

דימון (Isa 15:9) and להמנות (Qoh 1:15): On Dialectal Wordplay and Nasal Spreading in the Bible

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Abstract

Biblical punsters occasionally moved beyond the confines of Standard Biblical Hebrew, producing *dialectal wordplay*. In a number of cases, the nonstandard form is a *phonological* variant from another dialect. The best-known examples of this type involve dialectal differences in *diphthong contraction* (monophthongization). Less attention has been paid to cases involving a phonological process called *nasal spreading*, known from Old Canaanite, Hebrew, Aramaic, etc. One product of this process is the toponym דימון in דם דימון מלאו, “the waters of Dimon are full of blood” (Isa 15:9), referring to the Moabite town of Dibon. The form דימון was a phonological variant of דיבון, a dialectal form used in a prophecy against Moab to emphasize the appropriateness of the punishment. Another example is found in לא יוכל להמנות (Qoh 1:15), which means both “an incalculable loss” and “an irreplaceable loss.” In the second meaning, להמנות is a dialectal form of להמל(א)ות, “be made good,” a phonological variant produced by nasal spreading.

Keywords

implicit/explicit wordplay – assonance/wordplay vision – nasal assimilation/coarticulation – regional/social dialects – Semitic/Egyptian phonology – Rabbinic interpretation (of Scripture and dreams) – Jerome’s Isaiah commentary – Canaanite toponyms – Palestinian Arabic dialects

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לְעִלּוֹי נִשְׁמַת מִרְדְּכֵי יְהוּדָה בֶּן אֶפְרַיִם שְׁטִיִּינֵר ז"ל, מְחַמֵּד עֵינֵינוּ אֲשֶׁר לֹקַח בְּמִגְפָּה,
 חֹקֵר אֲמִיתוֹת מִתַּמְטוּיֹת, יוֹדֵעַ סִתְרֵי הַסְּכּוּמִים הָאִינְסוֹפִיִּים – וְעַתָּה, הִקְסָרוֹן לֹא יוֹכֵל
 לְהִמָּנֹת



1 Introduction: Dialectal Wordplay in the Bible

In all times and places, poets and punsters occasionally feel the need to stray from the confines of the dialect used by their audience. No wonder, then, that various examples of dialectal wordplay¹ have been discovered by students of the Bible over the centuries. One of the first examples to be discussed is found in *לְעִירִים לָהֶם* “he had thirty sons who rode on thirty burros (lit., donkeys) and owned thirty boroughs (lit., towns)” (Judg 10:4 NJPS). The pun in this verse, based on the homonymy of *עִירִים*, is so obvious that Abraham Ibn Ezra used it as one of his parade examples of

¹ *Dialectal wordplay* is the term used in studies of this phenomenon by Bible scholars. I use it here despite the fact that the (almost unattested) term *bidialectal wordplay* would be more precise and a better companion to *bilingual wordplay*. Many biblical examples of the latter have been proposed by modern scholars, but this is not the place to cite them all. For a publication devoted entirely to this topic, see Rendsburg, “Bilingual.” For examples proposed already in Antiquity, see Fraenkel, *דרכי*, 115–118; Steiner, “המלים,” 33–36; Steiner, “Aramean”; and Malachi, “Creative,” 280–281. A hitherto unnoted example is perhaps to be found in *עַם בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל* (Exod 1:9). These words, spoken by an Egyptian king (often identified with Ramesses II) to his Egyptian subjects, are understandably characterized as a “strange phrase” by Greenberg (*Understanding*, 20). One way of explaining the oddity would be to assume that the seemingly superfluous word *עַם*, which means “people” in Hebrew, is also to be understood in the sense of Egyptian *ʿm* (עאם), viz., “Asiatic.” This ethnonym—attested twice in the Beth-Shan Stele of Ramesses II (lines 9 and 16) and collocated with the adjective *hsī*, “vile,” in other inscriptions of that king—refers to one of the three traditional enemies of Egypt. The negative Egyptian attitude towards Asiatics is even clearer in another text from the reign of Ramesses II, the “Satirical Letter” in Papyrus Anastasi I (COS 3:12b): “He has gone over to those who are bad; he has mingled with the Shasu tribes and made himself an Asiatic.” Thus, it is possible that, in Exod 1:9–10, the king is insinuating that the Israelites are an Asiatic fifth column; cf. van Seters, *Changing*, 29: “[The Asiatics in northern Egypt] appear to have become a fifth column and collaborated with Asiatics from without against Egypt.” In short, the usage of *ʿm* in Egyptian texts fits the context of *יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּנֵי עַם* remarkably well.

explicit wordplay, a proof-text for the existence of this stylistic feature.² The second עִירִים is a plural of עִיר, alongside the more common plural עָרִים.³

Now, it has often been noted that the second occurrence of עִירִים in Judg 10:4 resembles the form עִירֵי(י)רֹת used in Mishnaic Hebrew.⁴ Moshe Bar-Asher has demonstrated that עִירֵי(י)רֹת is the only genuine plural of עִיר in MH, עִירִים being restricted to phrases borrowed from the Bible.⁵ Moreover, it has long been recognized that the oldest layer of MH is rooted in one or more dialects spoken in the Second Temple period⁶ and that it contains lexical items unattested in the Bible that are far older.⁷ In short, עִירִים should be viewed as a dialectal form—a morphological variant pressed into service to strengthen a play on words. There can no longer be any justification for emending it or viewing it as an artificial creation of the writer, as many have done.

Several examples of wordplay in the Bible involve dialectal differences in the contraction (monophthongization) of the diphthong /ay/. Of these, the best known is the one in בָּא הַקָּץ ... בְּלֵב קָיִץ, “a basket of summer fruit ... the end is coming” (Amos 8:2).⁸ Indeed, it is so well known today that it comes as a

2 For the term *explicit wordplay* and its antonym, *implicit wordplay*, see Ullmann, *Semantics*, 188–189; and Greenstein, “Wordplay,” 6:968–971. As used here, the former term refers to wordplays in which two or more words or phrases identical or similar in form but different in meaning occur together in a single context; the latter term refers to wordplays in which a word or phrase occurs only once in a single context and nevertheless is used with two or more unrelated meanings. Ibn Ezra viewed explicit wordplay as a form of צְחֹת, “eloquence, elegant style.” Indeed, he himself composed puns; cf. the play on the three meanings of תֵּירוֹ—“his bowstring,” “the rest of it,” “Jethro”—in the poem preceding his commentary to Exod 18:1 (personal communication from Uriel Simon). However, he refused to acknowledge the existence of implicit wordplay in the Bible. See Simon, “לדרכו,” 92–138.

3 For a sample of the many views about the historical linguistic relationship between עִירִים and עָרִים, see Gesenius-Kautzsch-Cowley, *Hebrew*, 286; Bauer-Leander, *Historische*, 620; Blau, *Grammar*, 70; Blau, תּוֹרַת, 86–87 (abandoning his earlier view) with n. 55 (missing in the English edition).

4 See, for example, Rashi’s commentary on Judg 10:4; Ehrlich, מְקוֹרָא, 73 n. 1; Kaufmann, סִפְר, 214; and Yellin, בְּתוֹבֵי, 6:282.

5 Bar-Asher, תּוֹרַת, 1:140. This conclusion would appear to imply that the two plurals have the same meaning, at least in MH. Rashi, by contrast, seems to assume that they have a different meaning, at least in BH. The Modern Hebrew singular form עִירָה is the product of a later backformation.

6 For bibliography, see Steiner, “Colloquialism,” 21–26. There is little controversy about the general picture, although naturally the precise details vary from scholar to scholar. See now Bar-Asher, “Mishnaic,” 371–372; Koller, “Social”; Cook, “Language”; Cook, “Supposed.” (I am indebted to Koller for the last two references.)

7 See Koller, *Semantic*, 11–12 with the literature by Greenfield and Levine cited there in n. 39.

8 For bibliography, see Weiss, עֵמוֹס, 2:427.

surprise to learn that commentators did not pay very much attention to the קִיץ – קֵץ assonance until the twentieth century. This is particularly true of Jewish exegetes. In the Middle Ages, two distinct approaches to קִיץ – קֵץ emerged, one *metaphoric* (based on *semantic* similarity) and the other *paronomastic* (based on *phonetic* similarity).⁹ Rashi and many of his successors—not to mention a major Karaite predecessor—followed the lead of Targum Jonathan in adopting the metaphoric approach exclusively.¹⁰ The first to champion the paronomastic approach was Maimonides. He did so in a philosophical treatise (*Guide*, 2.43) rather than a commentary, and the Arabic expression he used for the assonance in Amos 8:2 was the philosophical term **אשתראך**, “equivocality” (referring here to *near*-homonymy) rather than the literary term תגגיס, “paronomasia.”¹¹ Subsequently, we find Isaiah of Trani referring to the paronomasia of קִיץ – קֵץ by its proper, literary name, לשון נופל על לשון. For him, the paronomastic approach was only one of two possibilities.

Among Christian commentators, writing after the close of the Middle Ages, the two approaches were usually combined. Despite that change, the metaphoric approach continued to receive the lion’s share of attention. This is obvious in the following three discussions, each of which is cited for an additional reason: the first, by John Calvin, because it appears to be the first to apply the term *paronomasia* to קִיץ – קֵץ;¹² the second and third, because they are needed to understand subsequent developments:

By summer-fruit, I doubt not, he means a ripe punishment, as though he said, that the vices of the people had ripened, so that vengeance could no longer be deferred: for an exposition of the vision immediately follows, when he says, *the end of the people has come....* But there is a play on

9 Cf. Loewenstamm, “בלויב,” 319–322. The term *paronomasia* is derived from Greek *παρονομασία*, “play upon words which sound alike, but have different senses.”

10 For medieval Jewish (Rabbanite) commentaries on Amos 8:1–2, see <http://mg.alhatorah.org/Full/Amos/8.1#e0n6> and <http://mg.alhatorah.org/Full/Amos/8.2#e0n6>. For Karaite commentaries, especially Japhet b. Eli, see Nadler-Akirav, “דיון,” 149–150.

11 See Rambam, *נדרה*, 2:426; Maimonides, *Guide*, 392 (cf. 347–348). In the autograph of the Abarbanel’s commentary on Amos 8:2 (Ruiz, *Don*, 200 line 3), we find the term **שתוף השם**, “equivocality,” the Hebrew equivalent of **אשתראך**, which occurs many times elsewhere in Abarbanel’s commentaries. The term is “corrected” to **שתוף השם** = **שתוף השם** = **יתברך** (as if **השם** had the meaning “the Lord” in this context rather than “the noun”) already in the 1520 edition (Pesaro p. 661 of pdf at <https://hebrewbooks.org/42545>) and the 1641 edition (<https://hebrewbooks.org/43086>) of the commentary. For more on these and related terms, see Steiner, “Saadia,” 254–258.

12 Luther had previously used the synonym *agnominatio* and the more general term *allusio* for קִיץ – קֵץ; see Niggemann, *Martin*, 161–162.

words (*paronomasia*) in the Hebrew, which cannot be expressed either in Greek or Latin: קיץ means “summer-fruit”, קץ, means “end”: only the letter י is inserted in one word.... By “summer-fruit”, we may understand cherries, and those fruits which have no solid vigor to continue long; but this is too refined. So I simply interpret “punishment has become ripe”; for the people had not repented, though they had been so often warned; it was then as it were summer.¹³

קיץ ... is the fruit harvest. This harvest, *the last labor of the economic year*, is related to the final punishment (קץ ...) of the stubborn people—to gathering the fruits of its wickedness, as it were—substantively as well as linguistically, through the wordplay between קיץ and קץ.¹⁴

Paronomasia, or punning, is not infrequent among the prophets. It is not to be supposed that the words קץ and קיץ are at all connected etymologically.... Three interpretations are suggested: (1) As summer fruit, when ripe, may not last long, so Israel, ripe in her sins, shall now come to an end. (2) As summer fruit is plucked when ripe, so that it may not rot, so shall Israel be removed from home and carried into captivity. But it is better to adopt another, viz. (3) the summer fruit is late and poor, the best being gathered earlier; a receptacle containing summer fruit shows *the last of the crop, the end of the year*, and, by analogy, the approaching end of Israel's kingdom.¹⁵

The discovery of the Gezer calendar in 1908 should have immediately bolstered both of these approaches, because its list of agricultural activities ends with קץ, “summer fruit harvest.”¹⁶ However, of all the early students of the inscription, only G. B. Gray, writing in 1909, makes mention of Amos 8:2. In his discussion, he adopts the metaphoric approach almost exclusively, adopting the interpretation presented in the last two passages cited above:

... קץ, *summer-fruits*, may perhaps be used here as in Amos viii, 2, with a pun on קץ, *end*. For קץ, *summer fruits*, as characteristic of the *end* of summer, *cp.* also Jer. xlvi, 32; Micah, vii, 1 (parallel with the *vintage* בציר, but with קציר in Is. xvi, 9). Thus the calendar opens with אסף, *in-gathering*,

13 Calvin, *Commentaries*, 360, revised based on Calvin, *Praelectiones*, 296.

14 Baur, *Prophet*, 413. The italics are mine.

15 Harper, *Critical*, 175–176. The italics are mine.

16 The traditional rendering of קץ in this inscription is “summer fruit,” but this rendering is less compatible with the rest of the inscription than the rendering “summer fruit *harvest*.” For this suggestion, see Isa 16:9 with NJPS and perhaps also Jer 8:20; cf. Baur above.

which marks the close of one year (*cp.* Ex. xxiii, 16; xxxiv, 32), and ends with קָק, which is the last crop of the next.¹⁷

Gray's discussion shows that he recognized the significance of the calendar for the metaphoric approach to Amos 8:2, but his vocalization of קָק in the calendar as קָ.ק (to be understood as *ketiv* קָק, *qere* קָיִן) instead of קָק = קָיִן makes it clear that he had not yet grasped the potential contribution of the calendar to the paronomastic approach.¹⁸

The paronomastic approach did not begin to attract serious attention until 1925, when Karl Budde conjectured that (1) קָיִן must have had a contracted variant קָיִן in the *absolute* state, just as גָּיָא, חָיִל, and לָיִל had the contracted variants גָּיָא, חָיִל, and לָיִל; and (2) Amos must have used that variant. In 1959 and 1965, E. Y. Kutscher brought the form יָן, "wine" (*absolute* state), attested in many ostraca from Samaria, into the picture.¹⁹ He argued that Amos, although he was from Judah,²⁰ was prophesying in the northern kingdom and trying "to use the pronunciation of the people he was addressing." He concluded that this explicit wordplay "was much stronger if we assume that the prophet himself pronounced קָיִן" in northern Hebrew instead of קָיִן/קָיִן.²¹ For some reason, neither Budde nor Kutscher cited the Gezer calendar, which could have bolstered their arguments considerably.²² It was left to later scholars to correct this omission.²³

17 Gray's discussion is in a separate section of Lidzbarski, "Old," 31–32.

18 Gray's vocalization seems to be assumed by Rahtjen ("Critical," 417), as well. So far as I know, the currently accepted vocalization, קָק = קָיִן, makes its first appearance in Albright, "Gezer," 24–25.

19 Kutscher, *הלשון*, 47 n. 10; and Kutscher, *מליים*, 34. For reaction to Kutscher's suggestion, see Blau, *Pseudo-Corrections*, 34; Wolters, "Wordplay," 407–410; and Notarius, "Playing," 63–64, 74–80. Andersen and Freedman (*Amos*, 796) do not include any of Kutscher's publications in their bibliography; however, they agree with him in seeing dialect geography as the key to Amos 8:2, vacillating between his theory and a new theory based on a more complicated dialect map.

20 Some have speculated that Tekoa was in the northern kingdom, but see Steiner, *Stockmen*, 95–105.

21 Kutscher, *מליים*, 34. As demonstrated by Notarius ("Playing," 76–80), even in the northern dialect of Hebrew, קָיִן* would not have been a perfect homonym of קָק in Amos's time, contrary to the view of many earlier scholars, e.g., Wolters ("Wordplay," 409).

22 According to Google Maps, Gezer is only 39 miles from Tekoa, Amos's hometown. Rahtjen ("Critical," 416–417) gives the distance as "less than 25 miles," and he conjectures that Amos could have known the text of the calendar and even borrowed the pun from it.

23 See, for example, Wolters, "Wordplay," 409; Andersen and Freedman, *Amos*, 796; and Eidevall, *Amos*, 214.

The Budde-Kutscher theory has proven to be very successful. In recent decades, Maimonides' view of Amos 8:1–2 as a pure *Wortspielvision* or *Assonanzvision* (also known as a *wordplay vision* or *assonance vision*),²⁴ with no metaphoric component, has become increasingly popular. Alan Cooper has asserted that “whatever symbolic significance a קיץ כלוב might have, the meaning of the image within the context of the vision is determined *only* by the wordplay. It is not necessary to concoct an allegory about a basket of (rotten) summer fruit in order to understand that the ‘summer basket’ means that ‘the end is coming’.”²⁵ Francis Andersen and David Freedman even got the impression that this view was the *traditional* one: “The form in which the interpretation of the fourth vision has reached us in the MT has been traditionally understood as resting on play with the sound of words, not with the symbolic meaning of the visual objects.”²⁶

According to the Budde-Kutscher theory, then, the words בָּא הַקֶּץ in Amos 8:2 are a paronomastic interpretation, with dialectal underpinnings, of a *prophetic vision*. It has not been noted that this theory is further bolstered by Rabbinic texts that present similar interpretations of *predictive dreams*. In *b. Berakhot* 56b, for example, we read: “He who sees a cat in a dream—in a place where they call it a שורנא, a bad change (שינוי רע) is in store for him; in a place where they call it a שורנא,²⁷ a beautiful song (שירה נאה) is in store for him.” To my knowledge, this passage is the earliest explicit discussion of the relationship between paronomastic dream interpretation and the regional dialect spoken

24 For these terms, used of Amos 8:1–2, see Horst, “Visionsschilderungen,” 201–202.

25 Cooper, “Meaning,” 18.

26 Andersen and Freedman, *Amos*, 795.

27 This obviously correct form, known from a magic bowl in Jewish Babylonian Aramaic, as well as texts in Syriac, Samalian Aramaic, and Akkadian, is corrupted in most printed editions of the Talmud but preserved in Ms. Munich 95 (Greenfield, “Three,” 98–100; Sokoloff, *Dictionary*, 1125) and a number of Genizah fragments (alongside שורנא; see Hachi Garsinan. Its root is apparently ש-ו-ר, “watch, gaze,” used in the phrase כְּנִמְרָא אֲשׁוּרָא, “like a leopard I watch by the trail” (Hos 13:7). The image in that phrase is that of a cat lying in wait next to a game trail and watching patiently, with dilated pupils, for its prey to come within striking distance. A noun/participle derived from this root appears in ותבט עיני בשורי, “I have seen the defeat of those watching (for an opportunity to pounce on) me” (Ps 92:12); NJPS renders “my watchful foes.” Nouns similar in form to שורנא are attested in Mishnaic Hebrew, as vocalized in reliable manuscripts, e.g., סורבון, “refuser” (*m. Berakhot* 5:3, acc. to Cod. Parma 3173, f. 2r); רוֹצְחֵינִים, “murderers” (*m. Soṭah* 9:9, acc. to Cod. Kaufmann A 50, f. 122v); and דוֹרְשָׁנִים, “expounders” (*m. Soṭah* 9:15, acc. to Cod. Kaufmann A 50, f. 123r). Both שורנא and שורנא have counterparts in Syriac; see Sokoloff, *Syriac*, 1530 and 1536.

by the dreamer.²⁸ Another Rabbinic example of paronomastic dream interpretation is found in the story of a student who was told in a dream that he would die in Adar (אָדָר), never having seen another Nisan (נִסָּן).²⁹ As interpreted by R. Akiba, the dream described not the *time* of the student's death but the *manner*: he would die in glory (הִדָּר), never having seen trial or tribulation (נִסָּן, written נִסִּין to resemble נִסָּן in our Yerushalmi version). The equation of הִדָּר with אָדָר is reminiscent of the spelling הַמָּה for אַמָּה, “his mother,” in a bilingual (Greek-Aramaic) ossuary inscription from first-century CE Jericho.³⁰ It reflects a merger of /h/ with /ʾ/, one of the laryngeal mergers that Kutscher argued was *variable* in Roman Palestine.³¹ If so, we may view this as an example of dialectal wordplay. The second wordplay underlying the interpretation may also involve a variable sound change: נִסָּן, “Nisan,” interpreted as נִסָּן* rather than נִסָּן (or נִסִּין), the form with *segol* being the one used in Syriac (ܢܝܨܢܐ) and—one may conjecture—one dialect of Galilean Aramaic. Vocalized Genizah fragments of the Palestinian Targum and the Palestinian Talmud exhibit variation between *hireq* and *segol* in closed unstressed syllables (e.g., אָנוּן ~ אַנוּן, “they”),³² variation that may have its origin in social dialects.

It is clear that the people of Judah were well aware that northern Hebrew was not the only neighboring Canaanite dialect exhibiting the contraction **ay* > *ē* in the absolute state. Another biblical example of this dialectal feature is the form אֱלִי קָרָא מְשַׁעִיר שְׁמִר מִה־מְלִילָה שְׁמִר מִה־מְלִילָה לֵּיל, “someone is calling out to me from Seir: ‘Watchman, what (is left)³⁴ of the night? Watchman,

28 For other examples of paronomastic dream interpretation in the Talmud, see Lewy, “Traumbuch”; and Kristianpoller, “Traum,” 46–49. Such dream interpretation is well attested outside of Israel, e.g., “if (in his dream) he eats a raven/crow (*āribu*), income (*irbu*) will come (in)” (Oppenheim, *Interpretation*, 272 with n. 50). For a survey of the subject, see Noegel, “Puns,” 95–119. If there are any examples of *dialectal* wordplay in ancient Mesopotamia or Egypt, they have yet to be identified.

29 See *y. Ma'aser Sheni* 4.9.55b (4.6.55b in other editions); *Ekhah Rabbah* I (Buber, אֵיכָה רַבָּה, 27b with notes); and *b. Berakhot* 56b.

30 Rahmani, *Catalogue*, 244 no. 801.

31 Kutscher, *Studies*, 67–96.

32 Kutscher, “ביצוע,” 144–150; cf. Yiddish מְדַרְשׁ בַּיִת, “prayer and study house” (vs. בַּיִת מְדַרְשׁ); מְקַח, “price” (vs. בַּיִת מְקַח); etc.

33 See Young, “Diphthong,” 29: “... it would seem likely that the prophet is characterizing foreigners by the use of peculiar linguistic expressions considered typical of them. The form that is of particular interest ... is the absolute singular *lél* ‘night,’ used here in parallelism with *laylāh*.” The form לֵּיל occurs also in a Moabite context (Isa 15:1), but there it may be in construct to the following verb and exhibit the standard BH contraction.

34 The question מִה־מְלִילָה is obviously elliptical. The understood word appears to be נֹתֵר or נִשְׂאָר. The Israelite calling from Seir is presumably asking how many watches/hours are left in the night, i.e., how much more oppression Israel needs to endure.

what (is left) of the night?” (Isa 21:11). And here again it seems likely that the dialectal form is used for wordplay, because מה־מָלִיל was pronounced almost the same as מִה־מָלִל*; cf. מִי מָלִל, “who (would have) said,” in Gen 21:7.³⁵ In other words, the question מה־מָלִיל שָׁמַר had a second meaning in fast (allegro) speech: “(And) the Watchman—what did He say (in response to the question (מה־מָלִילֶה)?” This meaning is adopted by the Palestinian Talmud (*y. Ta’anit* 1.1.64a) in its interpretive paraphrase of Isa 21:11–12:

What is the meaning of מה־מָלִילֶה שָׁמַר מִשְׁעִיר קָרָא אֵלַי? The Israelites said to Isaiah, “Our master, Isaiah! What is going to come out for us from this night (of oppression)?” He said to them, “Wait (here) until I inquire.” After inquiring, he came back to them. They asked him, “What did the Watchman of the Worlds say (מה מִלִּל שׁוֹמֵר הָעוֹלָמִים), מה מִלִּל מִה־מָלִיל, (שָׁמַר מִה־מָלִיל)?” “The Watchman said, ‘Morning is coming (lit., has come), but also night (אָמַר שָׁמַר אֶתְהָ בִקֵּר וְגַם־לַיְלָה),’” he replied. They said (in horror), “But also night (all over again)?!” “It’s not what you think (לֹא כַשֶׁאתָם סְבוּרִים),” he responded. “(What the Watchman meant was) morning for the righteous but night for the wicked, morning for Israel but night for the nations of the world (that oppressed them).”

This wordplay is a hybrid; it is both explicit (with repetition of two near-homonyms: מָלִילֶה, “of the night,” and מָלִיל, “he said”) and implicit (with one of the forms, מָלִיל, having two meanings).

A third example of dialectal wordplay that belongs here has been identified in Gen 49:4, where יִצְוֵעֵי עֲלָה means both “my bed he mounted” and “the bed of a nursemaid.”³⁶ Both יִצְוֵעֵי and עֲלָה are homonyms, but the only homonymy that concerns us here is that of יִצְוֵעֵי, which means both “my bed” and “the bed of.” The latter meaning—and hence the implicit wordplay itself—is based on a diphthong contraction rule different from that found in Standard Biblical Hebrew.

Thanks to the epigraphic witnesses of the Canaanite dialects—with all of their orthographic limitations—diphthong contraction is, for modern scholars, one of the most obvious differences between the Hebrew of Judah and the other Canaanite dialects. However, not all forms of dialectal wordplay found

35 A Masoretic note in the Aleppo Codex (Masorah Parva to Isa 21:11) treats מָלִיל and מָלִיל as homophones, differing only in the *plene* spelling of the latter. However, the Greek transcriptions of Hebrew in Origen’s Hexapla, taken together with other evidence, suggest that the stressed /e/ in closed syllables of verbs, unlike the stressed /e/ in closed syllables of most nouns, was short at an earlier time.

36 Steiner, “Poetic,” 213–219; cf. Steiner, “Monophthongization,” 73–83.

in the Bible rely on diphthong contraction. Tania Notarius has argued that the phrase אֶל עַמִּי בְקֶרֶב עִמִּי יִשְׂרָאֵל (Amos 7:8) contains a complex wordplay based on three other phonological developments that distinguish northern Hebrew from the Hebrew of Judah.³⁷ In the remainder of this essay, I shall argue that the phonological process known as *nasal spreading*, too, plays a role in dialectal wordplay.

2 Nasal Spreading in Biblical Hebrew and Related Languages

Let us begin with a brief discussion of the difference between the phones [b] and [m]. Both of these phones are traditionally classified as voiced bilabial stops; they differ, however, in the position of the velum, the muscular soft palate that plays an important role in breathing and swallowing. In articulating [b], the speaker raises the velum, preventing the pulmonic airstream from entering the nose. As a result, air pressure builds up in the mouth behind the closed lips until the speaker opens them. The phone [m] is different: air pressure does not build up in the mouth because the velum is lowered, allowing the airstream to escape through the nose. As a result, the laryngeal tone is modified by *two* resonance chambers—one oral and one nasal. The acoustic effect of opening the nasal resonance chamber is known as *nasality*.³⁸

Nasality often spreads from nasal consonants—mainly [m] and [n]—to neighboring phones. Such *nasal spread/spreading* is often nothing more than a type of coarticulation or partial assimilation in contact; hence, the alternate terms *coarticulatory/contextual nasalization*, *nasal coarticulation*, and *nasal assimilation*. It has been asserted that “in every language there is some evidence for the fact that the nasality of nasal consonants spreads to the surrounding vowels. This is a universal process in the sense that there is always a tendency for nasality to spread in this way although the extent and the details vary from language to language.”³⁹

A simple place to begin is with the spread of nasality from a nasal to an adjacent consonant. For example, when [b] is in contact with a following nasal, we sometimes find [b] > [m]. As is often the case, we owe our knowledge of this development to foreign scribes, who tend to reveal what native scribes—trained

37 Notarius, “Playing,” 61–63, 70–74.

38 Some use the term *nasalization* for this property, while others apply that term to the process by which nasality is acquired.

39 Ferguson, “New,” 272. See also Foley, “Nasalization,” 197.

to employ historical and morphophonemic spelling—conceal.⁴⁰ Thus, the Old Canaanite toponym **Labnān*, “Lebanon” (derived from the root *l-b-n*, “white”), was heard as *Rmnn*, with nasal spreading (not to mention the usual rendering of [l] with Egyptian *r*), by Egyptian scribes in the time of Thutmose III and Amenhotep II.⁴¹ Similarly, the biblical toponym יְבִנְיָהּ (a shortened form of יְבִנְיָהּ [Josh 15:11; 19:33], derived from a jussive form of the root *b-n-y*, “build”) refers to a town that Greek scribes, beginning in the Hellenistic period, called Ἰαμν(ε)ία. In the Septuagint, by contrast, יְבִנְיָהּ appears as Ἰαβνη (2 Chr 26:6), with no nasal spreading.⁴²

This type of nasal spreading is found also in Galilean Arabic, distinguishing it from the Arabic spoken in Jerusalem. In the former dialect, we find *btišrab*, “you will drink,” but *mnišrab*, “we will drink,” with the future prefix *b-* becoming nasalized before the first-person plural imperfect prefix *n-*. The latter dialect has *btišrab* and *bnišrab*, with no such nasal spreading.⁴³ Here we have an example, from a living Semitic language, of nasal spreading as a dialectal feature.

Nasality can also spread to an adjacent *vowel*. As with spreading to an adjacent consonant, this occurs when the lowering of the velum involved in producing a nasal stop begins too early or ends too late.⁴⁴ In Papyrus Amherst 63, for example, the Demotic signs *mn*,⁴⁵ *Mn*, and *Imn* (with or without an additional *n* functioning as a phonetic complement) “seem to render Aramaic /m/ plus a nasalized vowel ... irrespective of whether that vowel is followed by /n/ or not.”⁴⁶ If so, it would appear that, in Egyptian Aramaic of ca. 300 BCE, syllable-initial /m/ frequently nasalized a following vowel.

40 See Steiner, “Papyrus,” 202–203.

41 Gauthier, *Dictionnaire*, 3:120 s.v. *ramnen*.

42 The personal name יְבִנְיָהּ, rendered Ἰαμν in the Septuagint (1 Kgs 16:21–22), does seem to exhibit that development at first glance, but this example is difficult to separate from the many examples of *bet-mem* interchange reflected in the Septuagint. (I am indebted to Aaron Koller for sharing with me his long list of examples.)

43 Hakim, עֵרְבִית, 66.

44 In other words, nasal spreading often results from the failure to synchronize movement of the velum with that of the tongue or lips; cf. Hajek, *Universals*, 65: “coarticulatory nasalization ... is a phonetic property of adjacency, where ... velic opening on V occurs through a failed synchronization with the oral closure of N.”

45 The Demotic sign transcribed as *mn* in Papyrus Amherst 63 is the Egyptian (including Demotic) negative particle *bn*, Coptic *mn*; see Erichsen, *Demotisches*, 116. This may be an example of nasal spreading in *Egyptian*. For nasalization of vowels after *m* and *n* in Egyptian during the first millennium BCE (and possibly also during other periods), see Peust, *Egyptian*, 248–250. See further below.

46 Steiner and Nims, “Aramaic,” 20.

The Aramaic form $\text{דנה} < \text{דנן}$, “this,” exemplifies the spread of nasality to a final vowel. For a long time, that form was known primarily from the Literary Aramaic of Babylonian Jewry—the official *targumim* (Onqelos and Jonathan to the Prophets), legal documents, magical texts, etc.⁴⁷ This distribution led Edward Cook to believe that it exhibited “the nunation sometimes added to unstressed final vowels in the Late Aramaic period.”⁴⁸ It is now attested in seven documents from the Judean Desert, dated to the end of the Herodian period and the Bar-Kokhba period.⁴⁹ Moreover, in the Katumuwa Inscription from Samal (8th century BCE), we find two occurrences of the form ונג , “this” (lines 8 and 9; alongside ונ in lines 3 and 5),⁵⁰ a form that is either the ancestor of דנן , despite the gap in attestation,⁵¹ or the product of parallel development. Four other early examples are $\text{המון} > \text{המון}$, “they” (Dan 2:34, 35; 3:22); $\text{תמן} > \text{תמן}$, “there” (late second century BCE);⁵² $\text{מן} > \text{מה}$, “what” (first century CE); and $\text{תנה} > \text{תנן}$, “here” (second century CE).⁵³ (Later on, the final *nun* was apparently reinterpreted as a grammatical ending and consequently was appended also to words—especially adverbs—ending in a *non*-nasal vowel, e.g., $\text{תובן} > \text{תובא}$, “again”; $\text{להלן} > \text{להלא}$, “further on”; and $\text{סגין} > \text{סגי}$, “very”.)

In each of the five *early* cases, it seems likely that a vowel assimilated to the preceding nasal, becoming nasalized. If so, it is possible that *n* in these forms represents nothing more than vowel nasality. That is the explanation given for a similar phenomenon in Coptic: “If one of the consonants *m* or *n* precedes a vowel, an additional unetymological *n* can occasionally be written after this vowel. This additional *n* certainly serves to express the nasality of the vowel,” e.g., *ntr*, “god” > *noute* ~ *nounte*, “idem” in the Akhmimic dialect of Coptic.⁵⁴

47 Tal, *לשון*, 8–9; Sokoloff, *Dictionary*, 344a s.v. דנא . The discussion in this paragraph is abridged from Steiner, *Disembodied*, 140–143.

48 Cook, “Orthography,” 64–65.

49 Yardeni, “שטר,” 308 with n. 2; and Yardeni, *אוסף*, 2:39 s.v. דנן .

50 See Pardee, “New,” 51–71.

51 For colloquial Aramaic forms that went underground after being suppressed in the *written* language by Achaemenid scribes, only to emerge centuries later in Jewish literary and legal texts, see Steiner, “Papyrus,” 202–203.

52 Murabba’at 72 (תמן in line 10 alongside three occurrences of ונה in lines 5–6!) in Yardeni, *אוסף*, 1:256. It used to be thought that תמן was attested already in the fifth century BCE at Elephantine; see, for example, Kutscher, “Language,” 4 n. 16 = Kutscher, *מחקרים*, 6 n. 16. However, this attestation is a misreading according to Yardeni (“שטר,” 308 n. 2).

53 The examples in this sentence and the next are from Beyer, *Aramäischen*, 1:149. The explanations are my own.

54 Peust, *Egyptian*, 248–249. It remains to be seen whether this Coptic phenomenon is related to the use of the Demotic signs *mn*, *Mn*, and *Imn* in Papyrus Amherst 63 discussed above.

Alternatively, the *n* in these forms (perhaps including the Coptic ones) may represent what phonologists call an *epenthetic nasal*⁵⁵ following the nasalized vowel. Nasal consonant epenthesis is attested in European languages, as well:

Spanish dialects often have [munčo] for standard [mučo] ‘much, many’... Bloch ... cites examples such as Old French *cimentiere* (cf. modern Fr. *cimetiere*), Picard *nun-pie* (from *nu-pieds*) and German *genung* (from *genug*)... Some English speakers say *uninted* for *united*....⁵⁶

In these European examples, nasality, after spreading to the following vowel, does not spread further to the following (oral) consonant, turning it into a nasal consonant. Instead, a new nasal consonant, one that is *neither etymological nor underlying*,⁵⁷ arises between the nasal vowel and the following (oral) consonant.

Many additional cases of nasalized final vowels were created in Jewish Aramaic and Hebrew when final nasals were (variably?) elided—especially at the end of *-in*—after having nasalized the vowels that preceded them.⁵⁸ Once again, we know of this development thanks to transcriptions of personal and place names produced by foreign scribes. In Babylonian inscriptions from Achaemenid Nippur (Murashu archive), for example, we find *Mi-in-ia-me-e* alongside *Mi-in-ia-a-me-en* and *Mi-in-ia-mi-i-ni* = מִי־יָמִין/מִי־יָמִין (2 Chr 31:15; Neh 12:17, 41).⁵⁹ In Greek inscriptions from Palestine, we find *Mωδεει* and *Mωδαι* alongside *Mωδεειν* and *Mωδαιν* = מוֹדַי(י)עִין.⁶⁰ It is unclear

55 Other terms include *exrescent nasal* and *intrusive nasal*.

56 Entenman, *Development*, 44.

57 Contrast the regular phonological rule in the French dialects of the Midi that “inserts a nasal consonant between a nasal vowel and a following consonant” in words such as *bonté* and *entendre*; see Detrich, “Nasal,” 524, 525.

58 Ben-Ḥayyim, “Traditions,” 210–211 = idem, “מְסֹרֶת,” 232–233; Qimron, *Hebrew*, 27–28; Steiner, “Hebrew,” 2:112; Elitzur, *Ancient*, 314–316; and Qimron, *Grammar*, 113–116. Already in 1952, E. Y. Kutscher had collected a large body of evidence for what he viewed as “word-final *m* > *n*” in “מְחַקְרִים בְּאַרְמִית” 38–43 = *Galilean*, 58–67, 101–103. However, his evidence (e.g., אָדָם > אָדָן in Mishnaic Hebrew) is reminiscent of the orthographic replacement of final *m* with *n* (“dentalization of *m*”) in Old French, attested already in the “Sequence of Saint Eulalie” (ca. 880); see Brasseur and Brasseur, *Séquences*, 138 n. 77; and for the linguistic background, Sampson, *Nasal*. In both cases, the orthographic change appears to be associated with the spread of nasality to preceding vowels and the subsequent (variable?) deletion of *m* and *n*. In short, I believe that Ben-Ḥayyim’s interpretation of Kutscher’s evidence is closer to the truth than Kutscher’s own interpretation.

59 <http://oracc.museum.upenn.edu/ctij/cbd/qpn/M.html> s.v. *Minyamen*. For *Mi-in-ia-me-e* > מִי־יָמִין in the Babylonian Talmud, see Zadok, “Notes,” 392.

60 Safrai and Safrai, *משנת*, 335.

whether the Babylonian and Greek forms with final *n* reflect (1) (variable) preservation of the original nasal consonant; (2) nasalization of the final vowel; or (3) epenthesis of a new nasal consonant, possibly the one written *ng* in English, viz., [ŋ].⁶¹

After nasality spreads from a nasal consonant to a neighboring vowel, it may continue its spread, in the same direction, to the next consonant.⁶² If that consonant is /b/, it will turn into /m/. Here again, we may cite *Mi-in-ia-mi-i-ni*, *Mi-in-ia-a-me-en* (Murashu archive) = מִינִימִן, מִינִימִן (2 Chron 31:15; Neh 12:17, 41), at least according to those who make the reasonable assumption that this name is derived from מִינִימִן.⁶³ Another likely example is found in 2 Kgs 5:12: *ketiv* אַבְנָה, *qere* אֲמָנָה. If the consonant affected by nasal spreading is /l/, it will turn into /n/. This development seems to be behind Hebrew בָּנָם, “lice,” whose cognates in almost all of the Semitic languages (including personal names in Old Akkadian, Old Assyrian, etc.) have /l/ instead of /n/.⁶⁴ It may also explain the name נְמוּאֵל (Num 26:9, 12), assuming that it is a variant of לְמוּאֵל (Prov 31:1). The latter, in turn, is a variant of the archaic form לְמוּאֵל (31:4), with the meaning “belonging to God,” itself seemingly a variant of לְאֵל, “idem” (Num 3:24). Finally, we may mention Jewish Babylonian Aramaic הַנִּי, “these,” probably derived as follows: אֵלִין > אֵלִינִ > הֵלִין > הֵלִי (with nasalized final vowel) > הַנִּי.⁶⁵ This example is of particular significance for our study because the form הַנִּי is indisputably dialectal. Compare American English, where the degree of nasal spreading differs from one dialect (regional or social) to another:

The overall amount of nasal coarticulation is found to be larger in Philadelphia than in Columbus. However, in Philadelphia, the young speakers produce less nasal coarticulation than the older speakers, with older men producing the greatest nasal coarticulation. In Columbus, the young women set themselves apart from the other groups by using very little nasal coarticulation.⁶⁶

61 In Portuguese, the word *fim*, “end,” is pronounced *fi[ː]* or *fi[ɲ]*; the word *um*, “one,” is pronounced *u[ː]* or *u[ɲ]*; and so on; see Trigo, “Inherent,” 392.

62 The term *nasal harmony* is sometimes applied to such a development; see Walker, “Nasal,” 1:1855: “In some cases, nasal harmony is restricted to consonants separated by no more than a vowel.”

63 See, for example, Daiches, *Jews*, 14; Hölscher, “Namenkunde,” 150; de Vaux, “Binjamin,” 400–402; and Zadok, *Pre-Hellenistic*, 59.

64 Kogan, “Proto-Semitic,” 212–213. The only cognates with /n/ are in Modern South Arabian, which may well reflect an independent development.

65 For the derivation and the (reconstructed) vocalization of הֵלִין and הַנִּי, see Sokoloff, *Dictionary*, 384a and 387a.

66 Tamminga and Zellou, “Cross-Dialectal.”

3 Nasal Spreading in Biblical Wordplay

With this background, we may turn to the toponym Dimon in **כִּי מִי דִּימוֹן מְלֵאֵי דַם**, “the waters of **Dimon** are full of **blood**” (Isa 15:9), part of a prophecy against Moab. Many scholars, albeit not all, have understood Dimon in that clause as referring to the well-known Moabite town of Dibon. Some of these scholars see the substitution of *m* for *b* as a textual corruption;⁶⁷ others seem to view the form **דימון** as a literary creation, an artificial variant used to play on **דם**;⁶⁸ and still others speak of it as a dialectal variant, used for the same purpose.⁶⁹

In commenting on this toponym, Jerome issues a prescient warning:

Ne quis scriptoris uitium putet et errorem emendare dum uult, faciat, una urbs et per M et per B litteram scribitur: e quibus Dimon silentium interpretantur; Dibon, fluens. Indito utroque nomine propter latices qui tacite fluant, usque hodie indifferenter et Dimon et Dibon hoc oppidulum dicitur.⁷⁰

Lest anyone think this is a copyist’s mistake and cause an error by wanting to correct it, the same city is spelled both with the letters *m* and *b*. Dimon is interpreted as “silence”, whereas Dibon means “flowing”. Up to the present day this town is spoken indifferently as both Dimon and Dibon, either name being used, on account of the water that flows quietly.⁷¹

In ignoring this warning, RSV and NRSV add insult to injury by citing Jerome’s own rendering with Dibon in the Vulgate (together with the reading **דיבון** in 1QIsa^a) as evidence against the reading of **MT**.⁷² Other modern scholars, by contrast, build on Jerome’s statement. Hope Hogg, for example, writes:

67 Baumgartner, “Handschriftenfund,” 115. RSV and NRSV translate “For the waters of Dibon are full of blood” and add a note on Dibon indicating that the rendering does not follow MT: “One ancient Ms Vg Compare Syr: Heb Dimon” (RSV); “Q Ms Vg Compare Syr: MT Dimon” (NRSV). For compelling evidence against this view, see Orłinsky, “Studies,” 5–8; and Kutscher, **הלשון**, 76–77.

68 Blake, *Isaiah*, 180: “Dimon = Dibon, changed to allow of the paronomasia”; and Briley, *How*, 1190: “Isaiah may have slightly altered the name as a wordplay on blood ... in order to highlight the destruction in Moab.”

69 See below.

70 *Hieronymi*, 179.

71 Scheck, *Jerome*, 246.

72 See n. 67 above.

If Abana = Amana, may not Dimon be equivalent to Dibon? Jerome in his commentary says, “Usque hodie indifferenter et Dimon et Dibon hoc oppidulum dicitur”, and in the OT itself we find Dimonah and Dibon used for the same place.⁷³

The last point is a reference to the village of דִּימוֹנָה in Judah (Josh 15:22), which is identified by many with the village of דִּיבֹן (Neh 11:25).

Jerome’s testimony is evidence that דִּימוֹן is a phonological variant⁷⁴ produced by nasal spreading in some regional or social dialect in the Levant, possibly a colloquial variety of Hebrew.⁷⁵ It suggests that both variants were still extant in Jerome’s time, even though the dialects from which they stemmed were probably no longer alive.

In short, *Dimon* is a dialectal form of *Dibon* that was pressed into service to play on דָּ, i.e., as a means of stressing the onomastic appropriateness of the punishment. Wordplays linking the punishment of a place to its name are a common feature of prophecies of doom, e.g., גַּם־מִדְּמֹן ... גְּלוּ עֲלֵיהֶּ רָעָה (Jer 48:2); וְהִכַּרְתִּי אֶת־כְּרִיתִים (Ezek 25:16); הַגְּלִגְלִ גְּלוּ יִגְלוּ (Amos 5:5); עֲזָה עֲזָה (Zeph 2:4).⁷⁶ In each of these examples of *paronomastic punishment*,⁷⁷ the prophet has used a wordplay to transform the principle of “let the punishment fit the crime” (מִידָּה כְּנִגְדֵּ מִידָּה) into “let the punishment fit the name” (*nomen est omen*).

Another plausible example of dialectal wordplay based on nasal spreading is found in מְעֻנֹת לֹא יִכָּל לְתַקֵּן וְחֶסְרוֹן לֹא יִכָּל לְהַמְנוֹת (Qoh 1:15). One meaning of this verse is “a twisted thing that cannot be made straight, a loss (lit., lack) that cannot be calculated (lit., counted).” In this translation, the rendering of להמנות follows most medieval and modern exegetes. However, the NJPS translation of the verse has a different interpretation of להמנות: “a twisted thing that cannot be made straight, a lack that cannot be made good.”⁷⁸

73 Hogg, “Dimon,” 1101.

74 In all likelihood, this is not Jerome’s own view. According to him, *Dimon* and *Dibon* have distinct etymologies, the former being related to שִׁמּוּם, “silence,” and the latter to the Aramaic root *d-w-b*, “flow.”

75 To the best of my knowledge, the first use of the term *dialectal* (or the like) with reference to Dimon appears in Gray, *Isaiah*, 285: “Dimon may be an error for Dibon, or possibly a dialectic variation, like Mecca and Becca, adopted to gain an assonance with *dam*, *blood*; Jerome, indeed, asserts that both names Dimon and Dibon were in use in his day.” So, too, Kissane, *Isaiah*, 1:19; Barthélemy, *Critique*, 2:114; and Waard, *Handbook*, 72.

76 Doron, “Paronomasia,” 37.

77 For this term, see Hurowitz, “Alliterative,” 63–88.

78 Note that NJPS takes Qoh 1:15 as composed of two noun phrases that complete the sentence begun in v. 14, not two independent sentences. This construal is found already in the commentary of Isaiah of Trani, ad loc.

This interpretation of להמנות is rooted in talmudic exegesis. In *b. Hagigah* 9b, the Rabbis note that the infinitive required by the context in the second clause is להמל(א)ות, “be made good,” rather than להמנות, “be calculated” (האי להימנות) (להמלאות מיבעי ליה).⁷⁹ This observation makes excellent sense for two reasons: (1) *m-l’ ~ m-l-y* is an antonym of *h-s-r*, e.g., in *m. Nega’im* 14:10; *Sifre Deut* 33:16; and Papyrus Amherst 63 (XI/15–16);⁸⁰ (2) להמל(א)ות, like לתקן, refers to a curative measure but להמנות does not. Further evidence for this interpretation can be adduced from a consolation formula discussed, in a different connection, elsewhere in the Talmud (*b. Berakhot* 16b): המקום ימלא לך חסרונוך, “may the Omnipresent One make good your loss (lit., lack).” Some have cited the two talmudic texts as a justification for emending the Masoretic Text.⁸¹ However, what להמנות exhibits is not textual corruption but rather the spread of nasality from /m/ to the following vowel and consonant, turning /l/ into /n/. If so, להמנות would appear to be a homonym in some Hebrew dialect, used here in an implicit wordplay to imply that the loss in question is both *irreplaceable* and *incalculable*.

This is not the only wordplay in Qoheleth based on homonymy.⁸² In Qoh 7:6, we find an explicit wordplay noted by Ibn Ezra: בקול הסיירים תחת הסייר בן שחוק, “the cackle (lit., laugh) of a fool is like the crackle (lit., sound) of nettles under kettles” (lit., thorns under a pot). In his commentary *ad loc.*, Ibn Ezra compares this to his parade example of explicit wordplay, the example with which we began this essay: וְיִהְיֶה לּוֹ שְׁלֵשִׁים בָּנִים רַבָּבִים עַל שְׁלֵשִׁים עֵינָיִם וְשְׁלֵשִׁים עֵינָיִם (Judg 10:4).

4 Conclusions

Most scholarly discussions of dialectal wordplay in the Bible deal with reflexes of the diphthong /ay/. The contraction (monophthongization) rule for this diphthong in Standard Biblical Hebrew differs in several respects from that

79 Most witnesses to the text of this passage (including the standard Vilna edition) read להמלאות, which, like the biblical spellings of the *qal* infinitive construct (מְלֹאֵת and מְלֹאֵת) has a silent *aleph*. (The *aleph* is present in morphophonemic spelling but omitted in phonemic spelling, e.g., מְלֹאֵת in Ezek 28:16 and מְלֹאֵת in Job 32:18). Three witnesses to the Talmudic text omit the *aleph*. One of them has להמלות alongside להמנות; and two of them (including a Genizah fragment) have לימלות alongside לימנות, with elided *he'*, as often in Mishnaic Hebrew. For all of these readings, see Hachi Garsinan.

80 Steiner and Nims, “Aramaic,” 44.

81 See, for example, Levy, *Buch*, 70–71 n. 15, citing Ewald and Graetz.

82 See Noegel, “Word.” Our example (Qoh 1:15) is not mentioned there.

in other Canaanite dialects. The most widely discussed example of this type is the one in *קָלוֹב קָיִץ* (Amos 8:1, 2), but there are also examples in *שָׁמֵר מִה־מְלִיל* (Isa 21:11) and in *יַעֲוֵי עֵלָה* (Gen 49:4).

Another phonological process associated with dialectal wordplay in the Bible is *nasal spreading*, attested in languages all over the world, including Old Canaanite, Hebrew, Aramaic, Coptic, and Galilean Arabic. One example is the toponym *Dimon* in *מִי דִימוֹן מְלֵאוֹ דָם* (Isa 15:9), referring to the Moabite town of Dibon. It is not a result of textual corruption, nor is it an artificial literary form created for the sole purpose of playing on דָם. It is rather a phonological variant of *Dibon*, in which nasality has spread from the final /n/ to the medial /b/ (*b > m* / *_Vn*). This form of the toponym was in use in some ancient regional or social dialect in the Levant, possibly a colloquial variety of Hebrew. It was normally concealed by historical spelling (דִּיבוֹן), but it was pressed into service in a prophecy of doom against Moab as a means of stressing the onomastic appropriateness of the punishment. Both forms of the toponym were still extant in Jerome's time, even though the dialects from which they stemmed were probably no longer alive.

Similarly, evidence from the Talmud and other sources suggests that the last word of *יִכָּל לְהַמְנוֹת* (Qoh 1:15) was a homonym in some Hebrew dialect, meaning both “be calculated” and “be made good.” In the latter meaning, *להמנות* developed from *להמל(א)ות* through nasal spreading (*l > n* / *mV_*). It is used here in an implicit wordplay to imply that the loss in question is both *irreplaceable* and *incalculable*.

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