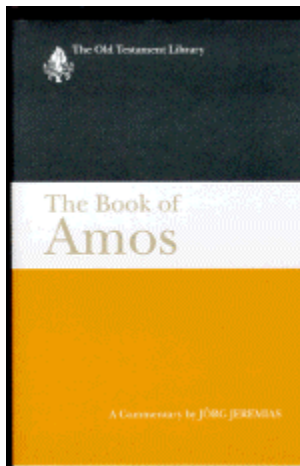


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**Jörg, Jeremias**

***The Book of Amos***

Translated by Douglas W. Stott

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This is a translation of J.'s *Der Prophet Amos* (Das Alte Testament Deutsche; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1995). No new preface was written especially for the English edition, and no translator's foreword is supplied.

In this concise study, J. describes even the earliest edition of Amos as an artistic accomplishment and not a simple preservation of the prophet's words. He proposes that the book was composed in a number of stages, but also claims that its exilic and post-exilic transmission-history is the true point of departure for exegesis. Even so, J. begins with an admittedly hypothetical study of the historical prophet. J. accords him the familiar date of between 760-750 BCE and infers that the reference to "two years before the earthquake" (1:2) shows that he prophesied for only a year or so. Although Amos himself may have written down some of his own words, the first real edition of a book of Amos only followed the fall of Samaria. It was considerably expanded in the time of Jeremiah, although its constitutive formation was not until the exilic - early post-exilic periods. The process saw Amos' critique of the northern kingdom adopted *pars pro toto* as a critique of the Israelite people as a whole. The final form of the book, which is late post-exilic, saw Amos' harsh message reconciled with older views of salvation.

Many, but not all of these ideas supporting this schema can be found in other treatments of Amos. The structural analysis and the acknowledgment that the composite nature of the chapters does not undermine their present literary unity are the strongest aspects of J.'s work. He sees the book as framed by two compositions spanning most of Amos 1-2 and 7-9: the oracles against the nations and the visions, each of which

(originally) followed a regular structure of five strophes. Chapters 3-6 are read in the light of this frame, even if they were once independent. These central chapters show complex internal arrangements of complementary substructures with a primary division occurring at 5:1. Some may justifiably quibble that 4:1 marks a new sub-unit because its use of the messenger formula is on a par with those in 3:1 and 5:1, but J.'s assessment of 4:1-3 as completing the themes of wanton luxury and class oppression are not to be taken lightly. Amos 5:1-17 is described as a parallel composition to 4:4-13. Two composite woe oracles follow (5:18-27; 6:1-12), their four-part structures mirroring each other. J. regards Amos' visions as unique, personal experiences. They were received at different times of the year as indicated by the late growth (7:1) of the third month and the summer fruit of the eighth (cf. the Gezer Calendar). The content of the reports does not suggest to J. that they were intended to be published, although their recording is ascribed to Amos or a close companion. The structuring of the first four visions in pairs calls attention to a change in Amos' prophetic career, from intercession (Amos 7:1-5) to judgment (Amos 7:6-8; 8:1-2; and cf. the fifth, 9:1-2), a change presupposed in the rest of the book. J. holds that the story of Amaziah was inserted between visions 3 and 4 (at 7:10-17) to explain the third vision and so cannot really be understood outside of its current context. Similarly, Amos 8:3-14 is a commentary on the fourth vision. The fifth vision connects the earthly temple and the divine realm. J. finds the original ending of the book of Amos at 9:4b. The concluding doxology at 9:5-6 forms the exilic-era frame with 1:2. Following a host of others, J. argues that the final section, 9:7-15, presupposes the exilic book.

J.'s insightful analysis of allegory and structure often cuts across perceived redactional and source material. His study, however, does not go far beyond the scope of the typical historical-critical examination. There is, for instance, no acknowledgment of the recent challenges to the historical-critical enterprise, nor is there any interaction with the social sciences or literary theory. J.'s "later edition first" method is surely an advance on other historical-critical offerings that stress the life and times of the historical prophet. Yet, as suggested by my summary above, it is one that J. himself often loses sight of. Earlier forms of the book are given precedence in the analysis over the latter, to the extent that some "late" passages are treated in isolation. J. is at times circular in his historical reasoning. The original superscription mentioning the "words of Amos" is likened to Prov. 30:1, 31:1 ("words" of Agur and Lemuel) and dated prior to any specific form of prophetic superscription (which assumes a relative date for Prov.). J. does not begin with the post-monarchic Amos-book, since he makes no mention of Jer. 1.1 "words of Jeremiah" or Neh. 1.1 as possible parallels of a later date than that supposed for the superscriptions in Proverbs or Amos. Other assertions simply assume too much. For instance, no explanation is given for why the content of visions need reflect the same season in which they are received.

The shortcomings of his inconsistent methods can be illustrated by two examples. J.'s description of the artistic pairings of the oracles, as they multiplied in number, remains illuminating on literary terms, but ultimately problematic. The oracles against Tyre,

Edom and Judah (1:9-12; 2:4-5) are exilic, a view with which many concur. But given his reservations about the historical Amos, it is curious that he can claim that the prophet originally compared but two nations (Aram and Ammon, 1:3-5, 13-15) with Israel, while the Philistines (1:6-8) and Moab (2:1-3) were included only when the first edition of the book itself was produced. J.'s treatment of these oracles can be criticized further. He asserts that the structure is discernible only by identifying the stages of growth. He examines the four "punishment" oracles first (oracles 1, 2, 5, 6). The Tyre and Edom "guilt" oracles (numbers 3 and 4) are then said to "completely shift" attention from the announcement of punishment (p. 29). His diachronic solution, therefore, was implicit throughout: the "shift" must be an intrusion, and not part of an original artistic structure of alteration of theme.

J. discovers much allegory in Amos 3:3-8 that paints an increasingly ominous portrait of the prophetic mission against Samaria, something made apparent in vs. 9. Verse 7 is considered secondary (as very many scholars agree). Neither does J. challenge the status quo, which holds that the passage reflects the prophet's self-justification before his detractors. Verse 8 is suspected of being an originally independent saying. J. again asserts the common view that it indicates how the historical Amos had the prophetic mission forced upon him. Thus, the key question of vs. 8b "Who can but prophesy?" is interpreted in terms of the historical Amos, and not in terms of the post-monarchic tradents. Yet, J. labels 3:13 ("Hear and warn the house of Jacob") a later, Deuteronomistic call for all of God's people who understand Amos' words to assume the prophet's office of watchman. No such observations are made about how these later thinkers would have interpreted vs. 8, or vs. 6, for that matter.

In many places, however, J.'s comments are perceptive. For instance, if the audience is challenged to take up the role of prophet, the prophet himself wears other hats: first, that of the king in calling witnesses from abroad to Samaria (3:13) and second, that of priests. Amos sarcastically calls pilgrims to transgress (4:4-5) and employs priestly language in 5:21-23. J.'s analysis of Amos 4:6-13 (following Wolff) relates the passage to Solomon's temple dedication in 1 Kgs 8. Both texts link plagues with the notion of a "return". Thus, J.'s conclusion that the Amos passage is based on "*a penitential ritual of the exilic community*" (p. 72, emphasis in original) is very plausible, if not necessary. He notices that the (exilic at the earliest) doxologies (4:13; 5:8-9; 9:5-6) are located in structurally strategic places, and that the third praises Yahweh's judgment and his renewed willingness to grant a new beginning.

In spite of my reservations noted above, J. has provided a serious attempt to understand the book's editorial history. Many of his conclusions, especially regarding the latter stages of redactional development, are quite reasonable. Although J.'s book is conservative methodologically, it does represent a major contribution to the wealth of older diachronic studies, and, in many respects, is one of the best on offer. J. makes many interesting observations about the Amos-book, especially regarding literary structure.

Often these are not predicated exclusively on the diachronic analysis itself, and so readers with alternative critical and methodological positions or interests are still very well rewarded for their efforts.