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Vineyard or Olive Orchard?

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Readers of Zenos's parable in Jacob 5 have been perplexed by the use of the term "vineyard" to denote a parcel of ground in which olive trees are planted. Perhaps one should expect the word "orchard" instead. This word, however, appears but twice in the King James Version of the Bible (Song of Solomon 4:13; Ecclesiastes 2:5), and is a translation of the word *pardēs*, a late Hebrew borrowing from Persian and source of the Greek word behind the English term "paradise."¹

Two questions must be addressed in order to make sense of the Zenos parable: (1) Is it reasonable to believe that, in the ancient Near East, olive trees were planted amid grapevines? (2) Does the Hebrew word rendered "vineyard" have a larger range of meaning?

The Hebrew word *kerem* (plural *k'ramîm*) is generally rendered "vineyard" in KJV. It is clearly associated with "wine," "vine," or "grapes" in a number of Bible passages.²

In the Bible, "vineyard" is often contrasted with "field"³ or with "seed" (Isaiah 5:10; Jeremiah 35:6–7, 9). For example, in Deuteronomy 23:24–25, the vineyard and its grapes are paralleled by "standing corn," while in 2 Kings 19:29 (Isaiah 37:30), we read of sowing and reaping and planting vineyards and eating "the fruits thereof." In still other passages, the vineyard and its fruit are contrasted with the garden and its fruit (Isaiah 1:8; Amos 9:14).⁴

From such examples, one is tempted to suggest that “vineyard” denotes anything in contrast with “field” and could include an orchard of olive trees. This does not hold elsewhere, however. There are, for example, passages in which vineyards are contrasted with both fields and olive trees and their products,⁵ or with gardens, fig trees, and olive trees (Amos 4:9). In other passages, the vineyard is contrasted with olive trees.⁶ In Nehemiah 9:25, we read of vineyards, oliveyards, and fruit trees.⁷

There are some biblical passages, however, that imply that a *kerem* is not restricted to viticulture. For example, Ahab requested of Naboth, “Give me thy vineyard, that I may have it for a garden of herbs” (1 Kings 21:2). The Hebrew word rendered “herbs” in KJV is *yrq*, which denotes green vegetables. Similarly, in Song of Solomon 8:11–13, the vineyard appears to be considered a garden. One chapter earlier, we read of pomegranates growing in the vineyard alongside grapes: “Let us go up early to the vineyards; let us see if the vine flourish, whether the tender grapes appear, and the pomegranates bud forth” (Song of Solomon 7:12).

In the Mishnah (*Zeraim* 4:1–8:1), we read that the rabbis argued about what else could be planted in a vineyard without breaking the law of diverse kinds.⁸ Most agreed that vegetables, grains, and flowers could be planted in a vineyard, provided there was adequate spacing between the various species. They also discussed the question of training vines over non-fruit trees and fruit trees, and both the olive and fig tree are mentioned.⁹ The sages concluded that if a vine was trained over only part of a fruit tree, the ground under the rest of the tree could be sown with other seeds. Clearly, to the rabbis of two millennia ago, there was

no problem with having olive trees in vineyards. This, however, may not reflect the situation at the time of Zenos.

In the New Testament, we read of a fig tree planted in a vineyard, in a passage which has similarities of language with the account in Jacob 5:

He spake also this parable; A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none. Then said he unto the dresser of his vineyard, Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none: cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground? And he answering said unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it: And if it bear fruit, well: and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down. (Luke 13:6-9.)

The cognate to *kerem* in most of the Semitic languages means "vineyard." This is true of Canaanite¹⁰ and Aramaic.¹¹ In Ugaritic, it apparently means "grape,"¹² while in Geez it means "vine."¹³ The Arabic form is given the meaning "vine, vineyard" in two sources.¹⁴ But Lane attests only the construction *'ibnu 'l-karm*, "grape or bunch of grapes," literally, "offspring of the vineyard." Indeed, Lane gives *karam* the meaning of "generous, good, fertile land," which implies a more general meaning for the word.¹⁵

Egyptian, which is related to the Semitic language family, has two basic forms for "vineyard." The older form has a final *n* and is variously written 𓂏𓂏𓂏𓂏 𓂏𓂏𓂏𓂏 𓂏𓂏𓂏𓂏 , etc. and is to be read *k3nw*.¹⁶ The use of both the tree and the vine determinative at the end of the word is evidence that it really means both "vineyard" and "orchard." Both meanings, along with "garden," are given by Erman and Grapow¹⁷ for the later form of the word, *k3m*, variously written 𓂏𓂏(𓂏)(𓂏) 𓂏𓂏𓂏𓂏 𓂏𓂏𓂏𓂏 𓂏𓂏𓂏𓂏 , etc.



Olive grove, showing the trees well tended and the ground carefully cleared. Jacob's use of the term "vineyard" to depict a place where olive trees were cultivated is in keeping with ancient Near Eastern terminology and practices.

According to Černý,¹⁸ the later form became Demotic *k3m*, "garden," with subsequent Coptic forms SAA²BF (*dôm*), Sahidic (*dom*, *dôme*), and Bohairic (*jôm*, a place-name), all meaning "garden, vineyard, property."¹⁹ We may also note Egyptian *k3my*, "gardener of wine/flowers,"²⁰ which Černý²¹ lists with Demotic *k3my*, "gardener" and with Coptic SB (*dme*), SSfB (*dmē*), Fayyumic (*dimē*), "gardener, vinedresser."²² Compare also Egyptian *k3ry*, "gardener of wine/flowers,"²³ and *k3ny*, "gardener of wine/fruit."²⁴

Erman and Grapow list Hebrew *krm* as a cognate to the later Egyptian form *k3m*. Albright, however, believed that the younger Egyptian form was a borrowing from Semitic.²⁵ If Egyptian borrowed from Semitic, however, we would expect the Egyptian form to be *krm* rather than *k3n* or *k3m*. Albright contends that the use of the glottal stop (3) shows

that it is “a very old” loanword. However, the Egyptian form with final *m* is, as Erman and Grapow have indicated, clearly the later form—the one which, as noted above, continued into Demotic and Coptic. It is much more likely that the Egyptian is merely cognate to Semitic.²⁶

The *Encyclopedia Miqra'it* notes that “The Egyptian *k3mu* could be used for both a vineyard of vines and a plantation of mixed fruit trees. . . . The scribe Any counted twelve vines that he planted in his garden, and alongside them 100 fig trees, 170 date palms, and the like.”²⁷

The early Syriac Fathers used both the grapevine and the olive tree to symbolize Christ.²⁸ The grapevine imagery, of course, derives from John 15, where Christ is the vine and his disciples the branches. Ephrem had this passage in mind when he wrote of the olive tree, whose “leaves stand fast” through the winter and “are an image of the faithful who persevere in Christ the Olive.” The Christians who hang on Christ “are like olive-leaves in winter . . . planted wholly in him.” (Murray, commenting on this passage, noted that the Syriac word used to denote an individual grape sometimes is used of the olive.²⁹) Similarly, several of the Syriac Fathers used the olive tree grafting imagery of Romans 11 in reference to the “true vine” and its branches in John 15. The interchange of the olive tree and the vine seems to have bothered them not a bit. The same can be said of the Jews who built the third century A.D. synagogue at Dura Europus, where the tree of life is depicted in a mosaic as both a tree and a vine. Rabbi Bahya, on Genesis 2:9, wrote that the trees of life and of knowledge formed a single tree at the base, which branched into two.

We conclude, then, that the use of the term “vineyard” to depict a place where olive trees were planted is not an error in the Zenos account in Jacob 5, but that it is perfectly

in keeping with ancient practices and with the imagery of the vineyard.³⁰

Notes

1. The word also appears in the Hebrew text of Nehemiah 2:8, where KJV renders it "forest."

2. Genesis 9:20–21; Leviticus 19:10; Deuteronomy 23:24; 28:30, 39; Judges 9:27; 2 Kings 18:32; Song of Solomon 2:15; Isaiah 5:1–4; 16:10; 27:2; Amos 5:11; 9:14; Zephaniah 1:13.

3. Exodus 22:5; Leviticus 19:9–10; 25:3–4; Numbers 16:14; 20:17; 21:22; 1 Samuel 22:7; Job 24:6; Psalm 107:37; Proverbs 24:30; 31:16; Isaiah 16:10; Jeremiah 32:15; 39:10; Micah 1:6. The same Hebrew word is used in Nehemiah 5:3–5, though rendered "lands" in KJV.

4. In Ecclesiastes 2:4–5, we have the tripartite parallel of vineyards, gardens, and orchards; however, the latter is the Persian borrowing referred to above.

5. Deuteronomy 24:19–21; 28:38–40; 1 Samuel 8:14–15; 2 Kings 18:32; Isaiah 36:17; 1 Chronicles 27:26–28. In Nehemiah 5:11, KJV renders the word "lands" instead of "fields." In Judges 15:5, we read of shocks, standing corn, vineyards, and olives. The Hebrew text actually reads "vineyards of olives," but, following LXX, KJV and all ancient and modern Jewish and Christian authorities read "vineyards and olives."

6. Deuteronomy 6:11; in Exodus 23:11; Joshua 24:13; 2 Kings 5:26. KJV renders the word "oliveyards." It is perhaps significant that the grape and olive harvests take place at the same time and were anciently celebrated in the Mosaic feast of Tabernacles.

7. Again, "oliveyards" should read "olive trees," while the Hebrew term rendered "fruit trees" actually means "edible trees."

8. "Thou shalt not sow thy vineyard with divers seeds: lest the fruit of thy seed, which thou hast sown, and the fruit of thy vineyard, be defiled" (Deuteronomy 22:9).

9. Cf. Hermas' *Similitudes* 2, where he wrote of the unfruitful elm tree as a support for the vine, enabling the vine to produce more abundantly.

10. H. Donner and W. Röllig, *Kanaanäische und Aramäische Inschriften* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1969), Band III, Glossaire und Indizes, 12b.

11. For Jewish Palestinian Aramaic, see Franz Rosenthal, *An Aramaic Handbook* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1969), I/2, 63b. For Syriac, see Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, Charles A. Briggs, editors (hereinafter BDB), *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), 501b; and Cyrus H. Gordon, *Ugaritic*

Textbook (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1974), Glossary No. 1306. For Samaritan, see Rosenthal, *An Aramaic Handbook*, II/2, 6b.

12. Gordon, *Ugaritic Textbook*, No. 1306.

13. BDB, 501b; Gordon, *Ugaritic Textbook*, No. 1306.

14. BDB, 51b; Gordon, *Ugaritic Textbook*, No. 1306.

15. E. W. Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon* (London, 1863–93), 2999c.

16. A. Erman and H. Grapow, *Wörterbuch der ägyptischen Sprache* (Leipzig, 1926–31), V, 107, 6–7.

17. *Ibid.*, V, 106, 3–9.

18. Jaroslav Černý, *Coptic Etymological Dictionary* (Cambridge Univ., 1976), 330.

19. W. E. Crum, *A Coptic Dictionary* (Oxford, 1962), 817b.

20. Erman & Grapow, *Wörterbuch der ägyptischen Sprache*, V, 108, 13–16.

21. Černý, *Coptic Etymological Dictionary*, 331.

22. Crum, *A Coptic Dictionary*, 817B.

23. Erman & Grapow, *Wörterbuch der ägyptischen Sprache*, V, 108, 13–16.

24. Erman & Grapow, *Wörterbuch der ägyptischen Sprache*, V, 107, 8–9.

25. W. F. Albright, *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1968), 157, fn. 13.

26. The earlier Egyptian form, *k3n*, should be compared to Akkadian *karanu/kiranu*, “wine, grapevine, grape.” See *The Assyrian Dictionary* (Chicago: Oriental Institute, Univ. of Chicago, 1956), VIII.202b. W. Muss-Arnoldt, *A Concise Dictionary of the Assyrian Language* (New York: Westermann, 1895), lists the Akkadian along with Aramaic (*qreyna*), Greek (*karoion*; also *karuion* and *karunon*), “sweet wine,” Latin *carenum* and *caroenum*. The Greek looks suspiciously like an attempt to adapt the word to a form which would comprise, in its latter half, the word *oinos*, “wine.” It was, of course, borrowed by Latin, and appears to have also been borrowed by Aramaic, which is unrelated to any of the other Semitic forms—including Akkadian—by virtue of its initial *q* in place of *k*.

27. *Encyclopedia Miqra'it* (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1962), IV:318, my translation. Any's garden is depicted on the walls of his tomb (Tomb 81) at Thebes. It contained a total of 481 trees of 23 varieties, plus vines.

28. See the discussion in chapter 3 (“The Vineyard, the Grape and the Tree of Life”) in Robert Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom: A Study in Early Syriac Tradition* (Cambridge University Press, 1975).

29. *Ibid.*, 113.

30. For more about this imagery, see my article “Borrowings from the Parable of Zenos” in this volume.