

THE HILLSIDE OF SAMARIA

Interpretation and Meaning of Micah 1:6*

Jan A. Wagenaar London

The similarity between the opening lines of the oracle against Samaria in Micah 1:6 and the oracle against Jerusalem in Micah 3:12 has often been noted¹. The opening of the oracle against Samaria *כרם לשדה*, 'I will make Samaria into a ruin of the field, (a place) for planting vineyards', parallels the fate of the city to the fate predicted for Jerusalem *עיר לשדה*, 'Therefore, because of you, Zion will be ploughed into an open field, Jerusalem will become a ruin, a place for the wild animals of the forest'². As Samaria will become a *ruin of the field*, a place for planting vineyards, so Jerusalem will be ploughed into a field and become a ruin, and the mount of the house will turn into a place for the wild animals of the forest. Although the meaning of the opening lines of the oracle against Samaria is undisputed, the wording has elicited a great deal of scholarly discussion.

Since the days of Julius Wellhausen it has often been pointed out that the expression *עיר לשדה*, 'a ruin of the field', is unparalleled in Ancient Hebrew and, therefore, cannot be right³. According to Wellhausen we have "Wild des Feldes, Kraut, Blumen, Bäume, Steine des Feldes, aber keine Ruinen des Feldes"⁴. Although he himself translates *עיר לשדה* as "*zu einer Wildnis des Feldes* (into a wilderness in the open country)", he suggests to read either *עיר לשדה*, 'forest land' (cf. Ezekiel 21:3), or - in accordance with the expression *עיר לשדה*, 'one of the cities in the field', in I Samuel 27:5 - *עיר השדה*, 'rural village (*Ackerdorf*)', which is adopted by Ehrlich⁵. Marti, followed by J.M.P. Smith, Donner, Jepsen and Fritz, emends

* I would like to thank Prof. Bob Becking, Utrecht, for his valuable comments on an earlier version of this article.

¹ J. Wellhausen, *Die kleinen Propheten übersetzt und erklärt*, Berlin 1963/4, 135; J.L. Mays, *Micah* (OTL), London 1976 47; H.W. Wolff, *Micah*, (BKAT XIV/4), Neukirchen-Vluyn 1982, 11.

² The expression *עיר לשדה*, 'wooded heights' should either be emended to *במה עיר*, 'the (wild) animals of the forest' (A.B. Ehrlich, *Randglossen zur hebräischen Bibel* V, Leipzig 1912, 280, followed by W. Rudolph, *Micah, Nahum, Habakuk, Zephaniah* [KAT XIII/3], Gütersloh 1975, 68; H.W. Wolff, *Micah*, 62), or the spelling *bāmōt* should be considered as a contraction of *bahmōt* < *bahimōt* (D.H. Hillers, *Treaty-Curses and the Old Testament Prophets* [Biblica et Orientalia 16], Rome 1964, 54, followed by A.S. van der Woude, *Micah* [POT], Nijkerk 1985³, 122-123) The interpretation 'animals of the forest' fits the context of judgement much better, and has close parallels in Malachi 1:3: 'I made his mountains desolate and gave his inheritance to the jackals of the desert', as well as the curses related to the Near Eastern Treaties and Loyalty Oaths (cf. D.L. Hillers, *Treaty-Curses*, 44-54).

³ Cf. the brief survey by W. McKane, "Micah 1,2-7", ZAW 107 (1995), 429.

⁴ J. Wellhausen, *Kleinen Propheten*, 135.

⁵ A.B. Ehrlich, *Randglossen* V, 273.

השדה to לעי השדה: 'I will make Samaria into a field, a place for vineyard plantings'⁶. Lescow, on the other hand, while retaining the text would prefer to delete השדה, in stead of עי: 'I will make Samaria into a ruin, a place for vineyard plantings'⁷.

Willi-Plein believes the present text to be the result of an elaborate process of textual corruption and reconstruction. The original wording שמרן לשדה למשעי כרם, 'I will make Samaria into a field, (a place) for vineyard plantings', was reduced to כרם לעי שמרן, 'I will make Samaria into a ruined vineyard (*Weinberggruine*)'. The reconstruction of the verse resulted in the wording כרם לעי השדה למשעי כרם שמרני⁸.

Wolff supposes that the words לעי השדה are a secondary addition to the text in order to set up the comparison between Samaria and Jerusalem. The absence of the copula before the final words כרם למשעי attests to the secondary nature of the addition. According to him, they could be a remnant of the original introduction to the oracle against Samaria, now lost⁹.

In spite of the numerous objections raised against the expression עי השדה, it is difficult to reject it from a grammatical point of view. The construct state 'a ruin of the field' does not refer to one of the standard items of the field: 'the animals, herbs, trees and stones of the field', but gives, as has already been pointed out by Driver, a nearer definition of the location of the ruin: 'a ruin *in* the field'¹⁰. The construction parallels that of ערי השדה, ' (one of) the cities in the field', in I Samuel 27:5. It is difficult to see why a 'city in the field' is acceptable to Wellhausen but its ruins are not.

The ancient translations, moreover, reflect the expression עי השדה of the textus receptus. The LXX reads ὁ πωροφυλάκιον ἀγροῦ, 'a garden-watcher's hut in the field'. The rendering of the LXX is possibly, but not necessarily, influenced by the text of Isaiah 1:8, where ὁ πωροφυλάκιον translates the Hebrew מלונה, 'shack', which is preceded there by כרם, 'vineyard'. The LXX, however, has ὁ πωροφυλάκιον, 'a garden-watcher's hut' for Hebrew עי, עיים, 'ruin', also in Micah 3:12 (but apart from the codex Alexandrinus not in the parallel Jeremia 26:18 (= LXX 33:18), where the LXX reads ἀβυσσόν, 'inaccessible', 'desolate') and Psalm 78:1 (= MT 79:1). The translators probably imagined a temporary shelter built from stones scattered in the field. The Vulgate reads *quasi acervum lapidum in agro*, 'as a heap of stones in the field'. An emendation of the text in Micah 1:6 seems, therefore, unnecessary.

Many scholars, accordingly, find no difficulty with the expression עי השדה and translate the

6 K. Marti, *Das Dodekapheton* (KHCAT XIII), Tübingen 1904, 267; J.M.P. Smith, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Micah, Zephaniah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Obodiah and Joel* (ICC), New York 1928², 34; A. Jepsen, "Kleine Beiträge zum Zwölfprophetenbuch", ZAW 56 (1938), 97 n 3; H. Donner, *Israel unter den Völkern* (VTS 11), Leiden 1964, 94; V. Fritz, "Das Wort gegen Samaria Mi 1,2-7", ZAW 86 (1974), 320 n 26.

7 Th. Lescow, "Redaktionsgeschichtliche Analyse von Micha 1-5", ZAW 84 (1972), 82 n 137.

8 I. Willi-Plein, *Vorformen der Schriftexegese innerhalb des Alten Testaments* (BZAW 123), Berlin 1971, 71.

9 H.W. Wolff, *Micha*, 11, 16.

10 G.R. Driver, "Linguistic and Textual Problems: Minor prophets II", JTS 39 (1938), 264. The objections raised by I. Willi-Plein, *Vorformen der Schriftexegese*, 71, that the explanation of Driver is not satisfactory from a geographical point of view, is inconclusive. There is no problem in envisaging Samaria - after the destruction - as a ruin in the 'highlands' (see below) of Ephraim.

opening lines of the oracle against Samaria as follows: 'I will make Samaria into a ruin in the field, a place for planting vineyards' (Allen, Mays, R.L. Smith, Fohrer)¹¹.

A number of scholars have based their objections against the expression עַי הַשָּׂדֶה on the observation that the opening lines of the oracle are quite unbalanced¹². The first hemistiche הַשָּׂדֶה לְעַי הַשָּׂדֶה, 'I will make Samaria into a ruin in the field', is twice as long as the second כָּרַם לְמַטְעֵי, 'into vineyard plantings'. Moreover, the hemistiches lack the parallelismus membrorum so characteristic of the adjacent lines. Several scholars attempt to restore the parallelism in the opening lines of the oracle by moving הַשָּׂדֶה to the second hemistiche.

Hillers, while reading לְעַי שָׂדֶה, parallels עַי שָׂדֶה as a description of the result of the destruction: 'I will make Samaria a ruin//an open field for vineyards plantings'¹³. Others, however, consider both הַשָּׂדֶה and שָׂדֶה as the object of the verb¹⁴. Van der Woude suggests that הַשָּׂדֶה has the meaning 'common lands of a city' and translates: 'I will make Samaria into a ruin//the common lands into vineyard plantings'¹⁵. Rudolph, while reading שָׂדֶה, proposes the meaning 'territory (Flur)', and translates: 'I will make Samaria into a ruin//its territory into vineyard plantings'¹⁶.

Although the objections against the expression לְעַי הַשָּׂדֶה as such are not decisive, the restoration of the parallelismus membrorum so characteristic of Hebrew verse, strongly suggests that we should consider an alternative distribution of the words over the first two hemistiches of the oracle against Samaria. The alternative reading of the first two lines of the oracle is even more convincing, when we take into account an alternative translation for שָׂדֶה, 'common lands', 'territory' suggested by Van der Woude and Rudolph.

The city of Samaria was built on a mountain - as can be inferred from I Kings 16:24: '[Omri] bought the hill Samaria from Shemer for two talents of silver and he built up the hill and he called the name of the city which he had built after the name of Shemer, the owner of the hill: Samaria'. A number of scholars refer to the location of Samaria on a mountain, when commenting on the initial sentence of the oracle against Samaria: "The slopes of the proud hill on which the city stood will revert to use as vineyards"¹⁷. In view of the imagery of the oracle the question presents itself whether שָׂדֶה in Micah 1:6 could mean 'hillside', 'hill', or 'mountain': 'I will make Samaria into a ruin//the hillside into vineyard plantings'.

The etymology of שָׂדֶה is still unclear, in spite of the vast distribution of the root¹⁸. Semitic cognates of שָׂדֶה are Ugaritic šd, 'field', 'single field', Phoenician šd, 'field', 'territory', Punic,

11 L.C. Allen, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah* (NICOT), 267; J.L. Mays, *Micah*, 45; R.L. Smith, *Micah-Malachi* (WBC), 15, 18; Fohrer, "Micha 1", in *Studien zu alttestamentlichen Texten und Themen* (BZAW 155), Berlin - New York 1981, 70.

12 A.S. van der Woude, *Micah*, 34; V. Fritz, ZAW 86 (1974), 320 n 26.

13 D.L. Hillers, *Micah* (Hermeneia), Philadelphia 1984, 16, 18.

14 Even H.W. Wolff, *Micah*, 9, who holds הַשָּׂדֶה לְעַי as a secondary addition, distributes the words in the present text over different hemistiches: 'Und ich mache Samaria [zur Ruine - das Feld] zu Weinberglagen'.

15 A.S. van der Woude, *Micah*, 34; cf. also R. Vuilleumier (& C. Keller), *Michée, Nahoum, Habacuc, Sophonie* (CAT Xib), Neuchâtel 1971, 15, who translates שָׂדֶה with 'ses environs'.

16 W. Rudolph, *Micah*, 33.

17 J.L. Mays, *Micah*, 47; cf. J. Wellhausen, *Kleinen Propheten*, 135: "Der Hügel worauf Samarien liegt ist ein fetter Hügel, der Reben trägt, nachdem die grosse Stadt verschwunden ist".

18 Cf. G. Wallis, שָׂדֶה, TWAT VII, 710.

šd, 'field', 'plain', and Old South Arabic *s2dw*, 'hillside', 'terraced hillside'¹⁹. Hebrew שדה and the poetic שדי are often derived from the same root as Akkadian *šadû*, 'mountain'²⁰. Weippert and Propp point out that the spelling of the Old Akkadian *šadwum* with SA, rather than SA, in the majority of the cases suggests an original root SDW²¹. Hebrew שדה and Akkadian *šadû*, therefore, appear to be related. Weippert suggests that the not too stable sounds /š/ and /s/ in Akkadian have merged in /s/²². The pronunciation of the sibilants may have differed in the various Semitic and Hebrew dialects²³. Words and names in Biblical Hebrew in which /š/ corresponds with proto-semitic /s/, reflect an Israelite as against a Judean pronunciation according to Knauf²⁴. Moreover, the pronunciation of /š/ by some may have sounded to others as /s/, as may be inferred from the differences in pronunciation of סבִּלָה/שבִּלָה by the Gileadites and Ephraimites at the incident related in Judges 12:6²⁵. A number of ש-ש puns in Old Testament poetry attest to the similarity in pronunciation of the two sounds²⁶. Propp contends that the word שדה may in some Hebrew dialects have, actually, been pronounced as שדי²⁷.

The meaning of שדה, 'field', is not in direct opposition to *šadû*, 'mountain'. Hebrew שדה does not refer to the 'plains' as opposed to the 'mountains', but to the uninhabited, uncultivated lands. The Akkadian *šadû* denotes the 'mountain wilderness', as seen from the cultivated land along the rivers Euphrates and Tigris²⁸. Occasionally the Akkadian *šadû* denotes the 'open country', 'steppe' in general²⁹.

In a number of Old Testament texts the word שדה appears to refer specifically to mountains or highlands³⁰. In Numbers 23:14, ויקחהו שדה צפם אל ראש הפסגה, 'he took him to the שדה of

¹⁹ Cf. HAL s.v. שדה; J. Hoftijzer and K. Jongeling, *Dictionary of the North-West Semitic Inscriptions*, Leiden - New York - Köln 1995, 1110 (s.v. *šd*₁); W.H. Propp, "On Hebrew *šade(h)*, 'highland'", *VT* 37 (1987), 234 n 1.

²⁰ Cf. Gesenius-Buhl s.v. שָׁדָה; HAL s.v. שָׁדָה; AHW s.v. שָׁדָה.

²¹ M. Weippert, "Erwägungen zur Etymologie des Gottesnamens 'El Saddaj'", *ZDMG* 111 (1961), 49-50; W.H. Propp, *VT* 37 (1987), 232.

²² M. Weippert, *ZDMG* 111 (1961), 51.

²³ Cf. E.A. Knauf, "War 'Biblich-Hebräisch' eine Sprache? Empirische Gesichtspunkte zur linguistischen Annäherung an die Sprache der althebräischen Literatur", *ZAH* 3 (1990), 16-17.

²⁴ E.A. Knauf, *ZAH* 3 (1990), 18; cf. E.A. Knauf, Shadday, *DDD*, 1417.

²⁵ Cf. J.A. Emerton, in *Mélanges bibliques et orientaux en l'honneur de M. Mathias Delcor* (Ed. A. Caquot, S. Légasse, M. Tardieu; AOAT 215), Neukirchen-Vluyn 1985, 149-157; cf. W.H. Propp, *VT* 37 (1987), 236 n 39.

²⁶ W.H. Propp, *VT* 37 (1987), 233, 236 n 40, lists the following examples: Deuteronomy 32:15; 35:5, 26; Isaiah 32:12; 44:2; Joel 1:10; Micah 2:4; Job 27:23; Proverbia 12:25.

²⁷ W.H. Propp, *VT* 37 (1987), 233; cf. M. Weippert, *ZDMG* 111 (1961), 54; J. Hoftijzer and K. Jongeling, *Dictionary of North-West Semitic Inscriptions*, 1111 (s.v. *šdh*₁).

²⁸ Cf. W.H. Propp, *VT* 37 (1987), 232; E. A. Knauf, Shadday, *DDD*, 1416.

²⁹ *CAD* s.v. *šadû* A2; Cf. M. Weippert, *ZDMG* 111 (1961), 50; W.H. Propp, *VT* 37 (1987), 232, 235-236 n 33.

³⁰ W.H. Propp, *VT* 37 (1987), 230-232; lists the following: Numbers 23:14, Judges 5:18, II Samuel 1:21, Jeremia 13:27; 17:3; 18:14; Psalm 1:11; Job 40:20; M. Weippert, *ZDMG* 111 (1961), 50 n 47, lists Judges 5:4, 18; Genesis 32:4; Psalm 50:11; *Gesenius-Buhl* s.v. שָׁדָה 5 lists the following proposals Genesis 32:4; Judges 5:4, 18; Numbers 23:14; Deuteronomy 32:13; Jes 56:9; Jer 17:3; 18:14; Ezekiel 21:2; Psalm 50:11; 80:14; 96:12.

the watchmen, to the summit of the Pisgah', the parallelism between שדה צפים, (to) the mountaintop of the watchmen', and ראש הפסגה ' (to) the summit of Pisgah', confirms the meaning 'mountain' for שדה. In Judges 5:18 the expression מרומי שדה, 'the heights of the mountains/highlands', shows that שדה may be a high elevation. In II Samuel 1:21 the word שדה in the expression שדי תרומת, 'the lofty hills', which parallels הרי בגלבע, the mountains in Gilboa', again refers to high grounds. The much debated תרומת must be interpreted as a plural of abstraction used of a quality, i.e. 'the hills of loftiness'³¹. In Jeremia 13:27 על גבעות השדה, 'on the hills in the highlands', שדה must refer to a 'mountainous area'. On account of these and a handful of other examples Propp proposes to create in the lexica a new category for שדה: 'highland', besides the recognized uses of שדה to denote agricultural fields, land outside a city and even national territories³².

The meaning 'mountain', 'hillside' would also be appropriate in Micah 1:6: ושמתי שמרון לעי // והשדה למסעי כרם, 'I will make Samaria into a ruin//the hillside into vineyard plantings'. The interpretation 'hillside', 'mountain', stresses the similarity between the fate of Samaria in Micah 1:6 and Jerusalem in Micah 3:12 even more strongly. The opening lines of the oracle against Samaria and the last lines of the oracle against Jerusalem now prove to be direct parallels, as may become clear from the following synoptic table:

Micah 1:6		Micah 3:12	
ושמתי	I will		
שמרון	make Samaria	ויירושלם	Jerusalem will become
לעי	into a ruin,	עיין תהיה	a ruin,
השדה	the hill(side)	והר הבית	the mountain of the house
למסעי	(into a place) for	לכמות	(a place) for the animals
כרם	vineyard plantings	יער	of the forest.

Samaria as well as Jerusalem will become a ruin. After its destruction the hillside of Samaria will only be fit for the planting of vineyards, whereas the temple mount in Jerusalem will be left to the wild animals of the forest.

³¹ W.H. Propp, *VT* 37 (1987), 231; cf. *HAL* s.v. שדה 6 f).

³² W.H. Propp, *VT* 37 (1987), 233; cf. G. Wallis, שדה, *TWAT* VII, 715.