

Jonah 2: A Death Liturgy for the Doomed Prophet

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INTRODUCTION: NATURE, DEATH, AND RITUAL IN JONAH 2

A number of recent analyses of the book of Jonah have critiqued the dominant anthropocentric bias in biblical scholarship in general and in Jonah studies in particular, shifting the focus of scholarly conversations towards the natural world and its other-than-human representatives.² Applying ecological and animal-oriented hermeneutics to the book, they have argued that in Jonah characters of the “otherkind” are indispensable to God’s economy; in fact, rhetorically, “the book of Jonah does not [even] happen without the natural world. . .”³ Taking these studies further and steering them in the direction of ritual discourse, this discussion intends to explore the intersection of nature, ritual, and theology in the book. Combining these frameworks, it will focus on the lament elements in Jonah 2 and their place in Jonah’s overall message. As one of the striking features of the book of Jonah is its personification and agentivization of creation and inanimate objects, it will be argued that in Jonah’s la-

¹ “Море обнимет, закопает в песок, Закинут рыболовы лески, Поймают в сети наши души. . .” Земфира. To Dasha K.

² E.g., M. Joerstad, *The Hebrew Bible and Environmental Ethics: Humans, Non-Humans, and the Living Landscape* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019); K.J. Kavusa, *Water and Water-Related Phenomena in the Old Testament Wisdom Literature: An Eco-Theological Exploration* (LHBOTS, 685; London/New York: T&T Clark, 2019); K. Stone, *Reading the Hebrew Bible with Animal Studies* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2017); P. Trible, “The Book of Jonah: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections,” in L.E. Keck (ed.), *The New Interpreter’s Bible* (vol. 7; Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1996), 461–529; R.F. Person, “The Role of Nonhuman Characters in Jonah,” in N.C. Habel, and P. Trudinger (eds.), *Exploring Ecological Hermeneutics* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008), 85–90; Y. Shemesh, “‘And many beasts’ (Jonah 4:11): The Function and Status of Animals in the Book of Jonah,” *JHS* 10 (2010), 2–26; S.W. Van Heerden, “Shades of Green—or Grey? Towards an Ecological Interpretation of Jonah 4:6–11,” *OTE* 30 (2017), 459–77.

³ B.A. Strawn, “On Vomiting: Leviticus, Jonah, Ea(a)rth,” *CBQ* 74 (2012), 445–64 (458).

ment nature likewise attains ritual agency—i.e., it solemnly participates in Jonah’s descent to the underworld, it prepares him for his entombment in the heart of the sea.⁴ Incidentally, the use of fauna- and flora-themed symbolism in ancient lament literature is a frequent rhetorical phenomenon. Thus, for example, in Gilgamesh’s iconic dirge over Enkidu’s death, the king engages his landscape with its varied elements to mourn for his friend, “May the high [*peaks*] of hills and mountains mourn you, . . . , may the pastures lament like your mother. May [*boxwood*] cypress and cedar mourn you. . . .” (GE VIII 11–19).⁵ Likewise, in biblical prophetic and wisdom texts the downfall of a nation or an individual, as well as their socio-religious misconduct, may be cast as eliciting a violent mournful response from the non-human creation (e.g., Hos 4:1–3; Joel 1:10; Jer 4:23–28, 12:4; Isa 24:19–20, 33:7–9; Qoh 12:1–7).⁶ Thus, encoding human tragedy in nature-based terms, these compositions create a comprehensive *griefscape* for those who find themselves on the receiving end of loss.

Furthermore, as pointed out by many, the psalm in Jonah 2 not only draws its nature-related elements from biblical conceptualization(s) of the cosmos (i.e., heavens, the netherworld, etc.), but it also fuses them with spatial parameters from Israel’s cultic topography (i.e., YHWH’s Temple). The outcome of this fusion is a rhetorically enhanced picture of Jonah’s demise. Hence, fleeing from God, the prophet traverses the land outside Israel finding himself in “the nethermost side of the cosmos,” i.e., the underworld, banished from God and his earthly (and heavenly?) abode(s) (cf. *היכל קדשך* ; *מנגד עיניך* [Jonah 2:5; MT here and throughout]).⁷ Utilizing spatial opposites from Israel’s cosmic and cultic realms, the text depicts Jonah’s doom by way of a steeply vertical movement to Sheol (Jonah 2:3–7). Relatedly, a number of recent studies have drawn attention to “totalizing description” as a literary device in the literatures of the ancient Near East (ANE) and the Hebrew Bible.⁸ Discussing an object

⁴ The term “ritual” here and throughout is used broadly in reference to mourning and funerary rites. On biblical and ANE mourning, see, among others, G.A. Anderson, *A Time to Mourn, A Time to Dance: The Expression of Grief and Joy in Israelite Religion* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991), 60–67; S.M. Olyan, *Biblical Mourning: Ritual and Social Dimensions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 29–34.

⁵ A.R. George, *The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic: Introduction, Critical Edition and Cuneiform Texts* (vol. 1; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 651.

⁶ For these and other texts that use the collocation “the earth mourns”/ *תאבל הארץ*, see K.M. Hayes, *The Earth Mourns: Prophetic Metaphor and Oral Aesthetic* (AcBib, 8; Leiden: Brill, 2002).

⁷ J.M. Sasson, *Jonah: A New Translation with Introduction, Commentary, and Interpretation* (AB, 24B; New York, NY: Doubleday, 1990), 172. On the vertical and horizontal use of space in Jonah 2, see, among others, B. Batto, “The Reed Sea: Requiescat in Pace,” *JBL* 102 (1983), 27–35 (33–34).

⁸ M.E. Couto-Ferreira, “From Head to Toe: Listing the Body in Cuneiform Texts,” in J.Z. Wee (ed.), *The Comparable Body: Analogy and*

or a subject in a comprehensive fashion, often from head to toe, this technique serves as a literary congener of the alphabetic acrostic. Thus, exploring this device in Israel's rhetoric, J. Vayntrub observes that it may be applied to the depiction of animate and inanimate subjects, experiences and events, states and circumstances—e.g., creation (Genesis 1), mythical beasts (Job 41), the city of Tyre and its demise (Ezekiel 27), human bodies (Song 4:1–7, 7:2–10), physical conditions (Deut 28:35; Job 2:7). Such descriptions, she explains, usually feature summarizing details signifying the totality or wholeness of the subject under discussion—i.e., lexemes such as כָּל/“all,” כָּלֵל/“to complete,” etc.⁹ Arguably, through the conflation of the aforesaid topographies Jonah 2 exhibits a similar rhetorical move in dealing with Jonah's drowning, albeit in a modified form. Since Jonah 2 describes an event, i.e., a descent to Sheol, its summative element—לְעוֹלָם/“forever”—indicates the finality and irrevocability of the experience, i.e., Jonah's imprisonment in the underworld forever (Jonah 2:7). Thus, casting Jonah's death at sea in nature-based terms and encompassing Israel's cosmic and cultic geographies, the text achieves a “totalizing description” of death, a nature-themed “acrostic” of sorrow.

Of further relevance for the discussion at hand is that, unlike the prose sections of the book, the psalm in Jonah 2 demonstrates imprecision in syntax and vocabulary and, according to some, has a non-chronological structure and exhibits no progression of thought.¹⁰ This has been attributed, among other factors, to the composite nature of the text.¹¹ In addition to the psalm's pre-history, however, it is worth-noting that in ANE literature

Metaphor in Ancient Mesopotamian, Egyptian, and Greco-Roman Medicine (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 43–71; J. Vayntrub, “Tyre's Glory and Demise: Totalizing Description in Ezekiel 27,” *CBQ* 82 (2020), 214–36; L. Quick, “The Hidden Body as Literary Strategy in 4QWiles of the Wicked Woman (4Q184),” *DSD* 27 (2020), 234–56.

⁹ Vayntrub, “Tyre's Glory,” 215–16.

¹⁰ J. Watts, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, Nabum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 86; U. Simon, *Jonah* (JPS Bible Commentary; Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1999), 17. S.W. Ramp in turn notes that the “prayer itself is a textual mess . . . it is neither elegant nor seamless.” S.W. Ramp, “When the Wheels Come Off: Homiletical Reflections on Jonah 2,” *WW* 1 (1999), 414–23 (416). Note that the phrase הָאָרֶץ בְּרַחֲמֵי לְעוֹלָם (Jonah 2:7) has caused a great deal of discussion. Also, *BHK* and *BHS* suggest deleting מִצּוֹלָה or לִבְבַּיִם (Jonah 2:4) as a gloss. For the versional confusion regarding סוּף (Jonah 2:6), see Sasson, *Jonah*, 184–85. On the symmetry and asymmetry in the book's structure, see P. Tribble, *Rhetorical Criticism: Context, Method and Book of Jonah* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1994), 110–20. On the relationship between the elements of lament and thanksgiving in Jonah 2 (and the versional take on them), see T. Bolin, *Freedom Beyond Forgiveness: The Book of Jonah Re-Examined* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1997), 108–9.

¹¹ On the composite nature of this chapter, see J. Magonet, *Form and Meaning: Studies in Literary Techniques in the Book of Jonah* (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1983), 39–54.

disordered speech in times of distress is a well-attested phenomenon.¹² Thus, given that Jonah 2 reflects a prayer in the most adverse of situations, at the redactional stage, its “textual messiness” could have been deemed useful—i.e., the disjointedness of Jonah’s song gives it an added degree of poignancy.

As indicated above, the primary interest of this discussion lies at the intersection of nature and ritual in Jonah 2. Regarding the hidden artistry of the book, J.E. Robson observes that “[o]n the surface there is a certain artless simplicity [in it]. But swirling amongst the seaweed are turbulent undercurrents, undercurrents onto which the reader is plunged.”¹³ Exploring these undercurrents and focusing on the ritual agency of other-than-human actors in Jonah 2, the present analysis will demonstrate that intricately locking the prophet and nature together, the text reads as a majestic *death liturgy*. Having considered this “liturgy,” in closing, this discussion will offer some remarks on how Jonah 2 can serve as an interpretive lens for reading Jonah 3 and 4, particularly their views on death and life. Hence, it will argue that in the broader context of the book—a book, that is a microcosm of God’s engagement with all of creation—the nature-based liturgy of chapter 2 is an indispensable part in the book’s theology.

JONAH’S “UN-CREATION”

As previously stated, to relate Jonah’s plight in Jonah 2, the psalm draws on diametrically opposite spatial categories. That is, God and his abode represented by “his eyes” and his Temple are juxtaposed with the underworld signified by a set of more or less synonymous terms (“the belly of Sheol,” “the heart of the sea,” “the earth,” “the pit,” etc.). Mapping these categories from mythic and cultic domains onto a vertical axis,¹⁴ the poem

¹² On disordered speech in moments of distress in ANE literature, see G. Rendsburg, “Confused Language as a Deliberate Literary Device in Biblical Hebrew Narrative,” *JHS* 2 (1999), article 6 and the bibliography cited there. Regarding the genre of Jonah 2, S.W. Ramp notes that it refuses to be classified, which can only reflect “the disorienting nature of grief.” Ramp, “When the Wheels Come Off,” 416. Cf. the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, where Enkidu dreams about his imminent death and in a delirious state of mind speaks to the door of cedar; for this Gilgamesh berates Enkidu calling his speech “profanity” (GE VII 37–64, 70). Cf. a broken Hittite text, in which two wounded soldiers in a mournful song call out to the burial shrouds, to which an unidentified voice responds by suggesting they are singing “monstrosity.” For text and translation, see H.C. Melchert, “Hittite *umas* and Congeners,” *IF* 91 (1986), 102–15 (102–3). But for the idea that Jonah’s psalm is arranged in a chiasmic manner, see Tribble, *Rhetorical Criticism*, 163–73; Sasson, *Jonah*, 167. On the retrospective reading of biblical laments, see H.G.M. Williamson, “Reading the Lament Psalms Backwards,” in B.A. Strawn and N.R. Bowen (eds.), *A God So Near: Essays on Old Testament Theology in Honor of Patrick D. Miller* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 3–15.

¹³ J.E. Robson, “Undercurrents in Jonah,” *TB* 64 (2013), 189–215 (190–91).

¹⁴ For biblical traditions which present Sheol as an extremity in the cosmos in contrast with “heaven(s),” see Isa 7:11, 14:12; Ps 139:8–12;

achieves the “totalizing” effect in re-counting Jonah’s drowning and casts it as an event of cosmic magnitude.¹⁵ In using this vertical schema, Jonah 2 not only echoes biblical and ANE distress texts (laments) but also positions itself among compositions with the descent to the underworld motif.¹⁶ Thus, a Sumerian myth, *Inanna’s Descent to the Netherworld*, features a comparable rhetorical technique, whereby the goddess journeys “from up high” or from “the great above,” i.e., heaven, to “the great below” or to “the land of no return,” i.e., the region of the dead (ETCSL: c.1.4.1). Incidentally, along with the downward vertical orientation of their heroes’ journeys, the two compositions share other thematic parallels—both utilize the “three days and three nights” motif while speaking of individuals travelling to chthonic locales and both view the traversed realms as having bolted doors and

Amos 9:2, etc. On the diminished cultic life in the netherworld, see S. Bar, *I Deal Death and Give Life: Biblical Perspectives on Death* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2010), 139–43. On the cosmological/“cartographical” imagination of the ancients, see N. Wyatt, *Space and Time in the Religious Life of the Near East* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2001). For ANE temples as the axis/centre of the world, see M.B. Hundley, *Gods in Dwellings: Temples and Divine Presence in the Ancient Near East* (WAWSup; Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013); Wyatt, *Space and Time*, 159–82.

¹⁵ Cf. Qoh 12:1–7 which casts the cessation of human life as a “cosmic disaster.” C. Seow, “Qohelet’s Eschatological Poem,” *JBL* 118 (1999), 209–34. On the multiple levels of meaning in the text (cosmological [meteorological], anthropological, and theological), see T. Krüger, “Dekonstruktion und Rekonstruktion prophetischer Eschatologie im Qohelet-buch,” in A.A. Diesel, R.G. Lehmann, E. Otto and A. Wagner (eds.), *Jedes Ding hat seine Zeit. . . : Studien zur israelitischen und altorientalischen Weisheit* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1996), 107–29 (122). On cosmic/mythological language in Jonah 2 (the River, the Sea, the Deep, etc.), see J. Nogalski, *The Book of the Twelve: Hosea-Jonah* (SHBC, 18; Macon, GA: Smyth and Helwys, 2011), 430; D. Tsumura, *Creation and Destruction: A Reappraisal of the Chaoskampf Theory in the Old Testament* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005), 161.

¹⁶ N. Wyatt understands the vertical axis as representing “the transcendent and infernal dimensions.” Wyatt, *Space and Time*, 40. For a comparison of Jonah’s psalm to ANE myths where individuals travel to the underworld, see S.M. Paul, “Jonah 2:7—The Descent to the Netherworld and Its Mesopotamian Congeners,” in M.J. Lundberg, S. Fine and W.T. Pitard (eds.), *Puzzling Out the Past: Studies in Northwest Semitic Languages and Literatures in Honor of Bruce Zuckerman* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 131–34. For this motif in the ancient world, see R. Bauckham, *The Fate of the Dead: Studies on the Jewish and Christian Apocalypses* (NovTSup, 93; Leiden: Brill, 1998), 9–48; S. Sanders, “The First Tour of Hell: From Neo-Assyrian Propaganda to Early Jewish Revelation,” *JANER* 9 (2009), 151–69. On the language of verticality in biblical and ANE conceptualizations of distress, see P. King, *Surrounded by Bitterness: Image Schemas and Metaphors for Conceptualizing Distress in Classical Hebrew* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2012), 99–140. In the Hebrew Bible, even distress is a “cosmological descent away from God to deep places.” *Ibid.*, 126.

gates (Jonah 2:7; cf. Isa 38:10; Job 17:16, 38:16ff; Pss 9:13, 107:17–18).¹⁷

Furthermore, contributing to the cosmic event in Jonah 2 is the presence of potent water symbolism. Analyzing this imagery in biblical profiles of the underworld (Pss 69:1–15, 88:4–8; Job 26:5–6),¹⁸ D. Rudman argues that the pairing of the two can be attributed to the appearance of water in traditions related to creation (Genesis 1) or un-creation (Genesis 6–8). Hence, he states that

The chaos waters by their very nature are symbolic of the *absence* of order and creation. In the flood narrative, they denote the *reversal* of creation. For the writers of the OT, who saw the formation of the individual as part of God's ongoing creative activity (Jer 1,5; 49,5; Zach 12,1), and who likewise saw death as a reversal of creation (Gen 2,7; 3,19; Qoh 12,7), the deep would be an appropriate image to denote the cessation of life. To be alive is to be part of the created world: to be dead is to be uncreated.¹⁹

In a similar vein, and speaking of Jonah 2, J.D. Nogalski asserts that “the sea language in the poem is used with parallel expressions (Sheol, the river, the deep, roots of the mountains) to connote images of death and chaos, not simply a large body of water. . . .”²⁰ Hence, the text's “liquid” vocabulary—מצולה/“the deep,” לבב ימים/“the heart of the seas,” נהר/“the river/currents,” משבריק וגליך/“your breakers and your waves,” מים/“the waters,” תהום/“the deep”—must be understood as having a dual function, i.e., representing Jonah's deep-sea drowning and casting this experience in terms of his “un-creation.” Moreover, Rudman explains that biblical “depictions of the individual swallowed up by the primeval chaos waters (cf. Gen 1, 2) denote the

¹⁷ For a funerary rite shared by these texts, see below. On the underworld as a fortified city, see N.J. Tromp, *Primitive Conceptions of Death and the Nether World in the Old Testament* (BibOr, 21; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1969), 27–28, 46, 154; Bar, *I Deal Death and Give Life*, 127–29. For the “three days and three nights” motif linked to death and/or the region of the dead in Jonah and elsewhere, see G.M. Landes, “The ‘Three Days and Three Nights’ Motif in Jonah 2.1,” *JBL* 86 (1967), 446–50. “The ‘three days (and) three nights’ are intended to cover the time of travel to the chthonic depths.” *Ibid.*, 449; D. Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah* (WBC, 31; Waco, TX: Word, 1987), 475; L.G. Allen, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah* (NICOT; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1976), 213–14; H.W. Wolff, *Obadiah and Jonah* (CC; Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1986), 132–33. Sasson, however, opines that Landes' view “risks turning the psalm into a travel guide to hell and back.” Sasson, *Jonah*, 153, n. 19.

¹⁸ D. Rudman, “The Use of Water Imagery in Descriptions of Sheol,” *ZAW* 113 (2001), 240–44 (242); Bar, *I Deal Death and Give Life*, 132–35; P. Johnston, *Shades of Sheol: Death and Afterlife in the Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 114–24. But note how Johnston asserts that Hebrew cosmology is “varied and imprecise.” *Ibid.*, 115. Kavusa, *Water and Water-Related Phenomena*, 84–87.

¹⁹ Rudman, “The Use of Water,” 244.

²⁰ Nogalski, *The Book of the Twelve*, 427.

passing of that individual from the realm of creation (life, the earth), to that of non-creation (death, Sheol).²¹ Relatedly, the language of creation from Genesis 1—ארץ/“earth,” תהום/“the deep” (Gen 1:1, 2)—appears in Jonah 2 to speak of Jonah’s undoing elevating his plight to a cosmic level of discourse (cf. Gen 7:11, 8:2).²² Such presentation of Jonah’s demise renders his earlier claim in Jonah 1:9 more poignant—the Creator God, the one who made the heavens, the sea, and the dry land, can also uncreate.

JONAH’S COSMIC “BURIAL”: “YOU [GOD] CAST ME INTO THE DEEP”

Of further pertinence for the ritual reading of Jonah’s fate is that unlike the first chapter that uses the roots טול (Jonah 1:4, 5, 12, 15) or נפל in Hiphil (Jonah 1:7) for hurling/tossing actions, the second chapter utilizes the root שלך in Hiphil while speaking of Jonah being flung into the sea—“for You [God] cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas” ותשליכני מצולה בלבב ימים (Jonah 2:4). The difference in the “hurling” vocabulary between the chapters is usually attributed to the difference in genre between them—Jonah 1 is prose and Jonah 2 is poetry.²³ However, given that שלך appears in a death-related vignette in Jonah’s psalm, it is of significance that in the majority of cases in the Hebrew Bible and in Qumran texts שלך, with human beings as its object, represents violent forms of interment outside the ancestral tomb. Thus, with or without nouns such as נבלה/“corpse” or פגור/“dead body,” it may stand for the dishonourable deposition of the dead into their final place of “rest” (Josh 8:29, 10:27; 2 Sam 18:17; 2 Kgs 13:21; Jer 41:9), the execution of individuals without interment, or exhumation of bodies (2 Sam 20:21, 22; Amos 8:3; Isa 14:18ff, 34:3; Jer 14:16, 22:19, 36:30; 1 Kgs 13:24, 25, 28; 2 Kgs 9:25–26, 10:25).²⁴ In fact, noting that most of shameful, undesirable burials in the Hebrew Bible feature the verb שלך in Hiphil or Hophal, S. Olyan understands such usage of the verb as “a ritual act of disrespect and disregard” for the dead.²⁵ Considering the practice of corpse casting in cuneiform

²¹ Rudman, “The Use of Water,” 244.

²² Note Bar’s observation that in “the biblical worldview, the underworld and the chaotic abyss are identical.” Bar, *I Deal Death and Give Life*, 134. For an assessment of views that Jonah’s sea-monster is a primeval creature, see A. Dyssel, “Jonah’s dāg gādōl, a Sea-Monster Associated with the Primeval Sea?” *JSem* 28 (2019), 1–18.

²³ H.W. Wolff, for example, observes that טול does not occur in the Psalter at all whereas שלך is featured in Pss 51:11, 71:8, 102:10, etc. Wolff, *Obadiab and Jonah*, 134; Stuart, *Hosea–Jonah*, 476.

²⁴ For a discussion of שלך in death-related contexts in the Hebrew Bible, see E.E. Kozlova, *Maternal Grief in the Hebrew Bible* (OTM; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 57–61. Admittedly, Isa 22:17 uses the root טול to represent Shebna’s punitive exhumation, but the link between שלך and death is more prominent.

²⁵ S. Olyan, “Some Neglected Aspects of Israelite Interment Ideology,” *JBL* 124 (2005), 601–16 (606–7); idem, “Was the ‘King of Babylon’ Buried Before His Corpse Was Exposed? Some Thoughts on Isa

sources, he asserts that such handling of dead bodies in ANE was reserved for “vanquished foes, executed adversaries, and others thought to deserve . . . contemptuous treatment.”²⁶ Given Jonah’s uncooperative, if not confrontational, stance towards God’s call in chapter 1, and given death motifs in chapter 2 (particularly its reference to the grave in v. 7 [שחת/“the pit”]),²⁷ the casting of the prophet into “the heart of the sea” should be seen as his penal “burial” with YHWH himself as his “undertaker.”²⁸ An analogous perspective on God, that is of him personally depositing a sufferer in their grave, is found in Psalm 88, where the distressed claims, “You [God] have put me in the lowest pit, in dark places, in the depths” (Ps 88:7; cf. Ps 22:16).²⁹

14,19,” *ZAW* 118 (2006), 423–26; idem, “Jehoiakim’s Dehumanizing Interment as a Ritual Act of Reclassification,” *JBL* 133 (2014), 271–79 (271–72).

²⁶ Olyan, “Jehoiakim’s Dehumanizing Interment,” 272.

²⁷ The word שחת/“pit” appears as “corruption” in the LXX, Syr., Vg., but cf. Pss 35:7, 55:23, 103:4; Isa 38:17, 51:14; Job 33:18, 22, 24, 28, 30. Bar, *I Deal Death and Give Life*, 171–74.

²⁸ Cf. 1 Kings 13 where a disobedient prophet is promised a violent death and the disposal of his body features the root שלך (vv. 24–25). Cf. P.K. McCarter’s discussion on Jonah 2 and a number of psalms arguing that water in these texts serves as God’s means of judgement. P.K. McCarter, “The River Ordeal in Israelite Literature,” *HTR* 66 (1973), 403–12. On punitive death entailing the depth and vast waters cast over the one judged by God, as well as their going to “the pit,” see Ezek 26:19–21. Interestingly, v. 21 indicates that Tyre will be sought but will never be found. Given ANE mourning practices, to be “buried” in a way that no mourning or visitation of the tomb is possible is unthinkable. So, Tyre’s fate, as is Jonah’s, is of the worst kind. On penal death in “the heart of the seas”/לבב ימים, see Ezek 27:27, 28:8 (cf. Jonah 2:4). Cf. Wolff’s observation that “the heart of the sea” usually indicates “the (unsearchable) open ‘high seas’ (Prov. 23:34, 30:19; Ezek. 27:4, 26).” Wolff, *Obadiah and Jonah*, 126.

²⁹ E. Zenger renders Ps 88:6 as “Among the dead (I am) one expelled, (I am) like the slain who lie in the grave, whom you no longer remember, for they have been cut off by your hand.” He represents the difficult חפשו/“freed person” as “one expelled” or “rejected among the dead.” F.-L. Hossfeld, E. Zenger, *Psalms 2: Hermeneia—A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2005), 389–90. He explains that the phrase indicates “the condition following the release of an adult subject from an obligation, [and it] has a substantive parallel in the Ugaritic expression *bt ḥp̄tt*, ‘house of the *ḥupšu*-status’ or ‘house of the rank of the *ḥupšu*-mercenaries,’ which has a clear connotation of the underworld. . . . The ‘house of the *ḥupšu*-status’ would describe an establishment in low regard that served in Ugarit as a reference to the underworld. . . . in Ps 88: as a ‘freed person’ could be released into a thoroughly despised social condition, so according to Ps 88:6 the petitioner also exists among the dead as a ‘freedperson,’ that is, as someone who can offer YHWH no further service and therefore is no longer subject to divine control.” The sufferer in Ps 88:7[6] claims he is in “the lowest and worst [condition] even in the underworld.” Ibid., 390, citing B. Janowski, “Die Toten loben JHWH nicht: Psalm 88 und das alttestamentliche Todesverständnis,” in F. Avemarie and H. Lichtenberger (eds.), *Auferstehung—Resurrection* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 3–45. In a similar vein, in Jonah, having freed himself from

Additionally, however, in view of Jonah's flight from God in chapter 1, it is worth-noting that שלך can also stand for God's punitive removal of his people from their land, and their subsequent experience of exile in a foreign land is imaged as a shameful disposal of a dead body (Deut 29:28; 2 Kgs 13:23, 17:20, 24:20; 2 Chr 7:20; Amos 4:3; Jer 7:15, 51:63; Ezek 16:5). In a similar vein, in Jonah 1, the wayward prophet flees from God and the land of Israel and in a tragic turn of events finds himself being *flung* by God (ותשליכני, Jonah 2:4) into the "land" from which there is no return (הארץ ברחיה בעדי לעולם, Jonah 2:7).³⁰ Furthermore, given the reading of שלך proposed here, i.e., denoting Jonah's "burial," it must be noted that the water symbolism in this chapter would signal not only Jonah's death as the end of his part in the created order but also his ritual preparation for interment. Assessing ancient Israel's "death and burial" archaeology, M. Suriano notes that the "presence of pitchers, dipper jugs and related vessels [inside or outside tombs] suggests that the body was washed and anointed during the primary burial."³¹ Hence, the potent water imagery in Jonah 2 may attain another layer of meaning—i.e., signifying Jonah's ritual ablution before he is entombed in the heart of the sea.

FUNERARY DANCES FOR JONAH: "THE FLOODS SURROUNDED ME . . . THE DEEP CLOSED AROUND ME"

As suggested above, Jonah's deep-sea drowning in chapter 2 is poetically cast as a cosmic burial of a strong-willed prophet. Since the book as a whole habitually personifies inanimate objects,³² it would not be implausible for Jonah's psalm to also mobilize and agentivize creation for a ritual purpose, i.e., to supplement Jonah's interment with mourning rites. Thus, of interest

YHWH's service, the prophet is now being interred by his God. On the assertion that YHWH "kills and makes alive," see Deut 32:39; 1 Sam 2:6; 2 Kgs 5:7; cf. 4 Macc 18:18–19; cf. "he leads down to Hades and brings up again," Tob 13:2; Wis 16:13.

³⁰ For the dishonourable meaning attached to death outside one's homeland see Jer 22:18–30 (cf. Gen 49:29; 2 Sam 19:38; Neh 2:5). For a hierarchical nature of Israel's ideology of burials, see Olyan, "Some Neglected Aspects," 601–16.

³¹ M. Suriano, *A History of Death in the Hebrew Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 46–47.

³² E.g., Jonah 1:4: והאניה חשבה להשבר/the ship *thought* of breaking up; Jonah 1:11: הים הולך וסער/the sea was *walking* and being tempestuous; Jonah 1:15: ויעמד הים מזעפו/the sea *stood* from its *raging*; Jonah 2:11: ויאמר יהוה לדג/God *said* to the fish; Jonah 4:10: the plant is a *child* of the night/בן-לילה. Sasson, *Jonah*, 96. Also, note that in Jonah 3:7–8 Nineveh's animals participate in penitentiary mourning rites, i.e., fasting, wearing sackcloth, and crying out to God (cf. Judith 4:9–10). On these and other ancient texts (Persian, Greek, and Roman) describing animals in mourning, see M. Mulzer, "Die Buße der Tiere in Jona 3,7f. und Jdt 4,10," *BN* 111 (2002), 76–89. Sasson, *Jonah*, 254–55. For animals worshipping God, see P.J. Atkins, "Praise by Animals in the Hebrew Bible," *JOT* 44 (2020), 500–513.

for the discussion at hand are the two claims made by Jonah in vv. 4 and 6—the floods surrounded him/וְנָהַר יִסְבְּבֵנִי and the watery deep closed around him/תְּהוֹם יִסְבְּבֵנִי. According to some, the root סבב/“to surround” featured in these statements should be read in terms of protection that is extended to the prophet in danger (cf. Deut 32:10; Ps 32:10).³³ Others, however, see in the encircling verbs סבב and אָפַף the idea of “mighty masses of water” imprisoning Jonah.³⁴ In view of death- and burial-related terms in this passage, however, another reading of the encircling acts is possible. In fact, it could be argued that each of these formulations functions as a *double entendre*—on the one hand they contribute to the depiction of Jonah’s drowning experience, but on the other they add to the overall funerary symbolism.

Of pertinence for Jonah 2:4, 6 is that in the ancient world it was customary for mourners to perform funerary dances for the deceased and in the Hebrew Bible this rite, among other verbs, is represented by the root סבב.³⁵ Thus, for example, the poem in Qoheleth 12 addresses the end of life and speaks of a person going to their eternal home, while being surrounded by mourners circling the streets—כִּי־הַלֵּךְ הָאָדָם אֶל־בַּיִת עוֹלָמוֹ וְסָבְבוּ בִשְׂוֹק הַסְּפָדִים (v. 5).³⁶ Seeing this text as describing a last rite for the dead, M. Gruber states that “perhaps the Mishnaic and Modern Hebrew term for a funeral *kwayah* derives from the common Semitic root *l-w-y* and refers to the circumambulation of the bier.”³⁷ Of relevance here is that dealing with the issue of death, Qoheleth 12 and Jonah 2 contain a number of comparable ideas. First, the cessation of life in both texts is related by means of explicit and implicit references to “creation” and “un-creation.” Thus, Qoheleth 12 images death as a cataclysmic event and

³³ Sasson, *Jonah*, 176.

³⁴ Wolff, *Obadiah and Jonah*, 136. On the “surrounding” verbs, including אָפַף and סָבַב, in contexts related to death and distress, see King, *Surrounded by Bitterness*, 150–51.

³⁵ On funerary dances in ANE, see Kozlova, *Maternal Grief*, 179–88 and the bibliography cited there. On Jewish funerary dances, see the chapter “The Rachel Tradition—Dancing Death,” in C. Sautter, *The Miriam Tradition: Teaching Embodied Torah* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2010), 107–31. On mourning rites, including funerary dances, in the Hebrew Bible, see E. De Ward, “Mourning Customs in 1, 2 Samuel,” *JJS* 23 (1972), 1–27. On images of dancing (including dancing performed in funerary contexts) on archaeological objects from the ancient Near East, see Y. Garfinkel, *Dancing at the Dawn of Agriculture* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2003).

³⁶ Cf. M. Fox’s observation that the “syntax of the passage supports the idea that 12.2–5 describes the time of death and mourning rather than the process of aging.” M. Fox, “Aging and Death in Qohelet 12,” *JSTOT* 42 (1988), 55–77 (61); S. Towner, “The Book of Ecclesiastes,” in L.E. Keck (ed.), *The New Interpreter’s Bible* (vol. 5; Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1997), 355.

³⁷ M. Gruber, “Ten Dance-Derived Expressions in the Hebrew Bible,” *Bib* 62 (1981), 328–46 (335, 336); Fox, “Aging,” 62; H. Ginsberg, *Koheleth* (Tel Aviv: Nyuman, 1961), 132; Seow, “Qohelet’s Eschatological Poem,” 226, cf. 233.

speaks of the need for humanity to remember their Creator (בוראִי/“your Creator,” Qoh 12:1). The latter in turn sounds as בורד/“your grave” anticipating a mention of the pit/grave in v. 7 (cf. Jonah 2:7 [וְהָעֵל מִשְׁחַת]) and the claim that “the dust returns to the ground it came from and the spirit returns to God who gave it” (Qoh 12:7).³⁸ The book of Jonah in turn presents YHWH as a creator of the cosmos (Jonah 1:9) and then exposes the prophet to the elements within it to subsume and uncreate him (Jonah 2:3–7). Secondly, both texts envisage death in terms of irrevocability and speak of humanity’s final destination as a *place of no return*—Qoh 12:5 describes the deceased going to their *eternal* home (בֵּית עוֹלָמוֹ)³⁹ and Jonah 2:7 places the prophet in the netherworld which locks him in for *eternity* (לְעוֹלָם). Finally, if Jonah 2 is read ritually then both of the poems contain allusions to funerary rites. Qoheleth 12 mentions the smashing of lamps indicative of the extinguishing of life and the breaking of earthen vessels representing the fragmentation and disintegration of the body in death (Qoh 12:6);⁴⁰ and both Qoheleth 12 and Jonah 2 cite ritual circumambulations (Qoh 12:5; Jonah 2:4, 6).⁴¹

In addition to Qoheleth 12, at least two more texts attest to the ritual/funerary use of סָבַב in the Hebrew Bible. Thus, Isaiah’s lament for Tyre compares the city to a harlot walking in circles/dancing with her harp (קָחִי כְנֹר סָבִי עִיר [Isa 23:16]) and Jer 31:22 speaks of Rachel’s solemn choreography around the casualties of the Babylonian crisis (נִקְבָּה תְּסֻבֵּב גְּבֵר).⁴² Given that the reference to encircling acts/circumambulations in Jonah appears in conjunction with its remark that the prophet was in the belly of the fish “three days and three nights” (Jonah 2:1), the aforementioned myth, *Inanna’s Descent to the Netherworld* is of interest as well. In it, prior to her perilous journey, which would

³⁸ Seow, “Qohelet’s Eschatological Poem,” 214, n. 23.

³⁹ On the phrase “eternal home” as a reference to the grave in extrabiblical sources, see J. Crenshaw, “Youth and Old Age in Qohelet,” *HAR* 10 (1986), 1–13 (9); Seow, “Qohelet’s Eschatological Poem,” 224–26.

⁴⁰ Seow, “Qohelet’s Eschatological Poem,” 231–34. On Qoheleth 12 as a poem about the end of life, see also S. Niditch, *The Responsive Self: Personal Religion in Biblical Literature of the Neo-Babylonian and Persian Periods* (ABR; New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2015), 46–50; J. Koosed, “Decomposing Qohelet,” in Y. Sherwood (ed.), *Derrida’s Bible: Reading a Page of Scripture with a Little Help from Derrida* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 247–59.

⁴¹ Olyan observes that texts that refer to one or two mourning rites may in fact presuppose a larger set of mourning rituals. Olyan, *Biblical Mourning*, 29, n. 5.

⁴² Kozlova, *Maternal Grief*, 157–96. On other mourning rites in Jer 32:15–22, see idem, “Grave Marking and Wailing: Ritual Responses to the Babylonian Crisis in Jeremiah’s Poetry (Jer 31:21),” *SJOT* (2017), 92–117. The root סָבַב in Qoh 12:5 and Isa 23:16 is featured in Qal, whereas in Jonah 2 it is found in Polel (cf. Jer 31:22). W. Oesterley claims that most of the Hebrew “dance” roots appear in “intensive forms” signifying “the nature and character of the sacred dance.” W. Oesterley, *Sacred Dance in the Ancient World* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2002), 44.

require the exact amount of time, the goddess instructs her servant to make a lament for her on the ruin mounds, to beat the *šem* drum for her in the sanctuary, and to circumambulate/make the rounds of the houses of the gods on her behalf (ETCSL: c.1.4.1.34–35).⁴³ Accompanied by these mourning rites, the sojourn of the strong-willed Inanna in the realm of the dead is reminiscent of Jonah’s descent to Sheol—fleeing from God, he finds himself *en route* to the netherworld while the floods and the watery deep swirl around him in a ritual frenzy. In view of Jonah’s fractured relationship with YHWH in the book and some of the narrative details suggestive of God’s penal or disciplinary actions towards his servant, the dances performed by the currents and the deep could read, to a degree, as a parody on proper mourning rites.⁴⁴

As previously stated, “to be alive is to be part of the created world; to be dead is to be uncreated.”⁴⁵ Thus, in ancient distress literature individuals on the brink of death or in mourning urged the world around them to share in the experience. Hence, in the aforesaid dirge over Enkidu’s death, Gilgamesh appeals to his surrounding landscape including the rivers Ulāy and Euphrates to lament for his friend (GE VIII 7–19). Similarly, other-than-human agents from the world of nature, particularly water-courses, are personified to mourn the death of a loved one in a funerary inscription of an Assyrian king.⁴⁶ As indicated above, comparable tendencies are likewise attested in biblical prophetic texts which utilize the phrase “the earth mourns”/תאבל הארץ (Hos 4:3; Joel 1:10; Jer 12:4, etc.; cf. Baruch’s dirge over Jerusalem [2 *Baruch* 10]).⁴⁷ Given the conventions of ancient lament

⁴³ On the mourning rites prescribed here, see D. Shehata, “Sounds from the Divine: Religious Musical Instruments in the Ancient Near East,” in J. Goodnick Westenholz, Y. Maurey and E. Seroussi (eds.), *Music in Antiquity: The Near East and the Mediterranean* (Berlin: de Gruyter; Jerusalem: Hebrew University Magnes Press, 2014), 102–28 (107, n. 22). The *šem* drum was an instrument used by the *gala* priests who were “employed in a number of kinds of ritual displays of grief in the service of temples and were called to perform at high-status funerals.” M. Bachvarova, “Sumerian *Gala* Priests and Eastern Mediterranean Returning Gods: Tragic Lamentation in Cross-Cultural Perspective,” in A. Suter (ed.), *Lament: Studies in the Ancient Mediterranean and Beyond* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 18–52 (20). Cf. “DN, who circumambulates the city, is the wailing woman for him, she circumambulates the city” (KAR 143, 66–67). *CAD* B:35.

⁴⁴ For nonhuman creation performing dances, including a circle dance (טבב), as an act of worship, see Ps 114:3–4. For a discussion of various types of dances in this text, see Gruber, “Ten Dance-Derived Expressions,” 333.

⁴⁵ Rudman, “The Use of Water,” 244.

⁴⁶ A 1070, no. 12, A 1168, A 1134. J.B. Bury, S.A. Cook and F.E. Adcock (eds.), *The Cambridge Ancient History: The Assyrian Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1925), 312, n. 73. Cf. 2 Sam 1:21.

⁴⁷ Cf. the Persian army who, in mourning, cut off their own hair and that of their animals. Herodotus, *The Histories* (trans. by G.C. Macaulay; ed. by D. Lateiner; New York, NY: Barnes & Noble Classics, 2004), 470. Cf. Plutarch’s account of Alexander’s grief and that of his

rhetoric, the ritual reading of the swirling, encircling acts in Jonah's nature-themed funeral is not implausible. Additionally, according to death and mourning practices from the Second Temple Period, a funerary procession was supposed to disrupt the community's activities causing those who encounter it to "join in the lamentation."⁴⁸ Arguably, a similar principle of the totality of mourning could be detected in ancient laments, whereby human grief is superimposed on the created order.⁴⁹ As suggested here, this principle could be at work in Jonah 2 as well, but more needs to be said about the role of nature in this text.

JONAH'S BURIAL SHROUD: "SEAWEEDS WERE WRAPPED AROUND MY HEAD"

Bearing in mind "the elasticity of grammar and vocabulary" in Jonah's psalm,⁵⁰ another nature-based detail in the construction of his demise is worthy of note—סוף חבוש לראשי (Jonah 2:6). Understanding סוף as a type of water plant (cf. Exod 2:3, 5; Deut 1:1; Isa 19:6), most modern translators render the phrase as "seaweeds were wrapped around my [Jonah's] head."⁵¹ B. Batto, however, argued that such a reading is not possible since "the context requires *sûp* to have something to do with a cosmic battle against chaos."⁵² Hence, "[g]iven the context of images of non-existence and in parallelism with mythic waters and the Abyss, here *sûp* (or *sôp*) must be derived from the Semitic root *sûp*, 'to come to an end,' 'to cease (to exist).'"⁵³ Accordingly, he renders the verse in question as "*The waters encompassed me up to the throat, the Abyss (têhom) encircled me; Extinction (sûp) was bound to my head.*"⁵⁴

troops, which involved the shaving of "the manes and tails of all horses." Plutarch, *The Life of Alexander* 72, in *The Age of Alexander: Nine Greek Lives by Plutarch* (trans. and annotated by I. Scott-Kilvert; Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1973), 329.

⁴⁸ *Contra Apionem*, 2.205; cf. Sir 7:34, 38:16–17. Fox, "Aging," 61.

⁴⁹ Cf. S. Miller's discussion of the Earth mourning in Mark's depiction of Jesus' death. S. Miller, "The Descent of Darkness over the Land: Listening to the Voice of Earth in Mark 5:33," in *Exploring Ecological Hermeneutics*, 125–30.

⁵⁰ Bolin, *Freedom Beyond Forgiveness*, 108.

⁵¹ Wolff sees here "huge algae growing in the depth of the sea." Wolff, *Obadiah and Jonah*, 136. Allen states that Jonah is "entangled among the marine growth at the bottom of the ocean." Allen, *Joel, Obadiah, Jonah*, 217. Sasson imagines Jonah "choking under clinging marine plants." Sasson, *Jonah*, 185.

⁵² Batto, "The Reed Sea," 33; P.K.-K. Cho, *Myth, History, and Metaphor in the Hebrew Bible* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 105.

⁵³ Batto, "The Reed Sea," 34.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 32. Admittedly, Batto's reading has some versional support. Yet, it is noteworthy that סוף is not the only nature-related word that the VSS struggled with—קיקון (4:6) and רוח קדים חרישית (4:8) puzzled them as well. Alternatively, the difficult סוף could be seen as creating a pun between "reeds" and "end." On a recent reassessment of the body of water called ים סוף in the Pentateuch, including Batto's view, see P. Yoo, "Once Again: The Yam Sûp of the Exodus," *JBL* 137 (2018), 581–97.

However, even though the text is replete with terms from Israel's mythic repertoire, it is highly unlikely that YHWH's confrontation with *Jonah* could be seen as his battle against *chaos*—in his suicidal state (Jonah 1:12, 4:3, 8), the prophet was already an easy target!⁵⁵ Furthermore, and as will be argued below, seeing סוף as a type of plant can still complement the images of non-existence in the text;⁵⁶ in fact, some scholars have already gestured towards this reading. Thus, J. Bewer, for instance, observes that in this macabre poem seaweeds are “wound around the psalmist's head, [creating] a gruesome turban with which he was about to enter the land from which no wanderer returns.”⁵⁷ As the verb חבש appears with cultic headgear elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible (Exod 29:9; Lev 8:13), this reading is certainly attractive. Yet, in the light of the discussion at hand, this phrase could be nuanced a little bit further.

Considering the saturation of Jonah 2 with death symbolism, it is noteworthy that חבש/“to wrap” is featured in another death-related text—“hide them in the dust together; bind their faces in the hidden place”/יחד פניהם חבש בטמון (Job 40:13). Regarding this line, D. Clines asserts that here, “Job is ironically being exhorted to drive the wicked into the underworld, hiding them in the dust of death, imprisoning them in the Dungeon (טמון, lit. ‘the hidden place,’ an otherwise unattested term for the underworld. . .).”⁵⁸ Understanding the verb חבש as “to bind,” he notes that the verse may allude to “the trope of the chaining of creatures in the underworld (cf. *1 Enoch* 10:5; Jude 6).”⁵⁹ Taking into account biblical profiles of Sheol as a fortified city or a prison and that חבש and its cognates may connote the idea of captivity, Clines' reading is certainly plausible. Yet, in Job the verb is linked to the reprobates' faces, which is an unusual body part to put in shackles (cf. 2 Sam 3:34; Ps 105:18). Incidentally, earlier in this passage, when God challenges Job to take his place and execute judgement on the wicked, he instructs him to adorn himself with glory and splendour and to clothe himself

⁵⁵ Batto, “The Reed Sea,” 33.

⁵⁶ Furthermore, since Jonah 2 and 4 share a few motifs, removing the “seaweeds” from chapter 2 would weaken the link with chapter 4, where the services of another plant are conscripted to deal with the prophet, and more specifically, to “interact” with his “head” (Jonah 4:6–8).

⁵⁷ J.A. Bewer, *Jonah* (ICC; New York, NY: Scribner's Sons, 1912), 46. Cf. “The image of the turban is borrowed in Jonah 2:6 (5), where weeds are wrapped about the head of a drowning man.” G. Münderlein, *TDOT*, vol. 4, 198. For the practice to cover the head and/or face in mourning see 2 Sam 15:30, 19:5; Jer 14:3–4; Ezek 24:17; Esth 6:12.

⁵⁸ D. Clines, *Job 38–42* (WBC, 18B; Waco, TX: Word, 2011), 1182; Tromp, *Primitive Conceptions*, 46–47.

⁵⁹ Clines, *Job*, 1182. Regarding vv. 11–13, F. Delitzsch states, that in “connection with טמון (from טמן; Aram., Arab., טמר, the lower world, including the grave is thought of (comp. Arab. *matmurât*, subterranean places).” F. Delitzsch, *Job* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1975), 356–57. Cf. Gray's translation, “Hide them in the dust together, imprison their persons in the lowly ground.” J. Gray, *The Book of Job* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2010), 482, 484.

in honour and majesty (Job 40:10). In v. 13, however, he speaks of casting the wicked into the grave and makes a reference to some manipulation of their faces. If “to wrap” is the preferred meaning of **חבש**, then vv. 10 and 13 create a nice thematic parallelism—having taken God’s place as a judge, Job is adorned/**עדה** and clothed/**לבש** with glory, whereas the wicked judged by him are thrown into the underworld wrapped/**חבש** in funeral garbs; the latter would be represented here by a burial shroud for the face as the “part for the whole” principle.⁶⁰ This reading is already reflected in J. Hartley’s commentary on Job, where he states,

When unleashing his fury against the arrogant wicked, Job would put them to death for their evil deeds. With their proud *faces shrouded* they would be given a common burial *in the grave*, an infernal crypt (*baṭṭāmûn*). Such treatment would be the final, humiliating blow to a proud person for whom the height of glory was to receive a stately funeral followed by interment in his own majestic monument (cf. 3:14, 15; 21:32, 33).⁶¹

Given the fate of the arrogant in Job 40:13, the sea with its growth in Jonah 2 could likewise be seen as donning the prophet in preparation for his entombment;⁶² this in turn could be sup-

⁶⁰ Cf. Job 40:11–12 that has a chiasmic structure. C. Habel, *The Book of Job: A Commentary* (OTL; Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1985), 563.

⁶¹ J. Hartley, *The Book of Job* (NICOT; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), 520–21. Interestingly, here and elsewhere in Job exercising God’s power involves acts of clothing—either with glory or shame (cf. Job 38:9, 39:19). For the role of clothes in Job, see L. Quick, “‘Like a Garment Eaten by Moths’ (Job 13:28): Clothing, Nudity and Illness in the Book of Job,” *BibInt* (2021), *forthcoming*. Cf. M. Pope’s translation of v. 13 as “bury them in the dust together, bind them in the infernal crypt.” For him, “the infernal crypt,” literally “‘the hidden (place),’ [is] a circumlocution for the netherworld.” M. Pope, *Job* (AB, 15; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1979), 265, 268. By “‘hiding’ the wicked in ‘the dust’ and ‘binding’ them in a ‘hidden place,’ Job would demonstrate his capacity to complete the punitive process and deliver the wicked as captives to the underworld according to the principles Job was advocating.” Habel, *Job*, 563. Job 40:13 echoes 14:13, where Job wanted to be hidden from God’s anger in Sheol. For “dust” as a symbol of death see Job 3:16, 17:16, 21:26; Isa 29:4; Ps 22:30, etc.

Cf. Job 24:13–16, which speaks of adultery, theft, and murder, all of which are carried out under the cover of darkness. Flanking a list of these “shady” activities, is Job’s assessment of the individuals who are involved in them—they are “those who rebel against the light” (v. 12) and they are the ones who “know/befriend terrors of thick darkness” (v. 17b). Within this frame, v. 15 speaks of the adulterer who wraps his face with a veil. Note also Job 38:15 which states that the wicked will be deprived of light.

⁶² On two more roots related to “wrapping” in Jonah 2—**צרר/צר** (Jonah 2:3) and **עטרף** (Jonah 2:8), see King, *Surrounded by Bitterness*, 144–50, 151–53. Regarding these roots, King asserts that they “access a physical domain of wrapping and the domain of psychophysical distress.” *Ibid.*, 153. Based on Akkadian texts which speak of being ill as

ported by textual and archaeological evidence for the use of burial clothes in ANE.⁶³ Of pertinence here is that in traditional societies (both ancient and modern) funerary laments preserve a concern for the deceased to be properly attired and adequately equipped for their way to the afterlife. This, for example, is seen in a Hittite lament from the so-called Puḫanu chronicle, which is sung by two soldiers in anticipation of their defeat and subsequent death in the Hurrian invasion of Hatti⁶⁴—“shrouds of Nesa, shrouds of Nesa, bind me, bind; take me down to my mother, bind me, bind. . .” (KBo 3.40 obv. 13’–14’).⁶⁵ According to M. Weeden, “the place-name Nesa [in this song] is the Hittite name for ancient Kaneš, modern Kültepe near Kayseri, a location the Hittites regarded to a degree as their ancestral home,”⁶⁶ and the “shrouds of Nesa” represent clothes for the dead.⁶⁷ Commenting on this mournful song, C. Watkins in turn notes that “the ample documentation of the Hittite rituals for the dead, . . . fully confirms the importance of the dressing of the corpse and bier in Hittite culture.”⁶⁸ Similarly, in the Assyrian

being “wrapped”/“clothed” in illness, Waldman argues that עטף, rendered as “faint” in lexica, reflects the more literal sense of “clothing.” Thus, Jonah 2:8 (בהתעטף עלי נפשי) should read “when my soul is wrapped upon/within me.” N.M. Waldman, “The Imagery of Clothing, Covering and Overpowering,” *JANES* 19 (1989), 161–170 (168–69). Cf. “A punishment from which there is no escape has overcome me; death is binding me [*kasanni mutu*].” (*The Epic of Tukulti-Ninurta*, iv, 28). Cf. the phrase חבלי-מוות/“the cords of death” encompassing individuals (Pss 18:4, 116:3).

⁶³ Incidentally, Batto arrives at a similar conclusion regarding Jonah 2:6: “*ḥābaš* apparently had acquired a certain currency in the context of death and underworld imagery, as illustrated from Job 40:13. . . This image of death as a binding of the face/head may derive from funerary customs of shrouding the body for burial. If so, the aptness of ‘*šp* was bound to my head’ [in Jon. 2:6] becomes all the more poignant as an expression of the threat of death or non-existence in Jonah 2.” Batto, “The Reed Sea,” 34.

⁶⁴ C. Watkins, “A Latin-Hittite Etymology,” *Language* 45 (1969), 235–42 (239–40 and the bibliography cited there); M. Weeden, “Poetry and War among the Hittites,” in H. Kennedy (ed.), *Warfare and Poetry in the Middle East* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2013), 73–99 (89); Melchert, “Hittite *uwaš*,” 104–6.

⁶⁵ Weeden, “Poetry and War,” 89. S. de Martino sees these lines as “a mourning song intoned by the Hittite warriors . . . expressing their wish to be at home with their ancestors.” S. de Martino, “Song and Singing in the Hittite Literary Evidence,” in E. Hickmann, A. Kilmer and R. Eichmann (eds.), *Studien zur Musikarchäologie III. Archäologie früher Klangerzeugung und Tonordnung/ Vorträge des 2. Symposiums der Internationalen Studiengruppe Musikarchäologie im Kloster Michaelstein, 17–23. September 2000, 2002* (Leidorf: Rahden, 2002), 623–29 (627); cf. Watkins, “A Latin-Hittite Etymology,” 239–40; Melchert, “Hittite *uwaš*,” 105.

⁶⁶ Weeden, “Poetry and War,” 89; A. Gilan, “Der Puḫānu-Text—Theologischer Streit und politische Opposition in der althethitischen Literatur,” *AbF* 31 (2004), 263–96.

⁶⁷ Watkins, “A Latin-Hittite Etymology,” 240 and the bibliography on 239–41; Melchert, “Hittite *uwaš*,” 106.

⁶⁸ Watkins, “A Latin-Hittite Etymology,” 240.

Elegy to a woman who died in childbirth an unknown speaker, possibly her husband, describes the dead parturient journeying to the netherworld and remarks on her solemn attire, “abandoned like a boat adrift midstream, . . . why cross the City’s river, *veiled in a shroud?*” (K 890, ll.1–3).⁶⁹ Since in these sorrowful songs, the fatally wounded and the bereft spouse (?) are calling for or referencing burial shrouds, in a composition of a comparable genre, i.e., Jonah 2, a veiled poetic nod to an analogous item of clothing is not inconceivable.

Furthermore, given the mythic veneer of Jonah’s psalm and the specifics of God’s instruction to Job (פניהם חבשו בטמון/“shroud their faces in the grave,” Job 40:13), *the Epic of Gilgamesh* is of interest as well. In it, having gone to the underworld and having succumbed to death, Enkidu is lovingly prepared for burial by Gilgamesh. One of the acts performed by the king for his dead friend is covering his face with a veil as a bride (GE VIII 59).⁷⁰ Another composition worthy of note here is the Akkadian version of the aforementioned myth, *Ishtar’s Descent to the Netherworld*. Discussing ritual preparations of Dumuzi to take the goddess’s place in the realm of the dead, the text makes a reference to his burial clothes: “Wash (him) with pure water, anoint him with sweet oil, clothe him in a red robe.” S. Dalley explains this line by saying that “[c]orpses were wrapped in red cloth for burial; traces [of which] have occasionally been recovered by excavations.”⁷¹ Concerning biblical evidence for an ideal burial entailing proper attire of the deceased, it must be recognized that it is very scarce. However, texts that do speak of people coming from the underworld or residing in it make mention of their clothes—hence, 1 Sam 28:14 relates the story of Samuel being conjured up from his grave wrapped in a robe/מעיל, whereas Isa 14:19, by contrast, refers to the (dishonourable?) garments of the slain/לבוש הרגים.⁷² Isa 22:17–18 in turn may

⁶⁹ For text and translation, see A. George, “Assyrian Elegy,” in S.C. Melville and A.L. Slotsky (eds.), *Opening the Tablet Box: Near Eastern Studies in Honor of Benjamin R. Foster* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 203–16. See also his discussion of “the Great City” as the realm of the dead accessed by river. *Ibid.*, 208.

⁷⁰ George, *The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic, vol. 1*, 655. Note that in his visit to the Netherworld, Enkidu had to wear soiled garments in order to blend in with its other residents.

⁷¹ S. Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia: Creation, the Flood, Gilgamesh, and Others* (OWC; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 162, n. 21. Regarding this line, P. Lapinkivi explains that here Tammuz was “ritualistically purified and clothed” for his burial. P. Lapinkivi, *The Neo-Assyrian Myth of Ištar’s Descent and Resurrection* (SAACT, 6; Helsinki: Neo Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2010), 90. For an Egyptian tale of Setme and his son Si-Osiris, first observing two funerals—that of a rich man buried in “sumptuous clothing” and that of a poor man interred unceremoniously—and subsequently traveling to the world of the dead to learn of the reversal of the deceased’s fortune, see Bauckham, *The Fate of the Dead*, 13–14 and the bibliography cited there.

⁷² Alternatively, the phrase could mean that the dead king was “clothed” with the slain (cf. NIV).

represent God's punishment on Shebna by means of unwrapping (or rewrapping?) his mummified corpse and casting it out of its tomb.⁷³

Archaeological evidence on the subject at hand is richer indicating that burial clothes were used for the deceased since time immemorial.⁷⁴ Regarding eighth-century BCE Judahite burial and mortuary practices, E. Bloch-Smith asserts that the "body was dressed and adorned with jewellery including rings, earrings, necklaces and bangles. Select individuals, including women, were then wrapped in a cloak, as evidenced by . . . the presence of toggle pins and fibulae in burials." The body was then transported to the tomb, where a set of mourning rites were performed by those assembled for the funeral.⁷⁵ Discussing Jewish burial practices from the Second Temple Period, R. Hachlili writes that

the body was wrapped in a shroud and then placed in the coffin, as indicated by the imprint of woven material found on several bones and on a skull in tombs at Jericho. . . At 'En Gedi, linen textiles found in several coffins and tombs designating burial shrouds. In coffin 4 of tomb 1 textile fragments were discovered around the skull and limbs, as well as a knotted piece above the deceased's right shoulder. . . The custom of wrapping the body in a shroud is mentioned in literary sources (M Kil. 9, 4; M Maas. 5, 12; T Ned. 2, 7; John 11:44. . .).⁷⁶

Interestingly, in Jonah, the doomed prophet combines the mention of seaweeds wrapped around his head with references to

⁷³ C.B. Hays, *A Covenant with Death: Death in the Iron Age II and Its Rhetorical Uses in Proto-Isaiah* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015), 243–49. Cf. Isaiah 25, where the Lord promises to destroy "the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations" (v. 7) and then says he will "swallow up death" (v. 8). Interestingly, the same verb (בלע) is used with "the shroud" and "death," as if they are if not synonymous then at least related.

⁷⁴ A. Thomason, "Clothing and Nudity in the Ancient Near East: Archaeological and Iconographic Perspectives," in C. Berner, M. Schäfer, M. Schott, S. Schulz and M. Weingärtner (eds.), *Clothing and Nudity in the Hebrew Bible* (London: T&T Clark, 2019), 87–126.

⁷⁵ E. Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices and Beliefs about the Dead* (JSOT/ASOR, 7; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992), 148; see also *ibid.*, 27, 32, 66, 86–87, 155, 218.

⁷⁶ R. Hachlili, *Jewish Funerary Customs, Practices and Rites in the Second Temple Period* (JSJSup; Leiden: Brill, 2005), 481 and the bibliography cited there. See also O. Shamir's discussion on the possible use of old clothes and shrouds to wrap the dead as an alternative form of burial. O. Shamir, "Shrouds and Other Textiles from Ein Gedi," in Y. Hirschfeld (ed.), *Ein Gedi—A Very Large Village of Jews* (Haifa: Hecht Museum, University of Haifa, 2006), 57–59. Cf. John 11, where Lazarus's "hands and feet [were] bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth" (John 11:44, cf. 19:40, 20:7; Matt 27:59). On burial clothes in ancient Rome, see V. Hope, "Dead People's Clothes: Materialising Mourning in Ancient Rome," in Z. Newby and R. Toulson (eds.), *The Materiality of Mourning: Cross-disciplinary Perspectives* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2018), 23–39.

him descending to the depths (Jonah 2:4) and being driven from YHWH's gaze (Jonah 2:5; cf. Ps 88:15). The notions of darkness, hiddenness (from God?) and restricted vision in the grave are likewise present in Job 40:13. Relatedly, in ANE the underworld in general was viewed as a place of gloom and darkness (cf. Pss 88:7, where "depths" parallels "darkness" [cf. Jonah 2:4], 12, 139:8–12, 143:3; Lam 3:5; Job 10:21–22, 17:13, 18:18; Sir 22:11),⁷⁷ and some traditions from the Second Temple Period not only describe the region of the dead as a place of darkness, but also mention the covering of a face in it: "cover him [Azael] with darkness, . . . , cover his face that he may not see light" (*1 Enoch* 10:4, 5; cf. 109:2). Considering the punitive overtones of Job 40:13 and the ANE ideas around the loss of sight, or eyes functioning in a diminished capacity, in death, the psalm in Jonah 2 could read as a layered text—with marine growth creating a funerary shroud for Jonah and at the same time restricting his vision, which could be suggestive of God's judgement on the prophet.⁷⁸

CONCLUSION

Focussing on the intersection of nature and ritual in the death vignettes of Jonah 2, the foregoing analysis has shown that despite its "textual messiness" the psalm speaks of the prophet's downfall as a fully developed funeral scene. In view of such reading, this discussion can now offer some remarks on the psalm's usage in service of the book's overall theological message. That is, Jonah 2 with its cosmic burial should serve as an interpretive lens through which Jonah 3 and 4 are to be read—i.e., the poem's cataclysmic event should be seen as casting its "dead-ly" shadow on the remaining sections of the book. Assessing the role of the non-human creation in the book and in chapter 4 in particular,

⁷⁷ Bar, *I Deal Death and Give Life*, 176–79. Cf. Ps 13:3 which indicates that if God does not light up the eyes of the sufferer he will sleep "the sleep of death" (cf. Ps 38:10); cf. Prov 29:13, where God is the giver of light to the eyes (cf. Prov 20:12; Ps 94:9; cf. Matt 6:22–23).

⁷⁸ Interestingly, in the aforementioned K 890, not only was the woman who died in childbirth veiled in a shroud on her way to the netherworld (l. 3), but also the goddess who turned away from the dying parturient, did so by veiling her own face (ll. 10–11). George, "Assyrian Elegy," 206, 209. Cf. *The Babylonian Poem of the Righteous Sufferer*, where the afflicted experiences relief brought about by Marduk and states, "My beclouded eyes, which were wrapped in the shroud of death. He drove (the cloud) a thousand leagues away, he brightened [my] vision." B.R. Foster, *Before the Muses: An Anthology of Akkadian Literature* (Bethesda, MD: CDL, 2005), 404. Given the aforesaid elasticity of Jonah's rhetoric, and in the light of the mention of Jonah's burial garbs (Jonah 2:6), the phrase "the deep surrounded me"/"תהום יסבבני" (cf. Jonah 2:4) may assume another layer of meaning. In later Jewish burial rites סובב is a swaddling sheet for the dead. Thus, the currents resulting from the deep/abyss encircling Jonah would produce a "liquid shroud" for him. Cf. Ps 104:6, where the deep/תהום, at creation, covers the earth as a garment.

P. Tribble proposes that “an ecology of pity becomes the paradigm for a theology of pity” adding that this pity should extend to both humans and the “otherkind.”⁷⁹ Borrowing Tribble’s language and adjusting it to the discussion at hand, it might be suggested that the book’s ecology of *death* likewise offers the paradigm for its theology of *death*, and by extension, that of *life*.

Thus, in view of Jonah’s sojourn in Sheol for “three days and three nights” (Jonah 2:1), the mention of “three days” in relation to Nineveh (Jonah 3:3), to a degree, images the city with its citizens as yet another site populated by the “dead,” as yet another “underworld,” albeit as a scaled-down version of it.⁸⁰ The semblance in the profiles of the two “hellish” (or “semi-hellish”) locales would then indicate the semblance in the plight and status of their respective populaces.⁸¹ That is, in God’s eyes, Jonah and the Ninevites are equally lost. And if one death occasions a cataclysm of cosmic magnitude, how much more taxing for creation would the loss of a city be? Moreover, if the demise of one individual is mapped onto the greatest scale possible, i.e., the cosmos, theoretically then, a greater scale would be needed to speak of the downfall of a city. As no cosmological schema in Israel allows for such a scale, the book reaches a rhetorical impasse. Such impasse, however, is the book’s theological triumph—the way God sees it, losing the Ninevites, and their “otherkind,” is not an option.

Additionally, given thematic parallels in Jonah 2 and 4,⁸² Jonah’s psalm is brought into a dialogue with his words in the wake of Nineveh’s repentance—“Lord, take away my life, for my death is better than my life”/“כי טוב מוֹתִי מֵחַיִּי” (Jonah 4:3, cf. v. 8). With the cosmic burial in the background, Jonah’s claims in chapter 4 indicate that he would rather go through the experience of “un-creation” again than to see Nineveh’s rescue. Arguably, in view of Nineveh’s “semi-chthonic” profile in chapter 3, Jonah’s words in chapter 4 suggest that Nineveh’s “dead” should stay where they are—“barred” in within it forever, never to be brought up from their “pit” (cf. Jonah 2:7). Such correlation of the chapters would highlight the underlying cause of Jonah’s earlier flight from God, i.e., his ethnocentrism, intimating that his “interment” in chapter 2 is not the only “thing” of cataclysmic proportions in the book. Furthermore, if, as proposed by many, Jonah’s attitude reflects Israel’s views of the post-exilic era, the correlation of chapters 2 and 4 would likewise offer a corrective for the post-exilic community as a whole. That is, informing the book’s theology of *death*, its ecology of *death* advances a claim that in God’s economy all lives matter. Hence, following the lead of other ecological readings of Jonah and focusing on the lament

⁷⁹ Tribble, “Jonah,” 525.

⁸⁰ Cf. an ominous tone in the “three days” motif in Exod 10:22, where it appears in conjunction with darkness descending on Egypt.

⁸¹ There are a few thematic links between Jonah 2 and 3—the “three days” motif (Jonah 2:1, 3:3), the “turning to God” motif (Jonah 2; 3:8), the feature of mourning clothes (Jonah 2:6, 3:5–8), the “merging of the human and natural realms” motif (Jonah 2, 3:5–10).

⁸² Tribble, *Rhetorical Criticism*, 110–19.

elements in chapter 2, this discussion has once again shown that the natural world is indispensable to the overall message of this prophetic text.