WAS AMOS A SHEEPMAN?

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At the meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature held in Philadelphia on December 31, 1907 I presented a paper (see JBL 27, iv) in which I showed that the term bölés in the biographical ballad describing Amos' encounter with the priest Amaziah of Bethel (Am. 10:10-17) was not denominative, derived from bālas, fig, which we find in Ethiopic, but the participle of the verb balás, to pierce, which appears in Assyrian as palăšu (Syr. pěláš). My explanation was recorded in GB15, xiii, ad 100b, but it is not mentioned in GB16.

We need not regard bölés as an Assyrian loanword (with s. for Assyr. š; cf. OLZ 17, 421; ZDMG 65, 561, 17). It may be merely an inaccurate spelling, just as bōsēkēm, your trampling, is written in Am. 5:11 both with š and s. Similarly we find in Am. 6:11 rēsīsīm, fragments, instead of rēsīšim, from the same stem from which Taršīš, spalling-floor (for the dressing of ores) is derived (BL 59). For the b in Heb. bölés instead of the p in Assyr. palăšu we may compare Heb. barzēl, iron, Assyr. parzillu; Heb. biqʿā, valley, Syr. pēqāṭā. In Nah. 2:4 we find bērōšīm, cypresses, instead of pārašīm, horsemen (Nah. 40). Similarly we read in 2 K 8:19 lē-ḥanāy, for his sons, instead of lē-jaʿānāy, before him (JBL 33, 166). On the other hand, we have in Est. 1:6 karpās, white lawn, for Aram. kargās (Est. 9) and Heb. palāṭ, to escape, is the Assyr. balāṭu, to survive, recover, live. Aram. ḫāṣpā, clay, corresponds to the Assyr. xuṣbu, earthen vessel. These changes are due to partial assimilation (GB16 79a, above).

Also in the OT this stem palāšu, to pierce, break through, is written with p in Pss. 58:3; 78:50; it means there to make way, open a path. The original spelling with p and š is preserved in the name of the Philistines, Pēššīm, which means invaders (Wi 200). For hitpallēš see JBL 29, 98, n. 13; Mic. 77.

1 For the abbreviations see vol. 34 of this JOURNAL, p. 41.
Balas, sycamore-fig, is not a non-Semitic word (Lagarde, Mitteilungen 1, 68) but an intransitive nominal derivative from the stem palāṣu, to pierce, just as Arab. ḥāṭan, son-in-law, is an intransitive nominal derivative from the stem ḥāṭana, to circumcise (ZDMG 63, 515, 9; Mic. 53, n. †). Heb. ḫāṭán, bridegroom, means originally circumcised, and ḥōṭén, father-in-law: circumciser. Among the Hebrews young men were originally circumcised by their father-in-law prior to their marriage (AJSL 22, 252, n. 10). The primary meaning of balas, sycamore-fig, is pierced, punctured. To induce earlier ripening, and to improve the flavor, the apex of the fruit of the sycamore-fig is removed, or an incision made in it (EB 11 10, 333b; EB 4832; RE 6, 304, 42). Dr. Post states (DB 4, 635a) that this puncturing of the sycamore-figs (scalpendo ferreis unguibus, Pliny 13, 57) is no longer done in Palestine, but, according to RB 979b, below, it is still practiced by the gardeners of Cairo.

This puncturing of the sycamore-figs must not be confounded with the so-called caprification, which denotes the suspending in the cultivated fig-trees of branches (Talmud. gamzījōt) of the caprifig, i.e. the uncultivated male form of the common fig (Hehn 99). Nor does Talmud. gamzūz denote a sycamore-fig, but a caprified fig (ἐπαναστός) although Syr. gummizā and Arab. jummājī signify sycamore-fig. Lagarde’s explanation of böles as caprifying (see his Nomina, p. 108) is unwarranted. In the notes on the translation of Ezekiel in the Polychrome Bible (p. 182) I have pointed out that an Assyrian sculpture from the Northwest Palace of Nimrud represents the caprification of figs. Herodotus (1, 193) confuses the caprification (ἐπαναστός) of fig-trees with the artificial fecundation of the female date-palm (Arab. ʿāllaqa, ṭāqqāha, ʿabarā; Greek ὀλυμβαξία). The Assyrian term is rukkubu (MVAG 18, 2, p. 40) = Talmud. hirkīḥ (e.g. at the end of Pes. 55b) which does not mean to graft (BT 2, 520). Cf. Arab. rākūb and Syr. ṣḥaṭ. fecundation, Greek ἑμβιοτωρ (BL 72, n. †). This cross-fertilization of date-trees is also referred to in Pes. 56a:

they apply the male palm-inflorescence to the female flower (JBL 32, 116, n. 38). According to the Talmud (l. c.) this is one of the six things which the men of Jericho practiced (ישח הברים אינים אילים).

Amos calls himself a בּוֹגוֹר u-בּוֹלֶס שִׁיקִּמִּים. The last term means piercer of sycamore-figs. The Hebrew name of the sycamore trees, שִׁיקִּמִּים (Hehn6 375) may be an old causative (AJSL 23, 248) derived from the root בּוֹ, the original meaning may be staturosa; cf. גְּבָהָה קוֹמָה, lofty of stature, Ezek. 31:3. The ficus אֶגְּיִתְיוֹת may reach a height of 50 feet. בּוֹגוֹר in Am. 7:14 is generally regarded as a scribal error for נּוֹגֵד, shepherd, because we find in the introductory gloss at the beginning of the Book that Amos lived among the נּוֹגֵדִים from Tekoa, and נּוֹגֵד means sheepmaster in 2 K 3:4 where we read that King Mesha of Moab was a sheepmaster who rendered to the King of Israel 100,000 lambs and 100,000 rams in fleeces. נוֹגֵד is derived from נאָגַד which denotes a spotted sheep (or goat) in the story of Jacob and Laban (Gen. 30:32). The original meaning is punctured, dotted. The noun נִיקָּרָד is the Hebrew term for punctuation; the punctuators are called נַקְדַנֵים.

I believe therefore that נוֹגֵד in Amos' statement קִנּוֹגֵדְנוֹקִי u-בּוֹלֶס שִׁיקִּמִּים does not mean shepherd, but puncturer, pricker: the poet says, A pricker am I, a piercer of sycamores.

The statement at the beginning of the Book that Amos lived among the sheepmen from Tekoa is due to a misinterpretation of נוֹגֵד in 7:14, just as the statement that Amos prophesied two years before the earthquake is due to a misunderstanding of the final pentastich at the end of c. 2 where the poet says, with reference to the imminent political upheaval which will be brought about by the Assyrians, I'll shake the earth 'neath your feet as a waggon shakes (on rough ground). For הִינֶהנִיָּה נְכִיָּה in Am. 2:13 we must read הִינֶהנִיָּה נְכִיָּה, and תֶּפֶצ for תַּפֶצ in the second hemistich; הַאִמְלָלָא after הַאִמְלָלָא is

a The singular of נָכִיָּא is נָכִי (not נָכִי, Levias, § 519) = Heb. נֵכֶית; cf. Margoli's grammar, p. 135th, below, also p. 28.

b The original meaning of הקָרָא (Arab. kāṣār, Syr. gusfrā; cf. Assyr. gusfrā = Heb. עֶפָר; see GI16 311a) is cover (Bl. 127, below) i. e. spathe of a palm.
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a secondary addition, and lāh ‘amīr is a tertiary gloss (OLZ 10, 310). After this first line of the final pentastich we must insert 4:11 (yē-haṣafī &c.).

Am. 1:1 is secondary, and the two statements who was among the sheepmen from Tekoa and two years before the earthquake are tertiary additions. Earthquakes are so frequent in Palestine that the date two years before the earthquake would be very indefinite. This gloss may have been derived also from 8:8 and 9:5. The first of these two passages (ha’-al-zōl lō-ṭīrgāz ha-ār̂g) is genuine, but does not refer to an earthquake; it means simply, Must not the land be stirred up over this? The second passage (who touches the earth that it totters, lit. suryes, heaves; Nah. 1:5; ZDMG 61, 278; Nah. 8) belongs to a Macca-bean psalm; 9:5. 6 must be combined with 5:8. 9 and 4:12. 13.

Amos could not have punctured sycamore-figs at Tekoa; this place lies too high for sycamores: it is situated on a detached hill about 2,700 feet above the level of the sea. Nor can we suppose that he was a shepherd at Tekoa, but owned a plantation of sycamores in the foothills leading down to the Philistine coast, where sycamores were common (1 K 10:27).

My view that nōqēḏ in Am. 7:14 does not mean sheepman, but puncturer seems to be at variance with the first hemistich of v. 15, the Lord took me as I followed the flock, but ha-ṣōn in this passage is a corruption of ha-ṣōn, peace, tranquillity, which we have in the place-name Beth-ṣhean. The Amarna tablets show that this word was pronounced šān, not šē’ān. about 1400 B.C. (see JBL 29, 97, n. 10; GB 16 98 a). Afterwards it may have been pronounced sōn, so that the difference between sōn, peace, and gōn, flock, would be slight. Confusion of š and ç is found in several passages; in Is. 9:4 c. g. we must read ġērefā, smelting instead of šērefā, burning:

Every clanking shoe and cuirassed corselet
Will go to the smelter to feed the fire.

All the weapons will go to pot, i.e. will be sent as old metal to the melting-pot; see Mic. 51, below; cf. JBL 32, 113, n. 23). In Syriac, šājnā means peace and tranquillity, and ḥāyā mēṣāiğēnē -signifies a peaceful life. Heb. me-‘ahrē before ha-ṣōn in Am. 7:15 may therefore be a corruption of me-haïē; the letters i and r are often confounded (AJSL 26, 10). The phrase ḥaïē ha-š-
箪 (or athon) would be synonymous with ḫaṣṣē ḫaṣ-šathyā. The Peshita has ʿumrā ṣalḥā yē-nithā in 1 Tim. 2:2 for Ἀρμός καὶ ὁσῶν ὁμοίος. Syr. min-ṣalī(yā (or min-gaṣ-ṣilā) is used also for unexpectedly.

The introductory lines of the ballad describing Amos’ encounter with the priest Amaziah of Bethel have 3 + 3 beats, also the last two lines exhibit the same rhythm, but the intervening stanzas have 2 + 2 beats in each line. Similarly the first two couplets and the last two couplets of David’s dirge on Saul and Jonathan (JHUC, No. 163, p. 55; cf. AJSL 20, 164 and contrast 32, 124) have 3 + 3 beats, while the intervening three triplets have 2 + 2 beats. According to Duhm, Die Zwölf Propheten (Tübingen, 1910) p. 16 (cf. ZAT 31, 15) Am. 7:10-17 is written in prose. The Hebrew text, however, should be read as follows:

10 ὑσῆλων ἀματίας ἑβηθέν 7 ἐπαρχήν ἐνυφθεὶς ἴσαρι

κήρυ βυχρὶ ἵσαρι

λαθίλα ἀτρίπιρι

ἱσαρίαν ἑβηθὲν

11 κηρυγμαί εἰμων ἱμομένων

αὐτῷ ἀματίας ἑβηθόν

κηρύ βυχρὶ ἵσαρι

λαθίλα ἀτρίπιρι

ἱσαρίαν ἑβηθὲν

12 κηρύ βυχρὶ ἵσαρι

αὐτῷ ἀματίας ἑβηθόν

κηρύ βυχρὶ ἵσαρι

λαθίλα ἀτρίπιρι

13 ὑσῆλων ἀματίας ἑβηθέν

κηρύ βυχρὶ ἵσαρι

λαθίλα ἀτρίπιρι

14 κηρύ βυχρὶ ἵσαρι

αὐτῷ ἀματίας ἑβηθόν

κηρύ βυχρὶ ἵσαρι

λαθίλα ἀτρίπιρι

15 κηρύ βυχρὶ ἵσαρι

αὐτῷ ἀματίας ἑβηθόν

κηρύ βυχρὶ ἵσαρι

λαθίλα ἀτρίπιρι

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This may be translated as follows:

*Amos and Amaziah.*

i 7, 10  The priest Amaziah reported to King Jeroboam of Israel: Amos conspires against thee in the midst of the House of Israel. The land is not able to bear all his denunciations:

11  "By the sword Jeroboam will die, and Israel will be deported."

ii 12  Amaziah said to Amos, the seer: Go, flee thee away to the land of Judah; There eat (thy) bread, and there prophesy!

13  But prophesy not any more at Bethel! 'Tis a royal sanctuary, a national temple.

iii 14  Then answered Amos, and said to Amaziah: No prophet I, nor prophet's son;"
A pricker I,
a piercer of sycamores.

15 JHVH took me
from the peaceful life:
η "Go, prophesy
to my people Israel!"

iv 16 { } Thou sayest to me:
Thou must not prophesy;
Thou must not bespatter
the House of Isaac.
Now therefore hear thou
the word of JHVH:

v 17 Thy wife (κ) will be made a harlot,
thy sons ( ) will fall by the sword;
'Mong strangers (μ) wilt thou die,
and Israel will be deported.ν

(a) 7, 10 of Bethel
(b) saying
(γ) 11 for thus said Amos
(δ) 11 from her land
(ε) 13 it is
(η) 15 JHVH said to me
(θ) 16 against Israel
(ι) 17 therefore thus said JHVH
(κ) 17 and thy Israel
(λ) thy land will be allotted
(μ) land
(ν) from her land

Amos' expulsion from the Northern Kingdom after his encounter with the priest Amaziah of Bethel may have taken place about the end of the reign of Jeroboam, i.e. prior to 743, but his patriotic denunciations of Israel may have been composed in Judah after Tiglath-pileser IV had captured Arpad (i.e. Irbid SW of Magdala on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee) in 740, and after the Assyrian king had annexed 19 districts of Hamath (the ancient capital of Galilee at the hot springs S of Tiberias) in 738 (ZDMG 69, 170, 35; cf. 64, 706, 33; ZAT 34, 144, 231). The Entrance to Hamath, mentioned in Am. 6:14, is the Wady al-Hammâm N of Irbid. From the Entrance to Hamath to the River of the Wilderness means From the northern end of the Sea of Galilee down to the Dead Sea

2 Heb. נַפְּרָה does not mean simply to drop, as we say to drop a remark (contrast Mic. 76) but to asperse with reproach or calumny. Arab. nāṭāfa means to denounce, accuse (of wickedness, qāḍafahu bil-fujūrī).
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Am. 6:2 is secondary, and rabbâ after Hamât is a tertiary gloss. The Galilean Irbid or Arbela (EB 291) appears in the OT also as Beth-arbel and Riblah (see my paper on Salman and Beth-arbel in BA 10, part 2). The fall of the Galilean stronghold in 740 and the deportation of the Galileans in 738 opened Amos’ eyes; he foresaw the fall of Samaria.

There is no evidence that Amos began to prophesy in 760, nor are we justified in assuming that Amos preceded Hosea (cf. JBL 34, 43). Hos. 4:15; 5:8; 10:5 (cf. AJSL 32, 74) which are supposed to be derived from Am. 5:5 (cf. Cornill’s Einl. 192) are not Hoseanic, nor is Am. 5:5 Amosian. I believe that Amos’ patriotic poems were composed about 740-735 (according to Valeton, Amos and Hosea, 1898, p. 12: 745-741). His predictions were fulfilled: Ammon (cf. AJSL 32, 71) and Moab (cf. KB 2, 21, l. 61) were subdued by Assyria in 734; Damascus fell in 732, Samaria in 722 (cf. Mic. 58).

Both Hosea and Amos were Israelitish poets, but Amos was an Israelitish gardener living in Judah after he had been banished from the Northern Kingdom (cf. EB 147, n. 3; Valeton, n. 86).

The biographical ballad in 7:10-17 certainly does not show that Amos was a farmer, just as 3:12 (cf. ZDMG 69, 168, 26) cannot prove that he was a shepherd (contrast Valeton, p. 93). Nor can we draw any conclusions as to Amos’ occupation from 2:13; 3:4, 5; 4:1-3 (cf. JBL 32, 117); 5:11. 17. 19; 6:12; 7:1. 2 (Joel, n. 94) and 4. 5; 8:1. 2; 9:3. 13. 14, especially as several of these passages are secondary (contrast Marti’s commentary, p. 146; Nowack², p. 120). We might just as well say that Schiller’s statement, science is to some eine tüchtige Kuh, die ihn mit Butter versorgt, shows that the poet was a dairyman (cf. Mic. 62, l. 9).