The Body of Nineveh:
The Conceptual Image of the City
in Nahum 2-3

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1. INTRODUCTION

Research on cities in the Hebrew Bible shows that urban spaces are often personified in the text. This seems to be especially the case for Jerusalem, whose personification as a woman is pervasive and distinctive.[1] According to Stéphanie Anthonioz, the depiction of Jerusalem is "unparalleled": "recurring images of Jerusalem appear from her childhood to her status as a fully grown woman, providing the texture of a life and history."[2] But is this indeed the case? Do other cities in the Hebrew Bible, in particular foreign urban places, lack such a unifying tale? Or do they feature as leading characters in their own story, either similar to or different from the biographical set-up of Jerusalem's story?

At first sight, foreign urban places in the biblical text sporadically appear as people, described with images that are similar to those used to depict Jerusalem (e.g., the prostitute in Nah 2:4–5 for

[1] P. L. Day, "The Personification of Cities as Female in the Hebrew Bible: The Thesis of Aloysius Fitzgerald, F.S.C," in F. F. Segovia and M. A. Tolbert (eds.), *Reading from This Place II* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 283–302; U. Sals, *Die Biografie der "Hure Babylon": Studien zur Intertextualität der Babylon-Texte in der Bibel* (FAT, 2.6; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004); F. W. Dobbs-Allsopp, "Daughter Zion," in J. J. Ahn and S. L. Cook (eds.), *Thus Says the Lord: Essays on the Former and Latter Prophets in Honor of Robert R. Wilson* (OTS, 502; London: T&T Clark, 2009), 125–34; M. J. Boda, C. J. Dempsey, and L. S. Flesher (eds.), *Daughter Zion: Her Portrait, Her Response* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2012); S. Anthonioz, "Cities of Glory and Cities of Pride: Concepts, Gender, and Images of Cities in Mesopotamia and in Ancient Israel," in D. V. Edelman and E. Ben Zvi (eds.), *Memory and the City in Ancient Israel* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2014), 21–42.

[2] Anthonioz, "Cities of Glory and Cities of Pride," 39.

Nineveh vs. Jerusalem in Ezek 16:15 or the mother in Nah 3:10 for Nineveh vs. Jerusalem in Isa 66:7).[3] Yet these personifications do not seem to generate a story, at least not that of a maturing woman, as they do for Jerusalem. Ulrike Sals's biography of the whore of Babylon implies by its very title and structure a comparable story for this city. However, the personifications of the place do not appear consistently throughout the biblical text. Rather, the notion of biography is an interpretational strategy developed by Sals—indeed, a very clarifying one—but it is not a strategy of the biblical storytelling itself. For example, Gen 11 describes the early days of Babylon (i.e., the metaphorical birth of the city, and interpreted as such by Sals), whereas texts such as Jer 50–51 depict the city's downfall (i.e., her death). Yet, the tower of Babel story does not imagine the city as a young woman. Such a personification does not occur in the text but in the interpreter's discourse, prompted by personified cities elsewhere in the biblical text as well as by the metaphor of life and death as the rise and fall of inanimate things (e.g., cities or empires).[4]

Explanations for the personification of cities as women are mostly sought in the literary-theological realm. Personification is a literary trope that allows the city to have a relationship with the deity.[5] Anthonioz interprets Jerusalem-as-woman as a "site of memory," "becoming alive for her God and to the reader."[6] For the same Jerusalem, F. W. Dobbs-Allsopp argues that the city is "constructed, imaginatively, through human cognition and inventiveness."[7] He questions both grammatical motivations (cities are feminine in Biblical Hebrew) and ritual-practical ones (there may have been an actual city goddess underlying the image) to conclude in favor of a literary explanation for the personification of Jerusalem, compensating what he earlier described as "the tacit lack of serious respect for literary figuration as a phenomenon."[8]

With these observations from previous research in mind and elaborating upon the also little discussed role of human cognition in the above quoted introductory statement by Dobbs-Allsopp

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[3] Anthonioz, "Cities of Glory and Cities of Pride," 34–37; Sals, *Hure Babylon*, 27–43.

[4] Sals, *Hure Babylon*, 145–96. Although women are featured in the story in Zech 5—this is the other text tagged as a birth narrative in Sals's book—the women do not stand for the city. If there is a tale of the woman Babylon, it is not one covering the life story of Babylon growing up.

[5] C. M. Maier, "Whose Mother? Whose Space? Jerusalem in Third Isaiah," in G. Prinsloo and C. M. Maier (eds.), *Constructions of Space V: Place, Space and Identity in the Ancient Mediterranean World* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 107–24 (107); Anthonioz, "Cities of Glory and Cities of Pride," 22.

[6] Anthonioz, "Cities of Glory and Cities of Pride," 22, 39–40.

[7] Dobbs-Allsopp, "Daughter Zion," 132.

[8] Ibid., 132–33, quote p. 133.

about personified cities, I will argue in this article that the picture of the enemy city in the Hebrew Bible—here exemplified by Nineveh in the book of Nahum—also tells its own complete story. Beyond as well as behind the personification of the city, the conceptual metaphor NINEVEH IS A BODY controls the biblical cityscape of the place. As with the life story of Jerusalem, the body image of Nineveh is used consistently, creating the story of a strong and healthy body becoming a sick and bereaved corpse. The image manifests itself in various stylistic and semantic choices. The text of Nahum includes ample metonymies in which the city and the inhabitants are interchangeable, with the former sharing the body of the latter. Likewise, the metaphors and similes in the text explore the same concept: Nineveh is a body. The frequent use of actual body parts further emphasizes a bodily understanding of the city space.

In what follows, I will build up the picture of the city as the reader would do, bottom-up, collecting bits and pieces as the story progresses: metonymies, metaphors, similes, and the mention of actual body parts. Then I will discuss the conceptual metaphor of the city as human body which connects all the different manifestations, as—to keep the metaphor—a body unites its body parts. By way of conclusion, I will reflect on the role of this image for the meaning making process of a reader.

2. THE IMAGE OF THE CITY

2.1. METONYMY: CITY FOR INHABITANTS AND INHABITANTS FOR CITY[9]

The attentive reader of Nah 2–3 will notice that there exists a subtle shifting between the city as city and the city as collection of inhabitants.[10] In other words, sometimes the city represents its physical, material reality of houses, walls, and streets. Other times the term city refers to the inhabitants, the people living in the city. This type of metonymy, a *totum pro parte*, replaces the part (the people) by the whole (the city as material, sociological, economic, and political entity).[11] The text of Nahum plays out this feature,

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[9] In addition, scholars consider Nineveh to be a metonymy for Assyria. See, e.g., S. W. Holloway, "Nineveh as Meme in Persian-Period Yehud," in D. V. Edelman and E. Ben Zvi (eds.), *Memory and the City in Ancient Israel* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2014), 269–92 (274–75).

[10] Obviously, this holds equally true for a listener. In the current contribution, the term reader has been used over listener since that is the dominant mode of modern research. This does not imply that the text was intended to be read or that the modern reader should not take into account the ancient setting of oral performances. Rather, it is a choice made to facilitate reading the argument made here.

[11] "A metonymy is a FIGURE OF SPEECH whereby two concepts are imaginatively and descriptively compared like/as connective" (K. Wales,

switching from one to the other in such a way that it does not disturb or confuse the reader. Besides, this type of metonymy is so common that most readers may not even experience it as such; similar to what happens with dead metaphors.[12] In Nah 2:2, the speaker of the prophecy addresses Nineveh.[13] A shatterer is coming (עלה מפיץ), so the city should prepare and be strong: נצור מצרה צפה דרך חזק מתנים אמץ כח מאד. Whereas an enemy can approach a city, it is clear that the verbs in the remainder of the verse address the inhabitants of the city rather than the city itself.[14] In the later verses (2:4–7), describing the attack on the city, the text envisages Nineveh again as a physical place.

    Nah 3:7 mentions spectators (ראיך) who will recoil from the city (ידוד ממך). They will call Nineveh destroyed (שדדה נינוה). These statements refer to the physical space of the city. The speaker then continues asking who will lament the city (מי ינוד לה). He wonders where to find people to comfort Nineveh: מאין אבקש מנחמים לך. Verse 7 starts with the city as material given. Halfway through the verse, the statement on the lamentation fulfills a pivotal role: it can refer to both a material city and a city of people. At the end of the verse, the shift to the people is complete. Cities cannot be comforted, unless in a metonymic or metaphorical way.

A Dictionary of Stylistics, 3rd ed. [Harlow: Longman, 2011], 383). See also T. Sovran, "Metonymy and Synecdoche," in *Encyclopedia of Hebrew Language and Linguistics* 2:636. Kövecses describes metonymy as a cognitive process. He adds that it is conceptually close to metaphor; both are part of the same "idealized cognitive model" (Z. Kövecses, *Metaphor: A Practical Introduction* [New York: Oxford University Press, 2010], 173). The specific type of metonymy discussed here, i.e., the whole for the part (or vice versa), has also been dubbed synecdoche (Sovran, "Metonymy," 636; Wales, *Stylistics*, 411).

[12] "Dead metaphors are words whose literal meaning is no longer current and whose sense has therefore been transferred to the figurative" (Wales, *Stylistics*, 267).

[13] Not all scholars agree upon this identification of the addressee. Some argue that v. 2 is still focusing on Judah (J. M. Roberts, *Nahum, Habakkuk and Zephaniah: A Commentary* [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1991], 57; D. W. Baker, *Nahum, Habakkuk and Zephaniah: An Introduction and Commentary* [Nothingham: InterVarsity Press, 2009], 33). Others defend an ambiguous reading, in which the text deliberately confuses the addressee (L. Lanner, *"Who Will Lament Her?": The Feminine and the Fantastic in the Book of Nahum* [New York: T&T Clark, 2006], 122). Note that in both cases the seemingly masculine imperatives form a problem since both Judah and Nineveh are addressed with feminine forms (see, e.g., Nah 2:1 for Judah and Nah 3:5 for Nineveh). Scholars have solved this issue by analyzing the forms as absolute infinitives rather than imperatives (D. L. Christensen, *Nahum: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* [New Haven: Yael University Press, 2009], 264–65).

[14] K. Spronk, *Nahum* (Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1997), 85; Christensen, *Nahum*, 264; J. D. Charles, "Plundering the Lion's Den—A Portrait of Divine Fury (Nahum 2:3–11)," *GTJ* 10 (1989), 183–201 (189).

Similarly, Nah 3:12 mentions the fortresses of the city (מבצריך), and thus references Nineveh as material space. In v. 13, the people of the city are called women (עמך נשים), presenting the city and the people as two distinct entities. In order to stress the difference between both, the speaker includes more material aspects of the city, such as the gates (שערי ארצך) and the gate bars (בריחיך). Yet in v. 14, although still using the second person feminine singular, the metonymy 'city for inhabitants' occurs once more. The inhabitants have to draw the water (מי מצור שאבי לך), strengthen the fortresses (חזקי מבצריך), and so forth.[15] Verse 13 signals the change from city to people: once the two entities are mentioned separately, one can replace the other. As in the previous examples, the shift is unmarked, disappearing in the smooth course of telling the story.

Far more prominent is the shift from city to inhabitant (king) in Nah 3:18–19. It has prompted scholars to change the pronominal suffixes in these verses from masculine (king) to feminine (city). *BHS* even suggests deleting the vocative מלך אשור, "king of Assyria."[16] With these changes, the last verses of Nahum form an example of personification as the ones discussed below. The emendations favor the continuity of the text with Nineveh as addressee. But an emendation is not really necessary. Although the shift from city to king is not as unmarked as the previously discussed changes, it follows the pattern of representing the city by means of human beings, more specifically human bodies. The metonymy (a *pars pro toto* this time, the king [part] replacing the whole [city]) allows the city to slumber and dwell (נמו . . . ישכנו) and to be incurably wounded (אין כהה לשברך).[17] Because of this underlying metonymy, the continuity of the story does not necessarily require a change of the suffixes. As various commentaries and articles show, the passage still concerns the city, and by extension the empire of which the king and the people are bodily substitutes.[18]

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[15] Commentators easily make this shift. Coggins and Han even seem to blend the city and her inhabitants in considering the imperatives to be addressed to women, something which they explain as part of "continuing sarcasm" in the prophecy (R. Coggins and J. Han, *Six Minor Prophets through the Centuries: Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi* [Blackwell Bible Commentaries, 29; Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011], 33).

[16] Fabry, *Nahum*, 205.

[17] Dietrich describes the relationship between the king and the empire (rather than the city) as one of *Verkörperung* (embodiment) (W. Dietrich, *Nahum, Habakuk, Zefanja* [Internationaler Exegetischer Kommentar zum Alten Testament; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2014], 88).

[18] Fabry, *Nahum*, 208–9: "Ihre Komposition ist bestimmt von der identischen Thematik: der unabänderliche Untergang Ninives und Assyriens. Der Ausblick von Ninive auf den König von Assur und damit auf das ganze mesopotamische Reich überschreitet die Perspektive des Nahum-Buches und dient den Zeichnung einer Endgültigkeits-Perspek-

A last metonymy occurs in Nah 3:10. This example shows
some affinity with the next category of comparative devices, per-
sonification, and therefore, I treat it out of the order of the text. In
v. 10, the speaker elaborates upon the comparison between Nine-
veh and Thebes. Since the comparison serves to predict Nineveh's
fate (as the remainder of the prophecy does), this statement refers
to Nineveh as well.[19] The city is destined to exile and walks in cap-
tivity (גם היא לגלה הלכה בשבי). Like other examples, the initial
statement can refer to the city as material given. Here, the nominal
construction also leaves the other option open, namely that the
speaker has the inhabitants in mind. In the second, parallel part of
the phrase, however, the verb הלך occurs, so that the city must be
read as its inhabitants to maintain a realistic picture. Because of the
parallelism, one could, retrospectively, argue that the first part
explores the city-inhabitant metonymy as well. Additionally, one
could argue that this example is part of the personification of the
mother in the second part of v. 10 (see below), although I am not
inclined to do so. Exile is inherently connected to inhabitants of
places, though not necessarily cities (these places could be larger
areas as well as smaller ones). The action of walking in this verse
therefore is not the journey of any human being (or of *a* mother),
but is a very particular type of travel that is done by a particular
type of people, inhabitants of a recently conquered place, such as
Thebes or Nineveh.[20]

For each of the discussed references, it is clear that a meto-
nymic shift takes place between city and people. But why does the
speaker make these shifts? The examples show that the changes
happen when actions are described that require a physical body.
The actions involve movement, something which an immobile
structure such as a city cannot possibly do unless in an imaginative
space, which is definitely not what Nahum is describing.[21] There-

tive" (209). See also Christensen, *Nahum*, 390. Spronk has pointed out an
acrostic sequence with the first letters of the cola in v. 18 which spells out
Nineveh's name (*Nahum*, 141).

[19] Huddlestun shows that the description of a place by the sea and sur-
rounded by water is not accurate for Thebes. Rather this picture seems to
draw upon Nineveh itself and its environment (J. Huddlestun, "Nahum,
Nineveh and the Nile: The Description of Thebes in Nahum 3:8–9,"
JNES 62 [2003], 97–110).

[20] According to *OED*, exile is "the enforced removal from one's native
land according to an edict or sentence." Also in encyclopedia entries as
well as volumes on exile in the Hebrew Bible the notions of population
and land are central. See, e.g., "Exile," *HBD* (1989), 268–69; E. Ben Zvi
and C. Levin, *The Concept of Exile in Ancient Israel and Its Historical Contexts*
(BZAW, 404; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2010); R. Albertz, *Israel in Exile: The
History and Literature of the Sixth Century BCE* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2010),
esp. 74–111.

[21] As Machinist argues, "This graphic quality indicates not a prophecy
of things to come, but a report—from the messenger already intro-

fore, the people in Nineveh are the bodies of the city. Every time the speaker wants to relate a physical action he shifts the referent from city-as-structure to city-as-people. When this action is not present, he returns to the initial material city.

2.2. PERSONIFICATION: A RANDOM HUMAN BODY FOR THE CITY

A second category of comparison that draws on the body image is personification. Personification attributes human features to animate non-human beings, or inanimate things, or situations. It is a subtype of the broader category of metaphors.[22] All depictions of the city as a woman in its various manifestations are personifications, because they are about the city-woman, firstly as a personification, and then about her role as a mother, thus a specification of the female personification.[23]

In Nah 3, several examples occur, starting in vv. 4 and 5 where the city is depicted as a prostitute (זונה). Scholars have studied this personification mostly in light of the marriage metaphor which occurs frequently in prophetic literature (e.g., Isa 57:3). In this mapping, the unfaithful wife stands for the religiously unfaithful nation.[24] Remarkably, the targeted nation here, or rather

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duced—of things happening now or that have recently happened" (P. Machinist, "The Fall of Assyria in Comparative Ancient Perspective," in S. Parpola and R. M. Whiting [eds.], *Assyria 1995: Proceedings of the 10th Anniversary Symposium of the Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, Helsinki, September 7–11, 1995* [Helsinki: The Project, 1997], 179–96 [181]). Even Lanner repeats several times that the text appears to refer to a real world, or at least one that comes across as real (*"Who Will Lament Her?"*, 196–98). Although she argues in favor of a fantastic element in the book of Nahum (ibid., 190–240), it does not seem that she would take this argumentation as far as to claim that the space of Nineveh is to be read as an unreal one.

[22] Wales, *Stylistics*, 314; A. L. Weiss, "Figures of Speech: Biblical Hebrew," in *Encyclopedia of Hebrew Language and Linguistics* 1:895–99 (896).

[23] Witness any of the quoted commentaries and articles on personified cities in the Hebrew Bible that use the label 'personification' for city-women, but also city-mothers, city-wives, and city-whores. Note that the label 'metaphor' will occur as often in these pieces (because all these personifications are by definition also metaphors). In case of more prominent or extended metaphors, scholars will occasionally use the term 'allegory' as well. See, e.g., K. Seybold on Nineveh as a prostitute, *Nahum, Habakuk, Zephanja* (ZBK.AT, 24.2; Zürich: TVZ, 1991), 36.

[24] E.g., N. Stienstra, *YHWH is the Husband of His People: Analysis of a Biblical Metaphor with Special Reference to Translation* (Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1993); G. Baumann, *Love and Violence: Marriage as Metaphor for the Relationship between YHWH and Israel in the Prophetic Books* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2003), esp. 43–56. Kelle defends a different mapping: "The marriage metaphor in the Hebrew Bible expresses not the covenant relationship between Yahweh and the people of Israel but the religious, social, and political activities of those rulers who held office in the seats of power." These rulers are represented by the capital cities mentioned as

city, is Nineveh, which does not have a relationship with God (contrary to Israel/Jerusalem).[25] The prostitute had eagerly exposed her body, leading people astray: מרב זנוני זונה טובת חן בעלת כשפים המכרת גוים בזנוניה ומשפחות בכשפיה. Now God will take care of her by uncovering the intimate parts of that same body: וגליתי שוליך על פניך והראיתי גוים מערך וממלכות קלונך. This connection between crime and punishment is a pattern that runs throughout the Hebrew Bible and ancient Near Eastern culture in general.[26] In both parts of the pattern, Nahum focuses on the body of the prostitute.

The personifications continue in the subsequent verses, returning to a more general image of understanding the city as a (female) person (vv. 6–9). In particular, she will be subject to scorn (ושמתיך כראי), lacking comfort (מאין אבקש מנחמים לך) and sitting along the water (הישבה ביארים). In Nah 3:10, the metaphor highlights yet another role of the city-woman: Nineveh is described as a mother whose children are dashed on the corners of the street (גם עלליה ירטשו בראש כל חוצות).[27] Note that after this statement, the speaker switches back to a non-figurative concept of city, mentioning the leaders and mighty ones of the place ("her") in v. 10b (גדוליה, נכבדיה). The shift is short-lived because in v. 11 more personifications occur: the city is drunk (גם את תשכרי), searching for refuge (תבקשי מעוז מאויב).

To distinguish from the metonymies discussed above, the comparison between Nineveh and a drunken person does not necessarily involve an inhabitant of the city. Rather reference is made to a random human being who had too much to drink. Likewise, the mother figure in v. 10 does not describe a specific inhabitant of the city, but addresses some general category of mother that the reader can relate to.[28]

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wives/mothers in the biblical text (B. E. Kelle, *Hosea 2: Metaphor and Rhetoric in Historical Perspective* [AcBib; Atlanta: SBL Press, 2005], 90).

[25] J. M. O'Brien, *Nahum* (London: Sheffield Academic, 2002), 67–68. Scholars point out that the prostitute is the enemy rather than Israel or Judah, as in other texts (e.g., B. Becking, "Passion, Power and Protection: Interpreting the God of Nahum," in B. Becking and M. Dijkstra [eds.], *On Reading Prophetic Texts: Gender-Specific and Related Studies in Memory of Fokkelien van Dijk-Hemmes* [Leiden: Brill, 1996], 1–20 [15]).

[26] Machinist, "The Fall of Assyria," 188; Baker, *Nahum*, 37; Christensen, *Nahum*, 342–44; O'Brien, *Nahum*, 67–69.

[27] O'Brien notes that there is a tradition of personifying cities as women (*Nahum*, 68; see also the sources mentioned in n. 2). Klopper explains this choice psychologically, following T. Frymer-Kensky (F. Klopper, "Nineveh is in Ruins—Who Will Grieve for Her? The Case of a Ravished City in Nahum 3:4–7," *OTE* 16 [2003], 616–24 [617]; T. S. Frymer-Kensky, *In the Wake of the Goddesses: Women, Culture, and the Biblical Transformation of Pagan Myth* [New York: Free Press, 1992], 172).

[28] If one accepts the emendations for vv. 18–19, more personifications occur at the end of Nahum with the image of a city that is injured. She

As indicated before, personification allows the speaker to apply typical human activities to an inanimate structure as the city of Nineveh. A closer look reveals that the activities chosen are all physical ones, which require a body to carry them out. Thus, the speaker does not explore dreaming, thinking, imagining, lying, and so forth, but walking, whoring, being drunk, sitting down, and being injured. In the prostitute example, the speaker not only evokes a female body, but makes it central to the argument. God will uncover the genitals of the prostitute (the city). It is this cruel picture of her public humiliation that draws the reader's attention. Of interest for the current discussion is the emphasis on the physicality and corporeality of the prostitute. The metaphor seems to have been chosen in order to single out a specific bodily image for the reader.

2.3. METAPHOR: X FOR THE CITY[29]

Apart from this specific type of metaphor, the text includes other metaphors for the city or its inhabitants.[30] In Nah 2:12–14, the speaker explores the metaphor of the lion. Initially the lion represents the people and the lion's den the city (v. 12: איה מעון אריות ומרעה הוא לכפרים אשר הלך אריה לביא שם). But then the referent of the image changes: the lion becomes more than the people, either the city or the empire, with the lairs and dens now smaller places within the larger (conceptual) space (see v. 13: אריה טרף בדי גרותיו). Verse 14 underwrites this shift with the recurrence of the address of the second person feminine, the city (הנני אליך). The metaphor of the lion appears several times throughout the Hebrew Bible for Israel (e.g., Num 23:24), God (e.g., Isa 31:4), and enemies (e.g., Babylon in Jer 4:7).[31] In the case of Assyria, the metaphor becomes even more powerful because the Assyrians themselves used lion imagery both in their writings and iconography. One such application, the one found here in the text as well, is the representation of the king as lion.[32] This image evokes danger, power, and

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will not recover from her wound (אין כהה לשברך נחלה מכתך). The wound has also been read metaphorically by Christensen (*Nahum*, 391), standing for the breaking of the empire.

[29] "Common ways of comprehending society and nation involve the source concepts of person and family" (Kövecses, *Metaphor*, 24).

[30] "When words are used with *metaphoric* senses, one field or domain of reference is carried over or mapped onto another on the basis of some perceived similarity between the two fields" (Wales, *Stylistics*, 265).

[31] B. A. Strawn, *What is Stronger than a Lion? Leonine Image and Metaphor in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East* (OBO, 212; Fribourg: Presses Universitaires; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2005); W. W. Wiersbe, *Index of Biblical Images: Similes, Metaphors, and Symbols in Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 67–68.

[32] Strawn, *What is Stronger than a Lion*, 178–80, 182–84; Christensen, *Nahum*, 325–27; Lanner, *"Who Will Lament Her?"*, 136–37. The lion hunt can be mentioned in this context as well, although the king and the lion

(divine) might.[33] The lion in Nahum lacks any of these. What is more, his place (i.e., the lion's, thus Nineveh) seems to have disappeared (איה מעון אריות), changed from devouring creature into nobody.[34]

Another metaphor occurs at the end of Nah 3, though less elaborately. In v. 18, the leaders are called shepherds (רעיך). The shepherd-king metaphor is a well-established one, both in the Hebrew Bible and in other ancient Near Eastern literature.[35] The shepherd stands for leadership and protection.[36] As with the lion, the shepherds are not executing the expected tasks, foreshadowing a disruption and end of the empire and the city.[37] In this example the metaphor connects the leadership of the city and shepherds. Nevertheless, the city is not far away as the ultimate addressee of the oracle and the place in which the king resides.

For all metaphors, the text focuses on bodily aspects (of humans or animals) that can be addressed with the help of a comparison.[38] The lion tears his prey apart and brings this to his den to feed his family (Nah 2:13: אריה טרף בדי גרותיו). The city is both the place to bring the prey and the lion providing to the empire. Especially in the latter case, the metaphor allows the city to rip apart its enemies, literally, and drag their bits and pieces to its center. The city transforms into a physical body via the image of the lion. Such an alteration may also underlie the metaphor of the sleeping shep-

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only become one at the end of the hunt. The lion initially stands for the wild, the chaotic, which the king will eventually domesticate (M. B. Dick, "The Neo-Assyrian Royal Lion Hunt and Yahweh's Answer to Job," *JBL* 125 [2006], 243–70 [244–56]; E. Weissert, "Royal Hunt and Royal Triumph in a Prism Fragment of Ashurbanipal (82–5–22,2)," in S. Parpola and R. M. Whiting [eds.], *Assyria 1995: Proceedings of the 10th Anniversary Symposium of the Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, Helsinki, September 7–11, 1995* [Helsinki: The Project, 1997], 339–58). Others see the scene in Nahum as a reversal of roles: the lion has become the prey (B. Tidiman, *Nahoum, Habaquq, Sophonie* [Vaux-sur-Seine: Edifac, 2009], 104–5).

[33] A. Labahn, "Wild Animals and Chasing Shadows: Animal Metaphors in Lamentations as Indicators for Individual Threat," in P. Van Hecke (ed.), *Metaphor in the Hebrew Bible* (BETL, 187; Leuven: Peeters, 2005), 68–97 (91); H.-J. Fabry, *Nahum* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2006), 167.

[34] Baker, *Nahum*, 35; M. A. Sweeney, *The Twelve Prophets, Volume 2, Berit Olam* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000), 440. Machinist has pointed out a parallel between the unable lion in Nahum and the able lion in Isaiah 5 (P. Machinist, "Assyria and Its Image in the First Isaiah," *JAOS* 103 [1983], 719–37).

[35] Spronk, *Nahum*, 142; Christensen, *Nahum*, 387.

[36] J. Gan, *The Metaphor of the Shepherd in the Hebrew Bible: A Historical-Literary Reading* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2007), 28–29; Baker, *Nahum*, 39.

[37] Gan, *The Metaphor of Shepherd*, 82.

[38] Kövecses describes both the human body and animals as recurring source domains for metaphor (*Metaphor*, 18–19).

herds in the last verses of Nahum, although this example is less clear than the other one. If the leadership is asleep, the city is asleep. Given the text's exploration of the fluid boundary between city and people, one may replace the other here as well.

2.4. SIMILE: THE CITY (OR INHABITANT) IS (LIKE) X

Furthermore, the text of Nah 2–3 incorporates various similes introducing bodily features. Contrary to metaphors, similes indicate which entities are compared. Often, but not always, a comparative conjunction is also used.[39] Both in chs. 2 and 3 the speaker makes use of similes to tell the story. Moreover, the similes occur for the city as material construct *and* as a collection of people, thus merging several comparative devices. The voices of the maiden are as doves' sounds in Nah 2:8 (ואמהתיה מנהגות כקול יונים). Obviously, the women carried into exile represent the population as a whole, and thus in extension the city. Their voices are the voice of the city.[40]

In Nah 2:9 the speaker compares the city to a pool of water (ונינוה כברכת מים). This simile, at first sight, does not give the city a (human) body. Yet scholars have explained the simile as part of the personification of the city. If the city is a person, then the defenders safeguarding her well-being are as vital as water to a human being.[41] In the text, the inhabitants of the city "are rapidly leaving the city, like a big stream of water running from a pool."[42] Thus, the metonymical city has a human body.[43]

In Nah 3, more similes occur. Two of them leave out the comparative conjunction, lingering between metaphor and metonymy: the forts are fig trees (3:12: כל מבצריך תאנים עם בכורים), and the troops are women (3:13: הנה עמך נשים בקרבך).[44] The former

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[39] Wales, *Stylistics*, 383–84; Weiss, "Figures of Speech," 896–97.

[40] Many commentators connect this action to mourning and lament (e.g., Spronk, *Nahum*, 98). This used to be a very physical activity.

[41] Lanner, *"Who Will Lament Her?"*, 135; J. H. Eaton, *Obadiah, Nahum, Habakkuk: Readings in Biblical Hebrew 2* (Birmingham: University of Birmingham, 1961), 82.

[42] Spronk, *Nahum*, 100. See also Becking, who considers the water both an image for the disappearing wealth and the people leaving (B. Becking, *Nahum* [Kampen: Kok, 1986], 44).

[43] A notion of inhabitants is also present in Christensen's reading of the verse (*Nahum*, 293) as well as Fabry's (*Nahum*, 175). Other scholars explain the comparison as one stressing the uselessness of the endeavor. The people escape from the city as the water from a pool (Baker, *Nahum*, 35). O'Brien notes that water is a common metaphor for destruction in the ANE (*Nahum*, 60). In her interpretation it is the water that forms the metaphor rather than that the city metonymically stands for the people.

[44] The examples in v. 8—"its rampart a river" and "its wall consisting of sea"—are not included in the list here. While these qualify as similes, they do not compare the city with something else. Rather they compare the sea with the fortification cities have (Christensen, *Nahum*, 356).

does not evoke bodily features explicitly until the end of the verse when somebody will eat the figs (ונפלו על פי אוכל). The text creates the image of another body, that of the opponent.[45] In the latter, the example in v. 13, the body plays a more obvious role. Earlier in the chapter, the speaker had already depicted the city as a prostitute, a particular type of woman. Here, a different aspect of the female body is explored. Women are physically weaker than men and vulnerable in times of war.[46] The text plays upon that idea by suggesting that the enemies will now easily conquer the city.

Finally, the book of Nahum ends with five comparisons with locusts in various stages of their development.[47] Verse 15 compares both the enemy, or rather the devouring sword of the enemy (תאכלך כילק), and the city (and its people) with locusts: התכבד כילק התכבדי כארבה. The simile with the enemy draws on the rapacious hunger of locusts, while that with the city draws on the rapid multiplication of the creatures. In both cases, the comparison shifts the attention to bodily actions (eating and multiplying).[48] Verses 16 and 17 continue to connect the city dwellers with hoppers. Again, the images explore the corporeal features of the locust, features that the city and even its inhabitants do not typically share. The hoppers are casting their skin and are flying away from the fences, ילק פשט ויעף, an action that calls for a specific bodily feature, wings.[49] Note

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[45] Christensen, *Nahum*, 364. It stresses the vulnerability of the city: it is as easy to consume as ripe figs (Baker, *Nahum*, 38; O'Brien, *Nahum*, 70; Coggins and Han, *Six Minor Prophets*, 33). Similar to the lion and various other images in the text, fruit as metaphor for the enemy also occurs in Assyrian texts (Spronk, *Nahum*, 134). For more allusions, see also Becking, "Passion, Power and Protection," 13.

[46] Baker, *Nahum*, 38; Spronk, *Nahum*, 134; Christensen, *Nahum*, 364; O'Brien, *Nahum*, 70.

[47] Spronk, *Nahum*, 139; Christensen, *Nahum*, 394. Wiersbe considers the locusts in Nahum to be images of multiplication (3:15–16), robbery (3:16), and abandoning responsibility (3:17) (*Index of Biblical Images*, 68). Also Baker focuses on their multitude, rapacity and transience, exactly as the simile suggests (*Nahum*, 39). The bodily aspect is not mentioned.

[48] Spronk considers the double referent for one and the same image problematic: "Although it can be noted that the poet can use different similes next to each other (v. 15a), he is usually consistent in the way he works them out" (*Nahum*, 137; and also later on, 139). Other commentators fit the shift more easily within their overall interpretation of the passage. See, e.g., Keil, "Fire and sword will devour Nineveh and its inhabitants like the all-consuming locusts, even though the city itself, with its mass of houses and people, should resemble an enormous swarm of locusts" (C. F. Keil, *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament: The Twelve Minor Prophets, vol. II* [trans. J. Martin; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1949], 38). In other words, what is supposed to be the city's strength becomes its enemy.

[49] And read as an image of "cowardly retreat" (O'Brien, *Nahum*, 71). Coggins and Han side with the people-locusts who now finally can move freely no longer subject to Nineveh's rule (*Six Minor Prophets*, 34).

that in v. 16, the simile turns into a metaphor to become a simile again in v. 17 (מנזריך כארבה), as to indicate the narrow line between the city, its dwellers, and the locusts.

2.5. BODY PARTS AND ALLUSIONS TO THEM

Up until now I have discussed devices of comparison. They all generate an image of the city as body. Additional support for this observation can be found in the use of various body parts throughout the text.[50] They add to the overall notion that the space should be understood bodily. Contrary to other texts, most of the references in Nah 2–3 refer to actual body parts. There are very few lexicalized prepositions and, although possible, metaphorical readings of the body parts are not necessarily primary.

In Nah 2:2, the speaker mentions the face and the loins of the inhabitants (עלה מפיץ על פניך . . . חזק מתנים). As discussed before, these are the body parts of a metonymic city: the enemy will appear before the city's face so she should steady her loins. In addition, both body parts have a symbolic value as well. The face often represents somebody's identity; the loins stand for military might and virility/fertility.[51] Thus, the enemy threatens the identity of the city. A powerful action can counter this danger. A few verses later (Nah 2:8), the maidens raise their voices, beating their hearts, which are considered the "symbolic core of the existential self" but just as much, if not more, the actual chest which they hit in their lament (ואמהתיה מנהגות כקול יונים מתפפת על לבבהן).[52] In v. 11, more hearts and loins, and also knees and a face appear: ולב נמס ופקברכים וחלחלה בכל מתנים. Again, the literal reading of the body parts generates a primary and sensible interpretation of the text. A metaphorical reading may add another layer to that. Loins may tremble, but so does military power. When a heart sinks, this may indicate the person has fallen or lost his courage.[53] The voice of the messengers shall no longer be heard (v. 14: ולא ישמע עוד קול מלאככה). And so, there will be no more messages of victories on behalf of

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[50] Scholars have drawn attention to the high frequency of body parts in other biblical books, such as Psalms, Judg 3 and 7, Jonah 2, and Job. See S. Gillmayr-Bucher, "Body Images in the Psalms," *JSOT* 28 (2004), 301–26; S. B. Noegel, "Bodily Features as Literary Devices in the Hebrew Bible," in M. Garsiel et al. (eds.), *Studies in Bible and Exegesis Presented to Samuel Vargon* (Studies in Bible and Exegesis, 10; Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 2011), 509–31 [Hebrew]; S. C. Jones, "Corporeal Discourse in the Book of Job," *JBL* 132 (2013), 845–63.

[51] M. B. Szlos, "Body part as Metaphor and the Value of a Cognitive Approach: A Study of the Female Figures in Proverbs via Metaphor," in P. Van Hecke (ed.), *Metaphor in the Hebrew Bible* (BETL, 187; Leuven: Peeters, 2005), 185–95 (188, 194).

[52] Christensen, *Nahum*, 293.

[53] O'Brien, *Nahum*, 61–62 ; S. Niemeier, "Straight from the Heart," in A. Barcelona (ed.), *Metaphor and Metonymy at the Crossroads: A Cognitive Perspective* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2000), 195–213 (199–201).

the city. In addition to body part lexemes, Nah 2 alludes to a face in v. 9 (ואין מפנה). The verbal form מפנה includes the notion of a face. Moreover, this is the same root as the body part and thus semantically the body part is indeed there in the action of facing.[54]

In Nah 3, further body parts are used: namely, we have blood in v. 1 (דמים היו עיר); two voices in v. 2 (קול שוט וקול רעש אופן); the face and private parts of the prostitute in v. 5 (see וגליתי שוליך על פניך והראיתי גוים מערך וממלכות קלונך); as well as a head in v. 10 (גם עלליה ירטשו בראש כל חוצות).[55] The last body part of this list is the metaphorical head of the street (in the city), not a body part of a human being. For the genitals of the prostitute, it is, technically speaking, the other way around. The text uses euphemisms to refer to the body parts rather than the body parts themselves: שולים, literally "seams, borders (of a skirt)," מעור, literally "nakedness," and קלון, literally "shame."[56] Other body parts in the text are a mouth (v. 12: על פי אוכל) and a palm (v. 19: תקעו כף עליך). In addition, in v. 10, some allusions to body parts occur. The word ידו includes a hand and the word רתקו evokes the construct of רקה which means temple. Note that the body parts that metaphorically refer to power (hand and palm) are connected to the opponents of Nineveh.[57] In v. 14, another allusion occurs to the heart (לב) in the word for brick (מלבן).

3. THE CONCEPTUAL METAPHOR "NINEVEH IS A BODY" AND ITS MEANING

All the above-discussed features have one element in common: the idea of Nineveh as a physical body. Or otherwise put, they draw on the conceptual metaphor NINEVEH IS A BODY. A conceptual metaphor is "understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another."[58] For the proposed metaphor, the abstract target domain of the city is connected with the concrete source domain of the body. In the blend, the city shows both characteristics of the

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[54] An additional body part may be present in v. 13 if one accepts the revocalization of בְּדֵי into בַּדֵּי, "limbs" (Spronk, *Nahum*, 106).

[55] Internal organs have been understood as communicating emotions: "Israelites associated emotions with the internal organs where the emotions were perceived to be felt physically" (M. S. Smith, "The Heart and Innards in Israelite Emotional Expressions: Notes from Anthropology and Psychobiology," *JBL* 117 [1998], 427–36 [431]). Contrary to other body parts, the heart seems to have covered all emotions (ibid., 432; see also R. Hupka et al., "The Color of Anger, Envy, Fear, and Jealousy as Felt in the Body: A Five-Nation Study," *Cross-Cultural Research* 30 [1996], 243–64).

[56] S. Schorch, *Euphemismen in der hebräischen Bibel* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2000), resp. 198, 151, 190.

[57] For body parts and symbolic power, see Noegel, "Bodily Features," 515–31.

[58] G. Lakoff and M. Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 5.

source and the target domain: she has fortresses (Nah 3:12), but also dashed children (Nah 3:10); her palace is flooded (2:7), but she is also a violated prostitute (Nah 3:4–5). In this blend, the city with its walls and gates is a body moving through space, once strong and healthy, now attacked, wounded, and bereaved. Note that the conceptual metaphor does not map the parts of the body to the parts of the city, but centers around movement and actions affecting the body, such as comforting and (mostly) physical violence. The figure below visualizes the conceptual blend.
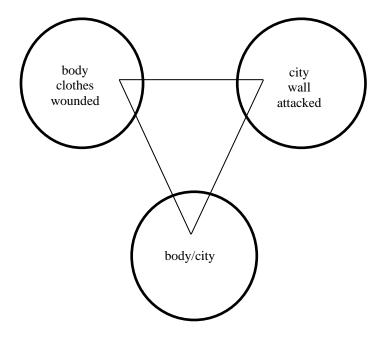
Figure: Conceptual Blend

But why should one want to present Nineveh as a body? What does the image do for the meaning-making process of a reader of Nah 2–3? Both cognitive-linguistic and critical-spatial research emphasize that human beings experience and understand the world through their bodies.[59] For the former, language and cognition are embodied, i.e., "structured in part by the nature of the bodies we

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[59] H. Lefebvre, *La production de l'espace* (Paris: Anthropos, 1974), 50; G. Lakoff, *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and Its Challenge to Western Thought* (New York: Basic Books, 1999); Kövecses, *Metaphor*, 7, 116. Note that Lefebvre stresses the difference between lived space (through bodily experience) on the one hand and thought and perception on the other, whereas cognitive linguists connect the realms of experience and cognition.

have and by our neurological organisation."[60] In the latter, bodily experience plays a role in the social aspect of space, the so-called lived space (*l'espace vécu*).[61] Following both theories, the spatial picture of Nineveh as a body is closely connected to human corporeality. But the writers of the text did not stop there. To develop the spatial conceptualization of the city as body, they have actively evoked the city-as-body image through various comparative devices as well as through the inclusion of a multitude of body parts in the text of Nahum. As such the body as natural given and the body as literary creation reinforce each other.

The image works as a key to read the space of the city in Nah 2–3. The people, hidden in the city-people metonymy, move through the urban space just as the reader can make his or her way through a place. The personifications and other metaphors depict the city as a woman, a mother, a prostitute, and a hungry lion. The similes add further comparisons of the abstract city with concrete bodies. Even though cities have material features as well, other aspects are harder to conceptualize. Think of the political city or the religious city, which are as much part of the fall of Nineveh as the actual physical space. Exactly to capture those more abstract notions of Nineveh, the city as body fulfills an important role.[62] The image allows the reader to draw the place nearer to his or her own world, and not only in terms of concreteness but also in terms of familiarity.[63] After all, Nineveh is a foreign place, which most readers have never seen. The text itself does not provide enough information to truly envisage the place. The physical reality of the city, therefore, is out of reach. The reader is left with an unknown place that is about to be destroyed. The comparative devices in addition to the frequent mentioning of body parts facilitate the needed connection between place and reader. The city becomes something palpable, a vulnerable and ultimately injured body.[64] All

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[60] V. Evans and M. Green, *Cognitive Linguistics: An Introduction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), 46.

[61] Lefebvre, *La production de l'espace*, 50–51.

[62] Cognitive linguists have described the body as a source domain for abstract things. "The human body is an ideal source domain, for us, it is clearly delineated and (we believe) we know it well" (Kövecses, *Metaphor*, 18).

[63] Gillmayr-Bucher makes a similar argument when discussing the role of body language in the Psalms ("Body Images in the Psalms," 325). The body of Job in the book of Job is the means by which he understands God and the cosmic order, according to Jones ("Corporeal Discourse," 846). Understanding or revealing the divine order is also part of Noegel's discussion of body parts in biblical texts ("Bodily Features," 531).

[64] S. Gillmayr-Bucher, "Meine Zunge—ein Griffel eines geschickten Schreibers: Der kommunikative Aspekt der Körpermetaphern in den Psalmen," in P. Van Hecke (ed.), *Metaphor in the Hebrew Bible* (BETL, 187; Leuven: Peeters, 2005), 197–214 (200).

readers can relate to this. They also know that if a wound is severe enough, death will follow.[65]

The body of Nineveh not only bridges the gap between city and reader, but also creates an emotional response to the story of the city body. The violating lion evokes fear, anger, or pride (depending on the point of view of the reader as either opponent or sympathizer of Nineveh), whereas the violated prostitute induces feelings of disgust or revenge.[66] Within the scope of this study, it is clear that the body metaphor in its various manifestations enables a reader response that is personal and emotive. Further study will need to reveal whether the metaphor yields towards particular emotions or uses specific forms for specific emotive reactions.

To conclude, the text of Nahum builds the enemy city as a body, as a coherent and stable bodily construct accessible to its readership of human beings with similar bodies. Each of the comparative devices (metonymy, metaphor, and simile) is a manifestation of this conceptual picture. The elements foregrounded in the comparisons are corporeal in nature. They tell the tale of a body that was once strong and healthy but is now weak and mortally injured. This story differs from the life story of Jerusalem, not in its nature as story—there is a story!—but in its kind and the techniques used to construct the tale. The image of the city as body is more than the mere result of human cognition. As Dobbs-Allsopp stated with regard to Jerusalem, the enemy city in the text is a blend of cognition and creativity.[67] It draws the far away near and renders the foreign familiar so that the reader can fully experience the death of the villain Nineveh.

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[65] Kövecses, *Metaphor*, 37; S. J. Melcher, "Discerning the Body: Metaphors of the Body in the Bible," *Classical Bulletin* 86 (2010), 4–17 (5, 8).

[66] Coggins and Han speak of a "rhetoric of terror" when discussing vv. 4 and 5 (*Six Minor Prophets*, 31).

[67] Dobbs-Allsopp, "Daughter Zion," 132.