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THE CRIMES OF THE NATIONS IN AMOS 1-2¹

ABSTRACT

In the oracles against the nations in Amos 1-2, several acts of the nations are condemned as “transgressions” or “crimes”. The text mentions “threshing” one’s enemy, deportations and slave trade, acting in wrath and anger, expanding one’s territory by conquest, ripping open pregnant women, and desecrating corpses. Although these are clearly acts of violence, they are viewed as legitimate in some contexts. Gods and kings are practising them. It depends on the perspective. The author of Amos 1-2 sides with the victims and identifies the perspective of the victims with God’s perspective. This lays solid ground for the Book of Amos, in which the social violence of the powerful against the weak and vulnerable in Israelite society is judged in the same way as a crime against God.

1. INTRODUCTION

In Amos 1-2, verses 1:3-2:16 give an account of eight oracles charging eight nations with transgressions that provoke the intervention of YHWH and the punishment of each nation. The first six oracles are directed against foreign nations, whereas oracles seven and eight address Judah and Israel.

1 This article is written in honour of my colleague and friend, Fanie Snyman. The last of the Twelve Prophets brought us together as we were preparing our commentaries on Malachi (Kessler 2011; Snyman 2015). As I am writing a commentary on Amos for the International Exegetical Commentary on the Old Testament series, I again draw from Fanie’s work, as he has published a number of studies on the third book of the Twelve (Snyman 1994a; 1994b; 1995; 2005; 2006).

In this article, I will only consider the crimes of the neighbouring nations, not the indictments against Judah and Israel, which differ from those of the other nations. What is the problem with the nations' "transgressions" or "crimes"? The oracles mention "threshing" one's enemy, deportations and slave trade, acting in wrath and anger, expanding one's territory by conquest, ripping open pregnant women, and desecrating corpses. These are obvious acts of violence. However, their qualification as "transgressions" or "crimes" is not self-evident. In this article, I will present texts that qualify these acts as honourable and glorious deeds of kings and nations, at times supported by the gods or even the God of Israel. I will show that it is a question of perspective as to how these deeds are valued. The author of Amos 1-2 sides with the victims and identifies the perspective of the victims with God's perspective.

2. THE MEANING OF פָּשַׁע (PÆŠA')

Each oracle calls the deeds committed by the nations and by Judah and Israel (not considered, in this instance) "transgressions" (KJV, RSV, NRSV), "violations" (Andersen & Freedman 2008), "misdeeds" (Barton 2014:84), or "crimes" (my translation). The Hebrew word פָּשַׁע (*pæša'*) covers a wide range of meanings. In some instances, it is used for transgressions between individuals (1 Sam. 24:12 [Engl. 24:11], where the NRSV translates the word with "treason"; 1 Sam. 25:28, "trespass" in the NRSV; Ps. 5:11 [Engl. 5:10], "transgression", among others) and even within the family (Gen. 31:36, "sin"; 50:17, "crime"). For the interpretation of Amos 1-2, two other aspects are important. First, the root פָּשַׁע (*pš'*) also "belongs to the 'language of politics' and means 'to revolt, rebel, cast off allegiance to authority'" (Paul 1991:45; Andersen & Freedman 2008:231). In this sense, it is used for the rebellion of the Israelites against the house of David following Solomon's death (1 Kings 12:19; 2 Chr. 10:19); the rebellion of Moab against their overlord, the Israelite king Ahab (2 Kings 1:1; 3:5, 7), and the rebellion of Edom against the rule of Judah (2 Kings 8:20, 22; 2 Chr. 21:8, 10). Secondly, the overlord against whom one revolts can also be God. Israel is warned not to rebel against God's angel who shall bring Israel to the promised land (Ex. 23:21). In the beginning of the Book of Isaiah, God laments that his children, the people of Israel, "have rebelled against me" (Isa. 1:2). The noun פָּשַׁע (*pæša'*) is often used in conjunction with other terms such as "iniquity", "transgression", and "sin" (Ex. 34:7; Lev. 16:16). It stands in parallel with words meaning "to rebel" (Ezek. 30:38; Lam. 3:42), "to transgress the covenant" (Hos. 8:1), or "to deny (God)" and "to turn away (from God)" (Isa. 59:13) (Paul 1991:45). To sum up, the root

פֶּשַׁע (*ps'*) means an act of rebellion against an overlord, who may be a political power or God himself.

Rebellion against a human overlord is never mentioned in Amos 1-2. The nations commit crimes against each other. Some are directed against Israel; verse 3.13 mentions the Israelite landscape of Gilead, and Edom is said to have “pursued his brother (Israel or Judah) with the sword” (v. 11). In other instances, it is left open to who the victims are. In 2:1-3, it is a transgression of Moab against Edom. But none of the nations enumerated in the poem – Damascus, Gaza and the Philistines, Tyre, Edom, the Ammonites, or Moab – rebels against another nation who is their overlord. In the logic of the poem, the only overlord they have is Yhwh. The “rebellion” of the nations is a rebellion against Yhwh, their overlord. This leads to the question on what grounds the peoples are judged.

3. YHWH AS GUARDIAN OVER JUSTICE AND RIGHTEOUSNESS IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

It is evident that Amos 1-2 is characterized by a “universalistic concept of the God of Israel”: “All of mankind is considered the vassal of the Lord whose power, authority, and law embrace the entire world community of nations” (Paul 1991:45). “Yahweh claims jurisdiction over all the region” (Andersen & Freedman 2008:232); he is “the worldwide guardian over justice and righteousness”.² Why are the acts of the nations – or rather the acts of the leaders of the nations – judged as rebellion?

The nations are not judged because of attacks upon Israel. Some of their crimes might be directed against Judah or Israel, especially when Gilead is mentioned (1:3, 13), or when Edom is accused of having “pursued his brother with the sword” (1:11). But this is not the focus of the charges. In the case of Moab, it is evident that their transgression of burning the bones of the king of Edom has nothing to do with God’s people. Neither are the nations condemned because of rebellion against the revealed laws of Yhwh, as is Judah (“because they have rejected the law (*tôrāh*) of YHWH and have not kept his statutes (*ḥuqqīm*)”, 2:4), nor are they accused of social injustice, as is Israel (2:6-8). There is no interference in the nations’ internal affairs.

In a thorough study of Amos’ oracles against the nations, Barton (2003:113) shows that the criterion for judging the nations is what he calls

2 Kaiser (2013:37): “*weltweiter Wächter über Recht und Gerechtigkeit*”.

“international customary law”. Barton’s (2003:78) central thesis is that Amos “was appealing to a kind of conventional or customary law about international conduct which he at least believed to be self-evidently right”. According to Barton (2003:82), Amos 1-2 contains “an appeal to (at least supposedly) international norms of conduct”. In modern international law, one would qualify the acts of the nations as “crimes against humanity”. In an earlier study, Amsler (1981) linked the concept of Amos 1-2 with the modern idea of human rights.

In this article, I will go one step further. Commentaries and articles often mention parallels in biblical and extra-biblical texts to acts that are qualified as transgressions, violations, or crimes in Amos 1-2. It strikes me that, in a number of instances, the deeds that are qualified as crimes in Amos 1-2 appear in a rather positive light in the parallels. If this is true, then Amos 1-2 would not simply be applying the norms of international customary law believed to be self-evidently right. Before doing this, the text would qualify certain acts as crimes, which were not at all judged as such by everyone.

To verify or falsify the *thesis*, I will discuss the individual oracles step by step.

4. THE AMBIVALENCE OF THE NATIONS’ TRANSGRESSIONS

4.1 Damascus (1:3-5)

Damascus will be punished “because they have threshed Gilead with threshing-sledges of iron” (v. 3). The prophet employs agricultural imagery as a metaphor “for the savage conquest of a territory” (Andersen & Freedman 2008:239). The metaphor portrays “the cruel and inhumane treatment of the land as well as its occupants” (Paul 1991:47). In Amos, threshing a territory with iron threshing-sledges is qualified as a crime. However, other texts use the same imagery in a neutral or even positive sense.

In Neo-Assyrian royal inscriptions, the metaphor of threshing countries or peoples is part of the (self-)presentation of the king. Ashurnasirpal II (883-859 BCE) is presented as the one “who threshes all the enemies”. Tiglath-pileser III (744-727 BCE) boasts: “I threshed Bit-Amukkani as (with) a threshing-sledge”.³ Both texts use the Akkadian equivalent to the Hebrew *dûš*, namely *dāšu*. In the vassal treaties of Esarhaddon (680-669 BCE), the metaphor is part of the curses. The god is expected to “thresh” the

3 Both texts are quoted in Paul (1991:47).

potential rebels: “May (Shamash) (*verb missing*) with an iron threshing-sledge your cities (and your districts)”. The Akkadian expression for “threshing-sledge”, *epinnu ša parzilli*, is the equivalent of the Hebrew *ħarušôt habbarzæl* in Amos 1:3.⁴ It is obvious that none of these texts qualifies threshing countries and peoples as a crime, as does Amos.

In the narrative texts of the Hebrew Bible, the metaphor is used in a neutral sense. In the story of Gideon, the hero threatens the officials of Succoth who refuse to give bread to his soldiers: “I will thresh your flesh on the thorns of the wilderness and on briers” (Judg. 8:7). The words highlight Gideon’s fierce determination, but he is not blamed for his speech. In another text, the metaphor of threshing emphasises the heavy defeat of the Israelite army: “the king of Aram had destroyed them and made them like the dust at threshing” (2 Kings 13:7). The words describe nearly total destruction, but they do not qualify the acts of the Aramean king as a crime of war.

In prophetic texts, the imagery of threshing is even employed in promises. (Deutero-)Isaiah announces divine help for the “worm Jacob” with the words: “Now, I will make of you a threshing-sledge, / sharp, new, and having teeth; / you shall thresh the mountains and crush them, / and you shall make the hills like chaff.” (Isa. 41:15).

In Deutero-Isaiah 40:4-42:15, the mountains and hills symbolize every form of resistance against Yhwh. In 41:15, those who resist YHWH are the nations, especially the Babylonians, who have reduced Israel to being like a worm. It is a promise for Jacob that, in the future, he will thresh these nations.⁵ That the nations are indeed the object of threshing becomes clear in the oracle of Micah 4:11-13. The text begins with the nations assembling against Zion. They hope to conquer her, not knowing that YHWH has gathered them to the threshing-floor. The prophet then quotes Yhwh’s address to the daughter of Zion: “Arise and thresh, O daughter of Zion, / for I will make your horn iron / and your hoofs bronze; / you shall beat in pieces many peoples” (v. 13). The prophet does not view these words as an incitement to commit crimes of war, but rather as words of encouragement and hope.

Finally, in Habakkuk’s prayer, YHWH himself is addressed: “In fury you trod the earth, / in anger you threshed nations” (Hab. 3:12). The text describes a battle between YHWH and his enemies. “God is angry with the nations (Assyria and Babylon) and has come to save his people and his anointed” (vv. 12-13) (Smith 1984:116) – and not to commit crimes.

4 Text and explanation in Paul (1991:47).

5 Interpretation following Berges (2008:198).

In sum, in all these texts, threshing one's enemies or their territories is a metaphor for savage conquest. However, it is not qualified as a crime. The metaphor is ambiguous at the very least. Its meaning depends on the position of the speaker. Those in power can boast about threshing their enemies. For the weak (Isa. 41:15; Mic. 4:11-13), it may be a promise of encouragement and hope. For the victims of "threshing", it is simply a "crime".

4.2 Gaza (1:6-8)

The Philistine city of Gaza is threatened "because they carried into exile entire communities, / to hand them over to Edom" (v. 6). It is not clear what is meant by the charge. The hiphil of the root *gālāh*, accompanied, in this instance, by the object *gālūt* – "to carry into exile" – is the technical term for deportation. Both the Assyrians (2 Kings 15:29; 16:9; 17:6) and the Babylonians (2 Kings 24:14-16; 25:11) applied this measure after their victories. For them, it was an accepted strategy to stabilize their empires. In his great "summary" inscription, Sargon II (721-705 BCE) writes that he "took as booty 27,290 people" who lived in the conquered city of Samaria.⁶ His successor Sennacherib (704-681 BCE) boasts of having taken out of Judah "200,150 people, young and old, male and female", certainly an exaggerated number.⁷

However, not only the rulers of great empires used deportation as a political tool. In a Phoenician inscription, a certain Azitawada claims to have settled people from "strong lands in the West ... in the far regions of my borders in the East".⁸ Similarly, in an Aramean inscription for his father, Panamuwa, the current king, writes about him: "And the population of the east he brought to the west; and the population of the west he brought to the east."⁹

In sum, none of these kings, whether great kings of the empires or rulers of petty states at the margins of the empires, holds deportations to be a criminal act. They are a normal part of policy. If the first hemistich of Amos 1:6b speaks of deportations, the prophet qualifies them as transgressions.

However, it is not clear whether "normal" deportations are meant. The second line states that the Philistines handed entire communities over to Edom. The hiphil of *sāgar* in Deuteronomy 23:16 (Engl. 23:15) denominates the deliverance of an escaped slave to his owner (1 Sam 30:15). The verb

6 2.118E in Hallo (2000:296).

7 2.119B in Hallo (2000:303).

8 2.31 in Hallo (2000:149).

9 2.37 in Hallo (2000:160).

can stand in parallel with “to sell” (Deut. 32:30). Amos 1:6 could thus indicate a case of slave trafficking. Catching people for financial gain could have happened in the form of a raid (1 Sam. 30:1-20), or in a more organized manner as in the case of the Phoenician cities (Ezek. 27:13; Joel 4:6-7 [Engl. 3:6-7]). The motif then is not that of deportation for political reasons, but to make money through the slave trade.

Whether Amos 1:6 alludes to deportations for political reasons or to economically motivated slave trafficking, neither is generally qualified as a crime. “The sale of human booty on the slave market was a well-known practice that became a profitable by-product for the victors in war” (Paul 1991:56).

4.3 Tyre (1:9-10)

The Phoenician city of Tyre is accused of two acts. The first resembles that of Gaza; the text uses the same vocabulary: “because they delivered entire communities over to Edom”. The verb “to hand over”, “to deliver over” in Hebrew is identical (*sāgar*), as are “entire communities” and “to Edom”. Only “to carry into exile” (Am. 1:6) is missing. Consequently, the text clearly alludes to slave traffic. Other texts (Ezek. 27:13; Joel. 4:6-7 [Engl. 3:6-7]) attest to the fact that the slave trade was a business model of Tyre and other Phoenician cities.

The second accusation is different: “because they ... did not remember the covenant of brotherhood”. I will return to this allegation in the next section of this paper and explain the reasons for this.

4.4 Edom (1:11-12)

The accusation against Edom repeats the word “brother” from the oracle against Tyre: “because he pursued his brother with the sword”. As in the case of Tyre, I will address this in the next section.

The second line of the Edom oracle continues: “[H]e maintained his anger perpetually, / and kept his wrath for ever.” Is this a crime? Anger and wrath are not negative qualities *per se*. On the contrary, in Mesopotamian royal ideology, the king is expected not to have mercy (Franz 2003:69). To be “without pity” (*la1 pa-du-ú2*) or furious (*ek-du*) are key epithets of a number of Assyrian kings (Seux 1967:80, 210). Esarhaddon (680-669 bce) is said to be a “furious lion” (Seux 1967:147).

Not only kings, but also the gods act in wrath and anger. In his profound book on God’s wrath, Jeremias (2009:35) quotes from a Sumerian city lament:

Indeed wild with anger!
 The word of the Lord, indeed wild with anger!
 The Lord, the great hero, indeed wild with anger!
 Mezebbasa, indeed wild with anger!
 Shedukishara, indeed wild with anger!
 Nabû, the princely son, indeed wild with anger!

Marduk, the Babylonian god, is also depicted as angry and full of wrath:

[Fur]jious in the night, growing in the day:
 Whose anger is like a raging tempest ...
 In his fury not to be withstood, his rage the deluge ...
 The skies cannot sustain the weight of his hand ...¹⁰

However, Marduk's wrath is balanced by gentleness. The full text at the beginning of the poem reads:

[Fur]jious in the night, growing in the day:
 Whose anger is like a raging tempest,
 But whose breeze is sweet as the breath of morn.
 In his fury not to be withstood, his rage the deluge,
 Merciful in his feelings, his emotions relenting.
 The skies cannot sustain the weight of his hand,
 His gentle palm rescues the moribund.

The God of Israel also often acts in wrath and anger: "In fury you trod the earth, / in anger you threshed nations" (Hab. 3:12). In contrast to Marduk, whose anger and gentleness are balanced, Yhwh's anger is always a temporary phenomenon. While mercy and grace are God's properties, anger and wrath are transitory. It is Yhwh's attribute to be "slow to anger" (Ex. 34:6). "He does not retain his anger perpetually" (Mic. 7:18). Isaiah 57:16 adds in Yhwh's own words: "... nor will I for ever be angry".

Anger and wrath are not crimes among either gods or human beings. That Edom, according to Amos 1:11, is full of anger and wrath should not be considered blameworthy. However, gods and human beings should be "slow to anger" and should find an end to it. Here lies the difference with Edom. Whereas YHWH "does not retain his anger perpetually" (Mic. 7:18) and is not for ever angry (Isa. 57:16), Edom "maintained his

10 From the Poem of the Righteous Sufferer, 1.153 in Hallo (1997:487). See the analysis of the text in Franz (2003:52-54).

anger perpetually, and kept his wrath for ever” (Am. 1:11). Anger and wrath are ambiguous; they are criminal when they are allowed to dominate one’s actions.

4.5 Ammon (1:13-15)

The people of the Ammonites are threatened “because they have ripped open pregnant women in Gilead / in order to enlarge their territory” (v. 13). The aim of their action, “to enlarge their territory”, is not generally viewed as a “transgression”. Territorial expansion is the primary objective of warfare in antiquity. In some contexts, expanding one’s territory is even carried out under divine promise. YHWH promises his people: “I will cast out nations before you and enlarge your territory” (Ex. 34:24; Deut. 12:20; 19:8). The words are identical to those used in Amos 1:13.

The Moabite king Mesha boasts of having taken several cities such as Ataroth, Nebo, and Jahaz that were formerly part of Israel. He claims to have killed their populations and to have made people of his own territories live there.¹¹ For the ruler, the expansion of his territory is no crime or transgression, but rather the fulfilment of his royal duties.

If the objective, namely expanding territory, is not the issue, the means whereby it is achieved seems extremely problematic for us. We qualify ripping open pregnant women as “barbarities” and “brutal atrocity” (Paul 1991:68). The practice is often mentioned in the context of warfare. The prophet Elisha foresees that the Aramean king Hazael “will kill their (the Israelites’) young men with the sword, dash in pieces their little ones, and rip up their pregnant women”. He calls all this “the evil that you will do to the people of Israel”, and he weeps aloud. The king himself speaks of “this great thing” (2 Kings 8:12-13). The Israelite king Menahem is reported to have sacked a city named Tiphseh and to have “ripped open all the pregnant women in it” (2 Kings 15:16). The prophet Hosea announces the future fate of Samaria: “their little ones shall be dashed in pieces, and their pregnant women ripped open” (Hos. 14:1 [Engl. 13:16]). Other forms of violence against women and children are mentioned in Isaiah 13:16; Nahum 3:10, and Psalms 137:9.

It is evident that ripping open pregnant women and dashing infants into pieces are acts of violence. However, this does not necessarily imply that they are considered criminal acts. In some royal texts, it is possible to integrate violent actions into the image of the king as a hero. In a so-called *Heldenlied* (heroic poem), an unnamed ruler, probably the Assyrian king Tiglath-pileser I (1114-1076 bce), is characterized in the following words:

11 Lines 10-21 of the inscription of king Mesha, 2.23 in Hallo (2000:137-138).

“He slits the wombs of pregnant women; he blinds the infants; / He cuts the throats of their strong ones.”¹² For the Assyrian king, “such behavior was worthy of heroic adulation” (Paul 1991:68).

4.6 Moab (2:1-3)

Israel’s eastern neighbour Moab is condemned “because he burned to lime the bones of the king of Edom” (2:1). Moab is accused of desecrating the corpse of the king, most likely after it was disinterred (Paul 1991:72). A regular interment and the inviolability of the tomb are highly valued in the cultures of antiquity. Grave inscriptions, in both Israel¹³ and her neighbouring cultures, include curses to protect the grave.¹⁴ Opening graves and spreading the bones is a heavy threat uttered by YHWH himself against the rulers of Judah, the political and ideological elites, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem:

The bones of the kings of Judah, the bones of its officials, the bones of the priests, the bones of the prophets, and the bones of the inhabitants of Jerusalem shall be brought out of their tombs; and they shall be spread before the sun and the moon and all the host of heaven ...; and they shall not be gathered or buried; they shall be like dung on the surface of the ground (Jer. 8:1-2).

Desecrating corpses is an act of violence. However, in some instances, this act is evaluated as one of legitimate violence. When he opened the tombs which he saw in Bethel, took out the bones, and burned them on the altar of the high place, king Josiah was not committing a crime, but acting “according to the word of Yhwh” (2 Kings 23:16). In the description of the treatment of the tombs and bones of the king of Elam by Josiah’s contemporary, king Ashurbanipal of Assyria (668-ca.-630 bce), this is a purposeful and legitimate act: “I took their bones to the land of Assyria, imposing restlessness upon their ghosts. I deprived them of ancestral offerings (and) libations of water.”¹⁵

4.7 Ambiguous acts and their condemnation as crimes

In summary: The majority of the acts of the peoples condemned in Amos 1-2 are ambiguous. “Threshing” one’s enemy; deportations and slave trade following victory in war; acting in wrath and anger; expanding one’s

12 Quoted from Cogan (1983:756).

13 See the “Royal Steward Inscription” from Jerusalem, 2.54 in Hallo (2000:180).

14 See the Phoenician sarcophagi of Tabnit and 'Eshmun'azor, kings of Sidon, 2.56 and 2.57 in Hallo (2000:181-183).

15 Quoted from Olyan (2011:215).

territory by conquest, and even barbarities such as ripping open pregnant women and desecrating corpses are viewed as legitimate acts of violence in some contexts. Everything depends on the perspective. In the eyes of the victors, performing such acts adds to their reputation. These deeds also turn into atrocities of warfare (Vieweger 1994:108, note 28). Paul correctly underlines this ambivalence when he comments on Tiglath-pileser's heroic poem on the king who "slits the wombs of pregnant women": "For Tiglatpileser I, such behavior was worthy of heroic adulation; for Amos, it was an example of a brutal act of savage and unforgivable cruelty committed against defenseless human beings ..." (Paul 1991:68).

The author – whether the prophet himself or a later redactor – of Amos 1-2 deliberately sides with the victims. The author's first and decisive step is to qualify the acts of the peoples and their rulers as "transgressions" or "crimes". Cruel, but legitimate acts of warfare are turned into crimes. This change of perspective enables one to judge these acts as violations of "a kind of conventional or customary law about international conduct" (Barton 2003:113). In a second step, the prophet identifies the perspective of the victims with God's perspective. The actions of the rulers of the foreign nations in Amos 1-2 are qualified as transgressions against Yhwh, because they are viewed from the perspective of the victims and not from that of the kings and rulers. Ambiguous acts are turned into unambiguous crimes, because God sides with the victims.

5. BREAKING TREATIES

Two oracles mention the breaking of treaties by the transgressors. Tyre is threatened, "because they did not remember the covenant of brotherhood" (1:9), and Edom, "because he pursued his brother with the sword" (1:11). The continuation of these words in English versions is usually translated by "and cast off all pity" (KJV, RSV, NRSV). However, the verb *šihēt* does not mean "to cast off", but "to destroy". The object *rah^amîm* in documents from Elephantine (AP 30,23f par. 31,23 = TAD A.4.7 l. 23f) clearly means "friends" or "allies". Amos 1:11 should probably be translated as: "because he pursued his brother with the sword / and utterly destroyed his allies/friends".¹⁶

The oracle against Tyre might allude to the treaty relations between David and Hiram of Tyre (2 Sam. 5:11; 1 Kings 5:15 [Engl. 5:1]); those between Solomon and Hiram (1 Kings 5:15, 26 [Engl. 5:1, 12]), or the marriage of king

16 Following Fishbane (1970:316).

Ahab of Israel to Jezebel, daughter of the king of Tyre (1 Kings 16:31).¹⁷ However, as the treaty partner is not identified, the indictment could also refer to Tyre's treaty with another nation (Paul 1991:61).

While relations between Tyre and Israel are always merely diplomatic, those between Edom and Israel are of a different nature. Their forefathers Esau and Jacob are regarded as twins (Gen. 25-36; Num. 20:14; Deut. 2:4; 23:8; Ob. 10, 12; Mal. 1:2-3). It is thus likely that, in Amos 1:11, "brother" is not used in the diplomatic, but rather in the ethnic sense of nations bound together by some (perhaps fictitious) blood ties.

Do the oracles in Amos 1:9-12 refer to treaty relations of Tyre and Edom with Israel or with other nations? In any case, breaking treaties in antiquity is unambiguously qualified as a crime. A typical example of a treaty between two (small) states is the Sefire inscription dating from the mid-8th century, stele I.¹⁸ The first section introduces the contracting parties. The second section mentions the gods who witness the treaty. The treaty is concluded in the presence of the gods of the two parties:

All the god[s of KTK and the gods of Ar]pad (are) witnesses (to it).
Open your eyes, (O gods!), to gaze upon the treaty of Barga'yah
[with Mati'el, the king of Arpad] (face A, lines 10-14a).

The ensuing longest section contains curses against the violation of the treaty. Face B of the stele underlines the sacred character of the treaty. The entire written document takes up 111 lines. Not more than twenty-five of these are dedicated to the stipulations of the treaty, and are placed near the end of the text. One almost gets the impression that the sacred character of the treaty and its inviolability are more important than the stipulations.

Upon reading the indictments against Tyre and Edom in light of this treaty – or many others documented from the ancient world –, it becomes clear that breaking treaties with their "brothers" could never be judged as something positive. A king may be glorified for brutal acts of violence, but never for breaking treaties. Breaking treaties in all contexts is unambiguously a crime against gods and human beings.

The charges against Tyre and Edom differ in character from those against the other nations and their leaders. Whereas the acts of the latter are ambiguous and only judged as crimes by the prophet, the deeds of

17 "Sidonians" in the verse means "Phoenicians"; Jezebel's father Ethbaal was clearly king of Tyre; see Noth (1968:354).

18 2.82 in Hallo (2000:213-215).

Tyre and Edom are unambiguously transgressions against the divinely guaranteed order. It has long been suggested, on the grounds of form, that the oracles against Tyre and Edom (and the one against Judah) are later additions to the composition of oracles against the nations (Jeremias 1995:10f). The different character of the transgressions supports this hypothesis.

6. A SHORT CONCLUSION

With the exception of breaking treaties, all the deeds committed by the nations are ambiguous in character. Their qualification is a question not only of material – political, imperial – power, but also of the power of definition. The author of Amos 1-2 clearly takes only one perspective, namely that of the victims of such acts of violence. In their eyes, all such deeds are neither deeds of glory nor signs of hope and encouragement; they are simply “crimes”. Amos not only personally sides with the victims, but he also identifies the victims’ perspective with God’s perspective. Amos speaks in God’s name. For him, the violent deeds of the nations are “crimes” not only in the eyes of the victims, but also in God’s eyes.

The Book of Amos rests on the identification of YHWH with the victims. In Amos 1-2, these are the victims of international warfare; in the ensuing chapters, beginning with the section on Israel in 2:6-16, the victims are victims of social violence. Like the military violence in the eyes of the nations’ kings, the social violence condemned in the ensuing chapters of the Book of Amos are, in the eyes of the mighty and rich perpetrators, not viewed as a transgression; it is judged as such by the prophet. Judging the acts of the nations as crimes and bringing them together with God’s will provide solid ground for the Book of Amos. God is always on the side of the victims of both military aggression and social violence.

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