

Francis I. ANDERSEN/David N. FREEDMAN, *Amos*. A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary (Anchor Bible 24A; New York 1989) XLII.979pp.

On the face of it this volume would seem to join without clamour the Anchor Bible commentaries cluster. It's true that the preface by David Noel Freedman would create the impression that within the "AB canon" there exists (or will exist) a separate 'canon' consisting of a series of exegetical enterprises on the eight-century prophets of Israel (Hosea-AB23A -; Amos - present book; Micah-work on it is 'already well advanced', p.viii - and Isaiah). But before one reads it, the book appears as a normal AB Commentary with the characteristic extended introduction that expounds the interpretative apparatus adoperated, an original translation of the biblical text, notes and comments, and an exquisite indexing service. Besides, this volume offers a number of photographs and maps (cfr. list of illustrations).

Perhaps the only peculiar 'formal' feature which could be regarded as a slight departure from the customary genre is the reproduction of the entire text of the Book of Amos at the very beginning of the volume (pp. XXV - XLII), ahead of the introduction itself. The present reviewer considers this editorial option as fortunate and very useful to readers who would like to get a global view of the biblical text to be studied (The text is then reproduced unit by

unit within the commentary itself, pp. 183 onwards; it could have been better to print the text always at the head of the page, instead of the present disposition) before the reading of the commentary starts. The numerous sub-headings and the minute enumeration of the subunits (sometimes consisting of single verses) tend to weigh down the perusal of the text and to create the impression of fragmentation, so that the experience of wholeness of this 'highly structured unity' (p.144) evaporates as one proceeds with his readings.

In their Introduction to the commentary (pp.1-178) Andersen and Freedman (AF) address the standard background issues one would like to be enlightened upon before embarking on a close reading of an ancient text: outline history of research (pp.3-9), literary and form criticism (pp.9-18), social and political context of the prophet to whose name the biblical text has been attached by tradition (pp.18-23) the theological contribution of the Book (pp.88-139), the prophet himself as a historical figure (pp.83-87) and textual criticism (pp.139-141). AF dedicate the greater part of their introductory discussion to the contents of the Book of Amos taken unit by unit (pp.23-73), and to Amos' geopolitical terminology (pp.98-139). A good slice is also left to an examination of the book's theology under the rubric 'The God of Israel in the Book of Amos' (pp.88-98).

AF's main concern in the Introduction, however, is not to provide the necessary background and hermeneutical information to the biblical

text under study; rather they write here an apology for their rapture with the traditional historical - critical approach to the Book of Amos. Just to quote a qualified representative of the established 'tradition-historical-critical' method concerning the formation process behind the present shape of this prophetic text, James L. Mays: "The final form of the book was thus the result of a process of formulation that reached from Amos down at least in the exilic period. A precise and detailed reconstruction of the course which that process took would have to be conjectural in large part. But at least an outline of the stages along the way can be suggested, *Amos. A Commentary* (SCM Press; London 1969)13. And it is the conjectural nature of this reconstruction that led AF to abandon the efforts to enter behind the text in order to discover the intricate process of its formation, and to concentrate on the present form of the text as the sole object of their research. They express their admiration and appreciation of the work of former scholars, 'but we concentrate now on the text itself. By this we mean the traditional masoretic text, not a revised form of the text produced by modern scholars, which is more commonly used in contemporary translations" (p.3). "Like all critical scholars, we are naturally interested in the forms of prophetic speech and in the original oral declarations of the prophets. But these are not what we now have:... It is a legitimate exercise to attempt to recover the original speeches that were given out during the prophet's

life time, and which supplied the material for the book, although we do not believe that much certainty can be achieved in such a venture, and we do not think that it would be the scholar's prime task. Attention remains rather on the book we now have" (pp.10-11).

AF's main concern in the Introduction is to defend the overall authenticity of this biblical text. They contend that 'the book itself (on something very close to it) comes from Amos himself, representing a comprehensive synthesis and testament prepared either by him or by an immediate disciple' (pp.11). 'Amos himself had a major hand in the selection and organization of his messages into something fairly close to the book we now have' (p.24). Of course they do not pretend to have here a transcript of Amos' oracles and stories about his experience recalled directly by him or through an amanuensis. They admit that the book is the outcome of "a significant editorial process". "An editor is at work putting the book together, certainly using materials taken directly from the prophet" (p.74). AF assume that the role of the editor was to make and maintain the centrality of Amos, man and prophet, words and deeds. The relationship between author and editor must have been close. Again it seems likely that the prophet and his editor were in close contact, and that the editorial work proceeded with the authorization and approval as well as the critical appraisal and connections, of the principal. To the extent that this is the way matters developed we can speak of the prophet as his own editor, one

who was heavily involved in that process (p.75). This means "that the transition from first oral presentation to ultimate or at least stable written form will have been done with the prophet's supervision and approval" (ibid). While admitting the presence of editorial activity within the text AF contend that "it would be a mistake to relegate automatically the revised or updated form in which the oracles now appear to the hand of a later editor - and to deem it of less value than the reconstructed original" (pp.75-76). Our two scholars accord little value to such reconstructed originals as they remain ultimately hypothetical and since the "revised form may be as much the work of the prophet as the original presentation. The editing or altering may well have been done with his approval and authorization if not with his direct participation" (p.76). The prophet could have well revised and rearranged his materials. "Thus the intermixture of elements deriving ostensibly from different occasions may not be the work of clumsy later editors or contributors, but rather the revisions and rearrangements of the prophet himself, making the book serve purposes other than those of the originally presented oracles" (p.76).

This constitutes the basic presumption of the commentary as a whole so that the greatest efforts in the Introduction are spent in refuting objections to authenticity raised on the basis of internal literary frictions, plurileveled doctrine, multiplicity of literary forms, and the presumed complex terial history of the Book.

*Literary frictions:* "There is no reason...to believe that items that break up otherwise continuous series are later additions, of dubious authenticity as Amos traditions" (p.13). The three hymnic interludes (4,13; 5,8-9; 9,5-6) situated at strategic points within the global structure of the Book, offer a good case. AF do not lobby for Amos authorship of the hymnes, but insist that their inclusion within the final form of the Book could have been the work of the "prophet or compiler" (p.16). AF prefer to give the benefit of the doubt to the literary character of the book in question of authenticity. *Changes in mood:* AF are especially critical of scholars who found the true voice of this eighth century prophet in the messages of doom and not in ideas of survivors, remnant, return or recovery which must therefore be deemed secondary and unauthentic. AF instead aim in their commentary to relate the changes in mood, focus and emphasis to development in Amos' own career (p.7). While admitting that in the Book of Amos we have a literary rather than a chronological presentation of the prophet's life and ministry (pp.8-9), and that it will be unwise to force identifications of events in life of the historical Amos into a scheme that is too tight (p.7), they attempt to outline this career on the basis of the scant biographical information scattered throughout the book and the four changes in point of view they distinguish within this biblical text (i) passages celebrating God's faithfulness and exhorting the people to conversion; (ii) passages which tes-

tify to the failure of Amos' early ministry and which warn that punishment is now inevitable; (iii) passages which announce the coming doom (cosmic and military); (iv) passages which express hope that notwithstanding the severe judgement, Yahweh's people still have a future (pp.5-6; p.8) (cfr pp.83-88). More than anything else this option involves a methodological stance: "...the assumption that for Amos the future beyond the doom was empty and blank is not self-evident. But more is involved here than simply a critical decision about the authenticity of this passage or of any other. Each such case must be judged on its own merits, and such questions are open, but they should not be prejudged by assertions that Amos was only a prophet of doom" (p.7).

*Style:* AF's chapter on the use of poetry and prose in the Book of Amos (pp.144-149) is likewise geared to sustain the authenticity thesis or rather to undermine the inauthenticity hypothesis. Their essay takes in consideration modern prosodic and rhetorical studies, especially those of F.I. Andersen (1983). AF contend that the writing of units in prose, poetry or formulaic language does not justify the distinction between authentic and old editorial and later. "The division between prose and poetry does not mean that the poetry belongs to Amos and the prose to the editor" (p.147). They feel confident, though, to assign the headings (1,1; 3,1; 4,1; 5,1) to the editor and "whatever poetry or nonprose compositions there are" to the prophet. But formulaic structures (1,3-2,8; 4,6-11) and mixed gen-

res could well belong to both. Amos was capable of composition all across the range, from pure prose to pure poetry (p.148). "The book as we have it is the product of editorial labour including selection, modification, expansion, adaptation and especially the incorporation of headings, closings, liturgical formulas, and the like...Drawing the line between what Amos said and did and may have written and what the editor may have contributed has proved to be a difficult and ultimately unrewarding task. In the end we must deal with the book of Amos, not Amos and his editor, but what the two or more of them together produced' (p.148). *Text:* AF declare their confidence that the Masoretic Text (MT) as handed down by tradition "has been preserved with a high degree of fidelity to its original, or at least early state" (p.4). And they state several times (pp.3.139-141 for instances) their reluctance to emend the text or to comment on an emended text. Their caution, they say, arises from concern for sound empirical method. "The textual evidence we have, in manuscript and versions, always has a better claim on our attention than readings that have been made in order to solve a problem" (p.3). Of course they are quite aware that the transmission process could not have left the text immaculate: "The MT enjoys prestige but not privilege" (p.4) and they do propose a small number of changes here and there (cfr commentary). But they refuse to count among secondary readings texts which prove to be difficult or obscure. "The fault could be with the author, who went

too far in being enigmatic or who did not realise that an idea, clear to him, would not come across in the language he selected" (p.140). Or the fault could be without ignorance of the language. When difficulties of this kind present themselves AF "prefer to leave some problems unresolved rather than attempt to explain the unknown by the unknown" (pp.3-4).

AF's discussions of Amos' geopolitical terminology, which takes up quite a consistent slice of the Introduction (pp.98-139), is ultimately aimed at bringing grist to the authenticity mill. The authors attempt to prove that the prophet had not only the northern kingdom for the object of his oracles, preaching and ministry in general. In this subsection they develop a hypothesis which presumes that when the term *yisra'el* is used alone it designates the northern kingdom only, but when the term is qualified by other words or expressions such as *bayit*, *bny*, *btwlt* or *'ammi*, the reference could be to the Israel of the Exodus, the twelve-tribe league, the United Kingdom rather than to the political entity of the month. "It can also refer to an ideal entity of the future or even the two kingdoms together conceived of or interpreted as a whole, the combined descendants of Jacob/Israel" (p.99). In this discussion other terms are included such as *yaaqob*, *yosep* and *yishaq*. AF proceed by examining text by text wherever any of the listed terms or expressions feature, and attempt to establish their semantic force (pp.99-126); then they offer an evaluation of the hypothesis (pp.126-139); according to their

analysis most instances examined would support their hypothesis or at least provide no hindrance to it. Only Amos 6, 8 and 9, 7 would seem to create difficulties for the hypothesis and AF were able to offer a rationale for these two exceptions (for a synthesis cfr pp. 126-129).

According to the authors of this commentary the selection and arrangement of the names for Israel (AF divide the Book of Amos in four major units: I, chapters 1-4; II, chapters 5-6; III, chapters 7,1-9,6; IV, Chapter 9,11-15 - p.132 -) and its variants, including related terms, were deliberate, carefully and artistically disposed by the author and editor - for the distribution cfr. pp.132-135. The use of geopolitical terms in Amos prove that the northern kingdom was the primary though not exclusive target of the prophet's message. Judah as well was taken as addressee. "In the many instances that reference is made to the 'house of Israel' or 'the Israelites' both nations are included and both are intended as the object of criticism and condemnation" (p.137). This discovery precludes the excising of the oracle against Judah (Amos 2,4-5) and the few references to the southern kingdom (1,1; 7,12) as necessarily belonging to the book's post-history - cfr Mays, *Amos*, 40. AF consider the procedure which label similar abstracts from Amos as inauthentic as circular reasoning that "can only convince the converted and cannot be defended as serious scholarship" (p.137).

AF try to explain the lack of uniformity in focus and emphasis in

the Book of Amos by relating the changes in presentation to developments in the prophet's career (p.7). They distinguish four perspectives within the biblical book, which they presume to be corresponding to four different moments in Amos' ministry: (i) There are passages celebrating God's faithfulness in the past, and appealing to the people to honour this past experience. Visions 1 and 2 (7,1-6) fit this stage (p.6; 1 refer the reader to pp.83-85 for a detailed analysis and explicitation of correspondences) (ii) Then there was a turning point brought about by repeated refusals on the part of the people to repent (cfr.4,6-11 for instance) as well as by the prophet's unfortunate encounter with Amaziah (7,10-17) during which Amos was presumably silenced forever. During this stage reflected in Visions 3 and 4 (7,7-9; 8,1-3) the prophet declares that the time of probation has ended, the time of judgement is about to begin. (iii) The period of judgement is echoed in the warnings of cosmic convulsions (earthquake) (Vision 5:9,1-4) and in warnings of utter defeat by military means (2,14-16). I refer the reader to pp.336-337 for an entire list of similar warnings. According to AF the oracles against the nations (1,3-2,8) belongs to this stage in Amos' career.

(iv) In this fourth moment AF fit those few verses towards the end of the Book, which sound a positive note, that announce that God's judgement is not after all the last word.

The logic of this reconstruction is that no part of this biblical book could be condemned to certain inauthen-

ticity because it cannot fit Amos' theological perspective. Former scholarship labelled Amos as prophet of doom so that whatever went beyond this perspective was judged to belong to a more recent redaction. AF refuse this procedure even though they are aware that the Book contains a literary presentation of the prophet's message rather than a chronological account of his life (p.68).

The present reviewer regards this volume as highly provocative, and one may allow himself be lured into the tricky labyrinth of endless debate over a great number of details. There is for instance AF's systematic refusal of emendations suggested by other scholars (on p.142 are listed "the ones non commonly doubted") to render the text more clear. On the wisdom of preferring an unclear text to an amended text that reads better on the presumption that its obscurity could be laid upon the original author's shoulders (p.140). The present reviewer would limit himself to a brief discussion of AF's basic presumption of the overall authenticity of the Book of Amos. The Introduction as well as the commentary seem geared to prove the reasonableness of this presumption. On the other hand AF obstructively exclude the alternative version of the redaction history of the book, which envisages a wider span of time for its formation process, and which presumes to explain the plurality of perspectives by plurality of authorships operating in different historical situations. The fact is that as long as our information upon the historical prophet draws exclusively upon this

book which tradition rightly or wrongly [pseudonymity was a strong reality in biblical tradition, cfr David C. Meade, *Pseudonymity and Canon*. An investigation into the relationship of Authorship and Authority in Jewish and Earliest Christian Tradition (W.B. Eerdmans; Grand Rapids, Michigan 1987), the protests of some conservative currents to the contrary - cfr for instance William J. Larkin Jr., *Culture and Biblical Hermeneutics*. Interpreting and Applying the Authoritative Word in a Relativistic Age (Baber Book House; Grand Rapids, Michigan 1988) 336 - notwithstanding] links to this prophet of the eight century BC, we shall never leave the realm of the hypothetical in our reconstruction of his thought, and of the redactional history of the script itself. So that with AF's reconstruction we have still to cross the threshold of historical certainty. Their attempt to ignore the post-history of this

prophetic book, built with great fatigue by colleagues, [for this concept I would refer to L. Alonso Schökel/J.L. Sicre Diaz, *Profetas*. Commentario, 1 (Ediciones Cristianidad; Madrid 1980) 22-24] reminded the present reviewer of the opening sentence in R.N. Whybray's monograph *The Making of the Pentateuch*. A Methodological Study (JSOT Supplements 53; Sheffield 1987) : "It is easier to cast doubt on earlier theories than to offer a satisfactory alternative" (p.9).

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