

**Stockmen from
Tekoa, Sycomores
from Sheba**

BY

Richard C. Steiner

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36

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A Study of Amos' Occupations

BY
Richard C. Steiner

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מו"ה יששכר דוב בן מו"ה נתן נטע רויזנשיין

תנצב"ה

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תושלב"ע

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Richard C. Steiner

Introduction

Amos is viewed by many as a pivotal figure in the history of prophetism, in part because he worked for a living before his call instead of training to become a prophet. But what precisely was his occupation? The question has been discussed time and again in biblical scholarship, for “it is believed that as his sociocultural background is grasped or reconstructed we have a key, if not *the* key, to his message.”¹

The question ought to be easy to answer. After all, three verses of the book of Amos deal with the question. Biblical scholars are accustomed to making do with far less! In truth, the question “seems quite complex.”² According to a scholar who devoted a good part of his career to just one of Amos’ occupations, the answer requires input from the fields of botany, zoology, genetics, philology, Talmud, and Egyptology, not to mention Bible!³ Just reading the literature on the subject is a daunting task.

Two of the three verses treated in this monograph are contained in Amos’ famous retort to Amaziah (Amos 7:14-15): לֹא נְבִיאָא אֲנִי וְלֹא בֵן

¹ G. F. Hasel, *Understanding the Book of Amos* (Grand Rapids, Mich., 1991) 29. Hasel himself devotes twelve pages to the question.

² J. A. Soggin, *The Prophet Amos* (London: SCM, 1987) 10. Soggin (*Amos*, 10-11) presents four distinct answers.

³ J. Galil, *השקמה בתרבות ישראל*, *Teva Vaaretz* 8 (1966) 354 fig. 5.

נביא אנכי כי בוקר אנכי ובולס שקמים. ויקחני ה' מאחרי הצאן ויאמר אלי ה' לך
 I am not a prophet; I am a בוקר and a בולס of sycomores. But the Lord took me
 away from אחרי הצאן and the Lord said to me, 'Go prophesy to my
 people Israel.'" The third verse is the book's superscription (1:1): דברי
 אשר היה בנקדים מתקוע "the words of Amos, who was among the
 from Tekoa."⁴ In these three verses, we have no fewer than four
 expressions referring to Amos' occupations. Before he became a prophet,
 Amos was בנקדים and אחרי הצאן; he was a בוקר and a שקמים בולס.

At first glance, we seem to be faced with an embarrassment of riches. However, there is less usable information here than meets the eye, for, as one scholar laments: "Unique or near unique expressions dog our quest of the historical Amos!"⁵ This is true of the three participles found in the four expressions: נוקד, בוקר, and בולס. Morphologically, these participles are *qal*, but lexicographically they are difficult, for they are poorly attested in Hebrew. The first occurs one other time in the Bible, enough to provide a general picture of its meaning but no more. The second occurs only here, but is arguably related either to the noun בקר "cattle" or to the *piel* verb בקר "examine." The third is the most isolated of all: even its root is unattested elsewhere in the Bible. As for the phrase אחרי הצאן, it too is rare in the Bible.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the meaning of each of these terms is mired in controversy. Moreover, the basic, lexicographic controversies have spilled over into other areas, spawning subsidiary controversies. Many scholars believe that 7:14, as traditionally interpreted, contradicts both 7:15 and 1:1; others deny this. Among the former group, many believe that the alleged contradictions call for the tools of higher or lower criticism, while others believe that the tools of philology suffice. Some scholars believe that Amos had two occupations; others, only one. Among the latter group, some believe that Amos was a herdsman, while others view him as a fruit farmer. Additional controversies arising from connotations of the aforementioned terms concern Amos' socioeconomic and sacral status.

⁴ For a comprehensive *Forschungsgeschichte*, see the commentary and notes of M. Weiss, *ספר עמוס* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1992) to these verses. My indebtedness to Weiss' painstaking labors will be evident throughout this monograph.

⁵ A. G. Auld, *Amos* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1986) 39.

In this monograph I shall address these problems and others. I shall delve deeply into the practice of sycamore horticulture, sycamore silviculture and animal husbandry. I shall attempt to resolve the lexicographic controversies using the resources of Akkadian, Mishnaic Hebrew, Yemeni Arabic, etc. The resolution of these controversies will prove to have significance beyond the confines of Hebrew philology, biblical criticism, the history of prophetism, and the history of agriculture. Specifically, I shall attempt to show that our results shed light on the origin of the biblical sycamore—a problem that has generated much controversy among archeobotanists and paleobotanists—and the Arabian trade that began in the Late Bronze Age. In view of the complexity of the issues, the reader who does not prefer to be kept in suspense may wish to read the summary of conclusions at the end before becoming immersed in the details.

Finally, a word about my use of the spelling “sycamore” instead of the more common “sycamore.” Both forms are used popularly to designate *Ficus sycomorus* L.,⁶ a relative of the common fig tree also known as “sycamore/sycamore fig,” “mulberry fig,” “fig-mulberry,” “Egyptian fig,” “pharaoh’s fig,” “wild fig,” “cluster fig,” and “ass fig (Eselsfeige).” Unfortunately, the name “sycamore” is applied to unrelated trees in America and England. To avoid confusion, some botanists in recent years have recommended using the spelling “sycomore” for *Ficus sycomorus* and reserving “sycamore” for *Platanus*

⁶ For other names found in older botanical works, see H. Grafen zu Solms-Laubach, *Die Herkunft, Domestikation und Verbreitung des gewöhnlichen Feigenbaums (Ficus Carica L.)* (Abhandlungen der Königlichen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen 28; Göttingen: Dieterich, 1882) 103-6; and C. C. Berg and J. T. Wiebes, *African Fig Trees and Fig Wasps* (Amsterdam: North-Holland, 1992) 74. The terms *Ficus gnaphalocarpa* (Miq.) Steud. ex A. Rich. and (less commonly) *Ficus trachyphylla* Fenzl. are still used as synonyms of *Ficus sycomorus* L. in studies of African plants; see H.-J. von Maydell, *Trees and Shrubs of the Sahel* (Eschborn: Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit, 1986) 273; and Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, *Traditional Food Plants: A Resource Book for Promoting the Exploitation and Consumption of Food Plants in Arid, Semi-arid, and Sub-humid Lands of Eastern Africa* (Rome: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 1988) 288. Two subspecies of *Ficus sycomorus* have been distinguished—*Ficus sycomorus sycomorus* (the “common cluster fig”) and *Ficus sycomorus gnaphalocarpa* (the “false cluster fig,” in Namibia, Angola and West Africa)—but Berg and Wiebes (*African Fig*, 76) argue that the distinction is not sharp, “making recognition of subspecies hardly worthwhile.”

occidentalis in America and *Acer pseudoplatanus* in England.⁷ I have followed their recommendation in this monograph.

⁷ See N. Hareuveni, *Tree and Shrub in Our Biblical Heritage* (trans. H. Frenkley; Kiriat Ono, Israel: Neot Kedumim, 1984) 41; F. N. Hepper, *Illustrated Encyclopedia of Bible Plants* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1992) 114; idem, *Pharaoh's Flowers* (London: HMSO, 1990) 59; R. Gale, et al., "Wood," in *Ancient Egyptian Materials and Technology* (P. T. Nicholson and I. Shaw, eds.; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) 340. Cf. also M. G. Easton, *Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1978) 668: "Syc'amore, more properly sycamore."

בולס שקמים:
History of Interpretation

Ancient and Medieval Interpretations of בולס

An astonishing variety of interpretations of בולס can be found in ancient and medieval exegetical literature: “scratch, cut open (fruit of)” (LXX, Jerome, Theodoret of Cyrrhus, R. Hai Gaon *apud* Ibn Bal‘am, Levi b. Yefet, Yeshu‘ah b. Yehudah, Ibn Ezra);¹ “search” (Aquila, Rashi, Qara, Joseph Qimḥi);² “have” (Symmachus, Targum Jonathan);³ “pick, gather (fruit of)” (Peshiṭta, David Qimḥi, Abarbanel);⁴

¹ Origen, *Origenis Hexaplorum* (ed. F. Field; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1875) 2. 978 n. 17; Jerome, *Commentarii in Prophetas Minores* (Turnholt: Brepols, 1969-70) 1. 324 lines 402-4; S. A. Poznański, “The Arabic Commentary of Abu Zakariya Yahya (Judah ben Samuel) Ibn Bal‘am on the Twelve Minor Prophets,” *JQR* 15 (1924-25) 32; David ben Abraham al-Fāsi, *Kitāb Jāmi‘ al-alfāz of David ben Abraham al-Fāsi* (ed. S. L. Skoss; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1936-45) 1. 203 (first apparatus); Ibn Ezra, *Sefer ha-Torah* (ed. U. Simon; Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University, 1989) 311. For Yeshu‘ah b. Yehudah, see below.

² Origen, *Hexapla*, 2. 978; Joseph Qimḥi, *Sefer ha-Giluy* (ed. H. J. Mathews; Berlin: Mekize Nirdamim, 1887) 75.

³ Origen, *Hexapla*, 2. 978; *The Bible in Aramaic* (ed. A. Sperber; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1959-73) 3. 427.

⁴ *The Old Testament in Syriac According to the Peshiṭta Version* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1972-) 3/4. 33; Isaac Abarbanel, *Don Isaac Abarbanel y su comentario al Libro de Amos* (ed. G. Ruiz; Madrid: UPCM, 1984) 196.

“tend” (Al-Qumisi, Isaiah of Trani);⁵ “carry, transport (fruit of)” (Yefet);⁶ “cut off” (Al-Fāsī);⁷ “mix (leaves of)” (R. Sherira Gaon *apud* Ibn Janāḥ, Ibn Parḥon, Tanḥum Yerushalmi);⁸ “beat (leaves off of)” (Ibn Janāḥ, Ibn Parḥon);⁹ “shake (leaves off of)” (Menaḥem, Tanḥum Yerushalmi);¹⁰ “dry” (Ibn Ezra);¹¹ and “pasture in the shade of” (Eliezer of Beaugency).¹² A few of the exegetes (e.g., Jerome, R. Hai Gaon, Rashi) buttress their interpretations with snippets of information about the cultivation of the sycomore in ancient and medieval times.

In the modern period, as interest in *realia* grew, biblical scholars began to delve more deeply into the ethnobotanical context of the problem. S. Bochart was a pioneer in this regard; his brilliant discussion of the etymology of בולס in *Hierozoicon*, published in 1663,¹³ includes descriptions of the sycomore excerpted from classical authors. In 1782-83, the rich literature on the natural history of the sycomore was summarized for biblical scholars by H. E. Warnekros in a seventy-page article.¹⁴ More recently, much light has been shed on

⁵ Daniel Al-Qumisi, פתרון שנים עשר (ed. I. D. Markon; Jerusalem: Mekize Nirdamim, 1957) 38; Isaiah of Trani, פירוש נביאים וכתובים (ed. A. J. Wertheimer; 2nd ed.; Jerusalem: Ktab Yad Wasepher, 1978) 2. 98.

⁶ Ms. British Library Or. 2400 (Margoliouth 282), p. רב = f. 102b, l. 5: האמל פלק “a transporter of sycomore fig halves”; l. 13 אלגמיו ואביעהא “I used to transport sycomore fig halves and sell them.” The former is from the translation of the verse; the latter is from the commentary.

⁷ Al-Fāsī, *Jāmi‘ al-alfāz* 1. 203 line 3.

⁸ Jonah Ibn Janāḥ, *Kitāb al-‘uṣūl: The Book of Hebrew Roots* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1875) 96 lines 5-9; Solomon b. Abraham Ibn Parḥon, מחברת הערוך (ed. S. G. Stern; Pressburg: Typis Antonii Nobilis de Schmid, 1844) 2. 9b; Tanḥum Yerushalmi, פירוש תנחום בן יוסף הירושלמי להררעשר (ed. H. Shy; Jerusalem: Magnes, 1991) 94-95.

⁹ Ibn Janāḥ, *‘Uṣūl*, 96 lines 1-4; Ibn Parḥon, מחברת הערוך, 2. 9b.

¹⁰ Menaḥem b. Saruq, *Maḥberet* (ed. A. Sáenz-Badillos; Granada: Universidad de Granada, 1986), 85*²; Tanḥum Yerushalmi, פירוש להררעשר, 94-95.

¹¹ Abraham Ibn Ezra, פירוש תררעשר (ed. U. Simon; Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University, 1989-) 249-50.

¹² Eliezer of Beaugency, *Kommentar zu Ezechiel und den XII kleinen Propheten* (ed. S. A. Poznański; Warsaw: Mekize Nirdamim, 1909-13) 2. 152. For an annotated Spanish translation of this and other medieval Jewish commentaries on Amos, see *Comentarios hebreos medievales al libro de Amos* (ed. G. Ruiz González; Madrid: UPCM, 1987).

¹³ See below.

¹⁴ H. E. Warnekros, “Historia naturalis Sycomori ex veterum botanicorum Monumentis et Itinerariis conscripta,” *Repertorium für Biblische und Morgenländische Literatur* 11 (1782) 224-71, 12 (1783) 81-104.

the problem by students of the sycamore from outside of the field of biblical studies, in particular, E. Sickenberger, C. Henslow, L. Keimer, T. W. Brown and F. G. Walsingham, and J. Galil.¹⁵ Galil studied the tree in Israel, Cyprus and Kenya, and devoted a series of articles and part of a monograph to it over a period of two decades. An even longer love-affair with the sycamore was carried on by G. Schweinfurth; it is said that he spent fifty-one years studying the sycamore in Palestine, Egypt, Ethiopia and Yemen.¹⁶ Two other botanists—Goldmann and Löw—compiled exhaustive surveys of the literature.¹⁷ Much of this research has been made available to biblical scholars in an article by T. J. Wright.¹⁸

Despite all of the work that has been done, a number of scholars feel that the problem has not been resolved in a satisfactory manner. After reviewing the evidence, J. H. Hayes writes: “In spite of such evidence, we still do not know what function a *boles* sycomores performed.”¹⁹ G. V. Smith feels that “none of these alternate translations are overly convincing.”²⁰ F. E. Greenspahn writes: “. . . one must conclude that the evidence is not sufficient to permit a convincing treatment of this word.”²¹ S. N. Rosenbaum suggests that the generally accepted etymology of בולס “takes us in the wrong direction.”²² M. Weiss concludes that “the etymology of בולס is problematic.”²³ A closer look at the history of this word before and after Amos is needed to dispel these nagging doubts.

This is not the place to examine in detail all of the many interpretations listed above. This chapter explores three of the most interesting

¹⁵ See below.

¹⁶ See Keimer, “Eine Bemerkung zu Amos 7,14,” *Bib* 8 (1927) 442.

¹⁷ F. Goldmann, *La figue en Palestine à l'époque de la mishna* (Paris: Librairie Durlacher, 1911) 42-46; I. Löw, *Die Flora der Juden* (Vienna and Leipzig: R. Lowit, 1924-34) I. 274-80.

¹⁸ T. J. Wright, “Amos and the ‘Sycamore Fig,’” *VT* 26 (1976) 362-68.

¹⁹ J. H. Hayes, *Amos, the Eighth-Century Prophet* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1988) 238.

²⁰ G. V. Smith, *Amos: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1989) 240.

²¹ F. E. Greenspahn, *Hapax Legomena in Biblical Hebrew: A Study of the Phenomenon and Its Treatment Since Antiquity with Special Reference to Verbal Forms* (SBLDS 74; Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1984) 106.

²² S. N. Rosenbaum, *Amos of Israel: A New Interpretation* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1990) 48.

²³ Weiss, עמוס, I. 239.

ones. Although we shall ultimately reject them, they serve as an introduction to some of the points made below. We shall return to some of the others in later chapters.

The Septuagint's Interpretation of בולס and Sycomore Horticulture

The Septuagint's rendering of בולס שקמים is κνίζων συκάμυνα. In my opinion, the best translation of this Greek phrase is "a scratcher of sycomore figs." This translation requires some justification. The verb κνίζω in this phrase has been translated in a great variety of ways, but "scratch" is the first meaning given for it by Liddell and Scott,²⁴ and we shall see below that it fits the context perfectly. The meaning and etymology of συκάμυνα will be treated in the next section.

As Jerome and Theodoret of Cyrrihus knew, the Septuagint's rendering of בולס שקמים refers to the practice of lacerating the figs on the sycomore tree to make them ripen.²⁵ This practice is attested very early in Egypt, long before the time of Amos. We shall see below that it is also attested in Palestine, albeit at a later period.

The connection between lacerating and ripening has been the subject of speculation since ancient times. Theophrastus seems to have believed that the effluence of juice from the wounded "Cyprian figs" causes them to ripen.²⁶ Jerome writes that, without this operation, the figs are spoiled by "gnats" (=wasps?), while Bar Bahlul suggests that the practice induces ripening by causing "gnats" to enter.²⁷

Until thirty-five years ago, modern students of the sycomore held similar views. Botanists connected the operation with the wasps that

²⁴ H. G. Liddell and R. Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996) 965.

²⁵ See Origen, *Hexapla*, 2. 978 n. 17; Jerome, *Commentarii*, 324 lines 402-4. (For the interpretations of these and other church fathers, see U. Treu, "Amos VII 14, Schenute und der Physiologos," *NovT* 10 [1968] 234-40.) By contrast, Theodore of Mopsuestia (*Theodori Mopsuesteni Commentarius in XII Prophetas* [Wiesbaden: O. Harrassowitz, 1977] 147 lines 2-3) took κνίζων to mean περισκάλλων "hoeing around (?)" and γεωργῶν "plowing (?)".

²⁶ Theophrastus, *Enquiry into Plants* (trans. A. Hort; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1948) I. 292-95 (4.2.3). Cf. Wright, "Sycomore Fig," 364.

²⁷ Jerome, *Commentarii*, 324 lines 401-4; Hasan Bar Bahlul, *Lexicon Syriacum auctore Hassano Bar-Bahlule* (ed. R. Duval; Paris: e Reipublicae typographaeo, 1888-1901) 1115 lines 8-9.

lay their eggs in the female flowers within the figs:²⁸ either the gashing served to let the wasps out or it served to let the air in, thereby drying up the female flowers upon which the wasps depend.²⁹ One biblical scholar elaborated on Theophrastus' theory:

. . . the fruit is rather bitter, but by making an incision in them before they are ripe, one can make some of the juice run out. The rest then ferments, and gives the fruit a sweet taste. . . .³⁰

Galil's experiments showed the true reason: gashing stimulates the production of ethylene, a gas that is used commercially for the ripening of oranges, bananas, etc. With the sycomore fig, it acts as a growth stimulator as well as a ripener, inducing a very great increase in size and weight.³¹

At first glance, the Septuagint's use of the verb κνίζω "scratch" to refer to this practice seems a bit odd. All of the ancient and modern evidence indicates that the laceration in question was more of a gash than a scratch. The solution to this problem lies in the ancient Greek accounts of this practice. It has often been noted that the same Greek verb or a variant of it is used in descriptions of the sycomore in Egypt.³² The earliest such description is that of Theophrastus:

²⁸ The (mutualistic and parasitic) relationships of (pollinating and non-pollinating) fig wasps to their figs are currently the subject of intensive research, stimulated in part by Galil's studies with D. Eisikowitch and others. For extensive bibliography, see Berg and Wiebes, *African Fig* 273-85; G. D. Weiblen, *Phylogeny and Ecology of Dioecious Fig Pollination* (Ph. D. diss., Harvard University, 1999) 261-304; C. Kerdelhué, et al., "Comparative Community Ecology Studies on Old World Figs and Fig Wasps," *Ecology* 81 (2000) 2847-49; and add J. Galil and D. Eisikowitch, "Further Studies on the Pollination Ecology of *Ficus Sycomorus* L. (Hymenoptera, Chalcidoidea, Agaonidae)," *Tijdschrift voor Entomologie* 112 (1969) 1-13.

²⁹ The latter explanation is still given by M. N. el-Hadidi and L. Boulous, *The Street Trees of Egypt* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 1988) 70.

³⁰ E. Hammershaimb, *The Book of Amos* (Oxford: B. Blackwell, 1970) 118. So too J. A. Arieti, "The Vocabulary of Septuagint Amos," *JBL* 93 (1974) 343.

³¹ J. Galil, "An Ancient Technique for Ripening Sycomore Fruit in East-Mediterranean Countries," *Economic Botany* 22 (1968) 188-89.

³² G. Henslow, "Egyptian Figs," *Nature* 47 (1892) 102; idem, "The Sycomore Fig," *Journal of the Royal Horticultural Society* 27 (1902) 130-1; S. R. Driver, *The Books of Joel and Amos* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1897) 212 n. 2; Wright, "Sycomore Fig," 363. Indeed, the point is implicit already in S. Bochart, *Hierozoicon*

καὶ πέττειν οὐ δύναται μὴ ἐπικνισθέντα· ἀλλ' ἔχοντες ὄνουχας σιδηροῦς ἐπικνίζουσιν· ἃ δ' ἂν ἐπικνισθῇ τετραῖα πέττεται·

It cannot ripen unless it is scratched on the surface; but they scratch it on the surface with iron claws; the fruits thus scratched ripen in four days.³³

The word used by Theophrastus to describe the Egyptian practice is ἐπικνίζω “scratch on the surface.”³⁴ Dioscorides uses that word as well, while Athenaeus uses κνίζω, the same verb as LXX.³⁵ We seem to be dealing with a technical term associated with sycamore horticulture in Egypt.

The reason for the use of verbs meaning “scratch” and “scratch on the surface” is clear from the context: the operation was performed with an instrument called a “claw.” Indeed, according to the 1996 revised supplement to Liddell and Scott, several occurrences of κνίζω that were formerly thought to mean “tickle” actually mean “scrape or scratch with the fingernails.”³⁶ It appears that κνίζω and ἐπικνίζω are used to refer to laceration with fingernails and claws.

Thanks to the work of Figari, Sickenberger, Henslow and Keimer, it is reasonably clear that the term “claw” used by Theophrastus refers to a knife or razor with a blade bent into the shape of a hook or claw. The existence of such an instrument in ancient Egypt would explain the curved shape of the scars on many ancient Egyptian representations of sycamore figs.³⁷ It would also explain why both the hieratic bird’s claw determinative and the knife determinative are used with the Egyptian word for the gashed sycamore fig.³⁸ Indeed, such an instru-

(London: J. Martyn & J. Allestry, 1663) I. 383-84 (= S. Bochart, *Hierozoicon* [ed. E. F. C. Rosenmüller; Leipzig: Weidmann, 1793-96] I. 405-6).

³³ Theophrastus, *Enquiry* I. 292-93 (4.2.1).

³⁴ Liddell and Scott, *Lexicon*, 639.

³⁵ Pedanii Dioscuridis, *De Materia Medica* (ed. M. Wellmann; Berlin: Weidmann, 1906-14) I. 116 lines 14-15; Athenaeus, *The Deipnosophists* (trans. C. B. Gulick; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1927-41) I. 222 (2.51).

³⁶ Liddell and Scott, *Lexicon*, Supplement, 179.

³⁷ L. Keimer, “Sur quelques petits fruits en faïence émaillée datant du Moyen Empire,” *Bulletin de l’Institut français d’archéologie orientale* 28 (1929) 52-55.

³⁸ L. Keimer, “An Ancient Egyptian Knife in Modern Egypt,” *Ancient Egypt* 1928, 65; idem, “Sprachliches und Sachliches zu ελκω ‘Frucht der Sykomore,’” *AcOr* 6 (1928) 293-94; idem, “Petits fruits,” 55. Egyptian has two words for the sycamore fig, one of which is believed to denote the gashed (“notched”) fruit; see chapter 3 below.

ment was still being used to gash sycamore figs in some parts of Egypt in the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth.³⁹

The above explanation is strengthened by another detail in Theophrastus' account. In describing the practice of gashing another variety of sycamore fig, the "Cyprian fig" in Crete, he uses a different term: ἐπιτέμνω "cut on the surface."⁴⁰ The difference in terminology seems to reflect a difference in the instruments used. In Cyprus, only ordinary kitchen knives are used today to gouge the fruit.⁴¹ If that was also the case in ancient times, it would help to explain why Theophrastus uses a verb meaning "cut on the surface" in discussing the "Cyprian fig" instead of the technical term meaning "scratch on the surface" that he uses in discussing the "Egyptian sycamine."

The LXX's interpretation of בולס reappears in Semitic sources in the Middle Ages. An Aramaic version of it seems to be attested in the tenth-century Syriac dictionary of Bar Bahlul. There we find the phrase מסטף שקמא—presumably a rendering of בולס שקמים—defined as "prick with a needle so that the gnats enter and it ripens."⁴² Löw wonders about Bar Bahlul's source:

Woher BB. die Wendung nimmt weiß ich nicht. Die Bibelübersetzer zu Amos 7, 14 kennen sie nicht. Hex. z.B. hat: חרט = κνίζων.⁴³

I would like to suggest that Bar Bahlul took the phrase מסטף שקמא from a version based largely on LXX, the Syropalestinian version, which is not extant on our verse.⁴⁴ As Löw himself notes, the verb סטף is attested in the fragments of that translation that *are* extant; it

³⁹ A. Figari (*Studi scientifici sull'Egitto e sue adiacenze compresa la penisola dell'Arabia Petrea* [Lucca: G. Giusti, 1865] 2. 178) describes "a kind of thimble (made) of sheet-tin ending in a claw." By the beginning of this century, the hooked (claw-shaped) blade had already evolved in the Cairo district and elsewhere into a circular (ring-shaped) blade, but Sickenberger (*apud* Henslow, "Sycamore Fig," 128-29) and Keimer ("Petits fruits," 54-55, 57-60) were able to find a few specimens with the older shape in Damietta and Miḥallet Marḥoum, respectively. See also Keimer, "Knife," 66; and T. W. Brown and F. G. Walsingham, "Sycamore Fig in Egypt," *The Journal of Heredity* 8 (1917) 10.

⁴⁰ Theophrastus, *Enquiry*, 1. 294-95 (4.2.3).

⁴¹ Galil, "Ancient Technique," 186.

⁴² Bar Bahlul, *Lexicon*, 1115 lines 8-9.

⁴³ Löw, *Flora*, 1. 280.

⁴⁴ See also n. 56 below.

renders κατατέμνω “lacerate” in Isa 15:2 (כול אִידרעיא מסטפין).⁴⁵ Thus, my suggestion boils down to a claim that the Syropalestinian version uses the same Aramaic verb (סטף) to render κνίζω in Amos 7:14 that it uses to render κατατέμνω in Isa 15:2. Evidence for this claim can be adduced from the Syrohexapla, which uses the same Aramaic verb (חרט “scratch”) to render κνίζω in Amos 7:14 (חרט שקמא “a scratcher of sycomores”) that it uses to render κατατέμνω in Isa 15:2 (כלהון דרעא מחרטא “all arms scratched”).⁴⁶

The use of the verb סטף to render בולס שקמים is worthy of attention, for it appears to be the Aramaic and Mishnaic Hebrew technical term for the gashing of sycamore figs. Elsewhere in Bar Bahlul’s dictionary, Syriac סטף is equated with Arabic *šaraṭa* “scarify, make an incision in the process of cupping.”⁴⁷ The verb therefore refers to non-hostile (curative or self-inflicted) laceration.⁴⁸

The Mishnah agrees with Bar Bahlul’s citation in using this verb to refer to an operation performed on sycamore figs: כל בנות שקמה פטורות: חוץ מן המסוטפות “all sycamore fruit is exempt [from tithing in cases of doubt] except for those that are מסוטפות” (*m. Dem.* 1.1). The term המסוטפות has often been taken as referring to sycamore figs that have split open naturally.⁴⁹ This interpretation is hardly likely for a verb in

⁴⁵ LXX to Isa 15:2 has πάντες βραχίονες κατατετημημένοι “all arms lacerated,” equivalent to ידים גדודות, which is not in the Masoretic text there, but does appear in a parallel prophecy against Moab in Jer 48:37. The Greek word is also used to render the verb *š-r-ṭ* in Lev 21:5 ישרטו שרתה לא ובבשרם = καὶ ἐπὶ τὰς σάρκας αὐτῶν οὐ κατατεμοῦσιν ἐντομίδας.

⁴⁶ *Codex Syro-hexaplaris Ambrosianus photolithographice editus* (ed. A. M. Ceriani; *Monumenta sacra et profana* 7; Milan: Impensis Bibliothecae Ambrosianae, 1874) 101a, 178a.

⁴⁷ See, for example, Bar Bahlul, *Lexicon*, 880 line 4. The verb *šaraṭa* is also used in the Arabic translation of Dioscorides in describing the laceration of sycamore fruit; see at n. 63 below.

⁴⁸ For more on this verb, see M. Moreshet, התנאים, בלשון החדש שנתחדש בלשון התנאים (Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1980) 243. Cf. also A. Tal, התרגום השומרוני לתורה (Tel-Aviv: Tel-Aviv University, 1980-83) 1. 123, where במסטיפיה renders ברהטים in Samaritan targ. A to Gen 30:38. It appears that the translator understood ברהטים as modifying פצל. In that case, the -ב is instrumental and a מסטף is a tool. This suggestion is recorded in my name (with the translation “chisel”) in A. Tal, *A Dictionary of Samaritan Aramaic* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2000) 2. 582.

⁴⁹ See Nathan b. Yehiel, ערוך השלם (ed. A. Kohut; Vienna: n.p., 1878-92) 6. 39a: יהודין שנבשלו באילן עד שנתבקעו מאיליהן “that ripened on the tree until they split by them-

stem passive form implies a human agent. Indeed, משקק in the *active* voice is used in Levi b. Yefet's compendium of Al-Fāsi's dictionary to gloss בולט in our verse.⁵¹

As Löw hints, this interpretation of מסוטפות makes perfect sense in the Mishnah. The difference between ungashed sycomore figs and gashed ones is that "jene gelten als herrenlos, diese als erwarteter Ertrag."⁵² This brief comment apparently alludes to the view of R. Yoḥanan in *y. Dem.* 1.1, 21c, according to which the reason most sycomore fruit is exempt from tithing in cases of doubt is that it is presumed to have been abandoned. A man-made gash, unlike natural splitting open, shows that the fig was not abandoned.⁵³ The Mishnah shows conclusively that the gashing of sycomore fruit was known in

microfilm, at least), but that may be because the scribe regularly dispenses with the superior points, as he does in the following word, אִישׁ "also." The insertion of the latter word seems to indicate that he too misunderstood the word תוב. Further confusion is evident in Maimonides' comment (מקור והרגום, בן מימון, מפרש רבינו משה בן מימון, [ed. J. Qafih; Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1963-68] 1. 133): מסוטפות - משקקה והו נוע: מן אנואע דלך אלתין "split, and that is one of the types of this fig." As it stands, this comment appears to be just a garbled version of R. Nathan's, in which the two alternative interpretations have been combined into one. It is possible that והו should be emended to א, but is also possible that Maimonides took משקקה as referring to the variety of sycomore figs that requires gashing, as opposed to the variety that ripens without being gashed; see n. 54 below. In *Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot Ma'aser* 13,1, he mentions בנות שקמה but not מסוטפות.

⁵¹ Al-Fāsi, *Jāmi' al-Alfāz*, 1. 203 (first apparatus): וקיל אלגמזי וקיל "and a circumciser of sycomore figs. Others say: 'one who cuts sycomore figs in half.'"

⁵² Löw, *Flora*, 1. 280.

⁵³ Cf. E. Sickenberger *apud* Henslow, "Egyptian Figs," 102: "The figs of the third generation are larger, of an agreeable taste, and sweet-scented; but they are not operated upon, only because in August and September, though the trees are much fuller of fruit than in May and June, the people have so much to do at that time. They are seldom sold, and only eaten by the owners of the trees, or else they are abandoned to the field-mice, birds and dogs. . . ." So too L. Reynier, "Méthode de caprification usitée sur le figuier sycomore," in *Mémoires sur l'Égypte publiés dans les campagnes du général Bonaparte* (Paris: P. Didot L'ainé, 1800-1803) 3. 189: "Ce procédé n'est plus usité dès que la seve (sic) commence à diminuer; alors on se borne à cueillir les fruits les mieux développés, et le reste tombe et pourrit au pied de l'arbre." See also Figari, *Studi*, 178: "The figs of the fall season ripen spontaneously without the intervention of cutting off their orifice. . . ."

ancient Palestine⁵⁴ and that it was denoted there by the verb סתף in the D-stem.⁵⁵ This strengthens our conjecture that the phrase מסתף שקמא is from the Syropalestinian version.⁵⁶

In Judeo-Arabic sources, the LXX's interpretation appears in the eleventh century. Ibn Bal'am cites the following comment in the name of R. Hai Gaon: "the cutting open of the sycamore (fruit) (תשריח), a well-known craft in Syria-Palestine."⁵⁷ The Karaites were

⁵⁴ Sycamore figs in modern Israel ripen without being gashed. According to Galil (השקמה, 349-52; "Ancient Technique," 188), the change is due to genetic mutation and natural selection. Amar (גידולי ארץ-ישראל, 300) believes that the variety of sycamore figs that requires gashing co-existed in medieval Palestine with the variety that ripens without being gashed.

⁵⁵ It has been claimed that the Mishnah has a second reference to the gashing of sycamore figs: סכין את הפנים ומנקבין אותן עד ראש השנה "they may oil the young figs and pierce them until the New Year" (m. Shebi. 2.5); see N. Hareuveni, *Tree and Shrub*, 91. However, this two-step procedure has survived until modern times, and almost all descriptions of it speak of the common (Carian) fig; see Maimonides' commentary to this mishnah; Thomas Shaw, 1722 and 1738, *apud* A. Goor, "The History of the Fig in the Holy Land from Ancient Times to the Present Day," *Economic Botany* 19 (1965) 134; Reynier, "Méthode," 186; Galil, השקמה, 348. Only one source—Da'ud al-Anṭākī in sixteenth century Palestine—reports this procedure for both common figs and sycamore figs; see Amar, גידולי ארץ-ישראל, 303-4 (where, however, the word ḥattā "until" has been misread as ḥayy).

⁵⁶ According to M. Bar-Asher, it is natural to assume that Bar Bahlul had access to this work, but this is the first clear evidence for that assumption (personal communication).

⁵⁷ Poznański, "Ibn Bal'am," 32; Z. Amar, בפרשנות ימיהביניים לצומח, של ארץ-ישראל *Sinai* 116 (1995) 94 (I am indebted to D. Talshir for this reference). Despite the fact that R. Sherira Gaon seems to have been familiar with the practice of gashing sycamore figs (see above), he did not connect it with the phrase בולס שקמים, according to the testimony of Ibn Janāh, *ʿUsūl*, 96 lines 5-9. It was left to his son, R. Hai Gaon, to make that connection. It is not impossible that he made it with the help of a Syriac rendering like Syrohexaplaric חרט שקמא "a scratcher of sycomores" or האך תרבא "a scratcher of wild figs"; see at n. 46 above, and Ishodad of Merv *Commentaire*, 4. 90 line 9. Such a rendering could have been supplied to him by the same Nestorian catholicos (אתהליק) who supplied him with a Peshiṭta-like Syriac rendering of Ps 141:5; see the passage from Hai's biography cited in Joseph Ibn 'Aqnān, התגלות הסודות והופעת המאורות: Mekize Nirdamim, 1964) 495. Whether that catholicos himself would have taken חרט שקמא to refer to the gashing of sycamore figs is another matter. Bar Ali uses חרט to gloss חרת "dig out, furrow," and Ishodad of Merv lists חרט שקמא as a variant of מחפר שקמא "a digger of (the soil around) sycomores"; see R. Payne Smith, *Thesaurus Syriacus* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1879-1901) 1. 1370 s.v. חרט; *Commentaire d'Išo'dad de Merv sur l'Ancien Testament* (trans. C. Van

particularly fond of this interpretation. One of the glosses of **ובולס שקמים** in Levi b. Yefet's compendium of Al-Fāsi's dictionary is **ולתאן אלגמוז** "and a circumciser of sycomore figs."⁵⁸ And in a recently published passage from Yeshu'ah b. Yehudah's commentary to Exod 23:11, we have "[by] **ואין מגמוזין** they mean **לא יכתנון**, one may not circumcise [sycomore figs during the sabbatical year], like **ובולס שקמים**."⁵⁹ Here, too, we are dealing with a technical term for the gashing of sycomore figs, this time in Arabic.⁶⁰

The LXX's interpretation makes an appearance in the twelfth century, as well. According to Ibn Ezra, **ובולס שקמים** means **השקמים ומשרטט** "and a scorer of my sycomores in order that they become sweet."⁶¹ Although Ibn Ezra knew Ibn Bal'am's work, his

den Eynde; CSCO 304; Louvain: L. Durbecq, 1950-) 4. 114 n. 4. It is possible that at least some Nestorians viewed **שקמא** and **חרט שקמא** as being synonymous; cf. n. 25 above.

⁵⁸ See n. 51 above. The same rendering is found in a Coptic-Arabic dictionary; see n. 60 below.

⁵⁹ O. Tirosh-Becker, "Linguistic Study of a Rabbinic Quotation Embedded in a Karaite Commentary on Exodus," in *Studies in Mishnaic Hebrew* (ed. M. Bar-Asher; Jerusalem: Magnes, 1998) 385-88: **ובולס שקמים**: **ואין מגמוזין ירידון לא יכתנון** מ^הל **ובולס שקמים**. The verb **יכתנון** appears in this edition as **כתנון** and is mistakenly translated as "trim [the vines]." As shown by Tirosh-Becker, the phrase **ואין מגמוזין** is part of a citation from the *Mekhilta de-R. Simeon bar Yoḥai*. See further below.

⁶⁰ This term is also attested in Muslim and Christian sources from Palestine and Egypt. Tamīmī uses it in a passage cited by Ibn al-Bayṭār in *Traité des simples d'Ibn al-Bāitār de Malaga* (ed. Mohamed al-Arbi al-Khattabī; n. p.: Dar al-Gharb al-Islami, 1990) 105 line 3 s.v. *jummayz*. (For translations and discussions of this passage, see *Relation de l'Égypte* [cited below], 85-86; *Traité des simples, par Ibn el-Beïthar* [trans. L. Leclerc; Paris: Impr. nationale, 1877-83] 364; and Amar, *גידולי ארץ-ישראל*, 299-300.) Like the Karaites (eleventh century), Tamīmī (tenth century) is from Jerusalem. In Egypt, it is known from a Coptic-Arabic dictionary, where the phrase *ḥattānu l-jummayz* appears as the gloss of the Coptic version's rendering of **ובולס שקמים**; see V. Loret, "Les livres III et IV (animaux et végétaux) de la *Scala Magna* de Schams-ar-Riâsh (1^{re} partie)," *Annales du service des Antiquités de l'Égypte* 1 (1899) 56 nos. 83-84. It survives in modern Egyptian Arabic; see Keimer, "Petits fruits," 51, 57, 75. Not surprisingly, this technical usage of *ḥatana* was not known in Iraq, where the sycomore is not found. Sherira Gaon uses the verb *šaqqaqa* to refer to the gashing of sycomore figs, and Hai Gaon uses *šarraḥa*. 'Abd al-Laṭīf al-Baġdādī (*Kitāb al-īfādah wa-l-ṭibār* [Damascus: Dār Qutaybah, n.d.], 22 line 2; *Relation de l'Égypte* [ed. S. de Sacy; Paris: Imprimerie Impériale, 1810] 83 n. 36) uses *wasama*.

⁶¹ Ibn Ezra, **פירושי תרי"ע**, 311.

comment does not give the impression of being based on it. Nor does it seem to be based on the Mishnah, *pace* Simon,⁶² since it does not use the verb מנקב (*m. Shebi.* 2.5) or מסטף. Instead it uses משרטט, a post-mishnaic verb derived via reduplication from older שרט. Since שרטט is normally used of scoring parchment, its appearance in this context would be quite unexpected were it not for the use of its Arabic cognate in the Arabic version of Dioscorides' description of the sycomore: *laysa yandaju dūna ʿan yušraṭa bi-mihlabin min ḥadīd* "it does not ripen unless it is slit with a claw of iron."⁶³ Ibn Ezra may have gotten the idea for this interpretation from Ibn Baḥam, but his formulation shows that Dioscorides influenced his thinking as well.

The Septuagint's Translation of שקמיו: The Meaning and Etymology of συκάμυος

Most scholars have recognized that συκάμυα had the meaning "sycomore figs" as well as "mulberries," and that συκάμυος had the meaning "sycomore" as well as "mulberry tree."⁶⁴ This is quite clear in the Septuagint from the collocation with κνίζω, which, as we have seen, was a technical term connected specifically with sycomore horticulture. Nevertheless, there are a few dissenting voices. Thus, E. W. G. Masterman writes: "שקמיה . . . in LXX wrongly tr^d by συκάμυος . . .

⁶² Ibn Ezra, פירושי תרי-עשר, 311.

⁶³ *La 'materia médica' de Dioscórides* (ed. C. E. Dubler and E. Terés; Tetuán/Barcelona: Emporium, 1953-) 2. 120. This translation reached Spain long before Ibn Ezra's time. Ibn Ezra could have seen the description of the sycomore there or in a derivative pharmacological work, such as Ibn Wāfid's *Al-adwiyah al-mufradah* (Spain, 11th century C.E.). In the transliteration of Ibn Wāfid's work into Hebrew letters (MS Escorial G-II-9, f. 123a bot.), we find וליס ינצג דון אן ישרט במכלב מן חדיד מן חדיד. The same sentence, in Arabic script, appears in Avicenna's *Qanūn*, book 2, part 2, s.v. *jummayz* (Abū ʿAlī al-Ḥusayn Ibn Sinā, *Al-Qānūn fi al-ṭibb* [Baghdad: Al-Muthanna Library, n.d.] 285 lines 29-30), but Z. Langermann informs me that it seems to have reached Spain too late for Ibn Ezra to have studied it. This sentence derives ultimately from Theophrastus' description cited above. It is striking that Galil (השקמה, 342) uses the verb שרטט in translating the latter into modern Hebrew: כן שורטטו אים מבשילים אלא אים כן שורטטו. על ידי צפורן ברזל תחילה.

⁶⁴ Liddell and Scott, *Lexicon*, 1670 s.v.

‘the mulberry.’”⁶⁵ R. K. Harrison agrees: “LXX incorrectly Gk. *sykámīnos* ‘mulberry.’”⁶⁶ And L. Zalcman refers to the “error of LXX in rendering *šiqmīm* as *συκάμιννα* (*συκάμινος* = sycamine, another name for mulberry!).”⁶⁷

This view flies in the face of the evidence. Already in the nineteenth century, C. E. Stowe cited Dioscorides’ statement in *De materia medica* that some people use the term *συκάμιννον* for the *συκόμορον*.⁶⁸ He could have added that Theophrastus and Strabo use the term *συκάμιννος* to refer to the sycomore in discussing the flora of Egypt.⁶⁹ However, I believe that more needs to be said about this usage.

We appear to be dealing with a dialectal difference between Egyptian Greek and other dialects.⁷⁰ That would seem to be the implication of Theophrastus’ statement that the *συκάμιννος* peculiar to Egypt “to a certain extent resembles the tree which bears that name in our country,” viz., the mulberry.⁷¹ Athenaeus clarifies another aspect of the dialectal difference: “Mulberries (*συκάμιννα*)—Although all other peoples without exception call them by this name, the Alexandrians call them *μόρα*.”⁷² These two statements would seem to complement each other: the Alexandrians called mulberries *μόρα*, because they used the usual term, *συκάμιννα*, for a different fruit. Taken together, they suggest that it is no accident that the Alexandrian translators of the Hebrew Bible (unlike Aquila, Symmachus and Theodotion) never use the term *συκόμορος*. We may summarize this hypothesis in tabular form:

⁶⁵ E. W. G. Masterman, “Sycamore, Tree,” in *International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia* (ed. J. Orr; Chicago: Howard-Severance, 1915) 5. 2877.

⁶⁶ R. K. Harrison, “Sycamore; Sycamore Tree,” in *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (ed. G. W. Bromiley; fully revised ed.; Grand Rapids, Mich.: W. B. Eerdmans, 1979) 4. 674.

⁶⁷ L. Zalcman, “Piercing the Darkness at *Bôqêr* (Amos VII 14),” *VT* 30 (1980) 254-55 n. 12.

⁶⁸ C. E. Stowe, “Sycamore,” in *Dr. William Smith’s Dictionary of the Bible* (ed. H. B. Hackett; New York: Hurd and Houghton, 1870) 4. 3130. Liddell and Scott (*Lexicon*, 1670 s.v.) cite Dioscorides for the same purpose.

⁶⁹ Theophrastus, *Enquiry*, 1. 290-91 (4.2.1); Strabo, *The Geography of Strabo* (trans. H. L. Jones; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1949) 8. 148-49 (17.2.4).

⁷⁰ For the Egyptian branch of the *koine* used by the Septuagint, see E. Tov, “The Septuagint,” in *Mikra* (ed. M. J. Mulder; Assen: Van Gorcum, 1988) 180-81.

⁷¹ Theophrastus, *Enquiry*, 1. 290-91 (4.2.1).

⁷² Athenaeus, *Deipnosophists*, 1. 222-23 (2.51).

	Egypt	Greece
mulberries	μόρα	συκάμzνα
sycomore figs	συκάμzνα	συκόμzρα

It appears that Egypt is not the only place where συκάμzνος referred to the sycomore. Pseudo-Scylax and Strabo mention a town near Mt. Carmel called Συκάμzνων πόλzς, which was already in ruins in Strabo’s time.⁷³ Clearly, this was a city named after its συκάμzνος-trees (cf. התמרים in Deut 34:3, Judg 1:16, etc.), but were those trees mulberry-trees or sycomores? H. B. Tristram gives the answer: “Sycaminopolis, near the modern Caiffa, derived its name from the Sycomore fig trees, which still flourish on the ancient site.”⁷⁴ Additional evidence comes from the toponym שקמזנה (*m. Dem.* 1.1),⁷⁵ generally identified with Συκάμzνων πόλzς, even though there is no independent evidence for this. Thus, συκάμzνος had the meaning “sycomore” in at least two of the Mediterranean countries where the sycomore is known to have been cultivated in antiquity.

It is generally agreed that συκάμzνος is a Semitic loanword,⁷⁶ but no

⁷³ K. Galling, “Die syrisch-palästinische Küste nach der Beschreibung bei Pseudo-Skylax,” *ZDPV* 60 (1937) 79-80, 90; Strabo, *Geography* 7. 274-75 (16.2.27). For other references, see M. Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism* (Jerusalem: The Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1974-84) 2. 292 n. 27. I am indebted to L. Feldman for this reference.

⁷⁴ H. B. Tristram, *Natural History of the Bible* (2nd ed.; London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1868) 398. In Egypt, a number of toponyms contain the word for “sycomore” (*nh.t*), either alone or in combination; N. Baum, *Arbres et arbustes de l’Egypte ancienne* (Leuven: Departement Oriëntalistiek, 1988) 24-25. Cf. the Palestinian toponym el-Jummeizeh; E. J. Kraeling, “Two Place Names of Hellenistic Palestine,” *JNES* 7 (1948) 200.

⁷⁵ So in manuscripts; see המשנה עם שינויי נוסחאות מכתבי יד של המשנה (ed. N. Sacks; Jerusalem: Institute for the Complete Israeli Talmud, 1972-75) 1. 168-69. The form in the printed editions, revived in modern Israel, is שקמזנה. Cf. also השקמזני in the *Sifre* (3x) and in *b. B. Bat.* 119a.

⁷⁶ For early discussions of the Semitic origin of the Greek word, borrowed with the plural ending, see H. Lewy, *Die semitischen Fremdwörter im Griechischen* (Berlin: R. Gaertner, 1895) 23. Is the synonym συκόμzρος (literally “fig-mulberry”) a product of folk etymology, similar to examples like *sparrow-grass* < *asparagus*, *cow cumber* < *cucumber* and *woodchuck* < *otchek*, discussed by R. Anttila (*An Introduction to Historical and Comparative Linguistics* [New York: Macmillan, 1972] 92)?

attempt has been made to be more specific. I propose the following hypothesis to explain the origin of the Greek term. The Greeks first encountered the sycomore while sailing along the coast of Palestine. This tree must have been one of the salient features of the land viewed from a ship, since then, as now, it grew right on the sandy beaches.⁷⁷ In the ports, during the Persian period, they learned the Aramaic name, שוקמין, a form known to us from Christian Palestinian Aramaic.⁷⁸ With a Greek case ending added, this became σκαμίνοϛ. The Greek sailors took this name with them to Egypt, which had sycomores, and to other places which did not. In the latter, they applied it to the mulberry tree, which, as Theophrastus noted, is similar in its leaves and other respects. Thus, the original meaning of the Greek term, “sycomore,” was preserved only in places that had sycomores.

Aquila’s Interpretation of בולט

Aquila renders בולט with the participle of Greek ἐρευνάω “seek, search, examine.”⁷⁹ This is the same Greek verb that he uses for חקר in Eccl 12:9, where the targum has בלש, “search.”⁸⁰ It is also the same Greek verb that LXX uses for חפש, “search” in Gen 31:35, 44:12, 1 Kgs 20:6, and 2 Kgs 10:23, where Onqelos and Jonathan have בלש. As S. Bochart points out, with a reference to Rashi, this interpretation seems to presuppose comparison of בולט with targumic Aramaic בלש.⁸¹ The latter is used transitively in the targum to 1 Kgs 20:6.

Aquila’s interpretation is, first and foremost, a conjecture based on phonetic similarity. Such conjectures are common in the exegesis of all ages when dealing with rare words. F. E. Greenspahn notes that “the assumption that similar consonants interchange” is implicit in the

⁷⁷ According to A. Danin, “The Origins of Israel’s Sycomores,” *Israel Land and Nature* 16 (1990/91), 59, the sycomore is so common on Israeli beaches that the average Israeli associates the two.

⁷⁸ See F. Schulthess, *Lexicon Syropalaestinum* (Berlin: G. Reimer, 1903) 214 s.v. שוקמין. The form שוקמין at Isa 9:10 is due either to analogy with the singular absolute or to scribal transposition of two similar letters.

⁷⁹ Origen, *Hexapla*, 2. 978.

⁸⁰ Origen, *Hexapla*, 2. 404; *The Aramaic Version of Qohelet* (ed. É. Levine; New York: Sepher-Hermon, 1978) 116 col. 3 line 4.

⁸¹ Bochart, *Hieroicoicon*, 1. 384 (ed. Rosenmüller, 1. 406).

renderings of the ancient versions.⁸² The ancient exegetes frequently ignore contrasts among Hebrew sibilants:

Thus טוּשׁ is rendered by the Aramaic טוּס in both the Targum and Peshitta, which also appears to translate עַמּוּשׁ as if it were עַמּוּס. עַמּוּס renders עַשְׂק in several Aramaic versions. שׁוּם is apparently understood as equivalent to סוּם by all the ancient versions, and שׁוּה is clearly equated with שׁוּס by Aramaic and Greek translations. Similarly, סַרְף is treated by the Targum (מִזְקִידָא) and Vulgate (*conburet*) as if it were שַׂרְף. Aquila treats שׁ like ס when rendering פִּשַׁח as “make lame” (ἐχλωσνε), while the Septuagint’s translation of שְׂקָד (ἐγρηγορηθη) is used often for שְׂקָד. Finally, Aquila’s ἀποθετος for שְׂפָן may indicate that שׁ and ז were also related.⁸³

To this list, one might add the interpretation of חֲבֹשׁ in Job 28:11 as חֲבֹשׁ (sibilants and labials) that Aquila shares with Theodotion.⁸⁴

Most of the examples listed above involve *śin*.⁸⁵ The assumption that *śin* interchanges with *šin* (same grapheme) or with *samekh* (same phoneme) is more natural and more common among the ancient exegetes than the assumption that *śin* interchanges with *samekh*.⁸⁶ The latter assumption appears in *derashot* of the אֵל תִּקְרֵי (“read not X but Y”) type,⁸⁷ but appears to be rare outside of midrash. The only non-midrashic attestations of this assumption that I know of are in Aquila’s interpretation of בַּלֵּס as equivalent to בַּלֶּשׁ and his interpretation of פִּשַׁח as equivalent to פִּסַּח.⁸⁸ Assuming that Aquila is, in fact, unusual in this regard, it is tempting to view this as a reflection of his background.

⁸² Greenspahn, *Hapax Legomena*, 52.

⁸³ Greenspahn, *Hapax Legomena*, 53.

⁸⁴ J. Reider, *Prolegomena to a Greek-Hebrew and Hebrew-Greek Index to Aquila* (Philadelphia: n.p., 1916) 92; reprinted in S. Jellicoe, *Studies in the Septuagint: Origins, Recensions and Interpretations* (New York: Ktav, 1974) 327. By coincidence, the Greek rendering is ἐξερευνάω “seek out,” almost the same verb as before.

⁸⁵ More precisely, *śin* with the realization [s]; see the article cited in the following footnote.

⁸⁶ See R. C. Steiner, “*Ketiv-Qere* or Polyphony: The שׁ-שׁ Distinction According to the Masoretes, the Rabbis, Jerome, Qirqisānī, and Hai Gaon,” in *Studies in Hebrew and Jewish Languages Presented to Shelomo Morag* (ed. M. Bar-Asher; Jerusalem: Bialik, 1996) *151-79.

⁸⁷ See the sources cited in Steiner, “*Ketiv-Qere*,” *156 n. 12.

⁸⁸ Compare Aquila’s rendering of וַיִּפְשַׁחֵנִי (Lam 3:11) with his rendering of פִּסַּחִים (Isa 33:23) and with LXX’s rendering of וַיִּפְסַח (2 Sam 4:4).

Aquila was a speaker of Latin and Greek from a non-Jewish family and a non-Semitic environment (Pontus in Anatolia). Presumably, he did not learn Hebrew and Aramaic until he was an adult. As such, he had only one voiceless sibilant in his native phonemic inventory, and it must have been difficult for him to distinguish *šin* from *samekh*. Indeed, even native Palestinian Jews whose primary language was Greek appear to have had difficulty distinguishing among the Semitic voiceless sibilants, not to mention the laryngeals. This can be seen in a bilingual (Greek-Aramaic) ossuary inscription from first-century C.E. Jericho.⁸⁹ The relative importance of the two languages in this inscription is clear: the Greek version appears twice, at the top and on the lid; the Aramaic version appears only once, at the bottom. Hence, when we find the name שלמציין written שלמשיין (and the word אמה “his mother” written (ה)מה) in the Aramaic version it is reasonable to suspect Greek influence.

A similar explanation has been suggested by E. Y. Kutscher for the form סלם = שלום, which appears once as a greeting in the Bar Kokhba letters:

סלם. This form is most surprising. It is true that interchanges of *šin* with *samekh* are found in the Qumran scrolls, as well as the Bar Kokhba letters . . . and also in Mishnaic Hebrew; however, there is no example of an interchange of *šin* with *samekh*. . . .

Perhaps one may suggest the following hypothesis: As mentioned, letters in Greek were found among the letters. One may assume that speakers of Greek did not know how to pronounce the sound *šin*, which is missing in their language, just as they did not know how to pronounce the laryngeals and pharyngeals, which do not exist in their language. . . .⁹⁰

Another factor that may have influenced Aquila’s interpretations of בלס and פשח is the fluid orthography current in his time. Among the examples of *šin* written for *samekh* at Qumran, we find פסח for פסח “Passover” (Exod 12:48).⁹¹ I do not mean to suggest that Aquila’s text

⁸⁹ L. Y. Rahmani, *A Catalogue of Jewish Ossuaries in the Collections of the State of Israel* (Jerusalem: Israel Antiquities Authority, 1994) 244 no. 801.

⁹⁰ E. Y. Kutscher, לשונן של האיגרות העבריות והארמיות של בר כוסבה ובני דורו, *Leš 25* (1960-61) 120-21.

⁹¹ E. Qimron, *The Hebrew of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (HSS 29; Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press: 1986) 28-29.

בולס שקמים — searching among sycomores to see which one's time has come to be cut down in order to add branches and which one is suitable for beams, for that is the practice: the virgin sycamore is cut down. And בולס is like בולש but (the former is written here because) Amos had a speech impediment, for that is what they said: Why was he called Amos? Because he was burdened (עָמוּס) in his speech/tongue, and Israel would call him פּסִילוֹס, as it says in the Pesiqta.⁹⁶

It is difficult to believe that Aquila's rather idiosyncratic interpretation occurred to Rashi independently. It seems more likely that Rashi learned of it from Byzantine Jews. D. S. Blondheim and N. R. M. de Lange have shown that Aquila's interpretations were preserved by Greek-speaking Jews until the Middle Ages.⁹⁷ Rashi's source may have been his pupil and amanuensis, R. Shemaiah. The latter knew Greek and was familiar with Byzantine coins and the customs of Byzantine Jewry; he may have come from southern Italy.⁹⁸

In resurrecting Aquila's interpretation, Rashi connected it to a tradition, recorded in rabbinic sources and in the introduction to Jerome's commentary on Amos, that Amos had some sort of problem in speaking.⁹⁹ For Rashi, the problem was a lisp that caused Amos to pro-

⁹⁶ Cf. *Pesiq. Rb. Kab.* 16. This version combines two traditions that are still separate in *Lev. Rab.* 10: the פּסִילוֹס tradition and an etymology of the name Amos offered by R. Phinehas. The relationship between the two would seem to be clarified by Jerome's prologue to Amos; see n. 99 below.

⁹⁷ D. S. Blondheim, "Échos du judéo-hellénisme," *REJ* 78 (1924) 1-14; N. R. M. de Lange, "Some New Fragments of Aquila on Malachi and Job?" *VT* 30 (1980) 291-94; "The Jews of Byzantium and the Greek Bible," in *Rashi 1040-1990: Hommage à Ephraïm E. Urbach* (ed. G. Sed-Rajna; Paris: Cerf, 1993) 207-8; "La tradition des 'révisions juives' au moyen âge: les fragments hébraïques de la Geniza du Caire," in "*Selon les Septante*": *Hommage à Marguerite Harl* (ed. G. Dorival and O. Munnich; Paris: Cerf, 1995) 134, 139-40.

⁹⁸ See A. Grossman, ספר היובל לרב מרדכי in ר' שמעיה השושני ופירושו לשיר השירים (ed. M. Bar-Asher; Jerusalem: Academon, 1992) 1. 37. M. Banitt (*Rashi: Interpreter of the Biblical Letter* [Tel-Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 1985] 79-130) claims that a tradition based on the Greek versions underlies most of Rashi's definitions of biblical terms. I am indebted to I. M. Ta-Shma for the latter reference.

⁹⁹ See M. Rahmer, "Die hebräischen Traditionen in den Werken des Hieronymus," *MGWJ* 42 (1898) 1-2. (I am indebted to S. Z. Leiman for this reference.) Jerome mentions the speech problem in his prologue to Amos; in the same prologue, a few lines earlier, and in the prologue to Joel, Jerome gives various interpretations of the name, but none of them has anything to do with Amos' being unskilled in speaking. It appears, therefore, that although Jerome knew the פּסִילוֹס tradition, he did not know R. Phinehas' etymology of the name עָמוּס; see n. 96 above.

nounce בולש as בולס. The terms used by the rabbis and Jerome, פסילוס and *imperitus sermone*, may also indicate that they had a lisp in mind.

The term פסילוס, derived from Greek ψελλός “inarticulate,” appears in a corrupted form (פסילים) in *y. Ned.* 1.2, 37a and *y. Naz.* 1.1, 51a.¹⁰⁰ There it refers to someone who, unable to pronounce [r] correctly, takes a vow to be a נויק instead of a נזיר.¹⁰¹ In all likelihood, the term has a similar denotation in midrashic sources that use it to gloss כבד לשון פה וכבד לשון (Exod 4:10).¹⁰² These sources are no doubt making the same point as other sources, midrashic and non-midrashic, that take כבד לשון פה וכבד לשון as referring to specific consonant groups that Moses was unable to pronounce correctly.¹⁰³ The same tradition is reflected in Saadia Gaon’s translation of ערל שפתים (Exod 6:12) as אלהג אלפם.¹⁰⁴ Arabic *ʿaltāgu* means “lispings, substituting one sound for another (e.g., *t* for *q*; *y* or *k* for *l*; *ġ* or *ʾ* for *r*; *ṭ* for *s*).”¹⁰⁵ It is, thus, the exact equivalent of פסילוס, and indeed in one translation from Greek, the phrase *li-man bibi lutġatun ʾaw ruttatun* “to one who has a *lutġah* or a

¹⁰⁰ I am indebted to S. Abramson ל”ז for these references.

¹⁰¹ According to Aristotle (*Problems*, 11.30), ψελλός is used of a speaker who elides sounds, while τραυλός is used of one who pronounces a specific sound incorrectly, e.g., a lisper. Semantically, then, פסילוס would appear to be equivalent to τραυλός rather than ψελλός. J. Duffy writes (e-mail communication, Feb. 24, 1999): “For *traulos* and *psellos* in actual practice there may well have been a certain lack of strictness in their use (e.g. vis-à-vis a definition by Aristotle). As a possible piece of evidence for such an assertion one could cite the Souda (or Suda) Lexicon, a 10th cent. compilation based on earlier sources. For *psellos* it gives three synonyms, namely, a. *asemos* = ‘indistinct’; b. *anarthros lalon* = ‘speaking inarticulately’; and c. *traulos*. In other words, it regards *psellos* and *traulos* as interchangeable.” In any event, neither the Greek evidence nor the Semitic evidence supports the translation “stutterer” for פסילוס in M. Sokoloff, *A Dictionary of Jewish Palestinian Aramaic of the Byzantine Period* (Ramat-Gan, Israel: Bar Ilan University Press, 1990) 440. Aristotle (*Problems*, 11.30) gives a third word with this meaning: ισχνόφθονος, referring to a speaker who is unable to quickly add one syllable to another. That word is used of Moses in Exod 4:10 and 6:30.

¹⁰² See מדרש דברים רבה (ed. S. Lieberman; 2nd ed.; Jerusalem: Shalem, 1992) 134-35.

¹⁰³ I owe this insight to S. Z. Leiman, who points to the three sources cited in הורה שלמה (ed. M. Kasher; Jerusalem: n. p., 1927-) 3. 173 note to §42. So too J. H. Tigay, “‘Heavy of Mouth’ and ‘Heavy of Tongue’: On Moses’ Speech Difficulty,” *BASOR* 231 (1978) n. 37. I learned of this discussion from A. Koller while reading the proofs of this monograph.

¹⁰⁴ *Oeuvres complètes de R. Saadia ben Iosef al-Fayyūmī* [ed. J. Derenbourg; Paris: E. Leroux, 1893-99] 88 l. 19.

¹⁰⁵ M. Ullmann, *Wörterbuch der klassischen arabischen Sprache* [Wiesbaden: O. Harrassowitz, 1970-] 2:189-91.

ruttah” renders τῶς ψελλοῖς καὶ τῶς τραυλοῖς.¹⁰⁶ The application of the term *ʾaltāgu* to Moses predates Saadia. It is found already in a paraphrase of Exod 4:10 by Abū Rāʾīṭa (bishop of Takrit in the early ninth century) and in the *Bayān* of Al-Jāhīz.¹⁰⁷

Jerome’s expression *imperītus sermone* “unskilled in speaking” has been understood in various ways. J. A. Soggin writes that “the great commentator was perhaps judging by the canons of Western rhetoric in his time.”¹⁰⁸ However, this suggestion overlooks the rabbinic parallels and the related term that Jerome uses in his commentary to Titus 3:9.¹⁰⁹ There he writes that the Jews “are accustomed to ridicule our lack of skill (*imperītia*), especially in the aspirates and certain letters that should be pronounced with a guttural roughness.” This passage shows that the term *imperītia* refers to “lack of skill” in pronouncing the characteristic sounds of Hebrew.

It is difficult to say whether Rashi was the first to connect Amos the בולט with Amos the פטילוס. Certainly neither Jerome nor the rabbis mention בולט in discussing Amos’ speech problem. On the other hand, the use of the Greek term פטילוס suggests the possibility that the tradition of Amos’ speech defect arose among Greek-speaking Jews as an explanation of Aquila’s translation. The label פטילוס, attested as a nickname already in the second century B.C.E. (Josephus, *Vita* 1 §3), may well have been applied to Greek-speaking Jews and/or Christians who were unable to pronounce Semitic sounds not found in Greek; cf. Jerome’s complaint about being ridiculed for his pronunciation of Hebrew. One might even speculate that Rashi received Aquila’s interpretation from his Byzantine source already tied to the פטילוס tradition. That would explain why Rashi passed up the opportunity to mention the speech defect at Amos 5:11, when interpreting בושסכם as בוטססכם.¹¹⁰

Those modern scholars who have embraced Rashi’s synthesis have usually toned down its midrashic appearance by transforming Amos’ lisp into a dialectal feature. M. Rahmer writes: “Näher liegt der Hin-

¹⁰⁶ Ullmann, *Wörterbuch*, 2.190a ll. 40-43. Thus, אלתג = *man bibi lutgatum* = ψελλός = פטילוס.

¹⁰⁷ Ullmann, *Wörterbuch*, 2.191a ll. 20-27.

¹⁰⁸ Soggin, *Amos*, 12.

¹⁰⁹ *S. Eusebii Hieronymi Stridonensis Presbyteri commentariorum in Epistolam ad Titum* (PL 26; ed. J. P. Migne; Paris: Garnier, 1884) 630.

¹¹⁰ Other alleged interchanges among the sibilants in Amos are cited by Zalcman, “Piercing,” 254 n. 11.

weis darauf, dass Amos sich einiger, wohl dem platteren Volksdialekte angehöriger Wortformen bedient, in denen merkwürdiger Weise gerade der S- und Zischlaut afficirt ist. so בולשׁ für בולשׁ (7, 14), בושׁשׁ für בושׁשׁ (5, 11). . . .”¹¹¹ W. R. Harper and S. N. Rosenbaum compare the dialectal peculiarity of the Ephraimites recorded in Judg 12:6.¹¹²

We come now to Rashi’s view of Amos’ search. According to Rashi, one of Amos’ occupations was searching among sycamore trees for those whose time had come to be cut down. At first glance, this interpretation seems bizarre, and it has found few adherents. Even in the Middle Ages, only Rashi’s student, Joseph Qara, accepted it. On closer inspection, however, the view has much to recommend it.

Rashi’s view of Amos as a silviculturist is based on rabbinic literature, in which the sycamore appears mainly as a valuable and renewable source of construction beams for roofing, etc. According to Rashi’s reading of the sources, the tree did not produce anything else that could conceivably have provided Amos with a source of income.¹¹³ Thus, he had little choice but to view Amos’ work with the sycamore in terms of the beams.

In his comment, Rashi refers to the practice, in the tannaitic period, of chopping down the young tree when it was strong enough to regenerate, leaving a stump 24 cm. high (the “sycamore anvil”).¹¹⁴ Every

¹¹¹ Rahmer, “Die hebräischen Traditionen,” 2.

¹¹² W. R. Harper, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Amos and Hosea* (ICC 13/1; New York: Scribner, 1905) 8; Rosenbaum, *Amos*, 48, 86-90. Rosenbaum (*Amos*, 89 n. 22) cites Z. Ben-Ḥayyim (נחם שומרון) [Jerusalem: Bialik/The Academy of the Hebrew Language, 1957-77] 4. 113) in support of the thesis that Ephraimite Hebrew lacked the sound [š]. In fact, Ben-Ḥayyim (עברית, 5. 24; *A Grammar of Samaritan Hebrew* [Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 2000] 36-37) shows the opposite: due to the merger of *ś with *š in Samaritan Hebrew, the sound [š] is far more common there than in Masoretic Hebrew! Moreover, Ben-Ḥayyim (עברית, 5. 24; *Grammar*, 36-37) explicitly denies any connection between this feature of Samaritan Hebrew and the inability of the Ephraimites to pronounce שבבלה. On the relation of Samaritan Hebrew to the northern dialect(s) of ancient Israel, see now R. C. Steiner, “Albounout ‘Frankincense’ and *Alsounalph* ‘Oxtongue’: Phoenician-Punic Botanical Terms from an Egyptian Papyrus and a Byzantine Codex,” *Or* 70 (2001) 101 n. 37. For the shibboleth incident, see now J. Blau, פתרונו קודמים וחדשים: עברית המקרא: פתרונו קודמים וחדשים, 9 דברי האקדמיה הלאומית הישראלית למדעים (2001) 3-10 and the literature cited there.

¹¹³ Rashi read *m. B. Bat.* 2.13 (*b. B. Bat.* 27b) as implying that the שקמה does not belong to the class of food trees (see Rashi’s commentary to *b. B. Meṣ* 109a, *b. Pes.* 53a, and *b. Suk.* 43a; I am indebted to A. Koller and D. Regev for the last two references). See further chapter 5 n. 40 below.

¹¹⁴ For a detailed analysis of this practice, see M. Kislev, — אשר בתבלישי לכיש, see M. Kislev,

seven years thereafter, the long straight limbs that grew from its stump were harvested for use as rafters.¹¹⁵ Sycomore beams (קורות שקמה) from the period have been found at Masada.¹¹⁶ The sycomore was an ideal source of such beams, thanks, in part, to its “extraordinary regenerative powers.”¹¹⁷ As for the quality of the wood, “its light weight and porous structure made it especially suitable for ceilings.”¹¹⁸ Sycomore beams had an important place in Israel’s economy, because they were available locally. This made them less expensive than cedar beams, which had to be imported.

It has long been suspected that at least some of the above was true already in the time of Amos.¹¹⁹ Until recently, the only basis for this suspicion was Isa 9:9: “sycomores have been chopped; we shall replace¹²⁰ them with cedars.” This popular boast of the eighth century reflects the same economic reality as *t. B. Meş. 8.32* and *b. B. Meş. 117b*, which deal with the permissibility of replacing a collapsed ceiling of sycomore beams with a ceiling of cedar beams.¹²¹ All of these imply that cedar beams were even more expensive than sycomore beams.

Not long ago, additional evidence for sycomore silviculture in the eighth century was pointed out. According to Kislev, twenty-two “sycomore anvils” with straight, developed beams growing out of them are depicted in the Assyrian reliefs of the siege of Lachish in 701.¹²² Z.

ירושלים וארץ-ישראל: ספר אריה קינדלר in זיהוי בראי דברי חז"ל (ed. J. Schwartz, Z. Amar and I. Ziffer; Tel-Aviv: Eretz Israel Museum, 2000), 23-30.

¹¹⁵ See *m. B. Meş. 9.9*, as interpreted by Rashi.

¹¹⁶ N. Lipschitz and G. Biger, השקמה בישראל בעת העתיקה לפי ממצאים בוטניים, *Hassadeh 72* (1992) 772.

¹¹⁷ N. Hareuveni, *Tree and Shrub*, 87. These powers are due to the abundance of starch stored in the trunk, branches and roots of the sycomore; see Kislev, השקמים, 26.

¹¹⁸ M. Zohary, *Plants of the Bible* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982) 68.

¹¹⁹ See, for example, Hepper, *Encyclopedia*, 112: “Although the sycomore is a kind of fig . . . , in Egypt and Palestine during biblical times, it was more important for its timber than for its fruits”; Danin, “Origins,” 62: “The practice of planting sycomores, mainly as a source of timber, is several thousand years old.” See also n. 135 below.

¹²⁰ The other meaning of החליף, also intended here, is “regenerate.” It is found in the context of cutting down (כרת, גדע) trees, cf. Job 14:7: “ועוד יחליף” “there is hope for a tree; if it is cut, it may yet regenerate” and *m. Abod. Zar. 3. 7*: “גידעו מה שהחליף” “if he chopped it and trimmed it for idolatrous worship and it regenerated, he may take away what it regenerated.”

¹²¹ See J. Feliks, עולם הצומח המקראי (Ramat-Gan: Massada, 1968) 54.

¹²² Kislev, השקמים, 23-30.

Amar argues that most of these are olive trees, but even he does not deny that some are sycomores.¹²³

Also from the eighth century is ABL 467, an Assyrian letter dealing with timber for construction. Lines 17-23 deal with the transportation of GIŠ *mu-us-ki* GIŠ.ÛR.MEŠ “beams of(?) *mušku*-wood.”¹²⁴ Thompson identifies *mušku* with Hebrew שִׁקְמוֹה, arguing that metathesis is not uncommon when there is an *m* in the word.¹²⁵ He could also have noted that the *u*-vowel in the first syllable matches that of Christian Palestinian Aramaic שִׁקְמוֹה, Greek σικαμόμυθος, and perhaps Arabic *sawqam* as well.¹²⁶ It is even possible that Akkadian *mušku*, if it was realized [mužgu] or [muzgu] in the Assyrian dialect,¹²⁷ is the source of the unattested Aramaic word that yielded Mishnaic Hebrew גַּמְזוּיֹה “sycomore figs” and Arabic *jummayz* “sycomore.”¹²⁸ In addition, the word GIŠ.ÛR = *gušūru* “beam” is equivalent in meaning to Hebrew קֹרֶה; indeed, Aramaic כְּשׁוּרָא < *gušūru* is used in some targums to translate קֹרֶה.¹²⁹ Hence the phrase GIŠ *mu-us-ki* GIŠ.ÛR.MEŠ is very

¹²³ Z. Amar, “הגידולים החקלאיים על-פי תבליט לכיש, *Bet Mikra* 159 (1998-99) 352-54. I am indebted to M. Kislev for this reference.

¹²⁴ So CAD s.v. *mušku*; AHw is similar.

¹²⁵ R. C. Thompson, *A Dictionary of Assyrian Botany* (London: The British Academy, 1949) 321-22. I am indebted to J. Huehnergard for this reference. For metathesis in Akkadian, see GAG (including Ergänzungen) §36, where one of the examples is the name of a fruit-tree. For a list of Akkadian-Hebrew cognates in which the order of the corresponding consonants is different, see H. Tawil, “Late Hebrew-Aramaic סַפַּר, Neo-Babylonian sirpu/sirapu: A Lexicographical Note IV,” *Bet Mikra* 154-55 (1997-98) 340-41. At least some of these must be the product of metathesis in Akkadian. See also chapter 2 nn. 39 and 44 below.

¹²⁶ See chapter 3 n. 29 below.

¹²⁷ It is well-known from loanwords and transcriptions that, in Assyria, Akkadian š was realized [s] and *k* was realized [g] in many environments, e.g., Šarru-kin > סַרְרִינִן > *šaknu* > סַכְנִן; see S. A. Kaufman, *The Akkadian Influences on Aramaic* (AS 19; Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press, 1974) 139-41; A. R. Millard, “Assyrian Royal Names in Biblical Hebrew,” *JSS* 21 (1976) 4; F. M. Fales, *Aramaic Epigraphs on Clay Tablets of the Neo-Assyrian Period* (Rome: Università degli studi “La Sapienza,” 1986) 59-66. This would suggest that *mušku* was pronounced [musgu] or, with voicing assimilation, [muzgu]. Alternatively, since the single Assyrian attestation of the word is written *mu-us-ki*, the pronunciation could be [mušgu] or, with voicing assimilation, [mužgu]. The major difficulty with this theory is the absence of voicing in מַסְכָּן < *muškēnu* and נִשְׁךְ < Nusku, but it is not insurmountable.

¹²⁸ See chapter 2 n. 12 below. If this conjecture is correct, the word for “sycomore” went from the Arabian Peninsula to Israel and (from there?) to Mesopotamia, whence it bounced back to Israel and Arabia, undergoing metathesis twice in the process.

¹²⁹ See J. Levy, *Chaldäisches Wörterbuch über die Targumim* (Leipzig: Baumgärtner, 1867-68) 393 s.v. כְּשׁוּרָא.

close to Mishnaic Hebrew קורות שקמה (*m. Shebi.* 4.5, etc.).¹³⁰ Thus, if Thompson's identification is correct, ABL 467 is further evidence for the use of sycamore beams in construction in the ancient Near East.¹³¹ They must have been imported by the Assyrians, since the tree does not grow in Iraq.¹³²

We have no reason to believe that sycamore silviculture in Israel began only in Amos' time. Already in David's time, there were sycomores in Israel, in the Shephelah.¹³³ The importance that David attached to his sycamore groves is seen by his appointment of one Baal-hanan as overseer בשפלה אשר והשקמים, "over the olive

¹³⁰ There is, of course, a syntactic difference: the Hebrew phrase exhibits the genitive construction, while, as Thompson (*Dictionary*, 321) saw, the Akkadian phrase exhibits apposition. We must therefore translate: "(as for) the *mušku*-wood, the beams (of/which . . .)." For a translation of the Akkadian phrase based on a different view of the syntax, see G. B. Lanfranchi and S. Parpola, *The Correspondence of Sargon II, Part II: Letters from the Northern and Northeastern Provinces* (State Archives of Assyria 5; Helsinki: Helsinki University, 1990) 209. I am indebted to H. Tawil for this reference.

¹³¹ The only other occurrence of *mušku* recorded by the dictionaries is in a lexical list, which equates *ur-zi-nu* with *mu-uš-ku*, both preceded by the plant determinative Ú; see CAD and AHW s.v. Based on this text, Thompson (*Dictionary*, 321) believes that *urzin(n)u* is "probably the same as . . . (b) (^{šam})(^{is})*Mus(š)ku, Ficus sycomorus* L." It appears that, for Thompson, the identification of *urzin(n)u* as *Ficus sycomorus* rests largely on the phonetic similarity between *mušku* and שקמה. It is, therefore, surprising that the dictionaries follow Thompson with regard to *urzin(n)u* (AHW s.v. *urzinu(m)*: "eine Sykomore?"; CAD s.v. *šimeššalú*: "*urzinnu* . . . sycamore[?]") while offering no identification for *mušku*. In any event, if the *urzin(n)u*-tree is the sycamore, then the latter was known very early in Mesopotamia, since the term is attested already in Old Babylonian texts.

¹³² C. C. Townsend and E. Guest, *Flora of Iraq* (Baghdad: Ministry of Agriculture, 1980) 4/1. 87. I am indebted to J. Huehnergard for this reference. Cf. also Strabo's description of Babylonia (*Geography* 7. 200-201 [16.1.5]): "On account of the scarcity of timber their buildings are finished with beams and pillars of palm wood . . . for, with the exception of the palm tree, most of the country is bare of trees and bears shrubs only."

¹³³ See 1 Kgs 10:27 ויתן המלך את הכסף בירושלם כאבנים ואת הארזים נתן כשקמים אשר בשפלה לרב, repeated in 2 Chr 1:15 and 9:27. We are not told precisely where these groves were, but the description of the Shephelah in Josh 15:33-44 includes the town of Hagedera. The latter was presumably the home-town of Baal-hanan the Gederite, the man in charge of David's sycomores (1 Chr 27:28). One could argue that just as the cattle in the Sharon were supervised by a Sharonite (1 Chr 27:29), so too the sycomores in the Shephelah were supervised by a local person. If this argument is correct, David's sycomores must have been in the vicinity of Geder. For a different view, see Galil, השקמה,

trees and the sycomores in the Shephelah” (1 Chr 27:28).¹³⁴ David undoubtedly had ambitious construction plans for his new capital, and he needed a cheap, abundant source of wood to realize them. Satisfying this need was no doubt the responsibility of Baal-hanan.¹³⁵ He may be compared to Asaph, the “keeper of the king’s park” in Nehemiah’s time, whose job was to supply “timber for roofing the gatehouses of the temple fortress and the city walls and for the house” of any official who had the authority to demand it (Neh 2:8). In Egypt, too, the sycamore was a source of roof timbers.¹³⁶ In that country, artefacts made of sycamore wood have been preserved from the third millennium B.C.E. From the Fifth Dynasty we have dummy vases and a column base and from the Sixth Dynasty we have a coffin; sycamore roots and figs have survived from the Predynastic period.¹³⁷ It is clear, then, that Rashi’s ideas about the economic role of the sycamore in the biblical period were quite accurate.

¹³⁴ For the authenticity and antiquity of the list of David’s stewards, see J. M. Myers, *I Chronicles* (AB 12; 1st ed.; Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1965) 185; T. N. D. Mettinger, *Solomonic State Officials* (ConBOT 5; Lund: CWK Gleerup, 1971) 87; M. Heltzer, המשק המלכותי של דוד המלך לעומת המשק המלכותי של אוגרית, *ErIsr* 20 (1989) 175 and 179 n. 13 and the literature cited there; S. Japhet, *I & II Chronicles* (OTL; London: SCM, 1993), 477-79; and I. Jaruzelska, *Amos and the Officialdom in the Kingdom of Israel* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu im. Adama Mickiewicza, 1998) 183-84. Japhet notes that many of the names on the list fit very well in the period of David. We may add that the Baalistic name Baal-hanan does too; see M. Noth, *Die israelitischen Personennamen im Rahmen der gemeinsemitischen Namengebung* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1928) 119-21. We may also add that the preposing of the title המלך דוד in the phrase למלך דוד at the end of the list (1 Chr 27:31) may also point to a pre-exilic source; see E. Y. Kutscher, הגלשון והרקע הלשוני של מגילת ישעיהו השלמה ממגילות ים המלח, *ErIsr* 10 (1959) 340; A. Hurvitz, בין לשון ללשון: לתולדות לשון המקרא בימי בית, *ErIsr* 10 (1959) 45. Of the other eight instances of המלך דוד in Chronicles, at least five are found in Kings, whereas none of the nine occurrences of המלך דוד in Chronicles are to be found there. For the origin and transmission of such lists, see also N. Na’aman, “Sources and Composition in the History of David,” in *The Origins of the Ancient Israelite States* (ed. V. Fritz and P. R. Davies; JSOTSup 228; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996) 170-86. For the existence of crown estate in David’s time, see C. Schäfer-Lichtenberger, “Sociological and Biblical Views of the Early State,” in *The Origins of the Ancient Israelite States* (ed. V. Fritz and P. R. Davies; JSOTSup 228; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996) 104 n. 71.

¹³⁵ Cf. O. Borowski, *Agriculture in Iron Age Israel* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1987) 128: “It seems that the royal sycamore groves in the time of David were maintained for timber rather than food.” I am indebted to J. Huehnergard for this reference.

¹³⁶ Gale, et al., “Wood,” 340.

¹³⁷ Gale, et al., “Wood,” 340-41.

בולס: Etymology and Meaning

Bochart's Etymology of בולס

The publication of Samuel Bochart's *Hierozyicon* in 1663 brought the problem of בולס considerably closer to a satisfactory solution. Bochart pointed out that both Arabic and Ethiopian have a word *balas* meaning “fig (fruit or tree).” He noted that in the Ethiopian (Geez) translation of the Bible, this word usually renders תאונה, but in Ps 77:52 (and, one might add, Amos 7:14), it renders שקמה.¹ Bochart suggested that בולס is the participle of a denominative verb, formed from the word for “fig (incl. sycamore fig).” Such a verb, he said, would be comparable to the denominative כורם “vintner” < כרם “vineyard” and to Greek denominatives like σταζω “to gather or pluck ripe figs” < στατή “fig.”²

Bochart's theory can be supported by other parallels. First there is the participle בוקר, used alongside בולס in Amos 7:14. Bochart himself says earlier that בוקר is “from the word בקר *bakar*, i.e., ox.”³ Indeed,

¹ Bochart, *Hierozyicon*, I, 384 (ed. Rosenmüller, I, 406); cf. also H. Ludolf, *Ad suam Historiam aethiopicam antehac editam Commentarius* (Frankfurt am Main: J. D. Zunner, 1691) 204; A. Dillmann, *Lexicon Linguae Aethiopicae* (Leipzig: T. O. Weigel, 1865) 487; and W. Leslau, *Comparative Dictionary of Ge'ez* (Wiesbaden: O. Harrassowitz, 1987) 97.

² Bochart, *Hierozyicon*, I, 384-85 (ed. Rosenmüller, I, 406-7).

³ Bochart, *Hierozyicon*, I, 383 (ed. Rosenmüller, I, 405). See chapter 4 below.

according to Bochart, all three participles used to refer to Amos' occupations are denominatives derived from nouns on the pattern *CaCaC*: בולס is derived from *בָּלַס, בוקר from בָּקַר, and נוקד from נָקַד.⁴

Another important parallel is the denominative verb *ballasa* “to pick figs” in postclassical Yemeni Arabic; its participle, *miballis* (classical vocalization: *muballis*), refers to “one who picks figs from a tree and sells them in the market.”⁵ The Egyptian Arabic term *gemamzi(a)* “sycomore fig grower(s),” derived from *gimmēz* “sycomore,” is also relevant, even though it is not a participle.⁶ This word is recorded by Brown and Walsingham, who write: “all the work in connection with the crop [of sycomore figs], including the beating of the tree [with a wooden club, so as to make a ring around the trunk] is done by the ‘gemamzia’ who buy the year’s fruit in advance.”⁷ “The gashing of the figs is also done by the *gemamzia*.”⁸

A related Mishnaic Hebrew denominative participle, מגמזין, has long been known from one witness to a rabbinic text listing agricultural activities forbidden during the sabbatical year.⁹ Some scholars have dismissed the form as a scribal error for the form attested in most witnesses, מגמזין,¹⁰ but Tirosh-Becker has discovered a new attestation of מגמזין whose date and place of origin command considerable respect.¹¹

⁴ For the last denominative, see Bochart, *Hierozoicon*, 1. 442-43.

⁵ M. Piamenta, *Dictionary of Post-classical Yemeni Arabic* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1990-1) 38; I. al-Selwi, *Jemenitische Wörter in den Werken von al-Hamdāni und Našwān und ihre Parallelen in den semitischen Sprachen* (Berlin: D. Reimer, 1987) 44.

⁶ It is a broken plural with a *nisba*-ending. It is certainly not accurate to gloss it with an infinitive, as does V. Täckholm, *Faraos blomster* (Stockholm: Generalstabens Litografiska Anstalt, 1969) 51.

⁷ Brown and Walsingham, “Sycamore,” 11. The beating of the tree, described more fully on p. 10 and explained in the caption to figure 1 (see also Galil, *השקמה*, 341, last four lines), is also reported in a sixteenth-century source; see Prosper Alpin, *Plantes d’Egypte* (trans. R. de Fenoyl; Cairo: Institut Français d’Archéologie Orientale du Caire, 1980) 21.

⁸ Brown and Walsingham, “Sycamore,” 10.

⁹ MS Vienna at *t. Shebi*. 1.11.

¹⁰ Goldmann, *La figue*, 44; J. Levy, *Neuhebräisches und chaldäisches Wörterbuch über die Talmudim und Midraschim* (Leipzig: F. A. Brockhaus, 1876-89) 1. 319.

¹¹ It appears in a citation from *Mekhilta de-R. Simeon bar Yoḥai* preserved in Yeshu‘ah b. Yehudah’s commentary to Exod 23:11: ואין מפסלין ואין מצדדין ואין מגמזין. On the last of these phrases, ואין מגמזין, the exegete comments: ובוּלס מִתֵּל וּבִלְסָא שֶׁמֵּיָמִים “they mean: one may not circumcise [sycomore figs during the sabbatical year],

Thus, it is now more likely that גַּמְזוּיָן is an authentic denominative from Mishnaic Hebrew גַּמְזוּיָה, a noun related to Arabic *jummayz*.¹²

But what is the meaning of גַּמְזוּיָה? Does this term refer to sycamore branches (E. Hareuveni, following the Babylonian Geonim) or sycamore figs (F. Goldmann and E. S. Rosenthal, following the Palestinian Talmud) or both (A. Geiger and S. Lieberman)?¹³ Rosenthal's claim that the Geonic interpretation relates to a lexically distinct variant reading current in Babylonia (גַּמְזוּיָה instead of גַּמְזוּיָה) undermines the rationale for the compromise position, but that position still retains a certain attraction, since the sycamore, like other trees of the genus *Ficus*, has specialized leafless branchlets ("panicles") that develop into sycamore figs.¹⁴ Indeed, these figs, or "syconia," are not true fruits at all:

like וּבֹרֵחַ שְׁקָמִים." This comment, written in 11th-century Palestine, is preserved in two manuscripts, one of which may itself be from 11th-century Palestine; see Tirosh-Becker, "Rabbinic Quotation," 382-84 and chapter 1 n. 59 above. Other attestations of the root גַּמְזוּ in the *piel* stem are found in liturgical poetry. In the 11th-century poem אֲמַרְרָ בְּכִי, one of the סְלִיחוֹת-prayers for the Seventeenth of Tammuz, we find the verbal noun גַּמְזוּ rhyming with מִזְמוֹר and תְּמוֹנָה; A. Rosenfeld, *The Authorised Selichot for the Whole Year* (London: I. Labworth, 1962) 368. However, it is used there metaphorically, in the phrase לְשֹׁבֵר בְּחֹרֵי גַמְזוּ (based on Lam 1:15), and so its meaning there is doubly uncertain. Much earlier but badly preserved (in a Geniza fragment) is the attestation of גַּמְזוּ (again rhyming with תְּמוֹנָה) in the poem אֵיל דְּכַמְן בְּהַנִּסָּן, one of the שְׁבַעֲתָא לְלַל-prayers composed by Joseph b. Nisan of Shaveh-kiriathaim towards the end of the Byzantine period; see *Ma'agarim: Second Century B.C.E. — First Half of the Eleventh Century C.E.* (CD-ROM; Jerusalem: The Academy of the Hebrew Language, The Hebrew Language Historical Dictionary Project, 2001) s.v. גַּמְזוּ. If correctly restored, the poem refers to dew as a therapy (זֵיִר וְחִבּוּשׁ), cf. Isa 1:6) for גַּמְזוּ.

¹² The relationship between these two nouns has been recognized since the Middle Ages; see S. Fraenkel, *Die aramäischen Fremdwörter im Arabischen* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1886) 140. Presumably, both are borrowed from Aramaic, even though the Aramaic etymon is not firmly attested. For the possibility that Aramaic *gmz* derives indirectly (via Akkadian) from *šqm*, see chapter 1 above.

¹³ E. Hareuveni, גַּמְזוּיָה, *Leš* 11 (1940-41) 39-41; Goldmann, *La figue*, 44; E. S. Rosenthal, מחקרי תלמוד: קובץ מחקרים... מוקדש לזכרו של פרופ' אליעזר בירורי מלים וחילופי נוסח שמשון רונטל (ed. M. Bar-Asher and D. Rosenthal; Jerusalem: Magnes, 1993) 29-36 (I am indebted to S. Friedman for this reference); A. Geiger, "Bibliographische Anzeigen," *ZDMG* 12 (1858) 363; S. Lieberman, תוספתא כפשוטה: באור ארוך לתוספתא (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1955-88) 1. 360-1.

¹⁴ M. A. Murray, "Fruits, Vegetables, Pulses and Condiments," in *Ancient Egyptian Materials and Technology* (ed. P. T. Nicholson and I. Shaw; Cambridge: University

The syconium, an inflorescence unique to the genus *Ficus*, is a fleshy branch transformed into a hollow receptacle which bears numerous minute flowers on its inner surface. . . . The true fruits are small drupelets (“seeds”) each developing in a female flower inside the syconium.¹⁵

Thus, the meaning of גַּמְזוּיָן is uncertain. The aforementioned Karaite commentary interpreted it as referring to the gashing of sycamore figs. Modern scholars, to the extent that they have viewed this form as authentic, have generally taken it as referring to removing twigs/branches.¹⁶ As noted above, this interpretation is based on the assumption that גַּמְזוּיָן could refer to twigs/branches, an assumption that has now been called into question by Rosenthal.

Bochart's Etymology and a Postbiblical Survival of בולט “Sycamore Fig”

The theory that בולט is a denominative presupposes that Hebrew had a noun בולט or the like referring to the sycamore fig. G. Hoffmann states the presupposition explicitly: “בָּלֵט* war . . . wohl Name der Sykomorenfrucht.”¹⁷ But where is the evidence for that noun in Hebrew? The asterisk, indicating that the form is unattested, is an acknowledgment that Bochart's theory is based on an unproven conjecture.

It is safe to say that one of the reasons for the skepticism of Weiss (“the etymology of בולט is problematic”) and the other scholars cited

Press, 2000) 622. It was E. Hareuveni (גַּמְזוּיָן, 39-41) who first called attention to a possible connection between this peculiarity and the conflicting interpretations of the term גַּמְזוּיָן; however, he himself concluded that the term is properly used only of branchlets (sycamore and carob).

¹⁵ D. Zohary, “Fig,” in *Evolution of Crop Plants* (ed. J. Smartt and N. W. Simmonds; 2nd ed.; New York: Wiley, 1995) 367, speaking of the ordinary (Carian) fig. Cf. I. J. Condit, *The Fig* (Waltham, Mass.: Chronica Botanica, 1947) 23.

¹⁶ Geiger, “Anzeigen,” 363; Lieberman, תוספתא כפשוטה, 2. 493; Moreshet, ליקסיקון, 123. S. Friedman (personal communication) notes that the continuation of Lieberman's discussion (loc. cit.) seems to indicate that this interpretation does not reflect his final conclusion.

¹⁷ G. Hoffmann, “Versuche zu Amos,” *ZAW* 3 (1883) 119.

above¹⁸ is the near-universal belief that no trace of such a noun survives in any period of Hebrew. I, too, was under that impression when I began my investigation; I assumed that the original noun had fallen into disuse at some point after the time of Amos. When I consulted the dictionaries of Levy, Jastrow, Ben-Yehudah, and the Academy of the Hebrew Language (on microfiche and CD-ROM), I found nothing remotely relevant under the root בלס.¹⁹

As my investigation progressed, I was astonished to discover that two of the earliest medieval commentaries to *Seder Zeraim* of the Mishnah tell a very different story.²⁰ The Yemenite expansion of the eleventh-century commentary of Nathan Av ha-Yeshivah²¹ to *m. Maas*. 2.8 reads: “בלסים: inferior figs known as *khanas* (sycomore).”²²

¹⁸ See chapter 1 above.

¹⁹ Levy, *Wörterbuch*; M. Jastrow, *A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature* (London: Luzac, 1903); Eliezer Ben-Yehuda, *מלון הלשון העברית הישנה והחדשה* (New York/London: T. Yoseloff, 1960); *Materials for the Dictionary, Series I: 200 B.C.E. — 300 C.E.* (Jerusalem: The Academy of the Hebrew Language, *The Historical Dictionary of the Hebrew Language*, 1988); *Ma'agarim: Second Century B.C.E. — First Half of the Eleventh Century C.E.* (CD-ROM).

²⁰ The readings of most, but not all, of the textual witnesses cited below are recorded in *משנה זרעים עם שינויי נוסחאות* 2. 192, 219.

²¹ Two manuscripts of the expansion are extant: MS British Library Or. 11117 (G. Margoliouth, *Catalogue of the Hebrew and Samaritan Manuscripts in the British Museum* [London: The British Museum, Dept. of Oriental Printed Books and Manuscripts, 1899-1935] 4. 161) and MS JTS R 1492. For the history of the latter manuscript, see M. Z. Fox (H. Fox), תשלום המלקט מפירוש רב נתן אב הישיבה למשנה, in *לראש יוסף*: מחקרים בהכמת ישראל (ed. J. Tobi; Jerusalem: Afikim, 1995) 371-86. Genizah fragments of the original commentary have been identified by N. Danzig and H. Fox; unfortunately our passage is not preserved in them (oral communication from H. Fox). One of those fragments, originally called to my attention by E. Hurvitz, has been published by Fox; see M. Z. Fox (H. Fox), המשנה בתימן; כתוביד מפירוש רב נתן אב הישיבה, *Asufot* 8 (1994) 161-67. It shows that the original commentary consisted of short glosses to individual words, much like “words of the Mishnah” and “difficult words” treated in N. Alony, *מחקרי לשון וספרות* (Jerusalem: Ben Zvi Institute, 1986) 1. 137-98, esp. 172-73. Indeed, the remnant of the name of the work preserved on the fragment—מילין—confirms that it belongs to the genre of lexical commentaries on the Mishnah.

²² MS British Library Or. 11117, f. 21: הבלסים תין דני ערף באלנס. JTS R 1492 f. 65a reads באלבלס תין דני ערף באלנס. Both *khanas* “sycomore” and *balas* “fig” are peculiar to the dialect of Yemen. Assuming that the words “ערף באלנס” were added by the editor, it is clear that he must have been a Yemenite (Qafih’s view), not an Egyptian

Sycamore figs fit nicely in the aforementioned passages from the Mishnah. *M. Maas.* 2.7-8 deals with limitations on the right of a worker to eat the figs (הַאֲנִים) that he was hired to pick. While working with an inferior variety (called בלסים by Nathan Av ha-Yeshivah and לבסין or the like by most other witnesses), he may not eat a superior variety (בנות שבע)²⁶ and vice versa. There is no difficulty in assuming that the term הַאֲנִים in Mishnaic Hebrew—like the terms הַאֲנִים in medieval Hebrew,²⁷ הַאֲנִי in Syriac,²⁸ *tīn* in Arabic,²⁹ *ficilficus* in Latin,³⁰ and *figs* in English³¹—could be used in a broad sense to include sycamore figs. And sycamore figs were certainly considered inferior in the time of the Mishnah.³²

M. Ter. 11.4 (and *m. Uqṣin* 1.6) contains a list of fruits that reads, according to Isaac b. Melchizedek of Siponto and the Babylonian Genizah fragment: הַאֲנִין וְגִרְגָרוֹת וְהַבְּלִיסִים וְהַחֲרוּבִין. Here again we have the collocation with הַאֲנִים “figs,” this time augmented by גִּרְגָרוֹת

²⁶ According to *y. Bik.* 1.3, 63d, this is the preferred variety of figs for the first fruit offering, since it is מִן הַמִּיבָחָר “among the choicest.” According to one opinion in *Gen. Rab.* 15 (מדרש בראשית רבא) [ed. J. Theodor and C. Albeck; Jerusalem: Wahrmann, 1965] 140-1), the irresistible fruit eaten by Adam and Eve (like the leaves that they subsequently wore) were from a fig tree of the בנות שבע variety.

²⁷ Estori Farḥi (כפתור ופרח) [ed. A. M. Luncz; 3rd ed; Jerusalem: A. M. Luncz, 1899] 527 lines 2-3) glosses בנות שקמה with הַאֲנִים מִדְּבַרֵי־וֹת “wild figs” and הַאֲנִי פִרְעָה “Pharaoh’s figs.”

²⁸ Bar Serošwai (c. 900 C.E.) *apud* Bar Bahlul (*Lexicon*, 2005 lines 14-15) defines שִׁקְמָא as tasteless הַאֲנִי, which the Arabs call *jummayz*. Among the definitions given by Ishodad of Merv in his commentary to Amos 7:14 (*Commentaire* [CSCO 303] 4. 90 lines 11-12), we find הַאֲנִי דְּבַרֵּא “wild figs.”

²⁹ *Book of Plants* by ʿAbū Ḥanīfa al-Dīnawar *apud* ʿAbd al-Laṭīf al-Baġdādī, *Kitāb al-ʿiḫḫādah wa-l-ʿiṭibār*, 22 lines 15-16: *wa-min ʿajānisi t-tīni tīnu l-jummayzi wa-huwa tīnun ḥulwun raḥbun*. . . . “One of the kinds of fig is the sycamore fig, which is a sweet juicy fig. . . .” Maimonides (משנה, 1. 132) glosses בנות שקמה with תין ברי “the sycamore, which is also a wild fig.”

³⁰ According to Jerome (*Commentarii in Prophetas Minores*, 324 line 402), the *sycamina* bear *agrestes* . . . *ficus* “wild figs.”

³¹ See Condit, *Fig*, 3.

³² In *t. Ter.* 5.7, גִּרְגָרוֹת, “sycamore figs,” are mentioned among the fruits whose תְּרוּמָה “the priests do not care about.” Strabo (*Geography*, 8. 148-49 [17.2.4]) reports that the fruit “is not prized for its taste.” The Palestinian Talmud (*y. Dem.* 1.1, 21c) implies that the owners of sycamore trees normally abandoned the figs; cf. chapter 1 n. 53 above. See also chapter 5 n. 40 below.

“dried figs.” The collocation with חרובין “carob fruit” is reminiscent of the frequent pairing of the sycomore tree with the carob tree in rabbinic literature.³³ Theophrastus too puts the two together.³⁴

It should therefore come as no surprise that the Yemenite editor of the commentary of Nathan Av ha-Yeshivah uses the Yemeni Arabic term *khanas* “sycomore”³⁵ to gloss כליסים as well as בלסים and that Maimonides takes כליסים to be a kind of fig. A. Kohut, too, takes the word as referring to a type of fig, and emends to בלוסין, while Sirillo emends to לובסין based on his text of *m. Maas.* 2.8.³⁶

The term כליסים also occurs in *t. Ter.* 5.6-7, where the context is seemingly less favorable to such emendations. According to *t. Ter.* 5.6, only one sixtieth of the harvest need be given as תרומה in the case of certain produce that the priests did not care about. The only examples given are חרובין והכליסין. In 5.7, a longer list of such produce is given: הקצח והכליסין והחרובין וגמזיות ותרמוסין ושעורין וידומיות. Since גמזיות means “sycomore figs,”³⁷ emending הכליסין to הבליסין would seem to be precluded—not only in *t. Ter.* 5.6-7 but also in *m. Ter.* 11.4 and *m. Uqṣin* 1.6. However, it is possible that the list in *t. Ter.* 5.7 is a composite, reflecting two different traditions, since the first three items have the definite article, while the last three do not. The term for sycomore figs may have been בליסין in one tradition and גמזיות in the other. It is

³³ See the many examples cited in Goldmann, *La figue*, 42 n. 8 and add *m. B. Bat.* 2.13, 4.8, 9; *b. Pes.* 56b; *b. Men.* 71b.

³⁴ After his description of two varieties of sycomore (the “Egyptian sycamine” and the “Cyprian fig”), Theophrastus continues (*Enquiry*, 1.294-95 [4.2.4]): “Like this too is the tree which the Ionians call carob; for this too bears most of its fruit on the stem . . . ; some call it the ‘Egyptian fig’—erroneously; for it does not occur at all in Egypt, but in Syria and Ionia and also in Cnidos and Rhodes.”

³⁵ JTS R 1492 f. 131a ברי תין וקיל וקיל ואלהאלוק וקיל תין ברי 131a. *Tālūq* is another Yemeni botanical term, taken here to be a synonym of *khanas* = *Ficus sycomorus*; see also Pianta, *Dictionary*, 52. However, *tāluq* is identified by P. Forskål (*Flora Aegyptiaco-Arabica* [Hauniæ: Ex officina Mölleri, 1775] 179 and CXXIV) as the Yemeni term for *Ficus vata*. Forskål’s identification is accepted by G. Schweinfurth, “Sammlung arabisch-äthiopischer Pflanzen,” *Bulletin de l’Herbier Boissier* 4 (1896) Appendix II, 129-31; A. Al-Hubaishi and K. Müller-Hohenstein, *An Introduction to the Vegetation of Yemen* (Eschborn: Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit, 1984) 162, 196; and P. Behnstedt, *Die nordjemenitischen Dialekte* (Wiesbaden: L. Reichert, 1985-92) 2. 138.

³⁶ Nathan b. Yehiel, ערוך השלם, 4. 241a s.v. כלס; Sirillo, מסכת תרומות, 159b.

³⁷ See at nn. 13-14 above.

also possible that Mishnaic Hebrew בלס referred not to the sycomore fig but to an inferior variety of the common (Carian) fig.³⁸

Despite all of the uncertainties, it is clear that the noun בלס survives in Mishnaic Hebrew (if not in its original form, then certainly in the metathesized form לבס),³⁹ referring to the sycomore fig or some other sort of inferior fig. One may surmise that, if it referred specifically to the *sycomore* fig, it was already an archaic literary term by the time that the Mishnah was edited, supplanted in colloquial usage by גמזויה “sycomore figs” and the more transparent term בנות שקמה “fruits of the sycomore.”⁴⁰ That would help to explain why, in most manuscripts of the Mishnah, there is no trace of בלס(י)ים. Instead, as noted above, we find forms like לבסין in *m. Maas.* 2.7-8 and כליסים in *m. Ter.* 11.4, *m. Uqṣin* 1.6, and *t. Ter.* 5.6-7.⁴¹ It is thus understandable that the form בלס does not appear as the name of a type of fig in the four major dictionaries of Mishnaic Hebrew cited above.⁴² However, it is less understandable that the metathesized form, לבס, found in 14 of 17 manuscript witnesses to *m. Maas.* 2.8,⁴³ not to mention the most common edition of the Mishnah (Vilna, 1908), is also unrecorded in these dictionaries or else buried in another entry as a variant reading.⁴⁴

³⁸ For the varieties of the common fig in the Near East, see Condit, *Fig*, 22-23.

³⁹ It is not impossible that the language actually had both בלס and לבס. For metathesis involving *lamed*, cf. שבלה-שלמה, שבלה-בלהה, בהלה-בלהה, Ezra 4:4 Kt מבלהים Qr מבהלים, etc. For metathesis from the same semantic field, cf. אלנומים-אלמים and n. 44 below. The antiquity of the form לבס would be confirmed if HALAT s.v. בלס, were right in identifying the Egyptian *nbs*-tree with the sycomore, but see chapter 3 n. 60 below.

⁴⁰ For בנות “daughters of” used in the sense of “fruit of (a tree),” see Goldmann, *La figue*, 44 on Syriac אסא בנת ארוא, בנת ארוא, etc. and Y. Feliks, צמחי התנ”ך: עצי־פרי למוניהם: בנות הדס = בנת אסא, בנות שבע, בנות חריע (Jerusalem: R. Mass, 1994) 200 on בנות חריע, probably an Aramaism.

⁴¹ Some sources even have קליסין instead of כליסים: Codex Parma B (De Rossi 497) at *m. Uqṣin* 1.6; פירוש הנאונים לספר שהרות (ed. J. N. Epstein; Jerusalem/Tel-Aviv: Magnes/Devir, 1982) 140.

⁴² See n. 19 above.

⁴³ So according to the files of התלמוד הישראלי השלם. I am indebted to Rabbi J. Hutner for granting me access to these files. The summary in שינויי עם שינויי נטחארה 2, 219, cites fewer manuscripts.

⁴⁴ One must turn to a concordance of the Mishnah to find an entry for לבס, referring to a type of fig; see C. Y. Kasovsky, אוצר לשון המשנה (Tel-Aviv: Massadah, 1967) 2, 1043. It is totally absent from the dictionaries of Ben-Yehudah and the Academy of the Hebrew Language. In Levy, *Wörterbuch*, 236, it appears s.v. בלופסין. In Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 640, it is listed s.v. כלופסין. It should be noted that Jastrow’s gloss, “Lesbian fig,”

The survival of this word in rabbinic literature but not in the Bible should not be surprising. It has long been recognized that a number of ancient Hebrew botanical and agricultural terms—nouns and verbs omitted by chance from the Bible—are preserved only or mainly in rabbinic literature.⁴⁵ Among the nouns are שָׂרָף “sap, resin”; זֵרְדִים “shoots” (cf. the toponym זֵרְד נַחֲלִים); שְׁחָלִיִּים “cress” (cf. Old Aram. שְׁחָלִין, Aram. תְּחָלִין, Akkad. *sahlû*); כְּרִישִׁים “leeks” (cf. Aram. כְּרִתִּין, Arab. *kurrāt*, *karrāt*, Akkad. *karašu*, *karšu*); צִמָּל “ripe fig.”⁴⁶

Two of these terms belong to the same semantic field as בֹּלֵט. The word שָׂרָף “sap, resin”⁴⁷ is used in phrases like שָׂרָף הַחַיִּינָה, שָׂרָף הַפְּנִים, שָׂרָף הַשְּׂמֹמָה (*m. Orlah* 1.7, *t. Miq.* 6.9) to refer to the milky sap (latex) of the fig and the sycomore.⁴⁸ There is no reason to doubt the conventional assumption that this term, derived from a good Hebrew root (שָׂרָף “burn”),⁴⁹ was in use during the biblical period. If the use of latex

is unfounded. The form בֹּלֵט has nothing to do with the Greek island of Lesbos; it is derived from בֹּלֵט via metathesis; see n. 39 above. Curiously, the word for inferior grapes, בְּאִשִּׁים, also undergoes metathesis in Mishnaic Hebrew, yielding בְּשִׁים.

⁴⁵ E. Y. Kutscher, מְלִיִּים וְתוֹלְדוֹתֵיהֶן (Jerusalem: Kiryath Sefer, 1965) 28, 79–81, based on Löw, *Flora*, passim; A. Sáenz-Badillos, *A History of the Hebrew Language* (trans. J. Elwolde; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 200. It is generally accepted today that Mishnaic Hebrew was descended from a colloquial idiom spoken in the biblical period; see the survey of the literature in R. C. Steiner, “A Colloquialism in Jer 5:13 from the Ancestor of Mishnaic Hebrew,” *JSS* 37 (1992) 11–26. The importance of Mishnaic Hebrew for biblical lexicography, has been stressed by R. Gordis (“Studies in the Relationship of Biblical and Rabbinic Hebrew,” in *Louis Ginzberg Jubilee Volume* [New York: American Academy for Jewish Research, 1945] 173–75); J. C. Greenfield (“Lexicographical Notes I,” *HUCA* 29 [1958] 204); B. A. Levine (“Survivals of Ancient Canaanite in the Mishnah” [Ph.D. diss., Brandeis University, 1962] 2; I am indebted to M. S. Smith for this reference); and E. Y. Kutscher (“Mittelhebräisch und jüdisch Aramäisch im neuen Köhler-Baumgartner,” in *Hebräische Wortforschung: Festschrift zum 80. Geburtstag von Walter Baumgartner* [VTSup 16; Leiden: Brill, 1967] 158–59), among others.

⁴⁶ For the first three examples, see Kutscher, מְלִיִּים, 79–80. I am indebted to J. Huehnergard for calling the Akkadian cognates to my attention.

⁴⁷ Vocalized שְׂרָפָה or שְׂרָפָה in reliable manuscripts.

⁴⁸ For fig latex, see Condit, *Fig*, 25. For sycomore latex, see Keimer, “Petits fruits,” 61. Keimer specifically notes that this latex “coule . . . de presque toutes les parties de *Ficus sycomorus*, de l’écorce quand on l’incise, des feuilles, des fruits. . . .” Similarly, the Mishnah speaks of latex of the leaves and latex of the roots (שָׂרָף הַעֲקָרִים, שָׂרָף הַעֲלִים) as well as latex of the figs (שָׂרָף הַפְּנִים) in *m. Orlah* 1.7.

⁴⁹ The root may allude here to the sensation caused by a proteolytic enzyme found in

to make cheese (*m. Orlah* 1.7) goes back to the biblical period, as the evidence of Homer (*Iliad* 5.902-3) and other Greek writers suggests,⁵⁰ the term probably does too. The antiquity of Mishnaic Hebrew צמל “ripe fig” was argued by J. C. Greenfield, who compared it to Ug. *šml*:

The word *šemel* is a virtual hapax in Mish. Heb. and is preserved in the sort of comparison that has all the marks of an earthy folk tradition. This lends strength to the assumption that we are dealing with an ancient term that may very well be “Canaanite” in origin.⁵¹

The evidence presented in this chapter confirms Bochart’s etymology in a rather conclusive manner. The etymology was inspired by a recognition of the relationship between the Hebrew participle בולס and the Arabic/Ethiopian noun *balas*. However, Bochart’s picture was incomplete, as shown by the empty cells in the following chart:

	noun	denominative participle
Hebrew	—	בולס
“Arabic,” Ethiopian	<i>balas</i>	—

latex called “ficin.” According to Condit (*Fig*, 25), “this enzyme accounts for the dermatitis often experienced by some packers of dried figs and especially by pickers and consumers of fresh figs.” Even latex gloves can cause a reaction.

⁵⁰ See Löw, *Flora*, 1. 246-7; Condit, *Fig*, 25; Liddell and Scott, *Lexicon*, 1241 s.v. ὀπός. It has been suggested that this use of latex may go back to prehistoric times; see J. M. Renfrew, *Palaeoethnobotany: The Prehistoric Food Plants of the Near East and Europe* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1973) 136. Ficin (see the preceding footnote) is still used “in the cheese industry as a substitute for rennet in the coagulation of milk” according to *The Merck Index: An Encyclopedia of Chemicals, Drugs, and Biologicals* (Rahway, N.J.: Merck and Co., 1989) 4019. I am indebted to J. Crystal for this reference.

⁵¹ J. C. Greenfield, “Ugaritic Lexicographical Notes,” *JCS* 21 (1967) 90; cf. also his “Amurrite, Ugaritic and Canaanite,” in *Proceedings of the International Conference on Semitic Studies held on Jerusalem, 19-23 July 1965* (Jerusalem: The Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1969) 99. J. Huehnergard calls my attention to the fact that others are much less certain of the meaning of Ug. *šml*; see G. del Olmo Lete and J. Sanmartín, *Diccionario de la lengua ugarítica* (Aula Orientalis-Supplementa 8; Sabadell, Barcelona: Editorial AUSA, 1996-2000) 2. 418 s.v. *šml* (III). Note also that, *pace* Greenfield, the vocalization found in reliable manuscripts is צמל.

We have now found the data to close these gaps:

	noun	denominative participle
Hebrew	לבס/בלס	בולס
Yemeni ⁵² Arabic	<i>balas</i>	<i>miballis</i>

As a result, there is no longer room for doubts about Bochart's etymology. The term בולס is the participle of a denominative verb, derived from the noun בלס. The implications of this etymology, which are weightier than Bochart realized, are the subject of the next section and the next chapter.

Bochart's Etymology and the Meaning of בולס שקמים

What are the semantic ramifications of Bochart's etymology? Is it compatible with LXX's interpretation ("a scratcher of sycomores")? Bochart himself abandoned that interpretation after examining a group of Greek verbs "formed from various fig names" that "signify whatever pertains to their care."⁵³ He concluded that בולס refers to *qui ficus colit, & sycaminos* "one who tends fig and sycamore (trees)."⁵⁴

Bochart does not go so far as to claim that his etymology is incompatible with the LXX's interpretation, but Greenspahn does: "It seems unlikely that the denominative of a kind of tree would refer to such an isolated part of its treatment."⁵⁵ The translation of the LXX, he says, "could be based on an educated guess relying on the botanical practice with regard to such trees in the translators' environment."⁵⁶ Greenspahn's point would be well taken if the verb בלס were, in fact, derived from a word denoting a tree. It would then be natural to expect that a

⁵² See chapter 3 below.

⁵³ Bochart, *Hierozoicon*, 1. 384-85 (ed. Rosenmüller, 1. 407).

⁵⁴ Bochart, *Hierozoicon*, 1. 385 (ed. Rosenmüller, 1. 407). The same conclusion was reached in the Middle Ages by Al-Qumisi (בתרוץ, 38) and Isaiah of Trani (פירוש, 98).

⁵⁵ Greenspahn, *Hapax Legomena*, 106.

⁵⁶ Greenspahn, *Hapax Legomena*, 106.

בולט would be responsible for all aspects of the work involved with that tree, like a כורם “vintner” and a *gemamzi*. However, we have shown above that בולט is derived not from the name of the sycamore tree but from the name of its fruit.⁵⁷

Another argument that has been raised against the Septuagint’s interpretation is independent of Bochart’s etymology. Goldmann writes that those who believe that a בולט שקמים is a gasher of sycamore figs “oublent que ce ne peut être un métier.”⁵⁸ W. Rudolph develops this argument: “Auf alle Fälle handelt es sich um eine Arbeit, die im Ablauf der jährlichen landwirtschaftlichen Verrichtungen nur wenig Zeit in Anspruch nimmt, so daß es unwahrscheinlich ist, daß sie als Berufsbezeichnung diene (kein deutscher Weingärtner wird als seinen Beruf ‘Rebenspritzer’ angeben). . . .”⁵⁹ That the gashing of sycamore fruit is not even close to being a full-time job is confirmed by the observations of Brown and Walsingham: “The work extends over a period of two to three days for each crop.”⁶⁰ It should be noted, however, that other common interpretations of בולט שקמים are open to the same objection.⁶¹

The Septuagint’s interpretation has had a number of defenders in modern times. Some of them (Keimer, Galil) may have been unaware of Bochart’s etymology,⁶² but others (G. Baur, Hitzig, Lagarde, P. Humbert) have seen no inconsistency in accepting Bochart’s etymology while rejecting his interpretation.⁶³ G. Baur writes:

. . . so ist auch das Verbum בָּלַט ein Denominativum dieser Art. Ihm die allgemeinste Bedeutung, “Maulbeerfeigen bauen” (Gesenius u. d. W.) zu geben, geht nicht an, weil nach dem Verbum noch einmal שקמים steht, der hebräische Ausdruck wäre dann ebenso ein Pleonasmus, wie wenn

⁵⁷ Cf. also the conjecture of Baur quoted below.

⁵⁸ Goldmann, *La figue*, 45 n. 1.

⁵⁹ W. Rudolph, *Joel—Amos—Obadja—Jona* (KAT 13/2; Gütersloh: G. Mohn, 1971) 257.

⁶⁰ Brown and Walsingham, “Sycamore,” 10.

⁶¹ I am indebted to J. Huehnergard for this observation.

⁶² Keimer, “Bemerkung,” 441-42; Galil, *השקמה*, 347.

⁶³ Hitzig, *Kleinen Propheten*, 142-43; P. de Lagarde, “Ueber die semitischen Namen des Feigenbaums und der Feige,” in *Mittheilungen* (Goettingen: Dieterichsche Sortimentsbuchhandlung, 1884-91) 1. 59. The latter refers to “das hebräische Denominativum בולט ein *caprificierender* Amos 7, 14.” The term *caprificierender* is used here in an extended sense, as explained by Reynier (“Méthode,” 184-89); Löw (*Flora*, 1. 275) criticizes that use of the term.

wir im Deutschen sagen wollten: “Gras grasen”; vielmehr da שקמה den ganzen Baum bezeichnet . . . , בולס nach dem Kamus die Frucht insbesondere, so muss das Verbum eine mit dieser insbesondere vorgenommene Thätigkeit bezeichnen, wie in unserm “den Weinstock beeren”, “das Kraut blättern” u. dergl. Am nächsten liegt nun, es durch “Maulbeerfeigen vom Baume sammeln” zu erklären; aber schon der ganz eigenthümliche Ausdruck deutet auf einen minder allgemeinen Begriff, und aller Wahrscheinlichkeit nach haben die LXX . . . das Richtige getroffen. . . .⁶⁴

P. Humbert suggests an ingenious combination of Bochart’s etymology with LXX’s interpretation. He argues that Arabic *balas* refers only to a *ripe* fig and that its denominative therefore means “to ripen a fig (artificially).” His source is the definition given by *Lisān al-ʿArab*: *ʿal-balasu tamaru t-tīni ʿidā ʿadraka* “*balas* is the fruit of the fig-tree when it has ripened.” He concludes that “בולס nicht bloss, wie bisher angenommen wurde, mit Feigen zu tun haben bedeutet, sondern die Reife der Feigen (oder Maulbeerfeigen) befördern.”⁶⁵ However, most sources do not support the notion that the meaning of the noun is restricted to *ripe* figs.⁶⁶

In my view, neither the interpretation of the Septuagint nor the interpretation of Bochart is precisely on the mark. Bochart’s interpretation rests to a great degree on his comparison of בולס with כורם, but that comparison, although very insightful, is imprecise in two respects. First, בולס is derived from the name of a fruit, while כורם is derived from the name of a tree or, rather, a collection of trees. In other words, we are not dealing with a denominative שוקם* comparable to כורם and *gemamzi*. What we have is בולס comparable to σκαύζω and probably *miballis*, both referring to the harvesting of fruit.

Second, בולס is transitive, while כורם is intransitive. In other words, בולס is part of a phrase (בולס שקמים) that has far more in common with

⁶⁴ G. Baur, *Der Prophet Amos* (Giessen: J. Ricker, 1847) 411-12.

⁶⁵ P. Humbert, “בולס שקמים (Amos VII, 14),” *OLZ* 20 (1917) 296-98. A partial parallel exists in Modern South Arabian. Jibbāli has a noun *ħfəl* meaning “ripe wild fig” and a number of verbs from the same root; T. M. Johnstone, *Jibbāli Lexicon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981) 104-5. The intransitive verbs have meanings like “to ripen, to be ripe, to be ripe enough to eat” (all restricted to wild figs), but transitive *ħhfəl* means “to collect wild figs.”

⁶⁶ Indeed, one source defines Yemeni *balas* as *ṣiġāru t-tīn* “young figs”; Zayd ibn ʿAlī ʿInān, *Al-Lahja al-yamāniyya fī al-nukat wa-l-ʿamtāl al-ṣarʿāniyya* (n.p.: 1980) 45 no. 460.

Lev 19:10 לא תעולל (and Baur's "den Weinstock beeren") than with כורם, assuming that *BDB* is right in taking תעולל as a denominative from עוללות. In both cases, a verb derived from the name of a fruit takes the name of the tree as its object. Here too the parallel refers to the harvesting of fruit.

Thus, the closest parallels to בלס support the interpretation of the Peshiṭta, David Qimḥi, and Abarbanel: לקט "pick, gather."⁶⁷ It follows that Amos' term בולס שקמים referred to a person that harvests the fruit of the sycamore. It may have stood in contrast to some term for a person who used the sycamore tree as a beam factory, something like מגדע/גוזר/כורת שקמים, "a cutter of sycomores." This may explain why Amos called himself a בולס שקמים rather than a שוקם*. The latter term would not have been capable of distinguishing the two very different modes of exploiting the sycamore tree in ancient Israel—the horticultural and the silvicultural. These two modes may well have been incompatible to a certain extent, for the treatment that promotes the growth of straight, smooth limbs inhibits the growth of fruit.⁶⁸ In later Hebrew, the difference between the two modes is reflected in terms for the tree itself: a sycamore that has been cut to produce beams is called a "sycamore anvil" (סדן השקמה); a sycamore that is allowed to grow naturally (and produce figs) is called a "virgin sycamore" (בתולת השקמה). Kislev has argued that sycomores of both types are depicted in the Assyrian reliefs of the siege of Lachish in 701, not long after Amos' time.⁶⁹

Galil believes that this conclusion can be undermined by asking why Hebrew needed a special verb for picking sycamore figs in addition to the verb לקט "pick, gather":

There are simple and accepted words in the Hebrew language to describe growing, gathering or picking. Why was this strange word, found nowhere else in the Bible, used here, if it is not the description of an action that is *sui generis*, connected exclusively with the fruit of the sycamore?⁷⁰

⁶⁷ So too AV: "a gatherer of sycamore fruit." As noted above, Qimḥi combines this contextual interpretation with an old etymology that equates בלס with Aramaic בלש "search."

⁶⁸ Kislev, השקמים, 26, 28.

⁶⁹ Kislev, השקמים, 23-30. See chapter 1 above.

⁷⁰ Galil, השקמה, 347.

There are two ways of dealing with this argument. One is to point to other verbs for gathering or picking in Hebrew that are restricted to a single kind of fruit, e.g., בצר for grapes and Mishnaic Hebrew מסק for olives. Another is to point out that accepting the Peshitta's interpretation does not necessitate total rejection of the LXX's interpretation.

According to the latter approach, these two ancient interpretations are not as far apart as they seem. The gashing of the sycomore figs may well have been viewed as the beginning of the harvest, since the picking of the figs followed only a few days later. Theophrastus writes that "the fruits thus scratched ripen in four days," while Athenaeus says "they become ripe and fragrant in three days."⁷¹ Reynier says that the gashed figs reach maturity "en peu de jours."⁷² Galil reports that "in three to four days the figs increase about seven times in weight and volume."⁷³ According to Brown and Walsingham: "The work extends over a period of two to three days for each crop, and the fruit is ready for gathering four or five days after the holes have been made."⁷⁴ Keimer too writes that "a few days later the fruit is picked."⁷⁵

Even stronger evidence could be adduced from the reports of Sickenger and Figari, if only they were credible. According to the former:

The operation is only made on fruits which shall be picked up the following day. The day after the operation the fig is quite ripe.⁷⁶

According to the latter, the gashing was done after the figs were cut from the tree.⁷⁷

We conclude that בולט refers to the entire process of harvesting sycomore figs, beginning with the gashing. The distinctiveness of that initial step may have promoted the coining of a special verb for the whole process.

⁷¹ Athenaeus, *The Deipnosophists*, 1. 222-23.

⁷² Reynier, "Méthode," 188.

⁷³ Galil, "Ancient Technique," 186.

⁷⁴ Brown and Walsingham, "Sycamore," 10.

⁷⁵ Keimer, "Knife," 65.

⁷⁶ *Apud* Henslow, "Egyptian Figs," 102; revised version in Henslow, "The Sycomore Fig," 129. Sickenger's report appears to be based largely on Figari's.

⁷⁷ Figari, *Studii*, 2. 177-78.

שקמה and בולם:
Linguistic Evidence for the Origin
of the Biblical Sycomore

The Controversy Surrounding the Origin
of the Biblical Sycomore

The conclusions of the preceding chapter can help to resolve the controversy surrounding the origin of the biblical sycomore. It has generally been assumed that the sycomores in the Shephelah were already there when David ascended the throne.¹ But how did this tropical tree get there, and when? Discussions of these questions in the seventies and eighties were inconclusive.

In 1976, Galil, Stein, and Horovitz asked: “Has the sycomore fig moved to the Middle East spontaneously as a part of the wild Sudanian element and remained in the area after losing its reproductive capacity only because of the active help of man, or has man been entirely responsible for its northward transportation?”² After much

¹ Japhet (*I & II Chronicles*, 478) writes: “The acquisition and origin of this vast agricultural property — land, vineyards, groves of olives and sycamore, cattle, sheep, camels and asses — are nowhere documented. The incidental geographical terms, Shephelah, Sharon and ‘the valleys’, probably indicate that these estates came to David as a result of his wars, when he lay claim to the royal property of conquered Canaanite states and cities, but this conclusion should be adopted only with caution.” See also Heltzer, *המשק*, 177.

² J. Galil, M. Stein & A. Horovitz, “On the Origin of the Sycomore Fig (*Ficus sycomorus* L.) in the Middle East,” *The Gardens’ Bulletin, Singapore* 29 (1976) 192.

deliberation, they were unable to reach a unanimous verdict.³ In 1985, Galil himself was still unable to make up his mind:

The disparity between the sycomore's rhythm of activity and the climatic rhythm in Israel, the absence of its pollinators, and its dependence on humans for propagation are seemingly evidence that it was brought by humans and planted here many years ago. But a second possibility exists—that the sycomore, like the other wild tropical plants that grow here, reached Israel on its own. . . . It is difficult to determine which of these two possibilities is correct.⁴

M. Zohary seemed to have a definite opinion on the matter in 1982:

Some scholars assume that the species was introduced from Africa, perhaps by Natufian man (about 10 000 BC) bringing seeds or cuttings. . . . In my opinion, it was never in fact “introduced” into Israel, but remained as a tertiary relic of the other tropical flora, not unlike other vestiges (*Acacia albida*, *Ziziphus spina-Christi*). . . .⁵

However, in a Hebrew encyclopedia entry published in the very same year, he gave a different picture: “It is assumed that the sycomore was introduced (הוכנסה) into the land of Israel from Egypt, and that it was brought to the latter from East Africa in the third millennium B.C.E.”⁶ In more recent literature, a consensus appears to be emerging, with writers describing the sycomore as having been “imported,” “brought,” or “introduced” into Israel.⁷

As for the date, there are at least four theories: (1) the “Canaanite period,” i.e., the Bronze Age;⁸ (2) the end of the Neolithic Period;⁹

³ Galil, Stein & Horovitz, “Origin,” 202.

⁴ J. Galil, *הפיקוס: עץ בר ועץ נוי* (Jerusalem: הוצאת כרמל, 1985) 77.

⁵ M. Zohary, *Plants*, 68.

⁶ M. Zohary, *מקראית*, in *אנציקלופדיה מקראית* (Jerusalem: Bialik, 1972-88) 8. 258. Volume 8 appeared in 1982.

⁷ The first term is used by Lipshitz and Biger (השקמה, 771) in presenting the “accepted” view; the second is used by Kislev (השקמים, 24); the third is used by D. Zohary and M. Hopf, *Domestication of Plants in the Old World* (3d ed.; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000) 164-65. Cf. also the article by Danin cited below.

⁸ Galil, *הפיקוס*, 67; Kislev, *השקמים*, 24.

⁹ Galil, *הפיקוס*, 77 (as an afterthought).

(3) the Natufian (Mesolithic) Period;¹⁰ and (4) the Tertiary Period.¹¹ Naturally, these two controversies are not unrelated: the earlier the arrival, the less likely it was to have involved human agency.

The three early datings (2-4) find no support in the fossil and archeological records. No sycamore fossils have been found in Israel.¹² The earliest remains of *Ficus sycomorus* discovered in Israel are from the Iron Age.¹³ The lack of earlier finds is striking, because fossilized leaves of *Ficus carica* embedded in travertine rock have been discovered at En Gedi,¹⁴ and “charred fig pips have been retrieved from numerous early Neolithic sites in the Near East . . . such as PPNA [pre-pottery Neolithic A] (7900-7500 bc) Netiv Hagdud, Israel . . . , PPNA (7000 bc) Jericho . . . , aceramic Neolithic (7800-6600 bc) Tell Aswad, Syria . . . , and PPNB (7200-6000 bc) ‘Ain Ghazal, Jordan. . . .”¹⁵ The absence of *Ficus sycomorus* remains is particularly striking at Jericho, because remains believed to be *Ficus carica* (carbonized pips and, in one instance, flesh of the fruit) were found there in many of the oldest layers (not only PPNA, but also Chalcolithic, Early Bronze, and Middle Bronze)¹⁶ and because Jericho was well known for its sycomores in later times.¹⁷ It is not surprising, then, that Galil, Stein and Horovitz are forced to admit that “evidence for the presence of *F. sycomorus* in the Middle East in ancient times is far from satisfactory, especially since the data supporting the presence of the plant in Natufian Palestine are based on an indirect method of inquiry.”¹⁸

¹⁰ Galil, Stein & Horovitz, “Origin.”

¹¹ M. Zohary, *Plants*, 68 (see at n. 5 above and the background given in M. Zohary, *Plant Life of Palestine* [New York: Ronald Press, 1962] 61, 63-64).

¹² Cf. Baum, *Arbres*, 21, arguing against M. Zohary.

¹³ Personal communication from M. Kislev. For sycamore wood excavated in Israel from the Iron Age on, see Liphshitz and Biger, *השקמה*, 772. The reference there to sycamore wood from PPNA Jericho must rest on some sort of misunderstanding.

¹⁴ Danin, “Origins,” 61.

¹⁵ D. Zohary and Hopf, *Domestication*, 163.

¹⁶ M. Hopf, “Plant Remains and Early Farming in Jericho,” in *The Domestication and Exploitation of Plants and Animals* (ed. P. J. Ucko and G. W. Dimbleby; Chicago: Aldine, 1969) 356-57.

¹⁷ See chapter 5 below. In Deuteronomy and Judges, however, Jericho is *עיר ההמרים*, not *עיר השקמים*.

¹⁸ Galil, Stein & Horovitz, “Origin,” 202.

The case for migration of the sycamore to Israel without human intervention is even weaker, as A. Danin has demonstrated:

Israel's sycomores were obviously nurtured by human effort. They develop tasty, juicy "figs," which do not contain fruits. Thus, they cannot spread locally through seeds—nor could they have germinated from fruits coming from a different area.

The sycamore fruits closest to Israel originate in southern Sudan. This is far too distant for the fruit bats or the birds which spread sycamore seeds around. Even if viable seeds were to be transported somehow, they could not germinate and develop under the conditions of Israel's southern coastal plain.

Tropical trees growing in Israel require an abundance of water during the hot seasons.¹⁹ Even the Mediterranean maquis bushes, which develop in the northern coastal plain, and germinate during winter and spring, cannot grow in the drier southern part.

The sycomores of Israel were thus obviously planted by farmers. . . .²⁰

The import theory, on the other hand, has much to recommend it. The practice of transplanting trees from abroad is attested early among Israel's neighbors. Long before David's time, Egyptian monarchs like Hatshepsut brought myrrh trees from Punt and planted them in the temple compounds.²¹ The Assyrian kings, too, were active in this regard:

Tiglath-Pileser I in the eleventh century is the first Assyrian king who reveals in his inscriptions a clearly utilitarian interest in establishing

¹⁹ The Hebrew version (A. Danin, השקמה אינה עץ בר, *Teva Vaaretz* 32 [1990] 31) adds: "The sands in the south of the coastal plain never have enough water for . . . germination, and certainly not in the hot season of the year." The point is that sycamore seeds require even more water than cuttings.

²⁰ Danin, "Origins," 62. As for the theory that the sycamore grew spontaneously in Upper Egypt in the Predynastic period (see n. 64 below), Danin writes: "I think that with the extreme desert areas located between the two areas (S. Egypt and Israel) and the missing habitats for both *F. sycomorus* and birds & bats, the seeds could not cross the "barrier" by natural agents; humans could transport it and plant it in places where no trees can establish themselves" (e-mail communication, Sept. 14, 2002).

²¹ F. N. Hepper, "An Ancient Expedition to Transplant Living Trees," *Journal of the Royal Horticultural Society* 92 (1967) 435-38; D.M. Dixon, "The Transplantation of Punt Incense Trees in Egypt," *JEA* 55 (1969) 55-65. I am indebted to L. E. Stager for these references.

gardens outside his capital at Assur to cultivate foreign trees for timber and fruit. He records that he “took cedar (*erēnu*), box-tree (*taskarinnu*), Kanish oak (*allakanish*) from the lands over which I gained dominion [in the west]—such trees which none among previous kings, my forefathers, had ever planted—and I planted [them] in the orchards of my land. I took rare orchard fruit which is not found in my land [and therewith] filled the orchards of Assyria.” . . .

In the ninth century Assurnasirpal II, in the remarkable text on the so-called Banquet Stela, recorded the trees, seedlings, and plants that he had seen on his military campaigns and then imported for planting in the irrigated gardens that he had created in his new capital at Kalah (Nimrud). Here pleasure and utility were blended. The range of species is wide, many at present untranslatable, extending from trees like cedar/pine, cypress, and juniper valued for constructional timber, to fruit and ornamental trees and shrubs. . . . Oppenheim has suggested that it was Sargon II in the later seventh century BC who changed the motivation of the royal patrons of gardening ‘from utilitarian to display purposes, from an interest in assembling the largest possible variety of specimens to incorporating a garden into the palace precinct for the personal pleasure of the king. . . .’²²

In the following sections, we shall see additional evidence, of a linguistic and archeological nature, that supports this theory.

The Distribution of *Bls* and *šqmt* in the Semitic Languages

The full significance of Bochart’s etymology has not been seen, even by those who accepted the conjecture that Hebrew had a noun בַּלֶּס, because it has been assumed that that noun and the Arabic-Ethiopian noun *balas* were independent reflexes of a common Proto-West-Semitic ancestor. However, this assumption is difficult to maintain once we compare the geographical distribution of *bls* with that of *šqmt*.

²² P. R. S. Moorey, *Ancient Mesopotamian Materials and Industries* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994) 349. See also D. J. Wiseman, “Mesopotamian Gardens,” *Anatolian Studies* 33 (1983) 138. It appears that Solomon continued this tradition; for this and other parallels between Solomon and the kings of Assyria, see B. Halpern, “The Construction of the Davidic State: An Exercise in Historiography,” in *The Origins of the Ancient Israelite States* (ed. V. Fritz and P. R. Davies; JSOTSup 228; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996) 48-51.

Based on what we know today, we can say that Bochart's characterization of the distribution of *bls* was in some ways too narrow and in others too broad. In Arabia, the word is peculiar to the Yemeni dialect.²³ In Ethiopia, on the other hand, the word is found not only in Geez, but also in Amharic, Tigre, Tigrinya, Gurage, Argobba, and Soddó.²⁴ In Hebrew, as we have shown, the noun is attested as well as the denominative participle. From a geographic perspective, the distribution of the word is rather limited. It is found only in Ethiopia, Yemen and Israel. It is not recorded for the Modern South Arabian languages spoken in Dhofar (Oman),²⁵ despite the presence of the sycamore and other *Ficus* species there.²⁶

The word *šqmt* has a similar distribution, although one would not know it from *HALAT*. The only cognates of Hebrew שקמה listed by *HALAT* are Syr. שקמא and Christian Palestinian Aramaic שוקמא > Greek σικάμινος. No mention is made there of the Arabic forms cited in the nineteenth-century dictionaries of W. Gesenius, A. Kohut and T. Audo. Gesenius compares שקמה with colloquial Arabic *sokam*, a rare name of the *Ficus sycomorus*.²⁷ The form *sokam* comes from Forskål,

²³ Cf. Našwān bin Sa'īd al-Ḥimyarī, *Šams al-ʿUlūm* (ed. K. V. Zetterstéen; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1951-53) 185 line 21: *al-balasu t-tīnu bi-luḡati l-yaman* "balas are figs (*tīn*) in the language of Yemen." See also al-Selwi, *Jemenitische Wörter*, 44; C. von Landberg, *Glossaire Daḡinois* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1920-42) I. 204. It is used not only of *Ficus carica* (the common fig) but also of *Ficus palmata* Forsk.; see Forskål, *Flora*, CXXXIV; Schweinfurth, "Sammlung," 125, 128; Al-Hubaishi and Müller-Hohenstein, *Introduction*, 196.

²⁴ See Leslau, *Comparative Dictionary*, 97; idem, *Etymological Dictionary of Gurage (Ethiopic)* (Wiesbaden: O. Harrassowitz, 1979) 3. 142; W. M. Kelecha, *A Glossary of Ethiopian Plant Names* (4th ed.; Addis Ababa: n.p., 1987) 48, 119. In addition to *Ficus carica* (the common fig), it is used of *Ficus palmata* Forsk. (Amharic, Tigre and Tigrinya) and *Ficus capreaefolia* Del. (Tigre); see Kelecha, loc. cit. and Schweinfurth, "Sammlung," 125.

²⁵ Jibbālī has a number of words for wild figs and wild fig trees; see Johnstone, *Lexicon*, 92 s.v. ḡyḏ; 104-5 s.v. ḥfl; 282 s.v. tyk.

²⁶ D. Heller and C. C. Heyn (*Conspectus Florae Orientalis: An Annotated Catalogue of the Flora of the Middle East* [Jerusalem: The Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1994] 28 and map 1) include Dhofar in the distribution of *F. sycomorus*, *F. palmata* and *F. vasta*. I am indebted to J. Huehnergard for this reference. According to A. G. Miller and T. A. Cope (*Flora of the Arabian Peninsula and Socotra* [Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996-] 94-102, 506-7), Oman is home to those species and also *F. carica*, *F. johannis*, *F. cordata*, and *F. ingens*.

²⁷ W. Gesenius, *Thesaurus philologicus criticus linguae Hebraeae et Chaldaeae Veteris Testamenti* (Leipzig: F. C. W. Vogel, 1835) 1477.

who also supplies an unpointed Arabic transcription: *سقم*.²⁸ Combining the two transcriptions, we get *soqam*, with two short vowels. Kohut and Audo compare שקמה with classical Arabic *sawqam*, defined as a fig-like tree in the dictionaries.²⁹

Even Gesenius, Kohut and Audo omit the crucial information that this Arabic word originated in Yemen. As noted by Rabin, *sawqam* is labeled a “Yemeni expression” (*luḡah yamāniyyah*) by Ibn Durayd.³⁰ And Forskål heard the word *soqam* in the Yemen Highlands or the nearby plain, somewhere between Al-Luḡayya and Ta‘izz, in 1762-63.³¹ In 1881, Schweinfurth recorded *súggama* as a vernacular name of *Ficus sycomorus* in Ḥaḍramawt, at al-Hāmī, east of al-Shiḥr on the southern coast of the Arabian Peninsula.³² The *g* of this form represents the

²⁸ Forskål, *Flora*, CXXIV.

²⁹ Nathan b. Yeḥiel, ערוך השלם, 5. 150a s.v. שקמה; T. Audo, *Simtā d-leššānā sūryāyā* (Mossoul: Imprimerie des pères dominicains, 1897) 596b. Is *sawqam* a hypercorrection for *soqam*? Such a hypercorrection could have been promoted by the existence of a *faʿal* pattern in Arabic. I am indebted to W. P. Heinrichs for this latter suggestion.

³⁰ C. Rabin, *Ancient West-Arabian* (London: Taylor’s Foreign Press, 1951) 27. Rabin’s gloss of Ibn Durayd’s *sawqam* is “sycamore,” which agrees with later Yemeni usage but not with Ibn Durayd’s own description. Ibn Durayd (*Kitāb jamharat al-luḡah* [ed. R. M. al-Ba‘labakkī; Beirut: Dār al-‘Ilm lil-Malāyīn, 1987-88] 2. 851 col. 2 lines 2-3) says that the tree resembles (but is not the same as) the *ḥilāf*. The *ḥilāf* is *Salix aegyptiaca* L., the Egyptian willow; Maimonides (“Moses Maimonides’ Glossary of Drug Names,” in *Maimonides’ Medical Writings* [Haifa: The Maimonides Research Institute, 1995] 311-12) actually gives *sālij*, an Arabic rendering of the Old Spanish reflex of *salix*, as one of its alternate names. M. Kislev suggests that Ibn Durayd may be referring to *Ficus salicifolia* (personal communication). As its name implies, the leaves of this very widespread relative of the sycamore resemble those of the willow; see S. Collette, *Flowers of Saudi Arabia* (London: Scorpion, 1985) 369 and Miller and Cope, *Flora*, 100-101, 507. Kislev’s suggestion appears to be confirmed by other dictionaries, which state that the *sawqam* is “exactly like the *ʿaḡab*, which is a tree of the fig-kind . . . having a fruit like the fig . . .”; E. W. Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1863-77) 1384. Schweinfurth (“Sammlung,” 133) reports that *Ficus salicifolia* is called *athāb* (and *thaāb*) in Yemen. Even if Schweinfurth’s *athāb* represents *ʿaḡab* (cf. *taʿb* in Al-Hubaishi and Müller-Hohenstein, *Introduction*, 196 and *ʿb* in Forskål, *Flora*, CXXIV), it seems likely that it is a colloquial form or by-form of *ʿaḡab*. For *ʿ > ʿ* in Arabic, see S. Fraenkel, *Beiträge zur Erklärung der mehrlautigen Bildungen im Arabischen* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1878) 12-13. (I am indebted to J. Blau for this reference.)

³¹ Forskål, *Flora*, CXXIV. The abbreviations there are explained on p. CI. The expedition is described on pp. LXXXVI-XC.

³² G. Schweinfurth, “Sitzungs-Bericht vom 15. October 1889,” *Sitzungs-Berichte der Gesellschaft naturforschender Freunde zu Berlin* (1889) 158 and Schweinfurth, *Sammlung*, 143. The latter gives the form as *sugguma*.

“bedouin” realization of *q*; the final *a* represents the feminine ending, which converts mass nouns into count nouns (*nomina unitatis*).

It seems likely that Epigraphic South Arabian (henceforth ESA) is the source of both *balas* (Yemen and Ethiopia) and *soqam* (Yemen),³³ and, in fact, the latter is attested in Qatabanian, although this has not been recognized. The term *s¹qmtm* occurs twice in an inscription from Wadi Bayḥān (RES 4932): *s²hr ḡyln bn ʿbs²bm mlk qtbñ bny ws¹hd[ṭ brd^ṣ ʿttr nwp]n w¹lh w s¹qmtm bytn byhn . . . ywm rd^ṣ ʿttr w¹lh w s¹qmtm s²hrḡln mḥḍ ḥḍrmt w²mr̄m. . .* RES translates: “Šahr Ḡaylān, fils de ʿAbšībām, roi de Qatabān, a bâti et renouvelé [avec l’aide de ʿAthtar Nawfā]n et des divinités d’irrigation, le temple Bayḥān . . . lorsque assurèrent ʿAthtar et les divinités d’irrigation à Šahr Ḡaylān la défaite de Ḥaḍramūt et ʿAmrum.”³⁴ The phrase *w¹lh w s¹qmtm*, translated “les divinités d’irrigation,” is similarly rendered by Ryckmans (“irrigation deities”)³⁵ and Ricks (“irrigation gods”).³⁶ This rendering of *s¹qmtm* can hardly be correct: the word for “irrigation” in Qatabanian and elsewhere in ESA is *ms¹qt*, *ms¹qyt* from the root *s¹qy*.³⁷ A different interpretation of *w¹lh w s¹qmtm*, based on Arabic *saqima* “be sick,” is given by Jamme: “les divinités de la maladie?” or, more precisely, “les divinités invoquées en temps de maladie.”³⁸ Jamme does not explain why such gods would not be called “gods of healing” or

³³ So too Yemeni *jafn* “grapevine”; see Selwi, *Jemenitische Wörter*, 63 and J. C. Biella, *Dictionary of Old South Arabic* (HSS 25; Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1982) 74 s.v. *ḡfn*. For South Arabian loanwords in the Arabic of Yemen, see Rabin, *Ancient West-Arabian*, 26; cf. also 45-47. For Sabeian influence on Ethiopian Semitic vocabulary, see D. L. Appleyard, “Ethiopian Semitic and South Arabian: Towards a Re-examination of a Relationship,” *Israel Oriental Studies* 16 (1996) 208.

³⁴ RES VII, 434-35.

³⁵ *Apud* F. Stark, “Some Pre-Islamic Inscriptions on the Frankincense Route in Southern Arabia,” *JRAS* (1939) 497. See also G. Ryckmans, “Inscriptions sub-arabes; cinquième série,” *Le Muséon* 52 (1939) 66-67 no. 216.

³⁶ S. D. Ricks, *Lexicon of Inscriptional Qatabanian* (Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1989) 10 s.v. *w¹L* and 162 s.v. *S¹QM*.

³⁷ Ricks, *Lexicon*, 162 s.v. *S¹OY*. In J. Huehnergard’s unpublished notes on RES 4932, which he was kind enough to send me after reading this discussion, the translation “irrigation” for *s¹qmtm* is labeled “v[ery] unlikely.”

³⁸ A. Jamme, “Le panthéon sud-arabe préislamique d’après les sources épigraphiques,” *Le Muséon* 60 (1947) 120 n 558. In Jamme’s view (“Le panthéon,” 89-90, 124-27), the ESA term for “irrigation god” is *mndḥ*. Ricks (*Lexicon*, 110 s.v. *NDḤ*) takes that term to mean “tutelary deity.”

the like. Nor does he explain why they would be responsible for assuring the defeat of neighboring countries.

I suggest that the term $\text{ʾlhw } s^1qmtm$ should be interpreted in the light of the Hittite term $DINGIR^{ME\check{S}} (L\acute{U}^{ME\check{S}}) GI\check{S}ERIN-a\check{s}$ “cedar-gods.”³⁹ If so, it means “sycomore-gods,” i. e., the gods who dwell on/in/under the sycomore(s).⁴⁰ Already in the pyramid texts of ancient Egypt (3rd millennium B.C.E.), we find a reference to “yonder tall sycamore in the east of the sky . . . on which the gods sit.”⁴¹ In those texts, there is also a reference to gods *under* a sycomore, and from later periods there are numerous representations of individual goddesses (Nut, Nut/Hathor, Isis, Nephthys, Neith) *in* a sycomore.⁴² There was a sycomore tree in the courtyard of the Eleventh Dynasty temple of Mentuhotpe at Deir el-Bahri, judging from the roots discovered there by Winlock.⁴³ Indeed, one scholar has speculated that every temple garden in ancient Egypt had a sycomore.⁴⁴ According to *t. Abod. Zar.* 7.(7) 8, at least one sycomore in postbiblical Palestine

³⁹ L. Zuntz, “Un testo ittita di scongiuri,” *Atti del Reale Istituto Veneto di scienze lettere ed arti* 96/2 (1936-37) 488-526, 530-31; ANET, 351-53; B. H. L. van Gessel, *Onomasticon of the Hittite Pantheon* (Leiden: Brill, 1998) 992-93. The signs $L\acute{U}^{ME\check{S}}$, used to write this expression in KUB XV but not in KBo VI, indicate the masculine nature of the deities, according to Zuntz, *Testo*, 531.

⁴⁰ The initial sibilants of ESA s^1qmtm and Hebrew קמץ correspond regularly; see A. F. L. Beeston, “On the Correspondence of Hebrew \acute{s} to ESA s^2 ,” *JSS* 22 (1977) 50.

⁴¹ R. O. Faulkner, *The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969) 159 §916; cf. R. Moftah, *Die heiligen Bäume im Alten Ägypten* (Ph. D. diss., Georg-August-Universität zu Göttingen, 1959); idem, “Die uralte Sykomore und andere Erscheinungen der Hathor,” *Zeitschrift für ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde* 92 (1966) 40-47; H. Kees, *Der Götterglaube im alten Ägypten* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1987) 84 and P. Koemoth, *Osiris et les arbres* (Liège: C.I.P.L., 1994) 55-56, 59-60, and *passim*.

⁴² Baum, *Arbres*, 44, 67-86.

⁴³ A. Lucas, *Ancient Egyptian Materials and Industries* (4th ed.; London: Histories and Mysteries of Man, 1989) 447.

⁴⁴ G. Schweinfurth, “Über die Bedeutung der ‘Kulturgeschichte,’” *Botanische Jahrbücher* 45 (1910), Beiblatt 103: 34. For the Egyptian temple gardens, see Dixon, “Transplantation,” 59; J.-C. Hugonot, *Le jardin dans l’Égypte ancienne* (Frankfurt am Main: P. Lang, 1989) 32, 35, 40, 41, 58, 65, 67, 75; idem, “Ägyptische Gärten,” in *Der Garten von der Antike bis zum Mittelalter* (ed. M. Carroll-Spillecke; Mainz am Rhein: P. von Zabern, 1992) 33-38; A. Wilkinson, *The Garden in Ancient Egypt* (London: Rubicon, 1998) 119-44. A famous Egyptian sycomore that is venerated to this day is the Virgin’s Tree in North Cairo; see S. Sachs, “A Tree Drooping with its Ancient Burden of Faith,” in *The New York Times*, Dec. 26, 2001, A4.

was venerated as a sacred tree: שלש אשירות בארץ ישראל חרוב שבכפר קסם ושבכפר פנשה ושקמה שבראניו ושבכרמל “There are three idolatrous trees in the Land of Israel: the carob in Kefar Qsm and that in Kefar Pgšh and the sycomore in R’ny/w and that at Carmel.”⁴⁵ Similarly, according to *Exod. Rab.* 2.5, when a gentile asked why God saw fit to speak to Moses from a thornbush, R. Joshua b. Qorḥah asked him whether he would have had a similar question had Moses been addressed from a carob or a sycomore. The pre-Islamic Arabian goddess al-ʿUzzā had a sanctuary containing one or more sacred trees (reportedly acacias) in a wadi near Mecca called *Suqām*.⁴⁶ At Palmyra, there was a sacred cypress in the temple of Aglibol and Malakbel called גנתא אליים “garden of the gods” in Aramaic and ἱερον ἄλσος “the sacred grove” in Greek.⁴⁷ All of this leads us to conjecture that there was a sacred sycomore in the temple renovated by the king of Qata-

⁴⁵ This text is problematic, since it names four locations, not three. In any event, the sycomore at Carmel may have been in Sycaminopolis; see chapter 1 above, and Kraeling, “Place Names,” 200. For a sanctuary and a sacred grove on Mt. Carmel, see H. O. Thompson, “Carmel, Mount,” in *ABD* 1. 874-75.

⁴⁶ Hišām Ibn al-Kalbī, *Kitāb al-aṣnām* (ed. A. Zeki; Cairo: Dār al-Kutub, 1924) 19 line 10; 24 line 2; 25 lines 6-11 = *The Book of Idols* (trans. N. A. Faris; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952) 17, 21-22; Yāqūt ibn ʿAbd Allāh, *Jacut’s Geographisches Wörterbuch* (ed. F. Wüstenfeld; Leipzig: F. A. Brockhaus, 1866-73) 3. 100; J. Wellhausen, *Reste arabischen Heidentums* (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1961) 34, 38-39; H. M. Al-Tawil, *Early Arab Icons: Literary and Archaeological Evidence for the Cult of Religious Images in Pre-Islamic Arabia* (Ph.D. diss., University of Iowa, 1993) 138-40. Did *Suqām* (like Sycaminopolis and el-Jummeizeh in Palestine and Nht in Egypt, discussed in the preceding footnote and in chapter 1 n. 74 above) get its name from sycomores (*suqam*) growing there? The sanctuary was “on the road from Mecca to al-Ṭāʿif” (M. C. A. Macdonald and L. Nehmé, “Al-ʿUzzā,” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam* [Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1954-] 10. 968). There are still sycomores in that area today. In a striking coincidence, Collenette (*Flowers*, 370) shows photographs of *Ficus sycomorus* taken in “Wadi Zaymah, between Taif and Makkah, on the eastern road”! According to Ibn al-Kalbī (*Aṣnām*, 18 line 8; 19 line 10 = *Idols* 16, 17), *Suqām* was a branch or side ravine of Wadi Ḥurād in Naḥlat al-Šaʿmiyya, and these other names can also be connected with names of trees. Naḥlat al-Šaʿmiyya, also called Naḥlah (*Aṣnām*, 24 line 2; 25 line 6 = *Idols*, 21), contains the word for “palm” (*naḥlah*) (cf. Yāqūt, *Wörterbuch*, 4. 768 lines 10-11, 17; 769 lines 3, 14). Ḥurād may be derived from *ḥurḍ* or *ḥuruḍ*, the name of a large shade-tree from which potash is obtained (Lane, *Lexicon*, 548). Note that *Suqām* and *Ḥurād* exhibit the same vowel pattern. Note also the family name *al-Suqāmi* (*al-Suqāmī*?), borne by one of the hijackers who destroyed the North Tower of the World Trade Center.

⁴⁷ J. Teixidor, *The Pantheon of Palmyra* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1979) 36-38; idem, *The Pagan God* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1977) 120-21.

ban. In view of the close connections between Yemen and Ethiopia, it is worth noting that the sycomore is “a sacred tree for various communities” in Ethiopia to this day.⁴⁸ If the same is true in Sudan, it may be possible to build a case that this cult was distributed in a continuous band from Egypt to Yemen in antiquity.⁴⁹

From a geographic point of view, the data presented above point to Yemen and Israel.⁵⁰ We must exclude Syria, since, according to Nöldeke, “dies Wort ist den Syrern fremd.”⁵¹ Presumably, Nöldeke meant that the word שִׁקְמָה in the Peshiṭta, used only as a translation equivalent of Hebrew שִׁקְמָה, is a Hebraism. Indeed, it is far from clear that sycomores were found in areas where Syriac was spoken.⁵²

בלם and שִׁקְמָה: Lexical and Botanical Imports from South Arabia

The similarity between the distribution of the word *bls* and that of the word *šqmt*—Israel and Yemen but not Saudi Arabia, Oman or Egypt where the sycomore and other members of the genus *Ficus*

⁴⁸ A. Bekele-Tesemma, *Useful Trees and Shrubs for Ethiopia* (n.p.: Regional Soil Conservation Unit, Swedish International Development Authority, 1993) 250.

⁴⁹ It may have been even more widespread than that. The cult of the sycomore in modern Burundi has been compared to that in Egypt; see J. M. M. Van der Burgt, *Dictionnaire Français-Kirundi* (Bois-le-Duc, Holland: Société “L’Illustration Catholique,” 1903) 556.

⁵⁰ And to Ethiopia if Geez *saglā* belongs here as well. Algerian *saqūm* is uncertain. It appears, transcribed as *el seḳoum*, in a list of 49 plants capable of sustaining human life in the wilderness; M. J. E. Dumas, *La vie arabe et la société musulmane* (Paris: M. Levy frères, 1869) 381. The list was dictated in 1846 by an Algerian courier to the Arab secretary of General Eugène Dumas. Dumas identified this plant with the *Ficus sycomorus*, but it appears that he did this without the help of the informant, perhaps using a dictionary.

⁵¹ Personal communication from T. Nöldeke to I. Löw; see Löw, *Aramäische Pflanzennamen*, 386 n. 2 and *Flora*, 1. 274. The basis for Nöldeke’s conclusion is not given.

⁵² Some modern writers list Syria among the countries in which sycomores grow, but they are generally vague about the exact locations. It is possible that these writers have drawn from older works in which Syria includes Lebanon. G. E. Post, *Flora of Syria, Palestine and Sinai* (2nd ed. by J. E. Dinsmore; Beirut: American Press, 1932-33) 516 lists locations for *F. sycomorus* in Lebanon, Palestine, and Sinai but not in Syria. I am indebted to J. Huehnergard for this reference.

flourish⁵³—is surprising if the words were survivals from Proto-West-Semitic, but quite natural if the biblical sycamore was imported from Yemen together with these two lexical items.⁵⁴ The fact that the word *bls* was applied solely to the fruit in Hebrew⁵⁵ may indicate that **bls*³ referred primarily to fruit in ESA.⁵⁶ Alternatively, it may simply mean that, when the sycamore tree and its fruit were mentioned together in ESA, **bls*³(*m*) was used only for the fruit and *s*¹*qmt*(*m*) was used for the tree.⁵⁷

As we have seen, the idea that the biblical sycamore was an import from the south is far from new. It has been assumed that Egypt was the source of the import.⁵⁸ However, the linguistic data do not support

⁵³ For the distribution of this family in the Arabian Peninsula, see Collette, *Flowers*, 368-70; Heller and Heyn, *Conspectus*, 28 and map 1; Miller and Cope, *Flora*, 94-102, 506-7.

⁵⁴ This suggestion is not entirely new. P. de Lagarde (“Ueber die semitischen Namen des Feigenbaums und der Feige,” *Mittheilungen* [Goettingen: Dieterichsche Sortimentsbuchhandlung, 1884] 1. 68) writes: “so scheint mir zweitens die Gleichung س = ס zu erweisen, daß בלס kein einheimisch israelitisches Wort ist.” So too Harper (*Amos and Hosea*, 174): “the vb. seems to be a loan-word, being a denominative from the Arabic *balasun*, a fig, or Ethiopic *balasa* (sic) = fig, or *sycamore*. . . .” Of course, the correspondence cited by Lagarde is now known to be completely regular and thus cannot serve as the basis for such a suspicion.

⁵⁵ As noted in chapter 2 above, בלס still refers to the sycamore fig or some other sort of inferior fig in Mishnaic Hebrew.

⁵⁶ In Ethiopian Semitic, *balas* also refers to the tree; see chapter 2 above at n. 1. So too *balasab* in Yemeni Arabic; see Piamenta, *Dictionary* 38. However, several dictionaries of classical Arabic speak of it only as a fruit; see *Lisān al-ʿArab*, cited above; *Al-Qamūs*, cited in Bochart, *Hierozoicon*, 1. 384 (ed. Rosenmüller, 1. 406): *ʿal-balasu tamarun ka-tīni wa-t-tīnu nafsubu* “*balas* is a fruit like the (common) fig and the (common) fig itself”; Al-Muḥkam, cited in Lane, *Lexicon*, 325 s.v. *tīn*: “*Tīn*—the tree of the *balas* or the *balas* itself.” Cf. also the quotation from Baur in chapter 2 above at n. 64.

⁵⁷ The latter explanation is suggested by the Ethiopian (Geez) rendering of Jer 8:13 וַאֲנִי הָאֲנָחַת בְּהָאֲנָחָה (LXX καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν σῦκα ἐν ταῖς συκαῖς) “and there are no figs on the fig tree”: *ʿalbo balas westa saglā*. The translator has used *balas* to refer to the fruit of the fig tree, and *saglā* to refer to the fig tree itself, even though *saglā* is normally used of the sycamore tree; see Dillmann, *Lexicon*, 487. Despite the usage of his Vorlage, he apparently found it awkward to use the same word (or related words) for the tree and the fruit in the same sentence. Contrast the Jewish Yemenite expression recorded by Piamenta (*Dictionary*, 38): *taqūl mā fī l-balasab balas* “as if there are no figs on the fig tree, i. e., as if nothing has happened.” Piamenta does not mention that this expression is based on Jer 8:13.

⁵⁸ See Galil, “Ancient Technique,” 178, 188; Baum, *Arbres*, 21; M. Zohary, “שקמים,”

that assumption. The sycomore fig is called *kꜣw* (Middle Kingdom) or *kꜣy.w* (New Kingdom) in Egyptian; the notched (i.e., gashed) sycomore fig is called *nqꜣw.t* (Dem. *ꜣlqw, lqꜣ*, Copt. *elkō, lkou*); and the sycomore tree is called *nh.t* (Dem. *nhy*, Copt. *nouhe*).⁵⁹ None of these terms bears any resemblance to Hebrew שִׁקְמוּחַ or לֶבַס/בלֶס.⁶⁰

An Egyptian export is unlikely for other reasons as well. R. K. Ritner writes: “Egyptian records often mention the importation of trees, but the reverse is unknown to me and cannot have been common.”⁶¹ The sycomore, a sacred tree and an important source of wood (not to mention food and shade) for the Egyptians, was a vital national asset, whose use was carefully controlled by the government:

Des comtes nous renseignent sur son exploitation, qui était réglementée: le vizir des 18^e et 19^e dynasties était chargé de faire procéder à l’abattage des sycomores suivant les recommandations du palais.⁶²

in מְקַרְיָתָא מִקְרֹפְדִיָּה אֲנִיצִיקְלוֹפְדִיָּה (Jerusalem: Bialik, 1972-88) 8. 258, (but Zohary rejects this view elsewhere; see below). Naturally, this assumption does not imply that the sycomore is native to Egypt; see below. For a nineteenth-century view of the Egyptian connection, see Solms-Laubach, *Herkunft*, 103: “Die Syrer dürften ihre Cultur erst von den Egyptern erlernt haben. . . .”

⁵⁹ A. Erman and H. Grapow, *Wörterbuch der ägyptischen Sprache* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1926-63) 5. 96; 2. 343; 2. 282; W. Erichsen, *Demotisches Glossar* (Copenhagen: E. Munksgaard, 1954) 8, 264; 221; W. E. Crum, *Coptic Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1939) 54b; 242b. The word for “fig” of any variety is *dꜣb*; it may be related to the Aramaic word תִּיב “wild fig,” discussed in chapter 1 n. 50 above.

⁶⁰ An Egyptian botanical term that does resemble לֶבַס is *nbs*, since Egyptian *n* sometimes renders Semitic [l]; see J. E. Hoch, *Semitic Words in Egyptian Texts of the New Kingdom and Third Intermediate Period* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994) 432, 435. The *nbs*-tree is identified with the sycomore by HALAT s.v. בֶּלֶס and J. D. W. Watts, *Vision and Prophecy in Amos* (expanded anniversary ed.; Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1997) 37 n. 54. Unfortunately, this identification is unknown to Egyptologists: “All modern authorities (ever since Maspero) are agreed that the *nbs*-tree is to be identified with *Zizyphus spina-christi* (L.) Wild., more popularly known as ‘Christ’s thorn’ in English. Germer states that this identification is certain because examples of ‘Christ’s-thorn’ fruits have been found in Old Kingdom-period pots labelled *nbs*” (personal communication from T. Dousa). See R. Germer, *Flora des pharaonischen Ägypten* (Mainz am Rhein: P. von Zabern, 1985) 114-15. There is also a reference to a *labas*-tree in a Coptic-Arabic word list (Crum, *Coptic Dictionary*, 137b), but this sole attestation is late (c. fourteenth century C.E.) and Crum identifies it with the aloe.

⁶¹ E-mail communication from R. K. Ritner, Dec. 20, 1999.

⁶² Baum, *Arbres*, 23-24. In Mesopotamia, all timber cutting was regulated by the royal authorities; see P. I. Kuniholm, “Wood,” in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Archae-*

It is dangerous to extrapolate, but an Ottoman analogy is illuminating. Tristram reports that “with the Turks, as in the time of David, [the sycamore] is a royal tree, and the government claim rent for the produce wherever it is planted.”⁶³ Finally, we should note that the sycamore is not an easy tree to smuggle out of Egypt, since it does not produce seeds there.⁶⁴

The linguistic evidence that we have examined points not to Egypt but to Yemen. Yemen is a logical source, since it (possibly together with neighboring regions) is the only place in the world outside of Africa where the sycamore sets seeds and grows wild, thanks to the presence of its pollinating wasp.⁶⁵ In all other places where the sycamore is found, including Egypt, it is sterile and can be propagated only by means of cuttings inserted into the earth (vegetative or clonal prop-

ology in the Near East (ed. E. M. Meyers; New York: Oxford University Press, 1997) 5. 347. C. Müller (“Holz und Holzverarbeitung,” in *Lexikon der Ägyptologie* [Wiesbaden: O. Harrassowitz, 1975-92] 2. 1265) believes that the same was true in Egypt.

⁶³ Tristram, *Natural History*, 398.

⁶⁴ Cf. already Theophrastus, *Enquiry*, 1. 292-93 (4.2.1): “it . . . contains absolutely no seeds.” According to Galil (“Ancient Technique,” 178), “dry sycamore fruit found in the grave of Ani of the XXth dynasty (about 1100 B.C.) contained neither seeds nor *Ceratosolen* wasps.” For the possibility that it still reproduced spontaneously in Upper Egypt in the Predynastic period, see Baum, *Arbres*, 23, and D. Zohary and Hopf, *Domestication*, 165. For the strict border control at Egypt’s eastern frontier, see M. Greenberg, *Understanding Exodus* (New York: Behrman House, 1969) 21.

⁶⁵ Precise information about other parts of the Arabian Peninsula where the sycamore grows—Asir, Hejaz, Dhofar—is difficult to obtain. Berg and Wiebes (*African Fig*, 211-12) record the presence of the pollinating wasp, *Ceratosolen arabicus* Mayr, in Yemen but nowhere else in the Arabian Peninsula. Similarly, E. Werth (“Die ‘wilde’ Feige im östlichen Mittelmeergebiet und die Herkunft der Feigenkultur,” *Berichte der Deutschen Botanischen Gesellschaft* 50 [1932] 552; cf. also the map on p. 547, explained on p. 557) reports that the sycamore grows wild in Yemen, while “das Kulturgebiet . . . erstreckt sich . . . nach Yemen und Hedschas in Arabien.” For additional information on the distribution of *Ficus sycomorus* in modern times, see Solms-Laubach, *Herkunft*, 102-3; Post, *Flora*, 516; J. Galil, M. Stein and A. Horovitz, “Origin,” 191, 193; Baum, *Arbres*, 19 (and the references cited there in n. 4); C. C. Berg, “Annotated Check-list of the *Ficus* Species of the African Floristic Region, with Special Reference and a Key to the Taxa of Southern Africa,” *Kirkia* 13 (1990) 256. See also the references cited in n. 26 above and in chapter 5 nn. 72-75 below. It should be noted that many descriptions overlook the distribution of *Ficus sycomorus gnaphalocarpa*; see Introduction n. 6 above. For seed production in *Ficus sycomorus*, see J. Galil and D. Eisikowitch, “On the Pollination Ecology of *Ficus Sycomorus* in East Africa,” *Ecology* 49 (1968) 259-69 and idem, “Further Studies.”

agation). Indeed, Schweinfurth, who saw wild sycomores in Yemen, posited a Yemeni origin for the Egyptian sycamore tree itself.⁶⁶

The sycamore would not be the only tree in the Levant thought to have been imported from South Arabia. A tree that grows today both in Lebanon and in South Arabia is believed by some to be the biblical *almog*, transplanted in Solomon's time (1 Kgs 10:11-12).⁶⁷ A number of botanists have suggested that the carob (which, as noted above, was closely associated with the sycamore in rabbinic and classical literature)⁶⁸ was brought to Palestine from Yemen in antiquity.⁶⁹ The same goes for *Commiphora opobalsamum*. This tree grew in royal groves near Jericho, according to Theophrastus, Strabo, Pliny, and Josephus, but it is indigenous to South Arabia,⁷⁰ and may have been transplanted from there.⁷¹ It not surprising, then, that Josephus records a tradition connecting this tree with the Queen of Sheba: “. . . and they say that we still have the root of the opobalsamon, which our country still bears, as result of this woman's gift.”⁷²

⁶⁶ Schweinfurth, “Kulturgeschichte,” 34-35; cf. idem, “Sitzungs-Bericht,” 158. He was followed by Henslow, “Egyptian Figs”; idem, “The Sycamore Fig,” 130. Cf. what Condit (*Fig*, 9) writes about the common fig: “The fig tree was probably first cultivated in the fertile part of southern Arabia, where wild specimens (sic), such as those reported in 1923 by C. M. Doughty, are still found.”

⁶⁷ M. Elat, קשרי כלכלה בין ארצות המקרא בימי בית ראשון (Jerusalem: Bialik, 1977) 60.

⁶⁸ See chapter 2 nn. 33-34 above.

⁶⁹ M. Kislev, ההכשרה של החרוב בארץ, *Halamish* 6 (1988) 25-27. Based on the assumption that the carob is not mentioned in the Bible, Kislev entertained the possibility that the carob was brought from Yemen in postbiblical times. It is true that the word חרוב does not appear in the Bible, but it has been shown that חר' יונים in 2 Kgs 6:25 is a synonym, perhaps colloquial, of חרוב; see M. Held, “Studies in Comparative Semitic Lexicography,” in *Studies in Honor of Benno Landsberger on his Seventy-fifth Birthday April 21, 1965* (AS 16; Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1965) 395-98 and the literature cited there. Moreover, any attempt to show that the carob was imported to Palestine in postbiblical times would seem to be refuted by the archeobotanical evidence (pollen grains, seeds and charred wood of carob trees) cited in N. Lipschitz, “*Ceratonia Siliqua* in Israel: An Ancient Element or a Newcomer,” *Israel Journal of Botany* 36 (1987) 194-95. I am indebted to M. Kislev for this reference.

⁷⁰ See R. C. Steiner, *The Case for Fricative-Laterals in Proto-Semitic* (AOS 59; New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1977) 126-27, 129 and add Josephus, *B.J.* 1.6.6 §138; 1.18.5 §361; 4.8.3 §469; *A.J.* 14.4.1 §54; 15.4.2 §96.

⁷¹ For other possibilities, see A. C. Western, “The Ecological Interpretation of Ancient Charcoals from Jericho,” *Levant* 3 (1971) 37.

⁷² *A.J.* 8.6.6 §174.

The sycamore could have been brought to Palestine from Yemen by traders. Israel's commercial ties with the Kingdom of Sheba in Yemen in the time of Solomon (tenth century B.C.E.) are well known.⁷³ Judging from the biblical account, Solomon imported a great deal of wood: cedar and juniper from Tyre (1 Kgs 5:22, 24) and *almog* wood transported by Hiram from Ophir (1 Kgs 10:11-12). As noted above, it has been argued that Solomon's *almog* wood came from saplings transplanted from South Arabia to Lebanon.⁷⁴

The Arabian trade did not begin with Solomon. L. E. Stager writes: "In Sheba grew the best aromatics in the world. . . . By the Late Bronze Age, the aromatics trade had become the most lucrative business in the ancient Near East thanks to the dromedary camel."⁷⁵ I. Finkelstein shows that overland trade routes from Arabia to the southern Shephelah and the coastal plain were active already by the twelfth century B.C.E.⁷⁶

It seems likely, then, that sycamore figs and/or saplings were brought to Israel from Yemen at some point during the two centuries preceding Solomon's reign⁷⁷ and that the words for the fig (*bls*) and the tree (*šqmt*) were brought with them.⁷⁸ M. Zohary's claim that "there is

⁷³ For a recent discussion of these ties, see L. E. Stager, "Forging an Identity: The Emergence of Ancient Israel," in *The Oxford History of the Biblical World* (ed. M. D. Coogan; New York-Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) 145-46; see also I. Finkelstein, "Arabian Trade and Socio-Political Conditions in the Negev in the Twelfth-Eleventh Centuries B.C.E.," *JNES* 47 (1988) 251; J. S. Holladay, Jr., "The Kingdoms of Israel and Judah: Political and Economic Centralization in the Iron IIA-B (ca. 1000-750 BCE)," in *The Archaeology of Society in the Holy Land* (ed. T. E. Levy; London: Leicester University Press, 1998) 383-86; Jaruzelska, *Amos*, 94-99.

⁷⁴ Elat, קשרי כלכלה, 60.

⁷⁵ Stager, "Forging," 146.

⁷⁶ Finkelstein, "Arabian Trade," 247-48.

⁷⁷ Cf. no. 1 above.

⁷⁸ It is tempting to appeal to the foreign origin of this word to account for its non-segolate plural in Hebrew (viz., שְׁקָמִים instead of שְׁקָמִים*), but other botanical terms exhibit the same irregularity: בְּטָנִים, הֶבְנִים, פִּשְׁתִּים, and צִיָּלִים; see A. Schlesinger, כהב' ובלשונו עקיבא שליונגר; מחקרים במקרא ובלשונו (Jerusalem: Israel Society for Biblical Research, 1962) 50-51; J. Blau, "Marginalia Semitica I," *Israel Oriental Studies* 1 (1971) 7 = J. Blau, *Topics in Hebrew and Semitic Linguistics* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1998) 191. At first glance, the Greek form σακάμιν-, with *alpha* inserted between the second and third consonants, seems to exhibit the regular segolate plural; but see at n. 86 below.

no evidence that [the sycomore] was imported into this country”⁷⁹ is no longer tenable.

The Etymology of שקמה

Our conclusion that שקמה is a South Arabian loanword attested in Qatabanian has relevance for a rather speculative etymology proposed by P. Haupt:

The Hebrew name of the sycamore trees, *šiqmîm*, . . . may be an old causative (AJSJL 23, 248) derived from the root *qm*; the original meaning may be *statureosa*; cf. *gəḫab qômâ*, lofty of stature, Ezek. 31:3. The *ficus Aegyptia* may reach a height of 50 feet.⁸⁰

Haupt assumes that Biblical Hebrew preserves relics of an old *š*-causative. If this view presupposes direct preservation of *š*-stem forms from Proto-Semitic, many scholars may find this assumption questionable.⁸¹ However, the relic could have been preserved indirectly, via borrowing from a Semitic language in which the *š*-causative was the norm. Qatabanian happens to have been a Semitic language of this type.⁸² Thus, the inscription quoted above has the causative *s¹h_d[l]* “renewed” five words before *s¹qmtm*.⁸³

Ezek 31:3 is not the only verse in which קומה refers to the stature of a tree. The same is true of קומה in 2 Kgs 19:23 = Isa 37:24, Ezek 17:6, and Cant 7:8. The situation in South Arabian is similar. The verb *qwm* appears in a Sabaic inscription (Gl 1520/4) with the name of a tree (*ʿlb*

⁷⁹ M. Zohary, *Plants*, 68.

⁸⁰ P. Haupt, “Was Amos a Sheepman?” *JBL* 35 (1916) 282.

⁸¹ Even for Biblical Aramaic, the tendency of most scholars has been to view examples of the *š*-causative as loanwords; see C. Rabin, “The Nature and Origin of the *š*af^{el} in Hebrew and Aramaic,” *ErIsr* 9 (1969) 148-58; Kaufman, *Influences*, 123-24; E. Y. Kutscher, “Aramaic,” in *Current Trends in Linguistics* (ed. T. A. Sebeok; 14 vols.; The Hague: Mouton, 1963-) 6. 354.

⁸² See A. F. L. Beeston, *Sabaic Grammar* (JSS Monograph 6; Manchester: JSS, 1984) 64.

⁸³ The single example of the causative of *qwm* cited by Ricks (*Lexicon*, 144) has an *h*-preformative: *hqmhw* “he set it up.” However, J. Huehnergard (personal communication) notes that the object suffix in *h* shows that it is Sabaic. Cf. F. Bron, “Le bilinguisme en Arabie du Sud préislamique,” in *Mosaïque de langues, mosaïque culturelle: le bilinguisme dans le Proche-Orient ancien* (ed. F. Briquel-Chatonnet; Paris: Maisonneuve, 1996) 125-30.

“Zizyphus spina-Christi”) as its subject: $\text{ל} \text{yqwm kl } \text{ל} \text{b} \text{m} \text{bfnwt} \text{n}$ “werde nicht angelegt jegliche $\text{ל} \text{b}$ -Pflanzung an d(ies)em Kanal.”⁸⁴ Since the meaning of *qwm* in this passage is “stand, be planted,”⁸⁵ its causative would have to mean “make stand, plant.” One might then claim that the שקמה gets its name from the fact that it causes buildings to stand; however, the use of an inanimate noun as the subject of a causative verb would be anomalous. A more grammatical solution would be to assume that the tree gets its name from the fact that it is caused to stand, i.e., planted. Thus, if the etymon of שקמה is a causative of a verb meaning “stand,” it is probably also a passive; cf. the German expression *mit Bäumen bestanden* “planted with trees.” Such a form could have been vocalized something like *šūqamat* (cf. Hebrew הוֹקְמָה, הוֹקֵם, הוֹקֵם) or *šūqamat*.⁸⁶ That is the vocalization that seems to be reflected in Christian Palestinian Aramaic שוקמא, Greek στυκάμινος, and perhaps Arabic *sawqam* as well.⁸⁷ The name could allude to a belief that the sycamore was planted by the gods, possibly the sycamore-gods discussed earlier in this chapter. It is even possible that the Qatabanian term *s¹qmtm* is an abridgment of a phrase like **ms¹qmt lhn* “planted by the gods.”

In sum, our conclusion that שקמה is a South Arabian loanword eliminates some of the objections to Haupt’s etymology; nevertheless, in the absence of further evidence, it must remain nothing more than an intriguing possibility.

⁸⁴ M. Höfner and J. M. Solá Solé, *Inschriften aus dem Gebiet zwischen Mārib und dem Ġōf* (Sammlung Eduard Glaser 2; Vienna: H. Böhlhaus, 1961) 19-20.

⁸⁵ A. F. L. Beeston, M. A. Ghul, W. W. Müller, and J. Ryckmans, *Sabaic Dictionary* (Louvain-la-Neuve: Peeters, 1982) 110 s.v.

⁸⁶ The vocalization of the corresponding ESA form is unknown; see Beeston, *Sabaic Grammar* 14 §5.3. J. Huehnergard suggests (personal communication) that the Hebrew vocalization may be the result of repatterning on the basis of other Hebrew botanical terms, such as those in n. 78 above. He adds that such repatterning is common in Arabic, as demonstrated by J. T. Fox, *Semitic Noun Patterns* (HSS 52; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2003).

⁸⁷ See n. 29 and chapter 1 above.

בוקר, בנקדים, and מאחרי הצאן

The Meaning of בוקר

The participle בוקר (Amos 7:14), also a *hapax legomenon*, was recognized as a denominative long before בולס was. Ibn Janāḥ, for example, says explicitly that it is derived from the word בקר “cattle”: “and from [בקר] it says ‘I am a בוקר,’ i.e., an owner of cattle not in need of anyone.”¹ Even earlier, Jerome reports that Aquila, Symmachus and Theodotion made a point of rendering *boger* (*sic*, instead of the expected *boker*) with βούκολος, which refers to “one who pastures cattle, not sheep.”²

Most of the medieval exegetes follow the Targum and the Talmud (*b. Ned.* 38a) in taking the בוקר to be something more than a simple cowherd.³ According to these commentators, Amos identifies himself as a בוקר in order to rebut the condescending insinuation that he has come to Bethel looking for a handout; hence, the בוקר must be reason-

¹ Ibn Janāḥ, *ʿUṣūl*, 106 lines 9-10.

² Jerome, *Commentarii*, 324 lines 387-88.

³ So Yefet (Ms. British Library Or. 2400 = Margoliouth 282, p. 27 = f. 102b lines 12-13), Al-Fāsī (*Jāmiʿ al-Alfāz* 1. 265 lines 84-87), Ibn Janāḥ (*ʿUṣūl*, 106 lines 9-10 and 451 lines 9-10), and Ibn Ezra (פירוש תרי"עשר, 310-11; less clearly 248-49). Cf. n. 58 below.

ably high on the socioeconomic scale. This deduction makes good sense. A person hired to herd cattle was probably called a רועה בקר “cowherd,” as in the Mishnah (*m. Sanh.* 3.1), just as a person hired to herd sheep and goats was called a רועה צאן “shepherd.” The term בוקר probably denoted a cattleman, a man who bred and sold cattle.

In modern times, however, several objections have been raised to this interpretation of בוקר as a denominative of בקר. They are summarized by Y. Breslavy: (1) the interpretation creates a contradiction between 7:14 (where Amos describes himself as a בוקר) and 1:1 (where Amos is said to be בנקדים);⁴ (2) the interpretation creates a contradiction between 7:14 (where Amos calls himself a בוקר) and 7:15 (where Amos says he was taken מאחרי הצאן);⁵ (3) the interpretation calls for a different nominal pattern, viz., בקר, as in *y. Beṣah* 5.3, 63b; cf. Arabic *baqqār* and Mishnaic Hebrew חֲבָר, חֲבָרָה;⁶ (4) “The mountain region, and the Judean mountains in particular, are not good for raising cattle, and certainly Tekoa, . . . situated on the threshold of the desert, was not fit for raising cattle. This border region can be exploited only by sheep and goats, since only they are capable of climbing the slopes of the mountains and hills and sustaining themselves for most of the year from poor dry grasses and a large series of desert plants from which cattle cannot derive benefit in any way.”⁷

These objections, especially (1) and (2), have inspired a wide variety of ingenious reinterpretations and emendations⁸ connecting the participle בוקר with

⁴ Y. Breslavy, *עמוס—נוקד, בוקר ובולס שקמים*, *Bet Mikra* 31 (1966-67) 93.

⁵ Breslavy, *עמוס*, 92.

⁶ Breslavy, *עמוס*, 94. Cf. also Late Aramaic בקר.

⁷ A. Cohen *apud* Breslavy, *עמוס*, 92; cf. Weiss, *עמוס*, 2. 445 n. 161.

⁸ See the sources cited in Weiss, *עמוס*, 2. 445 nn. 162-68, especially J. Wright, “Did Amos Inspect Livers,” *AusBR* 23 (1975) 6-11. The earliest reinterpretation is perhaps that which interprets בוקר as “shepherd,” comparing the *piel* of this root in Ezek 34:11-12: ודרשתי את צאני ובקרתים: כבקרת רעה עדרו . . . אבקר את צאני “I shall search for my flock and seek them out; as a shepherd seeks out his flock . . . so shall I seek out my flock.” A less common approach retains the traditional understanding of בוקר, while minimizing the value of בנקדים היה אשר in the superscription and reinterpreting or deleting מאחרי הצאן; see H. Schult, “Amos 7_{15a} und die Legitimation des Aussenseiters,” *Probleme biblischer Theologie: Gerhard von Rad zum 70. Geburtstag* . . . (ed. H. W. Wolff; Munich: C. Kaiser, 1971) 463-74 and O. Loretz, “Die Berufung des Propheten Amos (7,14-15),” *UF* 6 (1974) 487-88.

1. sheep
 - “one who looks after”
 - “shepherd” (ל. בוקד)
2. sycamore figs
 - “one who looks after”
 - “splitter”
 - “examiner”
 - “gleaner” (ל. בוצר)
 - “puncturer, piercer” (ל. דוקר or נוקד)
3. prophecy
 - “seer”
4. hepatoscopy
 - “examiner.”

In addition to these non-denominative interpretations, there is also a reinterpretation that takes בוקר as an Aramaism, a denominative of Aram. בקרא, with the latter taken to mean “Herde im allgemein” based on Syriac usage.⁹

Many of these solutions create new problems. A participle meaning “one who looks after,” “splitter,” or “puncturer, piercer” is not sufficiently specific to be the name of an occupation. An objective genitive would be required to remedy this defect, e.g., מבקר צאן or בוקר/דוקר בוקר שוקמים. Some have suggested that the word שוקמים later in the verse functions as the object of בוקר as well as בולס, but this suggestion presupposes a number of linguistic anomalies. First, there is the problem of the intervening pronoun, אנכי, noted by Weiss.¹⁰ This problem is, in my view, insurmountable, because a phrase like שוקמים בוקר/דוקר would normally be a genitive construction, if it is the name of an occupation, parallel to נביא, rather than merely the description of an activity.¹¹ However, the position of אנכי makes it impossible for בוקר and

⁹ B. J. Diebner, “Berufe und Berufung des Amos (Am 1,1 und 7,14f.),” *Dielheimer Blätter zum Alten Testament und seiner Rezeption in der Alten Kirche* 23 (1986) 103-4, 119. Cf. C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *The Twelve Minor Prophets* (trans. J. Martin; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1868) 312. Cf. also Mandaic באקרא “herd, flock.”

¹⁰ Weiss, *עמוס*, 2. 448 n. 195. Weiss cites Rudolph, *Joel—Amos—Obadja—Jona*, but I find no discussion of this issue there.

¹¹ Contrast כל ימי “and the men are shepherds” (Gen 46:32) with כל ימי הצאן “the entire time that we were with them herding the צאן” (1 Sam 25:16).

to form a genitive construction, at least in prose.¹² And even if we were to move the pronoun, we would still be left with the ungrammatical *בוקר/דוקר* וּבֹלֵס שְׁקִמִּים.¹³ In addition, some of the interpretations require the *pi'el* form (מִבְּקַר) rather than the *qal* (בֹּקֵר). As for the claim that *בֹּקֵר* is an Aramaism, it rests on the assumption that Aramaic *בְּקַרֵּא* could be used of sheep and goats in the biblical period, which cannot be proven using one or two Late Aramaic dialects; indeed, it is not even clear that the word was in use in Aramaic in that period, since it is not attested before Late Aramaic. In view of these flaws, we must conclude that, from a purely linguistic point of view, the traditional interpretation remains superior to the others.

As for the objections raised against the traditional interpretation, they are easily answered. The first two objections will be answered in the remainder of this chapter with the following claims: Amos was an איש מקנה (cf. Gen 46:32, 34), who owned both צֹאן (7:15) and בֹּקֵר (7:14).¹⁴ More precisely, he was a נוֹקֵד in the broad sense of the Neo-Babylonian *nāqīdu ša šēni u lāti*, a specialist stockbreeder who owned part of the herds and flocks that he managed. He alludes to his בֹּקֵר as a sign of self-sufficiency¹⁵ and to his צֹאן as a symbol of legitimacy.¹⁶

The third objection seems somewhat frivolous. The participle too is used for professions, especially in this semantic field, e.g., רֹעֵה, נוֹקֵד. Nor does the fact that this is a denominative change matters. H. Weippert correctly compares *בֹּקֵר* with כֹּרֵם,¹⁷ just as Bochart compared *בֹּלֵס* with כֹּרֵם. All are denominative participles used to refer to professions.

¹² See, for example, P. Joüon and T. Muraoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew* (Subsidia Biblica 14; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1991) 2. 463-65.

¹³ Hebrew grammar requires *בֹּקֵר/דֹּקֵר* שְׁקִמִּים וּבֹלֵס or the like in prose; see Joüon and Muraoka, *Grammar*, 464.

¹⁴ So H. Schmidt, *Der Prophet Amos* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1917) 9 n. 1; H. J. Stoebe, "Der Prophet Amos und sein bürgerlicher Beruf," *Wort und Dienst: Jahrbuch der Theologischen Schule Bethel* 51 (1957) 177; O. Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament: An Introduction* (Oxford: B. Blackwell, 1965) 396 n. 5; Rudolph, *Joel—Amos—Obadja—Jona*, 114; S. M. Paul, *Amos* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991) 35, 247-48.

¹⁵ They were roughly ten times more valuable than צֹאן; see E. Firmage, "Zoology," in *ABD* 6. 119b.

¹⁶ See below for a more precise formulation.

¹⁷ H. Weippert, "Amos: Seine Bilder und ihr Milieu," in *Beiträge zur prophetischen Bildsprache in Israel und Assyrien* (ed. H. Weippert, K. Seybold, and M. Weippert; Freiburg: Universitätsverlag, 1985) 4 n. 8.

The fourth objection appears to be somewhat exaggerated. If the wide plain around Tekoa is suitable for farming,¹⁸ it is certainly suitable for grazing cattle. As for Tekoa itself:

The hill, four or five acres, is broad at the top and not steep. The country is sterile and rocky, but rich in pasturage.¹⁹

H. J. Stoebe reports encountering a bedouin woman tending sheep and a cow while climbing from Herodion to Tekoa in the fall of 1955.²⁰ According to the 1974 animal census of the West Bank, cattle are raised in the hill country and even in the “desert fringe.”²¹ As for ancient Israel, cattle bones are found in archeological excavations in the hill country and in desert areas.²² The proportion of cattle to sheep and goats is lower today than in biblical times, “no doubt due to the fact that mechanized farming has largely replaced the use of the ox-drawn plow.”²³

The fourth objection is also irrelevant or, at least, inconsistent. The conditions that make Tekoa inhospitable to bovines are lethal to sycamores. As a result, most scholars, including Breslavsky himself, look for Amos’ sycamores outside of Tekoa.²⁴ Why not do the same for Amos’ cattle? Indeed, as we shall argue below, there are good reasons for assuming that Amos’ animals spent at least part of the year in the vicinity of his sycamores.

The Meaning of בְּנִקְדִים

The scholarly debate about the term נִקְדִים (Amos 1:1 בְּנִקְדִים, 2 Kgs 3:4 נִקְדִים) has focused on three questions: (1) Is the term restricted to people who deal with צֹאן or is it also used of people who deal with בְּבָקָר?²⁵

¹⁸ As reported by Z. Kallai, “Tekoa,” in *אנציקלופדיה מקראית* (Jerusalem: Bialik, 1972-88) 8. 925.

¹⁹ Harper, *Amos and Hosea*, 3.

²⁰ Stoebe, “Der Prophet Amos,” 177.

²¹ Firmage, “Zoology,” 1120b.

²² Firmage, “Zoology,” 1120a.

²³ Firmage, “Zoology,” 1120b.

²⁴ See chapter 5 below.

²⁵ Throughout this monograph, I use the Hebrew terms צֹאן and בְּבָקָר, due to the difficulty of finding an English translation for צֹאן. All of the translations currently in

(2) Does the term have socioeconomic connotations? (3) Does the term have sacral overtones?

The first question, unlike the second and third, has bothered exegetes for a long time. Abarbanel's uncertainty about the meaning of נוקד is evident in the corrections made in the autograph of his commentary: (1) רועה צאן בנוקדים אשר בעיר תקוע → "a herder of צאן among the נוקדים in the city of Tekoa" → "רועה בנוקדים אשר בעיר תקוע" → "a herder among the נוקדים in the city of Tekoa"; (2) נוקד הוא בעל הצאן → "a נוקד is an owner of צאן" → "נוקד הוא בעל הצאן או הבקר" → "a נוקד is an owner of צאן or בקר"; (3) אבל אמר אשר היה בנוקדים להגיד שהיה רועה צאן אחר אבל אמר אשר היה בנוקדים → "but it says that he was 'among the נוקדים' to indicate that he herded צאן belonging to another man" → "אבל אמר אשר היה בנוקדים" → "but it says that he was 'among the נוקדים' to indicate that he herded livestock belonging to another man."²⁶ The ancient versions do not speak with one voice concerning this question. For Aquila, the נוקד is a ποιμνιοτρόφος, a rearer of צאן,²⁷ both in 2 Kgs 3:4 and in Amos 1:1.²⁸ Similarly, for Symmachus (according to one tradition), he is a τρέφων βοσκήματα, a rearer of צאן²⁹ (2 Kgs 3:4), or a ποιμήν, a shepherd (Amos 1:1).³⁰ Other translators, however, used a more general term at Amos 1:1: κτηνοτρόφος "rearer of livestock."³¹ The expression ἄνδρες κτηνοτρόφοι is used by the Septuagint to render אנשי מקנה in Gen 46:32, 34. The word κτήνος regularly renders מקנה "livestock (וצאן ובקר)." Thus, at Gen 26:14, κτήνη προβάτων καὶ κτήνη βοῶν translates צאן ומקנה בקר ומקנה.

The Targum's rendering—גיתין in 2 Kgs 3:4 and Amos 1:1—is similar to κτηνοτρόφος in meaning and usage. Targumic Aramaic גיתין is a loanword related to Avestan *gaētha* "possession," and it is used to render מקנה "livestock."³² Thus, at Gen 46:32 וצאנם היו ומקנה היו וצאנם

use—"sheep and goats," "sheep-goats," "flocks," "small cattle," "ovi-caprine cattle," "caprovids," "capridae"—have drawbacks.

²⁶ Abarbanel, *Comentario*, 18 line 11; 18 line 20; 18 line 21 - 19 line 1.

²⁷ In the usage of Aquila, ποιμνιον normally renders צאן.

²⁸ Origen, *Hexapla*, 1. 655, 2. 967.

²⁹ In the usage of Symmachus, βοσκήματα always renders צאן.

³⁰ Origen, *Hexapla*, 1. 655, 2. 967.

³¹ Origen, *Hexapla*, 2. 967. For Philo's distinction between this term and ποιμήν, see P. de Robert, *Le berger d'Israël* (Neuchâtel: Delachaux et Niestlé, 1968) 19 n. 4. Philo's analysis does not seem to fit the usage of the translators.

³² A. Tal, לשון התרגום לנביאים ראשונים ומעמדה בכלל ניבי הארמית (Tel-Aviv: Tel-Aviv

ארי גברי מרי גיתי הוּו וענהוּן, ובקֶרם וכל אשר להם הביאו
 גיתי, and they have brought their צֶאֱן and their בֶּקֶר and all that is theirs,” showing that גיתי
 includes בֶּקֶר as well as צֶאֱן. The same picture emerges from Onqelos to
 Gen 26:14: גיתי עֵנָה וגיתי תורי. In Targum Jonathan to the Prophets, too,
 גיתי includes בֶּקֶר. This translation uses מרי גיתין) for בֶּקֶר in Amos
 7:14³³ and for נוקד in 2 Kgs 3:4, where it takes כרִים to mean דִּפְטָמָא
 “fattened cattle.”³⁴ We may say that, in the view of the Aramaic trans-
 lators, נקדים = גיתי = (גברי) מרי גיתין = אנשי מקנה.

The current view of the נוקד as a shepherd has less to do with the
 versions than with the lingering influence of the “pan-Arabic” period
 of biblical lexicography. Hebrew נוקד was already compared with
 Arabic *naqqād* by Judah Ibn Quraysh (late ninth or early tenth cen-
 tury).³⁵ This Arabic term has a very restricted meaning. As noted by
 Ibn Janāḥ, it denotes a *rāʿī naqqad*, a shepherd who tends a specific
 variety of short-legged sheep called *naqqad*.³⁶

Ibn Janāḥ was wise enough to distinguish the very narrow meaning

University, 1975) 186, 187. Despite its etymology, it is never used to render קנין “possession” or רכוש “property.” Nor is it used to render צֶאֱן; hence, M. Ellenbogen’s translation (*Foreign Words in the Old Testament: Their Origin and Etymology* [London: Luzac, 1962] 115) of מרי גיתין) in 2 Kgs 3:4 and Amos 1:1 as “flock owner” is unacceptable. The same goes for Watts’ translation (*Vision*, 35 and 36 n. 48) of מרי גיתין) at Amos 1:1 and 7:14 as “sheep-master” and the conclusions that he derives therefrom. In support of his translation, Watts cites S. Speier, “Bemerkungen zu Amos,” VT 3 (1953) 305. There is nothing relevant there on p. 305, but on p. 308, Speier writes: “. . . die aramäische Übersetzung des hebräischen מקדה, Vieh, ist. . . .”

³³ Cf. the citation in *b. Ned.* 38a.

³⁴ Distinguished from תורין דרעיִא “pastured cattle” in the Targum to 1 Kgs 5:3. For the distinction in earlier times, see M. Stępień, *Animal Husbandry in the Ancient Near East: A Prosopographic Study of Third-Millennium Umma* (Bethesda, Md.: CDL, 1996) 27, 197-98. These forms are vocalized דִּפְטָמָא and דִּרְעִיא by Sperber in *The Bible in Aramaic*, 2, 221 (1 Kgs 5:3) and 2, 275 (2 Kgs 3:4). And דִּרְעִיא is translated “of the pasture” in D. J. Harrington and A. J. Saldarini, *Targum Jonathan of the Former Prophets* (Wilmingon, Del.: M. Glazier, 1987) 220, 268. However, the Hebrew counterparts of these terms in *b. Beṣab* 38a are שור של רועה and שור של פטם. The correct vocalization must therefore be תורין דִּפְטָמָא “cattle of the fattener” and תורין דִּרְעִיא “cattle of the shepherd.”

³⁵ Judah Ibn Quraysh, יהודה בן קוריִישׁ של הרסאלה (ed. D. Becker; Tel-Aviv: Tel-Aviv University, 1984) 276-77.

³⁶ Ibn Janāḥ, *ʿUṣūl*, 451 line 6. Ibn Janāḥ does not give a definition for Arabic *naqqad*, but later exegetes do; see Poznański, “Ibn Baʿam,” 28; Tanḥum Yerushalmi, פירוש פירוש להרר-יעשר, 70-71; Bochart, *Hierozoicon*, 1. 442-43.

of this Arabic cognate from the meaning of Hebrew נֹקֵד (šāḥib ganam “an owner of sheep”).³⁷ W. Gesenius, standing on the broad shoulders of Ibn Janāḥ, widened the meaning of נֹקֵד even further. After presenting the meaning of the Arabic cognate, he writes: “Im Hebr. war aber wohl die Bedeutung allgemeiner: Viehhirt.”³⁸ Other Hebraists ignored Ibn Janāḥ’s example. S. R. Driver asserted that the herdsmen of Tekoa, “as the word used implies, reared a special breed of sheep, of small and stunted growth, but prized on account of their wool.”³⁹ To emphasize the point, he translated נֹקֵדִים as “naḳad-keepers.”⁴⁰ T. Nöldeke was of the same opinion. When an Akkadian cognate was discovered, he dismissed its importance: “Was נֹקֵד eigentlich bedeute, erfahren wir erst durch die Erklärung von naḳad.”⁴¹

In 1904, J. A. Montgomery adduced the Akkadian cognate as evidence that the Arabic meaning was too narrow:

The current interpretation of the word explains it from the Arabic *naḳad*, which is defined by Freytag (*Lex. s.v.*) as “a deformed and short-legged race of sheep which abounds in the Arabian province of Bahrein, . . . whose wool is considered to be the very finest.” . . .

But the Arabic parallel is provincial, and it seems a far cry to use such a special term for the general designation of shepherd as applied to Amos or Mesha. Should not the word, therefore, be explained as the equivalent of the Assyrian *nāḳidu*, shepherd?⁴²

As Akkadian gradually supplanted Arabic as the mainstay of biblical lexicography, the answer to Montgomery’s question came to be viewed as self-evident. Driver’s view of the נֹקֵד, cited above from works published in 1891 and 1897, is nowhere to be found in BDB (1907), which translates “sheep-raiser, -dealer, or -tender.”⁴³ This shift reached its

³⁷ Ibn Janāḥ, ²*Uṣūl*, 451 line 5.

³⁸ W. Gesenius, *Hebräisches and chaldäisches Handwörterbuch über das Alte Testament* (2nd ed.; Leipzig: F. C. W. Vogel, 1823) 509 s.v.

³⁹ S. R. Driver, *An Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1891) 293.

⁴⁰ Driver, *Books*, 128.

⁴¹ T. Nöldeke, Review of F. Delitzsch, *Prolegomena eines neuen hebräisch-aramäischen Wörterbuchs zum Alten Testament*, ZDMG 40 (1886) 723.

⁴² J. A. Montgomery, “Notes on Amos,” *JBL* 23 (1904) 94.

⁴³ BDB 667, s.v. According to the preface, Driver was not assigned this entry, but he “read all the proofs and made many suggestions” (p. ix).

natural conclusion in 1962 with a claim that Hebrew נֹקֵד was in fact borrowed from Akkadian.⁴⁴

Montgomery's push to broaden the interpretation of נֹקֵד did not go far enough. It was based on an interpretation of the Akkadian cognate that was itself too narrow, an interpretation that became increasingly untenable as the study of Akkadian progressed. In a highly influential series of articles beginning in 1948, M. San Nicolò showed that the Babylonian *nāqīdu* could be in charge not only of נֹשֵׂן (*nāqīdu ša šēni*) but also of בִּקֵר (*nāqīdu ša lāti*) or נֹשֵׂן וּבִקֵר (*nāqīdu ša šēni u lāti*).⁴⁵ He noted further that *NA.GAD* = *nāqīdu* is used of “the breeder of sheep, asses, and cows” already in the Sumerian Fara texts.⁴⁶ Finally, he pointed to a *nāqīdu* of the Eanna temple in Uruk (555/54 B.C.E.) named Iqīšā son of Nannā-ereš who was in charge of 500 cows in addition to 2000 sheep and goats.⁴⁷

These 2,500 animals have been mentioned by many an author in connection with question (2), but, inexplicably, they have been totally ignored—sometimes by the very same author—in dealing with question (1). Thus, A. S. Kapelrud writes: “This *naqīdu* . . . might be responsible for 500 cows and 2000 sheep and goats. The term . . . is

⁴⁴ Ellenbogen, *Foreign Words*, 115. Reaction to this claim has been mixed. P. V. Mankowski (*Akkadian Loanwords in Biblical Hebrew* [Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 2000] 104 n. 372) is not convinced. HALAT, 679 s.v., agrees with Ellenbogen, but, instead of citing him, it refers to two works that disagree: H. Zimmern, *Akkadische Fremdwörter als Beweis für babylonischen Kultureinfluss* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1915) 41 and *AHW* 744a. The claim of the latter is that only Sumerian and Syriac got the word from Akkadian; the suggestion of the former is that Akkadian may have borrowed the word from West Semitic! See also chapter 5 n. 34 below.

⁴⁵ M. San Nicolò, “Materialien zur Viehwirtschaft in den neubabylonischen Tempeln. I,” *Or NS* 17 (1948) 284; idem, “Materialien zur Viehwirtschaft in den neubabylonischen Tempeln. II,” *Or NS* 18 (1949) 295. Cf. H. M. Kümmel, *Familie, Beruf und Amt im spätbabylonischen Uruk* (Berlin: Mann, 1979) 49. For the problems associated with the reading *lātu*, see M. Van De Mierop, “Sheep and Goat Herding According to the Old Babylonian Texts from Ur,” *Bulletin on Sumerian Agriculture* 7 (1993) 173-74 and G. van Driel, “Cattle in the Neo-Babylonian Period,” *Bulletin on Sumerian Agriculture* 8 (1995) 217-18.

⁴⁶ San Nicolò, “Viehwirtschaft I,” 284 n. 3; cf. B. Landsberger, *Materialien zum sumerischen Lexikon, II: Die Serie Ur-e-a = nāqu* (Rome: Pontificium Institutum Biblicum, 1951) 107 n. 3.

⁴⁷ San Nicolò, “Viehwirtschaft I,” 285, cf. 279-81.

found also in the Sumerian Fara texts, with the meaning shepherd.”⁴⁸ Kapelrud cites San Nicolò here, but his statement about the Fara texts contradicts San Nicolò’s own words, which we have cited above. In the next paragraph, Kapelrud continues: “The translation sheep-raiser [for *noqed*], as suggested by Koehler, may therefore be accepted.” A. Jeffers makes the contradiction even more blatant: “[The *nāqīdu*’s] were often [*sic!* RCS] responsible for five hundred cows and two thousand sheep and goats. Moreover, the term ‘sheep-raiser’ is very easy to derive from the original meaning of the root *nqd*, ‘to puncture.’ . . .”⁴⁹

Nor has the publication of the Akkadian dictionaries succeeded in uprooting the tradition among biblicists of restricting the *nāqīdu* to sheep, even though *AHw* (s.v. *nāqīdum* “Hirte”) cites the phrase *nāqīdu ša lāti*, and *CAD* (s.v. *nāqīdu* “herdsman”) begins by citing Code of Hammurabi §261.22: *šumma awīlum nāqīdam ana alpī u šēnī re’im īgur* “if a man hires a herdsman to herd cattle or sheep and goats.”⁵⁰ Segert cites these very entries in claiming:

Larger numbers of sheep may help to explain the apparent specialization of the term *nāqīdu* for herdsmen of sheep, while the term expressing rather the overseeing of animals at grazing, Akkadian *rē’û*, Ugaritic *r’y*, Hebrew *rō’ē* could be in some contexts used as terms for herdsmen of bovines, of large cattle.⁵¹

Delcor too refers to *AHw* in asserting that “l’acadien *naqīdu* est traduit par ‘berger, éleveur de moutons.’”⁵² This reading of the Akka-

⁴⁸ A. S. Kapelrud, *Central Ideas in Amos* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1961) 6.

⁴⁹ A. Jeffers, *Magic and Divination in Ancient Palestine and Syria* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1996) 112.

⁵⁰ *AHw*, 744a; *CAD* vol. N, 333.

⁵¹ S. Segert, “The Ugaritic *nqdm* After Twenty Years. A Note on the Function of Ugaritic *nqdm*,” *UF* 19 (1987) 410. Similarly, P. V. Mankowski (*Akkadian Loanwords in Biblical Hebrew* [HSS 47; Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 2000] 104 n. 372) writes that connecting *nāqīdu* with Arabic *naqada* (“to pick, separate the good from the bad”) “would fit with the notion of *nāqīdu* as *Schafhirt* as distinct from *Rinderhirt*, since *nāqīdu* would not apply to bovines in the original usage.” This distinction between the two terms is made already by A. Salonen (Review of W. von Soden, *Akkadisches Handwörterbuch*, *AOf* 23 [1970] 96): “*nāqīdu* ‘Hirt’, d. h. das semitische Wort für ursprünglich ‘Schafhirt’ neben *rē’u* (*sic*) ‘Rinderhirt.’” However, there is not a single attested Semitic language that distinguishes the terms in this way.

⁵² M. Delcor, “Quelques termes relatifs à l’élevage des ovins en hébreu classique et dans les langues sémitiques voisines: étude de lexicographie comparée,” in *Atti del*

dian dictionaries is very different from that of H. Waetzoldt in *Reallexikon der Assyriologie*: “sum. na-gada, akk. *nāqīdu* . . . und gáb-ra, gáb-ús, akk. *kaparru* . . . ; beide hüten Groß- od. Kleinvieh. S. AHw und CAD.”⁵³ In short, students of Hebrew have unjustly imposed their narrow, ovine interpretation of נֹקֵד on Akkadian *nāqīdu* and even attributed it to the Akkadian dictionaries. Only Tur-Sinai and Paul have defied this trend, using Akkadian to argue for a broader meaning of the Hebrew word.⁵⁴

In view of the true meaning of the Akkadian cognate, it seems gratuitous to posit a contradiction between 1:1 and 7:14. It is more natural to assume that a בֹּקֵר is simply a specific type of נֹקֵד. It is interesting to note that Driver, even though he held the narrowest possible view of the נֹקֵד, resisted the temptation to posit such a contradiction: “From 7, 14 we learn that he had under his charge herds of larger cattle as well. . . .”⁵⁵ In light of the evidence presented above, the wisdom of Driver’s approach should be evident.

As for the second question, involving the socioeconomic connotations of נֹקֵד, modern scholars have generally returned to the view of Symmachus (according to one tradition),⁵⁶ the Targum,⁵⁷ and the early medieval exegetes⁵⁸ that the biblical נֹקֵד was not a lowly hired hand.⁵⁹

secondo congresso internazionale di linguistica camito-semitica (ed. P. Fronzaroli; Florence: Università di Firenze, 1978) 121-22.

⁵³ H. Waetzoldt, “Hirt. A. Philologisch (neusumerisch),” in *Reallexikon der Assyriologie* (ed. E. Ebeling, B. Meissner, et al.; Berlin/Leipzig: W. de Gruyter, 1928-) 4. 421-25. I am indebted to J. Huehnergard for this reference.

⁵⁴ N. H. Tur-Sinai, פְּשׁוּטוֹ שֶׁל בֹּקֵרָא (Jerusalem: Kiryath Sefer, 1962-68) 3. 450; Paul, *Amos*, 35, 247-48, citing the Hammurabi passage. Danell does not deal explicitly with question (1), but his translations and discussions of the Akkadian and Hebrew terms in connection with questions (2) and (3) (*Amos*, 8-9) show that he too recognized the broader meaning. Cf. also D. Pardee, “The Ba’lu Myth,” in *The Context of Scripture* (ed. W. W. Hallo and K. L. Younger; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1997-2002) 1. 273 n. 283.

⁵⁵ Driver, *Introduction*, 293.

⁵⁶ See Origen, *Hexapla*, 1. 655 ἀρχιποιμήν “chief shepherd.” So too, Ishodad of Merv (*Commentaire* [CSCO 303] 4. 82 line 7): רַעִיָא וְרֵשׁ רַעוּתָא.

⁵⁷ See above.

⁵⁸ Rabbanites, e.g., Ibn Quraysh (רַבִּיאָלִיָהּ), 276-77 no. 275) and Ibn Janāh (ʿ*Uṣūl*, 451 lines 5-7), and Karaites, e.g., Daniel al-Qumisi (פְּתוּרִין), 32), Al-Fāsi (*Jāmiʿ al-alfāz*, 2. 290 lines 21-22) and Yefet (Ms. British Library Or. 2400 = Margoliouth 282, p. קגו = f. 79b line 4). Cf. n. 3 above.

⁵⁹ By contrast, Jerome (*Commentarii*, 324 line 408) refers to Amos as a “humble and

This view is based first and foremost on the application of the term to Mesha, the king of Moab, in 2 Kgs 3:4.⁶⁰

Many scholars have adduced Ugaritic evidence to support this view. Already in 1938 Montgomery wrote:

The first published long text from Ras Shamra indicates that it is a “document” of a certain high official, who is *rb khnm*, “chief priest,” *rb nqdm* “chief sheepmaster.” This rare word appears to have had an official meaning, and Amos may have been more of “a gentleman” than critics have suspected.⁶¹

Subsequent discoveries of the term *nqd* in additional Ugaritic texts⁶² and in two Akkadian texts from Ugarit have corroborated Montgomery’s suggestion. A. F. Rainey writes: “The high status [of the *nqdm* at Ugarit] relative to other types of agricultural workers is indicated by the fact that they are the only class of agricultural workers that is included in the list of citizens holding feudal property.”⁶³ P. C. Craigie develops this view further:

[The *nqdm* in the Ugaritic texts] seem to have a higher status than mere labourers, or workers in general, as is indicated by the fact that under fiscal law a group of *nqdm* was equivalent to an entire village community. By way of contrast, the Ugaritic *rʾym* . . . , who are referred to in more than a dozen Ugaritic texts, appear to be closer to the level of labourers; they are described in various texts as receiving rations, work-

simple shepherd,” and Abarbanel (*Comentario*, 20) calls him “the lowliest and poorest of shepherds.”

⁶⁰ Interestingly, Moab was still known for its sheep in the Herodian period. According to *t. Men.* 9.13, the rams for the Temple service were imported from there; see S. Applebaum, “Economic Life in Palestine,” in *The Jewish People in the First Century: Historical Geography, Political History, Social, Cultural and Religious Life and Institutions* (ed. S. Safrai and M. Stern; CRINT 1; Assen/Amsterdam: Van Gorcum, 1974-) 2. 647; S. Safrai, “The Temple,” in *The Jewish People*, 2. 882; idem, “The Temple and the Divine Service,” in *The World History of the Jewish People: The Herodian Period* (ed. M. Avi-Yonah; New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1975) 321.

⁶¹ J. A. Montgomery, “The New Sources of Knowledge,” in *Record and Revelation* (ed. H. W. Robinson; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1938) 22.

⁶² See J.-L. Cunchillos and J.-P. Vita, *Concordancia de Palabras Ugaríticas* (Madrid-Zaragoza: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1995) 1456; Olmo Lete and Sanmartín, *Diccionario* 2. 329-30 s.v. *nqd*.

⁶³ A. F. Rainey, מבנה החברה באוגרית (Jerusalem: Bialik, 1967) 86.

ing under supervision, and generally having a less elevated status than the *nqdm*. . . .⁶⁴

. . . it is probably more accurate to think of Amos the *nōqēd* as being similar to the Ugaritic *nqd*; he probably owned, or managed, large herds of sheep and was engaged in the marketing of their products. Indeed, it was probably his marketing duties that took him north from his home state of Judah to the market towns of Israel, there to sell his goods. Taken together, the evidence indicates that Amos was engaged extensively in agricultural business, being involved in cattle and fruit-farming, in addition to sheep.⁶⁵

Finally, Akkadian evidence has also been adduced. Many scholars, beginning with Engnell and Kapelrud,⁶⁶ have cited San Nicolò's demonstration that the *nāqīdu*'s employed by the Eanna temple in sixth-century Uruk were "Viehzüchter" with a managerial role, the actual herding being done by *rē'û*'s assigned to the *nāqīdu*'s:

An der Spitze des mit der Aufzucht und Wartung von Rindern, Schafen und Ziegen des Tempels betrauten Personals standen ein oder mehrere *h^hrabi-bûli* "Viehvorsteher," in Eanna in der Regel drei, die meist selber Tierhalter waren. Jeder von ihnen hatte eine grössere Anzahl von "Viehzüchtern" (*h^hnāqīdu*, Ideogr. NA.GAD) unter sich. . . .

Soweit die Tiere draussen im Lande auf der Weide lebten, wurden sie von "Hirten" (*h^hrē'û*) unmittelbar betreut, die den einzelnen *h^hnāqīdu* zugewiesen waren.⁶⁷

Although biblical scholars continue to rely solely on San Nicolò's study from 1948, the subject has been revisited twice since then. Fortunately, San Nicolò's portrait of a three-tiered hierarchy at Uruk has been confirmed by these later investigations. H. M. Kümmel writes:

Soweit wir sehen können, entstammten die Viehvorsteher regelmässig der Gruppe der ihnen unterstellten "Viehhalter," ^{lu}NA.GADA = *nāqīdu*. . . .

Den Viehhaltern ihrerseits unterstanden die eigentlichen "Hirten" beim Vieh auf der Weide, ^{lu}SIPA = *rē'û*. Das zeigen die gelegentlichen

⁶⁴ P. C. Craigie, "Amos the *nōqēd* in the Light of Ugaritic," *SR* 11 (1982) 32. See also M. Dietrich and O. Loretz, "Die ug. Berufsgruppe der *nqdm* und das Amt des *rb nqdm*," *UF* 9 (1977) 336-37.

⁶⁵ P. C. Craigie, *Ugarit and the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983) 73.

⁶⁶ See I. Engnell, "Profetisms ursprung och uppkomst: Ett gammaltestamentligt grundproblem," *Religion och Bibel: Nathan Söderblom-Sällskapets Årsbok* 8 (1949) 15 n. 3; Kapelrud, *Central Ideas*, 6.

⁶⁷ San Nicolò, "Viehwirtschaft I," 284-85.

Erwähnungen eines Hirten als PN₁, *rēʾû ša* PN₂ (*nāqidi*) “PN₁, Hirte des (Viehhalters) PN₂,” bzw. PN₁ (*nāqidu*), PN₂ *rēʾû-šu* “der (Viehhalter) PN₁ (und) sein Hirte PN₂” deutlich.⁶⁸

So too G. van Driel:

The Uruk *nāqidu* is . . . sometimes a person with considerable holdings and connections. . . .

These *nāqidu*'s were not themselves the actual herdsmen, the herding was left to the *rēʾû*'s.⁶⁹

If we assume the cattle herding was organised along lines similar to sheep herding, herdsmen contractually received a share of the young animals. . . .⁷⁰ Perhaps we could speculate on a 33% share for the herdsman, as is the case with sheep, though this would seem very generous with regards to cattle.

. . . The *nāqidu*'s, the administrative herdsmen, will have been managers. We can only assume that part of their herds was their personal property.⁷¹

The status of the Old Babylonian *nāqidu(m)* and the Sumerian *na-gada* is far less clear. There is no evidence that the *nāqidu(m)/na-gada* was superior to the *rēʾû(m)/sipa*. Nonetheless, some scholars believe that the Sumerian term *na-gada* referred, at least sometimes, to an *Oberhirt*.⁷² The subordinate of the *nāqidu(m)/na-gada*, the one who did the actual herding, was the *kaparru(m)/gáb-ra*.⁷³

⁶⁸ Kümmel, *Familie*, 49-50. According to San Nicolò (“Viehwirtschaft I,” 285), there was also an “Oberhirt” (*rab-rēʾi*) who had a supervisory role; Kümmel (*Familie*, 50) notes that, at Uruk, there is only a single, very uncertain attestation of this term.

⁶⁹ G. van Driel, “Neo-Babylonian Sheep and Goats,” *Bulletin on Sumerian Agriculture* 7 (1993) 224-25.

⁷⁰ This is also what Jacob received from Laban, according to Genesis 30-31; see further J. J. Finkelstein, “An Old Babylonian Herding Contract and Genesis 31:38f,” *JAOS* 88 (1968) 30-36.

⁷¹ Driel, “Cattle,” 228-29.

⁷² See Landsberger, *Materialien*, 106 and F. R. Kraus, *Staatliche Viehhaltung im alt-babylonischen Lande Larsa* (Amsterdam: Noord-Hollandsche U. M., 1966) 16, 50; the latter compares the Roman *magister pecoris*, who had to be able to write and keep books. J. N. Postgate (“Some Old Babylonian Shepherds and Their Flocks,” *JSS* 20 [1975] 2) appears to agree. By contrast, Van De Mierop (“Sheep and Goat,” 168) states that the term *na-gada* refers to the lowest level in the hierarchy of herdsmen.

⁷³ See Finkelstein, “Herding Contract,” 32 n. 6; M. W. Green, “Animal Husbandry at Uruk in the Archaic Period,” *JNES* 39 (1980) 16 n. 82; Waetzoldt, “Hirt,” 421. The first

Socioeconomic conclusions can be drawn not only from the term *nāqīdu*/נֹקֵד, but also from Amos' association with both צֹאן and בָּקָר, if we may judge once again from the situation in Uruk:

. . . there are no flocks of sheep and goats in combination with cattle. When people are held accountable for both categories they belong to what might be called managerial levels.⁷⁴

We come finally to the claim that the term נֹקֵד had sacral connotations. This claim appears to have arisen in response to the discovery and decipherment of the tablets from Ras Shamra. In the colophon of the Baal cycle (UT 62:56, CTA 6 VI:56, KTU 1.6 VI:56), discovered in 1933 and published in 1934 by C. Virolleaud, a single individual is identified as *rb khnm rb nqdm* “chief of the priests and chief of the herdsmen.”⁷⁵ Virolleaud found this association surprising at first glance, but concluded that it was only natural for sheep-breeding to be a prestigious occupation in an agricultural society such as that at Ugarit.⁷⁶ In the following year, T. H. Gaster suggested reading more into the association:

Virolleaud opines that *rb nqdm* refers to the fact that the high-priest was a sheep-breeder, as were many people at Ugarit.

May not the title have a special meaning and refer to the sacred sheep of the temple?⁷⁷

In 1943, I. Engnell cited the Ugaritic phrase as evidence that the king in the ancient Near East was the high priest *par excellence*:

For another district, too, *viz.* Moab, the O. T. has something to say, 2 Ki. 3.4 styling king Meša as נֹקֵד. One has for a long time—owing to the

two scholars seem to treat *rē'û(m)* as an approximate synonym of *nāqīdu(m)*; the last believes that *rē'û(m)* is a superordinate term, covering both the *nāqīdu(m)* and the *kaparru(m)*.

⁷⁴ Driel, “Sheep and Goats,” 219.

⁷⁵ For a recent discussion of the colophon, see Pardee, “Ba'lu,” 273 nn. 281-83.

⁷⁶ C. Virolleaud, “Fragment nouveau du poème de Môt et Aley-Baal,” *Syria* 15 (1934) 242-43.

⁷⁷ T. H. Gaster, “Notes on Ras Shamra Texts,” *OLZ* 38 (1935) 475. For a different explanation of the association from around the same time, see E. Dhorme, *L'évolution religieuse d'Israël* (Bruxelles: Nouvelle société d'éditions, 1937) 223.

Arabic and Accadian etymologies—suspected this “shepherdship” to be of a sacral nature; and now the Ras Shamra texts have supplied the final proof. Gaster seems to be the first to have observed that נקד occurs at R Sh as a sacral term in the colophon of I AB, where רב נקדם is paralleled with רב כהנם and, evidently, also with ראש רעי. Hence *nōkēd* must denote king Meša as a sacral person, and probably as the high priest in principle.⁷⁸

As for the other biblical נוקד, Engnell wrote:

The import of the word נקד, now established through the R Sh parallel, ought to have its consequences also for the conception of Amos’ person and position (Am. 1.1). The present writer hopes to have the opportunity of reverting to the Amos question.⁷⁹

Engnell’s reference to Arabic and Akkadian etymologies is perplexing and his reference to Gaster, misleading. Gaster’s modest suggestion was that the *chief* of the *nqdm* at Ugarit raised sacred *sheep*. It is a long way from that to Engnell’s theory that *every nqd everywhere* in the ancient Near East was a sacral *person*. A less dramatic leap was made in 1948 by D. M. L. Urie: “At Ugarit the *nqd* was obviously a cult official.”⁸⁰

The consequences for Amos of Engnell’s theory were discussed first by his Uppsala colleague, A. Haldar, in 1945. Haldar pointed to the term נוקד as evidence that Amos and indeed all of the writing prophets were cultic functionaries, members of cultic associations headed by the king.⁸¹ Engnell himself returned to the question in 1948:

[Amos] is reported . . . to have belonged to “the herdsmen from Tekoa,” a place a couple of miles from Jerusalem. The Hebrew word for “herdsmen” in this case, *nōkēd*, reveals, upon comparison with corresponding

⁷⁸ I. Engnell, *Studies in Divine Kingship in the Ancient Near East* (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1943) 87.

⁷⁹ Engnell, *Studies*, 87 n. 2.

⁸⁰ D. M. L. Urie, “Officials of the Cult at Ugarit,” *PEQ* 80 (1948) 46. His view is cited approvingly in A. DeGuglielmo, “Sacrifice in the Ugaritic Texts,” *CBQ* 17 (1955) 89 and J.-M. de Tarragon, *Le Culte à Ugarit* (Paris: J. Gabalda, 1980) 135.

⁸¹ A. Haldar, *Associations of Cult Prophets Among the Ancient Semites* (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1945) 112 n. 4.

terms in other Semitic languages, something that the Ras Shamra texts also show, that A. had, in some way, a connection with a personnel class tied to the temple. Tekoa must have been a “branch” of the temple in Jerusalem. In view of the way in which, in antiquity, all economic and political life was centralized in the sanctuaries, his position as “herdsman” and, at the same time, member of a temple personnel group of some kind can be easily understood.⁸²

Not all of Engnell’s Swedish colleagues embraced his view of נֹקֵד as a sacral term. In an article published in 1949, E. Sjöberg attacked Engnell’s reasoning, arguing that the existence of one cultic *nqd* at Ugarit did not prove that all *nqdm* were cultic herdsmen, a point made also by E. Würthwein in responding to Haldar in 1950.⁸³ Sjöberg claimed that, in Mesopotamia, “just as there were cultic *nā-ki-du*, there were ordinary, profane ones, who could be placed together with cowherds . . . and farmers . . . into one group.”⁸⁴ Furthermore, “the Arabic word *naqad*, from which the Hebrew word is, for the most part, customarily derived has no cultic relation whatsoever. It is quite simply a designation of a certain species of sheep.”⁸⁵ Finally, “the juxtaposition [of herding and growing sycomore figs] becomes more natural, if in both cases it is a question of an ordinary middle-class food—if the sheep were as non-cultic as the sycomore figs.”⁸⁶

Engnell’s sole response to this refutation of his thesis was to cite the article by San Nicolò that was to become a cornerstone of the debate.⁸⁷ This response was essentially beside the point, since Sjöberg had already conceded that “there were cultic *nā-ki-du*” in Mesopotamia.

In 1951, there were further demurrals in Sweden and Germany, from G. A. Danell and O. Eissfeldt.⁸⁸ In that same year, however, M. Bič

⁸² I. Engnell, “Amos,” in *Svenskt Bibliskt Uppslagsverk* (Gävle: Skolförlaget, 1948) 1. 59-60.

⁸³ E. Sjöberg, “De förexiliska profeternas förkunnelse,” *SEÅ* 14 (1949) 16; E. Würthwein, “Amos-Studien,” *ZAW* 62 (1950) 39 n. 59.

⁸⁴ Sjöberg, “Förkunnelse,” 17 n. 14.

⁸⁵ Sjöberg, “Förkunnelse,” 17 n. 14.

⁸⁶ Sjöberg, “Förkunnelse,” 18.

⁸⁷ San Nicolò, “Viehwirtschaft I,” is cited in Engnell, “Profetismens ursprung,” 15 n. 3.

⁸⁸ G. A. Danell, “Var Amos verkligen en nabi?” *SEÅ* 16 (1951) 8-9; O. Eissfeldt, “The Prophetic Literature,” in *The Old Testament and Modern Study* (ed. H. H. Rowley; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1951) 159, cf. 124.

took Engnell's theory a step further, claiming that the real meaning of the allegedly sacral term *nāqidul* נִקְדָּל is "hepatoscopist."⁸⁹ This curious claim was immediately refuted by Murtonen.⁹⁰ When the theory reappeared in the following decade in the work of J. Gray, it was refuted again, by Segert.⁹¹ Bič argued once again for his claim in 1969, this time eliciting a refutation by Wright.⁹²

Engnell's theory was popularized by A. S. Kapelrud.⁹³ The latter spelled out evidence that the former only hinted at, and he formulated the theory in a more cautious manner:

Who, then, was a *noqed* in Judah in the time of Amos? It may have been a person of rather high rank who was responsible for a large part of the temple herds. Economically, as well as in what concerned the temple cult, he was therefore an important person. . . .⁹⁴

He may . . . officially have had something to do with the cult, even if his task has only been to furnish it with the necessary sheep for sacrifices.⁹⁵

Kapelrud's other contribution was to adduce additional Ugaritic evidence:

In text No. 113 (Gordon) *nqdm* are listed together with yeomen, *tnnm*, priests, *kbmm*, and another class of priests, *qdšm* (vv. 70—73). In No. 300 we find *nqdm* listed after *tgrm*, door-men, gatekeepers, and *šrm*, singers.

⁸⁹ M. Bič, "Der Prophet Amos—Ein Haepatoskopos," *VT* 1 (1951) 293-96.

⁹⁰ A. Murtonen, "The Prophet Amos—A Hepatoscoper?" *VT* 2 (1952) 170-71.

⁹¹ S. Segert, "Zur Bedeutung des Wortes nōqēd." *Hebräische Wortforschung: Festschrift zum 80. Geburtstag von Walter Baumgartner* (VTSup 16; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1967) 279-83.

⁹² M. Bič, *Das Buch Amos* (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1969) 8-9, 16-20; Wright, "Liver," 3-6.

⁹³ Kapelrud, *Central Ideas*, 6. Kapelrud is frequently assumed to be the originator of the theory, because he failed to attribute it to Engnell. The Swedish encyclopedia entry in which Engnell published the theory is not well known to most scholars. Kapelrud cites it frequently in his book but not in this context. The only work that Kapelrud cites in arguing for a connection of the *nqdm* with the temple is Montgomery, "The New Sources," quoted above, which says nothing about such a connection. Even stranger, Engnell himself credits Montgomery, "Notes," but that too does not deal with question (3) in any way, as noted already by Sjöberg, "Förkunnelse," 17-18 n. 15.

⁹⁴ Kapelrud, *Central Ideas*, 6.

⁹⁵ Kapelrud, *Central Ideas*, 69. See further below.

. . . There can be little if any doubt at all that the *nqdm* are mentioned among the temple personnel because they were an important guild in the service of the temple.⁹⁶

UT 113:71 (CTA 71:71, KTU 4.68:71) had already been discussed by Sjöberg in 1949, when the meaning of the word *tnnm* was still considered uncertain. Since the *tnnm* are grouped in that text with the *nqdm*, Sjöberg felt that the precise nuance (cultic or non-cultic) of the word *nqdm* was also uncertain.⁹⁷ For H. J. Stoebe, writing eight years later, the situation seemed far more clear-cut. In his view, Kapelrud's interpretation of Text 113 was very dubious:

Die *nqdm* sind mit den *tnnm* zusammengefaßt und haben mit diesen zusammen einen Bogenschützen zu stellen; *tnnm* stellen vielleicht ebenso wie die vorher genannten *mrnm* militärische Klassen dar. Es muß also sehr zweifelhaft sein, ob die *nqdm* hier mit den *khn* und den *qdš* zusammenzustellen sind. . . .⁹⁸

Stoebe also impeached the evidence of UT 300 rev:12 (CTA 82 B:12, KTU 4.103:44):

Indessen werden gerade in diesem Zusammenhang *khn* and *qdš* nicht aufgeführt, außerdem werden zu Anfang des Verzeichnisses Berufsgruppen mit Land dotiert, die kaum zum Tempelpersonal zu rechnen sind, so daß das Prinzip der Anordnung dieser Liste einigermaßen dunkel bleibt.⁹⁹

Finally, Stoebe questioned whether the *nāqidu*'s employed by the Eanna temple are to be considered true cult personnel:

. . . aber es ist damit wohl noch nicht entschieden, daß diese Leute den eigentlichen Kultpersonen des Tempels zuzurechnen sind. Trotz einer unbestreitbaren Abhängigkeit vom Tempel können sie doch ein gewisses Maß an Selbständigkeit gehabt haben, ja müssen es wohl sogar gehabt

⁹⁶ Kapelrud, *Central Ideas*, 6.

⁹⁷ Sjöberg, "Förkunnelse," 16-17 n. 14.

⁹⁸ Stoebe, "Der Prophet Amos," 166.

⁹⁹ Stoebe, "Der Prophet Amos," 167.

haben, weil die Weideplätze oft in erheblicher Entfernung von den Tempeln lagen.¹⁰⁰

Stoebe's distinction between temple personnel and cult personnel is standard in recent work. Wolff writes:

To be sure, it is quite possible that at Ugarit, as at Babylon, sheep breeders were responsible for temple flocks. But must they therefore have belonged to the cultic personnel? Certainly in the case of Amos such a positive conclusion should not be drawn.¹⁰¹

So too Craigie:

Thus, the term *nqd* does not necessarily carry any sacral or religious connotations. While the *nqd* could be a temple-servant, the majority of the evidence indicates that the *nqdm* were servants of the royal establishment. And even in the single instance in which temple-*nqdm* can be identified, the text gives no indication whatever that their role was in any sense sacral.

Applying this information to the role of Amos, the *nqd*, it is clear that while Amos could have been a temple-servant, it is far more likely that he was not.¹⁰²

A similar conclusion is reached by B. Cutler and J. Macdonald in their discussion of the *nqdm* of UT 113:

[Sheep-breeders] would have been needed to meet the unending needs of the palace with its wide repertoire of victuals for multivarious guests from different countries, as well as the king's personal hospitality to men of rank. . . . Thus Meshac and Amos would have been prosperous business men before (and during?) their respective roles of rule and prophecy.¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ Stoebe, "Der Prophet Amos," 166; cf. also 174-75.

¹⁰¹ H. W. Wolff, *Joel and Amos* (trans. W. Janzen et al.; ed. S. D. McBride, Jr.; Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977) 124.

¹⁰² Craigie, "Amos," 33.

¹⁰³ B. Cutler and J. Macdonald, "The Unique Ugaritic Text UT 113 and the Question of 'Guilds,'" *UF* 9 (1977) 25. Cf. also B. Cutler and J. Macdonald, "Identification of the *Na'ar* in the Ugaritic Texts," *UF* 8 (1976) 31 n. 30; and M. Heltzer, "Royal Economy in Ancient Ugarit," in *State and Temple Economy in the Ancient Near East, II* (ed. E. Lipiński; Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta 6; Leuven: Departement Oriëntalistiek, 1979) 472: "Among the people engaged in royal cattle-breeding, one finds, first of all, different kinds of shepherds, designated by the terms *nqdm* and *r'ym*."

As for the *tnnm*, who are grouped in that text and several others with the *nqdm*,¹⁰⁴ Cutler and Macdonald note that the equivalent group at Alalakh, the *šanannu*, appear as owners of livestock in several Akkadian texts. They conclude:

There can be little doubt, therefore, that the *šanannu* were stockholders who pastured their sheep in grass (Texts 341, 350), . . . and who played their role as military men only when required to do so in accordance with treaty agreements with the overlord of the territory in which they grazed their animals and, presumably, to whom they sold their sheep.¹⁰⁵

The most recent work on the Eanna herdsmen has made the notion of the cultic *nāqīdu* even less plausible. Van Driel stresses the importance of a distinction that was not made explicit by either San Nicolò or Kümmel:

We must differentiate between that part of the documentation belonging to the flocks directly managed by the temple personnel and its administrative supervisors, and the flocks managed indirectly, through written, and possibly unwritten, contract.¹⁰⁶

There is an internal organization which provides the animals required for the cult functions along different lines from the external organization, which, at least in part operates at considerable distances from the towns where the institutions have their abode. Especially in Uruk it is obvious that (some? of) the external herding was contracted out. . . .

The fundamental difference is that the personnel of the “home herds” figures in the ration lists, whereas the extramural personnel does not.¹⁰⁷

According to van Driel, the Uruk *nāqīdu* was part of the *external* organization:

In Uruk the *nāqīdu* was a person with sometimes wide ranging interests in cattle and sheep herding and in arable farming. As an entrepreneur he had acquired [*sic*] a position between the temple-administration and its herds in the external organization of sheep breeding.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁴ Cunchillos and Vita, *Concordancia*, 1456.

¹⁰⁵ Cutler and Macdonald, “UT 113,” 26.

¹⁰⁶ Driel, “Sheep and Goats,” 219.

¹⁰⁷ Driel, “Sheep and Goats,” 224.

¹⁰⁸ Driel, “Sheep and Goats,” 225.

It is, therefore, arguable that the *nāqīdu*'s hired by the Eanna temple were not even temple personnel, let alone cult personnel. If any of the Eanna herdsmen fit Engnell's description, it is the herdsmen of the *internal* organization, but they have a different title: *rē'û ginê* or *rē'û sattukki*.¹⁰⁹ In short, there is no longer the slightest basis for Engnell's claim that the term נוקד had sacral overtones.

It remains to be said that the phrase actually used in Amos 1:1 is not נקד היה (as in 2 Kgs 3:4) but היה בנקדים. It would appear that a term like בנקדים implies membership in an exclusive group. That is the case in the following parallels: "אכל אהה כל זכר בכהנים" "any male among the priests may eat it" (Lev 6:22); "הגם שאול בנביאים" "Is Saul too among the prophets?" (1 Sam 10:11); "אחיתפל בקשרים עם אבשלום" "Ahithophel is among the conspirators with Absalom" (2 Sam 15:31); "והיו באכלי שלחנך" "and let them (the sons of Barzillai the Gileadite) be among those that eat at your table" (1 Kgs 2:7); and "והמה בגבורים עזרי המלחמה" "they were among the warriors who gave support in battle" (1 Chr 12:1). We shall investigate the nature of the group to which Amos belonged in the next section and in chapter 5 below.

דברי עמוס אשר היה בנקדים מתקוע

According to the Peshiṭta, Vulgate, most medieval exegetes, and many modern scholars, מתקוע modifies נקדים rather than עמוס.¹¹⁰ If so, Amos 1:1 contains a reference to "the herdsmen from Tekhoa." This syntactic analysis was challenged in the nineteenth century by H. Oort and K. Budde, based on the evidence of Jer 1:1: "דברי ירמיהו בן חלקיהו מן הכהנים אשר בענתות" "the words of Jeremiah son of Hilkiah, of the priests that were in Anathoth." In the words of Budde:

Der vorliegende Wortlaut אשר היה בנקדים מתקוע kann überhaupt nicht lediglich dazu dienen sollen, des Amos Heimat und Stand anzugeben. Das würde, wie Oort richtig hervorhebt, nach Jer. 1, 1 lauten müssen מן הנקדים אשר בתקוע. . . . Was hier steht, könnte etwa heissen, dass Amos zu einer Schaar von Viehzüchtern aus Tekhoa gehört habe, die sich zu irgend einer bestimmten Zeit an einem anderen Orte einfanden oder aufhielten, so etwa, wie sich bei der Belagerung Jerusalem's die Reka-

¹⁰⁹ Driel, "Sheep and Goats," 226.

¹¹⁰ Weiss, עמוס, 2. 8 n. 77.

biten hinter die Mauern der Hauptstadt flüchteten (Jer. 35). Da aber eine solche Gelegenheit nicht zu ersinnen, noch weniger genannt ist, kann diese Auffassung nicht in Betracht kommen.¹¹¹

According to Budde, the parallel in Jer 1:1 would lead one to expect “the herdsmen *in* Tekoa” instead of “the herdsmen *from* Tekoa.” The latter formulation would make sense if the herdsmen were outside of Tekoa (e.g., taking refuge in Jerusalem), but, since that was not the case in Budde’s view, the interpretation is impossible. Budde’s solution is to take “from Tekoa” as modifying “Amos”:

. . . so erklärt sich das schwierige מן von selbst. Es ist eben das מן der Herkunft, der Heimat, unmittelbar an den Eigennamen anschliessend, wie אִישׁ מִבֵּית לַחַם אֲבָצָן Richt. 12, 8, vgl. Kön. II, 21, 19, 23, 36, gleichbedeutend mit dem Gentilicium הַתְּקוּעִי, das sich in Ueberschriften von Prophetenbüchern in מִיכָה הַמְּרִשְׁתִּי und הַאֲלֶקְשִׁי נָחוּם findet.¹¹²

Budde’s argument has been widely accepted, especially in Germany;¹¹³ however, it suffers from a number of weaknesses. First, Budde seems to have assumed that his “מן of origin” is used only with personal names. But, in fact, there are examples with common nouns, e.g., אִישׁ מִבְּנֵימִין (Judg 17:7), נָעַר מִבֵּית לַחַם יְהוּדָה (Judg 17:1), אִישׁ מִהָר אֲפְרַיִם (1 Sam 17:27), אֲנָשִׁים מֵאֲשֶׁר וּמִנְשֵׂה וּמִזְבֻּלֹן (2 Chr 30:11). Second, Budde ignored the explanation for the phrase “from Tekoa” that had already been offered by F. Hitzig. According to Hitzig, the work of the Tekoite herdsmen took them out of town, to the grazing lands of מְדַבֵּר תְּקוּעַ (2 Chr 20:20), where they stayed with their animals.¹¹⁴ At Nuzi too:

The pasturing of the flocks and herds took the herdsmen away from settled areas. Moreover, other activities such as the counting, shearing, plucking and slaughter of livestock probably occurred in agricultural

¹¹¹ K. Budde, “Die Ueberschrift des Buches Amos und des Propheten Heimat,” in *Semitic Studies in Memory of Rev. Dr. Alexander Kohut* (ed. G. A. Kohut; Berlin: S. Calvary, 1897) 107.

¹¹² Budde, “Die Ueberschrift,” 109.

¹¹³ See H. F. Fuhs, “Amos 1,1: Erwägungen zur Tradition und Redaktion des Amosbuches,” in *Bausteine biblischer Theologie: Festgabe für G. Johannes Botterweck* (ed. H.-J. Fabry; Köln-Bonn: P. Hanstein, 1977) 275 n. 16.

¹¹⁴ F. Hitzig, *Kleinen Propheten* (4th ed.; Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1881) 108.

areas surrounding the cities. One has only to remember the shepherd's hut in Gilgamesh to envision the herdsmen's normal environment.¹¹⁵

In all likelihood, the Tekoite herdsmen spent part of the year even further from home (e.g., in the Jericho Valley); seasonal migration (transhumance) would have been unavoidable, since מדבר הקוע does not have pasturage throughout the year.¹¹⁶ All in all, the Tekoite herdsmen probably spent very little time at home with their families, and thus “from Tekoa” is a far more natural description of them than “in Tekoa.”

It should also be noted that the superscription may be using a Jerusalemite expression or, at least, expressing a Jerusalemite perspective.¹¹⁷ The Tekoites would have been familiar figures in the Jerusalem livestock market, which, in view of its proximity and size, was presumably their main outlet.¹¹⁸ It is quite possible that in Jerusalem they were known popularly as “the herdsmen from Tekoa” to distinguish them from, say, “the herdsmen from Hebron” or “the herdsmen from Moab.” For shoppers looking for their stall in the Jerusalem market, it would make little sense to inquire about the whereabouts of the “herdsmen in Tekoa.”

Finally, the assumption that מתקוע modifies עמוס creates a very strange sequence of attributive modifiers: an asyndetic prepositional phrase sandwiched between two syndetic relative clauses. The normal order for these modifiers would be: אשר היה בנקדים, אשר חזה על ישראל בימי עזיה מלך יהודה ובימי ירבעם בן יואש מלך ישראל שנתים לפני הרעש. To account for this anomaly, Budde was forced to make the further assumption that the phrase אשר היה בנקדים is a later insertion, perhaps from the margin. Budde attempted to provide additional motivation for this assumption, unsuccessfully in my opinion.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁵ M. A. Morrison, “Evidence for Herdsmen and Animal Husbandry in the Nuzi Documents,” in *Studies on the Civilization and Culture of Nuzi and the Hurrians* (ed. M. A. Morrison and D. I. Owen; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1981-) 1. 259 n. 14.

¹¹⁶ See further in chapter 5 below.

¹¹⁷ For the origin of this superscription and its connections to Jerusalem, see D. N. Freedman, “Headings in the Books of the Eighth-century Prophets,” *AUSS* 25 (1987) 9-26.

¹¹⁸ See further in chapter 5 below.

¹¹⁹ Budde's argument (“Die Ueberschrift,” 110) is well summarized by Wolff (*Joel*

In my view, the traditional syntactic analysis of Amos 1:1 is preferable, for the reasons mentioned above and for one additional reason. There seems to be another reference in the Bible to the herdsmen of Tekoa that has been almost completely ignored in discussions of our verse.¹²⁰ As recognized by A. B. Ehrlich, the נקדים of Tekoa are probably the אדירים of Tekoa mentioned in Neh 3:5 ועל ידם החזיקו התקועים “and next to them, the Tekoites repaired, but their אדירים did not take upon their shoulders the work of their lord.” According to Ehrlich, אדירים in this verse refers to wealthy shepherds and is equivalent to the fuller expression הצאן אדירי in Jer 25:34-36 (which, in turn, stands in opposition to הצאן צעירי in Jer 49:20).¹²¹

A similar interpretation of אדירי הצאן is found already in Ibn Janāḥ’s dictionary: “great shepherds.”¹²² According to Ibn Janāḥ, אדירים has the same meaning in Judg 5:25. Tur-Sinai’s view is similar, except that he sees no implication of wealth or greatness: “אדיר is equivalent to רועה, נוקד, רועה.”¹²³ He adduces additional evidence for this interpretation, e.g., the parallelism between רעיך and אדיריך in Nah 3:18.¹²⁴

and Amos, 117): “While the first אשר-clause unquestionably has ‘Amos’ as its antecedent, the second probably refers back to the ‘words of Amos’ (דברי עמוס), since the comparable superscriptions (Isa 1:1; 2:1; 13:1; Mic 1:1; Hab 1:1) always specify an object for the verb ‘to view’ (חזק). Two relative clauses with such different antecedents hardly flowed from the same pen.” In fact, the difference in the antecedents posited by Budde and Wolff is by no means unusual. The construction that Wolff finds in our verse is just a special case of a well-attested construction in Biblical Hebrew (and Arabic): an attributive modifier of a genitive noun followed by an attributive modifier of the entire genitive phrase; see R. C. Steiner, “Ancient Hebrew,” in *The Semitic Languages* (ed. R. Hetzron; London: Routledge, 1997) 165. Two examples with genitive phrases of the form X דברי are Deut 5:24 אלהך דברו אשר דברו הוזהר “the sound of the words of this people which they spoke to you” and 28:58 הוזהר דברו הכתובים בספר הוזהר “all the words of this Teaching that are written in this book.”

¹²⁰ There is a fleeting allusion to this reference in Y. Ziv, “בוקר ובולס-שקמים”—בתקוע?, *Bet Mikra* 92 (1982-83) 50 n. 16.

¹²¹ A. B. Ehrlich, *מקרא כפשוטו* (Berlin: M. Poppelauer, 1899-1901) 2. 418.

¹²² Ibn Janāḥ, *ʿUṣūl*, 22 line 17.

¹²³ N. H. Tur-Sinai, בשולי המלון של אליעזר בן-יהודה, *Leš* 13 (1944-45) 108; idem, הלשון כרך הלשון והספר: 2nd ed.; Jerusalem: Bialik, 1954) 444. So too Saadia Ibn Danān, *Sefer ha-šorašim* (ed. M. J. Sánchez; Granada: Universidad de Granada, 1996) 32 s.v.

¹²⁴ Tur-Sinai, בשולי המילון, 108; idem, הלשון והספר: כרך הלשון, 444.

The Meaning of ה' מאחרי הצאן

If we are right in assuming that Amos was a *nāqīdu ša šēni u lāti*, dealing with both צאן and בקר, then the contradiction between 7:15 (מאחרי הצאן) and 7:14 (בוקר) is only apparent. But even if there is no logical problem, there is a problem on the level of conversational implicature: the singling out of בקר in 7:14 and צאן in 7:15 still requires explanation. We have already noted that singling out בקר makes perfect sense in 7:14, where the emphasis is on Amos' financial self-sufficiency. By the same token, singling out צאן makes perfect sense in 7:15, where the emphasis is on Amos' legitimacy as a leader. Andersen and Freedman write:

[Amos'] mandate came from God himself, who took him from following the flock—a cliché out of Israel's past but one that was packed with tradition and power. Israel's history was largely shaped by ex-shepherds: Moses, who was caring for a flock when summoned directly to service by the God of the holy mountain; and David, the archetypal shepherd boy, who was called to be the Lord's anointed from his duties to the flock to serve a larger flock as ruler and king.¹²⁵

A similar idea was articulated already in the fifteenth century by Abarbanel:

And the shepherds of Israel and its leaders were all herders of צאן, as is apparent from the patriarchs and Moses and David, on account of that trade being similar to leading the people. That is why he (Amos) says ויקחני ה' מאחרי הצאן and does not mention the בקר. . . .¹²⁶

This analysis accounts for the singling out of צאן in 7:15 by comparing Amos with a restricted set of leaders: Moses and David and perhaps the patriarchs. But what about the leaders who were not ex-shepherds, e.g., Saul, Elisha, and Gideon? One might reasonably argue that those other leaders are counterexamples and that their exclusion from consideration is arbitrary.¹²⁷

¹²⁵ Andersen and Freedman, *Amos*, 790.

¹²⁶ Abarbanel, *Comentario*, 196.

¹²⁷ For an extreme example of this broader approach, see the list of nineteen parallels (including a 20th-century German politician) in Schult, "Legitimation," 463-74.

The only objective criterion for excluding those leaders compels us to exclude Moses and the patriarchs as well. I am referring to the striking similarity between ויקחני ה' מאחרי הצאן . . . אל עמי ישראל in Amos 7:15 and לקחתיך מן הגוה מאחור הצאן . . . על עמי על ישראל in 2 Sam 7:8. Neither לקח ה' את X מאחור (י) הצאן nor לקח ה' את X מאחור (י) Y, appears to be a stereotyped formula. They are never used of any other biblical figure, even though they seem appropriate to some of them. Moses never says ויקחני ה' מאחרי הצאן, even though that description would seem to fit him at least as well as Amos. His call in Exod 3:10 comes when he is literally behind his flock; cf. Exod 3:1: וינהג את הצאן “he drove the צאן (from behind).” Elisha never says ויקחני ה' מאחרי הבקר, even though he was literally behind a team of oxen at the moment of his call in 1 Kgs 19:19. It should not be assumed that אחרי was the only preposition that could have been used in these expressions. 1 Sam 16:19 employs a different preposition: בצאן אשר בנך “send me your son David, who is with (lit. among) the צאן.”

H. Schult recognizes that the similarity between Amos 7:15 and 2 Sam 7:8 cannot be due to chance, and he admits that an explanation positing direct dependence of Amos 7:15 on 2 Sam 7:8 (quotation, allusion or the like) would, in theory, be more solid than one positing a looser connection. In practice, however, such an explanation is impossible “weil es einleuchtende Gründe für eine theologische oder sonst überlieferungsgeschichtliche Verbindung von Amos mit David gar nicht gibt.” Even “die Nähe von Am 9₁₁ (‘zerfallene Hütte Davids’) zur Nathanweissagung” does not solve this problem, according to Schult. It does not help us to understand “was David und Amos als Personen oder Gestalten nach Auffassung der Tradition miteinander verbinden soll.”¹²⁸ M. Weiss accepts this conclusion:

It is impossible to imagine what could have been the motivation, conscious or unconscious, for formulating the words of Amos concerning his being taken to prophesy in the language of the word of the Lord concerning David being taken to rule.¹²⁹

Three objections may be raised against the discussions of Schult and Weiss. First, they do not mention that the expression לקח ה' את X

¹²⁸ Schult, “Legitimation,” 476-78, esp. 477.

¹²⁹ Weiss, ספר עמוס, I. 240.

of markers pointing back to the older text makes clear that [the author] borrowed from that text,” unless “both [texts] utilize stock vocabulary, exemplify a literary form such as a lament, or treat a subject that calls for certain words.”¹³⁵ Based on this criterion, it is reasonable to conclude that Amos made use of Nathan’s oracle.¹³⁶

Third, Schult and Weiss are too hasty in concluding that it is impossible to explain why Amos would be alluding to David in 7:15. It is possible that Amos uses the phrase לִקְחֵנִי ה' מֵאַחֲרֵי הַצֹּאן in order to associate himself with David, in opposition to Amaziah and Jeroboam. Like David, he is a legitimate leader, taken away from following the flock by God.¹³⁷ Neither Amaziah nor his king, Jeroboam, can make that claim.

In any event, it is now apparent that the reference to צֹאן in 7:15 was necessitated by the fixed form of the expression לִקְחֵנִי ה' אֶת־X מֵאַחֲרֵי (י) הַצֹּאן. This is true whether we are dealing with an allusion or a formula. In either case, there is a plausible explanation for the tension that many have felt between 7:14 and 7:15.

corpus of ancient Hebrew literature that has come down to us in the Bible exhibits a remarkable density of such allusions. Now some may object that the sort of dynamic that comes into play when, say, T.S. Eliot alludes to Shakespeare and Milton cannot be applied to the Bible, which represents a “scribal culture” that makes frequent use not of literary allusion but of traditional formulas, verbal stereotypes. The whole notion of formula, so often invoked in biblical scholarship, needs serious critical re-examination because there is such an abundance of subtle, significant *variations* in the biblical use of formulas. . . . In any case, the Bible offers rich and varied evidence of the most purposeful literary allusions—not the recurrence of fixed formula or conventional stereotype but a pointed activation of one text by another. . . .

¹³⁵ Sommer, *Allusion*, 22, 32.

¹³⁶ If this is correct, it is another argument against the prevalent view of 9:11 as a late interpolation; see Paul, *Amos*, 288-91, Hayes, *Amos*, 223-27, and the literature cited there. For more on allusion and the criteria for distinguishing it from accidental similarity, see R. Klapper, G. Posner, and M. Friedman, “Amnon and Tamar: A Case Study in Allusions,” *Nahalab: Yeshiva University Journal for the Study of Bible* 1 (1999) 23-33 and the literature cited there.

¹³⁷ With this interpretation, we take Ben-Porat’s third step in actualizing an allusion: “the modification of the interpretation of the sign in the alluding text”; Sommer, *Allusion*, 12.

Amos' Occupations

The Herdsmen from Tekoa

We saw in the preceding chapter that Neh 3:5 appears to contain a reference to the herdsmen of Tekoa. The reappearance of this group centuries after Amos' time supports a theory proposed by S. R. Driver. Driver suggested that the settlement of נִקְדָּן at Tekoa may have consisted of "families following hereditary trades," and he compared the "families of scribes dwelling in Jabez" (1 Chr 2:55) and the "families of the linen factory at Beth-Ashbea" (1 Chr 4:21).¹ At Ur, "many of the men appearing in these [Old Babylonian herding] documents are related to each other as brothers and the profession was often passed on from father to son."² At Nuzi, too, "the herding profession was hereditary, and in a number of cases families of herdsmen can be found working for the same livestock owner or his family."³ This line of interpretation would imply that Amos was working in a family business.

One might go a step further and consider the possibility that Tekoa was home to a number of families of herdsmen that worked together

¹ Driver, *Books*, 128.

² Van De Mieroop, "Sheep and Goat," 169.

³ Morrison, "Evidence," 262.

in some sort of professional organization. Various terms have been applied to ancient organizations of this type. G. Alon uses the term “cooperative” to describe the חרמי טיבריה “fishermen of Tiberias,” who are mentioned together with the גרוסי צפורין “gristmakers of Sepphoris” and the דשוש עכו “wheat-stampers of Acre” in the Palestinian Talmud (y. *Pes.* 4.1, 30d; *Moed Q.* 2.5, 81b).⁴ I. Mendelsohn and S. Appelbaum use the term “guild” to refer to the organizations of wool producers, dyers, bakers, donkey-drivers and ship-owners whose rights are set forth in *t. B. Meṣ.* 11.24-26.⁵ Like the “fishermen of Tiberias” and the “gristmakers of Sepphoris,” these organizations were located in a single town. Thus, “the wool producers and the dyers are permitted to say: ‘We are partners in buying up whatever [wool and dye] comes to town’” (*t. B. Meṣ.* 11.24).

Organizations of herdsmen have also been discerned. The *nqdm* at Ugarit appear in lists of professional groups that are frequently labeled “guilds.”⁶ The term “collective” has also been applied:

One taxation document appears to equate a group of *nqdm* as being equivalent to a village for taxation purposes; this document may indicate that the *nqdm* functioned as a kind of land-holding collective.⁷

We should also mention the hamlet called *Kapru-ša-nāqidāti* “Village of herdsmen” in the Neo-Babylonian period⁸ and the town of *Ālu-ša-nāqidāti* “City of herdsmen” in the Neo-Assyrian period.⁹ Here too we seem to have groups of נקדים living and working together.

⁴ G. Alon, *The Jews in their Land in the Talmudic Age* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1980-84) 1. 167.

⁵ I. Mendelsohn, “Guilds in Ancient Palestine,” *BASOR* 80 (December, 1940) 19; Appelbaum, “Economic Life,” 685. Cf. also D. B. Weisberg, *Guild Structure and Political Allegiance in Early Achaemenid Mesopotamia* (Yale Near Eastern researches 1; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967).

⁶ See, for example, Kapelrud, *Central Ideas*, 6; Craigie, “Amos,” 31; Cutler and Macdonald, “UT 113.”

⁷ Craigie, “Amos,” 32.

⁸ San Nicolò, “Viehwirtschaft I,” 284. For the location, see R. Zadok, *Geographical Names According to New- and Late-Babylonian Texts* (Wiesbaden: L. Reichert, 1985) 194. I am indebted to J. A. Brinkman for this reference.

⁹ R. Zadok, “Zur Geographie Babyloniens während des sargonidischen, chaldäischen, achämenidischen und hellenistischen Zeitalters,” *WO* 16 (1985) 44. The latter town was located in Rashi, a small country sandwiched between Babylonia and Elam. For the Βουκόλων πόλις “City of cowherds” of Roman Palestine, see below.

The “herdsmen from Tekoa” have also been viewed in this way. In Engnell’s view, they constituted “a local shepherds’ collective subordinate to Jerusalem’s temple.”¹⁰ Danell, with *Kapru-ša-nāqidāti* in mind, writes that the expression in Amos 1:1 “can plausibly be understood as a designation of a *convivium* or village of tenders of livestock in Tekoa. Based on the definite form, it must have been a commonly known group for that time. . . .”¹¹ P. de Robert believes that they formed “une sorte de corporation, peut-être celle des propriétaires-éleveurs.”¹² Rosenbaum suggests that the מִקְדָּשׁ of Amos 1:1 were “perhaps a guild.”¹³

It is tempting to draw a further analogy between Tekoa and *Kapru-ša-nāqidāti* in support of one aspect of Engnell’s view. The latter village was located in the vicinity of Uruk, and its inhabitants were in charge of flocks and herds belonging to Eanna, the main temple of Uruk.¹⁴ Did the herdsmen of Tekoa have a similar relationship to the Temple of Jerusalem, only 16 km. away? To a certain extent, the analogy is supported by postbiblical sources. According to a *baraita* in the Talmud (*b. Men.* 87a and *b. Sot.* 34b), sheep for the public sacrifices were brought from Hebron.¹⁵ Since Tekoa is situated roughly midway between Hebron and Jerusalem, it is entirely possible that the “herdsmen from Tekoa” were regular suppliers of sheep for the Temple.

There is, then, no problem with the claim of Kapelrud, based on Engnell’s theory, that Amos “furnish[ed the cult] with the necessary sheep for sacrifices”; however, it does not follow that “a *noqed* in Judah in the time of Amos . . . may have been a person of rather high rank who was responsible for a large part of the temple herds,” let alone that Amos “may thus officially have had something to do with the cult.” Andersen and Freedman note correctly that “there are no examples within the OT of any Israelite shrines having their own flocks and shepherds.”¹⁶

¹⁰ Engnell, “Profetismens ursprung,” 15.

¹¹ Danell, *Amos*, 9.

¹² Robert, *Le berger*, 26.

¹³ Rosenbaum, *Amos*, 46.

¹⁴ San Nicolò, “Viehwirtschaft I,” 284.

¹⁵ Safrai, “The Temple and the Divine Service,” 321; *idem*, “The Temple,” 882. In the Middle Ages, there were plantations of sycomores around Hebron, according to al-Īṣṭaḥrī and al-Idrīsī; see Goor, “History,” 132.

¹⁶ Andersen and Freedman, *Amos*, 188. So too Wright (“Liver,” 10): “In contrast to Mesopotamia, there is little evidence that cultic centres kept herds of (*sic*) flocks.” It is

In rabbinic literature, too, there is not a single mention of temple flocks and herds or temple herdsmen.¹⁷ The same goes for the writings of Josephus. Both bodies of literature attest to the *purchase* of animals for communal sacrifice, but they are silent concerning the *breeding* and *raising* of such animals.¹⁸ In Roman times, animals for the public sacrifices were purchased by the Temple with funds from the “sacred treasury known as ‘Corbonas.’”¹⁹ These purchases could not have been meant to augment existing flocks and herds or start new ones, for there was a requirement that the animals offered as public sacrifices in any given fiscal year be purchased with coins earmarked for that year. During the month of Adar, the Temple began to solicit the donation of “new shekels” (תקל"ן חדתי"ן) for the following fiscal year, which began on the first of Nisan; from that day on, only animals purchased with “new shekels” could be used for public sacrifice.²⁰ As for the frequency of these purchases, our only hint is the Mishnah’s report (*m. Arak.* 2.5) that at least five inspected lambs were kept on hand in the Lamb Chamber at all times.

The abovementioned evidence for the *time* of purchase is consistent with the evidence for the *place* of purchase. According to *y. Sheq.* 8.2,

thus surprising that Wright (“Liver,” 11) leans towards the view that “Amos was attached to a cult.” Hasel (*Amos*, 37) credits Murtonen (“Hepatoscopet?” 170-71) with showing that there is not “any evidence that the Jerusalem temple or any Israelite shrine ever had such temple flocks and shepherds,” but Murtonen is completely silent about this issue. Nor is there reason to believe that the Temple possessed grazing lands. R. de Vaux (*Ancient Israel* [New York: McGraw-Hill, 1961] 379) writes: “Unlike the temples of Mesopotamia and of Egypt, the Temple in Jerusalem did not possess vast tracts of real estate.” E. Bickerman’s discussion of the Second Temple (*From Ezra to the Last of the Maccabees* [New York: Schocken, 1962] 14) goes further: “While in Egypt [in the fourth century B.C.E.], a very large part of the soil belonged to the temples . . . , the sanctuary of Jerusalem does not appear to have possessed any real estate outside its own site. . . .” For arguments to the contrary, see J. Blenkinsopp, “Did the Second Jerusalemite Temple Possess Land?” *Transeuphratène* 21 (2001) 61-68, and J. Weinberg, *The Citizen-Temple Community* (JSOTSup 151; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992) 95-97.

¹⁷ Here too there is no evidence for temple fields; Safrai, “The Temple,” 317.

¹⁸ The closest thing to an exception that I know of is a prohibition on buying the red heifer as a calf and raising it; see *Sifre Zuṭa* to Num 19:2 in ספרי דבי רב (ed. H. S. Horowitz; Leipzig: G. Fock, 1917) 300 lines 14-17.

¹⁹ Josephus, *A.J.* 3.10.1 §237 and *J. W.* 2.9.1 §175; *m. Sheq.* 4.1. For the financing in earlier times, see Y. Liver, פרשת מחצית השקל, in ספר היובל ליהודקאל קויפמן (ed. M. Haran; Jerusalem: Magnes, 1961) 54-67; J. A. Goldstein, *II Maccabees* (AB 41A; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1983) 200-201.

²⁰ See *m. Sheq.* 1.1, 4.1, 6.5 and *t. Rosh ha-Sh.* 1.1, 1.4.

50c, coins found on the Temple mount are presumed to be coins from the treasury that were used to purchase animals for communal sacrifice. This implies that the purchase of animals took place there—not in places like Hebron, Sharon, and Moab, where the animals were raised.

In short, the available evidence supports the view of S. Safrai that “it was the duty of the Temple treasurers to supply the Temple with . . . communal sacrifices.”²¹ The treasurers purchased these animals in limited quantities, as needed, from suppliers who brought the animals to the Temple. These suppliers were not temple personnel; indeed, they did not even have to be Jews (*t. Sheq.* 1.7). Like the suppliers of flour, wine, and oil, they were private businessmen.²² They may well have been the same dealers (סוחרֵי בהמה) who sold animals in the Jerusalem market for private sacrifice (*m. Sheq.* 7.2).²³ In S. Applebaum’s words, “the need of sacrifices must have been a permanent incentive to run cattle and sheep for sale in Jerusalem.”²⁴

Even in Mesopotamia, where the temples *did* own flocks and herds, the people who managed them were not always temple personnel, let alone cult personnel. We have already seen that this is true of the Eanna temple of Uruk in the Neo-Babylonian period: “Especially in Uruk it is obvious that (some? of) the external herding was contracted out. . . .”²⁵ It is equally true of the Nanna-Ningal temple of Ur in the Old Babylonian period:

The enormous herds belonging to the Nanna-Ningal temple complex were not herded by temple dependents, but were assigned to private shepherds who combined the care of their own herds with that of the temple animals.²⁶

²¹ Safrai, “The Temple,” 881.

²² It is clear from *m. Sheq.* 4.9 and *t. Sheq.* 2.11-13 that the Temple’s suppliers of flour, wine and oil were private businessmen, paid monthly, who had to agree to bear all losses resulting from spillage, spoilage, and market fluctuations up to the moment when their goods were actually used. Suppliers who guaranteed “price protection” (as it is called today) can hardly have been temple personnel.

²³ Safrai, “The Temple,” 320. For the number of lambs sacrificed each year on Passover alone during the Roman period and the size of the national herd needed to produce that number, see J. Pastor, *Land and Economy in Ancient Palestine* (London: Routledge, 1997) 10, 178.

²⁴ Applebaum, “Economic Life,” 655.

²⁵ Driel, “Sheep and Goats,” 224.

²⁶ Van De Mieroop, “Sheep and Goat,” 166-67.

In the archive of Apil-kittim . . . dating to the years Rīm-Sîn 31-36 (1792-1787), we see how a private businessman and his associates took care of all the daily worries with regard to the temple cattle. The temple is only mentioned as the owner, but the products are managed by Apil-kittim. The temple gave the right to manage the herds and to convert their products into silver to private businessmen, who were allowed to keep any profits they made during these transactions.²⁷

The Neo-Babylonian temples were not self-sufficient. They were forced to purchase sheep and cattle “to fill the gap between production and requirements.”²⁸ This was particularly true of the Ebabbar temple in Neo-Babylonian Sippar:

Especially in Sippar much cattle had to be bought for offerings. This is a clear indication of the existence of cattle breeding outside the institutions, producing for their needs. This strongly suggests the existence of a private sector.²⁹

Clearly, we have come a long way since the time when it was possible to assume that “in antiquity, all economic and political life was centralized in the sanctuaries” and to base conclusions about Amos on that assumption.³⁰ Nowadays, it seems more natural to assume that the herdsmen from Tekoa were self-employed.

The existence of an organization of self-employed stock breeders in eighth-century Israel would seem to represent a substantial shift away from the integration of animal husbandry and agriculture in the subsistence economy of the Highlands in the early Iron Age.³¹ In the affluent society described by Amos and Hosea, the demand for meat could no longer be satisfied by small family farms devoted mainly to agriculture.³² In the words of D. C. Hopkins: “In an agricultural system where fodder production was probably not achieved on any great scale . . . , there are obvious limits to the community’s involvement in pas-

²⁷ Van De Mieroop, “Sheep and Goat,” 170.

²⁸ Driel, “Cattle,” 217.

²⁹ Driel, “Cattle,” 233.

³⁰ Engnell, “Amos,” 59-60.

³¹ See D. C. Hopkins, *The Highlands of Canaan: Agricultural Life in the Early Iron Age* (Social world of biblical antiquity series 3; Sheffield: Almond, 1985) 245-50.

³² For meat consumption in eighth-century Israel, see M. Silver, *Prophets and Markets: The Political Economy of Ancient Israel* (Boston: Kluwer-Nijhoff, 1983) 97-98.

toralism beyond which the integration of the two modes of production fractures and specialist stock breeders take to distant pastures.”³³ Hence the rise of the herdsmen from Tekoa and of the term נקדיים used to refer to them.³⁴

The Location of Amos' Sycomores

It has often been noted that Tekoa is too high above sea-level for the sycomore, a tropical tree that cannot tolerate cold. Indeed, there were no sycomores in the wilderness around Tekoa in Jerome's time, a fact that led him to question the Septuagint's rendering of שקמים.³⁵ The same problem has led others to question the traditional identification of Tekoa.³⁶ Neither of these responses to the problem is warranted.

Where, then, were Amos' sycomores located? The best-known answer to this question is found in the Targum to 7:14: לי שקמין לי בשפלהא “and I have sycomores in the Shephelah” (cf. *b. Ned.* 38a). This paraphrase must have been suggested by the biblical verses that speak of the sycomores of the Shephelah.³⁷ A number of modern scholars have adopted this view.³⁸ According to Breslavy, the distance between Tekoa and the Shephelah is no obstacle:

Even if he did not leave Tekoa, his birthplace, he could have been a sycomore owner far from his city. From Arab agriculture in recent generations, we know that Arabs residing in the mountains had land in the Shephelah and the valleys.³⁹

³³ Hopkins, *Highlands*, 248.

³⁴ It has been suggested that נקדי is a loanword from Akkadian; see chapter 4 at n. 44 above.

³⁵ Jerome, *Commentarii*, 324 lines 404-7; cf. line 385.

³⁶ See the literature cited by Weiss (ספר עמוס, 2, 8-9 n. 80), Watts (*Vision*, 34 n. 28), and Rosenbaum (*Amos*, 29-40), and add the refutation of Weippert (*Amos*, 3). Weiss' assertion that Abarbanel accepts the view of David Qimḥi that Tekoa was in the territory of Asher is not completely accurate. A correction in the autograph of Abarbanel's commentary (*Comentario*, 18 line 12) shows that he changed his mind on this issue. He originally wrote אשר בעיר תקוע שהיא עיר אחת מנחלת בני אשר, but he subsequently crossed out the words אשר בני אשר. This correction must be understood in the light of his commentary to 2 Sam 14:2, where he states that Profiat Duran has refuted Qimḥi's opinion on the matter; see Profiat Duran, אנרות ר' פריפוש, ספר מעשה אפר' in דוראן (ed. J. Friedländer and J. Kohn; Vienna: J. Holzwarth, 1865) 199.

³⁷ 1 Kgs 10:27, 2 Chr 1:15, 9:27. See chapter 1 nn. 133-34 above.

³⁸ See Weiss, ספר עמוס, 2, 446 n. 177.

³⁹ Breslavy, עמוס, 100.

It is true that if Amos actually *owned* the trees, the distance between Tekoa and the Shephelah would not have been a problem for him. He could have sold the fig harvest in advance to a *gemamzi* in the Shephelah and kept the number of trips from Tekoa to a minimum. However, it seems unlikely that Amos owned the trees. The owner of sycamore trees who wished to impress others would identify himself as a harvester of beams, not figs, since the beams of the sycamore were far more valuable than the figs.⁴⁰ It is more likely that he himself was a *gemamzi* and that what he owned was the figs, not the trees.⁴¹

As noted by Danell, another possibility is suggested by the fact that many of the sycamore trees of the Shephelah were in groves belonging to the crown: “either *bōlēs šiqmīm* gives expression to Amos’ well-off status as an owner of mulberry(-fig) plantations or else it implies that he was a worker in the royal mulberry(-fig) plantations in Šefela (1 Kgs

⁴⁰ As noted in chapter 1 above, the value of sycamore beams came from their use in the construction of ceilings. According to a tradition attributed to Abba Saul in *t. Men.* 13.20, they were valuable enough to rob: קורות שיקמה היו ביריחו והיו בעלי־אבא שאול אומר, קורות שיקמה היו ביריחו והיו בעלי־אבא שאול אומר, קורות שיקמה היו ביריחו והיו בעלי־אבא שאול אומר, קורות שיקמה היו ביריחו והיו בעלי־אבא שאול אומר. עמדו בעלים והקדישום לשמים “Abba Saul says: There were sycamore beams in Jericho, and thugs used to come and take them by force, so the owners went and consecrated them (the beams) to Heaven.” The stump that produced the beams was valuable enough that, when the field in which it stood was sold, it was not included in the sale unless it was explicitly mentioned (*m. B. Bat.* 4.9). In Mesopotamia, too, “the significant and valuable part of a house was its wooden roof-beams”; E. Stone, “Texts, Architecture and Ethnographic Analogy: Patterns of Residence in Old Babylonian Nippur,” *Iraq* 43 (1981) 20 apud Moorey, *Mesopotamian Materials*, 355. By contrast, the figs had little value; see chapter 1 n. 53, 113, 119 and chapter 2 n. 32 above. In this connection too, the authority of Abba Saul has been invoked. According to Rashi’s reading of *m. B. Bat.* 2.13 (*b. B. Bat.* 27b), Abba Saul classified the שקמה as a barren tree (אילן סרק) rather than a food tree (אילן מאכל, the biblical עץ מאכל), which fits well with Abba Saul’s other statement about the שקמה. Despite the fact that other commentators (e.g., pseudo-Gershom and Maimonides) disagree with Rashi’s reading of Abba Saul’s statement and the fact that other rabbinic sources (*y. Orlah* 1.1, 70c and probably *Sifra* 90a to Lev 19:23) imply that that the שקמה was classified as a food tree, Rashi’s reading is accepted by I. Lewy (*Ueber einige Fragmente aus der Mischna des Abba Saul*, 1876, apud Löw, *Flora*, 1. 278, 2. 401) and by Lieberman (*תוספתא כפושטא*, 2. 361 n. 28).

⁴¹ For the Egyptian *gemamzi*, see chapter 2 above. The Yemeni *miballis* seems to own the trees as well as the figs; see I. Al-Akwaʿ, *Al-ʿamṭāl al-yamāniyya* (n.p.: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1968) 312 no. 909: “The *muballis* who picks *balas*, that is figs (*tīn*), from his trees and brings them early in the morning to the market to sell them. . . .”

27:28).”⁴² Danell also notes the possibility that Amos dealt with “the royal temple herds.”⁴³

A similar suggestion was made independently by H. Cazelles:

. . . les termes qui décrivent sa profession *bôqer*, *bôles* (VII, 14) font croire qu'il n'était pas un petit pâtre, mais un fonctionnaire d'Ozias-Azarias, dont on nous dit (II Chr., XXVI 10) qu'il aimait l'agriculture.⁴⁴

This brief remark is puzzling. It is difficult to see how the terms בוקר and בולט provide any support to the claim that Amos was a government official during Uzziah's reign.

Even more perplexing is the use of 2 Chr 26:10: ויבן מגדלים במדבר ויחצב ברות רבים כי מקנה רב היה לו ובשפלה ובמישור אכרים וכרמים בהרים ויבכרמל כי אהב אדמה היה. One would have expected Cazelles to focus on the reference to livestock and the Shephelah instead of on the reference to Uzziah being a “lover of the soil.” Unfortunately, the syntax of the verse is unclear precisely at that point. If ובשפלה ובמישור modifies ויחצב ברות רבים (“He built towers in the wilderness and hewed out many cisterns, for he had much livestock [there] and in the Shephelah and on the plain . . .”),⁴⁵ as the Masoretic accents suggest, it would seem that Uzziah had livestock in the Shephelah, in the vicinity of the sycamore groves he inherited from David. If so, Amos could indeed have worked for the king on both of these. However, some modern scholars construe the syntax of the verse differently. Thus, S. Japhet writes:

The precise division of v. 10 is not entirely clear (cf. also NEB and JPS); it seems that the *Ethnah* accent should be moved for a reading: “and farmers in the Shephelah and the plain” (thus JPS).⁴⁶

The possibility that Amos was a government worker has been raised by several other scholars. After discussing the list of the stewards of

⁴² Danell, *Amos*, 10-11.

⁴³ Danell, *Amos*, 11.

⁴⁴ H. Cazelles, “Mari et l’Ancien Testament,” in *La Civilisation de Mari: XV^e Rencontre assyriologique internationale . . . 1966* (ed. J.-R. Kupper; Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1967) 90.

⁴⁵ Alternatively (with most translations): “He built towers in the wilderness; and he hewed out many cisterns, for he had much livestock, both in the Shephelah and in the plain. . . .”

⁴⁶ Japhet, *I & II Chronicles*, 881.

David's property (1 Chr 27:25-31), which included sycamore plantations and herds and flocks, T. N. D. Mettinger writes:

In this context I would like to put forward a surmise concerning the profession of Amos. The different allusions made to this (Amos 1,1; 7,14; cf. 7,1) find a common denominator in the royal estate. Besides, Tekoa is mentioned among the royal fortresses (2 Ch 11,6). . . . It is therefore possible that Amos served in this branch of administration before his prophetic activity.⁴⁷

R. R. Wilson points to the term נִקְדָּיִם and its Ugaritic cognate as evidence "that Amos may have been a government employee who was responsible for a fairly sizable herd of sheep, or, alternatively, that he was an independent sheep owner with a large herd."⁴⁸ The Ugaritic evidence gains added significance from Craigie's subsequent finding that "the majority of the evidence indicates that the *nqdm* [at Ugarit] were servants of the royal establishment."⁴⁹

Such arguments are intriguing but far from conclusive. The other alternative raised by Danell and Wilson certainly represents the consensus of modern scholarship. The evidence presented in this monograph does nothing to undermine that consensus. It suggests that Amos was self-employed and that he owned both the livestock that he tended and the sycamore figs that he harvested (but not the trees themselves).

In any event, most scholars look for Amos' sycomores closer to Tekoa.⁵⁰ In 1928, W. Rudolph visited Tekoa and found that:

. . . die Bewohner des Ortes ihre Ackerfelder und Baumanlagen in den tiefer gelegenen, oft ziemlich weit entfernten Mulden und Tälern hatten, wo es auch Sykomoren gibt. Man braucht also gar nicht Weidegänge bis in die Schefela anzunehmen. . . .⁵¹

⁴⁷ Mettinger, *State Officials*, 87-88.

⁴⁸ R. R. Wilson, *Prophecy and Society in Ancient Israel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980) 268. His first alternative is accepted by Rosenbaum (*Amos*, 46), who assigns Amos "a middle-level position in his government's service."

⁴⁹ Craigie, "Amos," 33.

⁵⁰ See Weiss, *ספר עמוס*, 2. 446 n. 177.

⁵¹ Rudolph, *Joel—Amos—Obadja—Jona*, 258. At the beginning of the century, Masterman ("Sycamore," 2877) found something similar for the village of Silwan.

Several scholars locate Amos' sycomores near the Dead Sea.⁵² Others look to the Jericho Valley.⁵³ Both views are possible, but the latter has more evidence in its favor. The Jericho Valley was known for its sycomores in Roman times,⁵⁴ and it is not impossible that some of these trees had survived from Amos' time.⁵⁵ The beams cut by Elisha's disciples at the Jordan River (2 Kgs 6:2-5) may well have been from sycomores⁵⁶ growing near Jericho.⁵⁷ H. B. Tristram reports finding "a few gnarled and aged sycomores among the ruins by the wayside at ancient Jericho, and by the channel of the Wady Kelt," and Y. Feliks describes a giant sycamore alive in Jericho today.⁵⁸ We shall return to this question below.

Linking the Two Occupations

Is there a link between Amos' two occupations? The best answers to this question have been given by exegetes who assumed that Amos had

⁵² Driver, *Books*, 212; R. S. Cripps, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Amos* (2nd ed.; London: SPCK, 1955) 10; Hammershaimb, *Amos*, 118; Y. Feliks, *טבע ואורץ בתנ"ך* (Jerusalem: R. Mass, 1992) 143 n. 10. (I am indebted to M. Jacobowitz for the last reference.) Most of these are quoted below.

⁵³ B. E. Willoughby, "Amos, Book of," in *ABD* 1. 203; N. Hareuveni, *Tree and Shrub*, 91 (see below).

⁵⁴ See *t. Men.* 13.20 (quoted in n. 40 above), *m. Pes.* 4.8, and Luke 19:1-4.

⁵⁵ For the life-span of this tree, see Galil, *השקמה*, 313: "The exact age of the old trees has not been established, but an age of 500-800 is apparently commonplace." For the rabbinic estimate of 600 years, see Galil *ad loc.* and N. Hareuveni, *Tree and Shrub*, 88. The "cathedral fig tree" in Famagusta is said to be the oldest living thing in Cyprus, having been planted in front of St. Nicholas Cathedral while it was being built (1298-1312 CE). Kruger National Park in South Africa contains a sycamore said to be well over 1,000 years old. Finally, Y. Shapira (*גילן של שקמים עתיקות*), *Teva Vaaretz* 9 [1967] 28-29) argues that one modern specimen in Israel must be several centuries older than the Byzantine pool that was constructed next to it after its roots were exposed by erosion.

⁵⁶ Rabbinic literature knows of two principle sources of construction beams: the cedar of Lebanon and the sycamore. Cf. Isa 9:9, discussed in chapter 1 n. 120 above.

⁵⁷ The story suggests that the school that they had outgrown was not very far from the Jordan. This makes sense according to 2 Kgs 2:18-22, which is generally taken to mean that Elisha settled in Jericho after accompanying Elijah to ירדן על ירדן, only seven kilometers away. Indeed, the site selected for the new school may have been the very spot where Elijah and Elisha crossed the Jordan. As noted by Abarbanel (in his commentary to 2 Kgs 6:2), that would be the perfect spot for training would-be prophets.

⁵⁸ Tristram, *Natural History*, 399; Feliks, *עצי־פרך*, 167 n. 48.

only one occupation, that of a herdsman, because these exegetes were forced to ponder the benefits that the sycamore could provide to the animals in Amos' care.

For Eliezer of Beaugency, the major benefit was shade. According to him, the context suggests that בולס שקמים somehow refers to pasturing in the shade of sycamore trees.⁵⁹ Shade, in fact, is mentioned by many modern students of the sycamore as one of its salient characteristics.⁶⁰ The very name of the sycamore in Egyptian, *nh.t*, alludes to this characteristic.⁶¹ That sycomores (and carobs) provide more shade than other trees seems to be implicit in *m. B. Bat. 2.13*.⁶² The same shade that is bad for crops is good for livestock.

For Sherira Gaon, as cited by Ibn Janāh, the benefit was nourishment, and בולס שקמים refers to mixing sycamore leaves into fodder.⁶³ This view has reached modern scholars fourth- and fifthhand through M. Bič and T. J. Wright, who learned of it from Ibn Parḥon's Hebrew abridgment of Ibn Janāh's dictionary.⁶⁴ It should be noted that Ibn Parḥon substitutes "barley" for Ibn Janāh's "fodder." Wright asks two questions, only one of which need detain us:

⁵⁹ Eliezer of Beaugency, *Kommentar zu den XII kleinen Propheten*, 2. 52.

⁶⁰ See Figari, *Studii*, 177; Goldmann, *La figue*, 46; R. Muschler, *A Manual Flora of Egypt* (Berlin: R. Friedlaender & Sohn, 1912) 249; H. N. Moldenke and A. L. Moldenke, *Plants of the Bible* (Waltham, Mass.: Chronica Botanica, 1952) 107; Wright, "Sycamore Fig," 365; Kislev, *השקמים*, 24.

⁶¹ Baum, *Arbres*, 36, citing H. Fischer, "Another example of the verb *nh* 'shelter,'" *JEA* 64 (1978) 131-32.

⁶² This mishnah allows the owner of a field to cut off *all* of the branches of a sycamore or carob tree in a neighboring field that overhang his property, because their rich foliage blocks the sunlight and harms the field. For other trees, one may cut off only branches low enough to interfere with plowing. In modern Ethiopia, too, the sycamore is lopped to reduce shade; Bekele-Tesemma, *Useful Trees*, 250.

⁶³ Ibn Janāh, *ʿUṣūl*, 96 lines 5-9. For Ibn Janāh's citations of Sherira Gaon, see S. Abramson, *מפי בעלי לשונות* (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1988) 290-92. Sherira connects בולס שקמים with Mishnaic Hebrew עיסה בלוסה "mixed dough," i. e., dough from flour mixed with bran. David Qimḥi, followed by Abarbanel, combines Sherira's interpretation of בולס שקמים with the one-occupation view: "a gatherer (לוקט) of sycamore(-fig)s for his cattle to eat."

⁶⁴ Bič, *Amos*, 156; Wright, "Sycamore Fig," 366. See Ibn Parḥon, *מחברת הערוך*, 2. 9b. Curiously, Shelomoh Ibn Parḥon goes by the German (< Vulgate < LXX) name "Salomon," instead of "Solomon," in English discussions of our verse; see Wright, "Sycamore Fig," 366; Hayes, *Amos*, 236; Paul, *Amos*, 248. That is no doubt because Wright followed Bič in citing the text from a German article by Bacher but failed to substitute the English equivalent of שלמה. Even more curious is Danell's attribution

The second question—whether livestock ate a mixture of barley and sycamore leaves—is something I am unable to ascertain from other sources. . . .

Instead of sycamore leaves, it is just possible that the fruit of the fig would be used as fodder, especially those which are not induced to ripeness by wounding or gashing. . . . Such fruit are full of dead, male and some female, wasps. They are not palatable, and as such “at best, they are used by poor farmers and by bedouins as fodder for goats and other domestic animals.” Perhaps the concern of Amos was simply to provide fodder for those in his charge.⁶⁵

Uncertainty about the use of sycamore leaves as fodder was expressed already by Gesenius: “Sed folia sycomori armentorum pabulum fuisse, aliunde non constat.”⁶⁶

Wright’s revision of Sherira’s interpretation from leaves as fodder to figs as fodder is also not new. According to Bochart’s plausible reading of David Qimhi’s commentary to Amos 7:14,⁶⁷ the same revision is found there. The idea that Amos used sycamore fruit as fodder for his herd would later be put forward by G. Dalman and J. A. Soggin (“during the dry season”) as well.⁶⁸ Bochart labeled this idea “absurd,” on the grounds that sycamore fruit is not food for sheep.⁶⁹

There is no justification for either Bochart’s doubts about the use of the figs as fodder or the doubts of Gesenius and Wright about the use of the leaves as fodder. The use of sycamore figs as fodder by poor farmers and bedouin shepherds in modern Israel is noted above.⁷⁰ In

(“Amos,” 10) of this interpretation to the third-century Palestinian *amora* Resh Laqish, without supplying a reference. There is clearly some confusion here, since what Danell has translated into Swedish is the comment of the eighteenth-century exegete David Altschuler in his מצודת דוד, printed in the Rabbinic Bible. Danell seems to have interpreted Altschuler’s ר”ל “i.e.,” as “Resh Laqish.”

⁶⁵ Wright, “Sycamore Fig,” 366-67. Cf. n. 32, where he adds that “Roman farmers did use ‘fig’-leaves (among others) for fodder when green forage was not available.” Note that it is only untreated sycamore figs that are full of wasps and unfit for human consumption. It is an exaggeration to claim that “although the poor did eat sycamore figs, the fruit was mostly used for cattle fodder” (Willoughby, “Amos,” 204).

⁶⁶ Gesenius, *Thesaurus*, 213.

⁶⁷ Bochart, *Hieroicoicon*, I, 384 (ed. Rosenmüller, I, 406).

⁶⁸ G. Dalman, *Arbeit und Sitte in Palästina* (Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1928-39) I, 63; Soggin, *Amos*, 10.

⁶⁹ Bochart, *Hieroicoicon*, I, 384 (ed. Rosenmüller, I, 406).

⁷⁰ Wright (above at n. 65) quoting J. Galil and D. Eisikowitch, “Flowering Cycles and Fruit Types of *Ficus Sycomorus* in Israel,” *The New Phytologist* 67 (1968) 752.

Egypt, the leaves and fruit of the sycamore serve today as fodder for animals, and the ancient monuments show goats and cattle browsing on the foliage of trees and bushes in semidesert zones.⁷¹ In Ethiopia, “figs [of *F. sycomorus*] are eaten by livestock.”⁷² In East Africa, the “leaves/figs” of the sycamore “provide livestock forage in the dry season” and are “believed to stimulate milk production in cows.”⁷³ In the Sahel:

The fruit [of the sycamore] drop when still immature. They are eaten particularly by goats and sheep, but also by cattle and birds. . . . Leaves . . . are a much sought fodder. The tree is therefore lopped.⁷⁴

In the tropical Sudanian and the equatorial Guinean zones, the *Ficus gnaphalocarpa* Steud. (= *Ficus sycomorus* L.) is “consumed by livestock (leaves and fruit).”⁷⁵ In South Africa:

The Bantus feed cows with the foliage and fruit [of the sycamore] to stimulate milk-production. Research in this connection has revealed that the leaves digest easily and have a high nutritional value.⁷⁶

Wright accepts Sherira’s assumption that Amos had only one occupation. Indeed, he finds it so convincing that he uses it to critique other interpretations:

There is one major objection to [the interpretation of the LXX], other than the passage of time, and this is whether Amos would carry out both the task of shepherd and that of carer for sycomores simultaneously, especially in the light of the division of tasks as illustrated in 1 Ch. xxvii 25-31.⁷⁷

⁷¹ Baum, *Arbres*, 211.

⁷² Bekele-Tesemma, *Useful Trees*, 250.

⁷³ Food and Agriculture Organization, *Food Plants*, 290.

⁷⁴ Maydell, *Trees*, 273.

⁷⁵ H. N. Le Houérou, “The Role of Browse in the Sahelian and Sudanian Zones,” *Browse in Africa: The Current State of Knowledge* (Addis Ababa: International Livestock Centre for Africa, 1980) 91. For the term *Ficus gnaphalocarpa* Steud., see Introduction n. 6 above.

⁷⁶ P. Van Wyck, *Trees of the Kruger National Park* (Cape Town: Purnell, 1972-74) 1. 65. For the results of a chemical analysis of the leaves, see F. Busson, *Plantes alimentaires de l’ouest africain: étude botanique, biologique et chimique* (Marseille: L’Imprimerie Leconte, 1965) 107-9.

⁷⁷ Wright, “Sycamore Fig,” 368. Cf. already Rudolph, *Joel—Amos—Obadja—Jona*, 257 n. 18.

Wright's argument for the one-occupation theory based on the structure of the royal bureaucracy described in 1 Chr 27:25-31 is not convincing. There is no reason to expect a small business to exhibit the same degree of specialization as the royal bureaucracy. Moreover, Wright fails to explain why Amos would feel the need to tell Amaziah how he feeds his animals.

The usual assumption among modern scholars is that Amos was able to juggle two jobs. In support of this assumption, A. S. Yahudah is often cited:

En Orient les sycomores poussent très souvent près des puits. Les bergers s'occupent de l'incision des fruits pendant que leurs troupeaux paissent ou s'abreuvent. בִּילֵם שִׁקְמִים n'est pas un métier à part, mais ce peut être l'occupation accessoire d'un berger. . . .⁷⁸

In summary, the sycomore tree provides both shade and food for livestock, and it provides a good vantage point for the herdsmen to keep an eye on them. Its dependence on large amounts of water assures that there is always a nearby source of water for the animals to drink. Amos—or his children or employees or partners—could easily have tended animals and sycomores at the same time. This is particularly true if the animals were bovids, since “cattle require less labor to control and maintain than sheep-goats.”⁷⁹ All of this calls to mind Strabo's description of some ruined cities on the coast of Palestine south of Mt. Carmel. Immediately after Συκαμίνων πόλις “City of sycomores,” Strabo mentions Βουκόλων πόλις “City of cowherds”!⁸⁰ Could this be more than a coincidence? Is it possible that cowherds were drawn to the area by the sycomores?

The two professions are, thus, quite compatible, but even if they were less compatible, that would not be grounds for rejecting the two-occupation view. We have already cited van Driel's conclusion that “in Uruk the *nāqīdu* was a person with sometimes wide ranging interests

⁷⁸ A. S. Yahuda *apud* Goldmann, *La figue*, 45 n.1.

⁷⁹ R. W. Redding, “Subsistence Security as a Selective Pressure Favoring Increasing Cultural Complexity,” *Bulletin on Sumerian Agriculture* 7 (1993) 86.

⁸⁰ Strabo, *Geography* 7. 274-75 (16.2.27). For the use of βούκολος by Aquila, Symmachus and Theodotion to render בִּיקֵר in Amos 7:14, see chapter 4 above. For Συκαμίνων πόλις, see chapter 1 above.

in cattle and sheep herding and in arable farming.”⁸¹ Van Driel points to Iqišā son of Nannā-ereš, the *nāqīdu* in charge of 500 cows and 2,000 sheep and goats discussed above, adducing evidence that he also raised barley.⁸² Although barley was used as fodder, especially in the winter,⁸³ it is arguable that Iqišā’s combination of occupations is less natural than Amos’. In any event, Iqišā shows that there is no problem in assuming that Amos was a *nāqīdu ša šēni u lâti* who did a little farming on the side.

A number of scholars have attempted to find a suitable locale for this combination. In S. R. Driver’s view:

We must suppose the “naḳad-keepers of Tekoa” (i.1) to have owned lands in the “wilderness” or pasture-ground, stretching down to the Dead Sea on the east . . . ; and here, in some sufficiently sheltered situation, must have grown the sycamore trees, which the prophet “dressed.”⁸⁴

According to Hammershaimb:

[Sycamores] . . . can also be cultivated in the warm Jordan valley, and in the fertile oases by the Dead Sea. This does not make it impossible that Amos should have supported himself as a sideline by growing sycamores at one of these places, which are near enough to Tekoa for this to be combined with his work as a shepherd. He was probably able to drive his herds with him when he went to attend to his sycamore trees.⁸⁵

Feliks is similar but a bit more specific:

Amos apparently brought his cattle to the Dead Sea valley, where there are springs such as Ain Feshkha, next to which grow enormous quantities of reeds, which serve as pasturage for cows. Sycamore trees also grew in the area.⁸⁶

N. Hareuveni offers a theory explaining not only where but also how and why the two occupations would have been combined:

⁸¹ Driel, “Sheep and Goats,” 225.

⁸² See Driel, “Sheep and Goats,” 225 and chapter 4 above.

⁸³ See below.

⁸⁴ Driver, *Books*, 212.

⁸⁵ Hammershaimb, *Amos*, 118.

⁸⁶ Feliks, פֶּלִיִּקְס וְאֵרֶץ, 143 n. 10.

Amos, who was “among the herdsmen of Tekoa” . . . , must have followed the practice of other shepherds of the area. At the end of the dry, hot summer, when all the pasturage was gone from the Judean Desert, he would move his herds of goats and sheep to the Jordan Plain in the Jericho Valley. This is an area rich in green forage throughout Israel’s scorching summer season. . . .

The appropriate season for piercing the sycamore fruit, at least for the sycamores growing in the Jericho Valley, was around the time when the shepherds descended from the desert slopes of Judea and Samaria into the valley. Flocks could graze in the valley, while the shepherds could “moonlight” at other jobs. It is reasonable to assume that the sycamore owners utilized this convenient fact to offer grazing rights in exchange for dressing the sycamore fruit. The shepherd could perch on the sycamore’s broad branches and keep a lookout over his flocks while doing the monotonous work of piercing and oiling the still-green fruit. The sycamore owners, on the other hand, were assured of a top-grade crop.⁸⁷

P. J. King considers this “a plausible explanation” of “how Amos could be ‘a herdsman, and a dresser of sycamore trees’ at the same time.”⁸⁸ Nevertheless, he questions one aspect of it: “In the opening verse of the Book of Amos he is described as a *noqed*, probably a wealthy landowner and farmer, so Amos may not have been a simple shepherd on hired land.”⁸⁹ This is not a serious objection, since the term נֹקֵד has nothing to do with land ownership.⁹⁰

The real problem with Hareuveni’s theory is that, under the financial arrangement it posits, Amos was not deriving any income directly from tending sycamores. If so, it is not clear why he would mention this activity to Amaziah as evidence of his self-sufficiency. It seems more likely that, like the modern Egyptian *gemamzi*, he bought the fruit harvest in advance.⁹¹ Put differently, the herdsmen from Tekoa

⁸⁷ N. Hareuveni, *Tree and Shrub*, 90-91. For “the appropriate season,” see below. For “oiling,” see chapter 1 n. 55 above. Cf. Willoughby, “Amos,” 203: “Amos . . . may also have cut figs in exchange for grazing rights.”

⁸⁸ P. J. King, *Amos, Hosea, Micah—An Archaeological Commentary* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1988) 117.

⁸⁹ King, *Amos*, 117.

⁹⁰ See chapter 4 above.

⁹¹ See chapter 2 above. The sycamore tree produces 3-6 generations of fruit every year. In the Cairo district, only the earlier generations are gashed and eaten; see E. Sickenger, *Contributions à la Flore d’Égypte* (Mémoires présentés à l’Institut égyptien

were tenants for part of the year. The rent that they paid, perhaps with animals or animal products (wool, milk, etc.), gave them the rights to all vegetation and fruit in the fields that they leased.

In Roman times, the renting of fields containing sycamore trees was common enough to be discussed by the Mishnah (*m. B. Meṣ.* 9.9). The rabbis ruled that only a long-term renter (seven years or more) had the right to harvest the beams of a sycamore. It goes without saying that they placed no such restriction on the figs.

The herdsmen would have sold the good figs and, as Wright suggests, used the inedible figs and the leaves as fodder for their animals. This arrangement was beneficial to the trees as well as the animals:

The grazing of animals on fallow land, orchard land, and land freshly harvested is particularly important . . . , since the manure deposited by the animals helped to maintain the fertility of the fields.⁹²

Hareuveni's assumption that Amos' animals migrated every year to the Jericho Valley is quite reasonable. In this connection, we may cite more fully Hopkins' discussion of the connection between seasonal migration of livestock (transhumance) and specialized stock breeding:

In an agricultural system where fodder production was probably not achieved on any great scale . . . , there are obvious limits to the community's involvement in pastoralism beyond which the integration of the two modes of production fractures and specialist stock breeders take to distant pastures.⁹³

Over time, when the integration of animal husbandry and agriculture would break down and the edge in the competition for resources (fields versus pasture lands) would shift toward the farming sector, the most likely pathway of divorce in the ancient Highlands was some form of

4/2; Cairo 1901) 279; Brown and Walsingham, "Sycamore," 10-11. See also chapter 1 n. 53 above. This implies that the *gemamzia* there purchase only the first few crops. If Amos did not bring his herds to the sycamore groves until the end of summer, as Hareuveni assumes, he would have purchased only the *last* few crops.

⁹² Hopkins, *Highlands*, 247. However, there is little evidence for the manuring of fields in Israel (or in Egypt, for that matter) until the time of the Mishnah; see Y. Feliks, *החקלאות בארץ ישראל בימי המקרא המשנה והתלמוד* (Jerusalem: R. Mass, 1990) 78-101.

⁹³ Hopkins, *Highlands*, 248.

transhumance. Ecological conditions permitting the movement of flocks and herds accompanied by some segment of a community or specialist shepherds to seasonal pastures at some remove from the home settlement appear to exist within the Highlands and adjacent areas. . . . In the Judean and Samaritan Highlands seasonal migration may have been directed along wadi beds toward the Jordan valley, as has been reported for 19th century Bedouin inhabitants of the Transjordan. . . .⁹⁴

A similar point has been made about stockbreeding in Iraq:

All sheep-breeding depends on seasonal migration. In winter and spring shepherds follow the growth of vegetation in the steppes and deserts, and retire to the rivers and canals as the summer heat dries it up, pasturing flocks upon empty lands close to the water-courses and marshes or upon cultivated fallows, after making an agreement with the cultivators whereby the fellahin receive a rent in animals or their produce in addition to the manuring of their fields.⁹⁵

At what time of the year did this seasonal migration become necessary in the Tekoa region? According to N. Hareuveni, it was “at the end of the dry, hot summer, when all the pasturage was gone from the Judean Desert.” The lack of pasturage lasts well into the winter, and the only alternative to transhumance is supplemental feeding:

Winter feeding of livestock was a serious perennial problem that faced the stockowner in all Mediterranean lands. To solve it resort was had to a variety of fodder such as straw, branches, young shoots, hay, rice-stalks, unripe corn-stalks, carobs and gourds, and the pods of peas and lentils.⁹⁶

A similar situation obtains today in southern Iraq:

⁹⁴ Hopkins, *Highlands*, 250.

⁹⁵ Naval Intelligence Division, *Iraq and the Persian Gulf* (Geographical Handbook Series, B.R. 524, 1944), 467, cited by Van De Mierop, “Sheep and Goat,” 170. For further discussion of transhumance in the ancient Near East, see G. M. Schwartz, “Pastoral Nomadism in Ancient Western Asia,” in *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East* (ed. J. M. Sasson; New York: Scribner, 1995) 1. 249-58; M. P. Streck, *Das amurritische Onomastikon der altbabylonischen Zeit* (AOAT 271; Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2000-) 1. 55-59.

⁹⁶ Applebaum, “Economic Life,” 656.

For most of the year sheep secure their sustenance from the grasses and sedges available at pasture but during the winter there is a period of up to four months when little or no pasturage remains and they must be fed grain. . . . An individual sheep without sufficient pasturage is fed two handfuls of barley twice a day.⁹⁷

The problem of feeding livestock in the winter must have been particularly acute for cattle owners, since “cattle require greater access to higher quality forage [than sheep-goats].”⁹⁸ Already in the Old Babylonian period we read of this problem: “That straw has been used up and what shall your oxen eat?”; “Since yesterday I have no barley and straw; they are starving.”⁹⁹ Indeed, for cattle, supplementary feeding was necessary *before* the winter: “Do the oxen that have not eaten fodder in months IV-VI stay alive?”¹⁰⁰

The sycamore has a number of characteristics that make it uniquely suited for solving—or at least alleviating—this problem. First, much of its fruit, if not gashed and picked in time, becomes infested with wasps and unfit for human consumption. Consequently, a substantial portion of its unusually abundant yield is available for use as fodder. Second, the figs can be stored for several months.¹⁰¹ The sun-drying of sycamore figs, practiced by Palestinian Arab villagers in modern times,¹⁰² may well go back to antiquity. Third, Tristram reports that, in Palestine, “the Sycamore bears continuously, and I have gathered the figs from November to June.”¹⁰³ This report may well relate to “the hot Jordan valley” where “there is a tropical temperature throughout the year.”¹⁰⁴ Galil, Stein and Horovitz write: “*F. sycomorus* can . . . bridge

⁹⁷ E.L. Ochsenschlager, “Sheep: Ethnoarchaeology at Al-Hiba,” *Bulletin on Sumerian Agriculture* 7 (1993) 33.

⁹⁸ Redding, “Subsistence,” 86.

⁹⁹ M. Stol, “Old Babylonian Cattle,” *Bulletin on Sumerian Agriculture* 8 (1995) 195.

¹⁰⁰ *Loc. cit.*

¹⁰¹ Murray, “Fruits,” 622.

¹⁰² Galil, תפוחי, 73.

¹⁰³ Tristram, *Natural History*, 400.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 398. So too in Egypt: “Figs are found upon the trees at all seasons of the year. . . . After the appearance of the third crop there is a continuous but less abundant production of fruit during the autumn and even throughout the winter”; Brown and Walsingham, “Sycamore,” 5. On the cooler coastal plain, where Galil made his observations, “the figs are found occasionally on trees even during winter months, but their

over gaps in fruit supply. . . . There is only a short fruitless interval during the coldest months of the year.”¹⁰⁵ Fourth, as noted above, the figs and leaves are believed to stimulate milk production in cows.¹⁰⁶ Fifth, its leaves “persist throughout the year, except in the cooler regions, where most of them may fall in winter.”¹⁰⁷

Finally, it should be noted that the sycamore is used to solve a seasonal forage problem in West Africa—not in the winter but in the dry season:

The young leaves [of *Ficus gnaphalocarpa* Steud.] are consumed by sheep and cattle; during the dry season, the tree is lopped to produce browse for sheep and goats, and sometimes for cattle in very dry seasons, particularly in Ghana.¹⁰⁸

Our theory, then, is that the herdsmen from Tekoa rented fields containing sycamore trees at the end of summer, when the trees were full of figs. While keeping an eye on their animals, they harvested the figs, selling the edible ones and storing the others. When winter came, they fed their animals the stored figs plus the leaves on the trees and whatever additional figs had appeared on the trees in the meantime.

If the fields they rented were in the Jericho Valley, they were only around 20 km. from Jerusalem—not much further from the city than the spring pastures in the wilderness of Tekoa. If they were in the Jordan Valley, they were even closer. This constant proximity to Jerusalem would have made it easy for Amos and his business associates to supply a steady stream of animals for sacrifice in the Temple throughout the year.

number is usually small, and development very slow”; Galil, “Ancient Technique,” 180-82. The difference in climate between the Jordan valley and the coastal plain affects the leaves, as well; see n. 107 below.

¹⁰⁵ Galil, Stein & Horovitz, “Origin,” 197.

¹⁰⁶ Food and Agriculture Organization, *Food Plants*, 290; Van Wyck, *Trees*, 1. 65.

¹⁰⁷ Hepper, *Pharaoh's Flowers*, 58. Dalman observed sycomores clad with leaves on February 9, 1909 near the Jordan; near the cooler Mediterranean coast, he saw sycomores still nearly bare on April 5, 1921.

¹⁰⁸ M. Baumer, *Notes on Trees and Shrubs in Arid and Semi-Arid Regions* (Rome: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 1983) 185. For the term *Ficus gnaphalocarpa* Steud., see Introduction n. 6 above.

Amos' Occupations and His Prophecies

Is there a connection between Amos' occupations and his prophecies? This question was well formulated by Abarbanel at the very beginning of his commentary to Amos:

What is the significance of the phrase *אשר היה בנקדים בתקיע*? With the rest of the prophets, we do not find that Scripture tells what their profession or occupation was; instead, it is satisfied to mention their names and, at times, to relate them to their ancestors or their land. Why then with Amos . . . does it also mention his profession—that he was one of the *נקדים*, i. e., a herder of livestock? What does this have to do with his prophecy?¹⁰⁹

There is in fact a long tradition of reading the book in the light of Amos' life as a herdsman, a tradition summarized by Baur.¹¹⁰ There has even been an attempt to find parallels between his work with sycamore figs and his work with people.¹¹¹ A major component of this tradition in modern times has been the romantic view that the grandeur of nature in the countryside or the solitude of the desert shaped Amos' personality and his *Weltanschauung*.¹¹² This view was so axiomatic for J. Morgenstern that he attempted to use it to determine whether Amos was a shepherd or a cowherd:

. . . unquestionably his regular occupation as a shepherd, with its constant occasion for roaming with his sheep in the solitude of the waste country adjacent to his native Tekoa, far from the settled abodes of men, furnished ample opportunity for quiet meditation and for the visions which he experienced, far better than had he, as a cow-herd, been obliged to remain constantly in close contact with the village and its human relations, an opportunity almost indispensable for the psychic experiences which led to his consciousness and conviction of his prophetic commission.¹¹³

The degree to which this view is culturally determined can be appreciated by comparing Abarbanel's own answer to his question. It is

¹⁰⁹ Abarbanel, *Comentario*, 2-4.

¹¹⁰ Baur, *Der Prophet Amos*, 122-25.

¹¹¹ S. Bartina, "‘Hiendo los higos de los sicomoros’ (Am 7, 14)," *EstBib* 25 (1966) 354.

¹¹² For criticism of this view, see Soggin, *Amos*, 6.

¹¹³ J. Morgenstern, "Amos Studies I," *HUCA* 11 (1936) 36.

based on the *opposite* assumption: Amos became a prophet not because of his occupation but in spite of it. According to him, the point that Scripture wishes to make is that even a lowly, destitute, uneducated herder can be called to prophesy.¹¹⁴ The training received by the בני הנביאים was not a prerequisite.

Another aspect of Amos' prophecy that has been connected to his life as a herdsman is his imagery. As noted by Baur,¹¹⁵ it was Jerome who first made this connection in explaining the reference to roaring and shepherds in Amos 1:2:

It is natural that all professionals speak in examples of their profession and that each one offers a metaphor from the endeavor in which he spends his time. For example, one who is a sailor and a helmsman compares his sadness to a tempest; injury he calls a shipwreck; his enemies he calls head winds; . . .¹¹⁶

In modern times, a similar, but more modest, claim has been made concerning the “cows of Bashan” metaphor in Amos 4:1-3.¹¹⁷

Naturally, one must be cautious in making such claims. Amos also employs images from many fields in which he had no special expertise, and it would be arbitrary to focus on the herding images and ignore the others. Nevertheless, there is one verse in which Amos' profession seems to show through with particular force: כאשר יציל הרעה מפי הארי שתי כרעים או בדל און כן ינצלו בני ישראל הישבים בשמרון בפאת מטה ובדמשק ערש “as a shepherd rescues from the mouth of a lion two legs or a piece of an ear, so shall the Israelites dwelling in Samaria escape with the end of a bed or the pillow of a couch” (Amos 3:12).¹¹⁸ It has long been customary to interpret this verse in the light of Exod 22:12: אם אדם ירף ירף יבאדו עד הרפה לא ישלם, “if it was torn by beasts, [the shep-

¹¹⁴ Abarbanel, *Comentario*, 18-20.

¹¹⁵ Baur, *Der Prophet Amos*, 122 n. 82.

¹¹⁶ Jerome, *Commentarii*, 215 lines 100-104: “Naturale est, ut omnes artifices suae artis loquantur exemplis, et unusquisque in quo studio triuit aetatem, illius similitudinem proferat: uerbi gratia, qui nauta est et gubernator, tristitiam suam comparat tempestati, damnum, naufragium uocat; inimicos suos, uentos appellat contrarios; . . .” I am indebted to D. Berger for his help in translating this passage.

¹¹⁷ T. Kleven, “The Cows of Bashan: A Single Metaphor at Amos 4:1-3,” *CBQ* 58 (1996) 215-27, esp. 226.

¹¹⁸ I hope to defend this translation on another occasion.

pay no heed to your offerings of fatlings” (Amos 5:22).¹²³ Such talk cannot have been good for business. Financial self-interest would have dictated the opposite message or, at the very least, a discreet silence.

The members of Amos' collective would no doubt have been happier with Malachi's message: וְהִבֵּאתֶם גִּזוּל וְאֵת הַפֶּסֶחַ וְאֵת הַחֹלֶה וְהִבֵּאתֶם אֵת הַמְּנַחֵה הָאָרֶצֶה אֹתָהּ מִיַּדְכֶם “and you bring the stolen, the lame, and the sick—you bring them as a gift; will I accept it from you?” (Mal 1:13). From their point of view, there was a world of difference between Malachi's הָאָרֶצֶה and Amos' לֹא אָרֶצֶה. The former refers to rejection based on a physical or legal blemish in the offering; the latter, to rejection based on a moral blemish in the offerer. The former would have increased their profits; the latter must have reduced them. Thus, in pursuing the call to prophesy, Amos was not only neglecting his livelihood, he was undermining it as well.

¹²³ The translation offered here reflects only one of the possible syntactic analyses for the first clause.

Summary

Amos worked with both sycomores and livestock. In Amos' time, the beams of the sycamore were already being used for construction, and they were far more valuable than the figs. Nevertheless, the linguistic evidence does not support Rashi's view that Amos' interest in the sycamore was silvicultural rather than horticultural. Amos worked with the figs, but the precise nature of his work hinges on the meaning of the phrase *בולט שקמים*, in which the first word is a *hapax*.

Many ancient, medieval and modern readers of Amos, beginning with the Alexandrian translators, have taken *בולט* as referring to the practice of gashing sycamore figs, a few days before they are picked, to hasten their ripening. This practice has been known in Egypt and Cyprus for thousands of years, and has attracted an enormous amount of attention in travel accounts, pharmacological treatises, ethnobotanical studies, etc. from the time of Theophrastus until the present. It is true that this operation is clearly attested in rabbinic sources and that it had its own name in Greek, Arabic, Aramaic, and Mishnaic Hebrew. Nevertheless, the meaning of the biblical term is not that specific. The parallels to *בולט* that are closest in etymology and syntax suggest that it refers to the entire process of harvesting sycamore figs, beginning with the gashing.

The etymology of *בולט* was discovered by Bochart in 1663. It is the participle of a denominative verb, derived from a noun *בלט* meaning

“fig (incl. sycamore fig).” Although Bochart was not able to prove that Hebrew had such a noun, he was able to point to the noun *balas* “fig” in Ethiopic and Arabic. It has always been assumed that this noun is unattested in Hebrew, but this assumption is incorrect. The noun בלט appears in the Mishnah, according to some textual witnesses, as the name of an inferior fig. In one commentary, it is even identified with the sycamore. Moreover, Yemeni Arabic also has a denominative verb derived from the word for “fig”: *ballasa* “to pick figs.” Its participle *miballis* refers to a person who picks figs from a tree and sells them in the market. Hence, there are no longer any grounds for doubting Bochart’s theory.

Bochart’s discovery is more significant than he realized. The Hebrew noun בלט and the Yemeni noun *balas* are not cognates, descended from Proto-West-Semitic. The same goes for Hebrew שקבמה and Yemeni *súggama* “sycamore.” It seems likely that both the Hebrew terms and the Yemeni ones were borrowed from Epigraphic South Arabian. In fact, one of them is attested in Qatabanian, in the phrase $\text{ʿ}lhw s^1qmtm$ “sycamore-gods,” a phrase that has hitherto been misinterpreted. The ESA term s^1qmtm (apparently pronounced something like [šuqamatum]) may, in turn, be derived from the verb $*šūqamat$ “was made to stand, planted,” possibly alluding to a belief that the sycamore was a sacred tree planted by the gods.

These linguistic borrowings appear to have some relevance for the controversies among botanists concerning the origin of the biblical sycamore. They support the traditional view that this tropical tree did not come to Israel spontaneously in the Mesolithic or Neolithic periods but was deliberately introduced in historical times. The linguistic evidence suggests that sycamore figs and/or saplings were imported not from Egypt (as commonly thought) but from Yemen, and that the words for the fig (*bls*) and the tree (*šqmt*) were imported with them. (Yemen is the only place in the world outside of Africa where the fruit of the sycamore produces viable seeds, and it is believed to be the source of other Palestinian trees, such as *Commiphora opobalsamum*, which also grew in royal groves). This must have taken place at some point during the two centuries preceding Solomon’s reign, when the first signs of trade with Arabia appear in the archeological record of Israel.

Amos uses the participle בוקר to describe his other occupation. All of the ancient and medieval exegetes took this participle as a denomi-

native derived from the word בִּקְרָה “cattle.” Many modern scholars believe that this interpretation makes 7:14 contradict both 7:15 and 1:1. However, the term נִקְדִּים used in 1:1 does not mean “shepherds,” as these scholars assume. According to the Targum and some of the Greek translators, it is a synonym of אֲנָשֵׁי מִקְנֵה and thus may refer to people who deal with בִּקְרָה or צֹאן or both. This interpretation is corroborated by the Akkadian cognate. The Neo-Babylonian *nāqīdu* was a specialist breeder of בִּקְרָה (*nāqīdu ša lâti*) or צֹאן (*nāqīdu ša šēni*) or both (*nāqīdu ša šēni u lâti*). Amos belonged to the last category. In 7:14, he alludes to his בִּקְרָה as a sign of self-sufficiency. In 7:15, he alludes to his צֹאן as a symbol of legitimacy, using a phrase from Nathan’s oracle in order to associate himself with David, in opposition to Amaziah and Jeroboam.

In Mesopotamia, even *nāqīdu*’s hired by a temple to manage its herds and flocks were businessmen—not temple personnel and certainly not cult personnel. This is even more true of the נִקְדִּים from Tekoa. Although they were probably regular suppliers of sacrificial animals for the Temple in Jerusalem, neither they nor their animals belonged to the Temple. They were members of families that owned and managed livestock, living together in a settlement similar to the one in Babylonia known as *Kapri-ša-nāqīdāti* “Village of herdsmen” and working together in a kind of collective. They seem to have passed down their business for many generations, judging from the reference to the אֲדִירִים of Tekoa in Neh 3:5.

One of the most serious problems faced by stockbreeders is the winter feeding of their animals, especially cattle. To solve this problem, one Mesopotamian *nāqīdu ša šēni u lâti* leased fields for grazing and raised barley on the side, perhaps for use as fodder. It seems likely that the נִקְדִּים from Tekoa leased fields containing sycamore trees, possibly in the Jericho Valley, to feed their animals in the winter. The sycamore is uniquely suited to this purpose, since it is the only tree in the region that bears fruit in the winter and since much of its fruit is unfit for humans but good for cattle. Amos—or his workers—could keep his animals in the shelter of the trees and work on the fruit at the same time. He could sell the good figs and use the inedible ones and the leaves as fodder for his animals. Like the modern Egyptian *gemamzi*, who buys the yearly crop of sycamore fruit in advance and does all the work of gashing and picking, he did not own the trees themselves.

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