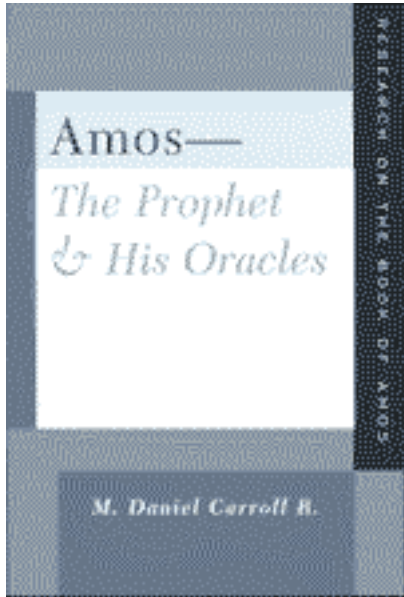


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Carroll R., M. Daniel

Amos: The Prophet and His Oracles

Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002.
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Reading M. Daniel Carroll R.'s *Amos—The Prophet and His Oracles: Research on the Book of Amos* is like being taken on a private tour in a library. The author is intimately familiar with the content of the books and has organized them to aid research. Carroll R. sets out as his hope that “this introduction to Amos research might serve to promote further study of this prophetic text” (vii).

The book consists of two sections, one of essays and another of bibliographies. In the essays the author explores the history of research on Amos. It covers the period from Wellhausen until 1990. Wellhausen (in 1878) suggested that there was a rift between the prophets and sacrificial religion. As a result, scholars, in varying degrees and emphases, wrote about the separation between Amos's theology and the practice of the cult. Amos was seen as a “religious innovator” (4) and portrayed by some as “champion of the marginalized” (7). During the same period, the idea of ecstasy was also explored. From another angle, some wanted to single out the original words of the prophets by isolating the prophetic utterance from the (later) written context, while others from a literary-critical point of view looked for the most authentic (i.e., earliest) message. This period sought in different ways to find the center of the “prophetic genius” (12).

The author posits that during the next period (1920s until the late 1960s/early 1970s) scholars sought a social setting for the prophets. As opposed to the view of the previous period, scholars considered (some of) the prophets as inseparable from the cultic institutions of their day. Some sought to make connections with the larger ancient Near Eastern prophetic traditions. Others approached the questions from a form-critical and tradition-critical perspective. Seeking to understand the preliterate history of the text, both concluded that the prophetic institution was not a break with past tradition but an effort of recontextualization. The author summarizes this period as one providing a number of theories, each with “varying strengths and weaknesses” (19).

Beginning in the late 1960s/early 1970s, Carroll R. suggests, scholars began to look for more productive ways to approach the text. The author identifies three different approaches: looking for what is “behind the text,” “within the text,” and “in front of the text.” Those who focused on what lies behind the text sought to reconstruct history through redaction history, archaeology, or social theory. Those who looked within the text studied Amos as “a received text.” Scholars taking this approach showed the unity of the text from a historical perspective or by accepting the text as an unquestioned unit within the canon. Scholars seeking to find what is “in front of the text” explored the impact it had on the readers, giving rise to various liberation theologies and other alternative readings.

In his second essay, Carroll R. writes about present research and predictions for the future. The author suggests that current work on Amos falls within the continuum of its past and, therefore, divides the essay in the same three categories as used in the first essay.

Current work on reconstructing what lies behind the text is found in four different approaches. The first seeks to establish the literary prehistory. Some seek to identify the original message, the different layers, as well as intertextuality. Others emphasize the chiasmic structures. A second approach focuses on the Book of the Twelve (seeking to establish its shaping or through reading it synchronically). A third approach seeks archaeological evidence to show the text’s setting. The focus is on issues of social life, the earthquake mentioned in Amos 1:1, the *marzēah* feast, Asherah, and the plumb line. The fourth approach aims at identifying what lies behind the text. The author refers to it as “social sciences approaches” (41). Here Carroll R. gives the reader a taste of various orientations and numerous models. His own methodology is categorized under this heading.

Those who read what lies within the text, the author posits, do so for different reasons (either because redaction-critical work is too uncertain or because there are good reasons

to accept the text as authentic). Some look for themes, others for structures, wordplays, metaphors, and literary nuances. Another group utilizes the analysis of poetics. (The author writes that he himself uses this methodology.)

The last group reviewed by the author consists of those scholars who look for what is in front of the text. This approach seeks to bring the text to the contemporary world. Most of this work arises from marginalized communities, but the author admits that some recent mainline commentaries have also sought to show the text's relevance in today's world. Carroll R. himself has committed himself to this approach.

As for a prediction for future Amos research, the author admits the view is hazy. He foresees a multifaceted research that will include interdisciplinary efforts, with leanings toward one or more of the three main approaches. He challenges those using social-science theories to be more precise in their methodology and self-awareness. The author expects the emergence of new literary approaches. He also predicts that new contextual concerns will have a direct impact on Amos research.

In his third essay, Carroll R., assuming unfamiliarity on the part of the readers, shows through examples and citations how marginalized groups, rather than representatives of traditional scholarship, read Amos. From the First World the author gives examples of a socioeconomic critique, African American and Hispanic American readings, feminist/womanist understandings, and an ideological critique. From the Two-Thirds World Carroll provides some readings from Africa and Latin America.

The second major section of the book contains the bibliographies. Carroll provides four different categories: (1) introductory works, commentaries, and monographs; (2) special topics and significant blocks of text; (3) chapters and verses; and (4) doctoral dissertations from 1985–2000. Each category is in turn subdivided to help the reader locate resources. The first section includes bibliographies, concordances, a representative listing of dictionary and encyclopedias, commentaries, and monographs/books (both scholarly and popular). Except for the representative listing of dictionary and encyclopedias, all entries are annotated. Under specific topics the author has the following: “The Man and the Book within the Study of Prophetism”; “Historical and Personal Background of the Prophet and the Book”; “Composition, Structure, and Literary Style”; “Textual Criticism and Ancient Versions”; “Amos and the Book of the Twelve”; “Use at Qumran and in Rabbinic Literature”; “Use in the New Testament”; “General Theology and Message”; “Theological Traditions”; “Specific Topics of Theology”; and “Contemporary Relevance and Pastoral Use.” Significant blocks of text are subdivided as “Studies on the Book As a Whole” (these are periodical articles, as opposed to the previously listed books and monographs); “Oracles against the Nations”;

“Doxologies (or Hymns)”; “Woe Oracles”; and “Visions.” No annotations are provided with these entries. The section on chapters and verses is structured, naturally, around subdivisions of chapter/verse; entries are not annotated. The entries under doctoral dissertations are annotated. The author subdivides them as “Dissertations Dedicated Solely to Amos” and “Selected Dissertations That Deal with Amos in the Context of Broader Discussions.” The author also provides a list of D.Min. dissertations, without annotations.

M. Daniel Carroll R. has provided the academic world with an updated bibliography of works on Amos. Henry O. Thompson published *The Book of Amos: An Annotated Bibliography* in 1997 (Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow). Carroll has added 125 works on Amos published from 1997 through 2001. The author does not force the bibliographical entries into the categories of approaches established in the essays but presents the richness of the field through other divisions, leaving the reader or researcher free to draw his or her own conclusions.

The essays on the history of Amos research are valuable both as an introduction and as a reference. The author does succeed in presenting a “representative” rather than “exhaustive” (4) picture of scholarship since 1878, giving a balanced overview of the whole spectrum of Amos research.

The third essay, being exemplary rather than representative, is more subjective. I found myself asking questions that the essay did not answer. For instance, out of how many examples did the author choose? Why is Asia not represented? Are there marginalized groups such as the African American, Latin American people, in other First World countries, reading Amos in their own context? The choices made in this chapter may limit the interest of readership somewhat, as it seems particularly focused on a North American audience.

The author takes the opportunity in the second essay to classify his own work and methodology. He establishes satisfactorily how his approach is interdisciplinary. The author shows consistency in his current evaluation of the field and his personal approach, with his hope for the future.

I have no doubt that this book will contribute to a continued investigation into the book of Amos. I myself, after reading this book, am greatly encouraged to continue my part of the task.