



Alessandro G. K. Casagrande

Das Amosbuch als epische Erzählung im dramatischen Modus: Ein Beitrag zu den synchronen Lesarten der Prophetenbücher

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This book has an intriguing and provocative title. Mainstream scholarship construes Amos as a prophetic book in which a variety of well-known prophetic genres are combined. I, therefore, was inquisitive to read the arguments of Alessandro G. K. Casagrande that prompted him to read the book of Amos as a narrative with a dramatic ring.

Casagrande starts his investigation with two descriptive rounds. First, he presents a survey of recent scholarship on Amos and other prophetic books for which a dramatic ring in these texts is proposed: House on Zephaniah; Baltzer and Berges on Deutero-Isaiah; Williams-Watts on Isaiah; Witte on Habakkuk; and Kessler on Malachi. In addition, he presents the drama-theoretical approach of Utzschneider. In a second round, Casagrande explores recent literary theory on its definition of *narratio*. This is a bewilderingly complex scholarly field. Casagrande confirms my presumption that a generally accepted consensus has not been reached. For any biblical scholar, this implies that the danger of cherry-picking lies at hand. With this I mean that members of our guild have the inclination to follow the theory that best seems to fit with one's exegetical agenda. Important in the approach of Casagrande is his in-depth attention to various levels of communication in and around a literary text. He coins the following terminology: *extradiegetisch* (narration about Amos); *intradiegetisch* (Amos narrates about YHWH); *metadiegetisch* (YHWH narrates about the nations, Israel, and Judah). These levels are inserted in the communication between author and reader, who both stand outside the text. I see the value of this scheme but have

a question: Why does Casagrande jumps so easily from the label “gives information about” to the classification “narrative”? I am not convinced by the necessity of this leap.

Thereafter, the focus turns to the book of Amos. Casagrande examines the nine chapters from three perspectives: epic narrative; fictionality; and performativity. He makes valuable remarks on these topics before concluding we should read the book of Amos “as an epic narrative in dramatic mode.” He delimitates the book of Amos in four sections: 1–2; 3–6; 7:1–9:6; and 9:7–15.

He applies this reading matrix to the interpretation of the book of Amos. He guides readers verse by verse through the book of Amos. In this exercise, a great number of detailed remarks are made that will bring the understanding of the text of Amos a few steps forward. Interesting is his view that the antecedent of the third-person masculine singular suffix in the repeated declaration of irreversibility in the oracles against the nations: “Because of three transgressions of X—yes, of four—I will not revoke it [’ăšibennû].” Adopting the view in the commentaries of Andersen and Freedman and Hayes, Casagrande assumes that the suffix would refer back to *qôlô*, “his voice,” 1:2 implying that there is no reason for God to hold back his coming ordeal. In my humble view, this interpretation is thwarted by the fact that 1:2 should be allotted to a different redactional layer from 1:3–2:16. On the other hand, Casagrande should be praised for his effort to make his approach from the theory of narration a fruitful basis for a consistent synchronic reading of the book of Amos.

An enigma in the interpretation of Amos is the undeniable fact that, after all the prophecies of doom and disaster, the text switches to the mode of a prophecy of salvation in 9:11: “On that day I will revive the withering booth of David.” Ever since the famous dictum of Wellhausen, “Roses and lavender instead of blood and iron,” by which he characterized the prophecies of salvation in Amos, critical scholarship has construed the final section of the book of Amos as a later addition to the tradition.¹ The minority of scholars who treat Amos 9:11–15 as original offers a variety of arguments for their view. Casagrande adds to this series the following remarks. In his view, Amos 9:7–15 should be read as the “closure” of the book. As in many other—biblical and nonbiblical—texts, such a closure brings the flow of the narrative to an unexpected end. Casagrande proposes that in the final section of the book of Amos a turn is made at the level of communication that switches from *intradiegetisch* to *extradiegetisch*. Phrased otherwise, the reader is now addressed by an actant outside the previous communications. This narrative agent makes clear that, beyond doom and disaster, there will be hope for a new future. It is a pity that Casagrande does not connect this reading with the concept of a two-staged futurology: at first a time of doom and after that a

1. Julius Wellhausen, *Die kleinen Propheten übersetzt und erklärt*, 4th ed. (de Gruyter, 1963), 96: “Rosen und Lavendel statt Blut und Eisen.”

period of salvation and prosperity as it is known from ancient Near Eastern texts, including the Hebrew Bible.²

I appreciate his careful analysis of the book of Amos. Many of his exegetical remarks compel me to rethink my view on various details. Nevertheless, I am not convinced by his general thesis that the book of Amos is an epic narrative in dramatic mode. Although I see various dramatic and traumatic elements in the prophetic book, my main argument against his view still is as follows: for a text to be a narrative, one expects the dominance of the syntactic *consecutio temporis*. These *wayyiqtol* forms are almost absent in the book of Amos.

2. See, e.g., Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Fortress, 1997), 171; Bob Becking, *Between Fear and Freedom: Essays on the Interpretation of Jeremiah 30–31* (Brill, 2004); Becking, *Micah: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AYB (Yale University Press, 2023). See also the discussion on the relevant ancient Near Eastern texts in Jason Radine, *The Book of Amos in Emergent Judah*, FAT 2/45 (Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 110–29.