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# SOCIAL STRUCTURE IN THE KINGDOM OF ISRAEL IN THE EIGHTH CENTURY B.C. AS REFLECTED IN THE BOOK OF AMOS

The description of social structure in the Kingdom of Israel on the basis of the information to be found in the Book of Amos[1] demands a short presentation of some sociological assumptions for the present study. Needless to mention, the theoretical approach would condition the selection of texts for the analysis.

## *1. Theoretical assumptions*

The term "social structure" is used in this paper not in its colloquial meaning but referring to Max Weber's concept. That eminent German scholar did not pronounce in a declarative form his way of conceiving social structure either in the introduction to his famous study on ancient Hebrew society "Das antike Judentum"[2] or in the short article on ancient Hebrew economy published in "Agrarverhältnisse im Altertum"[3]. However, one is able to extract Max Weber's point of view from his analysis.

First of all, the groups he deals with reveal his principles decisive in the description of social structure. The categories Weber enumerates (peasantry, landowners, wealthy families living in town, permanent cadre of royal officers, priests' families, metics, wageworkers, slaves, artisans) prove that different types of production and ownership are taken as criteria for social differentiation. A similar theoretical stance is visible in the conclusion of Weber's above-mentioned paper. He states there some shortcomings of the source material which make it difficult to write about the "agrarian history of the Hebrews before the Exile because we have no evidence regarding ownership and production in that period"[4]. It is to be noted that "agrarian history" seems to mean in this context social history, i.e. that of social structures in a society whose economic basis is agriculture.

It is worthwhile to point out that the above-mentioned groups existing within ancient Israelite society are called "classes" by the translator of the "Agrarverhältnisse im Altertum". He uses this notion in the context of listing people who benefit from the sabbatical rest. Besides "the debt slaves" mentioned in that text "other classes" are also implied, although without being enumerated. Furthermore, he speaks in terms of "classes" about, on the one hand, these "families which could not supply recruits and on the other, these which could, on the basis of property officially registrated"[5]. The latter is

called the "military class"[6]. I am adopting in the present paper the category of "class" in order to emphasize that I am dealing with aggregates of population selected on the basis of work division and ownership and not with any other type of human collectivity (e.g. age groups, sexes, professions, etc.). In other words, I am using the term "class" with the aim of expressing a specific aspect of social structure — the one that I am dealing with in the present paper.

It is necessary to add that I conceive a class as a sort of collectivity which does not necessarily presuppose the existence of another class as its opposite. Likewise, I would like to distance myself from the belief that classes must always be involved in class conflict and class struggle. This point of view seems to appear in Roland de Vaux's famous book on institutions in ancient Israel in the context of the author's dealing with "the poor" and "the rich". De Vaux states that "the poor" did not form a separate social class being in conflict with "the rich"[7]. The fact that he underlines the defencelessness of the former — "because they were isolated" — shows that for R. de Vaux the notion "class" presupposes a group necessarily undertaking common actions against an oppressor[8]. The author's view of classes as necessarily opposed groups is also revealed in the following sentence: "In Israel there never really existed social classes in the modern sense of groups concious of their particular interests and opposed to one another"[9]. As concerns my approach, the notion "class" remains a unit of analysis only. I am using it in order to avoid confusion with other types of social differentiation.

It is worthwhile to mention that in some studies on social structure in ancient Israel scholars deal essentially with groups selected according to both criteria, i.e. work division and ownership, but they do not call them "classes" because they maintain that these collectivities were not in mutual conflict. This is the reason why, for instance, R. de Vaux — although he depicts the socio-economic conditions of wage-workers, slaves, craftsmen, merchants — prefers to call these categories "divisions of the population" rather than "classes"[10]. Similarly, S.W. Baron distinguished analogous groups without defining them as "classes", to be sure, but using a general term of "differentiation" as a framework for his description[11].

It has to be admitted, however, that we often come accross serious difficulties attempting to associate certain data, found in the text of the Bible, with a particular social class. As already observed by M. Weber (see above), this is due to a lack of information concerning work division and ownership — critical for the establishing of social classes. We are confronted by questions: "Do the repeated allusions to "landowners" suggest a coherent social class or rather various categories of proprietors, including those who are creditors as well?"[12]. That is why in the present study, though I attempt to describe social classes in ancient Israel, I consistently avoid using the word "class" unless I am sure what type of collectivity I am talking about.

Further in my paper, I will successively present some social groups (perhaps classes) to be recognised in the Book of Amos. At the same time I would like to raise the question of the way in which those collectivities are depicted by the prophet. Are they seen in a positive or negative light? Which of them are charged with the responsibility for the calamities affecting Eretz Israel? However, before I attempt to provide the answers, some remarks on Amos himself and on the historical context of his message are necessary.



## *2. The historical context of Amos's message*

The prophet was active in the Northern Kingdom although he originated from Tekoa in Juda (1:1). He proclaimed his message during the reign of Jeroboam II (785—748)[13] in Israel (1:1; 7:10) and Uzziah (786—758)[14] in Juda (1:1). Before he followed his vocation to become a prophet, he had bred herds (1:1; 7:14) and been a sycamore grower (7:14). We do not know for how long Amos carried out his public ministry and in which cities of the Northern Kingdom, apart from Betel where the royal shrine was. The prophet foretold there the coming of doom on the nation and on the royal house, and as a result of that was silenced by Amaziah — the priest of Betel. Scholars are not sure whether this event ended Amos activity in Israel or not. Still, "one gains the impression that he continued to speak — though perhaps no longer at the royal shrine"[15].

The eighth century could be characterised as economically very flourishing. The remarkable prosperity in Eretz Israel in that period was the result of a favourable external situation. The first factor to mention here is the decline of the Assyrian power under the pressure of the Urartic empire[16]. Secondly, the other foe of Israel, Syria, was engaged in a conflict with Hamat and therefore "not in a position to maintain her hold on Israel"[17]. In that period the frontiers of both Kingdoms (i.e. Juda and Israel) expanded and became similar to the borders known from David's reign at the climax of the country's territorial expansion. Uzziah maintained his control of Negev and the southern desert as well as of the northern and eastearn parts of the Philistine plain. He captured Gath, Jabne, and Ashdod[18]. The last-mentioned was at that time the capital of Philistia after the decline of Gath. The king laid down the frontiers of that country and strengthened his power over it by the construction of towns in the area of Ashdod (2 Chron 26:6)[19]. Y. Aharoni notes that the action against Philistia gave Juda access to the sea, extending now from Yabne to the estuary of the Yarkon, and restored in this region the frontiers of the Kingdom of David[20]. All these military actions, which enlarged the territories of Juda and Israel, contributed to the creation of favourable conditions for economic growth in both states.

However, the period of restoration described summarily above "came to an end soon after the accession of Tiglat-pileser III to the throne over Assyria in 745 B.C.E. Tiglat-pileser soon conquered Syria-Palestine, ..., and Assyria maintained a firm grip on the region for more than a century"[21]. This subsequent decline needs to be mentioned before we begin to deal with the manifestations of economic prosperity, in order to establish a background for the understanding of Amos's prediction of oncoming ruin of the Kingdom of Israel.

### 3. *The most important manifestations of economic development in Eretz Israel in the eighth century B.C.*

The first beneficiary of the new situation was trade. Its major routes, thanks to the peace between Juda and Israel, ran from northern to southern Transjordan as far as North Arabia, as well as along the coastal plain "into the hinterland from the Phoenician ports"[22]. According to Y. Aharoni, Israel and Juda jointly ruled over the most important international trade routes. Samaria and Jerusalem became again the main centers of government to the west of the Fertile Crescent[23]. Bright enumerates the sources of benefit from the international trade routes that passed through the territories held by Israel. He mentiones the tolls from caravans and a free interchange of goods. Moreover, a revival of trade on the Red Sea — flourishing during the reign of Solomon — took place in that period as a consequence of the restoration by Uzziah of the port in Elat (2 Chron 26:2). Also the copper industry of Arabah was revived[24].

Another important factor was a conjectured but likely commercial treaty with Phoenicia, as during the period of Solomon and Omrides. The Bible reports other initiatives of Uzziah, such as the construction of towers, the digging of many wells, cattle breading or the planting of vineyards (2 Chron 26:10). Y. Aharoni explains, in the light of archaeological findings, that Uzziah restored and strenghtened the Israelite border fortresses on the roads crossing Negev. More particulary, archaeologists have discovered fortresses from that period in Arad and in other places. The fortresses were surrounded by casemate walls with prominent towers[25].

The economic enterprises of the king in Negev have been confirmed by the ascertaining, through archaeological excavations, of a remarkable (indeed unprecedented since the beginning of the history of Israel) density of the local population during his reign[26]. To the general picture it is necessary to add the development of industry with a famous weaving and dyeing center at Tel Bet Mirsim[27]. Some demographic data, not only in connection with the settlement in Negev mentioned above, could be illustrative if we wanted to assess better the economic changes in Eretz Israel in the 8th century. We are invited to consider the demographic question as important by the following statment of Y. Shiloh: "The concentration of the population of a developing society in large and densely settled centers brought about a rise of productiwe capacity in agriculture and its allied industries, with the consequent creation of considerable surpluses, the furthering of commerce and the development of service centers, and the rise of central government"[28]. The last decade has brought a number of interesting studies on this subject. Estimates concerning the size and density were done on a basis of architectural and archeological evidence[29]. Recently I. Finkelstein and M. Broshi have proposed 400000 inhabitants for Western Palestine (excluding Negev)[30] in the mid-eighth century[31]. In the MB II (1800—1550) there were 140000 people over the same area[32]. There are also different estimates for the 8th century, e.g. Silver Morris follows de Vaux's and Baron's figures obtained from Biblical sources: total-1000000; North-200000; South-800000[33].



Because of our special interest in the Northen Kingdom, it seems necessary to remark on some of the more important findings, in that region of Eretz Israel. As indicated by great quantities of beautiful pottery in Samaria, the capital city of the Northern Kingdom, such vessels may have been produced in its surroundings. The potter's wheels excavated in Megiddo and Hazor indicate that pottery was also developed in those towns. With jars and bowls standardized in shape and size, those wheels testify, according to Heaton, to "mass production methods and the employment of unskilled labor"[34].

Some of the archaeological data referred to above, apart from attesting to the development of trade and industry, also cast light on the background of contemporary social differentiation. The remarkable economic prosperity gave birth to many possibilities of increasing one's income. Nevertheless, at the same time it became a factor contributing to the polarisation of Hebrew society. I shall draw below a picture of social groups/classes, to be distinguished in the Book of Amos, whose living conditions are somehow related to the development of a monetary economy. In the presentation I follow the order in which the prophet evokes each of the particular social categories.

### 4. *Creditors*

The most relevant text to be cited here, though generally referring to this category of people, is in my opinion rather obscure: "Thus saith the Lord: For three transgressions of Israel (*pišᶜey isra'el*), yea, for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because they have sold the righteous (*ṣaddîq*) for silver, and the needy (*'ebhyôn*) for a pair of shoes: that pant after the dust of the earth on the head of the poor (*dalîm*), and turn aside the way of the meek (*ᶜanawîm*): and a man and his father will go unto the same maid (*ha-naᶜarah*), to profane my holy name: and they lay themselves down beside every altar upon clothes taken in pledge, and in the house of their God they drink the wine of such as have been fined" (2:6—8).

Amos speaks here as if addressing all the people of Israel; e.g. he condemns the selling of the righteous (*ṣaddîq*) for money (silver) and the poor (*'ebhyôn*) for a pair of shoes as "crimes" (*pešaᶜîm*) committed by all the nation: "because of three transgressions of Israel, yea for four" (2:6). This expression means, according to A. Hacham not a single wicked act but a multitude of bad deeds[35]. Although the prophet adresses Israelites in a general way, he actually criticizes only a particular group who are guilty of acting wickedly. What categories of people could be considered here? In those who oppress the poor, some scholars recognise corrupted judges pronouncing an unjust sentence in exchange for a bribe. If this is the correct interpretation, the judges act as if they were selling the righteous[36]. Some see here judges accusing a righteous man of theft, and then selling him, according to one of the stipulations of the Torah prescribed for such a case (Exod 22:2). Another possible interpretation is the recognition in the oppressors of individuals who kidnap people and sell them as slaves. We are informed about such a racket in Israel in the light of some legal texts (Exod 21:16; Deut 24:7).

Another group of scholars would rather identify those who "sell the righteous" with creditors because v. 8 alludes to the clothes taken as a pledge from a debtor. (The Law stipulated the restoration of a pledged cloak to its owner before sunset ⟨Exod 22:25—26; Deut 24:10—13⟩). Accordingly a righteous man "sold for silver" would mean a slave for debt: if a debtor was not able to repay his debt at all, he was compelled to sell himself to his creditor as a recompense. Among the many interpretations of this passage there is one that explains it in the light of an ancient custom consisting in taking off a shoe to mark in a symbolic way the renouncement of one's right of ownership (Ruth 4:7—8)[37]. R. de Vaux suggests that a poor man "sold for a pair of shoes" stands for the unjustly expropriated, this act of violence being given a legal apperance. If the interpretation of shoes as having to do with marking, in a symbolic way, ownership is correct, a debtor would appear as a small tenant and not as a completely propertiless person.

That the prophet deals in v. 6—8 with the problem of creditors and debtors might appear also from verse 7b, which is usually explained as referring to sacral prostitution[38]. A different possibility is proposed by M. Silver, who attempts to see here an allusion to the institution well known from Mesopotamia — namely an alewife or innkeeper as pawnbroker. In the eyes of this scholar, who follows the point of view of Cootes, "this line (i.e. 7b) may mean that a 'man and his father go to the alewife to invest for a usurous return'"[39]. This way of getting a gain would remain, among others things, a source of money to be lent to a small tenant (called here *'ebhyôn*).

Amos in the same verses (6—8) enumerates some other categories of people — namely *dalîm* ("the poor") and *'anawîm* ("the meek") oppressed by those who already exploit a righteous (*ṣaddîq*) and a poor man (*'ebhyôn*). It is hard to determine their socio-economic situation on the basis of the meaning of the terms only. Apparently three of them (*'ebhyôn, dal, 'anî*) are related and almost synonymous (*'ebhyôn* — "in want", "needy", "poor"; *dal* — "low", "weak", "poor", "thin"; *'anî* — "poor", "afflicted", "humble"[40]) hinting at the miserable condition of people described in the above-mentioned terms. The fourth category (*ṣaddîq* — a righteous man) plays a special role in the discussed passage. It occurs here in parallel to *'ebhyôn* and thus emphasises the righteousness of the debtor[41]. As concerns creditors, it is worthwhile to report here an opinion expressed by she comments on the social status of the creditor, which may not have been much higher than that of the debtor. According to her, a creditor belonged to the "middle class"[42]. Her opinion implies Amos's being able to perceive a social structure more complex than one composed only of two opposed classes — "the rich" and "the poor". It is only fair to note that Fendler's point of view differs from others, e.g. that of Miller and Hayes, for whom those who "sell a righteous for silver" and "a needy for a pair of shoes", belong in — the context discussed — to the upper class[43].

As we have seen so far, the data enabling us to describe in a precise way the socio-economic situation of both creditors and debtors are none too copious. A brief examination of the meaning of vv. 6—8 points out the shortcomings of the source material necessary for defining the socio-economic conditions of the



categories of people Amos deals with. We are told, for instance, neither of their place in the production process (were they small peasants?) nor of their assets. We are not even told unambigously whether the needy man (*'ebhyôn*) is a debtor. The one certain thing in this context is that creditors are being condemned. Alas, it is not said explicitly from whom the clothes they "lay themselves upon" have been taken. We can only suppose that the people they have been stolen from are the same as those named with the term *'ebhyônîm*. Although we come accross the shortcomings mentioned above, it is justifiable to maintain that Amos might address his message to a very concrete groups of people, little as he speaks, in his prophecy, about their place in work division and ownership relations.

As to the other aspect of the present inquiry (not the reconstruction of social structure but Amos's perception of it), an interesting remark suggests itself immediately. The passage 6—8 is essentially devoted, as we have seen, to the problem of debt, creditors beging condemned. None the less, the prophet speaks in those verses as if preaching to everybody. This way of rebuking the entire assembly as if they were guilty of the acts stigmatised in the speech (although only some of them are really concerned) is known in prophetical style. It is peculiar to religious preachers — also of today. Its function is to emphasize a message, to make it more impressive. Amos continues to speak in this style in the verses which follow and which relate to the above-discussed passage. After pointing out the "crimes", the God of Israel speaks directly in the first person — customary form in prophecies. He reminds His people of all the miraculous deeds He has accomplished for them (2:9—10): He cleared the country by destroying the Amorites; He liberated the Israelites from the Egyptian bondage; He led them through the desert for forty years in order to make them heirs of the country of the Amorites (Canaan). The God of Israel speaks of His acts for the benefit of His people in a very special context. The aim of the passage in question is to point out His faithfulness, which stands in a striking contrast to the attitude of His people: they are charged with failing to observe the Law — here particulary in the mater of loans.

Since God is supposed to speak to all the nation, though the wicked creditors are concerned first of all, we discover that in a sense the guilt of these oppressors acquires a more universal dimension. This idea is still clearer when the prophet, in his continued transmission of God's sentence, presages a forthcoming catastrophe which will fall not only on the wicked creditors (as might be expected) but upon all Israel. The horror of "that day" is described in terms of a complete defeat of the Israelite troops by a foe (2:13—16). It is justifiable to see here an allusion to the Assyrian menace pressing heavly on the Northen Kingdom[44]. We can admit that the creditors transgressing the Law are charged with the responsibility for the subsequent destruction. Their guilt is so enormous that it brings about a calamity affecting all the nation, even the innocent.

*5 Officials*

As in the preceding case a message directed to a particular group of people is encapsulated in a sermon addressed to all the nation (3:1—8). The God of Israel continues to speak in the first person. He underlines His preference for His people, chosen from among all earthly nations ("all earthly families": *mišp$^{e}$ḥôth ha'adama*) (3:2). Among other things, this choice consists in their having been taught moral rules — in contrast to other nations. Because of their knowledge in that matter they will be punished for their transgressions (3:2).

Further the prophet focuses his attention especially on the transgressions of those who dwell in palaces (*'arm$^{e}$nôth*): "Publish ye in the palaces (*'arm$^{e}$nôth*) at Ashdod, and in the palaces (*'arm$^{e}$nôth*) in the land of Egypt, and say, Assemble yourselves upon the mountains of Samaria, and behold what great tumult are therein, and what oppressions in the midst thereof. For they know not to do right, saith the Lord, who store up violence and robbery in their palaces (*'arm$^{e}$nôthehem*)" (3:9—10). The evocation of the palaces in Ashdod and Egypt could be explained as an appeal to the Israelites' neighbours and enemies to bear witness to the acts of corruption committed in the palaces on the mountains of Samaria — the capital of the Northern Kingdom[45].

The information that the population alluded to in the prophet's discourse dwells in palaces could be taken as an indication that Amos is addressing royal officials since the term *'armon* "denotes not only the royal residence but also the buildings required by court officials"[46]. Additionally, it is known from archaeological excavations that the palace of Ahab was part of a larger complex of buildings[47]. If so, royal functionaries may have lived there. In two other passages in the Book of Amos referring to the same category of people living in the palaces on the mountains of Samaria (3:12—15; 6:1—8), ivory houses (v. 15) and ivory beds are mentioned. As to the ivories unearthed by archaeologists, their "majority were uncovered in a building which may be identified with the 'ivory building' erected by Ahab (1 Kgs 22:39). Most of the ivories were small plaques intended to decorate furniture"[48]. Since the palaces mentioned in the Book of Amos were decorated with ivory, and since similar embellishments have been uncovered in the Samaria acropolis, we are allowed to think that those condemned by Amos in the discussed passage may have dwelt close to the king's court, thus being indeed royal functionaries.

In the passage cited above (3:9—11) those who "sat" in the palaces (*'arm$^{e}$nôth*) on the mountains of Samaria are reputed to "store up" violence and robbery in their palaces (*ha-'oṣrîm ḥamas wašod b$^{e}$'arm$^{e}$nôthehem*). This accusation is parallel to "they know not to do right" (*w$^{e}$lo'-yad$^{c}$û $^{c}$a-sôth-n$^{e}$khoḥah*). We have in this expression a hint of the fact that they get their gain by extortion. Is it possible to trace in a more detailed way the source of those dishonestly acquired treasures? Because the inhabitants of the palaces are accused exactly to store ill-gotten gains up (*'oṣrîm*), M. Silver suggests that the transgressions so defined might have had their background in the elongated constructions next to the palace of the king, excavated on the hills of Samaria, their function being



interpreted as that of storehouses. Similar buildings have been uncovered in other places of Eretz Israel — namely in Megiddo and Beersheba. S. Morris explains their function as follows: In Megiddo "several large buildings were excavated in which a central alleway was divided by rows of stone pillars from stone-paved side galleries. Stones troughs were located between many of the pillars. The buildings were originally called 'Solomon's Stables'. But as Kenyon points out,... the buildings postdate Solomon and probably were not stables. Three very similar buildings with troughs and tethering holes in some of the pillars were uncovered within the walls of Beersheba near the gate... But these stables were stacked with storage jars and uncharred cooking pots"[49]. The constructions thought for a long time to be stables are in fact "storehouses, the central aisles of which may have been used to tether and feed the donkeys as they were being unloaded... Warehouses constructed along the same basic lines have also been found at Hazor, Tell Abu Hawam, Tell el-Hesi, Tell Malhata, Lachish, Arad, Beth-Shemesh, and Tell Qasile"[50]. S. Morris supposes that exactly this kind of storehouses for consumption goods are meant in the passage of Amos cited above. Agricultural products originating from the countryside would be deposited there for security reasons, to be sold afterwards on the market.

Another important element casting light on the socio-economic situation of the dwellers of palaces is afforded us by the collection of 63 ostraca (potsherds written on in pen and ink) excavated in 1910 in Samaria. They were written in Hebrew script dating from the 8th century B.C., and are usually divided by scholars into two groups according to the dates to be read on them. These dates denote probably the years of the reign of two Israelite kings, Joash and Jeroboam II — kings whose military actions and economic enterprises were discussed in the introduction to this paper. On the first group there is a mention of the 9th and the 10th year and on the second of the 15th[51]. The first group of inscriptions contains a piece of information about a small amount of wine and oil, the name of a place (probably whence the deliveries were sent), a personal name with a preposition added, indicating the person for whom the deliveries were destined and the name of the sender. The second group, dated in 15th year, contains in many cases the name of a district in the Northern Kingdom.

The scope of this paper does not allow me to report the fascinating discussion over the ostraca from Samaria. I shall comment on only one of the interpretations illuminating the living conditions of royal officials[52]. The fact that several of the ostraca were parts of the same jar, written over by the same person, has enabled some scholars to maintain that they were inscribed in Samaria[53]. According to A. Lémaire the personal names of addressees refer to royal officials granted fiefs by the monarch. Because of their function at the court, they were physically detached from the lands received from the monarch in exchange for their services at the court. That is why intendents were charged with providing means of subsistence from the estates temporarily given by the king to royal officials. In his interpretation A. Lémaire refers to the fief system known from Egypt, Ugarit as well as from Eretz Israel (1 Sam 8:14).

According to Lémaire's explanation the personal names of senders on the ostraca would refer to the intendents[54].

Y. Aharoni suggests that royal officials owned not only fiefs but also private, inherited land[55]. On the basis of this opinion, the dwellers of *'arm$^{e}$nôth* could be identified with great landowners. Furthermore, the gains dishonestly acquired by them would derive from an accumulation of land involving the dispossession of small tenants. We have earlier seen Morris's suggestion relating the warehouses on Samaria Hills with the storage of products intended to be sold on the market. In that case the corrupt benefit would come from certain payments charged against the Law for the storage of products.

If this opinion about the origin of that income is justified enough it would show Amos as holding an interesting view on social structure. He would condemn not only those who robbed "the poor" (designated by the terms *'ebhyônîm* and *dalîm*) but also those who appropriated the fruits of work of the landowners coming to the capital in order to sell the produce of their fields. This enables us to suppose that the prophet defends the rights of the peasants capable of delivering the surplus of their production to the market. The need to store up products in towns finds its background in the development of a monetary economy, and therefore of markets, that we underlined in the introduction to this paper.

The fraud in the above-discussed passage of Amos appears as a manifestation of straying from righteous conduct: "For they know not to do right (*n$^{e}$khoḥah*)" (3:10). Then the prophet goes on to presage the punishment which will fall upon them: "Therefore thus saith the Lord God: An adversary there shall be, even round about the land: and shall bring down thy strenght from thee, and thy palaces (*'arm$^{e}$nôth*) shall be spoiled" (3:11). So the goods they have stolen will be taken away. So far it might seem that the nature of the punishment is such that in this case the retribution affects anly those that are guilty.

Whereas in the passage 3:9—11, Amos criticises the dishonest acquisition of goods, although without comenting in detail on their origin (we have mentioned only some possibilities), in the fragment 3:12—15 the luxurious way of life led by the officials is rebuked: "Thus saith the Lord:... that sit in Samaria in the corner of a couch, and on the silken cushions of a bed. Hear ye, and testify against the house of Jacob (*bêth Ya'aqob*), saith the Lord God, the God of hosts, For in the day that I shall visit the transgressions of Israel (*piš$^{e}$-Yisra'el*) upon him, I will also visit the altars of Beth-el, and the horns of the altar shall be cut off, and fall to the ground. And I will smite the winter house (*bêth ha-ḥoreph*) with (*'al* — "upon") the summer house (*bêth ha-qayiṣ*); and the houses of ivory (*batey ha-šen*) shall perish, and the great houses shall have an end, saith the Lord". Amos condemns here banquets, which, as is known, were held in antiquity by people semi-recumbent upon couches.

Blaming this class, the prophet directs his attention at the responsibility which this part of the population is charged with for the transgressions committed by all the nation. Such a function of theirs is visible in their being told to anounce to the *bêth Ya'aqob* the Lord's retribution for the guilts of



Israel. The iniquities are denoted with the same term as in the case of creditors — namely *peš$^{e}$aîm* ("transgressions) (3:14) — and followed by a depiction of punishment affecting, first of all, the officials themselves, since there is a mention of the ruin of the *bêth ha-ḥoreph* (winter house) *'al* (upon) *bêth ha-qayiṣ* (summer house). In the Hebrew text the preposition *'al* — "upon" is used suggesting double-storeyed constructions. This kind of building is known from ancient times in Israel and might be taken as an indication of wealth. Talking of this passage, Cripps refers to Jer 36:22 (a winter house of king Jehoiakim), and to Judg 3:20 whence "it is clear that within one and the same building there might be two *departments*, a 'summer parlour', being suitable for summer use"[56].

Parallely, the destruction of *batey ha-šen* (ivory houses — i.e. inlayed with ivory) is predicted, which could be seen as a retribution for wicked deeds committed by officials. It seems that the destruction of altars in Bethel, which the text talks about, remains in a close relation to this context. Significantly enough, in that very place there was a royal shrine looked after, in the time of Amos, by priest called Amaṣiah — Amos's persecutor. That sanctuary was erected by Jeroboam I in order to mark a secession of the Northern tribes. To the horns of the altars a special function was ascribed — that of an asylum. A person guilty of a crime committed without premeditation could keep hold of the horns and so be protected from the vengeance of the so-called "avenger of blood". If the ruin of the altars' horns is spoken of here, that means no possibility for the class of royal functionaries to escape punishment.

Nevertheless, retribution directed against officials implies certain more universal effects. This conviction seems to be presupposed in the introduction to the above-quoted section (3:12—15) written in wisdom style: "As the shepherd rescueth out of the mouth of the lion two legs, or a piece of an ear; so shall the children of Israel be rescued ..." (12a). One of possible interpretation of the verse is as follows: The God of Israel is innocent, He is not guilty of the ruin of the *bney Yisra'el* (sons of Israel). This passus refers to an ancient law from the period of settlement in Canaan, described in the Book of the Covenant (Exod 22:12). At that stage the Israelite economy was based on breeding animals. In the case of someone's confiding his animals to someone's else attention (because of a temporary absence), if during that period a confided animal was killed by a wild beast, then the shepherd in care of it was asked to produce a portion of the mangled body as a proof of his innocence. Then he was exculpated and exempted from paying the damages. So the reference to this practice would mean, in our context, that the God of Israel is able to present sufficient evidences to confirm His blamelessness for the ruin of the *bney Yisra'el*[57]. As the exppression *bney Isra'el* denotes all the nation, we could suppose that all the people of Israel are to be affected by the destruction, and not only those who dwell on the Samaria Hills.

Further in hid speech, Amos probaly attacks the wives of officials called in the text "kine of Bashan"[58]: "Hear this word, ye kine of Bashan (*parôth ha-bašan*), that are in the mountain of Samaria, which oppress the poor (*dalîm*) which crush the needy (*'ebhyônîm*), which say unto their lords, Bring, and let us

drink. The Lord God hath sworn by his holiness, that lo, the days shall come upon you, that they shall take you away with hooks, and your residue (*w^e'aḥarîthkhem*) with fish hooks. And ye shall go out at the breaches, every one stright before her; and ye shall cast *yourselves* into Harmon, saint the Lord" (4:1—3). Bashan was a region on the right side of the Jordan and had a reputation for having fertile pastures (cf Deut 32:14; Ezek 39:18; Ps 22:13)[59]. So, the cows of Bashan enjoyed excellent food. Comparing the wives of officials to the cows of Bashan, Amos implies that on the mountains of Samaria those women wallow in luxury gained by dishonest means. It is worthwhile to point out that the categories of people mentioned here as "robbed" by the noblewomen, i.e. *dalîm* and *'abhyônîm.* are the same as those oppressed by creditors. Apart from condemning the *parôth ha-bašan* for despolind the *dalîm* and *'ebhyônîm*, Amos also criticises here the banquets they take part in, like those "dwelling on the mountain of Samaria". The retribution predicted consists in the exile of these aristocratic women out of Eretz Israel. The eminent position of the exiles is revealed by the retinue (*'aḥarithkhen* — "their retinue") that follows them[60]. The name Harmon is enigmatic, unkown from elswere. If the text were slightly emended, one could read here Hermon (a mountain in the northern part of the contry — 2750 m)[61].

The next passage concerning the class designated here by the term "officials" adds new elements illuminating the way of life led by this part of the Israelite population, conditioned by well-defined ownership relations: "Woe to them that are at ease in Zion, and to them that are secure in the mountain of Samaria, the notable men of the chief of the nations, to whom the house of Israel come! Pass ye unto Calneh, and see; and from thence go ye to Hamath the great: then go down to Gath of the Philistines: be they better than these kingdoms? or is their border greater than your border? Ye that put far away the evil day , and cause the seat of violence to come near; that lie upon beds of ivory, and stretch themselves upon their couches, and eat the lambs out of the flock, and calves out of the midst of the stall; that sing idle song to the sound of the viol; that devise for themselves instruments of music, like David; that drink wine in bowls, and anoint themselves with the chief oinments; but they are not grieved for the afliction of Joseph" (6:1—6).

At the very beginning of the above citation, the remark that the people of Israel come to those "secure on the mountain of Samaria" hints at certain functions they play with regard to the people. Apart from that same role is implied, in the last verse, by censuring them for being indifferent to the affliction of the house of Joseph. It is fair to remark on a constant of Amos's condemnation of this class — namely banquets. For the third time this motif is coming back. Although Amos tells us nothing about the dimensions of the estates owned by royal functionaries, we are able to draw some conclusions on the subject from their way of life . Apart from the confortable couches made from precious materials and the ivory beds they lie upon, as in the passage (3:12—15) presented earlier, they are blamed for ointing themselves by the *re'šîth š^emanîm* — "first oil" — i.e. olive oil of the highest quality (6:6)[62]. The splendour of the feasts is accented by the music accompanying the meals (6:5).



Excessive consumption as a manifestation of one's economic position can reflect the dimensions of one's property and therefore be taken as an important criterion in the establishing of social differentiation. The allegation that the participants of banquets eat for festival meals "the lambs out of the flock and the calves of the midst of the stall" would suggest that the animals are somebody else's property. If the feast-makers were not thieves, the prophet would not rebuke them. It should be pointed out that, especially in the case of that class, we are confronted not with a mere condemnation but an expression of God's abhorrence as a reaction to these wicked acts. The God of Israel communicating His message through Amos's mouth proclaims: "The Lord God sworn by himself: I abhorre the proud of *Ya 'aqob* and I hate his palaces (*'arm^enôth*). And I will deliver a town and the everything inside of it to be plundered" (6:8). In the above-cited passage we once again come across the feature of prophetical speech we pointed out in some places before — though Amos directs his criticisim at royal officals, he talks as if addressing all the nation, and so blaming here the proud attitude of his listeners he uses a name denoting all the nation — *Ya'aqob.*

As in the case of culprits' wives, the punishment is declared in terms of exile: "Therefore now they go captive with the first that go captive, and the revelry of them hat stretched themselves shall pass away" (6:7). An interesting parallelism can be found here. The eminence of the wives' position in the ancient Hebrew society — they are the first — is confronted with their being at the head of the exiled. Here we certainly come across an allusion to the deportation carried out by Sargon II in 721 B.C. The aim of the deportation of the elite could be summed up, according to Maxwell Miller and Hayes, as follows: removing of the leards in order to prevent a possibility of revolt and also to settle areas needed to be cultivated and also to get labor force in another branches of production. According to 2 Kgs 17:6 (= 18:11) Israelites were settled in Halah at Habor Goran and in the towns of Media[63]. Sargon himself in his inscription wrote that he exiled 27290 inhabitants from Samaria and formed from them a contingent of 50 chars[64]. Here we could have it confirmed that the wealthiest part of the population, particulary the great landowners, went into captivity. It is only fair to remind that, according to Max Weber's theory, there was a close relation between land tenure and military service. The very high cost of arms and of military training could only be borne by landowners. A certain indication that those participating in military operations are concerned here is provided by allusions to the military actions carried out by Jeroboam II: Hamat and Qarnaim (6:2. 13). Thanks to these compaigns the territory of Eretz Israel was considerably expanded, as was mentioned in the introduction to this paper. So the deportation may have affected most significatly the rich. It is they who are revealed as the victims of the punishment.

There is also a question of another retribution added to the first one: the town will be delivered into the hands of agressors (6:8). It was connected, of course, with robbing all the inhabitants. So as in the case of wicked creditors, innocent people are also involved in the consequences of the unjust acts of "the

rich". All the nation suffers from the pestilence (6:9—10). Moreover, this universal dimension of such calamities is underlined by the prediction of the destruction of the big house as well as of the small one: "For, behold, the Lord commandeth, and the great house (*habayith hagadôl*) shall be smitten with breaches, and the little house (*habayith haqaṭôn*) with clefts" (6:11).

*6. Peasants*

Landowners, working with their own hands on their own land seem, in the light of Amos's message, to have been the most numerous aggregate of people within Israelite society. There are three important texts appearing to be relevant to the subject: 4:4—13;7:1—4; 9:14—15. The texts depict in minute detail the living conditions of this social class. Peasants are presented as town-dwellers (4:6). Living in town was natural because of the security the walls offered, the fields remaining outside. Only during harvest and fruit-picking did Israelites stay out in the fields[65]. They owned orchards (*ganôth*) with olives and fig-trees, and vineyards (*kᵉramîm*) (4:9) In the passage 9:14—15 the owners of such properties are depicted as planting them by themselves (9:14), which makes us define them confidently as peasants (i.e. working on their own pieces of land with their own hands).

As in the former case of creditors and officials, who appear in the prophetical text because of their various wicked acts, this class is also mentioned because of its specific transgressions. Amos begins by stigmatising the faulty form of worship practised by those who bring to shrines the products of their work: "Come to Beth-el, and transgress (*ûphišᶜû*); to Gilgal, and multiply transgression (*liphšoᶜa*); and bring your sacrifies (*zibhḥêkhem*) every morning, and yor tithes (*maᶜsrothêkhem*) every three days; and offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving (*tôdah*) of that which is leavened, and proclaim freewill offerings (*nᵉdabhôth*) and publish them: for this liketh you, O ye children of Israel, saith the Lord God" (4:4—5). The offerings of animals (*zᵉbhaḥîm*) and tithes (*maᶜasrôth*) of the fruits of the field and of the flock betray the rustic background of those that present them.

Reproach follows immediately, since such practices are termed "transgressions" (*pešaᶜîm*) In this context, Amos mentions two shrines — namely those in Bethel and Gilgal. There is a strong, ironic accent here, since we know that tithes were brought once a year (Deut 14:22). Therefore, the prophet stigmatises the excess of "religiosity" revealed in providing tithes much more frequently that it was demanded[66]. It should be remarked that peasants are rebuked mainly for worship in shrines, in contrast to creditors and officials, condemned bacause they violate someone's right of property.

From the picture of the punishment awaiting the peasants (outlined below) is clear that the calamities presaged for them are extremely hard. At the beginning there is mention of lack of food in all towns: "And I also have given you cleanness of teeth in all your cities, and want of bread in all your places: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the Lord (4:6). The God of Israel will cease to send the rain: "And I also withoolden the rain from you, when there were yet three months to the harvest: and I caused it to rain upon one city,



and I caused it not to rain upon another city: one piece (*ḥelqah*) was rained upon, and the piece (*ḥelqah*) whereupon it rained not withered. So two or three cities wandered unto one city to drink water, and were not satisfied: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the Lord" 4:7—8). In order to make the situation even more dramatic, He will hold the rain back in the period critical for agriculture (three months before harvest). A drought will affect some towns (4:7) while others are to be spared.

In parallel expressions, a piece of land that has been rained upon, and another which has not, are mentioned. The Hebrew word used here to define the rainy area is *ḥelqah*. This substantive, which could be translated as "part of land", designates a field, precisely limited, and in some contexts in the Bible acquired for money (silver) (Gen 33:19). Such a demarkation emphasises the peasants' ownership as holding over well-bounded portions of land. One might argue that if some towns are to be saved from the disaster whereas others are not (the same being true of fields), then the inhabitants of the spared areas must be innocent. Such reasoning raises doubts. It would be more natural to see here a picture of the confusion with which the people will be affected and which is, of course, very harmful. It takes the shape of running from one place to another in search of water.

Moreover, the locust will devour their orchards, vineyards, their fig trees, and their olive trees: "I have smitten you with blasting and mildew: the multitude of your gardens (*ganôthêkhem*) and your vineyards (*karmêkhem*) and your fig trees (*tᵉ'enêkhem*) and your olive trees (*zêthêkhem*) hath the palmerworm devoured: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the Lord" (4:9).

The further punishments are presented as if awaiting all the people of Israel. The verses that follow and are connected with the above through the formula: "Yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the Lord", predict a disaster painful for all the nation, i.e. an agression by a foe. The image of pestilence known from the period of the Exodus from Egypt is evoked here as well as a disaster from the patriarchal epoch — namely the destruction of Sodome and Gomore (4:10—11). These past calamities, intended to lead the people back to God have not, in fact, produced that effect. That is why the prophet predicts a new visitation of God (4:12).

However, in the section devoted to the visions of the prophet Amos (7:1—6), a destruction especially painful for peasants and predicted for them is, as a consequence of Amos's intervention, delayed: " Thus the Lord God shewed me: and, behold, he formed locusts in the beginning of the shooting up of the latter growth (*leqeš*); and lo, it was the latter growth (*leqeš*) after the king's mowings. And it came to pass that when they made an end of eating the grass of the land, then I said, O Lord God, forgive, I beseech thee: how shall Jacob stand? for he is small (*qaṭon*). The Lord repented concerning this: It shall not be, saith the Lord" (7:1—3).

These are the unique places where the word *leqeš* ("late corn") occurs in the Bible. It seems to refer to the latest yield, as the rain designated as *malqoš* is the last one in the year (Deut 11:14; Jer 3:3; Hos 6:3; Joel 2:23; Zech 10:1; Prov 16:15; Job 29:23). In Amos's vision the locust starts to devastate the fields the

moment the very lately-riping crop appears — which was, of course, an enormous damage. The people of Israel, designated here as *Ya'aqob* with the adjective *qaṭon* — "small", are saved from the disaster.

Similary in the next verses Amos looks in his vision at an enormous fire coming forth and devoring the whole *heleq* — the peasants pieces of land: "Thus the Lord God shewed me: and, behold, The Lord God called to contend by fire; and it devoured the great deep (*tehôm*), and would have eaten up the land (*ha-heleq*). Then said I, O Lord God, cease, I beseech thee: how shall Jacob stand? for he is small (*qaṭon*). The Lord repented concerning this: This also shall not be, saith the Lord God" (7:4—5). The disaster is so tremendous that even everything beneath the earth (*tehôm*) is destroyed by the fire. And once again, thanks to Amos's mediation, *Ya'aqob*, because he is (to use the prophet's term) *qaṭon* escapes the catastrophe. It seems necessary to pay attention to this adjective because in many contexts in the Bible it occurs as the opposite to *gadôl* — "great" (Gen 44:12; Deut 1:17; 1 Sam 5:9; 30:2; 2 Kgs 25:26; 2 Chron 34:30), as we have already noticed in the context of the prophet's prediction about the ruin of the "big house" (*habayith hagadôl*) and of the "small house" (*habayith haqaṭon*) (6:11). This parallel, which occurs also in the plural (*g^edolîm* versus *q^eṭanîm*: Jer 16, 6; Ps 115, 13), appears often in a sociological meaning, designating groups of people with the respect to their condition. Perhaps, Amos using the adjective *qaṭon* intended to underline a miserable socio-economic situation of those spared from disaster, i.e. small tenants.

In contrast to the above visions, anouncing calamities which, as we have seen, are to be especially grave for peasants, and the coming of which has been restrained through the prophet's supplication, there follows a vision of *'anak* (lead or plumb-line). This is not accompanied by the prophet's attempt to divert, by pleading, the accomplishment of the prophecy: "Thus he shewed me: and, behold, the Lord stood beside a wall made by a plumbline (*'anak*), with a plumbline (*'anak*) in his hand. And The Lord said unto me, Amos, what seest thou? And I said, A plumbline (*'anak*). Then said the Lord, Behold, I will set a plumbline (*'anak*) in the midst of my people Israel; I will not again pass by them any more" (7:7—8).

The word *'anak* used in v. 7 and 8 does not occur in any other place in the Bible. It denotes a kind of metal. Taking into account the word *nâku* in Assyrian, *anak* would be a mineral used for making the alloy of which the best weapons were produced. The vision evokes the menacing arsenal God will forge in order to ruin His people. According to another interpretation *'anak* is a plumb-line — a tool for controlling the verticality of a wall. In accord with this possible explanation, we are confronted with a vision of judgment to which Israel will be brought — namely He will pass Himself among His people[67].

A total ruin of *miqdašey Isra'el* — "shrines", and *bamôth Yiṣḥaq* — "high places" will not be retarded and the sword will destory the *beth Yorobh'am* — "the house of Jeroboam" (7:9). Here we are confronted with a particulary severe attack against the priests and the king (and probably also those making



offerings in shrines). Such a doom is comprehensible within the whole context, since the vision is followed by the threats Amaṣyah — the priest of Bethel — directs towards Amos, indignant at the prophet's presages of Jeroboam's death and the exile of Israel (7:9). An exceptional punishment will fall upon Amaṣyah — his wife will commit adultery and his daughters and sons will be killed by the sword (7:17).

Amos adds here as in v. 11 that Israel will go into exile. We discover once again a link between the faults of particular persons or groups inside the people of Israel and the effects of their transgression, painful to all the nation. However, taking into account the fact that the social elite was led into captivity first, we could see here a hint of a punishment intended for the richer classes of society (cf. The inscription of Sargon relating categories of people taken into captivity). If this interpretation is justifiable, we would find, here a further example of Amos's conviction about the particular responsibility for the people the elite is charged with. We have halted for a while on "the first" in Israelite society, whose ranks are now enlarged by the persons of the king and the priests, in order to grasp in a clear way, the difference in Amos's attitude towards the elite and the peasants.

The theme of the end of Israel is continued in the vision which follows — viz. *k^elûbh qayiṣ* — "a basket of summer fruits". The prophet is punning here, associating *qayiṣ* (summer) with *qeṣ* ("end" — of people Israel ): "Thus the Lord God shewed me: and behold, a basket of summer fruit (*k^elûbh qayiṣ*) And he said, Amos, what seest thou? And I said, A basket of summer fruit (*k^elûbh qayiṣ*). Then said the Lord unto me, The end is come (*ba' ha-qeṣ*) upon my people Israel; I will not again pass by them any more" (8:1—2). In the context of a prediction of the ruin of Israel, the revocation of the catastrophe in the case of small peasants is amazing indeed. As we have seen so far this class of people is not perceived by Amos as innocent.

Hence, another, more profound reason for the effectivness of Amos's prayer for them is to be sought. The passage from the final part of the text (9:11—15) telling about the restoration of Israel after the exile or in Messianic times casts light on this question. There is a unique place in the Book of Amos where Israel is symbolised by a picture of the tent of David (*sukkath David*). This falling tent will be put up again by the Lord, and its breaches repaired. A second manifestation of the restoration is the ruling of Israel over other nations. Here this hope is expressed as a promise to inherit the "other nations" — *kol ha-goyîm* (9:12)[68]. Both promises are followed by a picture picked out of a rustic context presenting the restoration as rural prosperity: "And I will bring again the captivity of my people Israel, and they shall build the waste cities, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and drink the wine thereof; they shall also make gardens, and eat the fruit of them. And I will plant them upon their land, and they shall no more be plucked up out of their land which I have given them, saith the Lord thy God" (9:14—15).

We see here the Israelites coming back, as we should expect, from captivity in Assyria. They reconstruct the desolated cities and settle in them. Then, they plant vineyards and orchards, which means that they live on their own pieces

of land. The abundance is emphasised by the promise that they will enjoy the fruits of their work. This formulation expresses also in a symbolic way the fact that the people will live in peace. As we have seen so far, the way of life depicted in this fragment is typical of peasantry.

To this context belongs also v. 13: "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that the plowman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him that soweth seed; and the mountains shall drop sweet wine, and all the hills shall melt". The image of a labourer following a reaper emphasises the abundance of the harvest, since the latter has not finished his work yet because of the abundance of the yield; and his work is in a way hastened by the former. The same meaning is to be read in v. 13b: there are so many grapes that making wine from them takes an unusually long time — that is to say till the time of sowing[69]. In the latter part of the verse the image of extraordinary wealth in terms of splendid agricultural fertility appears once again.

One might ask if the restoration of the nation being presented in terms evoking the peasants' way of life is a suggestion that this class was the most numerous within ancient Hebrew society. We should expect the prophet to have used images the most expressive for a majority of the nation. It would be a very interesting conclusion to be drawn here, concerning social structure. However, one has to be very cautious, since another possibility is acceptable in the same degree. The use of the image would express Amos's predilection for this class. Although in earlier passages he condemned it for the faulty worship in Israelite shrines, he would find it the most valuable part of society. He would perceive the faults of a particular category of people, still he liked it specially (perhaps also because of his own origin: as we remember, he was himself a former shepherd and sycamore grower). His sympathy for a given group or class does not mean a lack of criticism towards their transgressions.

*7. Judges*

Just one text in the Book of Amos seems to refer to the people whose particular function was to pronounce sentences in court: "They hate him that reproveth in the gate (*baša'ar*), and they abhore him that speaketh uprightly. Forasmuch therefore as ye trample upon the poor (*dal*), and take exactions from him of wheat (*mas'ath-bar*): ye have built houses of hewn stone (*batey gazîth*), but ye shall not dwell in them; ye have planted pleasant vineyards (*karmey-ḥemed*), but ye shall not drink the wine thereof. For I know how manifold are your transgressions (*piš'ékhem*) and how mighty are your sins (*haṭo'têkhem*); ye that afflict the just (*ṣaddîq*), that take a bribe (*kopher*), and that turn aside the needy (*'ebhyônîm*) in the gate (*baša'ar*) from their right. Therefore, he that is prudent shall keep silence in such a time; for it is an evil time. Seek good, and not evil, that ye may live: and so the Lord the God of hosts, shall be with you, as ye say. Hate the evil, and love the good, and establish justice (*mišpaṭ*) in the gate (*baša'ar*): it may be that the Lord, the God of hosts will be gracious unto the remnant of Joseph (*š'erîth Yôseph*)" (5:10—15). One is inclined to associate the above text with judges, since mention is made three times of judgments taking place at the gate — *ša'ar* (vv



10. 12. 15). In ancient Israel the place where juridical verdicts were pronounced was the city gate where the judges sat.

Similarly to creditors, officials and peasants, they are an object of prophet's interest because of the transgressions committed by them. As concerns their living conditions, they are depicted as owners of vineyards. However, a small detail allows us to notice that vineyards of quality are in question here. In contrast to the vineyards discussed previously, occuring there (4:9; 9:14) without any more precised attributes, the vineyards here, appear with a substantive *ḥemed* next to *k'ramîm* (the last word being in the genetive relation so-called "construct state" ⟨*karmey*⟩ with the precedent). *Ḥemed* means "desire", "delight"[70]. Thus the whole expression could be translated as "vineyards of delight". If vineyards belonging to judges are meant by that term, one is allowed to suppose that they were planted on particularly fertile soil and therefore the owners would get excellent wine from them and thus make good profit.

Another detail casting light on their place in the framework of ownership relations is a remark on their homes which are built of hew stone (ashlar) *batey gazîth* (5:11). It was stone worked in a special way. People used this material in the construction of fortresses. Dwelling in such houses would testify to the inhabitants' wealth. Nevertheless, it is to be noted thet they form a separate class lower than royal officials, living in palaces (*'arm'nôth*). As in the earlier-mentioned cases, details of the way of life of particular classes within Israelite society occur in the prophet's speech as elements of doom. In other words, we are told about living conditions (reflecting, of course, ownership relations) in the context of violent condemnation. The judges are accused of hating people saying the truth in the gate (5:10).

Moreover, Amos denounces the oppression of the poor (*dalîm*). It takes the shape of forcing out from them a tribute of grain (*mas'ath-bar*) (5:11). Scholars come across many difficulties to determine what this tribute consisted in. Some maintain that taxes charged on the crop are to be seen here, since the word *mas'ah* in the meaning of taxes occurs in 2 Chron 24:6 in reference to taxes destined for the Temple (*mas'ath moše*)[71]. Although we are not in a position to clarify the nature of that load, it could not be any regular, accepted form of taxing, since the phenomenon is condemned by Amos as a deed against juistice . It is necessary to make one remark here. In the light of the above-quoted passage (5:11), a poor man (*dal*) seems to be a small tenant, as he is capable to provide a certain quantity of wheat, which he is robbed of by the wicked judges[72].

Subsequently, the group in question is stigmatised for taking a ransom from a righteous man (*ṣaddîq*). According to Hacham the ransom (*kopher*) means, in this context, a bribe taken by judges in order to make the lot of a righteousman even worse[73]. The scholar founds his interpretation on a parallel between *kopher* and *šoḥad* "bribe" in Prov 6:35. Apart from blaming judges for oppresing the poor and righteous, Amos also deals with the matter of the needy (*'ebhyônîm*) who are abused "in the gate" — they are the victims of faulty judgments not precisely defined here.

The acts sketched above are designated by the prophet as "transgressions" (*peša'îm*) and "sins" (*haṭa'ôth*) (5:12). As in the case of previously discussed social classes, the judges who seem to draw extraordinary incomes from their public function within Hebrew society will be punished. They will be afflicted in their possessions — their vineyards will be devasteted and their houses destroyed. Thus, here, the retribution affects only those who are guilty. However, this verse is followed by a presage of calamities painful for all the nation: "Therefore thus saint the Lord , the God of hosts, the Lord: Wailing shall be in all the broad ways; and they shall say in all streets, Alas! alas! and they shall call husbandman to mourning, and such as are skilful of lamentation to wailing: And in all vineyards (*k^eramîm*) shall be wailing; for I will pass through the midst of thee, saith the Lord" (5:16—17). Acting against justice implies a ruin of all the people of Israel, with a collective lament in towns and fields as a consequence.

The vitality of respect for the laws in courts seems to be especially important in the eyes of Amos, since the salvation of the remnant (*š^e'erîth*) of Israel, called here by the name of Joseph depends on establishing justice in the "gate" (5:15). The question of the so-called "remnant" is very complex in the Bible. For the purpose of the presents analysis it is enough to mark that the term has "natural meaning of something left over or surviving from a scattering or general destruction"[74]. In the above passage "the remnant of Joseph is that which survives foreign conquest as yet in the future; this remnant may experience the favour of YHWH"[75]. As to the context of 5:15, the relation between escaping a total destruction by a small part of the population and the conduct of the judges, testifies to the responsibility that the last-mentioned are charged with. That is why the guilt of the wicked judges is especially heavy.

There is another question important for sociological analysis: Do they get, by virtue of their function in courts, a significant part of their resources? The weight of the problem rises when we attempt to make our reconstruction of the social structure of ancient Israel more precise. In the present paper, according to what we said in the introduction, ownership of the means of production (especially land) and work division are critical for such a description. The deficiency of data makes it difficult to answer the above question. As we have seen so far, the judges are presented mainly as landowners, enjoying particularly their delightful vineyards. However, if the judges were getting at the same time a significant part of means of subsistence from their activities at the gate (the dishonestly gains included), their socio—economic condition would differ from that of other landowners living mostly from their properties. From a sociological point of view, in the case of a serious benefit from judging, they would form, keeping their position as a "class", also a social stratum[76].

*8. Tradesmen*

The following passage seems to refer to this class: "Hear this, O ye that would swallow up the needy (*'ebhyôn*), and cause the poor of the land (*'aniwey-'areṣ*) to fail, saying, When will the new moon be gone, that we may sell corn (*našbîra šebher*)? and the sabbath, that we may set forth wheat (*bar*)?



making the ephah (*'êphah*) small, and the shekel (*šeqel*) great, and dealing falsely with balances of deceit; that we may buy the poor (*dalîm*) for silver, and the needy (*'ebhyôn*) for a pair of shoes, and sell the refuse of the wheat (*mapal bar*)" (8:4—7).

The people in question are so thirsty for gain that they act as if urging the new moon and the sabbath — the days of rest — to pass. Amos, in depicting their conduct, perhaps in order to mark and emphasize their yearning for profit, allows them to speak for themselves, which was not the case in the previous situations.

It is necessary to comment on the meaning of the expression *našbîra šebher*, translated here: "we may sell corn". Such a translation occurs also in the Hacham commentary and is justified by the author with a reference to Genesis 42:1—10. In that passage Jacob states, that there is *šebher* in Egypt translated usually as "corn" (42:1.2)[77]. We are told, as well, that Joseph sold the corn for money — that is, he was a seller (*hamašbîr*) to all the people of the land (42:6). This is the reason why Hacham sees also in the Book of Amos (8:5) sellers of the corn. Cripps proposes here the same lection.

Another thing causing problems in the discuseed passage is the meaning of *niphṭ^eḥah-bar*. Hacham suggests *niphṭ^eḥah 'eth 'ôṣrôth habar* — "storehouses with the wheat ". The scholar finds the background for such an interpretation, as in the previous case, in the Book of Genesis — namely, it is said in 41:56 that Joseph opened (*wayiphtaḥ*) everything what Egyptians had and distributed the grain (*wayišbor*) to the people of Egypt. If we accept the opinion that in Amos 8:5 storehouses with wheat are understood, the fact would very nicely square with the idea, mentioned in the discussion of ostraca from Samaria, of the possible storage of crops with in city walls to be sold afterwards on the market.

Moreover, if storehouses should be understood here, those once the sabbath and the new moon are over, would not appear as simple peasants coming to market in order to sell the surplus of their crop but rather tradesmen for whom trade remains the main source of income. Thus we would be confronted here with a special type of economic activity different from the production of material means. Hence, tradesmen would form a separate social class, according to what we said in the introduction about the ownership of means of production and work division remaining critical for social differentiation.

Such an interpretation could be strenghtened by some additional evidence showing up in the discussed passage. There is a question of cheating in trade by means of making „the ephah" — measure of yield, smaller, and "the shekel" heavier. "The shekel" was a stone against which customers weighted silver — the price of corn. The whole phrase means that they sell for an unfair price. Another method of selling corn to customers not according to the right measure and taking too much money was to falsify balances. This group of people is accused also of selling wheat of very bad quality (*mapal bar*), for the price of superior grain. The above-mentioned practices, denounced by Amos, are described as if they were routine acts, which would indicate that the class

of tradesmen is considered here rather than single peasants coming occasionally to town in order to sell a surplus of their production.

The sellers in the text are condemned for buying the poor (*dalîm*) and a needy man (*'ebhyôn*) "for a pair of shoes" (8:6). In 2:6 there was a question of buing a righteous man (*ṣaddîq*) "for money" (silver) and of a needy man (*'ebhyôn*) "for a pair of shoes". It is interesting to note that in both contexts buing or selling "for a pair of shoes" is associated with *'ebhyôn*. As concerns the *dalîm* Hacham argues that cheating in trade is to be considered here, through which the poor are obliged to sell themselves "for silver" — the price of corn[78]. In other words, they are compelled to do this in order to obtain the corn necessary for their survival. If this explanation is justifiable, *dalîm* would appear here as "owning nothing", as "propertiless". We could call them "the plebs". On the other hand, in the part of the present paper devoted to officials, the *dalîm* oppressed by them seemed to be small tenants. Once again, one comes across a difficulty trying to define precisely a particular social group.

The sketching of the wicked sellers is followed in the text by a presage of total ruin. It must be observed that in the case of tradesmen, no punishment especially painful for that class is indicated. Rather than that, the calamities in the present case are of a universal character. For instance the passage in question (8:4—6) is followed by a picture of an earthquake of the earth, mourning in all places, darkness; feasts and songs will turn into lamentations. The weight of the mourning is underlined by the comparison with the mourning after the death of an only son.

The catastrophe depicted here is presented as vaster than those predicted up to now. We are confronted with a real image of the day of YHWH. What follows the acts of the wicked tradesmen, as retribution for their deeds, takes the shape of an enormous national tragedy. It would of course be premature to comment on the connection between the coming of the day of YHWH and the misdeeds of discussed tradesmen by the prophet. Our goal is just to pay attention to this coincidence, taking into account several references in the Bible testifying to a critical attitude towards commerce (e.g. Ezek 7:12—13; Micah 6:11—12).

*9. Conclusion*

I. We have attempted in the present paper to ascribe some selected passages in the book of Amos to particular social classes. However, some significant shortcomings of the presentation have to be recognised. The above selection of classes was founded on the basis of the generally accepted and the most frequent opinions about the meaning of the treated passages. A thorough survey of particular collectivieties made it possible to assess how far a sociological analysis depended on an interpretation of the text. We have selected creditors, officials (royal functionnaries), peasants, judges (being also landowners) and tradesmen. We have selected them on the basis of some elements indicating the different types of of property they owned. The land and the ownership of warehouse installations, as well as of the means necessary for commercial activities (weights, measures etc.), and all kinds of economic



oppression by means of loans seem to appear in the Book of Amos as critical for social differentiation. We are confronted with difficulties in the sociological determining of groups designated with the terms *dalîm, 'ebhyônîm, 'anawîm*, because we are not told about their place in the system of ownership relations. The data are lacking to ascertain their socio-economic position as small tenants, although in some contexts such a situation, as we have seen in the case of *'ebhyônîm* and *dalîm* could be implied. Bacause of the lack of data it seems more cautious to avoid calling them "a social class" at the moment but rather to reserve for them the term "quasi — class"[79]. The groups we have distinguished may serve only as a frame of reference enabling a further, more profound study of the social structure of ancient Israel in the light of the Book of Amos. In order to make our description more rigorous, it would be required to compare the results of the analysis with the views of social structure in the other Biblical texts, especially those referring to the 8th century B.C. Moreover, it is indispensable to consult other material, external to the Bible (archaeological and historical), elucidating the passages discussed.

II. As concerns the answer to the second question of the present study, that of the prophet's attitude towards particular classes or quasi-classes (does he looks at them in a positive or negative light?), this is to be sought within the context of the kind of doom predicted for them as punishment for their deeds. The classes stigmatised in a most violent way, as we have seen, were creditors, officials, judges and tradesmen. They were condemned because of their transgression in the matter of property law, and these, in a majority of cases, consisted in violating the rights of the poor. The prophet's point of view is extremely interesting; for the retribution he presages, affects not only those accused of wicked acting but also all the nation. Whole Israel will suffer because of the unjust acts of some groups within ancient Hebrew society. This seems to suggest Amos'opinion about the enormity of their guilt — it is great enough to produce universal effects. It must be noted, however, that at the present stage of my research it would be impossible to draw justified conclusions about the degree of the guilt ascribed to a given class on the basis of the retribution falling on them. I can only remark that I have noticed particulary serious retributions in the case of tradesmen, wicked judges, and officials. Especially in the case of officials and judges, the severity of the punishment could be explained as a measure of the responsibility for all the nation they are charged with. Whereas the above-enumerated clasees are rebuked for transgressions in the mater of property, the peasantry is accused of the excessive worship in shrines. Therefore it is interesting to notice that transgressions involving the appropriation of someone else's goods are ascribed to classes living in wealth.

III. Another important question connected directly with the previous one and likewise to be pursued in further research, may now arise. Is it possible to select a class in the Book of Amos which would be presented by the prophet as innocent? We have already stated that peasantry is to be ruled out, although the prophet has a special predilection for this class. We would be inclined to

consider the people designated in the text by the terms: *dalîm, 'ebhyônîm, 'anawîm.* In the text they are always presented as objects of oppression and it would be wery difficult to find in the text any hints whatsoever of wicked acts committed by them, or a rebuke directed at them. However, it would be too precarious to ascertain on that basis that the prophet recognises them as innocent, since it is not justifiable to take his silence about unjust conduct as proof of general blamelessness. Moreover, one would be tempted to associate these categories with "the remnant" (*s^e'erîth*) discussed earlier. Any details concerning the sociological denotation of "the remnant" are lacking. It would be highly unjustifiable to identify *s^e'erîth* in question with *dalîm, 'ebhyônîm, 'anawîm.* The category of "the remnant" is situated in another plan. Its function is to express the hope that the annihilation will not be total, although the people are guilty. Because the stage of the current research does not permit to classify "the remnant" from a sociological point of view, and since we are not allowed to maintain that in each case the quasi-classes are innocent, we discover that Amos avoids simplification in his view of social structure. He does not perceive it as composed of the rich and the poor, of whom only the latter are free from guilt. Therefore it would be unjustifiable to maintain that the prophet pleads only the cause of a unique, particular social class within ancient Hebrew society.

## ABBREVIATIONS

BDB: *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, F. Brown, S.R. Driver, Ch.A. Briggs, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1972.

DB: *Dictionary of the Bible*, (rev. ed. F.C. Grant, H.H. Rowley), Clark, Edinbourgh, 1963.

TOB: *Ancien Testament. Traduction oecuménique de la Bible*, Cerf, Paris 1976.

## FOOT-NOTES

[1] The quotations in English according to Richard S. Cripps, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Amos*, M.A.B.D., London S.P.C.K. 1969.

[2] M. Weber, *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie*, b. III: *Das antike Judentum*, (reprint), Mohr, Tübingen, 1976.

[3] M. Weber, *Agraverhältnisse im Altertum*, [in:] *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Sozial — und Wirtschaftsgeschichte*, Mohr, Tübingen 1924, pp. 1-288. In the present text I use the translation by R.I. Frank, *The Agrarian Sociology of Ancient Civilisation*, NBL, London 1976.

[4] M. Weber, *The Agrarian Sociology of Ancient Civilization*, p. 146.

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 140.

[6] *Ibid.*, p. 146.

[7] R. de Vaux, *Ancient Israel, Its Life and Institutions*, DLT, London 1986, pp. 72—74.

[8] *Ibid.*, p. 73.

[9] *Ibid.*, p. 68.



[10] *Ibid.*, p. 68.

[11] S.W. Baron, *Histoire d'Israël. Vie sociale et religieuse*, vol. I, Presses Universitaire de France, Paris 1956, pp. 89—97.

[12] R. de Vaux also points out his difficulty in defining "**divisions of population**", but he perceives it as a semantic problem: "...it is not easy to define them owing to the variety and uncertainty of the vocabulary in use". R. de Vaux, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

[13] Y. Aharoni, *Carta's Atlas of the Bible*, Carta, Jerusalem 1974, in Hebrew; 790/89-750 according to N. Na'aman, *Historical and Chronological Notes on the Kingdoms of Juda and Israel in the Eighth Century B.C.* "Vetus Testamentum" XXXVI, 1 1986, p. 92.

[14] Y. Aharoni, *op. cit.*; 787/86—736/35, N. Na'aman, *op. cit.*, p. 93.

[15] DB, p. 28.

[16] J. Bright, *A History of Israel*, Old Testament Library (series), SCM Press LTD London 1966, p. 238.

[17] *Ibid.*, p. 238.

[18] *Ibid.*, p. 240.

[19] The opinion on the conquest of the Philistine cities, carried out by Uzziah (2 Chron: 26:6), raises, however, seriouis doubts. According to Miller and Hayes it was "Joash/or Jeroboam who went on to conquer the Philistine cities; and the Chronicler, who essentially ignores the existence of Israel during this period, has attributed the action to Uzziah". J. Maxwell Miller, J.H. Hayes, *A History of Ancient Israel and Juda*, SCM Press LTD 1986, p. 311.

[20] Y. Aharoni, *op. cit.*, p. 90.

[21] J. Maxwell Miller, J. Hayes, *op. cit.*, p. 307.

[22] J. Bright, *op. cit.*, p. 240.

[23] Y. Aharoni, *op. cit.*, p. 91.

[24] J. Bright, *op. cit.*, p. 240.

[25] Y. Aharoni, *op. cit.*, p. 90.

[26] J. Bright, *op. cit.*, p. 240.

[27] *Ibid.*, p. 240.

[28] Y. Shiloh, *The Population of Iron Age Palestine in the Light of a Sample Analysis of Urbans Plans*, Areas, and Population Density, BASOR, 239 1980, p. 25.

[29] *Ibid.*, p. 25.

[30] The exclusion of Negev was connected, among other things, with methodological reasons explained by Broshi and Gophna as follows: "The area encompased Western Palestine of the British Mandate (Israel and occupied territories) excluding the Negev, south of the Beersheba and Arad plains. This area (14000 of the 26000 km$^2$ of the land area of Mandatory Palestine) has reliable archaeological data available and it represents a definite geopolitical unit concerning which data from various period can be compared". M. Broshi, R. Gophna, *Middle Bronze Age II Palestine. Its settlements and population*, BASOR, 261 1986, p. 73.

[31] I. Finkelstein, *Census of Population in Eretz Israel in 734 B.C.E.*, Catedra, 1990 58, p. 11 (in Hebrew).

[32] M. Broshi, R. Gophna, *op. cit.*, p. 87.

[33] S. Morris, *Prophets and Markets. The Political Economy of Ancient Israel*, Kluwer-Nijhoff Publishing, Boston, The Hague, London 1983, p. 15.

[34] Ibid., p. 19.

[35] A. Hacham, *Tanach 'im peruš da'at miqra'. Tre 'asar*, vol. I, Amos, Mossad Harav Kook, Jerusalem 1990, p. 11 (in Hebrew).

[36] *Ibid.*, p. 11; cf. R.S. Cripps, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Amos*, M.A.B.D., London S.P.C.K. 1969, p. 140.

[37] Shoes, according to some scholars, represent a small value. Using this image, the prophet would condemn those who sold a poor man even for a very small price; that is precisely why their guilt is still greater. According to others the poor at that time went barefooted and shoes passed for an expensive thing. Then the passage would mean that a poor man is robbed of a precious thing. A. Hacham, *op. cit.*, p. 11; on the basis of

some biblical texts putting one's shoe on a piece of land symbolised becoming the owner of the land (Ps 60:10; 108:10) R. de Vaux, *op. cit.*, p. 169.

[38] R.S. Cripps, *op. cit.*, p. 142.

[39] S. Morris, op. cit., p. 66.

[40] BDB.

[41] In order to make the sense of the parallel in question still clearer it is worthwhile to evoke the opinion of Kapelrud quoted by Botterweck: "They who should represent justice and rightousness, who should be *ṣaddiqîm* par excellence, did so no more... Others had taken their place: *'anawîm, 'ebhyônîm, dalîm*, the poor, needy, people, who were trampled down by the mighty, they were the real *ṣaddiqîm*. They are entitled to have their rights in the Israelite society... their condition and their position in society were integrated part of their *ṣedaqah* — righteousness." *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Alten Testament*, W. Kohlhammer, b. I, Stuttgart 1973 pp. 32—33.

[42] M. Fendler quoted by N. Rosel, *Amos, Hoṣaat Aḥ*, Israel 1990, in Hebrew.

[43] J. Maxwell Miller, J.H. Hayes, *op. cit.*, p. 312.

[44] R.S. Cripps, *op. cit.*, p. 147.

[45] *Ibid.*, p. 158.

[46] DB, p. 717.

[47] A. Mazar, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible*, ABRL, Doubleday, New York 1990, pp. 503—504.

[48] *Ibid.*, pp. 503—505.

[49] S. Morris, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

[50] *Ibid.*, p. 36.

[51] A. Lémaire, *Inscriptions hebraïques*, vol. I, *Les Ostraca*, Cerf, Paris 1977, p. 81.

[52] Two other most frequent interpretations of the ostraca: The inscriptions 1) refer to taxes, 2) are receipts of provisions delivered and destined for the king. *Ibid.*, p. 67.

[53] S. Morris, *op. cit.*, p. 36, A. Lémaire, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

[54] A. Lémaire, *op. cit.*, p. 76.

[55] Y. Aharoni, *The Samaria Ostraca, Eretz Israel in the Biblical Period*, Jerusalem 1987, p. 281 (in Hebrew).

[56] R.S. Cripps, *op. cit.*, p. 164.

[57] TOB.

[58] "Wives of noble", R.S. Cripps, *op. cit.*, p. 165.

[59] TOB.

[60] "The retinue" is one possible meaning of *'aḥarîth*. TOB.

[61] Ibid.

[62] "The fines quality of oil was got by selecting the best berries before they were fully riped. These were pounded in a mortar, after which the pulp was poured into a basket of rushes or wickerwork. From this as a strainer, the liquid was allowed to run off into a receiving vessel. After the oil had floated and been purified, it formed 'beaten oil' such as had to be provided for the lightining of the Tabernacle (1 Kgs 5:25; Exod 27:20; Lev 24:2)", DB, p. 710.

[63] J. Maxwell Miller, J.J. Hayes, *op. cit.*, p. 337.

[64] *Ibid.*, p. 338.

[65] S.W. Baron, *op. cit.*, p. 96.

[66] DB, p. 1005.

[67] BDB; TOB.

[68] It is necessary to note that the reconstruction of all the nation and its ruling over its neighbors are frequent in prophetical speech generally — the above promises serve as images of messianic times.

[69] TOB; A. Hacham, *op. cit.*, p. 74.

[70] BDB; *ḥemed* refers to vineyards: Isa 27:2; to a field: Isa 32:12.

[71] A. Hacham, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

[72] Farby referring to some texts in the Old Testament argues that the term *dal* denotes a small peasant (Kleinbauer), since in the sabbatical year *dalîm* are not mentioned among those who benefit from a self-grown corn (Lev 25:6). They were also obliged to pay some taxes (similar to those paid by the rich to the Temple (Exod 30:15) and bring offerings, although suited to their condition Lev 5:11; 14:22. *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Alten Testament*, b. II, Stuttgart 1977, pp. 232—233.



[73] A. Hacham, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

[74] DB, p. 841; This original connotation occurs in Amos 1:8 where it designates the remnant of the Philistines. TOB, p. 1134.

[75] *Dictionary of the Bible*, eds., John. L. Mc Kenzie, S.J. Geoffrey Chapman, London — Dublin, 1972, p. 727.

[76] We reserve the notion "class" for aggregates of people getting the means of their subsistence from the production of material goods or their exchange (i.e. trade), or exchange of money (credit), whereas the notion "stratum" refers to groups of people finding subsistence recources in other than economic subdivisions in society, e.g. in administration, courts, religion, art, etc., J. Ładosz, K. Kowalski, *Dialektyka a społeczeństwo*, PWN, Warszawa 1979, pp. 181—184).

[77] On the other hand we are told of Jacob's sons buying corn in Egypt: Gen 42: 3. 5. 7. 10. The root *šbr* occurs here in the meaning of "acquire".

[78] A. Hacham, *op. cit.*, p. 64.

[79] J. Ładosz, S. Kozyr-Kowalski, *op. cit.*, pp. 180—181.