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Paronomasia as an element of communication leading to the recovery of self-identity. A communicological-biblical study of Mic 1:10–16

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Abstract

Paronomasia as an element of communication leading to the recovery of self-identity: A communicological-biblical study of Mic 1:10–16

This article examines paronomasia in Mic 1:10–16 as a communicative device directed toward restoring the audience's awareness of its own identity. The interdisciplinary approach adopted here integrates biblical exegesis with communication studies, taking into account the cultural specificity of ancient Israel and the oral roots of the Hebrew textual tradition. The first part of the article discusses the distinctive features of prophetic communication—its multi-agent structure (God, prophet, addressee), its persuasive intent, and the rhetorical function of phonic devices. The study then proceeds to analyse the ten instances of paronomasia found in Mic 1:10–15, employing the classificatory framework developed by S. B. Noegel. The analysis demonstrates that the wordplays built upon place names of the Shephelah do not serve a merely ludic function, but rather construct a semantic network of references to specific territories, communal bonds, and the people's relationship with God. Their compositional arrangement forms a chiasmic structure whose centre points to frustration and spiritual disorientation as consequences of the deviation from the identity proper to the people of God. The findings suggest that the concentration of paronomastic figures constitutes a deliberate rhetorical strategy aimed at awakening in the audience an awareness of its identity as Israel and at restoring its relationship with YHWH as the ultimate source of that identity. The study further opens, in a preliminary and exploratory fashion, the prospect of applying communication-theoretical tools and Biblical Performance Criticism to future research into the identity-constituting function of phonicity in the texts of the Hebrew Bible.

Keywords: paronomasia, Book of Micah, communication, identity, orality

One of the phenomena in the fields of communication and linguistics that carries enormous interpretive potential is paronomasia. Beyond its status as a literary device, it also holds a mandate within paralinguistics and interpersonal dialogue. Its application to biblical texts makes it possible to capture the communicative process taking place within and through those texts, and to illuminate universal mechanisms in a new light. The innovative character of the interdisciplinary research conducted on the subject of this article enables the identification of aspects that remain unnoticed in monolithic exegetical approaches, as well as the discovery of communicative dimensions

linked to identity. Such an approach is both feasible and justified by virtue of the specific provenance of the biblical text.

The Hebrew Bible, as a cultural artifact, grows out of the oral tradition within the community of ancient Israel. It was fostered by the network of familial bonds from which this people emerged after their liberation from Egypt and their consolidation during the journey to Canaan. The primary role of YHWH God in bestowing, shaping, and preserving the identity of Israel—as indicated by the Hebrew Bible and extrabiblical tradition—makes Him the first point of reference in situations threatening the community, as well as in cases of destruction or erosion of collective self-awareness. His activity on behalf of Israel, together with His word and dialogue with individuals, groups, and the nation as a whole, constitutes the principal theme of the tradition transmitted from generation to generation within this community. Communication within familial circles and across generations was natural and foundational to this culture. It was reinforced by a sense of belonging guaranteed by kinship bonds (Ong, 2002, p. 67) and safeguarded by regulations governing marriage exclusively within the nation (Deu 7:3–4). Credibility was guaranteed by the authority of the ancestors, measured within the community by their relationship with God, their obedience to His word, and its manifestation in the practice of life—referred to as faithfulness to YHWH. The weight of information was emphasized through various rhetorical devices, including paronomasia, as well as memorization techniques developed in oral cultures, techniques that appeal to the senses, implicate emotional experience, and make use of relational, temporal, and topographic codes (Ong, 2002, pp. 56–65). The greatest testimony to the importance of any given message was its written record. Such a record attested to the timeless quality of the information conveyed in a particular communicative situation and rested upon the authority of the sender. It comes as no surprise, then, that in ancient Israel, owing to its history, written records encompassed messages originating from God. A second significant impetus for the inscription of content transmitted orally from generation to generation was the experience of the threat to national and communal identity that befell the ancient Jews as a result of Assyrian and Babylonian invasions and the deportations that followed. Analogously, the specific nature of prophetic discourse—interpreting the present moment and current events in light of the foreseeable consequences of choices made by human beings—gave it priority and nominated it for written preservation. This was carried out in such a way as to render the

text as persuasively powerful as possible, seeking to transfer to the written medium the force of interpersonal face-to-face communication (including the experience of communication with God).

Communication within the prophetic texts

Communication in the prophetic books of the Bible takes place among three subjects: God, whose word is conveyed in a formula that marks its dynamic character (*the word of YHWH that came to...*—cf. Mic 1:1; Zeph 1:1) and in the so-called messenger formula (*Thus says the Lord...*—cf. Jer 2:5; Isa 50:1); the inspired author/prophet; and the recipient (Israel within the text, the direct recipient for whom the written record is intended, and the indirect recipient—the human being of every age who encounters the text). The communicative situation present within the action of the text is generally sketched at the outset in terms of its historical time and context—as in Mic 1:1—and contains a reference to the rulers of that period (in Micah: Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah). The topography—here: Moresheth, Jerusalem, Samaria—specifies the spaces upon which the prophet's attention will be focused. Topics are determined by specific historical situations (Mic 4:10; 5:4–5) and moods (e.g., Mic 4:9–10), as well as social and individual attitudes (e.g., exploitation in Mic 2:8–9; 3:11), to which the prophet responds under the influence of God's suggestions and word. These, in correlation with the prophet's education and cultural familiarity, take on a specific literary form—speeches (e.g., Mic 6:9–16), narrative (e.g., Mic 7:2–4), lament (Mic 1:8–9), song (absent in Micah), and others.

The purpose of prophetic communication is to stimulate the recipient to think, to reflect, and consequently to make decisions toward change in the sphere where previously choices of death, destruction, and self-destruction were made. The vision, the broader perception of reality offered by God, is oriented toward the preservation of the human being in his identity. This is why the confrontation is so often painful: attitudes, customs, and habits adopted at a given time hinder access to what is proper, original, and natural for the human person. The goal of the prophetic texts is not the proclamation of destruction brought upon the world by God, but rather the alarming of the human being who brings destruction upon himself, driving himself—in terms of his beliefs, the persons in whom he places his hope, his values,

and his state in its economic, social, and internal communal dimensions—to a condition of easy prey for enemies. The introduction of imagery and the use of rhetorical figures act upon the addressee's senses, attracting attention, extending the perception of content to sensory levels, and thereby enhancing the process of persuasion. The motive on God's part is love, and the goal is the liberation of the human being toward life.

Prophetic texts frequently resemble a form of diatribe—for example, when they invoke opinions expressed by the addressee in various situations. In this way, the communicative situation unfolds on two levels: that of the debate within the text, and that of the text's debate with the implied and actual recipient. This facilitates the confrontation of the latter with uncomfortable content from the message, since someone has already “gone through it” in their own skin and in their own circumstances, and one can see in that text or in other books what results this produced—and can also try on the advice oneself, tentatively, mentally for now, without the consequences of an error committed in action.

The specific nature of communication within the prophetic books grows out of their oral provenance. This discourse, which is the product of God's communication with human beings, conceived within the oral culture that was ancient Israel, is designed in spoken form, predisposed to oral performance (Voth, 2005, p. 118). It manifests itself in the immediacy of the message (in Mic 6:1: “Hear, I pray, what the Lord says” and elsewhere), in emotional expression (e.g., woe—Mic 7:1), in symbolic actions (absent in Micah), in the performativity that follows from the dramatic style (e.g., Mic 2:7–11), and sometimes also in the presentation of a dialogue between God and the prophet (absent in Micah) or of commands issued by God in that context (absent in Micah). According to J. Joosten, the reference to popular rhetoric is visible in prophetic texts, among other things, in the presence of dialectical negation forms (Mic 18b), pseudo-quotations (Mic 2:6), and vocative antonomasia (e.g., 5:1: “But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah”) (Joosten, 2013, pp. 49–54).

A text so rooted draws extensively in its content on cultural memory (Voth, 2005, p. 119), which is evidenced, among other things, in the invocation of past events charged with the emotional affect accompanying them—as in Mic 6:4–5. E. Voth, in his article, recalls E. Havelock's position that from oral contexts (and culture) derives the imagistic thinking found in prophetic texts—thinking oriented toward action and accompanied by an almost complete absence of abstract thought (Voth, 2005, p. 119). As a result, the texts

contain a heightened number of verbs, especially those pertaining to movement, and God is portrayed in action rather than through the characterization of predicates.

It is difficult to identify the precise sequence in which the orality of prophetic texts became intertwined with textuality (Niditch, 1996, p. 120). What is certain is that the mutual interaction of both forms of transmission in prophetism constitutes the basis for the expression found here (Niditch, 1996, p. 134). Communication along the axis God-prophet, prophet-people, and subsequently from generation to generation—including God-people and each individual member separately—is, also by virtue of the passage through these levels and environments, cultures, and relationships, strongly evocative and persuasive in every sphere. The more individually it is received, the greater its force of impact.

The conceptions outlined above concerning the origin of prophetic texts justify why various sound-based constructions are so numerous represented within them. These include the rhythm of individual phrases and of the text as a whole, meter, rhyme, chiasmic phonic similarities, alliteration, onomatopoeia, and paronomasia (Casanowicz, 1894, pp. 4–5). They render the message strongly emotive and thereby influence the perception of its content.

The specific nature of communication in the Book of the Prophet Micah from an oral perspective

The Book of the Prophet Micah, through its reference to the rulers Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, suggests the eighth century BCE as the key period for its dramatic arc. This is the era of the rising Assyrian power in the east, in the basin of the Euphrates and Tigris, of invasions and the first deportations of inhabitants of the Northern Kingdom (the Kingdom of Israel), as well as of Jewish alliances attempted with, among others, Egypt. Moresheth, from which Micah originated (Mic 1:1), was situated on the border of the Southern Kingdom (the Kingdom of Judah) and the Philistine territories around Gath, near the road connecting the Via Maris with Jerusalem—a location that conditioned the permanent passage of troops through the region and the prophet's constant experience of the tension of war (Wolff, 1990, p. 6). Turmoil, destabilization, and the stimulation of questioning constituted the atmosphere and backdrop of God's communication with Micah (in this article,

the text of the Book of Micah will be analyzed from a synchronic perspective). The central question concerns the causes—that is, the transgressions of the inhabitants of both parts of the former Solomonic state. Among those invoked are: the cultivation of hostility (Mic 2:1), greed (Mic 2:2; 6:12a), exploitation of fellow countrymen (Mic 2:8; 3:2–3; 6:10), violence (Mic 2:9), the venality of prophets (Mic 3:5), manipulation (Mic 3:9; 6:12b; 7:3b), bribery (Mic 3:11; 7:3a), idolatry (Mic 5:12; 6:16), and mutual hostility (Mic 7:6). In response to these, the word is directed and the announcement of God’s intervention is made, together with information concerning forthcoming events, understood as changes produced by the consequences of the choices currently being made by the members of the Chosen People.

As the first interlocutor in communication with God, the book presents the prophet himself, whose name etymologically means: *Who is like YHWH*. It is therefore no surprise that the fundamental theme of the prophetic message is the activity of God, recognized by the prophet as a response to the attitudes of the Chosen People and of its individual representatives. Within the book there also appear references and messages directed specifically to particular social groups and their identities—identities arising from the functions they perform—taking the form of debate and discourse, yet shaped as diatribe. This communication in a unilateral form, albeit with a shifting sender (in various configurations: prophet, God, personified Zion), continues until the conclusion (Mic 7:18–20), where it passes into a direct address of the prophet to God. The contents recur in a pattern of symmetry throughout the book, surrounded by divine utterances or the prophet’s commentary. Noteworthy is the recurring set of themes: the current attitude of the people and God’s opposition to it, elaborated in detail and presented repeatedly in a pattern of repetition—as though the absence of conformity with the norm were intended in this manner to reach the recipient and persuade him toward change.

This is an obvious motif in any kind of admonition, characteristic of prophetic texts. The effectiveness of admonition, however, is not so easily achieved—since, by virtue of the fact that the message calls for change, it also places the recipient in a situation that compels decision-making, departure from the comfort zone conditioned by what is familiar, the paradoxical evaluation of past behaviours (which is among the least pleasant of tasks), and the beginning of a new mode of functioning. However much any divine suggestion and call may redirect the human being toward his identity and situate him in a relational space with God and thus not alone in facing

change—this does not eliminate the effort involved or the intensity of emotion. In consequence, the form in which such content is transmitted plays an extraordinarily important role, and it is largely upon this form that the recipient's blockage to information—or, conversely, its acceptance and further dialogue with the Sender—depends. The Hebrew Bible frequently employs imagery, contrastive juxtapositions, and vocatives in these contexts. In Mic 1:10–16, a passage is introduced that appears exceptionally well-suited in its persuasive orientation toward the recovery of identity—a passage composed of a series of paronomasias. It stands out for its literary artistry from the rest of the book (McKane, 1998, p. 57) and by virtue of its remarkable sonic quality, it attracts attention.

Paronomasia as a literary device in Mic 1:10–16

Wordplay, according to S. Schorch, is most frequently employed in prophetic texts. One of its devices is paronomasia (Schorch, 2000, 2p.05). Paronomasia by its very definition links two worlds—even two independent words—and is thus a characteristic instrument that can be deployed in the construction of communicative space. At the same time, it constitutes a form of wordplay whose connecting mechanism is grounded in the phonetic aspect of words (Casanowicz, 1894, pp. 4–5), whose function is to attract attention and draw the recipient into the dynamics of communication (Schorch, 2000, p. 206; Casanowicz, 1894, pp. 4–5). This makes it particularly important in situations where the topic being addressed touches upon the necessity of introducing radical changes into everyday life.

The primary purpose of paronomasia is to engage some mental space within the recipient and to offer the experience of melodiousness (Casanowicz, 1894, pp. 4–5) —thus employing the sense of hearing to construct an invitation, or to offer a taste of the pleasure inherent in communication. It can frequently provoke a smile, introduce an element of lightness, even playfulness (in keeping with the designation *wordplay*), but it can also sublimate the recipient's experiences in difficult situations (Szeffler, 1968, p. 375).

In principle, sound in paronomasia is detached from meaning; yet this stylistic device is introduced deliberately, so as to convey specific content. It may underscore the message's content, or it may create a new semantic level (Schorch, 2000, p. 207). The immanent power of the word in Israel precludes

a purely “ludic” character of paronomasia. In the texts of the Hebrew Bible it frequently takes the form described by S. Schorch as exegetical (Schorch, 2000, pp. 211–212), because it links a given word with a second that constitutes its interpretation, illuminates and deepens its semantics. It thus allows for a movement into the depths of meaning along the path of their “identity,” enabling a better understanding of the reality being described. Frequently in such paronomasias, proper nouns are employed (Schorch, 2000, p. 212). S. B. Noegel classifies such paronomasias as appellative (containing both proper names and common nouns) (Noegel, 2021, p. 99). Wordplay then leads to the discovery of the distinctive, unique, individual characteristics of a place—and thus also of its community—and in a certain way poses a question to the recipient: did you see this? Did you appreciate it? Have you recognized yourself as unique in this place, in this world? And have you recognized your identity? Paronomasia, by constructing sonic bridges and associations, also frequently refers to other biblical texts (Schorch, 2000, p. 214), events, and divine actions, thereby deepening the message and rendering it strongly persuasive. It also facilitates, through the invocation of already-occurring situations, the practice of those values toward which it redirects attention.

A masterpiece of paronomasia is the text of Mic 1:10–16, which, across six verses, contains ten such forms. By virtue of their variety in this passage, it is difficult to maintain that they are coincidental (Ben Zvi, 1998, p. 118). They are indicated below in bold type.

Micah 1:10 *bēgat ‘al-taggidû bākô ‘al-tibkû bēbēt lē‘aprâ ‘āpār* (hitpallāštî) [hitpallšî]
Do not tell it in Gath, weep not at all [or: don’t weep in Akko]; in Beth-le-aphrah roll yourselves in the dust.

Micah 1:11 *‘ibrî lākem yôšebet šapîr ‘eryâ-bōšet lō’ yāšē’â yôšebet ša’ānān mispad bêt hā’ēšel yiqqah mikkem ‘emdātō*
Pass on your way, inhabitants of Shaphir, in nakedness and shame; the inhabitants of Zaanān do not come out; the lamentation of Beth-ezel will take from you its support.

Micah 1:12 *kî-hālâ lēṭōb yôšebet mārôt kî-yārad rā’ mē’ēt yhw̄h lēša‘ar yērûšālēm*
For the inhabitants of Maroth wait anxiously for good, but disaster has come down from the LORD to the gate of Jerusalem.

Micah 1:13 *rětom hamerkābā lārekeš yōšebet lākiš rēšit ḥaṭṭā't hī' lēbat-šiyyon kī-bāk nimšē'ū piš'ē yiśrā'ēl*

Harness the steeds to the chariots, inhabitants of Lachish! It was the beginning of sin to the daughter of Zion, for the transgressions of Israel were found in you.

Micah 1:14 *lākēn tittēni šillūḥīm 'al mōrešet gat bāttē 'akzib lē'akzāb lēmalkē yiśrā'ēl*
Therefore you shall give parting gifts to Moresheth-gath; the houses of Achzib shall be a deceitful thing to the kings of Israel.

Micah 1:15 *'ōd hayyōrēš 'ābī lāk yōšebet mārēšā 'ad-'ādullām yābō' kēbōd yiśrā'ēl*
I will again bring a conqueror to you, inhabitants of Mareshah; the glory of Israel shall come to Adullam.

Micah 1:16 *qorḥī wāggōzī 'al-bēnē ta'ānūgāyik harḥībī qorḥātēk kannēšer kī gālū mimmēk*
Make yourselves bald and cut off your hair for your pampered children; make yourselves as bald as the eagle, for they shall go from you into exile.

The majority of the paronomasias mentioned above are formed on the basis of a juxtaposition of a place name with some action or designatum. Some exegetes consider the list of these towns to mark the route of the march of the Assyrian army under Sennacherib (Nogalski, 2024, p. 83; Walton, Matthews, & Chavalas, 2000, p. 782).

The preceding context (Mic 1:8–9) suggests that they stand in the face of an approaching threat, which is the consequence of human behaviours, idolatry (Mic 1:7), and the pseudo-values and attitudes flowing therefrom. The prophet's lament does not render the situation hopeless, but rather functions as a final signal so that the annihilation of the inhabitants of the Northern Kingdom does not come to pass.

The first paronomasia consists in the play of sounds *bēgat 'al-tagḡîdû*. This is a homonymic paronomasia (Noegel, 2021, pp. 261–266)—the words sound similar (*Gat* / *tagḡîdû*—the consonants /g/ and /t/ in both), but carry different meanings. Semantically, it evokes Gath, which was a Philistine city, one of the strongholds of the Pentapolis, the hometown of Goliath (1 Sam 17:4). Etymologically, the name means *winepress*. The verb *nagad* in the hiphil form, combined with a negation, co-constructs the expression: *in Gath do not proclaim*. It evokes the space of this city—large, historically significant,

a stronghold of enemies (like a winepress). Perhaps the sound would echo there in a hollow reverberation.

The second paronomasia is represented in the formulation *bākô 'al-tibkû*. By virtue of context and semantic logic, it seems warranted to discern here the expression *be-Akko* and to identify it as the name of one of the towns in the Shephelah, rather than as the verb *bākāh* meaning *to weep*. On this assumption, the whole reads: *in Akko do not weep*. The words linked here share the same root but are different lexical forms (a proper noun and a verb with a negation). According to Noegel's classification, a homonymic paronomasia may be recognized here (Noegel, 2021, p. 99).

The next sound construction is *bēbēt lē'aprâ 'āpār*. Phonetically, it is constructed from a prepositional alliteration (*bēbēt*) and a paronomasia (*lē'aprâ 'āpār*). The formulation *lē'aprâ 'āpār* is a form of polysemy. According to Noegel's classification, it is an antanaclasis (Noegel, 2021, pp. 164–165), that may produce a paronomastic effect. The locality evoked here—situated on the border of the Shephelah and the coastal plain, adjacent to Philistine territories—is Beth-le-aphrah (*bēt le'aprâ*), the 'House of Dust.' It is juxtaposed with the noun *'āpār* (dust), from which it derives, and the verb that forms a sentence with them is *pālaš* in the hiphil (Becking, 2023, p. 106), the Qere form *hit-pallāštî* should be adopted on syntactic grounds), meaning *to roll oneself in the dust*—while phonetically evoking *pēlišṭîm* (Philistines) (Nogalski, 2024, p. 88).

In v. 11, the paronomasia *yôšebet šapîr 'eryâ-bôšet* appears, in which the name of the town Shaphir—located to the south of Hebron and etymologically meaning *beautiful/pleasant*—is positioned amid the half-rhyming sounds of the verb *yāšab* in the qal, together with the expression *'eryâ-bôšet* (Mic 1:11)—*in shameful nakedness*. A semantic contrast also appears here: beauty versus nakedness, which calls for concealment, since it implies shame (in the Hebrew mentality, shame accompanies transgression). The ironic dimension is clearly perceptible.

In the same verse, there is a cohesion of words not standing adjacent to one another, which is more properly classified as rhyme: *yāšē'* and *ša'ānān*. The verb *yāšā'* meaning *to go out* resounds with the name of the town Zaanān, which means *exodus/going forth*. They are placed within the expression: *lô' yāšē'â yôšebet ša'ānān—the inhabitants of Zaanān do not go out*. A semantic play operates between them on the principle of duplication, but with the verb negated by the particle *lô'*. It is as though something predisposed to going out and to movement has been abruptly halted (Becking, 2023, p. 106). Possibly

the background here is a plan to secure the town so that it will not be cut off, or a prediction that, out of concern for its autonomy, it will not offer support to fugitives (Szeffler, 1968, p. 377). In such a context, the invocation immediately following—*bêt hā'ēšel*, etymologically ‘house without shade/support’—as offering no support (Nogalski, 2024, p. 89), whether as a building or as a moral authority, in accordance with the semantics of the noun *'emdāh* (Becking, 2023, p. 107), confirms the earlier anticipations. G. A. Pierce recalls commentaries linking this designation with the Assyrian empire, which was supposed to offer protective shade but brought destruction instead (G. A. Pierce, 2021).

Mic 1:12 brings another paronomasia in the form of *mārôt kî-yārad rā'*. Without invoking the context, one gains an impression of semantic disjunction. The town of Maroth—etymologically ‘bitter’—is confronted with the question of how to await good when evil *descends* (*yārad*). The duplication of syllables at the end of this expression reinforces its meaning and the contrast it delineates. This is a paronomasia of weaker phonicity, grounded primarily in the semantic link between the name and the content of the oracle—close to what S. B. Noegel calls an allusion (Noegel, 2021, pp. 91–96), or *homoeopropheron* (Noegel, 2021, pp. 241–247)—if the focus is placed on the repetition of *r* as the initial consonant of the root. It is further highlighted by the contrast built through the semantics of the verbs: writhing/dancing in anticipation of good (Nogalski, 2024, p. 90), juxtaposed with the evil that descends.

An anagrammatic paronomasia—consisting in the transposition of syllables (Noegel, 2021, p. 273), here: *š* and *r*—occurs toward the end of this verse 12 in the expression *lēša'ar yērûšālēm*—*to the gate of Jerusalem*. Sonically it closes—and as it were sanctions as happening—what the passage previously describes (it underscores the very occurrence of the events).

Verse 13 contains the paronomasia *lārekeš yôšebet lākiš rē'šît*—between the proper name of the town Lachish and the word *rekeš*, meaning *steeds*. There are two consonants common to both, placed in the same order (*k* and *š*), with one differing (*r* vs. *l*). Lachish was an old Canaanite town, fortified by Rehoboam, wealthy and well-developed (Nogalski, 2024, p. 91), in which there were probably stables—which might testify to its power. The valley over which it rose served as a kind of gateway to Jerusalem (Becking, 2023, p. 108). The statement placed in Mic 1:13 would suggest that placing trust in the strength of military equipment was the beginning of the Chosen People's apostasy. All the more so since Mic 5:9 contains the words: *And it shall come to pass in that day, says the LORD, that I will cut off your horses from among you and destroy*

your chariots (wěhāyāh bayyôm-hahû' ně'um-YHWH wěhikrattî sūsêkâ miqqirbêkâ wěha'ābadtî markēbôtêkâ), situated in the context of YHWH's opposition to idolatry (Mic 5:10–14). In such a context, the paronomasia of Mic 1:13 poses a question to the recipient: from what do you draw in your identity—and are you making proper use of it?

The next paronomasia is *'akzîb lě'akzāb* in Mic 1:14. It follows a semantic wordplay that exploits the etymology of Moresheth, the prophet's hometown—from *môrāšāh*, meaning *possession* (Brown, Driver, & Briggs, 2000, p. 4192)—and juxtaposes it with the receiving of a gift, thereby introducing a duplication of content. The word *šillûḥîm* denotes the money or its equivalent that a man was obliged to pay to the father of his future wife before the wedding, and in the case of divorce – to return to her (Nogalski, 2024, p. 92). The expression *'akzîb lě'akzāb* juxtaposes the town of Achzib in the territory of Judah with the noun *'akzāb*, meaning *deception, falsehood, lie* (Szeffler, 1968, p. 377). Here one observes identity of roots with a difference in vocalization and lexical function. S. B. Noegel classifies such expressions as antanaclasses (Noegel, 2021, p. 164). A deceptive hope of support resonates here—support that will not ultimately be given to the kings of Israel. Paradoxically—or ironically—identity is preserved.

Verse Mic 1:15 contains two paronomasias. The first occurs within the phrase *ōd hayyōrēš 'ābî lāk yôšebet mārēšā* is built on the resonance between the name of the town of Mareshah (meaning *possession*—nearly synonymous with Moresheth) in the Shephelah (Becking, 2023, p. 109), and the participle *yōrēš* meaning *one who takes possession*. The acting subject of the action described here is YHWH. One gains the impression that the consequences of some earlier choice—perhaps negligence—have come to pass, as a result of which the town was captured.

The second paronomasia in v. 15 is formed by the words *yābô' kēbôd—glory shall come*. This is a type of homonymic paronomasia (Noegel, 2021, p. 261). Their placement in the same context as Adullam, a town controlling all movement in the Elah Valley (Becking, 2023, p. 110), evokes the space in which David found refuge when fleeing from Saul (1 Sam 22:1). The association is employed to construct the assurance of God's protection—perhaps a suggestion: *if you look at your identity, you will see Me, and I will save you*. At this point the mood of the utterance changes; this is no longer a lament, but a promise.

Verse 16, which closes this part of the prophet's discourse, contains no paronomasia in the strict sense—but from a sonic perspective it conveys the

totality of the dynamics that has run through the verses above, while simultaneously implying the necessity of movement in some direction, despite the prevailing atmosphere of mourning (McKane, 1998, p. 53). One perceives in this sentence an unevenness of sounds, a tossing of them throughout the space of the sentence.

Paronomasia in Mic 1:10–16 as an instrument of communication on the subject of identity

The arrangement of paronomasias in Mic 1:10–15 creates a distinctive music of irregular meter, which the clusters of sounds of successive paronomasias—each different from the others, yet each internally highly harmonized—systematically disrupt. The recipient gains the impression that harmony in communication is possible and beautiful, yet something systematically interrupts it. On the one hand, the recipient is drawn in by it; on the other, he finds himself in something akin to a mental loop, in which he must weigh the paths that stand open before him (Noegel, 2021, p. 303). The arrangement of these sounds escapes schematic pattern, thereby compelling reflection and a return—corresponding to the process of returning to identity and cultivating it, a process that does not conclude in a few acts.

The masterpiece of paronomasia in Mic 1:10–16 consists in the construction, within these verses, of a network of semantic references and connections. The mention of the entire pool of diverse localities within the ten paronomasias of the analysed text creates the impression as though harmony were proper to individual places, dwelling within them—whereas any coordination of these places and the dynamics occurring within them into a coherent whole is entirely absent. The question thus arises concerning the purpose of making such a fact apparent. Since all the localities mentioned are situated on the territory of Israel, each inhabited by Jews, perhaps the communication taking place here through the device of paronomasia is intended to make them aware of their shared identity and to encourage a return to it.

Listening to Mic 1:10–16 and its leaping sounds paradoxically provokes a smile from the sonic side. On the one hand, one might be tempted to state that the communication occurring here is very ludic (Casanowicz, 1894, p. 6)—yet the semantics of the words and the surrounding context construct an entirely different mood. These paronomasias speak to attention, imagination,

and emotion; they are easy to perceive yet difficult to forget (Casanowicz, 1894, p. 6). They impart a clear, albeit varied, tone; they bring energy (Casanowicz, 1894, p. 7) —perhaps even sarcasm (Casanowicz, 1894, p. 13).

The accumulation of sixteen occurrences of fourteen proper names across these seven verses has no parallel in the entire Book of the Prophet Micah. It seems to suggest an interpretive hint. Perhaps the inspired author wishes very forcefully to shift the recipient's attention toward the present, toward the territory on which he lives, toward the space of his everyday life. Since these names are linked with words carrying social and relational meaning, it seems warranted to ask whether the goal is not to highlight something specific and distinctive to each given locality.

Ben Zvi draws attention to the fact that in the first chapter of Micah the term *Israel* appears four times: in vv. 5, 13, 14, and 15—and each time its distinctness is in some way blurred, as though merged and juxtaposed with Judah (Ben Zvi, 1998, p. 116). Within the paronomasias, this is, successively: the juxtaposition of Lachish with the Daughter of Zion (v. 13), the equation of the impossibility of using Moresheth of Judah with Achzib (v. 14), and the invocation of the unity of the state through the mention of Adullam—and by implication David (v. 15). A deliberate intention to emphasize the close bond between both parts, inhabited by one Chosen People, seems to be present here. This fact demonstrates that the chain of paronomasias constructed in Mic 1:10–15 serves to enable the recipient of the text to recognize himself as a full-fledged subject of the identity 'Israel.' God speaks not to an abstract group, but to a specific community that is Israel—even if that community itself does not recognize this and does not live in accordance with its identity.

The exegete cited above emphasizes that the grammatical shifts of person (from the 2nd to the 3rd person and back), exceptionally frequent throughout Mic 1:10–16, are designed to enable the association of individual entities with one another, including Judah with Israel and the prophet with YHWH (Berlin, 1985, pp. 40–41). The result is a space of confrontation of lifestyles and values; the consequences of human choices are brought into relief. Spronk draws attention to the deliberately inverted logic within Mic 1–2: instead of moving from sin through consequences to lament, the recipient first experiences (through paronomasia) the pain of the destruction of his cities, and only afterward is confronted with its cause (Mic 2 ff.) (Cuffey, 2023, p. 285). This redirection of attention to the concrete pain of concrete places is intended

to awaken identity: *this is your city, this is your land, this is your God showing you the consequences.*

The individual wordplays in Mic 1:10–16 expose specific ways in which the true identity of God’s people is betrayed. The paronomasia *lākîš* | *rekeš* raises the question of genuine security—whether it is guaranteed by the army or by God (Wessels, 1998, p. 445)—and about the consequences of an improper choice in this matter. The paronomasia *’ākzīb* | *’ākzāb* reveals betrayal as something contrary to identity: if the ‘kings of Israel’ rely on something *akhzab* (false), then the text exposes them as those who have grounded their identity in a lie—rather than in Yahweh. The paronomasia *mārôt kî-yārad rā’* reveals the disparity between the good that people desire and the bitterness that their own way of life—their failure to function in accordance with their identity—brings upon them. The paronomasia of v. 15 *yôreš* / *mārēšâ*, in conjunction with the mention of the glory of YHWH emphasized by the paronomasia *yābô’ kēbôd* and Adullam, shifts attention to God, who always saves and is eternal. In the context of the chapters of the Book of Micah following the analysed text, the lament contained here is only the preamble to the drama (Cuffey, 2023, p. 180) —it is meant to move people to a decision of change and acceptance, and God will rebuild His people (Mic 2:12 ff.).

Cuffey, in analysing the arrangement of paronomasias in Mic 1:10–15, discerns a chiasmic structure linking phonetic wordplays with conceptual ones (Cuffey, 2023, p. 285). The centre of the chiasm is formed by the concepts of Etzel (supports taken away) and Maroth (exhausted waiting), which underscore the frustration and depletion of strength that are the lot of the Chosen People. This deliberate chiasmic composition reinforces the thesis concerning the intentional character of the paronomasia and the direction of the text: toward the identity of the recipient and toward God, in whose image and likeness every human being was created.

Conclusions

The analyses conducted shift the recipient’s attention back toward the ideas from which communication grows: toward encounter, understanding, and relationship. The primary level proves to be that of the human being’s encounter with himself, within the contexts in which he finds himself, in relation to the God who conceived him and who is Lord of the entire world. It is then that

the proper recognition of values takes place, and motivation toward change is born. The analysis conducted above ventures to constitute a contribution to the discussion of the importance of taking into account the orality of texts in order to reach the core of their message—so that, in dialogue with the One who reveals Himself, the human being might be reborn. Perhaps *Biblical performance criticism* (West, 2020, pp. 301–322; Rhoads, 2006a, pp. 118–133; Rhoads, 2006b, pp. 164–184) may also serve this end, corresponding as it does to contemporary media culture and the specific sensory character of twenty-first century recipients. The broader interdisciplinary approach applied in this article reveals the particular potential of categories from communication studies for the analysis of texts from ancient cultures, as well as for drawing from them aspects not previously investigated. It should be noted that the specific subject addressed here has never previously been treated. The tools applied here on a pilot basis may therefore serve not only in the further combination of disciplines, but also in the investigation of various aspects of communication within texts—especially those related to self-expression and to the identity of persons entering into interaction.

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