

## Wordplays in the Visions of Amos\*

Nili Wazana

The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

### *Introduction*

The book of Amos consists of nine chapters. Despite its modest size, it reflects its author(s)' impressive literary proficiency. The book is a mosaic of prophetic literary genres: oracles against the nations; prophetic lawsuits (*rîb* prophecies) and admonitions; oracles of woe against Israel; hymns in praise of God ("doxologies"); prophecies of consolation; a prophetic story; and visions. Furthermore, the language of the prophecies is vivid, exhibiting expert use of many stylistic devices such as numerical patterns; the use of series; rhetorical questions; and a variety of puns and wordplays.<sup>1</sup> Acknowledgment and appreciation of the book's aptitude for various literary patterns is the starting point of this paper, in which I shall propose a new interpretation of the visions of Amos.

### *The Visions of Amos*

Amos 7:1–9; 8:1–3 comprises a series of four connected visions.<sup>2</sup> They all begin with the formula כה הראני "this is what (my Lord God) showed me," using the transitive, *hiphil* third person form of the root רא" (7:1, 4, 7; 8:1).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See H. W. Wolff, *Amos the Prophet* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1973), 6–53; idem, *Joel and Amos*, trans. W. Janzen et al. (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), 91–100; J. A. Soggin, *The Prophet Amos*, trans. J. Bowden (London: SCM, 1987), 12–15; S. M. Paul, *Amos* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 4–7.

<sup>2</sup> The connection of v. 9 to the third vision (7:7–8) has been questioned by some scholars, who suggest interpreting it as part of the following prophetic narrative (7:9–17) or as a "hinge" or "bridge" connecting the story (7:10–17) to the vision (7:7–8). For discussion and review of scholarly opinions, see M. E. Campos, "Structure and Meaning in the Third Vision of Amos (7:7–17)," *JHS* 11/3 (2011), 2–28, at 4–6.

<sup>3</sup> Translations mainly follow NJPS, with modifications.

Some scholars attach another, fifth vision to this series (9:1–4).<sup>4</sup> However, this vision is different in content and form from the preceding four, and it begins with a different form of the root רָא, the *qal*, first person: רָאִיתִי “I saw” (Amos 9:1).<sup>5</sup> The fifth vision is placed not far from the four connected visions (eleven verses separate it from the fourth vision). Originally independent, in its current position the fifth vision sheds light on the conception of the fate of the people that is reflected in all of the visions. Since this pertains also to the interpretation of the visions here suggested, it will also be briefly discussed.

In the present form of the book, a prophetic story describing the confrontation of Amos with Amaziah, priest of Beth-el, separates the third vision from the fourth (7:10–17). Yet the four visions are clearly divided into two consecutive pairs according to their form and content.<sup>6</sup> The first pair presents dynamic visions, a “movie,” in contemporary terminology, with the same self-explanatory message, conveyed through the imagery of a plague of locusts and a raging fire. In each case the prophet reacts in almost identical words, intervening on behalf of the people, begging God to have mercy or cease the devastation: “I said, ‘O Lord God, pray forgive / refrain! How will Jacob survive? He is so small’” (7:2, 5). Twice God accedes to the prophet’s plea, renouncing his original decision. In the first vision: “The Lord relented concerning the intended punishment; ‘It shall not come to pass,’ said the Lord” (7:3). In the second vision: “The Lord relented concerning this; ‘That shall not come to pass, either,’ said the Lord God” (7:6).

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<sup>4</sup> See, among others, A. Weiser, *Das Buch der zwölf kleinen Propheten* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1956), 1:181; Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 337–38; J. Jeremias, *The Book of Amos: A Commentary*, trans. D. W. Stott (OTL; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1998), 125, 154–55. These commentators present the fifth vision as the climax of the series of visions.

<sup>5</sup> See V. Maag, *Text, Wortschatz und Begriffswelt des Buches Amos* (Leiden: Brill, 1951), 47; Z. Weisman, “Patterns and Structures in the Visions of Amos,” *Beit Mikra* 14/4 (1970), 40–57, at 41 (Hebrew); H. N. Rösel, *The Book of Amos* (Haifa: ‘Ah, 1990), 253 (Hebrew). For other scholars of this opinion, see Paul, *Amos*, 222, n. 5. Scholars who connect the fifth vision to the earlier four also acknowledge the marked differences in form that distinguish this vision from the others; see Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 337–38; Soggin, *The Prophet Amos*, 121–22.

<sup>6</sup> See, among others, Y. Zakovitch, *The Three-Four Pattern in the Bible* (Ph.D. diss., Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1979), 186–91 (Hebrew); G. Brin, *Studies in Classical Biblical Prophecy* (Jerusalem: Bialik, 2006), 36–37 (Hebrew).

The second pair of visions presents static pictures—still images which are not self-explanatory, but require clarification. This pair of visions is supplemented in each case by a dialogue that begins with God asking the prophet: “What do you see, Amos?” (7:8; 8:2). The prophet focuses on the central element in the vision: *’ānāk* in the third vision (7:8); “a basket of summer fruit (*qāyīš*)” in the fourth (8:2). In both cases the prophet’s answer is used as a springboard for God’s decree: “I shall set *’ānāk* in the midst of My people Israel” (7:8); “The end (*qēš*) has come for My people Israel” (8:2). Both are followed by the declaration: לא אוסיף עוד עבור לו “I will not pardon them again” (7:8; 8:2).

The pairing of the visions underscores their reliability as bearers of the divine message. Doubling the message is a familiar tactic in biblical oracular dreams. Since dreams are a common human experience, they are considered a relatively inferior conduit for the divine message; they give rise to the need for a way to distinguish between regular dreams and prophetic ones, often requiring additional interpretation. One of the means of identifying oracular dreams and distinguishing them from regular ones was the repetition of the message in a second dream, whether to the same person or to another.<sup>7</sup> This motif is frequent in the story of Joseph: in his own dreams (Gen. 37:6–9); in the dreams of the cupbearer and baker, which are contrasting variations on the same subject (40:5–11, 16–17); and in Pharaoh’s dreams (41:1–7, 17–24). As Joseph says explicitly when interpreting Pharaoh’s dreams, they both bear the same message: “Pharaoh’s dreams are one and the same: God has told Pharaoh what He is about to do”

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<sup>7</sup> H. Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods: A Study of Ancient Near Eastern Religion as the Integration of Society and Nature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), 255–58; A. L. Oppenheim, *The Interpretation of Dreams in the Ancient Near East* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1956; repr. 2008), 212; K. Gnuse, *The Dream Theophany of Samuel* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1984), 33–34. Another way of authenticating the message of oracular dreams was via mantic practices, such as extispicy. In relation to the oracular dreams of Gudea king of Lagash, see V. Hurowitz, *I Have Built You an Exalted House* (JSOTSup. 115; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992), 49–50. Koowon Kim suggests that the change in the mood of the dreamer is another literary motif indicating the authenticity of the dream; see K. Kim, *Incubation as a Type-Scene in the ’Aqhatu, Kirta, and Hannah Stories* (VTSup. 145; Leiden: Brill, 2011), 80.

(41:25). Their repetition indicates their oracular character: “As for Pharaoh having had the same dream twice, it means that the matter has been determined by God, and that God will soon carry it out” (41:32). The same phenomenon is apparent as well in the story of Gilgamesh. The hero is notified of the arrival of Enkidu by a pair of symbolic dreams (*Epic of Gilgamesh*, 1:243–89).<sup>8</sup> Repetition validates visions, too, for like dreams, they carry a visual divine message. Compare the words of Joseph to Pharaoh: “God has revealed (הראה) to Pharaoh what He is about to do” (Gen. 41:28), with the opening words of each of the visions of Amos: “This is what (the Lord God) showed me (הראני)” (Amos 7:1, 4, 7; 8:1).

Often the key to the meaning of a vision lies in wordplays and symbols.<sup>9</sup> Particularly for visions of the static kind, in which the prophet sees an image, there is need for a mediating figure to explain it—God; an angel (in the later strata of prophetic visions [Zechariah and Daniel]); or anyone who is capable of interpreting dreams. God asks Jeremiah: “What do you see Jeremiah?” and the prophet replies: “I see a branch of an almond tree (מקל שקד).” This answer is then interpreted by God: “You have been right, for I am watchful (שקד) to bring My word to pass” (Jer. 1:11–12). The second, affiliated vision in this pair features the steaming pot from the north (Jer. 1:13–14). As in all pairs of visions, the two carry one message—God is watchful to bring disaster upon his people from the north.<sup>10</sup> A similar technique figures in the visions of Amos. This is especially evident in the

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<sup>8</sup> See A. George, *The Epic of Gilgamesh* (London: Penguin, 1999), 10–11.

<sup>9</sup> For wordplays, in particular double meanings, in oracles, see I. M. Casanowicz, *Paronomasia in the Old Testament* (Boston: Norwood, 1894), 14 Ia; idem, “Paronomasia in the Old Testament,” *JBL* 12 (1893), 105–67, at 120–21. Wordplays and homophony also characterize another form of divine message, omens, according to S. W. Greaves, “Ominous Homophony and Portentous Puns in Akkadian Omens,” in S. B. Noegel, ed., *Puns and Pundits* (Bethesda, MD: CDL, 2000), 103–13. For interpretation strategies of omens, dreams, symbolic visions as well as enigmatic texts, see the many examples and discussion in E. L. Greenstein, “Hermeneutics in the Biblical World: From Dream Interpretation to Textual Exegesis,” *Mo'ed* 13 (2003), 65–78 (Hebrew).

<sup>10</sup> M. Haran, *Ages and Institutions in the Bible* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1972), 332 (Hebrew), suggests that the vision of the two baskets of figs (Jeremiah 24) was also originally two separate visions, fused together. As noted by Greenstein (“Hermeneutics,” 69), in these coded visions the visual signifier (here the noun: “almond tree”) represents a hidden meaning (the verb: “watchful”), which carries a divine message requiring mediation.

fourth vision, as has long been recognized by scholars. Recognition of wordplay as a dominant stylistic technique in all the visions can shed new light on the meaning of the visions of Amos, and suggest new ways in which to clarify textual and exegetical problems of the visions. I will therefore begin with the analysis of the fourth vision, and then return to the earlier three, where the same scheme has hitherto not been fully elucidated.

*The Fourth Vision (Amos 8:1–3)*

כֹּה הִרְאֵנִי אֲדֹנָי ה' וְהִנֵּה כָלוּב קִיץ. וַיֹּאמֶר מֶה-אַתָּה רֹאֶה עָמוּס נְאֻמֶר כָלוּב קִיץ; וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֵלַי בָּא הַקִּץ אֶל-עַמִּי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֹא-אוֹסִיף עוֹד עֲבוֹר לוֹ. וְהִילִילוּ שִׁירוֹת הַיְכָל בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא נְאֻם אֲדֹנָי ה' רַב הַפְּגָר בְּכָל-מְקוֹם הַשְּׁלִיחַ הַס.

In this vision Amos sees “a basket of summer fruit.” The message of God related in this vision is that the final hour, Hebrew קץ, has come for the people of Israel. This is a clear wordplay on the double meaning of the word *qāyis*, pronounced *qêš* in the northern dialect, where the diphthong *ay* was contracted into the monophthong *ê*.<sup>11</sup> Its first meaning is “summer fruit” (2 Sam. 16:1–2; Jer. 40:10, 12). The homonym *qêš* means “end, final hour.”

In the next verse God describes the future devastation using a vocal image that moves between two extremes: the howling of שירות היכל—a construct phrase which itself plays on a double meaning and will be translated below; and the horrible image of silent corpses left lying everywhere, with the command “Hush!”: וְהִילִילוּ שִׁירוֹת הַיְכָל בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא נְאֻם אֲדֹנָי ה' (8:3). רב הפגר בכל מקום השליח הס

The construct שירות היכל is unparalleled. The noun היכל carries two meanings in biblical Hebrew: “palace” (e.g., 1 Kgs. 21:1), and “temple” (e.g., Isa. 6:1).<sup>12</sup> The *nomen regens* שירות is a *hapax legomenon*. It looks like the

<sup>11</sup> On the phenomenon of the contraction of the diphthong in the northern dialect, see Paul, *Amos*, 254. The word קץ, summer, is found in its contracted form in the last line of the Gezer inscription; see S. Ahituv, *Echoes from the Past: Hebrew and Cognate Inscriptions from the Biblical Period* (Jerusalem: Carta, 2008), 256. For the possibility that the wordplay “summer fruit/end” is reflected already in the Gezer calendar, and even as the source for the fourth vision of Amos, see B. D. Rahtjen, “A Critical Note on Amos 8:1–2,” *JBL* 83 (1964), 416–17.

<sup>12</sup> *BDB* 228, s.v. היכל.

plural construct form of the word שירה (“song”; see Exod. 15:1); but the translation, “and the songs of the Temple shall be howling,” suggested by KJV, is difficult, since howling is performed by persons, not songs. Others suggested שירות “singing women”—elsewhere always written שָׂרוֹת (2 Sam. 19:36; Qoh. 2:8; 2 Chr. 35:25)—for the translation, “the singing women of the palace shall howl” (thus NJPS). Another possibility is that the word signifies the walls of the temple, שוררות, a word known only from biblical Aramaic, in the form שוריא/ה (Ezra 4:12; 13:16), and the phrase is translated accordingly “The walls of the palace will wail.”<sup>13</sup> The motif of howling walls is expressed in a different way in another prophetic text: “for a stone shall cry out from the wall, and a rafter shall answer from the woodwork” (Hab. 2:11).<sup>14</sup> The meaning “walls” is reflected also in the LXX on Amos, which translates τὰ φαρτώματα τοῦ ναοῦ “ceiling panels of the temple.” Perhaps this unique construct was also chosen for its use of wordplay. That is, perhaps the howling of grief pertains both to the singing women of the palace and to the walls of the temple, conjoined in one construct phrase.

Further, the fourth vision’s description of the devastation and the grief it will evoke utilizes a genus—everywhere, בכל מקום—and a merism, denoted by the contrast between the palace/temple on the one hand, and the implied heaps of a large number of corpses רב הפגר, on the other.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> It may be that the word שור in the singular appears in biblical Hebrew in poetic texts (Gen. 49:22; 2 Sam. 22:30 = Ps. 18:30). See R. Gordis, “Studies in the Relationship of Biblical and Rabbinic Hebrew,” in S. Lieberman, S. Zeitlin, Sh. Spiegel, and A. Marx, eds., *Louis Ginzberg Jubilee Volume* (New York: American Academy for Jewish Research, 1945), 173–99, at 191–92.

<sup>14</sup> And compare Lam. 2:9. Robert Gordis compares the biblical usage of the motif to the saying in *Midrash Eikhah Zuta* 1:2 (ed. S. Buber, [Berlin: Mekitze Nirdamim, 1894], 53): “Why is he who weeps at night different from him who weeps by day? When a man weeps by night, *the walls of the house* and the planets in the heavens weep with him” (Gordis, “Studies,” 192). As for the form שירות, Gordis suggests that this was a by-form of שוריות, as in the words צירים (Isa. 45:16), parallel to צורה; and שוחה (Jer. 2:6; 18:20 and more), parallel to שיחה (Ps. 57:7; 119:85; see Jer. 18:22 where שיחה is the *ketib* and שוחה is the *qeri*). For the difficulties in interpreting the construct, see Paul, *Amos*, 254–55, n. 15; M. Weiss, *the Book of Amos*, (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1992), 2.427–28, n. 327 (Hebrew).

<sup>15</sup> Because of the merism detected here, I reject the possibility that Amos is speaking of a particular temple (contra Zakovitch, *Three-Four*, 191, n. 82, who reconstructs here a missing definite article before the word היכל).

The fourth vision includes therefore wordplays on two different terms. The word ק(י)ץ is used twice, carrying two different meanings—first as summer fruit; then as the end, final hour—a stylistic device known as *antanaclasis*, which stands at the center of the vision.<sup>16</sup> The other term is mentioned only once, but plays on the double meaning implied: שירות היכל evokes the sense of the singing women of the palace, as well as that of the walls of the temple.

Scholars who have dealt with the visions of Amos have easily identified the double meaning at play in the use of קיץ—קץ in the fourth vision. Some have also searched for similar wordplay in the third, parallel vision.<sup>17</sup> Few have tried to identify similar wordplays in the initial two visions. The following discussion will explore the three earlier visions with an eye to their use of wordplay, in particular *antanaclasis*. As we will see, attention to this literary dynamic suggests a linkage between the visions that leads to a new understanding of their overall import.

### *The First Vision (Amos 7:1–2)*

In this vision, the prophet sees a dynamic scene:

כֹּה הִרְאֵנִי אֱדֹנָי ה' וְהִנֵּה יוֹצֵר גְּבִי בְּתַחֲלֵת עֲלוֹת הַלְקֶשׁ; וְהִנֵּה-לְקֶשׁ אֶסֶר גְּזֵי הַמְּלֶדֶת. וְהִנֵּה אִם-כִּלְיָה לְאַכְוֹל אֶת-עֵשֶׂב הָאָרֶץ וְאָמַר אֱדֹנָי ה' סִלַּח-נָא מִי יָקוּם יַעֲקֹב כִּי קִטְוֹן הוּא.

<sup>16</sup> *Antanaclasis* has been defined as “the use of one and the same word in two different senses” (Casanowicz, *Paronomasia*, 15). David Yellin described the two different ways in which this technique of wordplay is used in poetic biblical texts: “Expressions carrying more than one meaning were used by the poets to embellish their words in various ways. At times they were repeated twice or thrice in one statement, each time in a different sense. But sometimes the word was mentioned *once only*, signifying or hinting at its two meanings, in a way that enables one to interpret that word by both meanings simultaneously”; D. Yellin, “Mishne ha-hora’ah,” in *Kitvei David Yellin*, ed. E. Z. Melamed (7 vols.; Jerusalem: Rubin Mass, 1983), 6.254 (Hebrew; my translation).

<sup>17</sup> See J. Morgenstern, *Amos Studies* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College, 1941 [originally pub. 1936]), 1.83; F. I. Andersen and D. N. Freedman, *Amos* (AB 24A; New York: Doubleday, 1989), 616; A. Cooper, “The Meaning of Amos’s Third Vision (Amos 7:7–9),” in M. Cogan, B. L. Eichler, and J. H. Tigay, eds., *Tehillah le-Moshe: Biblical and Judaic Studies in Honor of Moshe Greenberg* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1997), 13–21, at 16–18; Jeremias, *Amos*, 132; J. R. Linville, “Visions and Voices: Amos 7–9,” *Biblica* 80 (1999), 22–42, at 30–31; Campos, “Structure and Meaning,” 6; T. Notarius, “Playing with Words and Identity: Reconsidering קיץ / קץ in Amos’ Visions,” *VT* 67 (2017), 59–86.

Prophetic dynamic scenes usually offer a preview of one possible future, which may be averted by prayer or by a change in behavior. Thus, for example, Jeremiah tells King Zedekiah that God has shown the prophet what the fate of the king, his wives, and his children will be if Zedekiah refuses to surrender (Jer. 38:21–23). The initial pair of visions in Amos also displays catastrophic events which may soon materialize.<sup>18</sup> The first vision depicts a future onslaught of locusts; the prophet sees God creating גְּבִי, one of the many types of locust named in the Bible (see Isa. 33:4; Nah. 3:17).<sup>19</sup>

The creation of locusts is accompanied by a temporal clause בתחלת עלות הלקש. *Leqeš* is a *hapax legomenon*, but it is mentioned in the Gezer calendar, in a construct phrase designating two late winter months, ירחו לקש.<sup>20</sup> Following medieval commentators, scholars interpret the biblical term as “late growth.” Two English translations of the temporal clause will suffice to demonstrate this consensus:

“in the beginning of the shooting up of the latter growth.” (KJV)

“when the late-sown crops were beginning to sprout.” (NJPS)

The translation of *leqeš* in the sense of “late growth” is also based on the biblical word מלקוש, “late, spring rain,” and similar words designating “delay” in rabbinic Hebrew, Arabic and Syriac.<sup>21</sup> The plague of locusts portends to be especially severe; falling at the end of the winter, it is to devour both the earlier crops as well as the later ones, which will have just begun to sprout.

<sup>18</sup> M. Weiss, *Amos*, 2.405, n. 104. For this aspect of prophecy in general, see L. Tiemeyer, “Prophecy as a Way of Cancelling Prophecy: The Strategic Uses of Foreknowledge,” *ZAW* 117 (2005), 329–50.

<sup>19</sup> This term is mentioned in rabbinic texts, and its cognates are familiar from Aramaic and Arabic; see Paul, *Amos*, 227, n. 5. Paul also mentions a Hebrew seal impression bearing a picture of a locust accompanied by the name לעזריו הגבה (translated: “belonging to ‘Azaryaw [son of] HGBH,” published by N. Avigad, “A Hebrew Seal with a Family Emblem,” *IEJ* 16 (1966), 50–53. The rabbis identified גובה with גובאי (*b. Hul.* 65a).

<sup>20</sup> Interestingly, the Gezer calendar also calls the last month ירח קץ “the month of summer fruit (or the last month),” see above, n. 11. For a comparison of the visions of Amos to the Gezer calendar, see Sh. Talmon, “The Gezer Calendar and the Seasonal Cycle of Canaan,” *JAOS* 83 (1963), 177–87, at 183–84.

<sup>21</sup> *BDB* 545, s.v. לקש. See Weiss, *Amos*, 2.401, n. 76.

The crux of the first vision is in the second clause. It begins with the word והנה, often rendered in English “and, lo,” or “and, behold.”<sup>22</sup> This word introduces a phrase referring to *leqeš* and followed by another temporal clause: והנה לקש אחר גני המלך. This phrase has usually been understood as explanatory, whether original to the prophecy of Amos or inserted by a later hand, “not belonging to the original text.”<sup>23</sup> According to this conception, the purpose of the explanatory phrase was to define the rare and difficult lexeme *leqeš* by way of another temporal clause: *leqeš* (grows) after *gizzê hammelek*. English versions of the verse accordingly repeat the translation of the word *leqeš* from the earlier part of the sentence. For example:

He formed grasshoppers in the beginning of the shooting up of **the latter growth**; and, lo, it was **the latter growth** after the king’s mowing (KJV).

He was creating locusts at the time when **the late-sown crops** were beginning to sprout—**the late-sown crops** after the king’s reaping (NJPS).

The interpretation of the second והנה clause as an explanatory gloss is problematic, however, due to the role this word generally plays in visions. The basic construction of both הנה and והנה is introductory, yet they do not fulfill identical functions.<sup>24</sup> הנה without the *waw* can introduce an explanatory or informative clause or phrase in texts that do *not* recount visions. An

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<sup>22</sup> The KJV and RSV reflect all five occurrences of this word in the visions. When והנה introduces a vision it is rendered “and, behold” (Amos 7:1, 4, 7; 8:1); when it is repeated in the first vision to introduce the clause under discussion, והנה is translated “and, lo.” According to F. I. Andersen, more than half of the occurrences of והנה in Biblical Hebrew disappear in the translations of NIV and NJPS; see F. I. Andersen, “Lo and Behold! Taxonomy and Translation of Biblical Hebrew והנה,” in M. F. J. Baasten and W. T. van Peursen, eds., *Hamlet on a Hill: Semitic and Greek Studies Presented to Professor T. Muraoka on the Occasion of his Sixty-Fifth Birthday* (OLA 118; Leuven: Peeters, 2003), 25–56, at 31. In NJPS only two of the five והנה constructions in the Hebrew are represented in translation: the one introducing the second vision “and, behold” (Amos 7:4), and the second והנה in the first vision “and, lo” (Amos 7:2b).

<sup>23</sup> Quoted from W. R. Harper, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Amos and Hosea* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1905; repr. 1994), 160. See similarly Rösel, *The Book of Amos*, 202; I. Willi-Plein, *Vorformen der Schriftexegese innerhalb des Alten Testaments* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1971), 45, § 98. Bartczek argues that the fact that the word והנה appears twice only in this vision renders this phrase secondary and thus redundant; in this view, Amos 7:2 directly continues Amos 7:1a. See G. Bartczek, *Prophetie und Vermittlung: Zur literarischen Analyse und theologischen Interpretation der Visionsberichte des Amos* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1980), 30.

<sup>24</sup> The following discussion is based on T. Zewi, “The Particles הנה and והנה in Biblical Hebrew,” *Hebrew Studies* 37 (1996), 21–37.

example may be found in the description of the location of the well at which God appeared to Hagar: על כן קרא לבאר באר לחי ראי הנה בין קדש ובין ברד  
 “Therefore the well was called Beer-lahai-roi; it is between Kadesh and Bered” (Gen. 16:14). However, in dreams and visions, after verbs of seeing, only the term והנה appears; in these contexts it generally introduces a new element in the scene or a new development. For example, in Jacob’s dream at Beth-el the word recurs three times. In each case it heralds a new stage of the dream: ויחלם והנה סלם מצב ארצה וראשו מגיע השמימה והנה מלאכי אלהים עלים וירדים בו. והנה ה’ נצב עליו  
 “He had a dream; (and, behold) a stairway was set on the ground and its top reached to the sky, and (behold), the angels of God were going up and down on it. And (behold), the Lord was standing beside him” (Gen. 28:12–13).<sup>25</sup> In Joseph’s dreams והנה also signifies a new development in the storyline:

שמעו נא החלום הזה אשר חלמתי. והנה אנהנו מאלמים אלמים בתוך השדה והנה קמה אלמתי וגם  
 נצבה והנה תסבינה אלמתיכם ותשתחווין לאלמתי

“Hear this dream which I have dreamed: (and, behold) we were binding sheaves in the field, (and, behold) my sheaf stood up and remained upright; (and, behold) your sheaves gathered around and bowed low to my sheaf” (Gen. 37:6–7).

Ezekiel’s vision begins with the spectacle of a valley full of bones:

והנה רבות מאד על פני הבקעה והנה יבשות מאד. . . וראיתי והנה עליהם גדים ובשר עלה ויקרם  
 עליהם עור מלמעלה

“(and, behold) very many of them spread over the valley, (and, behold) very dry  
 . . . I looked (and, behold) sinews on them, and flesh had grown, and skin had formed over them (Ezek. 37:2, 8).<sup>26</sup>

The double use of the word והנה in the first vision of Amos must thus be explicated in light of its role in biblical descriptions of dreams and visions. It first appears following a verb of seeing, as is the norm: כה הראני אדני ה’ והנה

<sup>25</sup> The translation of NJPS fails to render the word altogether, so I have added the translation “(and) behold” to the text here and in the following examples; in some cases, I have replaced the various words chosen by NJPS to represent it (i.e., “there”; “when suddenly”; “then,” etc.).

<sup>26</sup> For other examples of visions where the word והנה either follows a verb of seeing, or is repeated when presenting a new element or development, see, e.g., Gen. 15:17; Jer. 4:23–26; 24:1; 38:22; Ezek. 2:9; 8:2–16; 10:1, 9; 11:1; Zech. 1:8; 2:5–7.

ויהנה לקש אחר גזי “This is what the Lord God **showed** me: (**and, behold**) He was creating locusts at the time when the late-sown crops were beginning to sprout” (Amos 7:1). Then the word reappears: והנה לקש אחר גזי המלך “(and, behold) *leqeš* after *gizzê hammelek*.” As in all other biblical descriptions of dreams and visions, here, too, the second occurrence must present a new element or stage of the vision. The common understanding that in its second appearance the word presents an explanatory phrase or gloss is untenable.<sup>27</sup>

Rereading the verse as a sequence of scenes opens up new possibilities for interpretation. In the first scene, we see God creating locusts, at the beginning of the sprouting of the latter growth, the *leqeš*. The second scene denotes a new development: a second *leqeš* appears, also defined in temporal terms. This *leqeš* emerges after *gizzê hammelek*, a construct phrase which is itself a *hapax legomenon*. This second *leqeš* marks a new development in the vision and must mean something different from “latter growth.”

A hint as to the meaning of the second *leqeš* is signaled already in the conjugated infinitive עלות, which accompanies the first *leqeš* and describes its growth. The root על"י in the sense of “growth” in the context of locusts attracts attention.<sup>28</sup> While there are biblical examples of this root used with respect to plants (see, for example, ולא יעלה בה כל עשב “no grass growing in it”; Deut. 29:22), the common term to describe growth is צמח (see, for example, וכל עשב השדה טרם יצמח “no grasses of the field had yet sprouted”; Gen. 2:5; ולהצמיח מִצָּא דשא “make the crop of grass sprout forth”; Job 38:27). At the same time, the plague of locusts in Egypt is described by this verb, where it means “come upon, invade”: ויעל על ארץ מצרים “that they may come upon the land of

<sup>27</sup> Few commentators have noticed that there is a problem in the common interpretation. K. Budde, “Zu Text und Auslegung des Buches Amos (Schluß),” *JBL* 44 (1925), 63–122, at 67, says we expect the explanatory phrase to begin with: והלקש “and *leqeš* (is)”; but instead, the word והנה introduces the next move. Andersen and Freedman (*Amos*, 741), wonder why only the first *leqeš* is written with the definite article, which leads them to question whether the two occurrences of *leqeš* refer to the same thing.

<sup>28</sup> See Haran, *Ages and Institutions*, 333.

Egypt” (Exod. 10:12; see also v. 14). The book of Joel describes the onslaught of wave upon wave of locusts, in detail and at great length, also using a verb from this root: **כי גוי עלה על ארצי** “for a nation [of locusts] has **invaded** my land” (Joel 1:6).

The similarity between the first vision of Amos and the plague in Egypt is heightened by the use of the same words in both to describe the locusts devouring the herbage of the land: **ויאכל את כל עשב הארץ** (Exod. 10:12); **והיה אם כלה לאכל את עשב הארץ** (Amos 7:2). The construct **עשב הארץ** (“the grasses / herbage in the land”)<sup>29</sup> is unique to these two biblical texts.<sup>30</sup> Thus, the choice to render **עלות הלקש**—the sprouting of the late growth—by **עלות** rather than by **צמה**, in the context of an attack of locusts, cannot be accidental. I suggest that the infinitive construct **עלות** in the first scene should be viewed as a Janus word, bearing two meanings.<sup>31</sup> The selection of the root **על** to designate the growth of the late-sown crops brings with it the semantic field of Exod. 10:12, pointing us toward the use of *leqeš* in the next phrase as another word for a locust swarm, which indeed **עלה** “invades, comes upon” the land. This meaning for the second *leqeš* is supported by the LXX, which translates the second occurrence of the word **βροῦχος**, the usual translation for another word for locusts, **ילק**.<sup>32</sup> *Leqeš* as another collective noun meaning

<sup>29</sup> The translation “grasses” follows NJPS to Exod. 10:12; “herbage” is their rendering of Amos 7:1.

<sup>30</sup> The psalm describing the plague of the locusts in Egypt uses similar, though not identical, language: **ויאכל כל עשב בארצם** “they devoured every green thing in the land” (Ps. 105:35).

<sup>31</sup> See C. H. Gordon, “New Directions,” *Bulletin of the American Society of Papyrologists* 15 (1978), 59–66, at 59–60.

<sup>32</sup> The LXX translation of this entire verse probably constitutes a misinterpretation of the Hebrew: **καὶ ἰδοὺ ἐπιγόνῃ ἀκρίδων ἐρχομένη ἐσθινή, καὶ ἰδοὺ βροῦχος εἷς Γωγ ὁ βασιλεύς.** The participle **יוצר** was translated as a *nomen regens* in a construct phrase meaning “son (of locust),” perhaps read as the noun *yēšir*; see R. S. Cripps, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Amos* (London: SPCK, 1969; repr. of the 2nd ed., 1955), 219. The first *leqeš* in the temporal phrase **עלות הלקש** was translated by **ἐρχομένη ἐσθινή**, meaning “coming in the morning / from the east.” Perhaps the translator read the common construct **עלות השחר** (Gen. 32:25; Josh. 6:15; Judg. 19:25; 1 Sam. 9:26; Jon. 4:7) instead of the enigmatic **עלות הלקש**. The second phrase is also corrupt. Instead of **אחר** “after,” he read **אחד** “one,” and **גוי המלך** is translated by the personal name, Gog the king: “and, behold, one locust, the king Gog.” The suggestion to emend the second **לקש** to **ילק**, as reflected in LXX **βροῦχος** (Harper, *Amos*, 161; Weiser, *Zwölf kleinen Propheten*, 180, n. 2), is unwarranted. *Leqeš* can mean locust in its own right.

“locusts” joins the many biblical names for this phenomenon: ארבה, חסיל, ילק, גובי, גזם, חגב, חרגול. This meaning may be connected to the verb ילקשו, parallel to יקצירו (qere; ketib: יקצורו), “harvest,” used in Job 24:6. This *hapax* verb *yēlaqqēšû* is likely derived from the noun *leqeš*, just as the verb (הארבה) יחסלנו “the locust shall consume it” (Deut. 28:38) is derived from another noun denoting locusts, חסיל. Tur-Sinai further noted that there may be a connection between *leqeš* and Latin “locust.”<sup>33</sup> Yet he, too, failed to distinguish between the meanings of the twice-repeated *leqeš*, which according to him signifies “locust” at each appearance.<sup>34</sup>

The construct גזי המלך is typically explained as a special crop reserved for the king, and translated as “the king’s mowing/reaping.”<sup>35</sup> This interpretation, however, undermines the catastrophic impression of the vision, since it implies that some of the crops would have been spared for use, having been reaped prior to the plague. This is in disagreement with the next verse, in which the totality of the devastation motivates the prophet to intervene on behalf of the people: “when it had finished devouring the herbage of the land” (Amos 7:2). The word *gēz* may again be playing on two senses. It is found in the sense of vegetation growing on land in the poetic language of Ps. 72:6: ירד כמטר על גז כרביבים זרוץ ארץ “Let him be like rain on meadows, like a downpour of rain on the ground.”<sup>36</sup> In this context, the compositional morpheme *hammelek* is not a noun referring to the king, but is to be understood figuratively and translated as an adjective, “royal” (as

<sup>33</sup> Tur-Sinai credits his student, A. Amir, with this insight; see N. H. Tur-Sinai, *Halashon Vehasefer* (Jerusalem: Bialik, 1960), 2:426–27 (Hebrew); on this point he is followed by Haran, *Ages and Institutions*, 333–34.

<sup>34</sup> Tur-Sinai’s interpretation relies on several unsubstantiated textual emendations and a change of word order. He reads והנה יוצר גבי בתחלת עלת הלקש. והנה אחר הלקש גבי מהלך (“... and behold, He created *gobay* at the start of the invasion of the locust. And behold, after the locust a wandering *gobay*.”) See Tur-Sinai, *Halashon Vehasefer*; idem, *Peshuto shel Mikra* (Jerusalem: Kiryat Sefer, 1967), 3/2.470 (Hebrew). The noun *gēz* in its own right (without textual emendation) may evoke locusts; see the ensuing discussion.

<sup>35</sup> See Weiss, *Amos*, 1.216, and the references there.

<sup>36</sup> The context here is that of applauding the king, whose acts are seen as part of the divine order of nature. The definition for *gēz* in *BDB* 159b, “land to be mowed,” better fits this context than “mown grass” (*HALOT*, 185; KJV; RSV), or “a mown field” (NJPS). The translation “meadows” utilized here is offered by A. Weiser *The Psalms*, trans. H. Hartwell, (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1962), 500.

in כמשתה המלך “a royal feast” or “a feast fit for a king”; 1 Sam. 25:36; דרך המלך “the highway”; Num. 20:17; 21:22 etc.). The construct *gizzê hammelek* thus designates some special growth or crop, defined as “royal.”

The second possible sense once again evokes locusts. The term may be related to the biblical גָּזַם (Amos 4:9; cf. also Joel 1:4; 2:25); a similar term is mentioned in a rabbinic list of flying insects, in the absolute plural form: הגבין גזין וצרעין ויתושין (*b. Shab.* 106:b). The rare noun *gēz* (in plural and construct form, *gizzê*) was probably chosen to hint at this second meaning—locusts; just as the construct infinitive form עלות in the first part of the sentence was picked to designate growth while at the same time evoking, Janus-like, the meaning “to invade,” found in connection with locusts.

Thus, the scene presented by the second והנה describes, according to my understanding, a second wave of locusts. Both assaults of the locusts are defined by temporal clauses, consisting of an indicator of time (בתחילת, אחר) followed by a construct phrase in the definite state (גזי המלך; עלות הלקש); together they create a temporal merism that indicates the totality of the devastation. First, God creates locusts **at the beginning** of the sprouting of the latter growth (the end of winter); this is followed by another wave of locusts **after** the growth of the special royal crop (end of spring). The two continuing waves of locust devour the entire crop, as explicitly portrayed in the next verse: “when it had finished devouring the herbage in the land.” The utter destruction of all crops leads Amos to plead in protest: “O Lord God, pray forgive. How will Jacob survive? He is so small” (7:2).

According to this reading, the first vision of Amos reflects three plays on words: עלות plays on both the sense of the sprouting of plants and that of invasions of locusts; לקש evokes the senses of both late-sown crops and locusts; גזי suggests meadows or crops and also hints at another type of locust. All these words, then, suggest double meanings connected to plants—those affected and harmed by the plague—on the one hand; and to locusts—the agent of devastation—on the other. The words עלות and גזי, both in *nomen regens* of a construct state, are each mentioned once, their primary meanings

associated with growth; yet their rarity points to secondary meanings, connected with locusts. Between these two terms, גזי and עלות, the word לקש appears twice, each time in a different sense, in accordance with the literary phenomenon of *antanaclasis*. *Leqeš* appears as both object and subject of the plague. First it represents the spoiled crop, devoured by the *gobay*. Then it designates the agent of destruction, the second wave of locusts.

*The Second Vision (Amos 7:4)*

The second vision is similar to the first in its form and message; it presents, once again, a dynamic scene of complete devastation. This time the agent summoned by God is fire, which consumes water and desiccates the fields—the plague described here is a severe drought:

כֹּה הִרְאֵנִי אֲדֹנָי ה' וְהִנֵּה קָרָא לָרֵב בְּאֵשׁ אֲדֹנָי ה'; וַתֹּאכַל אֶת-תְּהוֹם רַבָּה וְאֶקְלָה אֶת-הַחֹלֶק.

Perhaps the sequence correlates with the natural order of the appearance of these disasters—locusts in the spring and drought and fire in the summer.<sup>37</sup>

The fire is to consume both תהום רבה “the Great Deep,” the underground reservoir of water, and the חלק. This second term plays on two meanings: as a collective term for agrarian fields (see חלק יזרעאל in 2 Kgs. 9:10, 36, 37; חלקה in Amos 4:7); and as “estate,” or “property.” In a metaphorical use, חלק ה’, “the property of God,” designates Israel (e.g., כי חלק ה’ עמו יעקב חבל נחלתו “For the Lord’s portion is His people, Jacob His own allotment”; Deut. 32:9). This second meaning is reflected in one manuscript of the LXX (Codex Vaticanus), which translates our passage: τὴν μερίδα κυρίου. As in the first vision, the totality of the devastation caused by the fire is depicted with the aid of a merism, this time a spatial rather than a temporal one. The fire is to consume the water **underground** and devour the fields **above ground**. The two visions are also connected by the use of the same root to describe the devastating act of the agents, אכל “to eat, devour, consume”: ותאכל את תהום רבה ואכלה את (Amos 7:2); והיה אם כלה לאכל את עשב הארץ

<sup>37</sup> The prophet Joel, too, presents the two plagues, locusts and drought, as following one another, in the same order as they are given here (Joel 1:18–19). See Jeremias, *Amos*, 129.

החלק (7:4). In both visions the word is echoed, creating alliteration and increasing the sense of the comprehensiveness of the devastation. In the first vision, this is done by the use of a similar-sounding word: כלה לאכל “finished devouring”; in the second, by repeating the same root in a different tense ואכלה . . . ותאכל . . . was consuming.”<sup>38</sup>

The major difficulty of the second vision is interpreting the description of God’s act, following the opening word קרא לרב באש: והנה. As in the first vision, God’s act is defined by a participial verb: in the first vision יוצר, translated “formed, was creating”; in the second קרא, “called; was summoning.” The prefix ל־ following a verb from the root קרא usually indicates an agent executing God’s judgment, as in קרא ה’ לרעב “the Lord has called for a famine” (2 Kgs. 8:1; cf., without the prefix, Ps. 105:16). In the doxologies integrated into the book of Amos, God is depicted by the phrase הקרא למי הים וישפכם על פני הארץ “Who summons the waters of the sea, and pours them out upon the earth” (Amos 5:8; 9:6). Yet in the position of the devastating agent following the verb קרא and the prefix ל we find the word רב, “lawsuit,” which is nowhere else considered either a punishment on its own or a punishing agent. Furthermore, the next word after the noun *rīb* starts with another prefix, ב, which together with the verb לריב “to contend against, chide, upbraid” designates the accused (for example, ריבו באמכם “rebuke your mother”; Hos. 2:4; see also Gen. 31:36; Jud. 6:32). It is impossible to see the fire here mentioned after the prefix *b-* as the accused.<sup>39</sup> Usually the *b-* is understood as instrumental, and the translations depict God as calling for a

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<sup>38</sup> In this again we find a parallel in Joel, where locust and drought are described in great detail. There too the waves of different types of locust אכל “devour”: יתר הגזם אכל הארצה ויתר: “devour”: אכל “devour”: אכל הארצה ויתר (Joel 1:4; note how in v. 6 the locust has teeth like a lion), followed by a consuming fire אש אכלה as an agent of destruction (Joel 1:19). No date is given in the superscription of the book of Joel, but based on internal evidence—relevant to our issue in particular is the fact that the book quotes extensively from earlier texts—most commentators date Joel to the postexilic period. See, among others, J. A. Bewer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Obadiah and Joel* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1911), 56–62; J. L. Crenshaw, *Joel* (AB 24; New York: Doubleday, 1995), 23, n. 21; J. Barton, *Joel and Obadiah: A Commentary* (OTL; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 14–18.

<sup>39</sup> In the words of Tanya Notarius: “the verb ריב ‘strive’ marks an argument by the preposition, but in the syntactic role of Recipient (‘the party accused’) and not of Instrument”; Notarius, “Playing with Words,” 60.

trial *by* fire “the Lord God called to contend by fire” (KJV), an idea which appears in Isa. 66:16: כי באש ה' נשפט ובהחרבו את כל בשר “for with fire will the Lord contend, with his sword against all flesh.”<sup>40</sup> However, according to this interpretation, the verse in Amos 7:4 is missing a direct object—whom is God calling to contend by fire?

Over the years there have been many suggestions of textual emendations of this difficult phrase.<sup>41</sup> I follow Ehrlich’s suggestion that the prefix *b-* before the word “fire” be deleted as dittography, and read והנה קרא “and, behold, He is summoning many fires.”<sup>42</sup> רב אש “many fires” is accordingly the agent summoned by God, written thus in order to create a wordplay with תהום רבה “the Great Deep.”<sup>43</sup> The double meaning of the word *rb* as noun and adjective meaning “much, many” as well as “great” is known in Hebrew and Ugaritic as well.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>40</sup> See Harper, *Amos*, 163; *GKC* 2d ed. (1910), § 119o.

<sup>41</sup> See Morgenstern, *Amos*, 59–64. In 1964 Hillers revived the suggestion that the word division should be changed; he read והנה קרא לרבב אש “and, behold, He was summoning a shower of fire,” as in the description of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah: “the Lord rained upon Sodom and Gomorrah sulfurous fire” (Gen. 19:24). This suggestion was received favorably by many commentators; see, e.g., the NJPS note to Amos 7:4; D. R. Hillers, “Amos 7:4 and Ancient Parallels,” *CBQ* 26 (1964), 221–25. Notarius reaches a similar meaning without emendation, by postulating a verb ריב II, meaning “bring up much water, abound with water, inundate” (Notarius, “Playing with Words,” 65–70).

<sup>42</sup> A. B. Ehrlich, *Randglossen zur hebräischen Bibel* (7 vols.; Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1908–1914), 5.248. A similar interchange between *rīb* and *rōb* is apparent in the *qeri* and *ketib* of Job 33:19. The defective spelling of רב is rare, and translations often read the word as *rōb*. For example the word *lārīb* in the phrase אל-תצא לרב מִקֶּרֶךְ (Prov. 25:8), understood as the infinitive “to strive” (KJV) or as a noun with prefix “in a quarrel” (NJPS), is translated by Symmachus: εἰς πλῆθος “in great numbers.” Note that the word *rīb* appears in *plene* spelling in the following verse (25:9). See also LXX to Exod. 23:2 (Bartczek, *Prophetie*, 34–35, n. 43). Translation into English of the construct רב אש is difficult—as a singular collective noun, the word “fire” cannot be preceded by an adjective signaling multitude. I have chosen to render the word in the plural—“fires”—to convey the double meaning at play in the vision.

<sup>43</sup> In the earlier, Hebrew version of his exegesis, Ehrlich noted this wordplay: “supporting this is תהום רבה at the end of the verse, for these two parallel each other, God summons רב אש to consume תהום רבה (my translation, words accentuated in the original); see A. B. Ehrlich, *Mikra Kifschuto* (3 vols.; New York: Ktav, 1969; originally pub. 1899–1901), 3.413–14 (Hebrew).

<sup>44</sup> See A. Berlin, “On the Meaning of *rb*,” *JBL* 100 (1981), 90–93, who notes a similar wordplay in the double mention of the word רבתי in Lam. 1:1. For the meaning of the noun רב “many,” see 2 Kgs. 19:23 (*qeri*); for “great,” see Exod. 15:7. The same double meaning is attested in the use of the adjective רב or its feminine form רבה: “many”; in Amos 8:3 (in the fourth vision); Jon. 4:11; “great” in Amos 6:2. Unlike the other examples of *antanaclasis* in the visions of Amos, which play on homonyms from *distinct* roots, here the meanings are close,

The second vision thus displays two wordplays: on *ḥēleq*, mentioned once, meaning both agrarian field and estate, in particular God's estate (Israel); and on *rb(h)*, twice repeated, in the senses of many and great, as *antanaclasis*. In this vision, also, the twice-repeated word is connected with both the agent and the object of the devastation: it first depicts the agent of destruction—*רב אש* “many fires”; and it then represents that which is to be destroyed—*תהום רבה*, “the Great Deep.” This reverses the order of the *antanaclasis* in the first vision, where *leqeš* appears first as the object of the devastation, and then as the devastating locusts. This chiasmic order is intentional, providing an additional link between the first pair of dynamic visions. The totality of the devastation is expressed by the combination of the two complementary visions, not only through the use of a temporal merism in the first vision and a spatial merism in the second, but also by the linkage of the two plagues that together devour all vegetation and water sources. The result is an absolute and comprehensive blow with no chance of recovery for the people, which drives the prophet to call in distress, after each vision: “Oh Lord God, pray forgive / refrain! How will Jacob survive? He is so small” (Amos 7:2, 5).

### *The Third Vision (Amos 7:7–8)*

This is the first of the second pair of visions, each of which presents an image followed by an explanation. The third vision revolves around the word *אנך*, repeated four times in this vision, and nowhere else in the Bible:

כֹּה הִרְאֵנִי וְהִנֵּה אֲדֹנָי נֹצֵב עַל-חֹמַת אֲנָךְ וּבְיָדוֹ אֲנָךְ. וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֵלַי מֶה-אַתָּה רֹאֵה עֲמוֹס וַיֹּאמֶר אֲנָךְ;  
וַיֹּאמֶר אֲדֹנָי הִנְנִי שָׂם אֲנָךְ בְּקֶרֶב עַמִּי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֹא-אוֹסִיף עוֹד עֲבוֹר לוֹ.

The vision itself mentions *ʾānāk* twice. Amos sees God (or a man, in light of LXX ἀνήρ) standing on, or by,<sup>45</sup> a “wall of *ʾānāk*,” holding *ʾānāk* in his hand.

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even complementary. See *HALOT*, 1170–72 (“רַב”); 1173–74 (“רַב”). See also the discussion in Notarius, “Playing with Words,” 65–70, especially the table on p. 68.

<sup>45</sup> For *על* in the sense of “standing by,” see Gen. 24:13: “Here I stand by the spring”; and Num. 23:6, 17: “standing beside his offerings.” Opinions vary as to the exact meaning of the word in this vision; see Linville, “Visions,” 29, n. 20.

When God asks Amos what he sees, the answer refers to the central element of the vision: *ʾānāk*. The message accordingly is: “I shall set *ʾānāk* in the midst of My people Israel, I will pardon them no more.”

The meaning of *ʾānāk* in cognate languages is the metal, tin; note particularly Akkadian *annaku*. In the light of this meaning the following possibilities have been suggested for the word in the third vision:

- (a) *ʾānāk* as signifying the basic meaning, “tin.”
- (b) *ʾānāk* as designating a builder’s plumb-line—although the piece of metal used as a weight at the end of the line was typically made of lead rather than tin. This understanding was first suggested by medieval interpreters of the vision, who did not distinguish between tin and lead.<sup>46</sup> Based on this distinction, subsequent commentators have rejected this interpretation; but Hugh Williamson points to the description of Zerubbabel building the House of the Lord, holding האבן הבדיל in his hand: וראו את האבן הבדיל ביד זרובבל: “and they shall see the *plummet* in the hand of Zerubbabel” (KJV, Zech. 4:10). בדיל is the ordinary biblical word for tin.<sup>47</sup>
- (c) *ʾānāk* meaning “weapon,” by way of a synecdoche: tin constituted a small but expensive component in the preparation of bronze, which in turn was utilized to manufacture swords and other weapons.<sup>48</sup>

None of those meanings fits all four occurrences of the word in the vision and its implication for the future of the people. The most common solution adopted by modern translations is “plumb-line,” the measuring tool of builders. The King James Version provides a good example of this solution:

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<sup>46</sup> Jeremias, *Amos*, 131 n. 19.

<sup>47</sup> H. G. M. Williamson, “The Prophet and the Plumb-Line,” in A. S. van der Woude, ed., *In Quest of the Past: Studies on Israelite Religion, Literature and Prophetism* (OTS 26; Leiden: Brill, 1990), 101–20, at 111. For a list of scholars who object to the plumb-line interpretation, see Cooper, “Meaning,” 13, n. 2. The word “plumb” is derived from Latin “plumbum,” designating lead. In English, too, the tool is named after the metal from which it is made.

<sup>48</sup> Jeremias, *Amos*, 131.

And, behold, the Lord stood upon a wall *made* by a **plumbline**, with a **plumbline** in his hand. And the LORD said unto me, Amos, what seest thou? And I said, a **plumbline**. Then said the Lord, behold, I will set a **plumbline** in the midst of my people Israel: I will not again pass by them any more (Amos 7:7-8)

The logic behind this interpretation is the well-known use of measuring tools for metaphoric descriptions of destruction in other biblical texts. The plumb-line used for building is symbolically applied here to signify the reversal of fortune, destruction rather than building: ונטה עליה קו תהו ואבני בהו “He shall measure it (Zion) with a line of chaos and with weights of emptiness” (Isa. 34:11; see also “the measuring line of Samaria and the weights of the House of Ahab,” which God is to apply to Jerusalem, 2 Kgs. 21:13). The first appearance of the word *ʾānāk* in the visions of Amos is in the construct phrase חומת אנך “a wall of *ʾānāk*.” Particularly relevant to the vision of Amos is Lamentations’ description of the metaphorical destruction of a wall: חשב ה’ קו להשחית חומת בת ציון נטה קו “The LORD resolved to destroy the wall of Fair Zion; He measured with a line” (Lam. 2:8). Typically, the act of applying the measuring tool to the wall prior to its destruction was interpreted as checking its stability. If the wall was not straight or tottering, this would be discovered by using the measuring line, and the wall would then be torn down.<sup>49</sup>

Following this line of thought, “a wall of *ʾānāk*” has been interpreted as “a wall made by a plumb-line.”<sup>50</sup> Yet, as noted by Arnold Ehrlich, it is highly improbable that the eye could distinguish between a wall made by a plumb-line, designated by a special term חומת אנך, and a wall that had been built without one.<sup>51</sup> Furthermore, the meaning “a wall made by a plumb-line”

<sup>49</sup> E. Hammershaimb, *The Book of Amos: A Commentary*, trans. J. Sturdy (Oxford: Blackwell, 1970), 111.

<sup>50</sup> Williamson, “Prophet and Plumb-Line,” 112.

<sup>51</sup> “When one sees a wall, no one can know whether it was built by a lead weight except for the expert builder; and the prophet is no such expert, how would he know?” Ehrlich, *Mikra Kifschuto* 3.414 (translation my own). The comparison made by Williamson (“Prophet and Plumb-Line,” 112) to עוגת רצפים “a cake baked on hot stones/coals” (1 Kgs. 19:6) is thus

contributes nothing to the distinct character of the wall and seems redundant and, indeed, unnecessary.<sup>52</sup> Of the three possibilities specified before, the best fit for the construct, “a wall of *’ānāk*,” is the first one. The wall seen by the prophet was made of *’ānāk*: a metal wall. Descriptions of metal walls are known from prophetic metaphors; for example: “I will make you . . . as a fortified wall of bronze” (Jer. 15:20; cf. Jer. 1:18); קיר ברזל “an iron wall” (Ezek. 4:3). The construct “wall of (a specific kind of) metal” is also found in military metaphors outside the Bible. The Egyptian king Seti I (1290–1279 BCE) is likened to a wall of bronze for his people and his son. Before the battle of Kadesh, his son Ramesses II is described as a wall of iron. And in the el-Amarna letters, Abi-Milki, head of Tyre, calls the Pharaoh the sun that shines on him and a wall of bronze built for his sake.<sup>53</sup> The metal wall in the third vision of Amos may be tin or bronze, which is an alloy made from tin and copper.<sup>54</sup> It is unlikely that in this vision a wall of tin, which on its own is a particularly soft metal and extremely rare, stands symbolically for instability and perishability, as asserted by some

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unconvincing; this kind of cake was indeed distinct in looks and essence from other cakes.

<sup>52</sup> Accordingly, many scholars indeed thought that the term should be deleted, reasoning that it might have been wrongly inserted here because God himself is said to be using (an) *’ānāk* as the vision proceeds (see *BHS*; Morgenstern, *Amos*, 82; for the scholars of this opinion until the 1930’s, see *ibid.*, 80, n. 101; Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 293–94; Hammershaimb, *Amos*, 111). Others have suggested emending the phrase to הומת אבן “a wall of stone,” by analogy to Neh. 3:35.

<sup>53</sup> For sources, see J. Ouellette, “Le mur d’étain dans Amos VII, 7–9,” *RB* 90 (1973), 321–31, at 324–25.

<sup>54</sup> Note that *annaku* means “tin” in Akkadian; B. Landsberger, “Tin and Lead: The Adventures of Two Vocables,” *JNES* 24 (1965), 285–96. Landsberger, followed by others, thought that neither in Hebrew could the meaning of the word have been “lead”; for others who followed his opinion, see Jeremias, *Amos*, 131, n. 19. In a biblical list of metals, בדיל, the usual designation for “tin,” is distinct from עופרת “lead” (Num. 31:22). From the phrase ואסירה כל בדילך “and take away all your tin” (KJV), Landsberger (*ibid.*, 286–87, n. 9) concluded that the noun בדיל is a derivation from the verb להבדיל “to distinguish,” indicating all metals other than silver, that is, different kinds of alloys. NJPS translates this phrase accordingly: “and remove all your slag.” As noted before, the word *’ānāk* appears only in the vision of Amos; so it is difficult to know whether, by analogy to its Akkadian cognate, the term can only designate tin in Hebrew. Others have argued that even in Akkadian, the word denotes lead (B. J. Noonan, “There and Back Again: ‘Tin’ or ‘Lead’ in Amos 7:7–9,” *VT* 63 [2013], 299–307) or a variety of metallic substances; see the discussion in M. Weigl, “Eine ‘unendliche Geschichte’: אבן (Am 7,7–8),” *Biblica* 76 (1995), 343–87.

commentators.<sup>55</sup> In both biblical and extra-biblical texts a metal wall is a symbol of strength and protection. The “wall of *ʾānāk*,” the metal wall in the third vision, is likewise a symbol of security and protection for the people—and it is to be overturned in God’s explanation.

If the third and fourth visions were self-evident, God would not have to explain them. “Cracking the code” of the wordplays is the key to the solution. The same literary phenomenon detected in the other three visions, *antanaclasis*—the repetition of a word in various meanings—is apparent in the third vision, with its fourfold repetition of the rare word, twice in the vision and twice in the dialogue following, suggesting that *ʾānāk* was chosen specifically for the rich possibilities in its multiple layers of meaning.<sup>56</sup> The repetition signals to the reader that (as in the fourth vision), the “riddle” of the vision may be “cracked” by attention to these multiple meanings.<sup>57</sup>

In its first appearance *ʾānāk* describes the wall. In the next use the same word denotes something held in the hand of the standing figure. The notion that God/the man is holding a bronze sword, as suggested by some commentators,<sup>58</sup> renders the vision “obvious”—which is contrary to the enigmatic spirit of the second pair of visions. The *ʾānāk* held in the hand serves as the trigger for the element of destruction spelled out later by God. In this instance, then, I tend to accept the translation “plumb-line.” A vision of a man holding a measuring tool in his hand is a prophetic symbol in the book of Zechariah, where it signifies future reconstruction, together with the image of God protecting Jerusalem as a wall of fire: ואשא עיני וארא והנה איש ובידו חבל מדה . . . ואני אהיה לה נאם ה' חומת אש סביב “I looked up and I saw a man holding

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<sup>55</sup> Landsberger, “Tin and Lead,” 287; Paul, *Amos*, 235. For criticism of this opinion, see Williamson, “Prophet and Plumb-Line,” 105–7; Jeremias, *Amos*, 132.

<sup>56</sup> Jeremias, *Amos*, 132–33. I do not accept Morgenstern’s suggestion (*Studies*, 84) that an Akkadian word was intentionally chosen in order to hint at the future enemy, Ashur. Throughout the entire book of Amos, the identity of the northern enemy remains unspecified, and Ashur’s appearance in the LXX to Amos 3:9, instead of the Hebrew “Ashdod,” is a reading influenced by the common pair, Assyria and Egypt, and does not indicate the original text.

<sup>57</sup> Linville, “Visions,” 31.

<sup>58</sup> For this explanation, see, e.g., Jeremias, *Amos*, 132–33.

a measuring line . . . and I Myself—declares the Lord—will be a wall of fire all around it” (Zech. 2:5–9; note also האבן הבדיל, the “plummet” that Zerubbabel holds in his hand, as mentioned above, Zech. 4:10). This late prophecy overturns the motif of the hand-held measuring tool that figures in images of destruction in classical prophecy and in the Deuteronomistic literature. The *’ānāk* in the hand of the figure in the vision of Amos is thus parallel to similar measuring tools such as חבל מדה, “a measuring line”; “weight”; “stones, weights.” These are measuring tools relevant to building as well as destruction.

The word *’ānāk* is mentioned twice again, in the dialogue between the prophet and God, where God clarifies the vision to Amos. Strictly speaking, we cannot tell from the prophet’s response exactly what he sees as the main point of the vision—is it the wall (strength) or the tool—impending destruction of what is supposed to be strong? God’s final sentence is itself ambiguous: “Behold, I will set *’ānāk* in the midst of my people Israel” (7:8). The common translation, “I am going to apply a plumb-line to My people Israel” (NJPS; similarly KJV, RSV, et al.) is unsatisfactory. The verb used in descriptions of wreaking havoc by a plumb-line is נט”י על “stretch out upon (something), measure”; whereas in this passage God is going to בקרב . . . שם “set [*’ānāk*] in the midst.”<sup>59</sup> As noted above, the third and fourth visions close with the identical divine pronouncement: לא אוסיף עוד עבור לו “I will pardon them no more” (7:8; 8:2). The fourth vision, as we have seen, signals Israel’s end; thus in the parallel third vision, to set *’ānāk* in the midst of Israel must signal the same end.

The interesting suggestion has been made to see in this last occurrence of our term a wordplay with אנוכי, the first person singular pronoun. Then the proclamation would be referring to God placing Himself in

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<sup>59</sup> See Andersen and Freedman, *Amos*, 758, who note the difference between על and בקרב. They too advocate for three different meanings of *’ānāk* in the third vision (ibid, 759), though their final suggestion differs from mine.

the midst of the people through some form of theophany.<sup>60</sup> In Akkadian the words *annaku*, “tin,” and *anāku*, “I,” were probably homonyms and identical when written syllabically *a-na-ku*; Baltzer adduces just such wordplay in a hymn to Ishtar.<sup>61</sup> Yet, wordplays are language specific, and there is no indication that in Hebrew these words were homonyms. The author of the account of the encounter between Amos and Amaziah, the priest of Beth-el, which is appended to the third vision, played on this assonance, repeating the pronoun אֲנִי thrice at the end of the sentences in the prophet’s answer to the priest (7:14).<sup>62</sup> However, the third vision should be interpreted in its initial form as bearing the same final clear message as the fourth vision; and this could hardly be achieved by God setting Himself in the midst of the people, even if we were to accept that “God’s presence becomes a destructive, rather than a beneficent force for the nation,” as Cooper suggests.<sup>63</sup> It thus seems probable that this *ʾānāk* refers to a weapon, perhaps a sword, another familiar agent of destruction and death, analogous to the locusts and fire mentioned in the first pair of visions.

This possibility is reinforced by v. 9, even if we consider it a “hinge” verse, added subsequently to connect the third vision to the report of the encounter with Amaziah.<sup>64</sup> This verse spells out the destruction and death by the sword (חרב) which will be the outcome of the third vision: “The shrines of Isaac shall be laid waste, and the sanctuaries of Israel reduced to ruins; and I will turn upon the house of Jeroboam with the sword” (Amos 7:9).<sup>65</sup> It may

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<sup>60</sup> R. B. Coote, *Amos Among the Prophets: Composition and Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981), 92; for discussion, see Cooper, “Meaning,” 18–21, who revives a suggestion of F. Prätorius, “Bemerkungen zu Amos,” *ZAW* 35 (1915), 12–25, at 23; Notarius, “Playing with Words,” 71–73. For other, less attractive suggestions such as אָנָה “groan” or a *piel* form of the root נָכַח “to smite,” unattested elsewhere, see the references in Cooper, “Meaning,” 17; Jeremias, *Amos*, 132–33.

<sup>61</sup> K. Baltzer, “Bild und Wort: Erwägungen zu der Vision Amos in Amos 7:7–9,” in W. Gross et al., ed., *Text, Methode und Grammatik* (Festschrift W. Richter) (St. Ottilien: EOS, 1991), 11–16. See Jeremias, *Amos*, 23, n. 27.

<sup>62</sup> See Williamson, “Prophet and Plumb-Line,” 117; Campos, “Structure and Meaning,” 17–20.

<sup>63</sup> See Cooper, “Meaning,” 20.

<sup>64</sup> See above, n. 2.

<sup>65</sup> Jeremias (*Amos*, 131) refers also to the sword mentioned twice in the fifth vision (Amos 9:1, 4).

also be that there is intentional wordplay here as well, between God’s initial threat, *śām . . . bēqereb* “set . . . in the midst” (7:8) and His subsequent proclamation that the shrines “shall be laid waste” *wēnāšamû*, and that He will turn upon the House of Jeroboam “with the sword” *bēḥāreb* (7:9). Verse 9 itself repeats the root הרב (*h/ḥrb*) twice in different forms: once in the form יהרבו “reduced to ruins,” and once בהרב “with the sword” (compare to the echoing of the root אכל in different forms in 7:4, or the play of אכל with the root כל”י in 7:2 noted above).

According to this interpretation, the third vision spells out God’s threat to set *’ānāk* “a sword” in the midst of His people Israel. Although there is no exact parallel to this act, Ezekiel refers to the “hand” that God will set against His people: וראו כל הגוים את משפטי אשר עשיתי ואת ידי אשר שמתו בהם “and all the nations shall see the judgment that I executed and the *power* that I wielded against them” (Ezek. 39:21). Another negative thing which is put בקרב “in the midst” of the people is דם נקי “guilt for the blood of the innocent” (Deut. 21:8); and note also the phrase: הרעב בקרב הארץ “famine in the land” (Gen. 45:6). A different prophecy in the book of Amos relates that there will be lamenting in every square, street, and vineyard: כי אעבר בקרבך “When I pass through **your midst**” (Amos 5:17). As noted by Williamson, the connection between that prophecy and the visions is also strengthened by the ironic, contrasting uses of the verb עבר. In the earlier prophecy, God’s passing **through** the people is understood as negative, a cause for lamenting; whereas in the visions, God’s “passing by them” is understood in a positive sense, but as something that is no longer going to happen: לא אוסיף עוד עבור לו: “I will not again pass **by them** any more” (7:8; 8:2; KJV).<sup>66</sup>

This analysis has shown that *antanaclasis* characterizes all four visions of Amos. In the third vision the word *’ānāk* is repeated four times with three distinct meanings: as building material, tin, or more likely bronze in the construct “a wall of tin / bronze”; as a measuring tool—a plumb-line; and as a

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<sup>66</sup> Williamson, “Prophet and Plumb-Line,” 116, n. 62.

weapon, a sword. As in the first pair of visions, the word signifies both the object of destruction—the metal wall, representing the protection and security of the people—and the agent of destruction (the sword). In terms of the sequence of object/agent, there is a structural relationship between the three visions. The first and second visions reflect chiasmic ordering (agent–object; object–agent). The sequence in the third vision is similar to that of the first vision. Yet between its occurrences as object and agent, the word appears to denote the measuring tool in the hand of the figure / God. This may signal the transition from the first pair of visions, where God relents, to the last pair of visions, where God will no longer pardon His people. On the contrary, He Himself will be the enemy and will put a sword in their midst.

*The Fifth Vision (Amos 9:1–4)*

The fifth vision, in my judgment, was not originally part of the foregoing series of visions that ends with שָׁמַח, the imperative “Hush!” (8:3). Yet its contents expand the catalogue of the acts of God against His people, and thus it is suitable that this vision appears last, following the earlier four visions:<sup>67</sup>

I saw my Lord standing by the altar, and He said: “Strike the capitals so that the thresholds quake, and make an end of the first of them all, and I will slay the last of them with the sword; not one of them shall escape, and not one of them shall survive. If they burrow down to Sheol, from there My hand shall take them. And if they ascend to heaven, from there I will bring them down. If they hide on the top of Carmel, there I will search them out and seize them. And if they conceal themselves from My sight at the bottom of the sea, there I will command the serpent to bite them. And if they go into captivity before their enemies, there I will command the sword to slay them. I will fix My eye on them for evil and not for good (Amos 9:1–4).

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<sup>67</sup> Willi-Plein, *Vorformen*, 48.

The fifth and final vision describes God’s acts of destruction from the midst of His people. The totality of the destruction is specified by a merism ראש-אחרית “head/first–last”: “Make an end of the **first** of them all, and I will slay the **last** of them with the sword” (9:1). A description follows the hunt for the fugitives, aided by a double vertical merism: Sheol and heaven, on the mythological plane, followed by ראש הכרמל “the top of Carmel” and קרקע הים “the bottom of the sea,” on the cosmological plane (9:2–3).<sup>68</sup> Then the vision tracks the remaining refugees into captivity. Even there, on the horizontal plane, there is no escape from death; God shall “command the sword to slay them” (9:4a).

In the fifth vision God makes use of two familiar destructive agents—earthquake and the sword, also calling upon the mythological serpent in order to depict the absolutely final end of Israel. The vision ends with a motif of reversal, typical of the prophet Amos: “I will fix My eye on them for evil and not for good” (9:4b). It is possible that whoever placed this vision here wished to explicate the essence of the terrible end described in the last pair of our four visions, where God “shall set *’ānāk* (a sword) in the midst of My people Israel”; “the end has come for My people Israel.” The content of the fifth vision supports the interpretation that in the third vision, the *’ānāk* that God will set in the midst of Israel is a sword spelling death.

### *Conclusion*

The visions of Amos are intentionally enigmatic; using an unusual number of *hapax* formulations, they were as remarkable for the prophet’s audience as they are for us. Earlier commentators have long recognized the wordplay on *qāyis* / *qēṣ* in the fourth vision of Amos. The present analysis has shown that all four visions in Amos 7 and 8 are linked by the use of the same literary technique, *antanaclasis*, which both structures each individual vision and creates links of form and content between them. Identification of the working

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<sup>68</sup> For these pairs and their cosmological and mythic meaning, see Andersen and Freedman, *Amos*, 682–85. Note similar motifs of inescapability from before God in Ps. 139:5–10.

of this technique in the first three visions supplies a key to deciphering the meanings of these hitherto enigmatic passages. Each of the visions features one repeated (often rare) term which is meant to invoke two or three meanings in its context (לקש, רב[ה], אנך, ק[י]ץ). Similarly, all but the third vision utilize terms and unusual or unique constructions which appear only once but are intended to evoke double meanings (עלות, גזי המלך, חלק, שירות). Such wordplays with their Janus character are well-suited to the riddle-like character of prophetic visions. The third vision is unique in its fourfold repetition of the enigmatic term אנך, with three distinct meanings.

The visions of Amos utilize another literary tool to signify the totality of the destruction of the land and of the people: merism, again used in all but the third vision. The all-encompassing nature of the coming devastation is conveyed by the use of temporal merism (בתחילת—אחר) “in the beginning—after”); spatial-vertical merism (תהום—חלק) “the deep—agrarian field/estate/God’s estate [Israel]”); vocal merism (הס—היללו) “howl—hush!”); and class-based merism (היכל—בכל מקום) “temple/palace—everywhere”). The fifth vision, originally independent, uses a double, chiasmic vertical merism: Sheol and heaven, top of the Carmel and the bottom of the sea, to present a picture of total, systematic devastation, in which God hunts down the people wherever they may be found.

In this reading the two pairs of visions represent a progression in the deteriorating relationship between God and Israel, an increasing sense that the relationship is beyond repair. In the first pair of visions God summons external agents of destruction to wreak catastrophe on the land—locusts and many fires. These agents, were they to have materialized, would have severely harmed the people’s basic sources of living—crops and water. Fortunately, the prophet intercedes on behalf of the people and God relents. In the second pair of visions God Himself appears and denies a pardon to His people. The third vision marks the shift, as God set a sword for destruction in the midst of His people; the fourth confirms that the end is upon them. The

final pair of visions portends, not an indirect agent that will punish the people by destroying the sustaining elements of life, food, and water, but a direct blow brought on by God Himself as the agent of destruction. The final outcome of this direct divine assault on people and land will be terrible carnage, accompanied by wails and lamentation from the very buildings (temples and palaces) and/or the female lament-singers with death “everywhere.” The visions end with the most devastating word to a prophet, נביא, called by God “to call, proclaim” (Amos 7:15):<sup>69</sup> “Hush!”

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<sup>69</sup> For the meaning of נביא as a spokesperson, see *BDB*, 611.