

RESEARCH ON THE BOOK OF AMOS

Amos—

*The Prophet
& His Oracles*

M. Daniel Carroll R.

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Preface

My interest in the book of Amos was kindled in Guatemala. As a seminary student, I had begun to read about theological trends in Latin America that were trying to respond to the pressing economic needs and social injustice of that long-suffering region. This literature would often appeal to the prophets of the Hebrew Bible in order to ground their demands for change in a powerful word from God. Shortly after graduation my wife and I moved to Central America, where I was to teach at an evangelical seminary in Guatemala City.

This was a homecoming of sorts for me. I am half-Guatemalan (my mother is Guatemalan, hence my second surname is Rodas), and I had spent quite a bit of time there as a boy. Now, though, it was all being processed differently: as a seminary professor trying to teach students from all over the Americas about God, the Bible, and Christian living in a manner that would be relevant and authentic to that context. So I turned to the eighth-century prophet for guidance.

My doctoral research at the University of Sheffield revolved around the book of Amos, and since that time this ancient text has served as the testing ground to explore how orientations drawn from other disciplines, such as literary theory, anthropology, sociology, and ethics, might illuminate the study of the Bible. Ultimately, all of the insights gained are designed to help draw Amos and the Hebrew Bible into a closer dialogue with the realities of the modern world, especially Latin America. Biblical studies for me have always been *for* something, not an end in themselves or a scholarly exercise divorced from the very stuff of life. To try to bridge the gap in the academy between traditional approaches and more directed ones is not always easy, and there can be distrust (even disdain) from each side of the divide toward the other. Hopefully, the days of such scholarly apartheid are numbered.

My hope is that this introduction to Amos research might serve to promote further study of this prophetic text. This volume is divided into two parts. The first part begins with two essays that present the history of Amos research. The initial essay takes the reader from the second half of the nineteenth century to

about the year 1990; the second brings the survey up to the present and closes with some thoughts concerning where research might head in the future. It is difficult to try to distill the huge amount of research that has been done into a readable and truly representative survey. I encourage the reader to mine the endnotes, where other sources and details, which would have made the essays too cumbersome, are mentioned and discussed. The third essay of this initial part is not a sustained historical overview, but rather a presentation of what many would label “readings from the margins”—that is, interpretations of the book since 1990 by minority groups within the West and from the perspective of the Two-Thirds World.

Part two consists of four bibliographies that cover commentaries, monographs, and articles on every aspect and part of the book. These are designed to be comprehensive, not exhaustive, listings of sources for further study. The last bibliography is an annotated listing of all doctoral dissertations on Amos completed between 1985 and 2000.

David Orton was the one who introduced me to this project. Carey Newman, my initial editor at Westminster John Knox Press, and Dan Braden have been a great help and a joy to work with in the race to meet publishing deadlines. I would like to thank the library staff at Denver Seminary for their untiring help, expressed always with a gracious smile, in finding obscure references. A special word of thanks goes to Zola Hill, the one in charge of interlibrary loans, who was able to secure all sorts of sources from around the world for a professor so focused on this one Minor Prophet.

My wife, Joan, and two sons, Matthew and Adam, have been patient again with the long nights and weekends at my desk at home. But, in the end, I dedicate this book to my mother, Edit Rodas Carroll. It was she who gave me a love of books and the classroom, as well as nurtured my Guatemalan roots. These are things that define in so many ways who I am and my vocation in life. *Mamá, desde lo más profundo de mi corazón, te agradezco por el rico legado que me has dado: por tu persona, por tu ejemplo en tantas esferas de la vida, y por el orgullo que siento por mi ‘guatemalidad.’*

Thanksgiving, 2001

Abbreviations

AB	Anchor Bible
<i>AcAn</i>	<i>Acta Antiqua</i>
ACEBT	<i>Amsterdamse Cahiers voor Exegese en bijbelse Theologie</i>
AGJU	Arbeiten zur Geschichte des antiken Judentums und des Urchristentums
<i>AJA</i>	<i>American Journal of Archaeology</i>
<i>AJSL</i>	<i>American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures</i>
AnOr	Analecta Orientalia
ASTI	<i>Annual of the Swedish Theological Institute</i>
AOAT	Alter Orient und Altes Testament
ATANT	Abhandlungen zur Theologie des Alten und Neuen Testaments
ATD	Das Alte Testament Deutsch
ATLA	American Theological Library Association
<i>AusBR</i>	<i>Australian Biblical Review</i>
<i>Auss</i>	<i>Andrews University Seminary Studies</i>
AzTh	Arbeiten zur Theologie
BAR	<i>Biblical Archaeology Review</i>
BASOR	<i>Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research</i>
BAT	Die Botschaft des Alten Testaments
BBB	Bonner biblische Beiträge
BBET	Beiträge zur biblischen Exegese und Theologie
BBR	<i>Bulletin for Biblical Research</i>
BEATAJ	Beiträge zur Erforschung des Alten Testaments und des antiken Judentums
<i>BeO</i>	<i>Bibbia e Oriente</i>
BEvT	Beiträge zur evangelischen Theologie
BHS	<i>Biblia hebraica stuttgartensia</i> , ed. K. Elliger and W. Rudolph. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelstiftung, 1981
<i>Bib</i>	<i>Biblica</i>

ST	<i>Studia theologica</i>
SWBA	Social World of Biblical Antiquity
<i>SwJT</i>	<i>Southwest Journal of Theology</i>
TB	Theologische Bücherei
<i>TBl</i>	<i>Theologische Blätter</i>
TBT	<i>The Bible Today</i>
TEV	Today's English Version
TGI	<i>Theologie und Glaube</i>
<i>TbX</i>	<i>Theologia Xaveriana</i>
TLZ	<i>Theologische Literaturzeitung</i>
TOTC	Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries
TQ	<i>Theologische Quartalschrift</i>
<i>TRu</i>	<i>Theologische Rundschau</i>
TSAJ	Texte und Studien zum antiken Judentum
TSK	<i>Theologische Studien und Kritiken</i>
TTE	<i>The Theological Educator</i>
TTZ	<i>Trierer theologische Zeitschrift</i>
<i>TynBul</i>	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
TZ	<i>Theologische Zeitschrift</i>
UF	<i>Ugarit-Forschungen</i>
<i>VCaro</i>	<i>Verbum caro</i>
VD	<i>Verbum domini</i>
VF	<i>Verkündigung und Forschung</i>
<i>VSp</i>	<i>Vie spirituelle</i>
VT	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
VTSup	Supplements to <i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WMANT	Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament
WO	<i>Die Welt des Orients</i>
<i>WuD</i>	<i>Wort und Diest</i>
ZAH	<i>Zeitschrift für Althebräistik</i>
ZAW	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
ZDPV	<i>Zeitschrift des deutschen Palästina-Vereins</i>
ZTK	<i>Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche</i>
ZWT	<i>Zeitschrift für wissenschaftliche Theologie</i>

PART I

Essays on Amos Research

A History of Amos Research: From Wellhausen until 1990

INTRODUCTION

The book of Amos holds a unique place among the canonical prophetic literature. Its place as the first written prophetic text, the brief biographical revelations of a call and its impressive visions, and the enduring power of the message of the man from Tekoa have continually brought this text into the center of many of the broader concerns of investigation into prophetism in general. A number of years ago James Mays aptly remarked:

Amos is the first of the writing prophets, and so the point of departure for the study of the prophetic movement and its literature. His book is the testing ground for every thesis about the nature of prophecy and its developing history. Prophets there had been before him, but his oracles are the earliest direct evidence for what a prophet said, so that those who preceded him must be seen somewhat in the light of the given of his book, and his successors in the prophetic calling are approached with the knowledge that he has already been in the field. Moreover, his preaching is direct, clear, simple—deceptively so. His vocabulary is relatively small, his concerns specific, and his message seems as plain as his style. Here, surely, is a prophet one can read and understand.¹

David Petersen more recently has voiced the same sentiment:

Amos and the scholarship devoted to it offer a microcosm of work on prophetic literature. Virtually every method or perspective available has been exercised on these nine chapters. As a result, no prophetic book has a bibliography comparable in size to that on Amos.²

It is possible to trace research into Amos, therefore, in parallel with the trends and interests that have driven the study of the prophets as persons, their words,

and the composition of the books that now bear their names. This correspondence will be evident as I review in this essay scholarly work on Amos since the end of the nineteenth century.

The review of studies on Amos in this first essay is in no way exhaustive, but rather attempts to be representative of the most important currents in research and of those scholars who have had the most impact in the field from the closing years of the nineteenth century until about 1990. My breakdown of the history of Amos research into three periods must be appreciated as a suggestion of approximate divisions, as trends overlap and work off of each other in mutual fashion. My purpose is to present a general, but trustworthy, picture that can prove insightful to those intending more extensive study of this prophetic book. The survey essay in the next chapter will cover research from the early 1990s until the present and also will offer projections about the future.

Those who desire to pursue Amos research until 1990 are well served by a number of helpful survey articles,³ a formal bibliography,⁴ and by several recent monographs that offer detailed summaries of research and extensive bibliographies.⁵ Each of these sources, of course, reflects the particular priorities of its social and academic context and so allows one to take the pulse, as it were, of scholarly concerns over time.

THE PROPHET AS A CREATIVE RELIGIOUS GENIUS

This opening section of inquiry will focus on three interrelated principal topics of scholarly investigation from the mid-1880s through the first decades of the twentieth century: the appearance of a different understanding of faith in the God of Israel among the eighth-century prophets, the interest in ecstasy, and the desire to recover the very words of these spokespersons for God from the prophetic books.

Amos as a Religious Innovator

Any examination of theories about the evolution of the beliefs and religious practices of Israel finds a natural starting point with the nineteenth-century German Old Testament scholar Julius Wellhausen. In his epoch-making *Prolegomena to the History of Israel*, the first edition of which was published in 1878, Wellhausen articulated a reconstruction of the history of the religion of Israel that would largely define scholarly comprehension of the development of the people's religion for years to come as well as forever change the appreciation of the biblical presentation of that faith. This reconstruction of

Israel's religion, of course, necessarily also affected the understanding of the nature of prophetism. In Wellhausen's view, and in contradistinction from what is found in the pages of Scripture, the classical (or canonical) prophets—of whom Amos was the first—predated the Mosaic covenant and the law. In other words, the actual historical sequence contradicted the biblical presentation.⁶ At least two components of this perspective are especially pertinent to this discussion.

To begin with, the strident ethical demands of these divine spokespersons could no longer be taken as grounded in the lists of Pentateuchal statutory and institutional stipulations; instead, they now were taken to be the reflection of universal moral principles. What is more, the message of the prophets was envisioned as primarily a call to social justice, with direct access to God coming only in the doing of righteousness. Consequently, the prophets adamantly opposed the misguided rituals of the people and would have denied the efficacy of the intricate and mediated cult as it is now presented in Exodus to Deuteronomy. Indeed, the move to a formal cult system, with all of its rites and personnel, actually signified a degeneration of the faith of Israel, a loss of a more personal relationship with God.⁷ Thus, through the work of Wellhausen and others, a breach had been driven between the prophets and sacrificial religion.

A second observation springs from the first. The appeal to and proclamation of fundamental moral principles also meant that in the prophets' day Yahweh could not be conceived solely within the limits of a theology of a national patron deity. In their preaching, the God of Israel was to be recognized as the God of every nation who would judge all of humanity in accordance with the requirements of his character of justice.⁸

This combination of moral demand and geographical transcendence was in some measure discontinuous with Israel's earlier beliefs. Even though in the prophetic teaching the God of Israel was the same God as that of the ancient fathers of the nation, the understanding of the nature of his person and demands received a fresh orientation. In this theological development the prophet Amos, as the initial canonical prophet, had a special role to play: "Amos was the founder, and the purest type, of a new phase of prophecy."⁹ With him came the inchoate steps toward a universalism, founded upon what this German scholar would call "ethical monotheism." The prophets expanded Israel's understanding of their Deity and so ultimately would help lay the theological foundation that would later help preserve that monotheistic faith by placing it beyond the sociopolitical vicissitudes and fatal final destiny of the nation.

At this juncture Wellhausen's almost poetic description of the appearance of the prophet Amos merits citation:

Under King Jeroboam II, two years before a great earthquake that served ever after for a date to all who had experienced it, there occurred at Bethel, the greatest and most conspicuous sanctuary of Jehovah in Israel, a scene full of significance. The multitude were assembled there with gifts and offerings for the observance of a festival, when there stepped forward a man whose grim seriousness interrupted the joy of the feast. It was a Judaeon, Amos of Tekoa, a shepherd from the wilderness bordering on the Dead Sea. Into the midst of the joyful tones of the songs which with harp and tabor were being sung at the sacred banquet he brought the discordant note of the mourner's wail. For over all the joyous stir of busy life his ear caught the sounds of death: "the virgin of Israel has fallen, never more to rise; lies prostrate in her own land with no one to lift her up." He prophesied as close at hand the downfall of the kingdom which just at that moment was rejoicing most in the consciousness of power, and the deportation of the people to a far-off northern land.¹⁰

A short while later Wellhausen would repeat this view of the prophet Amos with more detail in his brief commentary on the Minor Prophets. For instance, the introduction to his observations on 4:4–14 reads:

This passage no longer applies to those of high position in the capital, but rather to the people as a whole, perhaps to a feast gathering. *The sin of the people is the cult*—that is, the false estimation itself, the illusion, that through it Yahweh could be sought and found and connected with Israel. Of a foreign service or illicit practices Amos says nothing. He does not take Bethel, Gilgal, and Beersheba as idolatrous sanctuaries, but rather as the glorious places for the cult of Yahweh. . . . The more zealously and grandiosely they pursue the cult, the more they offend Yahweh. He had clearly and repeatedly made known their offense, but the tragedy is that they did not then turn from this, but rather still continued to be attached to the false way, simply offering more sacrifices and gifts.¹¹

At 5:24 he says: "The old antithesis: no cult, but rather justice!"¹² The violation of the divine ethical imperative allows no hope for restoration beyond the judgment. In Wellhausen's oft-quoted phrase: "Roses and lavender instead of blood and iron."¹³

Several elements of this position concerning the prophetic (and hence Amos's) assessment of Israelite worship continued to have a profound influence on Old Testament studies. Discussion on the significance of the cult and its relationship to divine ethical demands would persist for many years after the appearance of Wellhausen's volume. In broad terms, scholars continued to underscore the idea that the ethical emphasis and universalism of Amos was somewhat of a new view birthed by the prophet Amos, but differences surfaced vis-à-vis the conceptualization of the details of the historical-religious recon-

struction. Some—whether speaking of prophetism in general¹⁴ or as commentators on Amos in particular¹⁵—continued to maintain a sharp opposition between the theology of Amos and the ideology and practices of the cult as celebrated by Israel in the prophet's day.¹⁶ Other scholars could agree with the notion of the priority of the moral, without at the same time holding that the prophet desired the dismissal of everything cultic.¹⁷ Still others held that the theme of justice was certainly central to the message of Amos but disagreed that the prophet was the creator of an ethical monotheism, since Amos appealed to theological and historical antecedents within Israel and assumed a sense of basic right and wrong in all peoples.¹⁸ In any case, the perception of Amos as the champion of the marginalized gained prominence. He, along with the other eighth-century prophets, was seen as a harbinger of the higher ethics of the Christian faith and a precursor to the social gospel of the early twentieth century.

Amos as an Ecstatic

Another avenue of investigation that dominated scholarly interest in this time period was the desire to arrive at the uniqueness of the prophets by probing their inner life. This was an attempt to describe the nature of their communion with God and the subsequent communication of the divine revelation to the people of Israel. The crucial term in these discussions was "ecstasy"—that is, the supernatural overpowering of the prophets in the reception of Yahweh's message and the divine compulsion to transmit this word against the sins of Israel. For some scholars this uncommon encounter with God was tied into the ethical monotheism that the prophets preached: that prophetic conviction was ultimately grounded in an intense, personal experience with Yahweh.

The best-known pioneer of this approach was G. Hölscher, who proposed a theory of the development of prophetism in *Die Propheten*.¹⁹ He was by no means the first to show interest in prophetic inspiration and ecstasy,²⁰ but with his work the topic captured special attention. Hölscher joined comparative evidence from surrounding cultures with psychological theory to propose an explanation of prophetic ecstasy. He believed that the phenomenon originated in pre-Israelite Syria and Asia Minor and was then taken up by Israel's early prophets. Certain characteristics, he believed, continued to mark prophetism, even though there were changes over time in terms of its magnitude and manifestations.²¹

Scholarly debate focused primarily on four points. First, were ecstasy's beginnings to be limited to early Palestine and Asia Minor, or was the phenomenon more global (both throughout the ancient Near East and in modern religious experience)? Second, although all acknowledged certain bizarre activity in early prophetism (e.g., 1 Sam. 10:5–13, 18:10, 19:20–24), was the

ecstasy mentioned later in Israel's history (e.g., 1 Kgs. 18:25–29; cf. 2 Kgs. 9:11; Hos. 9:7; Jer. 29:26) to be limited to false or non-Yahwistic prophets? In other words, did the classical prophets, with their developed socioethical messages, demonstrate in any way some of the same ecstatic behavior? Third, was the label “ecstasy” best applied to the reception of the divine word, to its delivery to an audience, or to the whole process from the special encounter with God to the divinely empowered communication? Lastly, could the meaning of the term be related to the etymology or to a particular verbal stem of the verb “to prophesy” (*nbʿ*)? Such concerns were still occupying large portions of introductory texts on prophetism even during those days in which the idea of ecstasy had lost much of its appeal.²² One of the last to seek more far-ranging ancient and modern parallels and to attempt to nuance its meaning and so demonstrate its relevance for the study of prophetism was Lindblom.²³

The prophet Amos, as the first of the canonical prophets and as one who concentrated on the ethical, marked for many the change from ecstatic phenomena to a more rational and controlled prophetism. Nevertheless, some did hold that Amos in some fashion was an ecstatic, too.²⁴ For instance, in regard to the vision of the basket of fruit in 8:1–3, Robinson writes:

It would seem that we have here a suggestion as to one of the ways in which ecstasy took hold of the Prophet. He might be looking fixedly at a certain object, and its name, revolving in his mind, would bring home to him the substance of what he was to say. The dazed condition which often springs from such a fixed gaze would thus merge gradually into the actual experience of the ecstasy itself.²⁵

Lindblom also sought to establish some kind of solid link between Amos and the earlier ecstatic *nēbīʿim*. In his mind, some discontinuities and developments within prophetism had inevitably taken place, but Amos was still to be considered an ecstatic. Lindblom enumerated those items that he felt would qualify this prophet as an ecstatic:

It is clear that the difference between Amos and the earlier nabīs was not a radical one. He was connected with them by many ties. In tradition he was regarded as a prophet. Amaziah called him a seer, *hōzēh*. “Seer” and “prophet” were at the time identical. His activity was described as “prophesying,” i.e., his appearance and his actions were those of a nabi. The redactor of the Book of Amos calls its contents “words which he saw,” i.e., prophetic revelations. Amos himself represents Yahweh's command at the moment of his call this way: “Go, speak as a prophet to my people Israel.” When he says, “When the Lord Yahweh speaks, who can but prophesy?” (iii. 8), he no doubt has in mind himself and his personal experiences. His messages frequently have the form of oracles, introduced by the usual oracle formula: “Thus says Yahweh.” They were based on revelations from God. As

divine words they were regarded as having effective power. Amaziah said that the land was unable to endure all his words. The feeling of divine constraint and compulsion is expressed in his words: “When the lion roars, who does not fear? When the Lord speaks, who can but prophesy?” (iii. 8). A series of real visions received by Amos is preserved in tradition. A real vision is always based upon ecstasy of one form or another.²⁶

Many could agree with much of this list of observations about the ministry of the prophet Amos; nevertheless, eventually few scholars came to classify these items under the rubric of “ecstasy.” One commentator strongly opposed such a suggestion:

Although Amos can see visions, yet evidence is entirely absent that the primitive or lower kind of *ecstasy*, which was the distinguishing feature of earlier “prophesy,” was part of Amos' equipment. . . . If prophets in the line begun by Amos received at times, in an abnormal state, their message, or their first “call,” the “ecstasy” seems to have been almost entirely of a high order, having its analogy somewhat in that of the Christian mystic; it is difficult to understand how it could be compared with that which is common in a primitive religion. Nor does there seem to be sufficient evidence to conclude that their messages were *delivered* in ecstasy.²⁷

More tellingly, this same scholar quotes Hölscher himself to substantiate the profound change that had taken place within prophetism by the time of Amos's appearance:

In all this, the words of Amos stand out as ecstatic speech—but what a distance from the older prophetic ecstasy! No stammered, half-intelligent sounds, but distinct announcement of divine truths. All external expedients, all exaggerated behaviour has disappeared before manifest spiritualisation.²⁸

By the mid-1960s interest in ecstasy had diminished. It would surface again, though, years later within the very different conceptual framework of cultural anthropology approaches (see below).

The Ipsissima Verba of Amos

A third important issue was the effort to isolate within the received biblical text the very words of the prophets and so recuperate their fundamental message. This recovery of the prophetic revelation was thought to be very important, because these words would represent the essence of their unusual personal experience with God as well as the unadulterated call to the spiritual and ethical faith demanded by Yahweh.

There were two fundamental theoretical perspectives on how to identify the original words of the prophets and then reconstruct the process of the composition of the canonical books. These distinct means of argumentation were sometimes coordinated and utilized together. The first approach returned to the theme of ecstasy. The style and parameters of prophetic speech were defined in accordance with that prophetic experience: the intense meetings with God provided just short, symbolic messages, which were then communicated verbally rather than written down. In other words, the prophets were above all else orators and poets, not authors. Gunkel makes this view clear:

Originally, the prophets were not writers, but became such towards the end of their history. They were originally orators, as can be seen from the expression "Hear!" with which their speeches begin. We must try and imagine their sayings being uttered orally, and not as they stand on paper, if we are to understand them. . . . We must not imagine that their manner of delivery, especially in the case of the older prophets, was as deliberate as that of modern preachers, and in fact the comparison between prophets and preachers (and even more between them and teachers) has greatly hindered our understanding.²⁹

And again: "Of its nature, enthusiastic inspiration speaks in poetic form, and rational reflection in the form of prose. Consequently, in form the prophetic 'speech' was originally a poem."³⁰ This view, accordingly, would hold any prophetic oracle to be unavoidably brief, and, in the case of the juxtaposition of several oracles, no necessary coherence between them was to be expected. Robinson states:

To each of these [i.e., prophetic utterances] we may give the name "oracle," understanding by that term the message given at any one time and through any one ecstatic experience. There is no reason to believe that this experience was commonly of long duration. . . . In any case it seems clear that the oracle itself—that is, the words in which the message was enshrined, was almost always short, and consisted of a few sentences which would drive home the point in unforgettable fashion. Further, it would seem that the oracle was always cast in poetic form, that it was, in fact, a short poem of the characteristic Hebrew type. It is this fact which enables us to ascertain something of the structure of the prophetic books. The Hebrew was not reflective, and the ecstatic experience tended to produce emotional expression rather than logical consistency. The result is that one does not look in the individual oracle for more than one dominant idea. It is not a reasoned process of thought that is attempted. The prophetic oracle is rather an effort to bring home a single truth in arresting language and striking phrases.³¹

In accordance with this point of view, with the passing of time these poignant words from God, which had been proclaimed on any number of separate occa-

sions, would have been recorded and then collected by a prophet's disciples.³² Still later, this collection would have been supplemented by additional material. The task of the exegete, therefore, was to isolate those first poetic sayings in order to *truly* hear the voice of the prophet.

The second perspective offered a different rationale for singling out the authentic oracles. This approach paralleled the literary-critical viewpoint prevalent at that time within Old Testament studies in general and within Pentateuch research in particular. Here the focus was on demarcating the first written sources, which later would have been expanded. Philosophically, these scholars held that the chronologically earlier—that is, the original revelations—were inherently superior to the subsequent additions. In other words, the necessity of trimming back the existing text to uncover the original words of the prophets was still paramount:

Nowhere is it more necessary to distinguish sharply between the actual words of an author and those that have been added by later writers than in the case of Amos and Hosea. . . . Care has been taken, therefore, to keep separate the quite considerable portion of material (ascribed by tradition to these authors) which may confidently be treated as of later origin.³³

Harper explains that Amos left his oracles in writing to his disciples. To get back to these initial oracles, which are now interlaced with several succeeding layers of secondary material, Harper appeals to the poetic character of prophetic speech. This, he believes, was of a consistent strophe length and meter and so can be retrieved by the careful study of the text. The nature of the primary poetic level is delineated in detail and serves to introduce his exposition of the text.³⁴ Wolfe takes the same tack, but does so in a more dramatic tone that exhibits an unbounded confidence in the critical method and the sensibilities of "discerning scholarship":

Inasmuch as Amos and Hosea were master poets, a number of secondary additions issue their own condemnation by reason of poor poetic quality or even prose style. The interpolations also frequently show variations (in person, number, case, tense, word usage, vocabulary, etc.) which set them off from the context into which they are placed. In these, and other numerous ways, stylistic and grammatical, the secondary passages usually bear witness against themselves.

Faced with this condition of the prophetic productions, the biblical scholar has been confronted with a formidable challenge. This is the project of restoring these writings to something approaching the original forcefulness and beauty they possessed as they left the lips of these prophets. Marvelous restorations are carried on these days in all branches of art. Why cannot the same be done with these masterpieces of literary and religious art? . . . As with the art critics and their

restored paintings, it has been a thrilling adventure to remove the secondary accretions here and there, repair the damage to the text caused by careless scribes, and see these writings re-emerge, after all the centuries, to display once more their original grandeur and again speak their powerful messages.³⁵

In sum, each of these three topics of research—ethical monotheism, ecstasy, and the quest for the ipsissima verba of the prophets—in its own way sought to discover the locus of the prophetic genius, whether by basing it on a transcendent moral content, an incomparable encounter with the divine, or the rhythmic patterns of a sublime message. New trends, however, were emerging, some of which were presented as direct alternatives to these scholarly views.

LOCATING THE PROPHET SOCIALY AND THEOLOGICALLY

In sharp contrast to some scholarly opinion that the prophets eschewed ritual in order to champion a more pure ethical ideal, new directions in research that gathered force in the 1920s began to suggest that the prophets—or at least some of them—were intimately connected with cultic institutions. This new orientation was part of a broader movement to better understand the setting of the prophets and their messages within the social life of Israel. This interest was pursued in two distinct, but sometimes related, tracks. The first focused more on certain comparative material from the surrounding cultures of the ancient Near East and a selection of biblical passages and terminology; the second grounded its arguments primarily in theories about specific literary forms and the traditions embedded within the prophetic books.

The New Year Festival Theory and Prophetic Labels

While commenting on 1 Sam. 10, Hölscher in passing had suggested a connection between some of the prophets and the cult.³⁶ Gunkel, too, noticed commonalities between the prophetic literature and the Psalms, such as the use of liturgical language in some of the prophets (e.g., Joel), the polemics against ritual and the concern for social justice in several psalms that also are prevalent in the prophets, and the appearance of oracular speech (the divine “I”) in certain psalms that looked like prophetic utterances. In his mind, and in line with the scholarly view at the time that many of the psalms were to be dated relatively late, the implication of these observations was that the prophets had influenced the cult.

An important development, which would alter the direction of future study, came with Sigmund Mowinckel’s landmark work, *Psalmenstudien*.³⁷ The crucial change in outlook was Mowinckel’s reversal of Gunkel’s conviction that the prophetic writings had often preceded the production of the psalms. This different appreciation of the relationship grew out of this Danish scholar’s reconstruction of the history of prophetism in Israel. He believed that a prophetic link with the cult could be substantiated early in Israel’s existence in the seer’s pronouncement of divine oracles of curse and blessing at the sanctuaries. The seer, in other words, performed a prophetic function. Once in Canaan, Israel had appropriated the charismatic form of the ecstatic *nēbî’im*, who in time organized themselves into prophetic guilds and assumed the role of those ancient seers.³⁸ The giving of oracles (characteristically of weal) continued to play an important part in the cultic setting, as the prophets would respond to appeals to the Deity by the people, the king, and other individuals (e.g., Pss. 60, 82, 110). Some prophets, he believed, probably had composed a number of the psalms.

The premier cultic setting for Mowinckel was an annual New Year Festival, in which he envisioned a symbolic reenthronement of Yahweh in a ceremonial drama with the participation of the king. The festival, he believed, ultimately had its roots in the Babylonian *Akitu* festival.³⁹ This rite also entailed the renewal of Israel’s covenant with their God, with the attendant proclamation of promises of blessing and threats as well as the demand for adherence to covenant obligations. One of the complex of foundational “festal myths” celebrated at these festivals would have been the victory of Yahweh over his and Israel’s enemies. Mowinckel suggested that the Oracles against the Nations in Amos (chaps. 1–2) may have had their origin in such a cultic setting.⁴⁰

Mowinckel distinguished the prophets at the sanctuaries (especially the temple in Jerusalem) from those in the prophetic guilds and the “free reform” or canonical prophets (who could be very critical of the cult), but other scholars soon extended the category of “cult prophet” to include either every or most of the biblical prophets. Haldar, for instance, broadened the data base for coupling the prophets with the cult by arguing for similarities with the ancient Near Eastern phenomena of divination and ecstasy. More specifically, he connected the seer-priest in Israel with the Mesopotamian *bārûm* and the prophets with the *mubhûm*. Unlike most scholars, he denied any disjunction between the earlier prophets and the writing prophets.⁴¹ A less extreme and more carefully articulated view was put forth by Aubrey Johnson. In his understanding of prophetism, the prophets were members of the official cultic personnel—once again, this would have been true especially in Jerusalem⁴²—and occupied themselves with the giving of oracles and offering intercession at the sanctuaries. Theirs was the task of promoting the welfare of the nation by communicating

the will of Yahweh to the people. The classical or canonical prophets, therefore, had not lashed out at the cult as such, but rather had spoken out against those who abused their vocation by giving false oracles while claiming to speak for Yahweh.⁴³

The studies by Haldar and Johnson mention Amos only briefly. For Haldar the designations *nōqēd* (Amos 1:1) and *bôqēr* (7:14) prove “him to have belonged to the cult staff.”⁴⁴ The first term he defines in accordance with a specific interpretation of a phrase in an Ugaritic text (*KTU* 1.6.vi.55), which links certain shepherds to a sanctuary: *rb kbnm rb nqdm* (“chief of the priests, chief of the shepherds”). Haldar relates the second label (*bôqēr*) to the Hebrew verb *biqqr* (piel of the root *bqr*) and to divination. Johnson cites Amos 3:7 as an illustration of the personal contact with Yahweh, which would have been the basis for the prophetic oracular function in the cult.⁴⁵

Several scholars, whose research was more directly concerned with Amos, also contended that Amos had some sort of relationship with the cult or a sanctuary. Bič argued that the term *nōqēd* in 1:1 revealed that the prophet was a hepatoscoper—that is, one who inspected the livers of sacrificial animals in order to interpret oracles.⁴⁶ On the basis of the use of this term in the aforementioned Ugaritic text, Kapelrud proposed that Amos had been a high-ranking cult official, who was in charge of the temple herds (cf. *KTU* 4.68.71; 2 Kgs. 3:4). In addition, with Mowinckel, he related the prophet’s message about the day of the Lord to the New Year Festival.⁴⁷

Lindblom reacted against the idea that the terms *nōqēd* and *bôqēr* meant that Amos was a formal member of a sanctuary staff, but on other grounds did feel that the prophet had been attached to a group of sanctuary prophets at Bethel for a brief period and that Amaziah had addressed him as such.⁴⁸ Watts disagreed, too, with categorizing Amos as a cult prophet per se, if by so doing there was any hint of participation in divination. In his view, Amos appeared regularly at the sanctuaries—especially at the New Year Festival of covenant renewal—to deliver his messages. His ministry as a mediator and spokesperson, in other words, had been carried out within the context of the cult, even if Amos himself was not a cult prophet.⁴⁹ Others questioned the interpretation of the Ugaritic data, in particular the meaning of the term *nōqēd*.⁵⁰ The significance, even the very existence, of a New Year Festival as envisioned by Mowinckel and others came increasingly into question.⁵¹

The Prophet within Form and Tradition Criticism

Interest in a cultic background for the prophets (and thus Amos) arose from other quarters as well. Early in the twentieth century scholars began to try to probe behind the hypothetical documents postulated by source criticism with different

methods called form criticism and tradition criticism.⁵² The former developed first, with the discipline of tradition history appearing somewhat later. Though distinct, these approaches are interrelated by a shared concern to comprehend the preliterary history (i.e., the origin and development) of biblical texts.

Form criticism focuses on certain terminology and ideas, which are set in definite conventional literary structures and genres (*Gattungen*), and attempts to discern the possible social and institutional settings (the *Sitze im Leben*) in ancient Israel that might have given rise to those forms now within the biblical documents. From this perspective, these forms would have originally been oral compositions, which only at a later time were put into writing. Tradition criticism in theory studies the progression from oral through written transmission evident between the stages highlighted by form and source criticism. Like form criticism, tradition criticism is concerned about the social contexts in which the biblical materials were created and handed down and also underscores the prominence of the oral over the written.⁵³

An important consequence of the form- and tradition-critical approaches was the conviction that, in contradistinction from previous scholarship, the prophets were heirs, transmitters, and developers of earlier communal and national theological convictions and expressions (such as liturgies). In other words, their creative genius did not lay in a break with the past in an anticlitic ethical monotheism but rather was displayed in the recontextualization, as it were, of older forms and beliefs into new situations. Importantly for our discussion, at this juncture in Old Testament studies form and tradition criticism linked the prophets to the Israelite cult, which both rooted in an ancient covenantal theology.⁵⁴ Even though at that time there was a widespread *theological* coordination of the prophets in general (and Amos in particular)⁵⁵ with cult and covenant, I will narrow attention to specific trends within form-critical and tradition-historical studies of Amos.

First, scholars have long had a special interest in identifying the most characteristic and foundational genre of prophetic speech. For many the earliest form was the judgment speech. It has been recognized that these oracles usually consist of two parts: the threat or announcement of judgment (*Drohwort*) and the reproach or reason for that declaration (*Scheltwort*). Research on the genre has debated several issues, such as the adequacy of scholarly terminology, whether these two aspects were originally separate or go intrinsically together, and whether both are a divine revelation or the second a (human) prophetic reflection.⁵⁶ Our concern is not to rehearse opinions on these details but instead to concentrate particularly on the proposed *Sitz im Leben* of the prophetic accusations.

Although significant work on the judgment speeches in Amos appeared as early as 1926,⁵⁷ several studies particularly stand out in the discussion about

the relationship between the oracles of Amos and the cult. In 1950 Würthwein published a long essay entitled simply "Amos-Studien," in which he argued that Amos indeed had been a cult prophet.⁵⁸ His position was grounded in the widely held supposition that the prophets at the sanctuaries were prophets of weal (*Heilsnabi*), who delivered messages that would have denounced the enemies of Israel and proclaimed blessing for the nation (e.g., the Oracles against the Nations in Amos 1–2). In time, however, Amos's vocation had been dramatically altered. This change in perspective and calling, Würthwein believed, could be traced through the visions in chapters 7–9: from the task of intercession on behalf of Israel evident in the first two visions (7:1–6), Amos is moved to an obligation to announce judgment in the final three (7:7–9; 8:1–2; 9:1–4). Just as the initial call had thrust him into the prophetic office (7:14), through another direct intervention of Yahweh Amos now had become a prophet of woe (*Unheilsnabi*).⁵⁹ This change in the tone and content of his message would explain the motivation behind the confrontation with Amaziah: Amos had now stepped outside the proper boundaries for a cult prophet at the central sanctuary (7:10–17). In light of this reconstruction of the ministry of Amos, it could no longer be said that the prophet was either against all ritual or that he stood against the prophets in general (cf. 2:11–12; 3:7).⁶⁰ In addition, Würthwein argued that Amos's denouncing of Israel was based on early preexilic amphictyonic laws⁶¹ and a covenant.

In a subsequent elaboration of the idea that Amos was a cult prophet, Reventlow disallowed the dichotomy between the two kinds of prophets that Würthwein had postulated.⁶² In Reventlow's view, the cultic prophets interceded on the people's behalf as well as delivered oracles of both woe and weal. This breadth of activity is evident in Amos's ministry. Reventlow went beyond earlier studies to suggest further that much of the material in the book of Amos had specific liturgical settings: the Oracles against the Nations reflected a cursing ceremony against foreign enemies,⁶³ and the original context of 4:6–11 and 9:13–15 was to be found within the blessing and cursing rituals of a covenant feast. A few years later Brueggemann could agree with Reventlow's connection between 4:6–11 and the covenant curses of Lev. 26 and suggested that the passage reflected a covenant renewal festival. He did not think, however, that Amos had held a cultic office;⁶⁴ for Crenshaw, these verses suggested a "liturgy of penance."⁶⁵

Another avenue of support for the position that the message of Amos was grounded in covenant theology and thus connected to some sort of covenant ritual came from research into ancient Near Eastern suzerain-vassal treaties of the second millennium B.C.E.⁶⁶ Special appeal was made to the form of a covenant lawsuit (the *rib*), in which the superior within the agreement chastises the vassal for breach of covenant and then enumerates curses for that dis-

obedience. The prophets were said to have consciously patterned their words to reflect such an arrangement between Yahweh and his people; at the same time, this background material also was cited to defend the idea that the concept of covenant within Israel would have been an early and natural perspective rather than a late development within the history of their religion. This perspective was applied to the prophet Amos, who by means of such a lawsuit would have attacked the monarchy and the nation for having violated the Sinai covenant and invoked the appropriate covenant curses.⁶⁷

Reactions to the characterization of Amos as a cult prophet and to the conviction of a prophetic covenant theology were varied. Several critics raised the issue of the authenticity of several passages utilized in some of the argumentation that Amos had officially ministered at a sanctuary.⁶⁸ There was the doubt, too, about whether the use of cultic language by Amos required that he be a cult prophet. Farr commented that he may well have been simply "an intelligent layman who took his religion seriously, attending the services in the temple and at other shrines."⁶⁹ In addition, many scholars attacked both the biblical data and the use of the ancient Near Eastern material that had been marshaled to expound a covenant theology for the classical prophets. The coupling of various forms and terminology with an ancient covenant were considered to be tenuous, and the concept itself was once again pushed forward in time to be contemporaneous with (or even later than) the eighth-century prophets.⁷⁰ Nevertheless, the explanation of the words of Amos against the treaty background has been championed by some recent commentators,⁷¹ and others continue to argue for the importance of covenant ideas for the book's message and assume the antiquity of covenant ideas.⁷²

Yet another response to the covenant emphasis was the presentation of an alternative social context for Amos to that of the cult: wisdom.⁷³ After a period of neglect, wisdom literature began to generate more scholarly interest in the 1930s. This was sparked in part by archaeological finds (such as the Egyptian Wisdom of Amenemope), which, on the one hand, pointed to a prominence of wisdom thought prior to the exile and hence to its possible influence on pre-exilic prophetic ideas⁷⁴ and, on the other hand, suggested that comparable groups of wisdom teachers within the royal court and scribal schools might have existed in Israel as they had elsewhere in the ancient Near East.⁷⁵ Terrien subsequently proposed that Amos had drawn from the language and several literary forms of wisdom in communicating his message.⁷⁶

The identification of Amos's intellectual and spiritual background (*geistige Heimat*) with wisdom was most carefully articulated by Wolff. Building on Terrien's work, which had linked the graded numerical sequence (3/4) of the Oracles against the Nations in chapters 1 and 2, the didactic questions of 3:3–8, and certain vocabulary (e.g., "the right" in 3:10) to wisdom, he expanded the data base of

wisdom influence to include still more forms (the woe cries of 6:1, 3–6; 5:18–20; and perhaps 5:7, 10; the exhortation speeches [*Mahnrede*] of 4:4–5; 5:4–6, 14–15) and themes (such as the concern for the poor and the condemnation of extravagant lifestyles).⁷⁷ Wolff specified Amos's milieu as that of the older, more rural, ethical clan wisdom in contradistinction from that of the royal circles.⁷⁸

This point of view, however, also came under severe scrutiny. A number of scholars have questioned the notion of clan wisdom as the framework for the preaching of Amos and have given other explanations for each point of Terrien's and Wolff's hypotheses.⁷⁹ As in the cases of the cult and covenant, advocates of a very circumscribed intellectual and social background have tended to overstate their case and have ignored or inadequately handled contrary data. Research has increasingly come to the conclusion that the prophet probably appealed to the variety of extant theological traditions available to him to communicate the divine will to Israel.⁸⁰

In sum, these attempts to reconstruct the institutional and social context of the prophet Amos on the basis of parallels drawn from the rituals and literature of the surrounding cultures and by more textually focused critical methods illuminated many biblical details and succeeded in offering fresh perspectives on the man from Tekoa. In the end, however, it was recognized that these approaches had yielded theories of varying strengths and weaknesses. This frustration would lead scholars to pursue more sure results by other means or would suggest to some that such an enterprise must be abandoned for alternative interests.

THE QUEST FOR WHAT LIES BEHIND, WITHIN, AND IN FRONT OF THE TEXT

As this heading implies, I will subdivide this final section of the essay, which covers research from the late 1960s and early 1970s to about 1990, into three parts. Each of these foci concentrates on a particular dimension of the study of the prophetic literature.

Behind the Text

The phrase "behind the text" refers to those approaches that concentrate on some sort of historical reconstruction—whether that be by trying to trace the compositional growth and redaction history of the book of Amos, to uncover archaeological data to elucidate textual particulars, or to explain the complexities of the actual world of the eighth-century prophet on the basis of social theory.⁸¹

Proposals about how this prophetic book came to be continued in the line of form and tradition criticism. Pride of place in this kind of textual approach belongs to the commentary by Wolff. In his introduction Wolff presents a survey of the various speech forms in the book of Amos,⁸² and the exposition of each pericope is prefaced by the discussion of its "Form" and "Setting." Building upon an earlier piece by Schmidt as well as his own criteria for distinguishing and dating phrases and pericopes, Wolff proposes a six-stage formation of Amos.⁸³ Three of these strata, he believes, can be traced to the eighth century (the very words of Amos in chaps. 3 and 4; the "literary fixation" of the Oracles against the Nations and the visions; and the "old school of Amos"); to these were added the Bethel redaction of the Josianic reform of the seventh century, an exilic Deuteronomistic redaction, and the postexilic words of restoration. Wolff presents this hypothetical reconstruction with confidence. While he can say "the initial phases [of the transmission] are the most difficult to ascertain," just a few lines later he will declare that these layers can be separated out "with a high degree of probability."⁸⁴ Wolff posits that the redactional efforts of those who actualized the prophecy of Amos were motivated by the conviction that the divine revelation continued to have power and relevance across the centuries:

On the whole, therefore, the uniquely sombre message of Amos concerning the end of Israel remains unmistakably audible through all layers of tradition. To be sure, the old school of Amos modified it in one instance with the cultic expectation of salvation (5:14–15). The Bethel-exposition and the Deuteronomistic redaction recognize the new relevance of the words of Amos in the seventh and sixth centuries. Only the postexilic theology adds, briefly but distinctly, that Yahweh's sentence of death is not his last word.⁸⁵

Several commentators and detailed studies, to a lesser or greater degree, assumed Wolff's reconstruction of the genesis of Amos.⁸⁶ At the same time, the creative role of the redactors of the various stages of the book's composition began to draw greater attention. Although Wolff spoke of the setting of his hypothetical redactors and the reasons for their additions, other scholars were more aware of literary and lexical interconnections between the various passages within the text and tried to elaborate more comprehensive theories regarding the growth of Amos at the hands of redactors with intentional theological and political agendas.⁸⁷ For some, this redactional work also had pastoral and theological implications for today. Coote, for example, states:

Each stage of recomposition represents an interpretation of Amos's words, and thus an actualization of them, a reading and understanding of them that makes them real and important in a new and different present. Without these successive actualizations, the words of Amos

would soon have been forgotten. These actualizations are earlier analogues of our own interpretation of Amos by which we make it meaningful to us. The life of the word in the community of faith depends on continuously reactualizing the word. To say the recomposers of the book of Amos may not meaningfully do so is to imply that we may not. To say that they may, and to take them seriously at it, allows us to see ourselves in direct continuity with the persons and communities of faith that read Amos so actively that they rewrote him as they read. Our Scriptures *came into being in the process of interpretation*.⁸⁸

The most elaborate presentation came from a cooperative project headed by Koch.⁸⁹ In a very extensive analysis, Koch prioritizes the structure of the text as we now have it, yet without discounting editorial activity. He divides the book into four principal parts (chaps. 1–2; chaps. 3–4; 5:1–9:6; 9:7–15). Introductory and closing formulae and the hymnic passages are especially highlighted in the exposition of the coherence of the larger units and of the book as a whole. Some studies concentrated on particular sections within the text instead of encompassing the entire book. Fritz and Gosse, for instance, tried to coordinate the Oracles against the Nations with the Deuteronomistic History; each, however, drew different conclusions from the data regarding whether and how each corpus might have influenced the other and what the dates of the individual oracles might have been.⁹⁰

During the same period of this concern to elucidate the *literary prehistory* of Amos, archaeological discoveries were providing an ever-growing amount of information that could help clarify the *concrete historical realities lying behind the prophetic message*. Evidence came from a wide spectrum of social life,⁹¹ but new data concerning the religious beliefs and practices of Israel dominated scholarly publications and debates. Standing stones, altars and cult stands, terracotta figurines, seals, and other religious paraphernalia had been discovered throughout the length and breadth of Palestine.⁹² Two finds particularly stand out, both of which have profoundly affected the scholarly understanding of popular religion in eighth-century Israel and, therefore, can impact the interpretation of the message and ministry of the prophet Amos as well.

One area of research had to do with the *marzēah* feast. This was apparently a celebration sponsored by wealthy fraternal associations, documentation for which covers several centuries and a wide geographical area. Opinions differed over the possible religious significance of these banquets. In addition, there were the spectacular finds at Kuntillet 'Ajrud in the eastern Sinai and at Khirbet el-Qôm, which is near Hebron in Judah. At Kuntillet 'Ajrud paintings and inscriptions on two pithoi (large storage jars) created a stir, as scenes apparently depicting religious motifs were juxtaposed with lines pronouncing a blessing in the name of "Yahweh of Samaria and his asherah." At Khirbet

el-Qôm another inscription also communicated a blessing in the name of "Yahweh and his asherah."

Discussion has revolved around a set of interrelated issues.⁹³ First, the figures and their activity in the pictures had to be identified, and the words and syntax of the inscriptions needed to be deciphered and properly translated. These efforts often have gone hand in hand with attempts to categorize the various religious movements within ancient Israel. Scholars have tried to distinguish the "official Yahwism" of the state apparatus from "popular" faith;⁹⁴ questions surfaced concerning the (foreign or indigenous) sources and development of any "heterodox" elements; and the nature of the prophetic critique of the eighth century vis-à-vis these various religious expressions had to be formulated. This archaeological data concerning the *marzēah* and Kuntillet 'Ajrud and Khirbet el-Qôm many times became part of the basis of broader hypotheses regarding the rise of Yahwistic monotheism.

This essay will not offer any decisions regarding this evidence or the evolution of Yahwism. Rather, what is important for my purposes here is to point out the impact this material has had on the study of Amos. Some scholars readily incorporated this information into the interpretation of the book. To begin with, the term *mirzāh* actually appears in 6:7. King noted the parallels between the description of the feast in 6:4–7 and what had been discovered about the *marzēah* elsewhere.⁹⁵ Barstad took the evidence still further and postulated that the prophetic diatribe against the feast appears as well at 2:7b–8 and 4:1 and incorporated this interpretation into his view that the primary goal of the prophet Amos had been to counteract Baalism and promote the worship of Yahweh alone.⁹⁶ Others recognized the presence of the *marzēah* feast and its religious connotations but did not conjecture that the prophet's overriding concern was to attack religious aberrations.⁹⁷ Still others focused on the social ramifications of the celebration in 6:4–7 but did not concern themselves with (or perhaps were unaware of) its religious implications.⁹⁸

The data from Kuntillet 'Ajrud and Khirbet el-Qôm have underlined the complexity of the nature of religion in eighth-century Israel, and this information can be related indirectly to Amos research. I say "indirectly" in the sense that it can inform the discussion of certain passages, especially 5:25–26 and 8:14. Scholars have disagreed over whether these verses point to other deities and, if so, whether these words could have come from the prophet himself. Wolff and others would admit references to other divinities but date these lines later than the ministry of Amos,⁹⁹ while some argue that the worship of other deities beside Yahweh can be situated within his time frame.¹⁰⁰ There are two other means of linking these finds with the message of the book of Amos. Some propose taking 'āsmā ("guilt") in 8:14a to be a pejorative allusion to a female deity,¹⁰¹ other scholars emend the text to read either "Ashima" or

"A/asherah."¹⁰² In addition, the term *'ašmâ* in 8:14 is in construct with "Samaria." The notion of a local manifestation and worship of the Deity echoes the inscriptions at Kuntillet 'Ajrud. All of these options can establish a clearer connection with the scholarly debate over the religious contexts at Kuntillet 'Ajrud, Khirbet el-Qôm, and elsewhere.

A third type of research into Amos that attempts to get "behind the text" has come from anthropological and sociological approaches.¹⁰³ Attempts to utilize the social sciences in Old Testament studies go back over a hundred years. One well-known example is Max Weber's *Ancient Judaism*, which attempted to reconstruct Jewish history and the emergence of the Jews as a "pariah people." Within his scheme Amos was one of the classical prophets that had evolved from the "free *nebiim*." These were, in Weber's opinion, intellectuals and political ideologues who opposed the professionalization of the army, the bureaucratization of the state, the violation of the values of Israel's nomadic past, and the concentration of wealth and power in the urban centers.¹⁰⁴

The last quarter of the twentieth century, however, has witnessed the use of the social sciences with an increased theoretical sophistication. Two avenues of study have been of special importance in Amos research. The first appeals to cultural anthropology and cross-cultural comparisons; the second works at reconstructing the socioeconomic system that was the target of the prophet's harsh denunciation. I will deal with each in turn.

In his *Prophecy and Society in Ancient Israel* Robert A. Wilson explores the social dimensions of prophecy.¹⁰⁵ He believes that the term "intermediary" is the best label to cover the range of prophetic activities and to facilitate the search for parallels within contemporary religious communities around the globe that might exhibit phenomena similar to that of the Old Testament. The interest in the social requires that one be attuned to the expectations and models for intermediation for both the (aspiring and accomplished) prophets and their audience. The calling by a deity, experiences with the divine, certain behavioral characteristics, and acts of power are but some of the necessary components for the social acceptance of prophets and for them to function effectively. It is within this kind of theoretical framework that the issue of ecstasy resurfaced (also note Overholt, below).

Wilson also differentiates between central and peripheral intermediaries. Broadly speaking, the former would be those who promote the maintenance of the existing social construction of reality; the latter stand outside those structures, seek more radical social change, and question the various legitimations of the status quo.¹⁰⁶ Coupling his cultural analogies with form- and tradition-critical approaches, Wilson presents a hypothetical picture of each prophet's social location, ministry, and message. Amos is tentatively classified as a Northern peripheral prophet from Judah.¹⁰⁷

Another scholar who employs cultural anthropology and cross-cultural parallels is Thomas Overholt.¹⁰⁸ He draws his comparisons from several Native American prophets of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In his paradigm, the prophetic process necessitates three actors: a deity, a prophet, and an audience. These three relate to one another in complex ways. This dynamic includes one or more revelations, the proclamation of the divine message, feedback, and supernatural corroboration of the prophet's call and ministry. The feedback has two dimensions—that between the prophet and the deity, and that between the prophet and the recipients of the message. The basis and nature of the audience's reaction is contextually determined. That is, within their sociocultural and historical setting people acquire a set of expectations as to what a prophet should look like, do, and say. Divine confirmation can strengthen the audience's perceptions and evaluation and can be made manifest in several ways (such as trances, visions, and miracles). From this perspective, prophets cannot base their authority only on claims of personal encounters with God. Public acknowledgment and some sort of institutional support (or rejection), too, are foundational for allowing the exercise of their ministry and for determining its success. Overholt applies these phenomenological insights to several passages in Amos that allude to the reception of the prophet's person and message (2:11–12; 3:8; 7:10–17).

Sociological approaches that attempt to reconstruct the socioeconomic world that the prophets so vigorously condemned have received a major impetus from the work of several scholars, especially Norman Gottwald. His general thesis is that the prophets reacted against the change from the communitarian ideals and social structure of early Israel to a tributary mode of production, which arose with the monarchy and led to unjust social relations of production and the unequal distribution of wealth.¹⁰⁹ Other scholars, appealing to a different theoretical construct, explain the mechanisms of oppression within the framework of what is labeled "rent capitalism."¹¹⁰

Rent capitalism is a system in which rural peasants are in many ways at the mercy of political and economic urban elites. As they fail in their struggle to subsist and support their families, these peasants fall into debt. They are forced to seek credit for tools and seed, and eventually can lose their patrimonial land to creditors. According to some of this persuasion, in addition to this development in ancient Israel, with the shift in the sociopolitical structure to a centralized monarchy, prebendal domain whereby land and privileges are granted to state officials as rewards for loyal service became more common and extensive. These various factors would have given rise to more extreme social stratification and to latifundialization. The end result was an oppressive social and economic system, which exploited those without power.

Among the several social theories applied to the world described in the book of Amos,¹¹¹ this perspective of rent capitalism has been championed by

Coote and Lang.¹¹² This suggestion, however, has not gone unchallenged. Dearman believes that the notion of envisioning a capitalistic economy for eighth-century Israel is anachronistic and argues that such a view fails to recognize the intrusive role of the state in ancient economies (in contrast to private entrepreneurs in a more open-market system) and the impact of other important external, international factors—political, economic, and military.¹¹³ After criticizing the rent capitalism hypothesis for lack of sufficient substantiating data, Fleischer alternatively proposes a progressive impoverishment of the nation due to population growth, inheritance problems, and other changes brought about by the development of the monarchy.¹¹⁴

Nevertheless, these criticisms and disagreements are not meant to convey the idea that sociological approaches are without value. Scholarship in general is enriched by a host of intriguing possibilities for understanding the prophetic milieu and message. What was being called for was greater theoretical clarity and more careful utilization of these sorts of tools. At the same time, though, in the general time period under discussion other scholars were pursuing a second avenue of interest. Increased attention was directed at the received text of the Old Testament. The goal was not necessarily to “get behind it” by various kinds of reconstructions (whether by form or tradition criticism, archaeology, anthropology, or sociology), but rather “to move within the text” in order to grasp better its structure and inner workings.

Within the Text

Several factors served to stimulate scholars to turn from more traditional critical methods to investigate other means of textual study. First, on the basis of their historical research, some contended that most of the book of Amos could be confidently connected to the prophet of the eighth century.¹¹⁵ Therefore, there was no need to try to separate out possible redactional layers. In other words, the textual phenomena had explanations other than those that had been put forth in some critical approaches. Andersen and Freedman argued that the apparent inconsistencies that scholars had taken as evidence of multiple redactions could be better interpreted as referring to discrete stages in the prophet's career.¹¹⁶ This conviction was reinforced by a renewed attention to literary structures, a sensibility that could appreciate more artistry and less disjunction in the final form of the text.

If we finish with a reluctance to disregard any part of the book as “certainly not Amos,” it is partly because we have come to the conclusion, after working through the whole business many times and weighing all arguments, that there are no compelling reasons against accept-

We have two main reasons for deviating from traditional criticism on these points. First is the cumulative demonstration of the *literary coherence* of all of these diverse ingredients in the whole assemblage, which is more than an assemblage; it is a highly structured unity. Second is the diverse and divergent (even apparently contradictory, sometimes) points of view we account for as reflecting successive phases in the prophet's career, which underwent quite substantial changes in inner perception and declared messages.¹¹⁷

Not all scholars, however, have contended for focusing on the received text because of biographical considerations. For example, from the perspective of canonical criticism Childs argues for the primacy of the final form for very different reasons. On the one hand, and in contradistinction from the aforementioned scholars, he could agree with critical studies that postulate a complex prehistory of that final form: “Historical critical research has demonstrated convincingly, in my judgment, that the present form of the book of Amos has been reached only after a lengthy history of development.”¹¹⁸ Nevertheless, at the same time, unlike those methods that purpose to unravel a hypothetical redaction history, “the goal of canonical interpretation is to discern in the final composition how the message of Amos was appropriated and formed to serve as authoritative scripture within the community of faith.”¹¹⁹ He believes that in ancient Israel there had been a conscious process by which the various oracles—whatever their provenance—were put together and shaped to endure as an ever-relevant message. In other words, this prophetic book ascribed to Amos is not to be taken as simply the written testimony of the past, which is locked in to a specific time and place. Childs chides Wolff's work of historical and literary reconstruction as marked by “speculation,” as “counter” to what the text is trying to communicate, and finally (along with much of critical method) as doomed by “theological bankruptcy” in its attempt to make the text meaningful to the believing community today.¹²⁰

Besides these two orientations informed by particular historical perspectives or by a commitment to the Old Testament as part of the Scripture of the Christian church, several trends within general literary theory, which called for closer readings of the final form of texts, began to be utilized within Old Testament studies. Approaches guided by rhetorical criticism, formalism, and structuralism began to pay closer attention to patterns and literary techniques in every segment and level of the biblical text. Even though many of these publications dealt with narratives in the Pentateuch and in the historical literature (such as the books of Samuel and Kings), some scholars did turn their attention to the prophetic material.¹²¹ Amos research was also the beneficiary of these new studies.

More literary readings of Amos ranged from studies of smaller units to that

of literary techniques found in the book.¹²³ Gese pointed out the text's penchant for series of five items, while Limburg demonstrated the tendency for heptads (i.e., series of seven).¹²⁴ Utilizing insights from classical rhetoric, Gitay analyzed 3:1–15 as a single, carefully crafted unit designed to make a powerful appeal to the prophet's audience.¹²⁵ Landy discussed the skillful interconnectedness and emotional impact of the language in the five visions and the accompanying "interludes" (7:10–17, 8:3–14) in chapters 7–9.¹²⁶

De Waard and others discerned a chiasm spanning 5:1–17, as well as shorter concentric structures within that same section.¹²⁷ De Waard and Smalley even suggested that the entire book could be organized as a chiasm, whose center lay at 5:8 ("Yahweh is his name")—the very same climax as that of the chiasm of 5:1–17.¹²⁸ Wendland also believed that chiasms are prominent in Amos, but he criticized de Waard and Smalley's efforts to apply such a structure to the entire text as somewhat forced.¹²⁹ Working from the very different theoretical base of archetypal criticism associated with Northrop Frye, Ryken concentrated on the general tone (rather than on an exegetical study of the text) of the prophet's attack on the institutions and society of Israel to categorize the genre of Amos as "the major work of informal satire in the Bible"¹³⁰ that utilizes "a rhetoric of subversion."¹³¹

Still another level at which to analyze the received text was to locate Amos within what has been called "the Book of the Twelve"—that is, within the Minor Prophets as a literary unit in their current canonical order. House proposed that this "Book" exhibits a general thematic coherence and a "comic" plot line, which moves from an indictment of sin, to the announcement of punishment, and then to a resolution with the restoration of Israel.¹³² Amos is located in the section that enumerates the rebellious acts of Israel and of the other nations. In its canonical sequence, then, it specifies the sins of the nations alluded to in Joel (even as its focus on Edom serves as a transition to Obadiah), while also underscoring the covenantal disobedience described in Hosea.

In sum, different interpretive interests and methodological considerations changed the center of attention from the various kinds of historical considerations that might lie behind the book of Amos to the present shape of the prophetic text itself. This cursory review demonstrates the potential contributions to a new appreciation of this prophetic book that literary approaches had begun to offer. While some were limited to more structural insights on texts of various lengths, others pursued issues of character and plot development.

In Front of the Text

interaction that takes place between the text and readers (and communities of readers). This was a commitment not to limit research simply to deciphering new background information or to discovering literary styles and structures. More important was what happened "in front of the text"—that is, in the impact of the text upon readers and in their appropriation of that text.

The variety of approaches that can be placed within this perspective do not accept the notion of a hypothetical objective stance by the reader vis-à-vis the text or that of a rootless, autonomous text that can transcend time and space. Consequently, certain presuppositions of classical critical methods and of more recent literary studies as practiced by some scholars were judged to be inadequate and naive at best (and conscious hegemonic enterprises that continue to monopolize the academic guild and faith communities at worst) in their attempts to mine the text for timeless universals, to bring to light information related to the background or the production of that text, or to uncover interesting literary elements. Those who underscored what is "in front of the text" saw the proper—and, more crucially, the ethical—goal of the study of the Bible as moving beyond some sort of theological, historical, or literary reconstruction of the text. It was not, however, that these criticized methodologies were in and of themselves totally counterproductive. The crucial evaluative factor lay in the purpose of their use in biblical studies. The Bible was to be proactively and intentionally engaged from and for a particular agenda. Under this rubric one could place the various liberation theologies and other alternative approaches from the Two-Thirds World.¹³³

The book of Amos has always drawn the attention of those stirred by the exploitation of the weak.¹³⁴ Time and time again the text has been made more relevant to new contexts by substituting places, people, and ethical issues that have been considered to be equivalent or parallel to those of the ancient text. Amos has been used to combat violations of a more singular nature, such as racism,¹³⁵ or utilized to try to move the conscience of believing communities in a more general way.¹³⁶

The concern for justice and the prophetic denunciation of oppression has resonated in a special way in liberation theology within the Two-Thirds World. The prophets in general, of course, have always provided an important biblical foundation for liberation theologians' denunciation of social injustice and the announcement of a better tomorrow.¹³⁷ Speaking out of the Latin American context in her *Bible of the Oppressed*, Tamez tried to develop a theology of justice based on the study of nine Hebrew roots related to oppression.¹³⁸ This analysis, she argued, demonstrates that the exploitation by the

For his part, Miranda utilized source and tradition criticism to ascertain what he believed to be the original, and hence, authentic message of the prophets. This he construed as the forceful demand for social justice. The book of Amos figures in two parts of his presentation. First, Miranda cites 5:21–25 to highlight Yahweh's view of Israel's rituals. It will not do to hold that God desires merely a reform of the cult that would require a more sensitive attitude to the needy. The conviction of the prophet Amos, Miranda explained, is more radical: "What he says can be summarized in this way: *I do not want cultus, but rather interhuman justice.*"¹³⁹ Indeed, Yahweh is unknowable apart from participation in acts of justice.¹⁴⁰ Second, the sharp rejection of the nation of Israel by Yahweh, therefore, is to be understood as grounded in the violation of this moral imperative (he mentions Amos 2:4–8; 3:9–11; 5:11; 8:4–14).¹⁴¹ Based on his critical criteria, Miranda said that the call for justice in the prophets, which also was made explicit in the Old Testament laws, was not based on a covenant theology (which he holds to be no earlier than the seventh century). The mandate goes back to the exodus, the most dramatic divine intervention in history on behalf of the exploited, and ultimately to the character of Yahweh himself.¹⁴²

In several publications the Argentine liberationist Old Testament scholar Severino Croatto has articulated a hermeneutical perspective that is dependent in many ways on Ricoeur and other literary theorists.¹⁴³ He reasoned that the potential of sacred oracles to continue to generate meaning is evident in the redactional reworking of earlier layers of the biblical material, which he takes to be subsequent appropriations of the text by later communities of faith. According to Croatto, this activity is exemplified in the book of Amos. On the one hand, he postulated that Amos 9:11–15 was a postexilic addition designed to alter the condemnatory tone of the original prophetic diatribe of the rest of the book. In other words, this intentional canonical reshaping would show that the earlier text had acquired a new significance in a new context and that its declaration of the end of Israel was no longer considered to be Yahweh's final word.¹⁴⁴ This sort of expansion of the prophetic books, whereby a message of judgment is subsequently supplemented by one of restoration, exhibits a pattern he felt also should have been repeated in the quest for justice in his own country during the 1980s: the Argentine military, who apparently had been responsible for the death and disappearance of thousands of innocent victims, must submit to due process of law before there could be any talk of pardon or reconciliation. The good news of reconciliation must follow the proper execution of judgment, not bypass or supplant it, even as the hope passage of Amos appeared only after the actual experience of the wrath of God.¹⁴⁵ The rereading of texts and the canonical formation of the Bible in the past, then, are akin to the theological and hermeneutical exercise that continues to this

day. Pablo Andriñach also appeals in part to Ricoeur to establish the theoretical foundation of his study of Amos, but his analysis follows a structuralist approach.¹⁴⁶ The fundamental binary opposition that he develops throughout the book is oppression-justice, and this focus serves then as the basis of his hermeneutical move to critique areas of ideology, cult, praxis, and *concientización* in Latin America today.

In a full-length study of the book, Milton Schwantes draws parallels between the context and message of the prophet and the situation of "total terror" that the poor and oppressed in Latin America endure in their day-to-day existence.¹⁴⁷ He declares this connection with modern realities in dramatic fashion:

Amos spoke and speaks. He comes from experiences of long ago and arises in those of today. His context lodges itself in our context.

It behooves us then to embrace the words that our God has had reach us through this biblical text. And it falls to us to live in continual protest against the pain that is laid upon our Latin American peoples.

Therefore, let us listen to Amos, bowed down and reverent before the text but unsubmissive and irreverent before the hangmen.¹⁴⁸

According to Schwantes's understanding of Amos's background, one can locate him among the rural poor, who survive by doing several jobs and seasonal work. His chapter discussions of a portion of the prophetic text are either introduced or closed by quotations from Latin American activists. As is often the case with other liberationist biblical studies, this work is grounded in critical approaches to the text. In fact, Schwantes dedicates an entire chapter to explaining the book's redactional history.¹⁴⁹

Because of a lack of acquaintance with the broad spectrum of biblical studies being produced in the Two-Thirds World, many in the West sometimes have a limited perspective that reduces discussions of contextual approaches to liberation theology. Yet a more informed look at the theological reflection that has gone on in Latin America over the last few decades, for instance, makes clear that this restricted perspective does not do justice to those of certain evangelical persuasions or of more traditional Roman Catholic convictions, which also have wrestled with the pressing socioeconomic and political needs.¹⁵⁰ An example of a context-sensitive evangelical work on Amos is the commentary by the Ecuadorian Washington Padilla. In his introduction Padilla declares:

Amos is one of the most relevant books of the Bible for the situation of the poor countries of the world today, as it deals with one of the most burning issues of the twentieth century: social injustice as the specific manifestation that the sin of idolatry assumes in society, and the justice that God demands as the expression of true devotion to him, the true God.¹⁵¹

he adds:

The relevance of the message of Amos for the spiritual, political, and social problems and conditions of today's world is undeniable. It is significant that in our effort to contextualize this message for today we have had no difficulty in finding parallels—while maintaining the proper distance—between the situations, sins, and truths that we encounter in this ancient biblical document and the news that we read every day in the newspapers.¹⁵²

Padilla's discussion of each section of the prophetic text is followed by extensive comments on the violence, class tensions, economic inequalities, and distorted images of Yahweh that have characterized Latin American life for the last five hundred years.

It is evident that exegetical methods were now envisioned to be answerable to very concrete, social obligations. Biblical research was not to be considered an academic pursuit for personal gain and academic acclaim. Scholars were to use their training to serve the needs of suffering humanity. The task of working what was "in front of the text" was to be the final objective of the work that had been done "behind" and "within" the book of Amos.

CONCLUSION

This survey of a century of Amos research charts the shifting points of interests of scholars in the person of the prophet Amos and in the book that bears his name. Each area of study in its own way has contributed to a fuller understanding of the phenomena of prophetic activity and of the message of this one who claimed to speak for Yahweh. Scholars have probed the prophet's experience of the divine and the social setting and cultural backdrop of Amos's ministry, as well as investigated with detailed precision the text itself. In addition, the demands of the modern world also have pressed scholars to see how their work might prove relevant in a constructive way for those who unfortunately live in exploitative circumstances.

In light of this rich and varied research, one could say that scholars now can articulate their views regarding this eighth-century prophet more knowledgeably than ever before. Nevertheless, at the same time, my comments in each major section of this essay have also made clear that every phase of study and kind of approach has lacunae and also raises new questions. It is not surprising, therefore, that research into Amos has not diminished. The next essay will highlight studies that have been done since 1990 and will offer projections as to where Amos research might go in the future.

The State of Amos Research: Present Trends and Projections into the Twenty-first Century

The book of Amos continues to generate scholarly interest. Since 1990, a full-length introduction to Amos research has appeared,¹ and entire issues of journals have been dedicated to this prophetic book.² R. F. Melugin has written a detailed survey of Amos research that covers the last twenty years,³ and H. O. Thompson has provided a comprehensive annotated bibliography.⁴

The purpose of this essay is to bring the survey of Amos research begun in the previous chapter up to the present day and to make some prognostications as to where it might continue to develop in the coming years. Following the layout of the final section of that last essay, my discussion will be divided into three major parts that will summarize approaches that focus on what is behind, within, and in front of the text. This breakdown is designed in part to demonstrate that studies today in some measure are continuing past trends.

RECONSTRUCTING WHAT LIES BEHIND THE TEXT

To investigate what is "behind" the text is to probe various different directions of research: theories concerning the literary history of the received text, the findings of archaeology, and possible explanations from the social sciences for the more systemic issues driving the prophetic critique. This first section will deal with each of these three areas in turn.

The Literary Prehistory of the Book of Amos

Some scholars remain dedicated to trying to ascertain the trajectory and development of the various layers of textual material that eventually led to the

canonical book of Amos.⁵ Over the last number of years the hypothetical redactors have been ascribed an increasingly greater creative role in the shaping of the biblical texts. They are not envisioned simply as editors working in a mechanical way to piece together originally independent prophetic oracles with new additions. To the contrary, scholars envision them as astute theologians with a high level of literary skill and theological sophistication.⁶ Perhaps the most prolific and influential scholar of this persuasion to attempt a literary reconstruction of Amos, both in its constituent parts as well as in regard to the book as a whole, has been Jörg Jeremias. He has published essays on different sections of the book of Amos, several of which have been gathered in a recent collection.⁷ The results of his work inform his commentary on Amos.⁸

Jeremias believes that the historical Amos proclaimed the end of Israel, a fate deserved because of its failure to live out properly its responsibility as the people of God. The difficult challenge for the critical scholar today, he says, is to try to sift through the redactional accretions and work back to the prophet's original message (he considers the vision accounts to be the earliest material). On the one hand, the received text of Amos does have a certain priority, since it is the Scripture of the Christian church. Nevertheless, Jeremias is convinced that tracing the redactional trajectory can offer insights into a living text that was modified over time and reappropriated for new situations by later believers in Yahweh. Because the community of faith must continually contextualize its Scripture, research into that process of compilation can become a constructive theological and pastoral enterprise to orient this ongoing need. Jeremias lays out the nature of that process as he envisions it:

To be sure, Amos' message . . . can be recovered only through complicated, and in many instances only hypothetical, reconstruction. The book of Amos by no means reflects this message directly, but represents rather the precipitate of this message's history of reception and influence; it was not transmitted as a result of any historical interest in past history, but rather was written down and at the same time continually updated on the basis of its meaning for an ever new and changing present.⁹

Jeremias posits several steps in the growth of the book: an original collection from chapters 3–6, flanked on either side by five authentic oracles against the nations (chaps. 1–2) and the five vision reports (7:1–9:4). Subsequent redactions occurred before and after the fall of Jerusalem (the Josianic and Deuteronomistic material) and in the postexilic period (9:7–15). In general terms, the impact of the process on the earliest edition was that the pointed attack on certain circles of the elite was broadened to include the entire nation.¹⁰

Two unique aspects of Jeremias's thesis that stand out are his attention to the literary qualities of the canonical text and his argument that Hosea and Amos need to be read together. A good illustration of his sensitivity to the synchronic is his treatment of 5:1–17, a favorite passage of final form studies that is often heralded as a stellar example of the book's inherent literary quality because of its neat chiasmic structure. While he acknowledges that many critics have missed the literary artistry of this text and therefore unnecessarily emended and rearranged verses according to other criteria, Jeremias, too, defends a redactional history behind its present form.¹¹ He holds that three originally separate sayings (vv. 2–3; vv. 4–5; vv. 7, 10–12, 16–17) and other early material were supplemented in the exilic-postexilic period (vv. 5ab, 6, 8–9, 13), but he also supposes that from the beginning there existed a basic ring structure. Subsequent additions were designed to fill out and expand that first chiasm.

The other special contribution by Jeremias is his attention to intertextual details, whether between pericopes within the book or between Amos and other prophetic texts—specifically, between Amos and Hosea. Examples of the conscious connections between passages within Amos would include, for instance, those between the Oracles against the Nations and the visions and between 8:4–7 and 2:6–7.¹² In regard to the affinities between Amos and Hosea, Jeremias argues that influences flowed in both directions.¹³ He finds echoes of Amos 4:4 and 8:14 in Hos. 4:15, while Hos. 8:14 sounds like the standard judgment formula found in the Oracles against the Nations. Jeremias feels that here one can see evidence of Hosea's Judean readers applying Amos's denunciation of Israel to Judah after the fall of Samaria, but before Josiah's destruction of Bethel. At the same time, Jeremias proposes that the book of Amos was influenced by Hosea, since thematic dependence on Hosea is visible, he holds, at Amos 2:6–8; 3:2; 5:25; 6:8; and 7:9. This mutual influence would indicate that the prophets' disciples wanted these two prophetic messages to be read conjointly as a single divine word for the people of God. This cross-pollination, as it were, would have occurred before the exile (i.e., before the Deuteronomistic standardization of all of the prophetic materials), but at different times in the case of each collection. Jeremias postulates that the book of Amos from its very initial stages drew upon an original edition of Hoseanic texts, whereas at least parts of the book of Hosea were fixed before the insertion of Amos-like lines.

Several other scholars have put forth their own hypotheses concerning the redactional history of the book of Amos. In his 1996 monograph, *Studien zur Redaktion und Komposition des Amosbuches*, Rottzoll argues for twelve redactional stages.¹⁴ Although he does build on some of Jeremias's positions (e.g., that chaps. 1–2 and 7–9 were the frame for chaps. 3–6), Rottzoll presents a much more complex picture of subsequent redactional activity. Of note is

Rottzoll's view that the entire book of Amos is shaped as a chiasm, with the concentric structure of 5:1–17 as its centerpiece. He even organizes his exposition of Amos accordingly, with each of his chapters working step by step from the outer sections of that overarching ring composition in toward the core passage. As in the case of Jeremias, Rottzoll does not see synchronic analysis as mutually exclusive of diachronic concerns. He, too, understands the elaboration of many of the literary patterns to be later in the history of the development of the finished text.

Very different approaches are offered by Loretz and Peckham. Loretz attempts to place the composition of Amos against the background of ancient Near Eastern prophecy.¹⁵ He observes that it has not been uncommon for scholars to point out correspondences between the terminology and worldview of Israel's prophets and those of its neighbors. What they have neglected, however, is the important fact that the prophetic oracles of the surrounding cultures are not preserved in anything like the "book" form of Israelite prophecy. Loretz believes that the gathering of prophetic oracles into these collections was a postexilic phenomenon. He also is careful to differentiate between the historical Amos and the canonical work that now bears his name. This distinction is apparent in terms of Amos's use of the Law. The phrase *lex post prophetas* would have been quite applicable to the prophet himself and the message he spoke in the eighth century, but, in contrast, the book of Amos presupposes the Pentateuchal laws.¹⁶ Loretz calls the book of Amos a "midrashic" composition, whose goal was to explain the Assyrian invasion of Israel and the later defeat of Judah.

Unlike most critical scholars, Peckham argues that Amos (and the rest of the Hebrew Bible for that matter) was from the very beginning a written work.¹⁷ The book as we now know it was produced in two primary stages. He would describe the first edition of Amos's words in this way: "Amos wrote a long narrative poem filled with repeated forms, refrains, catalogs and listlike chants and declamations. Each part of the poem is a collection of rhetorically similar sayings, a canto with its own rhythm and beat building in a crescendo of insistent sound."¹⁸ The four original cantos would have been: I (1:1a–2:16), II (3:1–5:7), III (5:10–6:13), and IV (7:1–8:10). A later revision, both literary and theological, which apparently knew of the Deuteronomistic History, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Obadiah, and Joel, separated these cantos with the insertion of new material and added literary connections between them.¹⁹

In addition to those scholars who have proposed a redactional process for the entire prophetic book, others have produced studies on specific passages. For instance, Williamson and Clements have written detailed analyses of the encounter between Amos and Amaziah at Bethel (7:9/10–17) and its relationship to the third vision report (7:7–8).²⁰ Their conclusions are quite different.

The location of 7:9–17, Williamson believes, cannot be adequately explained by saying that the passage follows chronologically in the life of Amos after the three visions (thereby explaining his expulsion from the North) or by appealing to a catchword principle, which would bind 7:10–17 to 7:9 ("Jeroboam"/"by the sword," vv. 9, 11). Williamson argues instead that 7:9–17 was inserted deliberately as a unit at this juncture by a Deuteronomistic editor. In line with the emphasis of the Deuteronomistic "school" on the prophetic role in warning the people of God of the consequences of violating Yahweh's moral law (note, e.g., Deut. 18:18–19; 2 Kgs. 17:13, 23; 21:10–15; 24:2), this passage would have been placed here to demonstrate that the rejection of the prophet Amos confirmed the judgment of inescapable doom that would befall Israel.²¹

Clements takes a different tack. He distinguishes verse 9 as a distinct redactional level from 7:10–17. The former would have been added to 7:7–8 after 745 B.C.E. and the rise of Assyria, while the latter sometime between 722 and 701 B.C.E. Both supplements would have served basically the same purpose. Each was a redactor's interpretation of how the rather obscure prophetic prediction of divine judgment in 7:7–8 had actually been worked out in the political history of the nation. On the one hand, 7:9 took the warning pictured by the weapon in Yahweh's hand²² as fulfilled with the termination of Jeroboam's dynasty; 7:10–17, on the other hand, saw the vision confirmed by the death and exile wrought by the Assyrian invasion and the destruction of the Northern Kingdom.

Another section of Amos that has received attention is the Oracles against the Nations. Niemann begins his reconstruction with the Israel oracle, without which the others, he says, would not make sense.²³ He envisions a three-stage process. The first, around 720 B.C.E., would have included the Damascus, Ammon, and Israel oracles; the second, after 586, involved the insertion of the Gaza and Edom oracles between the Damascus and Ammon oracles. The last phase completed the set with the oracles directed at Tyre, Moab, and Judah. This final arrangement was designed to provide a sense of comprehensiveness to the theological and historical focus of the older collection by a geographical framework, which moved from an outer ring (Damascus-Gaza-Tyre-Edom) to an inner circle (Ammon-Moab-Judah-Israel).

Niemann mentions the possibility of the mutual influence between the oracles and the vision reports.²⁴ The oracles apparently presuppose Amos's understanding of his mission as one to announce judgment, a change in self-perception manifest in the visions. The oracles and the visions, therefore, are to be read in conjunction, informing each other. He suggests that, if these two sets of material had been at one time a single composition (possibly going back to Amos himself), the visions at that stage might have preceded the Oracles against the Nations. This arrangement would have been changed to the present order, when they were combined with chapters 3–6.

The Book of the Twelve

This survey of redaction-critical approaches can serve as a bridge to another topic that has become the focus of quite a bit of scholarly research: the composition of the Book of the Twelve (i.e., the Twelve Minor Prophets read as a unit). This is not a totally novel topic, but the high level of interest is quite recent.²⁵ Even newer commentaries have begun to incorporate hypotheses of the composition of the book of Amos within a broader theory about the literary history of the Twelve.²⁶ What is happening for the first time in a significant way is the placement of theories of the prehistories of individual prophetic books within the larger framework of the redaction of the entire corpus of the Minor Prophets.

Jeremias concludes his discussion of the connections between Amos and Hosea by mentioning two possible implications for the development of the Book of the Twelve.²⁷ To begin with, if the first edition of Hosea does indeed predate that of Amos (even though the historical prophet ministered after Amos), then the placement of Hosea before Amos in the collection of the Minor Prophets might find a ready explanation. Second, the multiple links between these two books proves to him that the Minor Prophets were never conceived of as twelve separate and disconnected entities but rather always as part of a larger whole.

Aaron Schart, a student of Jeremias, has taken this hypothesis of an intertwined origin for the books of Hosea and Amos as the foundation for a more intricate theory concerning the composition of the Twelve.²⁸ Schart coordinates his analysis of the literary evolution of Amos with that of the Twelve by identifying parallels between the redactional layers of each. He postulates that the earliest stages of Amos (the collection of speeches in chaps. 3–6 and then the first edition of chaps. 1–9) were expanded by a Deuteronomistic layer and that this redaction was part of a broader effort to produce a Deuteronomistic corpus (Amos + Hosea, Micah, Zephaniah). Nahum and Habakkuk are related because of their *maššā*' superscriptions, and they supplemented that initial group of four. A salvific redaction (Amos 9:11, 12b, 13a, 14–15) brought the addition of Haggai and Zechariah 1–8 (and perhaps much of Zech. 9–13), while Joel and Obadiah were part of an even later eschatological stage (Amos 9:13a,b; 4:9). Jonah and Malachi were the final texts annexed to the collection.

While the starting point for both Jeremias and Schart is Amos, other scholars do not give the book such a prominent place within their hypotheses about the composition of the Twelve. One of the more ambitious projects has been that of Nogalski. Even though he mentions a number of features, like quotations, allusions, motifs, and framing devices, the most important criterion for his theory is the catchword principle:²⁹

Intertextual work in the Twelve must recognize that catchwords play a significant role in the literary logic of the Twelve as both an ordering principle and a logical principle in light of significant evidence that catchwords recur consistently across neighboring writings and that many of these catchwords have been deliberately (redactionally) implanted into existing texts to highlight these connections. In addition, catchwords also reach across non-adjacent writings in the Twelve, thereby serving as potential guides to any reading strategy.³⁰

He argues for two multivolume collections: a Deuteronomistic (Hosea, Amos, Micah, Zephaniah) and a Haggai–Zechariah 1–8 corpus. These each predate the appearance of the Book of the Twelve. The incorporation of these six into the larger corpus did not entail expansions in nearly the same degree as Nogalski thinks is evident in the other six books. Important for his reconstruction is a “Joel layer,” which brought the first two collections together and added Nahum, Habakkuk, Malachi, Joel, and Obadiah. While the first three of these five had probably existed as independent texts, Joel and Obadiah were probably intentional theological creations based upon and simultaneously interconnecting the entire corpus. Jonah and Zechariah 9–13 were the last to be included.

His comments on Amos attempt to explain the nature of the relationships between Joel, Obadiah, and Amos.³¹ Nogalski believes that Joel 4:15 (Eng. 3:15) takes up Amos 1:2. The Oracles of the Nations, in other words, were used as a model for the last chapter of Joel. At the same time, according to his critical reconstruction of the literary history of Amos 9:11–15, Joel 4:18 (Eng. 3:18) is cited in Amos 9:13 (the promise of abundance). Amos 9:12a (the eschatological judgment upon the nations), on the other hand, is a summary of, and anticipates, Obad. 17–21. Amos 9:12a, 13 are canonical markers, therefore, that point in two opposite directions—one back to Joel, the other forward to Obadiah. This kind of interconnectedness (along with other similarities between Joel and Obadiah) hints at the strong possibility that Joel and Obadiah entered the Twelve at the same time, probably during the postexilic period.

Jones, while appreciative of much of Nogalski's work, brings the Septuagint (LXX) and 4QXII^a into the discussion and on the basis of that evidence has to question some of Nogalski's conclusions. Differences in the order of the Minor Prophets in these collections suggests that at one time there could have been three versions of the Twelve in circulation, of which the Masoretic Text (MT) was the last to be formed. He dedicates considerable space to Amos 9:12, in part because of its importance for Nogalski's argument.³² In Jones's view, the disagreement between the LXX and the MT of 9:12 is not due to a scribal misreading by the LXX; instead, he argues that the LXX reflects a different

Hebrew *Vorlage*, which the MT emended to establish a connection between Amos and Obadiah. The Masoretic version would have moved Joel, Obadiah, and Jonah from their original location in the LXX to their present position.

While each of these scholars has labored in his own way to understand how the Book of the Twelve took shape over time,³³ others, while assuming a redactional history, nevertheless have focused on a synchronic reading of the Twelve. Here one can include the work of van Leeuwen and Sweeney.³⁴ Van Leeuwen endeavors "to detail certain techniques by which the scribes added hermeneutical patches at key junctures, arranged and stitched together previously existing works, all to shape this prophetic scroll into a theological whole."³⁵ The fundamental issue, he feels, for the redactor(s) of the Twelve was theodicy, an effort to explain Yahweh's decision to destroy Israel and then Judah. Exodus 34:6-7, with its juxtaposition of mercy and justice, serves as "the base text" for the theological shaping of the first six books of the Twelve. While making the common observations about the similarities between certain verses in Joel, Amos, and Obadiah, van Leeuwen proposes that Joel and Obadiah were placed on either side of Amos at a later date to respond to the theological problem of the devastating judgment announced in Hosea and Amos. Joel communicates that repentance (something Israel did not do) can lead to restoration and so vindicates the severe sentence (and the grace) of God. Obadiah puts the destruction of the Northern and Southern Kingdoms within the broader perspective of a universal, eschatological judgment and the future exaltation of the people of God.

Sweeney also offers a synchronic reading of the Twelve, for both the MT and LXX.³⁶ That the purpose of each Book of the Twelve differs, he argues, follows logically from the different order of the prophetic books. As with several other scholars, the placement of Joel in the MT is key:

Joel defines the Leitmotif of the Masoretic form of the Book of the Twelve, i.e., Jerusalem will be threatened by the nations and the natural order will be threatened by the forces of chaos, but YHWH will step in to deliver Jerusalem and creation from that threat on the Day of YHWH when the forces of the nations and chaos are defeated and subsumed to YHWH's sovereignty at Zion.³⁷

In line with the MT's concentration on Jerusalem, the present form of the book of Amos is designed to highlight the divine decree of judgment upon the cult at Bethel and the monarchy of the Northern Kingdom, both illegitimate, and so urge the faithful to seek Yahweh in Jerusalem and under Davidic rule.³⁸

A final kind of approach to the Book of the Twelve offers a synchronic reading, but without exploring the possibility of a history of redaction as relevant to that enterprise.³⁹ The most prominent scholar of this perspective is Paul

House. He is aware and appreciative of the other approaches to the Twelve, but his aim is to ascertain a coherent reading of the canonical order of these texts. House divides the Twelve into a fundamental three-part structure: covenant and cosmic sin (Hosea-Micah), covenant and cosmic punishment (Nahum-Zephaniah), and hope for restoration (Haggai-Malachi). These divisions are not meant to imply that these are the exclusive themes of each part, but rather that these headings reflect the main points of the prophetic message. More recently House has written on the character of God that is disclosed within this scheme. In the book of Amos, God is portrayed as the sovereign judge and creator.⁴⁰

The Archaeological Background to the Book of Amos

In addition to the preliterate history of the received text, there is the aspect of the material remains that also "lie behind the text." The most complete utilization of archaeology to interpret the book of Amos is found in Shalom Paul's commentary in the *Hermeneia* series. Both the comments themselves and the footnotes are a mine of information about pertinent ancient Near Eastern material. Good examples of the contribution of his expertise to the exposition of the text are his discussions of 5:26, 6:7, and 8:14.⁴¹ In each case he provides a great amount of detail regarding ancient religious practices and beliefs. Paul's commentary is obviously very different from the classic form- and tradition-critical work by Wolff (1977) in the same series, a fact that the editor readily acknowledges.⁴²

Other scholars have offered work of more limited scope to help illuminate Amos's cultural setting. For example, Campbell and Freedman and Welch present shorter, chapter-length studies on relevant topics—fittingly in a *Festschrift* dedicated to Philip King, the author of an archaeological commentary on several eighth-century prophets.⁴³ Campbell believes that a fruitful avenue to explore in order to ascertain the targets of the prophetic invective has been the excavation of domestic dwellings.⁴⁴ The results can help shed light on the nature of the social life that Amos denounces. An early study that claimed to have substantiated inequalities on the basis of an investigation of dwellings was the excavation of Roland de Vaux at Tirezah (Tell el-Far'ah North), Stratum II. Though many have criticized that work, Campbell believes that this French archaeologist's point was well taken. Campbell focuses on another site: Shechem, Field VII, Stratum VII—more particularly, House 1727. A reconstruction of these remains seems to point to a two-story structure of select building materials, which would have been destroyed by the invading Assyrian army in the eighth century. This dwelling could very well indicate the existence of a social stratum of the well-to-do beyond the limited confines of the

royal court. In other words, in the outlying towns there also would have been those who were quite probably taking advantage of less fortunate neighbors. For their part, Freedman and Welch try to discern allusions to the earthquake mentioned in 1:1 in other passages in the book of Amos, as well as capture the impact of earthquakes in general upon the ministry of other prophets.⁴⁵

Several other items of archaeological interest for Amos research that were touched on in the last essay continue to garner attention. To begin with, scholars still debate the significance of the *marzēah* feast in Amos 6:3–7 (and possibly at 2:8; 4:1). Did this ceremony have religious connotations, and was it related to any sort of veneration of the dead? Schmidt denies any connections to such a cult in the passage. In his view, biblical references to preexilic mortuary rites actually describe later practices that have been read back into these earlier textual settings.⁴⁶ Other scholars, however, do argue for an early cult of the dead, of which the *marzēah* would have been a manifestation.⁴⁷

Second, the burgeoning literature on *a/Asherah* often makes at least passing reference to the enigmatic phrase *'āšmat Šōmērōn* (“the guilt of Samaria”) in Amos 8:14. The question that is raised is whether these words can be translated or emended in such a way so as to be accepted as evidence for a cult to the goddess or to another deity in ancient Israel.⁴⁸ Of course, scholarly discussion about the *marzēah* and the *a/Asherah* is often part of more comprehensive hypotheses about the rise of monotheism and the nature of popular religion in ancient Israel.⁴⁹

Finally, a textual detail that has generated more scrutiny has been the term *'ānāk* in 7:7–8.⁵⁰ Debates revolve around the precise meaning of this Akkadian loanword and its significance in the context of the third vision. Although in the last few decades the trend has been to translate *'ānāk* as “tin,” Williamson and Hoffmeier have argued for a return to the more traditional view, which takes this word to denote “lead” (or some alloy) and so to be a reference to a plumb line.⁵¹ Williamson begins with a thorough review of the different interpretations of this hapax legomenon, but for a variety of reasons rejects the interpretation of “tin.” He links this passage to the work of Deuteronomistic editors, who underscored the consequences of rejecting the prophets’ warnings of judgment. He feels that the comparison of Amos to a plumb line would picture in a graphic way the ideal of a prophet found in Deut. 18:18–19 (i.e., Amos himself embodied the standard of obedience), while the confrontation of 7:10–17 exemplifies the disregard of the prophetic message. To Williamson’s focus on lexical issues Hoffmeier adds evidence from Egypt.⁵² In addition to presenting pictographic illustrations of plumb lines for architectural use and a brief overview of some pertinent linguistic parallels, Hoffmeier notes the association of plumb lines with scales—specifically with the divine balance that weighs the life of the dead in terms of the practice of justice. Could

not these lines, asks Hoffmeier, have been part of a dramatically enacted prophetic parable in which Amos demonstrated that Israel and its leaders had been found guilty when their actions were tested by Yahweh’s divine standards?

Social Science Approaches to the Book of Amos

A third way of “getting behind the text,” beyond the literary and archaeological, appeals to the social sciences. Here the aim is to attempt to reconstruct social realities, systems, institutions, and movements in dimensions that more traditional historical approaches are usually ill equipped to do. Scholars have utilized a variety of orientations (such as functionalist and cultural materialist) and a plethora of models in order to better understand the ancient world. This diversity increasingly has forced the practitioners in the field to be more methodologically self-conscious and articulate.⁵³

Within Amos studies, Carroll R. has pointed out with the most detail some of the problems and limitations of social science approaches to this prophetic book.⁵⁴ He mentions two basic issues that can radically affect the quality of the research: the actual expertise of the biblical scholar in the social science selected as the analytical tool, and the availability of reliable data (both within and outside the text). From this line of questioning, Carroll R. moves on to propose a consideration of sociologist W. G. Runciman’s discussion of the four tasks required for constructing a rigorous social science study.⁵⁵

Runciman’s first step is *reportage*, a depiction of the actions, attitudes or context to be investigated, which would be acceptable to the agents under study and other observers. The second is *explanation*. This is the attempt to construct a reasonable and successful account (especially in contradistinction from rival conceptual models) for what is presented under reportage. A third aspect is *description*. This is not reportage, as the purpose at this juncture is to ascertain a conceptualization of what life is truly felt and understood to be like, which both the agents and the researcher would deem accurate and authentic. The last phase is *evaluation*, by which what is researched is judged to be good or bad. At each step it is important to keep distinct the researcher’s point of view from that of the agents themselves.⁵⁶ What has often happened in social science approaches within biblical studies is that these essentially distinct components of a social theory model are either confused or bypassed. The resulting hypothetical constructs, therefore, can be muddled or skewed.

This critique, however, in no way implies that one abandon the effort to put the social sciences to good use in the examination of the book of Amos. On the contrary, Carroll R. himself turns to interpretive anthropology, whose best-known spokesperson has been Clifford Geertz.⁵⁷ Carroll R.’s primary

interest has been to explore the nature of religious life reflected in the world of the text of Amos. He has devoted attention to the concepts of religion in general and popular religion in particular. Differing from other demographic and sociological approaches to popular religion, this perspective appreciates the formal and informal symbols, values, behavior, and rituals that are shared across generational, socioeconomic, and gender boundaries—those “webs of significances,” to use Geertz’s famous phrase, which provide some level of coherence within any cultural setting. The resulting picture of religion described (and denounced) by Amos, therefore, can be much more complex and self-destructive than many might think.

Izabela Jaruzelska has published several social science studies of the book of Amos, but her work has not been readily accessible to a large English-speaking audience.⁵⁸ Her desire is to push beyond the simple dichotomy of rich versus poor that occasionally appears in some Amos research. Utilizing what she calls a society-as-a-whole orientation and the socioeconomic theory of ownership, as well as data drawn from the biblical text and archaeology, Jaruzelska endeavors to examine the status of royal officials in eighth-century Israel and the control of the means of production and labor that came under the prophet’s critical scrutiny. She differentiates several types of officials within the government bureaucracy (such as those responsible for exacting taxes) and tries to reconstruct the impact of their lifestyles and policies upon the broader populace.

Another kind of social science approach turns from the world that is being described through the text to the text itself as a social artifact. These studies can be placed under the rubric of what is known as ideological criticism.⁵⁹ The issue here is the production of texts as sociotheological, even political, literature within particular ancient contexts. Ideological criticism also brings to the fore the researcher’s own ideology vis-à-vis the text, but that dimension will be dealt with in the third major section of this essay.

J. David Pleins looks at the multiple, and sometimes conflicting, ethical visions that find expression in the biblical materials and tries to locate them socially and historically.⁶⁰ His discussion of Amos reviews those passages that deal with injustice and the abuse of the poor in Israel’s agrarian-based economy (e.g., 2:6 and 8:4–6; 2:8a; 5:11–12; 3:12, 15; 6:4). Through Amos, Yahweh condemns the exploitative legal and economic structures, as well as the Canaanite urban values that had permeated and adversely influenced social life. The prophet offered no systemic analysis of Israel’s ills, just announced the nation’s ruin and exhorted the people to seek the face of God.⁶¹ Pleins’s section on Amos is part of his chapter on the Minor Prophets, whose purpose was to emphasize (although in different ways) “the justice question.” The impact of this ethical thread can be felt as one moves across that collection of prophetic oracles. A properly informed critical appreciation of this material,

he says, will sense the important role of the redactors in the growth of these books and the interrelationships between them in their present canonical shape:

In the ebb and flow of the waters of this righteous stream, we hear some provocative answers regarding how to live out that collective call to justice. We also hear words of warning spoken to the society that fails to heed this call. Furthermore, in the writing, transmission, and reading of these words, we see this tradition-under-construction offering a hermeneutical model for bringing past prophecies into active dialogue with radically changed circumstances and institutional realities.⁶²

Pleins’s conviction is that an appreciation of the diversity within the Hebrew Bible will enable readers to better appropriate the biblical traditions today. For him an ideological approach is a constructive ethical task. As will be seen later, other scholars are not so sanguine about what the text has to offer.

READING WHAT LIES WITHIN THE TEXT

While some have directed their efforts at inquiring into the various dimensions behind the text, the number of those scholars who deal with the text-as-it-is has been increasing. Of course, reasons for studying the final form do vary. It is interesting to observe that even a few who have acquired a reputation for their work in form and redaction criticism are less sanguine today of these approaches than in the past. Melugin, for example, explicitly singles out Wolff’s theory of the composition of Amos as an illustration of composition theories that stretch meager evidence too far, and encourages more concern for synchronic readings.⁶³ This feeling that some redaction work is built on too tenuous a foundation is echoed by others. Gowan states:

My work on the prophets has led me to question both of these assumptions [i.e., of biographical and redactional reconstructions] and to set aside every effort to recover the “historical Amos,” focusing instead on the book of Amos, or what may also be called the Amos tradition. The first assumption fails because of the scarcity of explicit evidence about the life of Amos, which should call for scholarly caution. I see no reason to be as skeptical as some scholars are, but I am skeptical of all efforts to deduce from the words of the prophets what their personal experiences may have been or clear standards as to what they could or could not have said. The book of Amos may all have come from him, may be mostly his with a few later additions, or may have been heavily redacted. Each of these opinions may be found in the work of able scholars, but we cannot demonstrate that any one of them is true or false, and since that is the case, some might be driven to the skeptical

conclusion that we cannot be sure that any of these words are the very words of Amos.

I prefer to think of this conclusion as cautious rather than truly skeptical, however. It is probably far less important to know exactly what the man Amos said than many have assumed . . . the lives and religious experiences of the prophets seem to have been a subject of little or no interest to the Israelites who collected and produced the final editions of this material. The incidents from the lives of the prophets that are contained in these books quite clearly have been preserved because they contain a message from God to Israel, and not because the prophets lived such interesting lives.⁶⁴

In addition to those who have grown impatient with certain critical approaches, there are others who will testify to the theological coherence of the book as proof of its general authenticity and as the rationale for studying the book as a whole. Gerhard Pfeifer believes that the prophet would have been able to write and thus transcribe much of what we now have in the book. He analyzes the relationship between its rhetoric and theology with a method he has labeled *Denkformenanalyse*.⁶⁵ For Pfeifer, the theology of the book revolves around the multiple descriptions of the person and actions of Yahweh. Niehaus and Bramer, on the other hand, propose a pervasive theology of covenant, communicated in the genre of a covenant lawsuit, in order to explain how every part of the book is interrelated.⁶⁶ Shalom Paul's conviction of accepting almost all the text as authentic is based more on historical factors. Careful historical study, he believes, would eliminate most critical objections. With few exceptions, he sees no cause to question parts of the book as not originating with the prophet.⁶⁷

The aim of this part of my essay, however, is not to survey arguments for the authenticity of the book of Amos, but rather to highlight developments in literary approaches to the received text. The scholars that have just been mentioned are aware of some of the literary qualities of the text, but their efforts are not designed to be primarily literary readings per se. Paul, for instance, points out heptads in the text and certain chiastic structures. His greatest contribution in terms of literary sensitivity has been his widely cited analysis of the Oracles against the Nations. He describes this set of oracles as carefully linked together by a concatenation of catchwords and phrases.⁶⁸

Since 1990 there have been quite a variety of literary studies published on the book of Amos.⁶⁹ I divide the discussion into three parts. First are those studies that have concentrated on structural schemes. Dempster argues for an intentional arrangement of the names of God, a patterning that helps disclose the outline of the book (1:1–2:16; chaps. 3–6; 7:1–9:6; 9:7–15) and serves to underline theologically the identity and nature of Yahweh.⁷⁰ Steinmann posits that the Oracles against the Nations exhibit several interlocking patterns (geo-

graphical, linguistic, political) that reveal anything but a haphazard collection of words against the enemies of Yahweh.⁷¹ O'Connell also turns to these Oracles.⁷² While acknowledging that recognition of the N/N+1 (that is, 3/4) pattern is commonplace, he attempts to extrapolate this speech form to include the entire book. Not only does O'Connell find evidence of this arrangement throughout the text, he also would suggest that there is a concomitant "telescoping pattern of development" after 2:16, whereby the final member of a particular 3/3+1 sequence functions as a transition to the next on at least three occasions.

One tendency that has become especially prominent within this kind of approach is the notion that the book of Amos, in its parts and as a whole, exhibits chiasm (alternatively called symmetric, inverted, palistrophic, ring, or concentric patterns). As mentioned in the preceding essay, the existence of this kind of structure in 5:1–17 was heralded in the 1970s and 1980s by scholars such as Jan de Waard.⁷³ Since that time, others have produced more detailed and comprehensive chiastic designs for Amos. Two that deserve special mention are David Dorsey and Roland Meynet, both of whom have written on Amos yet also have published volumes encompassing the entire Hebrew Bible.⁷⁴

Dorsey underscores the use of heptads (he lists twenty-three) in conjunction with the chiasms as the most striking literary features of the book.⁷⁵ He envisions a chiasm of seven sections for the prophetic text (with its center at 5:1–17), as well as smaller symmetric units within this larger framework (i.e., in 3:1–15; 5:1–17; 5:18–6:14; and 8:4–9:15). He feels that this pattern is ubiquitous in the biblical material (and the ancient Near East) and serves to enhance its beauty, coherence, and power.⁷⁶ Meynet has coauthored a detailed work on the book of Amos with Pietro Bovati.⁷⁷ They classify their approach as *rhétorique biblique* in contradistinction to *rhétorique classique*. They hold that the latter is based more on Greco-Latin criteria and terminology than inherent within the biblical text itself;⁷⁸ "biblical rhetoric" is heavily characterized by parallelism and concentric constructions. They propose the book of Amos to be chiastic, in both its three larger sections (1:3–2:16; 3:1–6:14; and 7:1–9:15) and its smaller parts (which they call "sequences"). The creative and extensive use of different fonts makes it possible for them to enhance the visual presentation of interrelated words and phrases within each inverted structure and the connections that cut across the book as a whole. In a more recent volume Meynet traces the historical development of scholarly awareness of this "biblical rhetoric" over the last couple of centuries and then gives a detailed exposition of its presuppositions and features. Multiple examples from the book of Amos appear in his methodological discussion.⁷⁹

A second category of literary approach does not limit its attention so acutely to textual structures. These studies do incorporate structural observations but

also probe the theological conundrums that are communicated through these structures and a host of literary wordplays, metaphors, and nuances.⁸⁰ In an article that distills much of his doctoral thesis, Karl Möller reconceptualizes Wolff's category of *Auftrittsskizzen*, the objection-response interaction between a prophet and his audience transmitted onto the pages of a prophetic book (he uses this of Hosea), into a rhetorical strategy of the compilers of Amos.⁸¹ In other words, his view of this format is not so much historical and biographical as literary. This strategy he describes as "the presentation of a prophet in debate" and was intended to motivate its hearers and readers to learn from the fate of fallen Israel and so respond appropriately to the prophetic word. He substantiates his proposal with a reading of Amos 3, the doxologies, and 7:10–17.

Paul Noble has published a series of articles on the book of Amos over the last decade. Each of these in its own way attempts to demonstrate the advantages of a synchronic approach over against some limitations of diachronic studies.⁸² Several grapple with an issue that has been much debated throughout the history of Amos research: Was the prophet's declaration of judgment final and without possibility of escape, or was it the case that the prophet warned his people of destruction in hyperbolic fashion while at the same time giving them glimpses of hope if they turned in repentance to Yahweh? Based on his close readings of the Oracles against the Nations, chapters 3–6, and 9:1–10, Noble argues that the answer to that question is less than clear and that it is full of tensions.⁸³ It will not do to eliminate one of the options to attain a neat and tidy message. The eschatological message of hope at the end of the book is well integrated into the rest of the prophetic text, even as it makes the whole more complex and paradoxical. More recently, Noble has offered a synchronic study of Amos 7–8 in order to demonstrate that these chapters are a structural and thematic unit.⁸⁴ The narrative that follows the third and fourth vision has the same function: to illustrate the sin and thus justify the pronouncement of disaster upon Israel communicated in the preceding vision.

James Linville proposes to bring to light the profound subtleties and ambiguities of the text.⁸⁵ His detailed readings attempt to display the book's inherent—and deliberate—polysemy. He considers that various readings are possible and plausible at any one time and that these interact with each other and reveal themselves to be more or less viable as the reader progresses through the book. Expectations are met or frustrated in the ongoing encounter with the metaphors, irony, and structure. Unlike Noble, however, Linville does have a concern for specifying the historical context and purpose for the text. He argues that the book of Amos reflects a literary world created by scribes in the postmonarchic period, which has been projected back into the experiences of the eighth-century prophet to try to deal with their own questions about prophecy and faith.

A third category of literary approach, poetics, has a bit of a different focus. While appreciating and utilizing observations of methodological orientations similar to the first two (i.e., structure and literary art), poetics develops with more emphasis other features such as plot, point of view, and characterization. This sort of approach has often been identified with scholars such as Robert Alter, Meir Sternberg, Harold Fisch, and Adele Berlin. M. Daniel Carroll R. has applied the insights of poetics to the book of Amos.⁸⁶ Beginning with his doctoral thesis, later published as a monograph, he has endeavored to present careful readings of different parts of the prophetic text. The goal has been to grasp the characterization of the nation and leaders that is portrayed within the world that is the Northern Kingdom in the book. The entirety of Israel, along with all of its institutions and social mores, merits Yahweh's pronouncement through the prophet of imminent and devastating destruction. What surfaces in these readings is a deeply religious construction of reality, with multiple intersecting interests and complicity in self-deluding, and finally fatal, misconceptions about life and the Deity by every sector of the population.

A feature that distinguishes Carroll R.'s work from other scholars is that he complements his poetics with contributions from other disciplines, like cultural anthropology, the sociology of knowledge, virtue ethics, and other elements of literary theory.⁸⁷ He finds these to be useful tools, as he does not want to divorce literary readings from either the realities of ancient Israel or those of the world today. Ultimately, Carroll R.'s desire is to engage the readings of Amos with modern life. They are to be readings hopefully of a "responsible reader," of one engaged with the challenges of daily social existence. Carroll R.'s primary interlocutor in that effort has been Latin America—in particular Guatemala.

This commitment to put the book of Amos into meaningful dialogue with the contexts of modern readers and their communities is a helpful transition to the final major section of this essay. For the sphere of Amos research that looks to the relevance of this text, what is of paramount concern is the nature and impact of the interaction between it and its various audiences.⁸⁸

IN FRONT OF THE TEXT AND INTO THE WORLD

The book of Amos has continued to grip the imagination of those seeking to establish justice in the world today. The preceding essay described how, especially in the decades of the 1970s and 1980s, Amos was an important text for liberation theology. Since 1990, liberation theology has not commanded the same high profile it once did. There are various reasons for this, but that discussion lies beyond the purposes of this chapter.⁸⁹ These "readings from the

margins," however, do continue to appear all over the globe. Sadly, many scholars in institutions of the First World are uninformed about work on the prophetic material being done by minority communities within their own countries and in different parts of the world. My third essay provides excerpts of interpretations from African American, Hispanic American, feminist, womanist, ecological, African, and Latin American perspectives.

Of course, it would not be fair to limit interest in the social and ethical to liberationist or minority circles. Several other Old Testament scholars from across the theological spectrum recently have published lay-oriented commentaries on Amos, each of which provides ample suggestions concerning its ongoing relevance at personal, ecclesial, and broader social levels: Donald Gowan,⁹⁰ Bruce Birch,⁹¹ and Allen Guenther.⁹² Gary Smith has published a commentary in the NIV Application Series. The discussion of each passage is divided into three parts: in "Original Meaning" the author summarizes the fruit of his textual work; in "Bridging Contexts" more transcendent principles are sought to help carry the implications of the biblical material over to the modern world; the last section seeks to explore more specifically the "Contemporary Significance." What is interesting in the case of Smith is that he published a more traditional commentary on the book of Amos over a decade earlier. Undergirding his reflections for today, therefore, is a solid exegetical foundation.⁹³ Amos, in other words, is clearly not a dead text.

CONCLUSION: WHERE DOES AMOS RESEARCH GO FROM HERE?

Where might Amos research go in the future? At the beginning of the first essay I said that developments in Amos studies have paralleled research on the prophets in general. Naturally, this will continue. But what might that broad statement imply for this prophetic book in particular? The three-part breakdown of "behind the text," "within the text," and "in front of the text"—some of which have subcategories—has served as a heuristic device to encompass the multitude of methods that have been utilized to study the book. Those fundamental divisions will be maintained here.

Scholars naturally tend to gravitate to one or more of these three orientations or emphases, according to their interests and training. It is not possible to say that any one of the three (or one of the methods listed under them) embodies *the* paradigm that will take the field. One should not say, as Ferdinand Deist has, that a newer set of questions and approach are replacing an older, "dominant" model.⁹⁴ From his point of view, this change was to be led by methods informed by the social sciences and the "new archaeology." In the

past others have trumpeted the rise of literary approaches as signaling a drastic paradigm shift. Surely Robert P. Gordon is correct: "The current phase of prophets study is, therefore, a multifaceted one, and it is difficult to imagine the discipline ever again being hogged by a single dominant approach as was the case for large areas of biblical scholarship in the era of the historical-critical *solus*."⁹⁵ It is best to speak of alternative paradigms, the number of which seems to be multiplying. Sometimes these are easily distinguishable, each with their own set of projects and researchers. At other times, however, boundaries are crossed, and the results of these multidisciplinary efforts profoundly enrich the entire enterprise. What trends can be envisioned in each of the three general areas in the investigation of the book of Amos? Let me briefly mention a few that seem to be more prominent.

Behind the Text

It is safe to say that redaction studies are growing increasingly complex. Part of the reason for this is that the "text" under study is expanding. Now some link the redaction of Amos to the growth of the Book of the Twelve. New questions arise, new data have to be considered, and composition theories have to be more all-encompassing. This newer area of research has been generating quite a bit of activity, so at least in the short term one should expect more such hypotheses to emerge.⁹⁶

Another factor leading to increased complexity in redaction theories comes from a very different quarter. Comparative information from ancient Near Eastern prophecy also is being brought to bear by some on these discussions, especially in regard to the move from oral performance to the actual writing down of prophecy.⁹⁷ Redaction questions, then, could become more contextually informed and rely less on scholarly ingenuity divorced from more solid historical controls.

Continuing study of the lives and messages of prophets elsewhere in the ancient Near East should also shed more light on the theology and genres of the words of one like the prophet Amos.⁹⁸ In addition, as discoveries into the various types of religious phenomena in Syria-Palestine come to light and fresh paradigms are put forward to explain their meaning and significance, our understanding of the prophet's denunciation of the cultic practices of eighth-century Israel can only become more lucid and exact.

Attempting to forecast where social science approaches might go in the coming years is a more difficult task. On the one hand, the call for greater methodological precision and self-awareness will be more insistent. Scholars will have to be more careful in their proposals and should expect a level of educated critique that might not have been possible before. On the other hand,

the direction of some of this kind of research might depend in part on a new set of global influences. In the past, certain scholars—not all, of course—probed the depths of social theory to serve a social cause, such as the liberation of the poor in the Two-Thirds World. The social sciences facilitated the exploration of both ancient and modern socioeconomic realities in order to get at the text's ethical message. Will the changes in the world's economic and political arrangements occasioned by the collapse of the Soviet Union and the disillusion worldwide with much of socialism redirect social science research into different areas (e.g., ecology and ethnicity)? If so, to what extent and how? For others, the motivation to use the social sciences has been simply one of historical interest to attain a more comprehensive vision of the past. Whatever the agenda, new research in a wide variety of areas will be relevant and beneficial to Amos research.

Within the Text

Literary approaches will continue to appear and should provide fresh appreciation of the book of Amos. The question in search of an answer, however, is whether over time some types of approaches might lose their appeal and value, while others come more to the fore. How many new literary patterns still lie undetected, waiting to be uncovered by those studies that focus solely on textual structures? Perhaps those studies that incorporate other dimensions of literature (such as plot, characterization, point of view) and utilize diverse literary theories to explore the history and nature of text reception, the nature of metaphor, and the like represent the long-term future of literary orientations.

Of course, if theories of redaction multiply, so might literary readings of all kinds as well, as they are applied to the different composition layers to explain their purpose and cohesion. It also bears mentioning that entry into this field by certain scholars who had specialized in other critical approaches and so have unique lenses to read the text could generate creative work in many directions along the wide spectrum of literary approaches.⁹⁹

In front of the Text

The book of Amos has always engaged the contexts within which it has been read. The end of the twentieth century witnessed its appropriation by fresh voices around the world seeking a life free from social, economic, political, or gender oppression: liberation theologies, feminism, womanist views, and concerned evangelicals. The harsh realities of human existence, sadly, guarantee that Amos will continue to be a source of encouragement to those who denounce evil and hope for a qualitative difference in their day-to-day life.

What remains to be seen is the impact of the conviction that the book is in some way ideologically flawed, even harmful. Can such a text continue to speak with the same power as in the past? If not, what might be its impact? How will such approaches interface with those who might share similar contextual concerns in the modern world but are more inclined to accept the text in its totality as a word from God?

In sum, it is hard to do anything more than give vague ideas about where Amos research is headed. The future seems bright, even if its paths only will become clearer as the twenty-first century unfolds.