A NOTE ON MICAH 5:1 (HEBREW 4:14)

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Obscurities in the Hebrew text of Micah have given rise to numerous conjectural emendations, many of which fall short of the mark when submitted to closer scrutiny. One example among many may be gleaned from Micah 5:1 (Hebrew 4:14).

The phrase חָתָןָה נְדוּּדָה has been called into question by many textual critics. Wellhausen, for example, proposed the reading חָתָןָה חָתָןָה, or vice-versa, which he interpreted as, “cut yourself severely.” Robinson suggested, חָתָןָה יְבֵנֵר, “you are enclosed with a wall,” leaning as he often does, on the Septuagint. This is the reading adopted by the RSV.

But are such emendations really necessary? All versions presuppose the same consonantal text, if allowance is made for the common confusion between ה and ח reflected in the Greek, ζῳζξαθαι θυγατη θαμβαγμω. Peshitta’s חָתָןָה חָתָןָה might be rendered, “you shall go out in bands, O daughter of bands.” Jerome’s nunc vastaberis filia latronis apparently took the verb חָתָןָה as a denominative from חָתָןפ. Targum’s חָתָןפ understood the phrase as “band yourself together, O city of sieges,” again reading חָתָןפ חָתָןפ. נְדוּּדָה of the Aramaic is the Ithpael of וּרְכָע, which Jastrow renders by “to join in troops.” Since the Peshitta, the Vulgate, and the Targum understood חָתָןָה as a denominative verb from חָתָןפ, we propose to do the same. In Jer 5:7 this verb makes good sense as “trooped,” even though some critics

1 J. Wellhausen, Die Kleinen Propheten übersetzt und erklärt (Berlin, 1898), p. 145.
would emend it there to נמרודים, "they stay as clients," again leaning on the LXX.

The main objection to the text as it stands is the hapax-legomenon הבתנודים. One should remember, though, that הבתנודים is found in 2 Chr 25: 13, which RSV translates, "the men of the army." Whereas הבתנודים is mostly rendered as "raiding band," in many texts it is synonymous with אוגר. It refers to the armies of God in Job 25: 2; and Job compares himself to a king "among his troops," חמלל בנודים (Job 29: 25).

In fact it seems that the word gained in dignity through the centuries, and in Chronicles it becomes unquestionably the equivalent of אוגר (Cf. 1 Chr 12: 18, 21; 2 Chr 25: 9-10). Rolf Knierim has massed convincing arguments in his article, "Exodus 18 und die Neuordnung der Mosaischen Gerichtsbarkeit," 3 to the effect that the juridical organization of the Israelites was superimposed on a military foundation, so that the רכש and the פסח had in many cases identical functions. This situation is clearest in the time of the Judges who, beside carrying juridical responsibilities, acted in emergencies as charismatic military leaders. Knierim favors the opinion of Junge who interpreted the אלפים יהוה of Mi 5: 1 as detachments of the army in which the population was divided. If the argument above is valid, then the phrase הבתנודים would easily be understood by a population accustomed to military organization. 4

There is then no need of connecting v 14 with vv 9-10 b, as Lindblom does, forcing its 3: 3 meter into a qinah in a way that is not at all satisfactory. Without Wellhausen’s emendation, v 14 most naturally follows v 13 both in content and in form. There Zion is summoned to arise and tread her enemies which have besieged her. Here she is summoned to organize herself

4 On the other hand, Margaret B. Crook ("The Promise of Micah 5," JBL, LXX [1951], 318) interprets הבתנודים as "possibly a city in distress," thus betraying the precarious understanding of the text.
into troops and repel the attack of the arrogant adversaries. The insulting arrogance is particularly stressed in v 14 b.

The next difficulty met in the verse is the verb שְׁעֵת. The LXX renders it by ἐπεστῶ, the Peshitta by מְשַׁע, the Vulgate by posuerunt, and the Targum by וְחֵרָד. Most critics favor reading מְשַׁע with the Peshitta, Vulgate and Targum, but Haupt prefers to retain the singular form with the LXX. Roorda suggested the part. pass. שְׁעֵת, for which he would have the support of Symmachus συνοχή ἐπεστῶ “siege is laid.” But both the 3:3 meter and the following וְהִ בא rather favor מְשַׁע, which as an indefinite 3rd pl. may well be translated passively.

שְׁעֵת LXX, τὰς φυλὰς; Peshitta, מְשַׁע; Vulgate, indicis; Targum, בְּיוֹד. Here the versions go different ways. LXX reads what would correspond to מְשַׁע “tribes;” B-68 has τὰς πυλὰς “the gates,” an inner Greek corruption. Peshitta’s מְשַׁע “shepherd” is plainly a free rendering of מְשַׁע. The Vulgate agrees with the Massoretic text, as does also the Achmimic version תַוֹן קֹרֶת. Targum’s reading points to a plural מְשַׁע, the וֶה of which might have fallen out by haplography. Instead of haplography, some scholars, e.g. Haldar, are inclined to explain it, on the basis of the Lachish Ostraca, as the regular omission of one of two identical consonants in adjacent position.

We would therefore translate this verse as follows, “Now you band yourself together, O daughter of troop(s); siege is laid against us; with the rod they strike upon the cheek the rulers of Israel.”

5 So Smith, Nowack, Sellin, Procksch.
7 Cited by V. Ryssel, Untersuchungen über die Textgestalt und die Echtheit des Buches Micha (Leipzig, 1887), p. 80.