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Splitting Hairs in Israel and Babylon.

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According to Zimmerli /1 the shaving, weighing and disposal of hair described in Ezek 5.1-5 belong to a set of three symbolic actions described in 3.25-5.4a, the original text of which ran as follows. /2

- I     And you, son of man - take a brick  
       and lay it before you  
       and draw upon it a city  
       and lay siege to it  
       and build siegeworks against it  
       and set up a siege wall against it  
       and establish battering rams round about
- II     And you - take wheat and barley  
       and beans and lentils and millet and spelt  
       and put them into the same pot  
       and make bread of them for yourself  
       and your food shall be 20 shekels a day:  
       at regular times shall you eat it.  
       And water you shall drink by measure, a sixth  
       of a hin:  
       at regular times you shall drink.
- III    And you, son of man - take a sharp sword  
       and pass it over your head and beard:  
       and take a balance  
       and divide it (the hair).  
       One third you shall burn with fire:  
       and one third you shall cut up with the sword  
       and one third you shall scatter to the wind

The Babylonian background to Stanza I (or, Symbolic Action 1) is transparent: clay tablets comprised the commonest medium for writing and for drawing city plans and the like the evidence is conveniently presented by Zimmerli. /3 As for Stanza II, the cereals listed there point to no specific local background. However, the reference to the loaf per day (4.9 - omitted by Zimmerli) echoes the same time-counting device in the Epic of Gilgamesh. Also, fo

Hebrew "round-cake" (4.12. also omitted in Zimmerli's reconstructed text) LXX has ἄσπιδος "ash-baked bread". the exact equivalent of kamān tumri as used in the roof-ritual of a Babylonian text (see presently). Quite possibly then Zimmerli's excisions cannot be justified by the neatness claimed for the "original" text (as above).

Having established the Babylonian background to Stanzas I and II we now come to the main subject of this brief note, namely Stanza III (or Symbolic Act 3). Up till now no parallel could be cited for this Stanza. Related texts such as Isa 5.12: Jer 41.5: 48.37 and passages from the Ugaritic Baal Cycle /4 refer to acts of mourning and therefore are not relevant. However a recently edited set of Babylonian texts /5 does now provide the background (Babylonian, of course) for this third symbolic action even if some problems remains unsolved. In this set of Babylonian texts there is a passage which comes in part of a complex ritual designed to cure someone suffering from a whole range of symptoms, including epilepsy, shivering, total indecision and the like /6 . The ritual goes as follows. In a sheep pen everything is made ready. An unmated kid bought for a loaf of ash-baked bread is fed on tamarisk for a day. At night the roof is swept and sprinkled and an altar set up to Ishtar. Offerings of food and drink are provided and Gula the goddess of healing is offered loaves of bread. Incense and beer is also offered. The rubric continues:

"You hold a balance high, place the hair of his  
(the patient's) head and the hem of his garment  
and weigh them."

A special song is sung. Next the kid is slaughtered its heart roasted and its hide placed near the paraphernalia. The sick man then raises his hand and recites an incantation three times, the texts of which includes a reference to the balance prepared by the officiant for the weighing of hair and hem (line 32). /7

Both texts (Ezek 5.1-5 and the Babylonian ritual) share the following common features:

- (1) removal of hair (by implication in the Babylonian text but see footnote 7)
- (2) weighing of hair on a balance;
- (3) reference to the hem of a garment. /8

There are also difference. In the Babylonian text no explanation is given for weighing hair and hem /9 and the ritual is magic and complex. The passage from Ezekial on the other hand is very clearly a symbolic and not a magical act and its explanation is provided in 5.12 (cf 5.17 also). With due allowance for later elaboration /9 it can be schematized as follows:

one-third burnt in city /10 - pestilence and  
famine

one-third cut up by sword - death by sword

one-third scattered to wind - dispersion /11

Beneath the features shared by both traditions at the surface lie deeper common concepts. In both it would seem the hair represents the person involved (Ezekial the prophet represented Israel so his hair was equivalent to the whole nation) /12 . Also actions are not empty gestures but betoken events: in Babylonia at the level of (sympathetic) magic; in Israel as prophecy.  
/13

Finally although the Babylonian text discussed provides an undeniable Babylonian setting for Ezek 5.1-5 in line with the other two symbolic actions Ezekial need not necessarily have depended on that particular text.

### Notes

1. W. Zimmerli, Ezekial 1. A Commentary on the Book of the Propeht Ezekial. Chs 1-24 (Fortress Press, Philadelphia 1979; translation of BKAT XIII/I, 1969) 155-156.
2. The text reproduced here is Zimmerli's; the complete text is set out (in translation, with notes) in Ezekial 1, 148-151. The full text for Ezek 5.1-5 runs: "And you, son of man, take a sharp sword; use it as a razor and pass it over your head and beard. And take a balance and divide it (ie, the hair). One third you shall **burn** in the city with

fire when the days of the siege are completed; and one third you shall take and cut up with the sword around it, and one third you shall scatter to the wind. And I will draw the sword after them. And you shall take from there a small number and bind them in the skirt of your garment. And you shall take (some) of them and throw them into the fire and burn them with fire. And you shall say to the whole house of Israel: Thus has the Lord Yahweh said: This is Jerusalem! I have set it in the midst of the nations with the lands round about it."

3. Zimmerli, Ezekial 1, 161-162. Clay tablets were also used for Ugaritic, Hittite, Elamite, Linear B etc., but scarcely if at all in Palestine.

4. See, conveniently, J.C.L. Gibson, Canaanite Myths and Legends (Clark, Edinburgh 1978) 73 (vi 17-19) and 74 (i 2-3)

5. W. Farber, Beschwörungsrituale an Ishtar und Dumuzi (Steiner, Wiesbaden 1977)

6. The complete set of symptoms which includes dumbness could easily apply to Ezekial himself.

7. See Farber, op.cit., 64-67 (A Ia 14-21 esp. 18-19; and 32). The act of tearing hair from the sick man's forehead and ripping away of his hem (154, 203-204) in what is essentially a mourning ritual arose from confusion with the ritual just described (see Farber's comment 106). Similar confusion may have occurred in our Ezekial passage which mentions binding a small number of hairs in the hem of his garment (5.3).

8. As mention (note 7) this element may be an interpolation in both texts. See too the last part of note 13.

9. See Zimmerli, Ezekial 1, 152 AND 176

10. "By fire" is unnecessary and ill fits the Hebrew; a possibility to be considered is "on the roof" (cf. Akkadian uru, "roof") as in the Babylonian ritual. Scattering to the winds would be more dramatic from the

roof-top.

11. There are Ugaritic parallels to these actions, namely, two descriptions of how Mot (death) was destroyed.

They run: "She (Anath) seized divine Mot, with a sword she split him, with a sieve she winnowed him, with fire she burnt him, with millstones she ground him, in a field she scattered him" - and "Because of you, Baal, I have suffered abasement, splitting with the sword, burning with fire, grinding with millstones, winnowing with the riddle, scattering in the sea" (Translation: Gibson, op.cit., 77 and 79, with abridgement).

12. Goat's hair for example was used to represent a person in certain Babylonian rituals (namburbi)

13. Ezek 5.1-5 is not discussed by M.I. Gruber, Aspects of Nonverbal Communication in the Ancient Near East (Studia Pohl 12, Rome 1980). It would be interesting to determine whether the hem connotes an element of supplication as established for other texts by E. Greenstein, " 'To grasp the hem' in Ugaritic Literature", VT 32 (1982) 217-218.

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