

## Reappraising the historical context of Amos

PETRUS D. F. STRIJDOM (UNIVERSITY OF FORT HARE)

### ABSTRACT

*The dominant communis opinio dating of Amos' prophetic activity in 760-750 B.C.E.—which is often entirely based on the reference in the Amos text to king Jeroboam II's reign (Amos 1:1 and 7:10-11)—is critically questioned by linking a fresh interpretation of the seemingly obscure, but significant evidence in Amos 6:2 with the western campaigns of Tiglath-Pileser III and with other historically pointed allusions in the text. This leads to the conclusion that several recorded prophetic words of Amos become lucid and more intelligible at a significantly later date between 738-732 B.C.E..*

### A INTRODUCTION

This study aims to illuminate the historical placement of the society-denouncing language ascribed to the prophet Amos, as part of the broader research question into the socio-historical circumstances and societal aspects that may have given rise to such stinging condemnations. The analysis of a socio-historical setting as dysfunctional as the one apparently reflected in the Amos text should include the *longue durée* angles of geographical data, land use, social structures and cultures of peoples.<sup>1</sup> However, the scope of the current examination is limited to various *histoire événementielle*, or "salient history" perspectives, focusing particularly on major political events. In other words, an attempt is made to contribute to the reconstruction of the world which produced the text of Amos by plotting a number of noteworthy pointers towards a chronological-historical contextualisation of the prophet.<sup>2</sup> Detailed analysis of a few otherwise hardly comprehensible allusions, clues and hints in the Amos text will be used in the process.

### B AMOS 1:1 AND THE ESTABLISHED *COMMUNIS OPINIO* DATE OF AMOS

The prophetic activity of Amos is widely accepted to be fairly easily datable on the basis of chronological data given in the superscript to the book. This editorial dating of his words in the time of Uzziah of Judah and Jeroboam (II) of Is-

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<sup>1</sup> For an attempt to address such aspects see Petrus D. F. Strijdom, "What Tekoa did to Amos." *OTE* 9/2 (1996): 273-293.

<sup>2</sup> All aspects of prophetic contextuality remain crucial; cf. Wilhelm J. Wessels, "n Verkenning van Tendense in Profetenavorsing." *OTE* 22/1 (2009): 223.

rael is granted such historical value that most histories of Ancient Israel<sup>3</sup> use the Amos text as key source for the reconstruction of Israelite history during the reign of Jeroboam II. Jagersma says, for example: "Thanks above all to the information in the book of Amos, we know something more about the domestic situation in the time of king Jeroboam II."<sup>4</sup>

Because Amos' activity is almost exclusively linked to the kingdom of Israel,<sup>5</sup> the prophet's public prophetic utterances are accordingly placed within the chronological limits of Jeroboam II's regnal years, 787-747 B.C.E.. This date is seen as confirmed by factors such as the reference to Jeroboam in the biographical section, 7:10-17, the silence of the text on the state of anarchy which followed Jeroboam's death<sup>6</sup> and the correlation of Jeroboam's conquests mentioned in 2 Kings 14:25 with references to conquered places in Amos 6:2 and 6:13.<sup>7</sup> In this near-axiomatic reconstruction the multiple references in the text that suggest a rich upper class and general economic progress, has been coupled with ease to Jeroboam's so-called golden years of "great prosperity and peace."<sup>8</sup> Reference to wealth and political stability in foreign affairs is seen as a reflection of the prosperity and grandeur that was introduced by the eminently successful Jeroboam II, but often without due recognition of the concur-

<sup>3</sup> See e.g. Martin Noth, *The History of Israel* (London: A & C Black, 1960), 249; Julius Wellhausen, "Geschichte Israels," in *Grundrisse zum Alten Testament* (ed. Rudolph Smend; München: Chr Kaiser, 1965), 45; Eduard Meyer, *Der Orient vom zwölften bis zur Mitte des achten Jahrhunderts* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1975), 355-356; Herbert Donner, "The Separate States of Israel and Judah," in *Israelite and Judaeon History* (eds. John H. Hayes and Max Miller; London: SCM, 1977), 414; John Bright, *A History of Israel* (London: SCM, 1980), 257-258; Siegfried Herrmann, *A History of Israel in Old Testament Times* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981), 228, 233; Henk Jagersma, *A History of Israel in the Old Testament Period* (London: SCM, 1982), 150; Alberto Soggin, *A History of Israel* (London: SCM, 1984), 216 and Israel Finkelstein & Neil A. Silberman, *The Bible Unearthed* (New York: The Free Press, 2001), 212.

<sup>4</sup> Jagersma, *History*, 150.

<sup>5</sup> Recently also Izabela Jaruzelska, *Amos and the Officialdom in the Kingdom of Israel: The Socio-Economic Position of the Officials in the Light of the Biblical, the Epigraphic and Archaeological Evidence* (Poznan, Poland: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu im Adama Mickiewicza), 1998; Finkelstein and Silberman, *Bible Unearthed*, 212.

<sup>6</sup> Theodore H. Robinson, *Die Zwölf Kleinen Propheten: Hosea bis Micha* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1954).

<sup>7</sup> Some have even dated the earthquake of Amos 1:1 (see Soggin, *History*, 218-219.; James L. Mays, *Amos*, London: SCM, 1969, 20) and the eclipse of the sun in Amos 8:9 (see Robinson, *Zwölf*, 71).

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Jagersma, *History*, 151 and Finkelstein and Silberman, *Bible Unearthed*, 212-213.

rent social injustice,<sup>9</sup> perhaps even the seeds of resistance and subversion, that is clearly and prominently portrayed in the Amos text.

It is vital to recognise that such dating arguments are usually raised in order to confirm or define more exactly a date which is largely perceived to have been predetermined by the mention of Jeroboam II.<sup>10</sup> The perceived predetermination is also not surprising, given the prevailing scholarly view that:

Die einzige konkrete Angabe darüber...ist die Bemerkung in der Überschrift...dass es in die Regierungszeit des Königs Jerobeam (II) fiel.<sup>11</sup>

In the process some scholars have dated Amos' activity around 760 B.C.E.<sup>12</sup> while others feel that 760-750 B.C.E. is a safer position.<sup>13</sup> Watts places Amos in 752 B.C.E., while Morgenstern is rather specific with 'the day of the fall equinox of 752/1,' which is also regarded by Albright as a "plausible" beginning date for Amos' prophetic career.<sup>14</sup> Several scholars arrive at around 750 B.C.E.,<sup>15</sup> whereas only a few would situate Amos after 745 B.C.E.,<sup>16</sup> with

<sup>9</sup> See Francis I. Andersen & David N. Freedman, *Hosea: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 1980), 33; Herbert Donner, *Geschichte des Volkes Israel und seiner Nachbarn in Grundzügen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1987), 284 and Harry T. Frank, *An Archaeological Companion to the Bible* (London: SCM, 1972), 173, who alludes to "flawed prosperity." John H. Hayes, *Amos the Eighth-Century Prophet* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1988), 27, sees a situation of great political and economic decline.

<sup>10</sup> Rolf Rendtorff, *The Old Testament: An Introduction* (London: SCM, 1985), 223.

<sup>11</sup> Martin Noth, *Aufsätze zur biblischen Landes- und Altertumskunde* (ed. Hans W. Wolff; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1971), 210.

<sup>12</sup> See for example Wilhelm Rudolph, *Joel-Amos-Obadja-Jona* (Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1971), 95; James L. Crenshaw, *Story and Faith. A Guide to the Old Testament* (New York: Macmillan, 1986), 252; Werner H. Schmidt, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (London: SCM, 1984), 196; Hans W. Wolff, *Joel and Amos* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), 124; Jörg Jeremias *Der Prophet Amos* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1995), XV; David Pleins, *The Social Visions of the Hebrew Bible* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 368.

<sup>13</sup> Rudolph Smend, *Die Entstehung des Alten Testaments* (Stuttgart: W Kohlhammer, 1981), 175; Robinson, *Zwölf*, 71 and Otto Kaiser, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1973), 216. Francis I. Andersen & David N. Freedman (*Amos: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*; New York: Doubleday, 1989, 19) thinks not later than 765-755 B.C.E..

<sup>14</sup> John D.W. Watts, *Vision and Prophecy in Amos* (Michigan: Eerdmans, 1980), 35; Julius Morgenstern, *Amos Studies* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College, 1941), 124, 127-179; William F. Albright, *The Biblical Period from Abraham to Ezra* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), 71.

<sup>15</sup> Erling Hammershaimb, *The Book of Amos: A Commentary* (London: Basil Blackwell, 1967), 13; Theo C. Vriezen & Adam S. van der Woude, *De Literatuur van Oud-*

Albright considering 738 B.C.E. as Amos' "last datable prophecy" and Coote settling for a context between 750-725 B.C.E..<sup>17</sup>

Even critical interpreters with a sensitivity for redaction-historical stratification and editorial ideology<sup>18</sup> such as Hans Walter Wolff, follow the dominant scholarly reconstruction of Amos' time as largely based on the "Jeroboam factor" in the text, despite his view that the editorial dating in 1:1 and mention of Jeroboam in 7:10-17 are "inauthentic" later additions to the book.<sup>19</sup>

The overwhelming firmness of this "Jeroboam-based" dating of Amos<sup>20</sup> resulted in the disregard of other significant factors. For example, the rule of Judaeen king Uzziah/Azariah, who is mentioned before Jeroboam in the superscript, and whose reign according to some only ended in 736 B.C.E., has been neglected. Obscure historical hints in the text that may challenge the traditional date of Amos have not received adequate consideration. The popular "Jeroboam-based" reconstructions are therefore often interspersed with excessive generalisations showing little proof of historical precision.<sup>21</sup>

It is possible that the references to Jeroboam in the Amos text form part of a redaction-historical layer which displays deuteronomistic traits and a

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*Israel* (Wassenaar: Servire, 1973), 244; Joseph Blenkinsopp, *A History of Prophecy in Israel* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1983), 93; Donner, *Geschichte*, 281; Bernhard W. Anderson, *The Living World of the Old Testament* (London: Longman, 1988), 270 and Hayes, *Amos*, 47.

<sup>16</sup> Richard S. Cripps, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Amos* (London: SPCK, 1960), xxi and Adolphe Lods, *The Prophets and the Rise of Judaism* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1950), 231.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Albright, *Biblical Period*, 71 and Robert B. Coote, *Amos among the Prophets* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981), 3.

<sup>18</sup> Prophetic texts are ideologically reworked products, placed within a chosen framework and questions of their dating and composition remain important (see Wessels, "Verkenning," 208, 210, 212-213). It is illusory to suppose that we can gain information on Amos and his message without working our way back through an editorial history of several centuries (Blenkinsopp, *Prophecy*, 93).

<sup>19</sup> Wolff, *Joel and Amos*.

<sup>20</sup> Recent departures from the traditional position include Joyce R. Wood, *Amos in Song and Book Culture* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), who proposes that Amos' poems originated during the reign of Manasseh in seventh-century Jerusalem, and James R. Linville, *Amos and the Cosmic Imagination* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2008), who postulates that the entire Amos text is the literary product of the Persian-era community in Judah.

<sup>21</sup> Recent exceptions include the Israelite history by Finkelstein and Silberman, *Bible Unearthed*, and the detailed socio-economic reconstruction of Amos' time by Jarużelska, *Amos*.

strong anti-Bethel sentiment.<sup>22</sup> The precise and perhaps overcomplicated six stage redaction-historical study by Wolff may have contributed to perceptions of this methodology as the "most complex difficulty" or "more complicated than once imagined."<sup>23</sup> Scholars also produce diverse results with the method. But Coote's three-stage rendering of Wolff, Amos-Josiah-Postexilic, is very useful due to his elimination of the doubtful "Amos school" and "Bethel interpretation" hypotheses and his use of sociological criteria.<sup>24</sup> Following this line of enquiry, the oracles of Amos which belong to the first redactional layer, do not mention Jeroboam II at all and also cast doubt in other respects on the solid traditional dating of 760-750 B.C.E..

Several less prominent historical allusions or hints or clues in the Amos text may point to a later dating. The only control over naïve or purely theoretical reconstruction is, after all, the interpreter's attention to "every scrap of evidence, and his nicety in interpreting it."<sup>25</sup>

## **C THE SIGNIFICANCE OF OBSCURE HISTORICAL ALLUSIONS, CLUES AND HINTS IN THE AMOS TEXT**

### **1 Amos 6:2 and the overpowering of Calneh, Hamath and Gath**

- a Go and look at the city of Calneh
- b and go on from there to Hamath the Great
- c and then go down to Gath of the Philistines.
- d Are not their kingdoms stronger than your kingdoms?

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<sup>22</sup> Redaction-historical study has grown since Victor Maag, *Text, Wortschatz und Begriffswelt des Buches Amos* (Leiden: EJ Brill, 1951), the seminal article of Werner H. Schmidt, "Die deuteronomistische Redaktion des Amosbuches," *ZAW* 77 (1965): 168-193, and many subsequent studies, including Ina Willi-Plein, *Vorformen der Schriftexegese innerhalb des Alten Testaments: Untersuchungen zum literarischen Werden der auf Amos, Hosea, und Micha zurückgehenden Bücher im Hebräischen Zwölfprophetenbuch*, BZAW 123 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1971); Wolff, *Joel and Amos*; Klaus Koch & Mitarbeitenden, *Amos: Untersucht mit den Methoden einer strukturalen Formgeschichte*, AOAT 30 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1976); Coote, *Amos*; Hartmut Gese, "Komposition bei Amos," *SVT* 32 (1981): 74-95 and Jeremias, *Amos*. Increasingly the redactional role of alleged glosses is interpreted and not simply deleted as non-genuine after the older literary critics.

<sup>23</sup> See Christoph Hardmeier, "Old Testament Exegesis and Linguistic Narrative Research," *Poetics* 15 (1986): 89-109 and Norman K. Gottwald, *The Hebrew Bible* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), in that order.

<sup>24</sup> Coote, *Amos*, regards all references to Jeroboam II as seventh-century supplements to the eighth-century oracles of Amos.

<sup>25</sup> Simon B. Parker, "Revolutions in Northern Israel," in *SBL Seminar Papers* (Chicago: Scholars Press, 1976), 311-321.

e Are not their territories larger than yours?<sup>26</sup> (Amos 6:2)

In the broader macro-context of the entire Amos communiqué, as well as the meso-context of the 6:1-14 unit, it is highly probable that Amos 6:2 refers to conquered territories that are mentioned as examples of what lies in store for Israel. Hence the certainty of Israel's coming disaster before the same bar of justice as her enemies is elsewhere spelled out in clear terms such as the funeral cry (הו, 6:1), the terrible time of disaster (characterised as יום רָע, 6:3), exile (יָגְלוּ בְּרֹאשׁ גְּלִים, 6:7a), the handing over of the city and its contents to the enemy (הִסְגִּירְתִּי עִיר וּמְלָאָהּ, 6:8), death of entire families (6:10), destruction of large and small houses into rubble (6:11) and occupation and oppression of the country by a foreign army (6:14).

When interpreting Amos 6:2, many exegetes instantly rule out the obvious significance of Tiglath-Pileser III's capturing of Calneh in 738 B.C.E. as potentially alluded to, because of its chronological uneasiness in the light of a fixed Jeroboam-based date of Amos. Bulkeley may serve as typical in stating:

Tiglath-Pileser III captured...Calneh in 738 B.C.E., but the date of Calneh's fall makes it difficult to interpret Amos 6:2 as spoken in this form in the reign of Jeroboam.<sup>27</sup>

Various efforts have thus been offered to explain this uneasiness away. Maag and others argue, for example, that "the utterance makes good sense if it is regarded as a quotation...",<sup>28</sup> but there is no indication in the text, as is clearly done elsewhere in Amos, that that is indeed the case.

Characteristics of its style and content resemble the discourse in Isaiah 10:9-11. There the Assyrian intention of conquering Jerusalem, like other major cities, is worded as if uttered by Assyria: "Is not Calno like Carchemish,

<sup>26</sup> A sensible translation of this much debated phrase (6:2d-e), taken from *Translator's Old Testament: The Book of Amos* (London: British and Foreign Bible Society, no date), no pages. A reversal of pronominal suffixes and insertion of pronoun, "ye", is not necessary if the preposition "min" is attached to the first instead of the second "gəbûl", a simpler way of obtaining the same result (Cf. Cripps, *Amos*, 204). The "hā" followed by "im" indicates the double question (Reiner-Friedemann F. Edel, *Hebräisch-Deutsche Präparation zu den "Kleinen Propheten" I* (Marburg: Ökumenischer Verlag Dr. R. F. Edel, 1968), 55).

<sup>27</sup> Tim Bulkeley, *Amos: Hypertext Bible Commentary* (Auckland: Hypertext Bible, 2005).

<sup>28</sup> Maag, *Text*, 39; Mays, *Amos*, 115; Koch & Mitarbeidern, *Amos Untersucht*, 184; Jan de Waard & William A. Smalley, *A Translator's Handbook on the Book of Amos*, (Stuttgart: United Bible Societies, 1979), 126 and Keith Beebe, *The Old Testament: An Introduction to its Literary, Historical and Religious Traditions* (Belmont: California-Dickenson, 1970), 224.

Hamath like Arpad, Samaria like Damascus? As my hand seized kingdoms...whose images were greater..., shall I not do to Jerusalem...as I have done to Samaria?" Here the explicit conquests of specific cities between 717 and 732 B.C.E. are impressed upon Jerusalem's citizens as examples of what they can expect.<sup>29</sup>

Was the rhetorical staging of annihilated place names as curses or effect-inducing examples<sup>30</sup> typical in ancient near eastern contexts? It is well known in Assyrian war propaganda and is also present elsewhere in Amos (see 2:11 e.g.).

With Albright, Coote and Roberts, partly supported by Meyer, Hammershaimb and Cazelles, the place names in Amos 6:2 are deemed important historical references to events that might help clarify the historical background of the prophet Amos and his text.<sup>31</sup>

The authenticity of 6:2 is, however, seriously questioned by the majority of scholars,<sup>32</sup> and mainly because of their dating of the events referred to, which at first glance seem irreconcilable with the traditional Jeroboam-based dating of Amos. Others take 6:2 to be authentic, but disregard on chronological grounds the possibility of an allusion to the conquest of Calneh and Hamath by Tiglath-Pileser III in 738 B.C.E..<sup>33</sup> Again their interpretation is determined by the Deuteronomist's dating of Amos in the time of Jeroboam II (787-747 B.C.E.).

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<sup>29</sup> Amos 6:2 also recalls parallel passages in 2 Kings and Isaiah where an Assyrian official is pictured as conveying to the Judean king: "Did anyone save Samaria? You have heard what an Assyrian emperor does to any country he decides to destroy. Do you think that you can escape? Where are the kings of the cities of Hamath, Arpad, ... and Ivvah"? See 2 Kings 18:34/Isaiah 36:19; 2 Kings 19:11, 13/Isaiah 37:11, 13. See also Jeremiah 7:12, 14.

<sup>30</sup> See e.g. Jeremiah 26:6b. Are the names of Sodom and Gomorrah used to achieve a similar effect, for example in Isaiah 1:9 and Amos 4:11?

<sup>31</sup> Albright, *Biblical Period*, 71, Coote, *Amos*, 21, Jim J. M. Roberts, "Amos 6.1-7," in *Understanding the Word. Essays in Honor of Bernhard W Anderson*, (ed. James T. Butler, Edgar W. Conrad and Ben C. Ollenburger; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1985), 155-166; Meyer, *Orient*, 359 and Cazelles, quoted in A. Graeme Auld, *Amos* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1986), 44, 49.

<sup>32</sup> Including Wellhausen, *Geschichte*; William R. Harper, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Amos and Hosea* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1979); Cripps, *Amos*, 204; Willi-Plein, *Vorformen*, 41; Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 270-271, 274-275 and Ludwig Markert, "Amos/Amosbuch," *Theologische Realenzyklopädie* (TRE) 2 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1978).

<sup>33</sup> See Rudolph, *Joel-Amos*; Hammershaimb, *Amos*, 99 and Robinson, *Zwölf*, 94 – who see it as referring to the weakening of Calneh and Hamath by Shalmaneser in 858-846 B.C.E..

Some scholars regard 6:2 as a later, deuteronomistic supplement on the basis that its formulation as direct address interrupts the sequence of participial forms that characterise the original didactic style of the woe-oracles.<sup>34</sup> However, later studies illuminated syntactic aspects of woe-oracles, showing that the combination of direct address (הוֹי) and *participia* is natural and clearly applied elsewhere.<sup>35</sup> It is worth noting that upholders of the former argument retain two similar interruptions of participial forms by direct address in 5:18b and 6:3 as genuine Amos words, citing them in those particular instances as brilliant examples of the creative power of Amos in reshaping and expanding traditional genres!<sup>36</sup>

A few remarks may be appropriate in this regard. *Firstly*, Amos' woe oracles are very likely freely fashioned transformations of ancient basic forms, irrespective whether such forms were originally paramilitary curses, cultic curses, funerary laments or pedagogical wisdom sayings.<sup>37</sup> Amos' style shows a preference for rhetorically effective direct address forms such as vocatives, imperatives and interrogatives which are here used in combination with what Wolff over-restrictively terms the "definite elements of the genre of the woe-oracle."<sup>38</sup> *Secondly*, the argument of Wolff and others partly rests on the perceived impossibility of reconciling historical allusions such as the conquests of Calneh, Hamath and Gath with the assured *communis opinio* dating of Amos "around 760." Hence Wolff very aptly admits that "it is more difficult to explain how the present text could have arisen secondarily than to interpret it as it stands in light of eighth-century history."<sup>39</sup> That considerations of history or chronology do not necessitate an arguing away of this verse, but in fact brings it to light, will be argued shortly. *Thirdly*, a close reading of the passage with due attention to the stylistic features that initially enhanced the persuasive power of the spoken and written word,<sup>40</sup> may open perspectives that safeguard

<sup>34</sup> See Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 274 and Willi-Plein, *Vorformen*, 40.

<sup>35</sup> See Roberts, "Amos 6" and Waldemar Janzen, Review of Christoph Hardmeier, *Texttheorie und biblische Exegese*, *JBL* 98 (1979): 592-594.

<sup>36</sup> See Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 271-272, who appropriates an earlier idea of Erhardt Gerstenberger, "The Woe-Oracles of the Prophets," *JBL* 81 (1962): 253-254.

<sup>37</sup> Petrus D. F. Strijdom, "Social Injustice and the Prophet Amos," D.Th. diss., University of Stellenbosch, 1996, 186.

<sup>38</sup> Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 254.

<sup>39</sup> Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 90 and 271.

<sup>40</sup> Recognition for recovering Amos' literary skill is due to earlier scholars such as Wellhausen, Harper and other literary critics of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century – see Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (London: SCM, 1979), 397. Today his amazing power of speech and expression, the vivid sayings with the wealth of imagery as well as the notability of style, diction and rhetoric, expressed in artistic balance and biting irony, is recognised – to the extent that our key evidence for him is as extraordinary skilful communicator. See Cornelis Van Leeu-



against possible historicist and formalist misreading. In ancient texts irony often eludes modern readers. Yet, it can be maintained that the passage under discussion exhibits a peculiar tone of sarcastic irony, conceivably even "the clearest example" of unmistakable irony in the book of Amos.<sup>41</sup> Here, master of irony, Amos,<sup>42</sup> describes the inflated self-esteem of his audience, only to acknowledge with sarcasm that they will be accorded priority in being marched off as slaves into exile.

Amos 6:2 makes not only good sense on the basis of its coherence and logical consistency with the rest of the discourse in 6:1-14, but in fact forms a key element of the argument. A subtle, implicit, indirect unity is created below the surface. Points are raised in 6:1 and 6:13 which are taken up in the remainder of the discourse to hit the audience with its own proofs and certainties.<sup>43</sup> In 6:1,13 Amos sketches the pride and secure feeling, built on the strength and defensibility of Jerusalem's fortifications and Samaria's strongholds (6:1), as well as the rejoicing and boasting about military strength that defeated Lodebar and Karnaim (6:13). This is depicted as euphoria which precedes the coming disaster. Especially in 6:2, 3 and 14 the justification of this pride and secure feeling is questioned,<sup>44</sup> trivialised, and shown to be self-delusion. It is primarily achieved by the prophet's sober reference to the historical fate of other cities (6:2) that should teach those who can see that Israel will receive no different treatment,<sup>45</sup> and that the *יִם הַרְעָה* which is already secretly feared, is unavoidably (6:3) bringing a foreign military power to occupy and oppress the entire country (6:14).

There can be no doubt that the audience was expected to be well aware of what happened at Calneh, Hamath and Gath.<sup>46</sup> It seems a typical Amosian stylistic feature to invite, even demand that the audience use their imagination

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wen, *Amos* (Nijkerk: Callenbach, 1985), 15; Rudolph, *Joel-Amos*, 97; Schmidt, *Introduction*, 196; Beebe, *Introduction*, 222 and Auld, *Amos*, 73.

<sup>41</sup> See e.g. Robert Martin-Achard & Paul Re'emi, *Amos and Lamentations* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 47.

<sup>42</sup> Other clear usage of irony in Amos include 3:12, the ironical use of priestly torah in 4:4, the ironical question in 6:12 and ironical employment of doxologies, carefully placed at the climax of attacks on the cult to turn cult-oriented hymnic language against itself. See further Strijdom, "Social Injustice," 188, n 26.

<sup>43</sup> Artur Weiser, *Das Buch der zwölf kleinen Propheten 1* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1963), 175.

<sup>44</sup> Weiser, *Buch*, 176: "Die Berechtigung des Stolzes wird in Frage gestellt."

<sup>45</sup> In the eyes of God, Israel is just like the Ethiopians (Amos 9:7) and qualifies for the same treatment as her two foremost enemies, the Philistines and Syrians, mentioned first in Amos 1.

<sup>46</sup> Rudolph, *Joel-Amos*, 219 and Hammershaimb, *Amos*, 97.

to make connections and fill gaps of this nature.<sup>47</sup> As elsewhere, it is here done by drawing them into making their own interpretation of what is being said.<sup>48</sup> Amos wants them to conclude: What happened to Calneh and Hamath and Gath, that were grand and powerful, will inevitably happen to the people of Israel and Judah. Jerusalem and Samaria with their surrounding territories are neither stronger nor larger than those notable addresses, hence if those could be destroyed, reduced, or robbed of their independence, so can Israel and Judah. There is no rational basis for the false sense of security that still pervaded the ruling classes in the two cities. The context of his discourse (6:1-14) would have left them no other interpretation.

The centrality and essentiality of 6:2 all the more stands out when the following factors are considered: (1) it forms part of the greater rhetorical unit<sup>49</sup> of 5:18-6:14 with its central theme of Israel's reliance on false security,<sup>50</sup> (2) the remarkable parallels between 6:1-14 and the יְהוָה oracle, 5:18-27<sup>51</sup> and (3) Amos' characteristically patterned semantic recursion to maintain continuity and cohesion in very much larger patterns using themes rather than words or clauses.<sup>52</sup>

In the past verdicts about the "prehistory" of the text or endeavours to disentangle the layers of textual tradition were often based on a supposed lack of meaningful relationships within a given discourse. More recently, however, scholars are more careful and few would now dare say that meaningful relationships between textual elements do not exist simply because they have not yet discovered them.<sup>53</sup>

In summary then, the "authenticity" of 6:2 cannot be questioned on form-critical, syntactical, stylistic or structural grounds. It will further be argued that chronological argument cannot challenge its "authenticity" either.

<sup>47</sup> Obscure language abounds in Amos, especially in the first oracle against Israel (2:6-16) where punishment is expressed in terms of an overfull cart pressing down and the crushing of a threshing sledge. Congruent with the deliberate opaqueness of language sometimes used in the Old Testament, Amos's God-talk often consists in hints rather than forecasts (Auld, *Amos*, 73).

<sup>48</sup> De Waard & Smalley, *Translator's Handbook*, 7-8.

<sup>49</sup> Macro-structural text analysis has become increasingly important. See Hardmeier "OT Exegesis," 89-109, the literature cited there and the important recent study of Karl Möller, *A Prophet in Debate: The Rhetoric of Persuasion in the book of Amos* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003).

<sup>50</sup> De Waard & Smalley, *Translator's Handbook*, 195, 209; William A. Smalley, "Recursion Patterns and the Sectioning of Amos," *BT* 30/1 (1979): 122.

<sup>51</sup> De Waard & Smalley, *Translator's Handbook*, 115-116.

<sup>52</sup> Smalley, "Recursion Patterns," 118-127.

<sup>53</sup> Jan de Waard, "The Chiastic Structure of Amos V 1-17," *VT* 27/2 (1977): 171.

The Amos 6 discourse with its expectation of the reign of violence and long period of  $\text{סָרָה}$  (6:3), the exiling of the upper classes (6:7), the delivering up of Samaria and its contents to an enemy (6:8), large-scale killing of people and the escape of only a few (6:9-10), destruction of great and small houses (6:11), and the coming of a nation that will oppress them from the pass of Hamath to the *wadi* of the Arabah (6:14), must be read against the milieu of the entire Amos text. It then emerges that Amos expects Israel to become the victim of an overwhelming process in which all attempts at resistance or escape would be futile (cf. Amos 2:14-16; 3:12; 5:19; 9:2-4) and the scale of which would be so great that the whole of Syria-Palestine would be forced to submit to it. Damascus would be destroyed and the Aramaeans exiled to Kir in Mesopotamia (1:5), the four remaining cities of the Philistine Pentapolis (1:10) and the principal Edomite cities of Teman and Bozrah would all be destroyed (1:11,12). Rabbah, the capital of Ammon, would befall the same fate and their king and princes would be exiled (1:13-15). Moab is also expected to "die" while their ruler and other leaders would be killed and Kerioth burnt down (2:1-3). Jerusalem and Judah would be burnt (2:5) whereas the total invasion (3:11), looting (3:11), crushing (2:13), destruction and exiling (4:3; 5:5; 6:7) of Israel is repeatedly painted in vivid language. In fact the whole of the Ancient Orient would be affected by this process and it would prove to be not a mere passing storm, but a historical turning point of lasting significance. For Israel it would mean the end (8:2), total obliteration (9:1-4) and being blotted out from the pages of history (9:8).

Against this background, the three cities and events in their history alluded to in 6:2, are crucial particulars to be understood. Why are these three particular cities singled out as examples for the listeners? What do Calneh, Hamath and Gath have in common? It seems as if a fate has befallen them that is undoubtedly expected by Amos to befall Israel. The verse can only be explained as the loss or reduction or at least the threatening of these territories.<sup>54</sup> The prophet says indirectly that Israel would experience a fate comparable with that of three cities in Syria and Philistia that were apparently unable to resist an invasion.

*Calneh* (Akkadian Kullani) was the capital city of a state in northern Syria, approximately 500 kilometres north of Israel. Assyrian tribute lists state that it was conquered by Tiglath-Pileser III in Eponymn year 738 B.C.E.<sup>55</sup> after troubles in Syria diverted his efforts to the west, with Kullani as the chief objective of the campaign. Typical of Tiglath-Pileser, the attack fell on the king, who "forgot my covenant," the capital was captured and turned into the head-

<sup>54</sup> Willi-Plein, *Vorformen*, 40.

<sup>55</sup> Leo Oppenheim, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts relating to the Old Testament* (Princeton: JB Pritchard, 1955), vol. 3: 282-283.

quarters of an Assyrian governor who was appointed over the land, now to be treated as a province of Assyria.<sup>56</sup>

The Aramaean kingdom *Hamath* was the nearest state to the north of Israel's boundaries as restored by Jeroboam II.<sup>57</sup> The city *Hamath*, which lies a few hundred kilometres north of Damascus, ruled a district that extended a good distance to the south, where its territorial claims had expanded greatly after 800 B.C.E.. Does the unusual construction "*Hamath the Great*" (Amos 6:2) refer to the capital city or the great state of Hamath? Assyrian annals report that in 738 B.C.E. Tiglath-Pileser III subjugated the northern and central state, turning Hamath's nineteen western and northern districts into two Assyrian provinces, Smirra and Hatarikka,<sup>58</sup> "which had formerly been at most spheres of influence,"<sup>59</sup> and leaving only a remnant as a small dependent state.<sup>60</sup> It therefore seems likely that "Hamath the Great" in Amos 6:2 refers to the greater Hamath annexed by Tiglath-Pileser in 738 B.C.E..

Before the reference to *Gath* can be treated, serious doubts about the "authenticity" of 6:2b needs attention. Numerous scholars regard the reference to "*Gath of the Philistines*" as secondary,<sup>61</sup> and present at least five reasons for this opinion, which have been refuted elsewhere.<sup>62</sup> Only two will be dealt with here. *Firstly* it is argued that Gath was only conquered in 711 B.C.E. by Sargon which thus occurred half a century after the activity of Amos. Sargon was, however, not the only one in the history of Gath that did serious damage to that city. For example, 2 Chronicles 26:6 recalls Uzziah of Judah tearing down the walls of Gath during the time of Amos. The fact that Gath is not mentioned with the other four Philistine cities under threat in Amos 1:6-8, supports the idea that its conquest by Uzziah is presupposed in 6:2.<sup>63</sup> *Secondly*, it is argued that the reference to Gath in 6:2 is metrically redundant. In view of the utter uncertainty of matters pertaining to metre,<sup>64</sup> coupled with the fact that metre was often mixed within a single poem in the Israelite poetic tradition,<sup>65</sup> it would be unwise to delete a portion of text on this ground. Newer literary ap-

<sup>56</sup> Sidney Smith, "The Supremacy of Assyria," in vol. 3 of *The Cambridge Ancient History: The Assyrian Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), 32-42.

<sup>57</sup> 2 Kings 14:25.

<sup>58</sup> Roberts, "Amos 6," 158.

<sup>59</sup> Smith, "Assyria," 32-42.

<sup>60</sup> Oppenheim, ANET 3, 282.

<sup>61</sup> See for example Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 274; Weiser, *Buch*, 176; Rudolph, *Joel-Amos*, 216 and Robinson, *Zwölf*, 94.

<sup>62</sup> Strijdom, "Social Injustice," 194-195.

<sup>63</sup> Harper, *Amos & Hosea*, ciii.

<sup>64</sup> See for example Hammershaimb, *Amos*, pref.; Vriezen & Van der Woude, *Literatuur*, 58 and Gottwald, *Hebrew Bible*, 523-524.

<sup>65</sup> Gottwald, *Hebrew Bible*, 252.

proaches have therefore, rightly, shifted the focus from scanning metre to a wider range of poetic features such as rhythm that encompasses imagery and metaphors, sentence structure as a means of emphasis, the opening and closing of stanzas, and the sequence of ideas making use of anticipation, retardation and irony. After all, the gist of Hebrew poetics is not in syntax alone, but in a subtle conjunction of syntactic, semantic and phonological factors.<sup>66</sup> It is concluded, therefore, that no convincing argument for the deletion of the reference to Gath has been offered.

The Philistine city *Gath*, part of the so-called Philistine Pentapolis, is well known from Biblical texts. It was the furthest inland of these, bordering Israel on the edge of the Shephelah and was occupied from 3000 to 1000 B.C.E.. It shows ample evidence of occupation in Iron Age II, including the eighth century B.C.E..<sup>67</sup> Archaeologically it seems unnecessary to doubt that Gath of the Philistines existed during the eighth century.

Why is the name of Gath not mentioned by Amos with the other four existing Philistine cities (1:8) yet is only referred to with two victims of the Assyrians as an example of misfortune (6:2)? The answer probably lies in one of two directions. *Firstly*, it is possible that Tiglath-Pileser III attacked the city of Gath,<sup>68</sup> during his campaign to Philistia in 734 B.C.E. as part of Assyria's avowed goal of controlling the commerce of the eastern Mediterranean basin,<sup>69</sup> although the "attack upon Gaza was the principal event in the campaign."<sup>70</sup> *Secondly*, the reference in 2 Chronicles 26:6 to Uzziah's destruction of the walls of Gath in the course of his expansion into Philistine territory<sup>71</sup> warrants a closer look. Keeping in mind that the preceding verse (6:1) refers to the secure feeling of Jerusalem and Samaria, based on the strength and defensibility of their fortifications and strongholds, the reference to the destruction of huge city walls in nearby Gath would have been rhetorically effective and typical of Amos's ironic style. If Uzziah died between 742 and 736, as shown by the available chronologies, this attack on Gath can be tied in with the reduction of

<sup>66</sup> James L. Kugel, *The Idea of Biblical Poetry: Parallelism and its History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), chapters 1-2.

<sup>67</sup> Cf. Philip J. King, *Amos, Hosea, Micah - An Archaeological Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1988), 59.

<sup>68</sup> Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 158, 274, says: "In 734 Gath came under the hegemony of Assyria, either losing its independence or passing out of Judean control."

<sup>69</sup> Mordechai Cogan, *Imperialism and Religion: Assyria, Judah and Israel in the 8<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Centuries B.C.E.* (Missoula: Scholars, 1974), 92.

<sup>70</sup> Smith, "Assyria," 32-34. Arguments from silence are not as decisive as details of the first Assyrian campaign to Philistia (734 B.C.E.) that came to light from a fragmentary inscription of Tiglath-Pileser from Calneh where the only Philistine city mentioned is Gaza, which was captured and sacked. See Otto Kaiser (ed.) *Texte aus der Umwelt des Alten Testaments* (TUAT) 1: 373, 376-377.

<sup>71</sup> Roberts, "Amos 6," 158.

Hamath the Great and the fall of Calneh into a common sequence of events around 738 B.C.E..

If this interpretation of Amos 6:2 is correct, it means that Amos was active in 738 B.C.E. or not long thereafter, as already surmised by Albright.<sup>72</sup> Amos 6:2 must therefore be regarded as "evidence for activity later than the time of Jeroboam II."<sup>73</sup> With Roberts I deem that Coote is going a bit too far, however, when he concludes on the same basis that "Amos prophesied not during the reign of Jeroboam II but rather during that of his successors, the contemporaries of Tiglath-Pileser III."<sup>74</sup> The evidence of Amos 6:2, considered independently and on own merit, do not yet necessitate a choice between the time of Jeroboam and that of Tiglath-Pileser. If it is kept in mind that Jeroboam's death is dated by some as late as 747 B.C.E., 747/6 B.C.E., 746 B.C.E.,<sup>75</sup> 745 B.C.E. and 743 B.C.E.,<sup>76</sup> Cripps seems to be correct that Amos could have been active at a point in time within Jeroboam's lifetime and after the rise of Tiglath-Pileser III<sup>77</sup> (745 B.C.E.). This would also tie in with the superscript's reference to Uzziah, who died between 742–736 B.C.E.<sup>78</sup> and thus well into Tiglath-Pileser's reign.

It appears quite certain that Menahem was king in Israel in 738 B.C.E. when Kullani and Hamath were subjugated and that he paid heavy tribute to Tiglath-Pileser at this time. This is attested to in Assyrian as well as Biblical records and ties in with our knowledge of Assyrian annexation practices.<sup>79</sup> If

<sup>72</sup> Albright, *Biblical Period*, 71.

<sup>73</sup> Cazelles in Auld, *Amos*, 44.

<sup>74</sup> Roberts, "Amos 6," 158; Coote, *Amos*, 22.

<sup>75</sup> See Begrich-Jepsen, Conrad and Albright, in that order. All references to these chronologies as well as to Pavlovsky-Vogt, Thiele and Andersen are from the summaries supplied by Jagersma, *History*, 268-269 and Hayes & Miller, *History*, 682-683.

<sup>76</sup> See Frank M. Cross, "The Epic Traditions of Early Israel," in *The Poet and the Historian* (ed. Richard E. Friedman: Chicago: Scholars Press, 1983), 13-39 and Lods, *Prophets*, in that order.

<sup>77</sup> Cripps, *Amos*, xxi.

<sup>78</sup> Available chronologies date his death in 736 (Begrich-Jepsen), 739 (Pavlovsky-Vogt), 740/39 (Thiele), 741/40 (Andersen) and 742 (Albright).

<sup>79</sup> "Tiglath-Pileser...invaded Israel, and Menahem gave him thirty four thousand kilograms of silver to gain his support in strengthening Menahem's power over the country. Menahem got the money from the rich men of Israel by forcing each one to contribute fifty pieces of silver. So Tiglath-Pileser went back to his own country" (2 Kings 15:19-20, GNB). The Assyrian tribute list after Tiglath-Pileser's 738 B.C.E. campaign...includes "Minihimme alu Samerinai," Menahem of Samaria. During his 738 campaign Tiglath-Pileser possibly sent an expedition to overawe immediate neighbours, including such a demonstration against Israel (Smith, "Assyria," 33). This would be in accordance with Tiglath-Pileser's "system of destroying step by step the political independence of...petty states for the purpose of incorporating them into the

one assumes that the allusion to these catastrophes was made when their impression was still relatively fresh<sup>80</sup> and not too long after they occurred, it follows that 6:2 indeed places Amos in the time of Jeroboam's successors. Wolff thinks it is during this period, between 738 and 733 B.C.E., the time of the impending "ruin of Joseph" (6:6), that this woe oracle against the self-reliant most likely originated in the light of the contemporary political situation.<sup>81</sup> This would make much sense, particularly if it is considered that in 738 B.C.E. "the first scene was enacted in the closing drama of the history of Israel."<sup>82</sup>

## **2 The imminent overwhelming political disaster in Amos**

### **2a Scholarly denial of allusion to Tiglath-Pileser III and the Assyrian threat**

Because Jeroboam was thought to have died before the rise of Tiglath-Pileser in 745 B.C.E., thus ruling out any overlap in their respective reigns, most scholars conclude that Amos had no knowledge of Tiglath-Pileser III. This is based on a strict Jeroboam-based dating of the prophet and since Tiglath-Pileser, or the Assyrian threat that he embodied, is never unambiguously referred to in the text of Amos.

According to Noth the non-appearance of the name Assur—completely in contrast to his "prophetic successors" Hosea and Isaiah—cannot be accidental,<sup>83</sup> but indicates that Amos "preached" shortly before Tiglath-Pileser III. With others he detects some awareness in Israel of the great power of Assyria that loomed "sinisterly in the background," although not yet seen as a power to fear.<sup>84</sup> Cohen finds it "not surprising that Amos takes but little notice" of the Assyrians, since in Jeroboam's time they did not yet have the reputation of "an invincible, overawing nation of conquerors;" their western campaigns were

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provincial structure of the Assyrian empire," of which the first stage consisted of the "establishment of a vassal relationship by a demonstration of Assyrian military might" (Donner, "Separate States," 419). Arthur Ferrill, *The Origins of War* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1985), 70, calls this demonstration of might "applied and advertised terrorism" or "propaganda of terror" as part of the Assyrian grand strategy, while Wilfred G. Lambert, "Assyrien und Israel," in *Theologische Realenzyklopädie* (TRE) 4 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1979), 269, sees it illustrated in 2 Kings 18 and Isaiah 10:5.

<sup>80</sup> Wellhausen in Willi-Plein, *Vorformen*, 41.

<sup>81</sup> Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 274.

<sup>82</sup> Henry A. Sayce, "The Book of Hosea in the light of Assyrian Research," *JQR* (no date): 166.

<sup>83</sup> Noth, *Aufsätze*, 210.

<sup>84</sup> Noth, *History*, 250; Hammershaimb, *Amos*, 13 and Alberto Soggin, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (London: SCM, 1980), 242.

more in the nature of raids than permanent conquests, and in between there were long intervals when they did not appear in the West at all.<sup>85</sup>

Gottwald explains the non-mention of Assyria as Amos' means of emphasising that it is the work of Yahweh,<sup>86</sup> while for Coote it means that the Assyrian threat is so imminent that it is taken for granted.<sup>87</sup> Schmidt explains it by pointing to the remoteness of their threat, even to those of farseeing political vision, and because they made no move farther south after dealing with Aram.<sup>88</sup>

Noth, Gottwald and Schmidt clearly show the dilemma of noticing allusions to Assyria while holding on to the cast-in-stone traditional date of Amos, leading them to place the Assyrian threat in Amos almost fifty years earlier as the only possibility worthy of consideration.

The reference in Amos 6:2 to the overpowering of Kullani and Hamath refutes the entire argument that Tiglath-Pileser and the Assyrians are not part of the threat in Amos.

Adding more weight to this reasoning is Andersen and Freedman's convincing logic that Amos in fact refers to *Assyria* in 3:9a, "Proclaim upon the walls of *Assyria* (MT: Ashdod), and upon the walls of Egypt,"<sup>89</sup> finding it a more suitable parallel to *Egypt* than the reading *Ashdod*, which makes no sense and since other eighth-century prophets commonly pair Egypt with Assyria.

## **2b Scholarly recognition of allusion to Tiglath-Pileser III and the Assyrian threat**

As long ago as 1886 Zeydner definitely connected the prophecy of Amos with the rise of Tiglath-Pileser III. Referring to Amos 8 he commented on the political thunderstorm following the elevation of Tiglath-Pileser III in 745 B.C.E..<sup>90</sup> In 1894 his countryman Valetton followed his thesis, declaring:

<sup>85</sup> Simon Cohen, "The Political Background of the Words of Amos," *HUCA* 36 (1965): 159.

<sup>86</sup> Norman K. Gottwald, *All the Kingdoms of the Earth: Israelite Prophecy and International Relations in the Ancient Near East* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), 96-97.

<sup>87</sup> Coote, *Amos*, 21.

<sup>88</sup> Schmidt, *Introduction*, 196.

<sup>89</sup> With the New Jerusalem Bible, they follow the LXX Ἀσσυρίοις, who, assuming frequent confusion of Hebrew *d* and *r*, read בַּאֲשׁוּר for בַּאֲשׁוּר (Andersen & Freedman, *Amos*, 405-406).

<sup>90</sup> Cripps, *Amos*, xxi.



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It is not improbable that the appearance of Tiglath-Pileser was for Amos the thing in which he heard God's voice calling, and was the occasion of his prophetic activity.<sup>91</sup>

In 1931 Meyer called attention to Amos 6:2, which he linked to Tiglath-Pileser's moves in northern Syria in the years after 740 B.C.E.,<sup>92</sup> and in 1935 Lods gave more substantiation to the thesis.<sup>93</sup> Subsequently, other scholars such as Cripps, Albright, Cazelles, Coote and Roberts dated Amos' public appearance after the rise of the great Assyrian conqueror.<sup>94</sup>

Gottwald has no doubt that the "enemy" of 3:11, the "nation" of 6:14, which will strike from the north and oppress Israel from its far northern to its far southern boundary, as well as the threat of an exile "beyond Damascus" (5:27), taken together, localises the enemy as Assyria. He also shows that it is only with Amos that the threat of exile suddenly leaps to prominence in Biblical writings.<sup>95</sup>

Coote, who interprets 6:2 as fitting the Tiglath-Pileser period, takes Amos' announcements of an impending deportation of the elite as pointing to the reign of Tiglath-Pileser III since "deportation did not become a significant article of Assyrian imperialistic policy" until his reign and that it was only carried out as from 738 B.C.E..

Roberts interprets 6:2 as indicating Tiglath-Pileser's first campaign to the west in 738 B.C.E. and Uzziah's destruction of the walls of Gath. He adds that the editorial addition of date formulas in Amos 1:1 did not consider Jeroboam's successors worth mentioning, and that the reference to Jeroboam can therefore not be taken as a *terminus ad quem*. As with the reference to the

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<sup>91</sup> Cripps, *Amos*, xxi.

<sup>92</sup> Meyer, *Orient*, 359.

<sup>93</sup> Lods, *Prophets*: "The fact that Amos threatens Israel with deportation indicates perhaps that Tiglath-Pileser III had already ascended the throne (745); it is this sovereign who systematically employs the displacement of entire populations in his conquests."

<sup>94</sup> See Cripps, *Amos*; Albright, *Biblical Period* (partly); Auld, *Amos*; Coote, *Amos* and Roberts, "Amos 6."

<sup>95</sup> Gottwald, *Kingdoms*, 96-97: "There is...no certain pre-Amosian usage of the root גלה in the sense of a deportation of considerable elements of a population... The use of גלה in the sense of slave-trading appears in the oracles of Amos against the Philistine cities (1:6) and Tyre (1:9)...but there is nothing...to suggest that the exile described is politically motivated. It remained for the Assyrians to make political as well as economic capital of deportation policies... Tiglath-Pileser III is indelibly connected with the inauguration of the deportation of conquered populations as a studied policy. Under his tutelage, (it) became...a program of colonization. The new element was the deliberate exchange of populations among various conquered regions with a view to the prevention of revolt and to permanent colonization."

earthquake it merely indicates when Amos' prophetic ministry *began*. Amos' frequent references to the ruling class' oppression of the poor fits the situation in Israel after the Assyrian victory in 738 B.C.E.. It was the time when Menahem paid heavy tribute to Tiglath-Pileser, which he raised by onerous exactions, and surely "the wealthy who had to pay the fifty shekels of silver passed the costs on to their less fortunate countrymen who were dependent on them."<sup>96</sup>

Before turning to significant Amos texts that may be understood in the light of the Assyrian advances, it is necessary to have as accurate a picture as possible of the Assyrian campaigns in Israel and its immediate region at the time of Amos. This could illuminate several aspects of the text as well as some statements that would seem almost contradictory at face value. It is a major problem in Amos research, for example, to reconcile apparent first-hand experience of the following: a final annihilation of Israel (9:8a), a devastating blow to Israel as exemplified in the fallen virgin metaphor (5:2; 8:14), statements to the effect that the time is ripe for the final blow (8:2), or that some of the Israelites in Samaria will be saved in a manner comparable to how a few pieces of a devoured sheep is saved from a lion's mouth (3:12, see also 9:8b), or that Yahweh God Almighty may perhaps have mercy on the remnant of Joseph (5:15) and avert the sweeping through the house of Joseph like the fire that devastated Bethel (5:6). What can be known of the movements of the Assyrians?

## 2c Excursion: The Assyrians and Israel, 738-732 B.C.E.

In ancient times trade routes between Egypt and Mesopotamia had to pass through Palestine and Syria, with its natural geopolitical advantages, control of international caravan routes and potential hold on ports with direct international trade possibilities on two seas.<sup>97</sup> This was realised early on, became especially apparent during Solomon's reign<sup>98</sup> and was coveted by the great regional powers, including the Neo-Assyrian kingdom, whose rise to its eventual dominant position saw an incomparable power structure which determined the destinies of the ancient Near East for almost half a millennium.<sup>99</sup>

<sup>96</sup> Roberts, "Amos 6," 158-160.

<sup>97</sup> Noth, *History*, 253.

<sup>98</sup> Hanoch Reviv, "History," in vol. 8 of *Encyclopedia Judaica* (EJ), 592.

<sup>99</sup> Donner, "Separate States," 416. It is known that Assyrian royal inscriptions are "official documents of self-praise" that fuse ideology with historical reality; see Hayim Tadmor, "History and Ideology in the Assyrian Royal Inscriptions," in *Assyrian Royal Inscriptions* (ed. Frederick M. Fales. Roma: Instituto Per L'Oriente, 1981), 13 and Mario Liverani, "The Ideology of the Assyrian Empire," in *Power and Propaganda* (ed. Mogens T. Larsen. Copenhagen: Akademisk Forlag, 1979), 300. But new features of this era can nevertheless be clearly identified; see e.g. Henry W. F. Saggs, *The Greatness that was Babylon* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1962); Smith, "Assy-

Assyria's occupation elsewhere in the first half of the eighth century enabled the two Israelite states to regain the economic strength and territorial extent of the Solomonic empire. But a storm broke out with Tiglath-Pileser III's conquests after 745 B.C.E.. Of the three-century period after 850 B.C.E., only twenty extra-Biblical synchronisms from Assyrian and Babylonian sources are available for Old Testament studies and five of these fall within the eighteen year reign of Tiglath-Pileser III (745-727 B.C.E.), enabling a relatively reliable chronology of Israelite-Assyrian history in this era. Tiglath-Pileser created the notion of centralised government in the sphere of politics<sup>100</sup> and developed a system of destroying step by step the political independence of small states. This was achieved through successive stages of (i) vassal relationship with heavy tribute, (ii) military intervention with pro-Assyrian ruler, territorial incorporations and deportation of upper class, and (iii) deposition of ruler, replacement by Assyrian governor, deportation of leading class and populating with foreign settlers.<sup>101</sup> For Tiglath-Pileser the subjugation of Syria and Palestine was one of his principal aims. While the events of his campaigns are known from his annals and a stele found in Iran,<sup>102</sup> these are supplemented by Biblical material in 2 Kings 15-21. Obscure hints in the prophecies of Isaiah and Hosea have long been interpreted against the backdrop of events around 730 B.C.E. and the current study will hopefully contribute towards understanding part of Amos against a similar background.

A summative survey of the political relationship between the Assyrians and the two Israelite states down to the fall of Samaria may be obtained from the five maps that follow. These are largely based on Assyrian texts in order to obtain a fairly clear picture of the political and commercial motives behind the

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ria", Bustany Oded, "The Phoenician Cities and the Assyrian Empire in the time of Tiglath-Pileser III," *ZDPV* 90 (1974): 38-49 and Donner, "Separate States." *Firstly*, the Assyrian kings henceforth went beyond acquisition to annexation of conquered territories, supported by strong central government, an effective standing army, chariots and cavalry. *Secondly*, a strategy of calculated terror in the form of massacre, impaling, burning and taking captives was introduced, coupled with 'calculated frightfulness' through exaggerated royal propagandistic literature; see Olmstead in Hayim Tadmor, "Assyria and the West," in *Unity and Diversity* (ed. Hans Goedicke and Jim J.M. Roberts; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1975), 36. *Thirdly*, expansion policy was adapted to incorporate conquered territories as provinces in the classical Assyrian provincial system (see Donner, "Separate States," 417). *Fourthly*, an extensive ring of vassal states was established around the Assyrian homeland, forcing their rulers to pay tribute and provide auxiliary troops.

<sup>100</sup> Sayce, "Hosea," 165.

<sup>101</sup> This normal 3 step-procedure was modified by Tiglath-Pileser in Syria-Palestine, the far-off western corner of the empire - see Benedict Otzen, "Israel under the Assyrians," in *Power and Propaganda* (ed. Mogens T. Larsen; Copenhagen: Akademisk Forlag, 1979), 253.

<sup>102</sup> See Kaiser (ed.), TUAT 1:378.

Assyrian invasion of the West. Biblical material in 2 Kings, 2 Chronicles, Isaiah, Hosea and Amos, even if supplemented with archaeological results, have an important though limited value, since they interpret the coming attack of Assyria exclusively from the religious viewpoint that it is the punishment of Yahweh.

Tiglath-Pileser subjugated northern and central Hamath, including the city of Kulanni, in 738 B.C.E. (see map 1) and turned most of it into Assyrian provinces, leaving only a small remnant as dependent state and transplanting 30,300 inhabitants from Hamath. Among other cities and states that paid tribute to him in the hope of tempering the conquering king into postponing, if not evading altogether his gathering storm<sup>103</sup> was "Menahem of Samaria."<sup>104</sup> Tiglath-Pileser's records say that Menahem had little choice, that the Israelite king was overwhelmed "like a snow storm" and sent fleeing "like a bird, alone."<sup>105</sup> For gold, silver and linen garments Menahem was allowed to resume the throne in Samaria. Israel was from 738 B.C.E. a vassal.

Menahem's submission and ensuing tribute burden entailed heavy taxation for many Israelites, since he paid with money collected from the free landowners (2 Kings 15:19-20), which did not meet with undivided approval. The Samaria ostraca suggests that the tax was collected in the form of agricultural products.<sup>106</sup> There is also the hint that Menahem used the occasion to strengthen his hold on power by an alliance with Assyria and to weaken some monied interests who could effectively oppose him.<sup>107</sup> Influential in the upheavals after Jeroboam's death were great landowners and prominent parties from Transjordanian Israel<sup>108</sup> who, dissatisfied with the Assyrian domination, advocated stern military opposition rather than bearing the burden. This position eventually threw Israel helpless before Assyria when coup d'etat and murder brought Pekah, a military noble of Gilead, into power to implement anti-Assyrian policies. He profited from a three-year diversion of Tiglath-Pileser's energies away from Syria and Palestine in the period 737-734 B.C.E..

<sup>103</sup> Frank, *Companion*, 185.

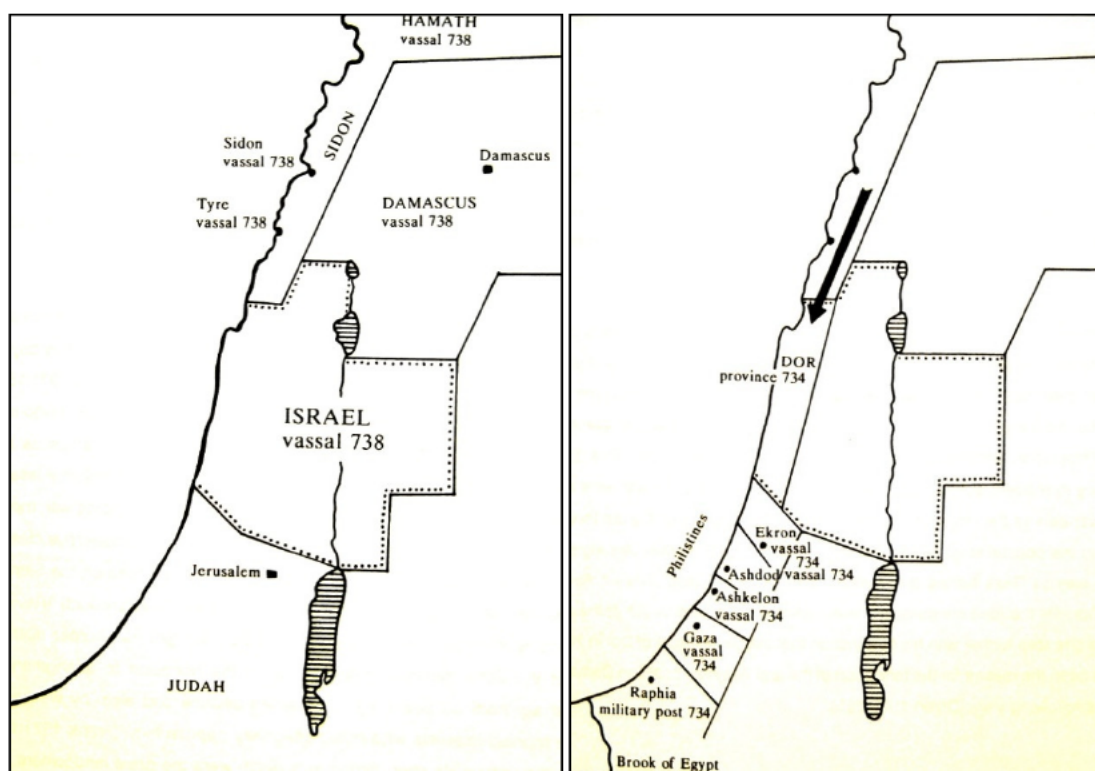
<sup>104</sup> Kaiser (ed.), TUAT 1:371.

<sup>105</sup> Kaiser (ed.), TUAT 1:372-374.

<sup>106</sup> Reviv, "History," EJ 8:604.

<sup>107</sup> Frank, *Companion*, 185.

<sup>108</sup> Reviv, "History," EJ 8:602.

THE ASSYRIANS AND ISRAEL<sup>109</sup>

MAP 1: 738 B.C.E.

MAP 2: 734 B.C.E.

In 734 B.C.E. (see map 2) the Assyrian list of Eponymns records Tiglath-Pileser's expedition "to Philistia." After he had secured a victory on the coast of central Syria and plundered Phoenician seaports,<sup>110</sup> he created the new province of Dor and forced his way southward through the territory of Israel, the western parts of which extended as far as the coastal plain of Palestine. Tadmor showed that the first campaign to Philistia in 734 B.C.E. was largely motivated by the Assyrian aim of commanding the Mediterranean seaports and their commerce, mainly the trade between Phoenicia and Palestine, and to exact taxes from both Phoenician and Philistine cities.<sup>111</sup> Contemporary scholarship, which stresses commercial interests as foremost motive power in empire formation, limits Assyrian interest in 734 B.C.E. to the coastal strip only, where they avoided the establishment of provinces and merely created Philistine vassal states in Ashkelon and Gaza, for example, even despite revolt. The presence of an Assyrian army in Philistia had an immediate effect on the politics of Israel and Judah. It is likely that Ahaz of Judah turned to Tiglath-Pileser during this campaign for aid in the Syro-Ephraimite attack on him, and submitted to

<sup>109</sup> The five illustrative maps used in this article are taken over from Strijdom, "Social Injustice."

<sup>110</sup> See Oded, "Phoenician Cities," 42-43.

<sup>111</sup> See Otzen, "Israel under Assyrians," 255.

the king of Assyria.<sup>112</sup> Within a few years, therefore, Tiglath-Pileser had invaded the whole of Syria-Palestine, spread fear of Assyria's overwhelming power everywhere, and where he did not convert the conquered territories into Assyrian provinces, tribute paying vassal states were created.

After disposing of Hamath and Philistia, the most important powers in Syria-Palestine were the kingdoms of Damascus and Israel<sup>113</sup> and it was only a matter of time until the Assyrian heel ground them to dust. For the following two years, 733-732 B.C.E., the Eponym list notes "to Damascus." Tiglath-Pileser, however, first crushed the kingdom of Israel in 733 B.C.E.

Judging by 2 Kings 15:29, as supported by archaeological excavations (see map 3, 733 B.C.E.), he invaded the uppermost part of the Jordan valley, destroyed the huge stronghold of Hazor<sup>114</sup> and captured the territories of Galilee, Naphtali and Gilead, sweeping through the plains of Esdraelon and Sharon and incorporating all but the mountainous heartland of Samaria into Assyrian provinces. Megiddo was looted and destroyed, then rebuilt and turned into the administrative centre for the Galilean hills and the valley of Jezreel. Many other cities, towns and villages suffered equally. Israel was shorn of most of its territory, including all of Gilead, where another new province was created. Only the remnant state of Samaria in the Ephraimite hill country was left, which was eventually transformed into a puppet state in 732 B.C.E. with king Hoshea depending on every whim of the Assyrian monarch. Tiglath-Pileser records that he annexed all the cities of the land. "The town Samaria only did I leave."<sup>115</sup>

Extensive deportations from the urban upper class as well as all the inhabitants of Transjordan took place "to Assyria."<sup>116</sup> In exchange, foreign Assyrian governors, officials and a new upper class from other parts of the empire were transferred to the new provinces. Israel was finished. The ultimate step of incorporating Samaria and mount Ephraim into the Assyrian provincial system remained little more than a formality. Only the death agony was to be played out.

<sup>112</sup> See 2 Chronicles 28:19-21; Reviv, "History," EJ 8:604.

<sup>113</sup> Noth, *History*, 259.

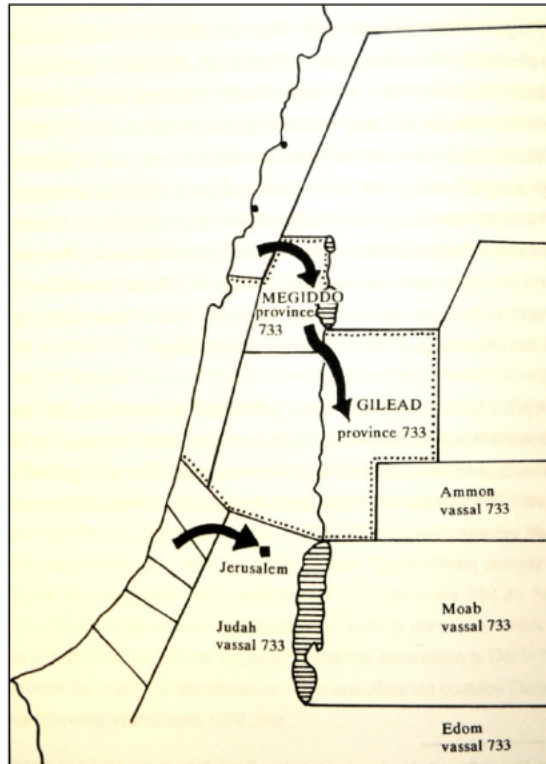
<sup>114</sup> See Otzen, "Israel under Assyrians," 260, and Frank, *Companion*, 187.

<sup>115</sup> Kaiser (ed.), TUAT 1:372; Finkelstein & Silberman, *Bible Unearthed*, 215.

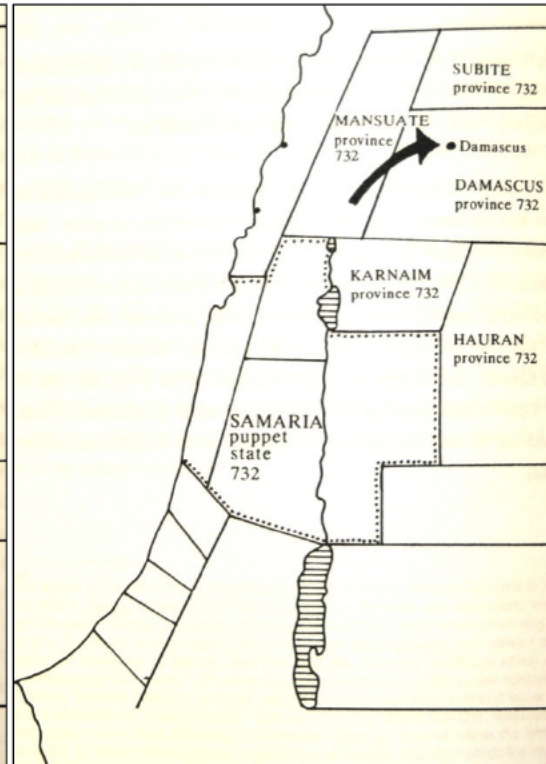
<sup>116</sup> 2 Kings 15:29; ANET: 283-284; 1 Chronicles 5:26.

## THE ASSYRIANS AND ISRAEL

MAP 3: 733 B.C.E.



MAP 4: 732 B.C.E.



Perhaps the Lord god of Hosts may be gracious to *the remnant of Joseph* (Amos 5:15)

I spared only *isolated Samaria* (Tiglath-Pileser, Assyrian monumental inscription)

Lord God, please stop! How can *Jacob* stand, for he *is small*? (Amos 7:5)

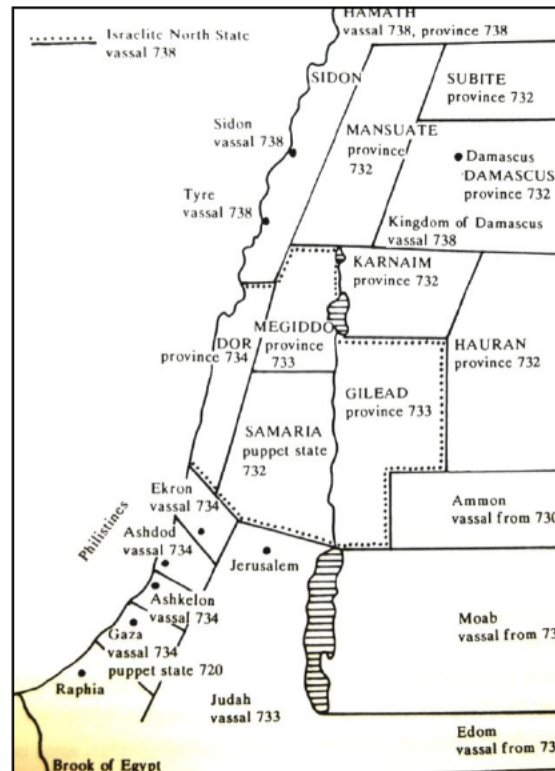
In 732 B.C.E. (see map 4) Tiglath-Pileser besieged and captured Damascus, making it the centre of an Assyrian province. He levelled 591 townships to the ground and deported 800 inhabitants to Assyria, creating three or four more provinces in the area. In the northern part of Transjordan, including Bashan of Menasseh, the provinces Qarnini, named after its capital Karnaim (Amos 6:13), and Haurina were founded. The long struggle with Damascus was over, for that city never again appears as an independent power.<sup>117</sup>

Tiglath-Pileser's second western campaign was thus even more decisive in its effect than the first, and from the Taurus mountains in the north to the River of Egypt in the south (see map 5: 738-732 B.C.E.), the entire Mediterra-

<sup>117</sup> Smith, "Assyria," 32-42.



nean littoral now paid him homage, whether as province or as vassal kingdom.<sup>118</sup>



**THE ASSYRIANS AND ISRAEL, MAP 5:  
THE ENTIRE PICTURE: 738-732 B.C.E.**

I am stirring up a nation against you, O house of Israel, that will *oppress you all the way from Lebo Hamath to the valley of the Arabah* (Amos 6:14)

## 2d The unnamed menacing power from the northeast in Amos

Our argument that Amos was active during the Tiglath-Pileser III period and that hints in the text support this thesis, does not differentiate between what Coote's "A-stage" and "B stage"<sup>119</sup> of the text offers in this regard. This will become clear as clues in the physical appearance of the text are being identified that encompass both stages of growth. Once read from the perspective of 738-732 B.C.E., it is possible that even some avowed later stages of textual development may make better sense as emerging from such a context.

<sup>118</sup> William W. Hallo, "From Qarqar to Carchemish," *BA* 23/2 (1960): 60.

<sup>119</sup> At no stage of its study can the redaction history of the multi-layered Amos text be ignored and the three stage reconstruction of Coote, *Amos*, can be supported in broad terms.



(i) Dating the oracles against the nations (1:3-2:16)

Some redactional studies have shown that the oracles against the nations (1:3-2:16) reflect a theological perspective which transcends the personal and historical vision of Amos, both in terms of geographical scope and extent of time.<sup>120</sup> Observations on the historical background of these oracles<sup>121</sup> have, however, only concentrated on finding substantiation for the *charges* made by Amos against the nations, thus arriving at events and dates that predate the activity of Amos, and have not been particularly successful.<sup>122</sup> Even if *threats* may not be seen to be containing historical allusions as such because of their orientation to the future and their rhetorically-persuasive nature, it may be worthwhile to pay attention to the punishment expected in the form of *disaster in the near future* in these oracles, in order to arrive at a clearer picture of events and dates that might assist in dating the activity of Amos.

All the oracles in 1:3-2:16 are characterised by the certainty of a coming disaster of a scale so great that the whole of Syria-Palestine would be forced to submit. Somehow scholarly work of the past largely failed to see this perspective from the oracles against the nations in combination with the same—albeit Israel-oriented—perspective in the rest of the Amos text, and as part of the same geographical-historical frame of reference. The threat against Israel is only a part of the much larger threat against the whole of Syria-Palestine. This ties in with the most acceptable view of the interrelationship of the different announcements of judgement to each other, namely that the whole section (1:3-2:16) displays a climactic structure, culminating in the poem of judgement against Israel, which is shown by the structure to be the chief accused.<sup>123</sup> This opening collection of judgement poems is actually the key which opens up the whole book of Amos, because the threat against Syria-Palestine which is here interpreted as God's judgement against these nations, culminates in the threat against Israel, which is further examined from different angles in the rest of the Amos text. Once this is fully realised, it is difficult to evade the conclusion that *the entire literary legacy of Amos is dominated by this all-encompassing external threat*.<sup>124</sup> And that holds true, irrespective of whether Amos himself or his later interpreters left these clues in the text. At this point the argument seems to

<sup>120</sup> Childs, *Introduction*, 401.

<sup>121</sup> See e.g. Cohen, "Political Background," Menahem Haran, "Observations on the Historical Background of Amos 1:2-2:16," *IEJ* 18 (1968): 201-212 and Keith N. Schoville, "A Note on the Oracles of Amos against Gaza, Tyre and Edom," in *Studies on Prophecy* (ed. Georg Fohrer; Leiden: Brill, 1974), 55-63.

<sup>122</sup> Beebe, *Introduction*, 224.

<sup>123</sup> De Waard & Smalley, *Translator's Handbook*, 28.

<sup>124</sup> Amos' keynote is the ominous roar of a lion that sounds forth, sending a shudder of terror through the entire land (1:2). The Assyrian lion's seizure of his political prey becomes – in daring poetic metaphor – Yahweh whose voice roars in judgment from Zion, having caught his prey (1:2; 3:4).

be quite close to the views of late nineteenth century Dutch scholars Zeydner and Valeton who held that the rise of Tiglath-Pileser III occasioned the prophetic activity of Amos.<sup>125</sup>

The large-scale disaster that is anticipated to strike Syria-Palestine,<sup>126</sup> is expected to affect it in the following way: In Damascus the burning of the palaces, the smashing of the city gates, the removal of the rulers of Bikath-Aven and Beth-Eden, along with the exiling of the Aramaeans to Kir, is expected (1:4-5). In Philistia the burning of Gaza's walls and palaces, the removal of the rulers of Ashdod and Ashkelon, the punishment of Ekron, and the death of all remaining Philistines is expected (1:7-8). The burning of the walls and palaces of Tyre (1:10), the burning of Edomite Teman and the palaces of Bozrah (1:12), the burning of the walls and palaces of Ammonite Rabbah along with the exiling of their king and his princes (1:14-15), the burning of Moab, the destruction of the palaces of Kerioth, the death of Moab, the removal of her ruler and the slaughtering of all her princes (2:2-3), and the hurling of fire on Judah to burn up the palaces of Jerusalem (2:5), is expected. For Israel the annihilation of the state and the end of the people is foreseen ("I will crush you" - 2:13), by a force against whom her own proud army will be overwhelmed (2:14-16).

Leaving aside for a moment the controversy regarding the "authenticity" of these oracles, clearly a menacing power is expected, or pictured as expected, that would submit Damascus, Philistia, Tyre, Edom, Ammon, Moab, Judah and Israel by burning and smashing the walls and palaces of principal cities, the removal, exiling or killing of their rulers, the transplantation or extermination of entire populations and the burning of vast areas. Few people would doubt the similarities between what is here expected as a coming disaster, and the triumphs of the Assyrians under Tiglath-Pileser III in the years from 734 B.C.E.. Taken together with other considerations which point in the same direction, this gives force to the basic thesis that the time of Amos' prophetic activity included the time of Tiglath-Pileser. Irrespective whether this picture comes from the hand of the prophet Amos, or was notably touched up later, a menacing military force, expected to bring utter disaster to the entire region of Syria-Palestine, if not expected by the prophet Amos himself, was without any doubt, associated with the time of his prophetic activity.

The *dramatic luminosity of the description* seems to reflect first-hand knowledge of Assyrian war practices and tactics. The convincing description of coming disaster may indicate that this power is no longer merely looming "in

<sup>125</sup> See Cripps, *Amos*, xxi.

<sup>126</sup> Bright, *History*, 80, calls it "the time of sheer terror for the petty states of Western Asia."

the background" as a "shadow,"<sup>127</sup> but has a distinct shape and identity and is in the process of continuing its reputed and advertised grand strategy as invincible overawing conqueror. Alternatively it could indicate that a later hand with first-hand knowledge of what actually happened touched up these oracles to accurately predict the course of events in Syria and Palestine. As Wolff says, "we cannot overlook the possibility that older oracles of Amos, in either the cycles or the 'words,' also received their present, politically pointed formulation" only at the hands of later editorial activity. I would settle for the first possibility at this stage and agree with Wolff's comment about the probability of the "original sharpness of the older material."<sup>128</sup> The possibility that Amos could have been responsible for politically updating his own oracles in view of the dramatic unfolding of historical realities, as proposed for Isaiah 5-10,<sup>129</sup> should not be ruled out either. More clarity may emerge from considering other parts of the Amos text.

(ii) Historical allusions in Amos 3-6 and the Visions (7:1-9; 8:1-3; 9:1-4)

Chapters 3-6 are generally held to be the second main block component of Amos.<sup>130</sup> Although the larger topical units are seen by some as "a reworking of the original oracles without destroying their contours,"<sup>131</sup> others have pointed to the marked continuity of content which oscillates between prophetic invectives of accusation (4:1-11; 6:1-6, etc.) and divine words of judgement (3:14-15; 4:12; 6:8), a distinction regarded as characteristic of Amos. All the subsections fit into a broad thematic framework: the end has irrevocably come for Israel on account of her sins.

When these sections are read against the historical situation proposed here, it opens up various possibilities that may show that Amos did not merely see the Assyrian danger "der am politischen Horizont seiner Tage...drohend heraufkommen,"<sup>132</sup> but that he actually saw the western campaigns of Tiglath-Pileser III and their devastating effects in Syria-Palestine, including parts of greater Israel. Hence he refers to severe defeats his people had suffered in recent battles, saying: "I overthrew some of you as God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah" (4:10), with survivors being likened to a burning stick saved from a fire (4:11). Hence also his metaphoric funerary lament, "Fallen no more to rise is the virgin Israel" (5:2). The question whether a part of the northern kingdom might survive (5:14-15; 6:2, 6) gain its urgency precisely in view of Tiglath-

<sup>127</sup> See Noth, *History*, 250 and Andersen & Freedman, *Hosea*, 33 respectively.

<sup>128</sup> Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 111.

<sup>129</sup> Anderson, *Living World*, 230.

<sup>130</sup> See Wolff, *Joel and Amos*; Coote, *Amos*; De Waard & Smalley, *Translator's Handbook* and Rendtorff, *Introduction*, among many.

<sup>131</sup> Childs, *Introduction*.

<sup>132</sup> Donner, *Geschichte*, 284.

Pileser's advances. At the least the "ruin of Joseph" (6:6)—and with it the question of the future for a "remnant of Joseph" (5:15)—have become burning issues. At the most it could mean that parts of Joseph have already fallen, as explained by Tiglath-Pileser's turning of the Transjordanian half of Manasseh into the Assyrian province of Gilead in 733.

The unusual appellation "Joseph" for Israel—similar to the use of "Ephraim" in Hosea—presupposes more than just the endangering of Israelite territories,<sup>133</sup> since it suggests coincidence with the devastating effects of the 734-733 Assyrian campaigns into Israel and the dramatic decrease of its territory by the creation of Assyrian provinces, leading Amos to refer more than once to the smallness of Jacob (7:2, 5).<sup>134</sup>

Amos prophetically saw the coming overpowering, domination and devastation that would befall the two Israelite kingdoms. Hence his words, "I am stirring up a nation against you, O house of Israel, that will oppress you all the way from Lebo Hamath to the valley of the Arabah" (6:14).

The *first-person report of five visions* forms the core of the final third of the book (7:1-9; 8:1-14; 9:1-10). They forcefully duplicate the irrevocability-of-punishment theme of the opening oracles (see 2:4, 6), showing clear radicalization<sup>135</sup> from Yahweh's willingness to avert the downfall on the basis of intercession (first two visions, 7:3, 6) to the unambiguous annihilation of the Israelite state and the end of the people—in words such as "I will spare them no longer" (7:8, 8:2, see also 3:8), "the end has come for my people Israel" (8:2) and "I will destroy it from the face of the earth" (9:8).

If these visions are interpreted symbolically, much of it may allude to Tiglath-Pileser and the Assyrians. In the *first vision* a plague of locusts" (Assyrian armies?) consumes the "people's crop" after the earlier "royal crop" already went to the king. Though Amos pleads forgiveness for Jacob, who is "so small," leading to a divine change of mind, it still means hunger for many and death for some, since the locusts had already finished when the intervention came.<sup>136</sup> In the *second vision* fire has licked dry the deeps below the earth and is proceeding to consume the arable land. Amos pleads God to stop because of Jacob's smallness, and it is averted, but may still imply that basic food security is permanently impaired. In both visions there is intensification with respect to the earth's ability to secure food. Is the metaphoric use of locusts and fire signi-

<sup>133</sup> Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 110.

<sup>134</sup> Progressively *Jacob* – the territorial extent of Jeroboam's Israel and Uzziah's Judah – was reduced to *Joseph* – the central Israelite hill country, valley of Jezreel and Gilead – and eventually to *Ephraim* – the mountainous Samaria heartland.

<sup>135</sup> See Strijdom, "Social Injustice," 111-112.

<sup>136</sup> Auld, *Amos*, 16-18.

ifying Tiglath-Pileser's partly accomplished destruction in Israel? Forgiveness is requested where life may somehow still continue.<sup>137</sup>

Gese argued convincingly that the  $\pi\pi\pi$  seen in *vision 3* (7:7-8) should not be understood as "plumbline," but as the tin tip of a battering ram and that the metal wall ( $\pi\pi\pi$  חומת) symbolises colossal in-conquerable military potential in the hand of God,<sup>138</sup> who says that He will no longer spare Israel. The basket of ripe summer fruit (*vision 4*, 8:1-2) symbolises readiness for devouring, associated with the swallowing up or engulfment of what has been captured, and is explained as: the time is ripe for Israel not to be spared any longer. In the *last vision* (9:1) the top and foundation of the (Bethel?) sanctuary are shattered on all the people, ensuring all are then killed with the sword.

Also the threats of deportation (7:11, 17; 9:8) and the repeated question whether a part of Israel might survive (9:10) gain their urgency precisely in view of Tiglath-Pileser's systematic advances.

The future prospects contained in all these different prophetic words seem to reflect earlier and later stages in the historical unfolding of the Assyrian grand strategy for Israel and also a deepening of perspective on the part of Amos with regard to Israel's future. The fall of the state of Israel at the hands of the Assyrians is a foregone conclusion in the latest stage.

## D CONCLUSION

The century old presupposed axiom that dates Amos in 760-750 B.C.E. is built on deuteronomistic addition of Jeroboam in the text and should be abandoned. The reference to the destroyed cities of Calneh and Hamath in 6:2 shows credible correspondence with Assyrian conquests during Tiglath-Pileser III's first western campaign in 738 B.C.E.. When the broader context of Amos' entire message and constituent meso-contexts in 6:1-14, the oracles against the nations (chapters 1-2) and the visions in chapters 7-9 are read against the milieu of Tiglath-Pileser III's western campaigns in 738-732 B.C.E., many recorded prophetic words of Amos become not only more intelligible, but lucidly clear. These texts clearly anticipate and interpret a process of invasion, destruction and exiling that amounts to a historical turning point of lasting significance which spells the end for Israel and affects Syria-Palestine entirely. They breathe a time when the Assyrians led by Tiglath-Pileser III systematically replaced Jeroboam II and Uzziah's golden heritage, first with vassal status for Israel (738 B.C.E.) and Judah (733 B.C.E.) and eventual puppet status for Israel (732 B.C.E.).

<sup>137</sup> Auld, *Amos*, 16-23.

<sup>138</sup> Gese, "Komposition", 74-95.

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Dr. Petrus D. F. Strijdom, Centre for Leadership Ethics in Africa, University of Fort Hare. Private Bag X1314, Alice, 5700. *Email:* pstrijdom@ufh.ac.za.