, the heavy punishment of the gods; may he will therefore be chased away outside the gate of his city, may they make him dwell outside of his city; may he moan as long as he lives; may he not (have the right to) come near his family; may they afflict him with dropsy!"⁷².

The fate of the leper in ancient Mesopotamia clearly emerges from this and other similar curses: he is deprived of his family, chased out of the gates of his city and forced to roam the steppe like other restless entities, such as roving spirits, demons, beasts of prey, wild asses⁷³ and outlaws⁷⁴.

The common fate of the leper and the dead person's spirit is evinced not only by the very frequent juxtaposition of these curses, but also by the usage of similar terminology in both cases. Restless spirits of dead as well as lepers are said to roam the same waste places: the *šēru*, *kamītu/kamātu*, *sūqu*, etc.⁷⁵.

71. For curses of leprosy, see *CAD* s.v. *saḥaršubbū*, *epqu*; see Hillers, *Treaty-Curses*, 15ff. and the recent general summary and analysis of K. Watanabe, "Die literarische Überlieferung eines babylonisch-assyrischen Fluchthemas mit anrufung des Mondgottes Sin," *ASJ* 6 (1984): 99-119. For a possible curse of leprosy in the Ugaritic Aqht story, see D.L. Hillers, "A Difficult Curse in Aqht (19 [I Aqht] 3.152)", in: A. Kort and S. Morschauser (eds.), *Biblical and Related Studies Presented to Samuel Iwry* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1985), 105-107; cf. W.G. Watson, *SEL* 6 (1989), 47f. with further bibliography. Other curses that appear frequently in close conjunction with the other two are those of seed and progeny, threatening the violator with the utter destruction of his house, and death by want and hunger (see the sample in the next note). For the significance of these curses for the theme of this study see below.

72. For more examples of the coupling of these two and other curses see the following texts: *VTE* lines 419-427 (leprosy, blindness [for which see further below] and prevention of burial); *Sumer* 38: 124 IV 6-23 (curses of seed, leprosy, prevention of burial, hunger); C.J. Gadd & S.N. Kramer, *Literary and Religious Texts*, UET 6/2 (London: British Museum, 1966), 402:37f. (leprosy, poverty, curse of seed); *ZA* 65:56:54-63 (leprosy, blindness, hunger); *Afo* 8: 20 IV 4ff. (leprosy, hunger); *MDP* 2, pl. 23 (hunger, leprosy, seed); L.W. King, *Babylonian Boundary Stones and Memorial Tablets in the British Museum* (London: British Museum, 1912) (hereafter *BBSI*), no. 7 II 16-21 (leprosy, blindness); no. 11 II 25-III 5 (leprosy, seed) and more. For a thorough discussion see our forthcoming *Prevention of Burial*. See also the juxtaposition of the curses of prevention of burial, skin-diseases, blindness, anarchy, etc., in Deut 28:27ff. and see Weinfeld's discussion, where he suggests that the order of the curses reflects the hierarchy of the gods in charge of each (*Deuteronomy*, 119ff.). A second look at such curses in Mesopotamian sources (and see the small sample cited in this note) clearly shows that there is no fixed order among the curses, but rather they seem to be haphazardly organized. The only recurrent pattern is their juxtaposition, in no strict order however. This shows that one has to look for the underlying conception of these curses as the factor drawing them together, rather than the hierarchy of the gods responsible for them; see more below and n. 102. For the disease of dropsy and its significance in the context of leprosy, see van der Toorn, *Sin and Sanction*, 75f.

73. For the wild ass (*sirrimu(m)*), which figures prominently in curses of leprosy, typifying the leper's fate as an outcast roaming the steppe, see J. Nougayrol, "*Sirrimu* (non **purimu*) "âne sauvage", *JCS* 2 (1948): 203, 208. King Nebuchadnezzar is said to have lived in the steppe like a wild ass (*rwd*, Dan 5:21) and with other wild beasts, and this strengthens the suggestion to see here a reflection of the tradition about Nabonidus's being afflicted with leprosy according to the "Prayer of Nabonidus" from Qumran; see above n.11.

74. See the interesting diagnostic omen *Afo* 18: 66:42-45: "If the flesh of a man shows white spots and is dotted with *nuqudu*-marks (cf. Lev 13 passim), this man is rejected by his deity (and) rejected by mankind" (see Kinnier Wilson's remarks on this omen, which for him is the most significant evidence for the existence of leprosy in ancient Mesopotamia *RA* 60: 49ff.). For the leper as a typical object of contempt and rejection see Watanabe, *ASJ* 6: 114f.; van der Toorn, *Sin and Sanction*, 73f.; for the rejected person in ancient Mesopotamian society see also the lexical entries quoted in *CAD* S, 81a s.v. *sakpu* A; cf. also our remarks in n. 102 below. Note that in *VTE*, 419-421 the curse of leprosy is supposed to cause the banishment of the afflicted from the presence of the gods and the king (cf. Watanabe: 112f.); cf. also the case of King Uzziah who, after being afflicted with leprosy, was cut off from the society of men and relegated to *byt hhpšyt* (2 kgs 15:5; 2 Chr 26:21); he is also said to have been "cut off from the house of God" (2 Chr 26:21). In a lexical list of the *lú = ša*-type the leper is listed between the prisoner on the one hand, and various terms for foreigners, enemies, outsiders and criminals on the other (*MSL* 12, 166:272-273 and 275-283, respectively). For the significance of the mention in the same context of the prisoner see n. 102 below.

75. See Malul, *JSOT* 46: 102f. and our full discussion in *Prevention of Burial*.

Moreover, the verb used in both cases to describe the restless roving and roaming the steppe is the same: *rapādum* in the Gtn-iterative stem "to run to and fro, to roam, to wander aimlessly" and the like⁷⁶. The reader should recall here the above discussion of the biblical verb *'sp* and its usage with lepers, spirits of dead and in clear legal-technical meanings of adoption and marriage.

According to the evidence discussed above, then, the leper (and the *zb* for that matter) and "the one who falls by the sword" shared the same fate: both were considered social outcasts and were doomed to restlessly roam the waste places, outside society.

C. *ḥsr lhm*. The same principle of patterning helps to elucidate the meaning and significance of the expression "one who lacks bread (= hungry and poor)" in the context of the present curse, for the curse of hunger and want is also frequently coupled with the above-discussed curses. Note the frequent juxtaposition of the curses of hunger and death by the sword in the OT: Jer 14:15ff.; 18:21; Ezek 14:21 and passim in the surrounding verses; Lam 4:9; Lev 26:25-26; and see in particular Job 27:14f, where death by the sword, hunger and prevention of burial⁷⁷ are juxtaposed. The horrible results of hunger in times of war—the eating of one's children's flesh—is a common motif in the OT and cuneiform texts⁷⁸.

A similar pattern is attested in the cuneiform sources, and the reader is referred to my *Prevention of Burial* for a thorough exposition of the evidence⁷⁹. Here the question is the thematic relation between the curse of hunger and the other curses already discussed above.

The connection between the sword and hunger is not only a result of the prosaic fact that both were frequent in wars, but also reflects the fact that the dead of both hunger and sword were left unburied, serving as carrion for beasts of prey⁸⁰. In that case, the spirits of both suffered the same fate, as explained above. Also, among the types of roaming spirits that have not found final rest and peace are not only those of people who died in wars and were left unburied, but also hungry spirits that have no one on earth to provide for their needs. As said in the passage from the Epic of Gilgamesh quoted above, such spirits were forced to wander about looking for scraps of food and leftovers thrown in the streets. One may not only die of hunger, but one's spirit may also suffer from want, and both motifs can be reflected in the expression *ḥsr lhm*.

Beyond that, since it seems that the expressions in David's curse reflect social statuses, one can understand the *ḥsr lhm* not only as a person who died of hunger (in war or otherwise), but also as a poor person belonging to the lowest and probably most loathed strata of society, whose fate was not much different from that of a leper. This hypothesis is based on certain verses in the OT which parallel the poor man with certain social outcasts, particularly the *nbl*.

The significant verse Prov 30:22 mentions the unexpected and probably odious and infuriating change in the legal status of certain people occupying the fringes of society: the slave, the *nbl*, the rejected

76. See *AHW*, *CAD* s.v. and *Prevention of Burial*; for its usage in curses of leprosy, see Watanabe, *ASJ* 6: 113f. Note a line from the "Babylonian Job" *Ludlul* 1 50 (= *BWL* 32): *uštēši <ina> bitiya kamāti arpud* "I have been driven out of my house (and) I roam outside".

77. *Sic!* See *BH*³ to verse.

78. See Lev 26:29; Deut 28:53-57; Jer 19:9; cf. Isa 49:26; Zach 11:9; and Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy*, 127ff.

79. See the sample cited in n. 72 above. For other cases of the curse of hunger (sometimes with the attendant horrible results of eating one's children's flesh) see the following examples: *AKA*, 106ff. VIII 85-88 (together with eating the children's flesh); so also in *AKA*, 167:19-23; *BBS* 36 (seed, hunger, prevention of burial); *VTE*, 448ff. (hunger, prevention of burial, seed, breaking the bow), and more; see Weinfeld, loc. cit.

80. See the OB omen *ḥušaḥḥum ša šalmātum innaddū ibbašši* "There will be famine (so severe) that corpses will be thrown (around unburied)" (A. Goetze, *Old Babylonian Omen Texts*, YOS 10 [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1947], 24:33f.). Among the types of ghosts mentioned in the ritual edited in Ebeling, *TuL*, 145 is also "the ghost (of him) who died in hunger... a ghost (of him) who died in thirst..." (line 26)

and divorced wife and the maid. The change in the *nbl*'s status is that he has enough to eat⁸¹. That the *nbl* was indigent is borne out by Jer 17:11: "As the partridge sits on eggs and hatches them not, so he that gets riches, and not by right, shall leave them in the midst of his days, and at his end shall be a *nbl*"⁸². Now other evidence discussed elsewhere⁸³, especially Job 30:3ff., clearly puts the *nbl* outside society, in the steppe, as a typical outcast.

That this connection between hunger and poverty and being an outcast from society is not fortuitous is borne out by another biblical term for an outcast or outlaw, the *ryq*, which etymologically means "empty, having nothing", that is, poor!⁸⁴ See Prov 28:19 where the *ryq* is placed against him who eats bread (cf. 12:11). Finally, see also Ps 37:25: "I have been young, and now am old; yet I have not seen the righteous deserted (*n^czb*), nor his seed begging bread."⁸⁵

Turning again to the Mesopotamian evidence, one again encounters the same theme as reflected in the above biblical verses. For example, in the boundary stone *MDP* 2, pl. 23 the curse immediately preceding the curse of leprosy is that of hunger, which runs as follows (lines VI 29-40): "May Marduk... inflict him with hunger, his great punishment, so that he will always have to wander the streets of his town, under hostile stares, begging and with no food." The dire status of the poor in ancient Mesopotamia as reflected in this curse is quite clear⁸⁶.

All in all, the interpretation of *h^sr l^hm* as referring to a person's lowly status in life as an outcast does not exclude understanding it also as reflecting the status of his spirit in the afterlife as restless and hungry, doomed to eternal suffering⁸⁷.

81. For the motif of such extreme changes in one's social status from rich to poor and vice versa, see, e.g., 1 Sam 2:5, 7; and the cuneiform references cited in *CAD* L, 95a.

82. According to this interpretation, the translation "fool" for *nbl* by the AV is completely off the mark. For *nbl* in the OT, see the general discussion and bibliography in J. Marböck, "nābāl, n^chālāh", *TWAT* V (1984ff.):171-185; cf. Malul, *JSOT* 46:102. Cf. also P.K. MacCarter, Jr. *II Samuel*, Anchor Bible 9 (Garden City: Doubleday, 1984), 118f., 323, clearly understanding *nbl* to mean "outcast".

83. Malul, *JSOT* 46:102.

84. Cf. Gen 31:42. Note in this context the interesting Sumerian equivalent of Akk. *lapnu* "poor" lú níg-nu-tuku, lit. "a man who has nothing" (*MSL* 12, 159:51); cf. also 178 ii 7ff.; *MSL* 13, 116f.:77ff. It is interesting to note that the Sumerian sign níg "a thing, something" can be also read ninda "bread", in which case the entry lú níg-nu-tuku could be read lú ninda-nu-tuku and literally translated "a man who lacks bread"! There is no doubt that the two readings and meanings of this cuneiform word are conceptually related, and the definition of "a poor" (Akk. *lapnu*) covers both. Cf. also the term nu-sík = Akk. *ekūtu* "destitute girl" (*CAD* E, 72) which can be interpreted literally "she who has no wool (= cloth)".

85. Another piece of significant Akkadian evidence is the equation of *lapnu* "poor" with *kalbu mītu* "a dead dog" in the NA letter *ABL* 1285:13 quoted in *CAD* L, 95a a1'. The expression "a dead dog" is found in the OT too, the most significant place for our purpose being in 1 Sam 24:14 in a self-description of the outlaw David, pursued by King Saul. In the second encounter between Saul and David in the desert (1 Sam 26:19; and cf. esp. v.20 with 24:14), the latter complains that by their denunciation of him people caused him to be driven away from taking part in God's inheritance "saying: 'Go, serve other gods!'" (This strongly recalls the above-quoted diagnostic omen [n.74] defining a leper as one rejected by god and man; in both cases, a stigmatized person is forced to live outside the borders of the society of men.) That David's use of the expression "a dead dog" for referring to his status as a person driven out of society to roam the lawless places is not accidental is borne out by other biblical and external evidence depicting the dog as a typical beast, and therefore a symbol, of the waste and lawless places outside society. See our extensive discussion in *Prevention of Burial* and *JSOT* 46: 101ff. This evidence adds further support to the suggested conceptual bond between the poor and hungry and the social outcast.

86. See also, nn. 72, 79 above.

87. Cf. W. Sommerfeld's remarks to a curse in the boundary stone discussed in *UF* 16: 303 V 13-15: ^d*Anunnakū in eršeti liššuhū manzāssu* "May the Anunnaku remove his position from the *eršetu*". Sommerfeld says (pp. 305f.) that the curse either means that the violator will lose his status in society (*eršetu* = "land"), or will be deprived of a resting place in the netherworld (*eršetu* = "netherworld").

D. Summary. The basic and common theme in all the expressions in David's curse seems clearly to be social –being chased across the border of civilized society and forced to stay in the lawless sphere. Whether a person is gonorrhoeal, leprosy, poor, or has fallen by the sword (and his corpse is assumed to have been left without burial), in all cases he or his spirit is relegated to the status of an outcast from society, having to roam the sphere of outlawry outside society.

It is notable that no distinction is drawn here between life and death and the two seem to merge not only in the same curse⁸⁸ but also in the same expression: note our dual interpretation of the expression *hšr lhm* as denoting both the lowly status of a poor person in life as well as referring to a hungry dejected spirit in the afterlife. This is not accidental and it is clearly reflected in the indicative conceptual juxtaposition between the leper and leprosy and the realm of death, already alluded to above⁸⁹.

In Num 5:2 the leper is mentioned not only beside the *zb* but also beside the *tm' lnpš* "the mourner". Elsewhere the leper is expected to behave like a mourner with all the required external symbols⁹⁰. When Miriam is afflicted by leprosy on account of her denunciation of Moses, Aaron intercedes with Moses on her behalf in the following words (Num 12:12): "Let her not be as one *dead*, of whom the flesh is half consumed when he cometh out of his mother's womb." According to the Ugaritic evidence, *byt hhpšyt*, the place where lepers were quarantined in biblical times (2 Kgs 15:5; 2 Chr 26:21), designated the nether-world⁹¹. Finally, some cuneiform evidence explicitly equates the life of the leper with death. In the epilogue to the Code of Hammurabi L 59-63 it is said: *balātam ša itti mūtīm šitannū ana šimtim lišimšum* "May (Sin) decree for him a life that vies with death", which means that the condition of a leper (see lines 41ff.) vies with the condition of death, is an emulation of death⁹².

Below we shall cite very significant Talmudical evidence which adds further support to this bond as well as casting more light on the whole curse under discussion.

The cuneiform sources mention restless spirits not only of persons who fell in wars and whose remains were left unburied as carrion for beasts of prey, but also of persons who have no one on earth to provide for their spirits after death. A ritual for exorcising spirits of dead people lists the following types: "Whether you are a spirit who has no one to care for him, or a spirit who has no one to make funerary

88. David's curse contains expressions referring to a person's outcast status *during* life (thus the leper and gonorrhoea sufferer) or in the afterlife -referring thus to his spirit ("he who falls by the sword"); for "he who lacks bread" see immediately below.

89. See n.62 above; see also van der Toorn, *Sin and Sanction*, 75.

90. See Lev 13:45; see Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, 200f.

91. See *KB*³, 328b. This meaning of *byt hhpšyt* is supported also by Ps 88:6 (cf. also Job 3:19) which occurs in quite a significant context, as will be shown below (see n.98). van der Toorn does not accept this meaning of the expression (*Sin and Sanction*, 75 and 196 n.253). It is interesting that the desert or steppe where lepers dwelt or roamed is perceived in the OT as a place of death; sometimes these two concepts even become synonymous. See Ch. F. Fensham, "Common Trends in Curses of the Near Eastern Treaties and *Kudurrū* Inscriptions Compared with Maledictions of Amos and Isaiah", *ZAW* 75 (1963): 166f. and bibliography there; J. Pedersen, *Israel. Its Life and Culture*, 4 vols. (London: Oxford University Press, 1926), I-II.463ff.; O. Keel, *The Symbolism of the Biblical World* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1978), 76f.; and Malul, *JSOT* 46: 102f. and 119 n.51 and references there to Talmon's extensive discussions of the desert motif in the OT.

92. Cf. also the following potency incantation edited by R.D. Biggs, *ŠA.ZI.GA: Ancient Mesopotamian Potency Incantations*, TCS 2 (Locust Valley, N.Y.: Augustin, 1967), 3, 66 - STT 280 i 22-25, in which the cause of a man's gonorrhoea is said to be the fact that "[that man]'s semen has been [put] in the ground with a corpse." For similar acts of sorceresses placing a man's figurines or water in the lap of a corpse, in graves, in waste places, etc., see also G. Meier, *Die assyrische Beschwörungssammlung Maqlū*, *AFO Beiheft* 2 (Osnabrück: Biblio-Verlag, 1967), IV 17-50.

offerings for him, or a spirit who has no one to libate water for him, or a spirit who has no one to mention him by name"⁹³.

The other most common curse mentioned beside the curses of prevention of burial and leprosy is the curse of the violator's seed and progeny, frequently attested in the OT too in close conjunction with prevention of burial and feeding the dead to beasts of prey; see, for example, 1 Kgs 14:10-14; 16:3-4; 21:21-24; 2 Kgs 9:7-10; Isa 14:19-22; Jer 14:16; 16:3-8; 22:28-30; 36:30-31; Job 18:16-19⁹⁴. This juxtaposition as well as the list of spirits cited above⁹⁵ clearly prove that in the eyes of the ancients the fate of the dead person's spirit in the afterlife was the same if one's remains were denied due burial, discarded as carrion for beasts of prey, exhumed, or if one left no descendants on earth to take care of his needs in the afterlife. This is one of the main reasons, if not the main one, why childless people adopted children in ancient times.

Returning to David's curse, the question is this: in it we have found all the juxtaposed elements in Mesopotamian curses appended to various types of documents, and our analysis suggests that one common theme runs through all. Supposing that David did indeed utter here a conceptually related series of curses, what is the place of *mḥzyq bplk* in this pattern? Also, where in David's curse is the equivalent of the Mesopotamian curse of the violator's seed and progeny (see here 1 Kgs 2:32-33)? Could it be that the *mḥzyq bplk* -expression is this equivalent? We believe this is the case, and below more evidence will be presented to buttress this contention.

III. *mḥzyq bplk* RECONSIDERED

Already our conclusion of section I above suggests that *mḥzyq bplk*, which denotes a sexually deviant person, an effeminate man, who, among other things, may have engaged in homosexual activities, must be the functional equivalent of the curse against seed and progeny attested in cuneiform sources in conjunction with the other curses discussed above. For as an effeminate person, probably even with some physical sexual deficiency⁹⁶, such a person must have been unproductive or unable to sire children. One begins now to see the underlying conceptual connection between this expression and the others in David's curse, and also the unifying theme that runs through the whole curse: the whole perspective of the curse is focused on one's social and legal status in society, both in this life as well as in the afterlife, its loss being so serious as to render the difference between the realms of life and death immaterial for the person losing it. Being a *mḥzyq bplk* belongs to the same conceptual framework: in life, membership of a certain cate-

93. CT 16, 10 IV 47-V 14; see R.C. Thompson, *The Devils and Evil Spirits of Babylonia*, 2 vols. (London: Lozac, 1903), 1.38ff. See A. Tsukimoto, *Untersuchungen zur Totenpflege (kispum) im alten Mesopotamien*, AOAT 216 (Kevelaer: Butzon & Bercker; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1985), 149f.; and earlier M. Bayliss "The Cult of Dead Kin in Assyria and Babylonia", *Iraq* 35 (1973): 116 and passim for more texts. The general term comprising all the above is *pāqidu*, the etymological equivalent of Hebrew *pwqd*; see *AHW* s.v.; cf. also J.C. Greenfield, "Un rite religieux araméen et ses parallèles", *RB* 80 (1973): 46-52.

94. For ancient Mesopotamia see the examples cited in nn.72, 79 above. See also the curse from the inscription of *Ešmun-azar* line 8 quoted in n.55 above.

95. There are other lists like that and other kinds of texts which clearly show the importance of having descendants on earth for the well-being of one's spirit in the afterlife; see the passage from the Epic of Gilgamesh quoted above and our extensive discussion in *Prevention of Burial*.

96. Asexual? Castrated? See n.40 above.

gory of aberrant people who violated the normal rules of nature and were therefore rejected from society⁹⁷; and in the afterlife, being among spirits of persons who have left no one on earth to care for their needs.

This interpretation of the expression *mhz̄yq bplk* is borne out by another piece of cuneiform evidence touching in particular on the fate in the afterlife of a spirit that has no one on earth to care for it. See the following line from a prayer to Shamash:

rēš etemmē murtappidī ša dūtu lā paqdū

“(You [Shamash] are) the helper of the roving spirits who have not been granted virility!”⁹⁸

This description of the spirit that lacks virility is to be understood in the same vein as other descriptions of spirits condemned to wander restlessly: spirits could suffer either because the dead person's corpse was left unburied, devoured by beasts of prey or exhumed, or because the dead person has left no one on earth to care for him. By virtue of such descriptions the relative clause in this sentence must be understood as referring not to the spirit but to the man who, lacking virility, had not produced children, so there was no one to attend his spirit's needs in the afterlife; whereupon Shamash is invoked for help. A curse in an inscription of Ashurbanipal supports this interpretation. In *Asb*, 302 iv 27 the king writes: *nīš libbišu lītir lihalliq zēršu* “May (Marduk) take away his potency, destroy his seed!”⁹⁹

Having put all the pieces of the puzzle together on the basis of Mesopotamian and biblical evidence, one is struck by a very significant Talmudical passage which seems to reflect the same conceptual framework and underlying theme; at the same time it explicitly declares the underlying conceptual connection among all the statuses explored above¹⁰⁰. In *b. Ned.* 64:2 it is said: “Four are accounted as dead: a poor man, a leper, a blind man, and one who lacks sons”¹⁰¹. Note the parallelism between the leper and poor

97. They were sexually deficient and engaged in unnatural sexual relationships, thus unable to produce progeny. Such bizarre people also belonged to the fringes of society and occupied the same place as other outcasts and asocials (cf. Bottéro-Petschow, *RIA* 4: 466f.); cf. the Akkadian rituals mentioned in n.65 above which reflect a conceptual parallelism between the leper's and the *assinmu*'s statuses.

98. *UVB* 15, 36:10 quoted and discussed by Å.W. Sjöberg, “Beiträge zum sumerischen Wörterbuch”, in *Studies in Honor of Benno Landsberger on His Seventy-Fifth Birthday*, ed. H.G. Güterbock and T. Jacobsen, AS 16 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), 63. A most significant place for understanding the exact meaning of the word *dūtu* in this text is the hymn to Ishtar edited by Sjöberg in *ZA* 65: 161-253. There, in line 125 quoted above, Ishtar is described as granting *dūtu* to a man where the context clearly places this trait of Ishtar in the same context as those curses turning a man into a woman in the sense of depriving him of his sexual potency, or even decreeing his birth with such a permanent sexual impotence (see Sjöberg's remarks on pp. 223ff. and cf. above section I). For the man deprived of his virility (*dūtu*) see the following line from the “Babylonian Job” *Ludlul* I 47 (= *BWL*, 32f.): [*in*] *netir baltī dūtī ūtammiš* “my vigor has been taken away, my virility diminished” (this line occurs in the same context as the line quoted in n.76 above); see also the lines from *Maqlū*, III 8-12, where the sorceress is described as depriving the young man of his *dūtu*, the young maiden of her sexual attractiveness; and especially the following diagnostic omen (*TDP*, 82:18 quoted in *CAD* D, 202b), which specifically defines the lack of *dūtu* as the working of Ishtar: *šumma ina kišādīšu mahiṣ u dāssu etret qāt Ištar* “if he is inflicted on his neck and his virility is taken away, (it is) the hand of Ishtar!” More examples are cited in *CAD* *ibid*. In similar medical contexts the term used for a man's virility and potency is *nīš libbi*: see, e.g., Thompson, *AMT*, 71, 1:1: *šumma amēlu n[ī]š libbišu etir* “if a man is deprived of his potency”; for this term and the problem of lack of sexual potency in ancient Mesopotamia see Biggs, *Š.Ā.ZI.GA*. Translating *dūtu* in *UVB* 15, 36:10 as “virility” meaning a man's sexual potency and ability to sire children is thus founded.

The biblical equivalent of this concept seems to be the word *'eyāl* which occurs in the suggestive context of Ps 88:5. Note that the sufferer is described not only as “a man without virility (*'eyāl*)”, but also as a dead man in *š'wl* who has been neglected and forgotten by God (v.6) and whose relatives have been separated from him (vv.9, 19). The picture of suffering envisaged in this psalm is quite close to that emerging from the curses discussed above of the outcast leper, the roving spirit and the dejected poor.

99. M. Streck, *Assurbanipal und die letzten assyrischen Könige*, 3 vols. (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1916), 2.302, Cf. Biggs, *Š.Ā.ZI.GA*, 3.

100. The following Talmudical evidence was kindly brought to my attention, and discussed with me, by Mr. Uri Melammed, a graduate student at the Hebrew University.

101. See also *'Abod. Zar.* 5:1. The same passage occurs also in the *midr. Lam. Rab.* 3:1.

here and the *zb wmsr*¹⁰² and *hšr lhm* in David's curse. The "one who lacks sons" in the Talmudical passage must be the equivalent of *mhzzyq bplk* in David's curse, and thus adds further support to the interpretation of this expression suggested above.

The Talmudical passage and David's curse each contains an expression which is not paralleled in the other (the blind in the first, the *mhzzyq bplk* in the second). This is only a reflection of the incompleteness of both these lists, which could be completed, for example, by the curses in Deut 28 where all the elements occur, including blindness¹⁰².

Finally, note the explicit connection of all statuses with the realm of death, which is quite significant in view of the similar conceptions described above, and especially the apparent indistinction, or rather overlapping, between the realms of life and death, as reflected in the curses under discussion. Belonging to one of these statuses made no difference to the person so afflicted whether he was alive or dead; in either case he suffered equally. Nevertheless, the final perspective of such curses was focused on the future – on one's conditions in the afterlife, which were believed to be dire if a person belonged to one of these statuses. And this is hinted in the Talmudical passage by explicitly connecting them with the realm of death.

To summarize: David's curse of Joab in 2 Sam 3:29 employs a series of conceptually related expressions with a common basic theme: all refer to a person's status as an outcast from civilized society and relegated to the sphere of outlawry, both in this life and in the afterlife. In the context of this common theme, the expression *mhzzyq bplk* is to be understood as designating a person's status as effeminate (psychologically or physiologically) and being unable to sire children he was not only dubbed socially

102. See also the sample of curses cited in nn.72, 79 above; neither of them seems to contain all the elements. This incompleteness is another argument for the haphazardness of these curses described in n.72 above, and for the lack of any fixed hierarchical order among the curses as maintained by Weinfeld. One could hardly expect that curses of certain gods would be omitted and others retained. On the other hand, when the common conceptual theme of such curses is the main issue, omitting or adding one curse does not affect the main thrust of the whole series.

The curse of blindness seems to fit nicely in this common conceptual theme, for it too refers to one of those social statuses to be found in the fringes of society, much like the poor. In Ps 146:7-9 the blind man is mentioned together with the oppressed, hungry, imprisoned, bowed down, stranger, orphan and widow. The lowly status of the blind is reflected in other biblical verses, e.g., Lev 19:14; Deut 27:18; 2 Sam 5:8. In Deut 28:28-29 the curse of blindness could be interpreted metaphorically as referring to legal blindness (see Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy*, 119f.), in the sense that the blind man finds himself in the state of anarchy and social lawlessness, being oppressed and molested and unable to remedy the situation (see also the following verses dealing with sexual violation of the wife, pillage, enslavement of children - all conveying a clear notion of lawlessness and anarchy; see Weinfeld. *ibid.*; see also Isa 59:9-11). Such a status would not be much different from that of an outcast leper (cf. also the suggestive lists of similar low social statuses in Matt 11:5; Luke 7:22).

One more point of much interest for the theme of this article is the mention of the "imprisoned" (*šwrym*) in Ps 146:7, which calls for some explanation in view of the claim made here that such lists of social statuses reveal an underlying conceptual tie running through all the "titles" making up the lists. Akkadian lexical evidence lists in one breath the "prisoner, captive" (*šabtu(m)*, *kamū*) together with the "rejected person", the "one whose god rejected him" (*sakpu*, *ša ilu iskipu[š]u*, see *MSL* 12, 169:376-381; 195:6-10; for the one "rejected by god and man" see n.74 above). Furthermore, quite significant for our purpose is an Akkadian commentary to a medical text which runs as follows: *dām kamū: dām lūgarbānu aššu kamū: lūgarbānu* "blood of a prisoner equals blood of a leper, because 'prisoner' equals 'leper'" (quoted in *CAD* G, 50a); see also the equation [*k*]amū: *garbānu* in *ZA* 47: 244:r.3 (Lambert, *A/O* 17: 315E:3). Finally, see also the lexical list in *MSL* 12, 166:272-274 and following, which mentions the leper (1.274 *ša epqam malū* "he who is filled with leprosy") right after the prisoner (1.272 *ša šibittim*, 1.273 *ša maššartim*) and before the stranger, foreigner, enemy, outsider, violent man, thief, robber, criminal (lines 275-283; note 11.290ff.: *mitum* "a dead", *lā qebrum* "an unburied [dead]") and recall the significance of prevention of burial in the context of the theme discussed here). van der Toorn (*Sin and Sanction*, 74, 196 n.248) takes this juxtaposition as reflecting the custom to keep lepers imprisoned in special colonies or camps. On the basis of this usage is to be understood the curse attested in another *kudurrū* (*MDP* 10, pl. 12 iv. 18) right after the curse of leprosy ascribed to Sin. It runs as follows: *ina šubat aḫat āli lemniš liktassū* "May they (the gods) bind him miserably forever in a place outside the city" (contra the *CAD*, which does not identify here the verb *kasū* A "to arrest, bind", K, 253b s.v. *kasū* B).

aberrant and pushed to the fringes of society, but his spirit too, for lack of descendants on earth to provide for its needs, was doomed to eternally suffer and roam the waste places among other social outcasts.

Much of the external evidence cited above occurs in the form of curses appended to political treaties and other types of legal documents, threatening the violator with dire consequences. Since Joab's murder of Abner was an outright violation of a treaty recently concluded between the latter and David, it has already been noted by scholars that David's, and later Solomon's, attitude toward Joab, and David's curse in 2 Sam 3:29 must be understood in the setting of the ancients' beliefs regarding the fate of treaty violators¹⁰³. David and Solomon then attempted to dissociate themselves and their house from this sin of treaty violation by transferring the dire results associated with it to Joab and his house (see also 1 Kgs 2:31-33)¹⁰⁴.

One more point of interest. David's curse, especially the part of *mĥzyq bplk*, should be viewed against the basic *Weltanschauung* of the ancients. One of the basic pillars of the ancient's world seems to have been the order of things in terms of each adhering to its preordained or accepted place in the overall scheme. For a thing to transgress its borders and to get mixed up with other things not of its kind meant to the ancient man a blurring of the order and an injury to the world –on the same level as bringing chaos again to rule the world¹⁰⁵.

A person of the type of *mĥzyq bplk* and his like mentioned above epitomize in their behavior such an injury to the world order, for here is a clear case of mixing kinds that should not be mixed, and of transgressing natural borders. According to the natural order of sexes, there are two distinctive sexes whose natural union results in the continuance of the species. For a male to behave and dress like a woman, and vice versa, is to attack the natural order of things. This is the philosophy underlying the laws concerning transvestism and *kil'āyim* (Deut 22:5, 9-11; Lev 19:19). Things should not be mixed in such a way that blurs the borders¹⁰⁶.

It should be noted that these laws of transvestim and *kil'āyim* appear in close conjunction to laws of adultery, sacral prostitution and the like, and the same pattern is clearly evinced in the appellations assigned to those sexually deviant persons who are always attested in contexts obviously suggesting lewd behavior. This parallelism also points to the conclusion that the biblical author was clearly aware of such people and the social institutions associated with them, and he polemicizes against them¹⁰⁷.

103. See Gevariahu (n.17 above), especially pp. 141f. 145ff.

104. Gevariahu has also suggested that Joab's being buried "in his house in the *desert*" (1 Kgs 2:34) is to be related to his being a treaty violator, for such seems to have been the punishment in such cases (ibid, 141f.). This is significant in view of the place of the desert and the desert conception in the background of the curses discussed above (see above passim and especially nn.64, 66, 91). The notion of the "punishment fitting the crime" underlying such curses and the related treatment of the dead is discussed extensively in our forthcoming *Prevention of Burial*.

105. See Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, 260, 269f.; and cf. Ramban to Lev 19:19.

106. Bestiality is a case of "confusion" (*tbl*; *BDB*, 117b; Wenham, 260), for it confuses the borders between man and beast set at the time of creation.

107. In our forthcoming *Prevention of Burial* we discuss in detail the philosophy underlying this basic *Weltanschauung* and the social and legal significance of the various titles and concepts associated with the realms of death and lawlessness.