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Amos amongst the *nōqdīm*: Navigating agrarian class conflict in the book of Amos

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Abstract

This paper proposes that Amos's designation as a נקד conveniently aligns the class position of the eponymous prophet with that of lower-ranking scribal elites. Given the likelihood that the reference to the נקדים in Amos 1.1 is a redactional insertion, this appears to be a deliberate scribal attempt at indicating that Amos was, like themselves, a member of an administrative-bureaucratic class fraction. This observation invites a reappraisal of the excoriating critiques of social ills embedded in the book's prophetic oracles. Rather than representing the interests of the peasantry per se, the oracles instead highlight intersections between petty-elite and peasant interests. This perhaps reflects a rhetorical attempt to imply a sense of agrarian solidarity between these social groups, whilst avoiding an institutional critique of the upper echelons of Judah, or Yehud's, ruling classes.

Keywords

Book of Amos, class conflict, prophets, redaction criticism, scribal circles, scribalism, social class, social scientific approaches

I. Introduction

The enigmatic designation of the prophet Amos in Amos 1.1 as being 'amongst the נֹקְדִים' has been the source of some scholarly interest. A broad consensus has emerged that נֹקֵד likely refers to a manager of a large flock, and not, in fact, a simple shepherd, in contrast with the depiction of Amos as a seasonal agricultural worker in Amos 7.14–15. Although this view is well founded, the *implications* of the use of נֹקֵד are under-explored. This paper will posit that the scribal circle responsible for Amos 1.1 have deliberately sign-posted their equivalent class-position as petty administrators, who either were or shared class interests with נֹקְדִים. When reading the critique of social ills in the subsequent prophetic oracles, we might observe that the class interests underlying the attacks on the

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rich and powerful are not simply those of the peasantry, but rather speak to the intersections between petty-elite and peasant interests. More speculatively, this may represent a rhetorical attempt to forge an agrarian solidarity between these differing social groups against a common 'class enemy' in the form of landlords and estate owners, aligned with the political centre.[1]

Biblical scholarship is hardly bereft of analyses of social and economic inequality in Amos. Indeed, a strain of materialist approaches to the so-called eighth century prophets can be found in the work of scholars such as Gale A. Yee (2007, 2016),[2] Marvin L. Chaney (2017b: 191–204), Davis Hankins (2023: 131–52), Matthew J. M. Coomber (2010: 1–32). These critics posit that the social critiques of these prophets can be directly correlated with certain economic trends in the eighth century, namely an expansion in estates and landlordism, and an attendant increase in social and economic inequality. The prophets themselves, Yee (2007: 23) argues, were 'class traitors', and, utilizing the conceptual framework of the late James C. Scott (Yee 2007: 13–15, 23–24; Scott 2018), reflected something of a 'hidden transcript', a counter-hegemonic *Tendenz* that at least on the rhetorical level challenged and subverted the 'public transcript' expressed through royal diktats, 'official' religion, and so on.

1. The question of whether Amos presupposes an 'urban' or 'rural' setting is somewhat vexed. Walter Houston (2010: 108–9) has proposed the book is primarily concerned with urban poverty, noting, for instance, the book's primary interest in Samaria and the references to the poor living in city gates in 5.10, 12 and 15. Houston's intervention is an important and useful one, and it is indeed the case that only administrative and cultic centres would have been able to support scribal populations; walled communities one could reasonably refer to as 'cities'. This is not insignificant; but an essential problem remains with this line of reasoning, namely, an underlying assumption that the urban and rural poor (or, indeed, urban and rural rich) can be delineated in what was an overwhelmingly agrarian society. Houston (2010: 109, 112) at various points notes that the 'environs' of Samaria or the area surrounding Jerusalem might also have been in view for the prophets, and concedes some of the references to the peasantry in Amos, e.g., 5.11. Of course, these hinterlands of cities were not 'metropolitan areas' in the modern sense; they were *rural*, and likely produced much of the grain consumed in cities. Indeed, many of the poor even in cities were likely agricultural labourers in these hinterlands, and many 'urban' non-producers owned or managed estates in the countryside. Hence, the undoubtedly 'urban' First Isaiah appears to be interested in 'rural' issues in, e.g., Isa. 5.8, and rural imagery (e.g., that of the vineyard) pervades both Amos and First Isaiah (not to mention the other 'eighth century' prophets). In effect, agrarian issues would have been an inescapable part of the social worlds of the rich and poor, producers and non-producers, in ancient Judah. Given this, Marvin Chaney (2017a: 146) concludes in his response to Houston that 'Landlord-peasant relations defined the major axis of exploitation in eighth-century Israel and Judah', and further notes a high level of interchange between the rural and urban. On this basis, it seems best to move beyond the 'urban' and 'rural' debate, and instead focus on whether authors and redactors appear to align themselves with the political centre, wherever they might have lived or hailed from originally. Similarly, this paper will generally avoid discussion of the 'rural', which might imply a clear, 'urban' corollary; rather, the terms 'agrarian' and 'agrarianism' are preferred.
2. See Yee 2016: 496–501 for discussion of Amos specifically.

This analysis has much to commend it, though with the partial exception of Yee, George V. Pixley, and Norman K. Gottwald, insufficient attention has been paid to the class position of redactors, prophetic circles, and scribes more generally.[3] In a society with low levels of literacy, the very fact that these prophetic oracles exist as *texts* implies elite authorship.[4] Ironically, then, extant Marxist approaches have not focused enough upon the intersections between issues of social class and authorship. This paper will therefore adopt elements of this materialist hermeneutical approach, particularly its understanding of class,[5] whilst also offering a constructive critique of existing scholarship in this tradition.

3. Yee (2007: 23) does note both the hostile elite responses to prophetic ministry, and the relative security enjoyed by prophets, afforded by their social status and class position. This security, she argues, allowed for the 'voices of the marginalized [to be] mediated' through the more socially secure prophets. However, *why* these sections of the elite sided with the peasantry is not scrutinized; neither are the possible divergences between peasant and petty-elite interests ossified in the written prophetic oracles of the Hebrew Bible. Though he does not develop the idea, another partial exception is Pixley (1991: 53), who denounces Amos as a mere 'reformer'. Gottwald (2016: 35), the father of Marxist exegesis of the Hebrew Bible, perhaps comes closest to synthesising a class analysis with a redaction-critical one, in theorising that redactors were responsible for the 'dilution of class content' in Isaiah, Amos, and Micah. However, Gottwald does not explain why the political motivations of the 'initial' authors of prophetic texts were so distinct from subsequent redactors, given their presumably identical class position.
4. It is important to consider that these elite groupings may have, to some degree, utilized traditions that existed in the broader cultural imagination. A scholarly trend that speaks to this issue is the embrace of a cultural- or social-memory model for understanding the composition of prophetic texts. This approach was largely adopted from the work of the late Jan Assman (1992) and was developed in the realm of biblical studies chiefly by Ehud Ben Zvi (see, particularly, his collected work on Persian period social memory in Ben Zvi 2019) and Ian D Wilson (2017, 2018). Writing on Hosea, Ben Zvi (2019: 276) emphasizes how in the shaping of the collective/social memory of named prophets, 'some core concepts and even metanarratives are actively and substantially negotiated, such socially constructed sites of memory … often provide a socially appropriate, 'safe' playground for exploring and integrating multiple voices'. Elite literary production, then, can build on and even engage dialogically (or even dialectically) with something of a broader collective memory. However, the realm of contextualization (critically, of overarching meta-narratives within literary works) is ultimately the domain of scribal elites. This offers a further avenue through which one can understand why prophetic works occasionally contain discourses that may be in some tension with a prescriptive understanding of elite class interests. Perhaps most importantly, though, Ben Zvi's paradigm gives further justification for thinking carefully about both the framing of texts (and thus, elements like prophetic superscriptions, a core concern of this paper) and the *social* aspect of social/cultural memory. That is to say, the extent to which the interests of particular social groups may have shaped the adoption and transformation of preexisting traditions.
5. Class in the Marxist sense is dictated by a group's relationship with a particular mode of production; that is, their control of, and access to, the means of production, and attendant position within the division of labour. In an ancient agrarian society, class position is thus often determined by access to and *control* of land, and consequently the produce of said land. For a useful overview, see Gottwald 2016, especially 22–28.

Here, recent continental scholarship is useful. It has tended to correctly identify the elite character of literary production,[6] and in the case of the book of Amos specifically, that the נֹקֵד was no humble shepherd.[7] Perhaps most importantly, a welcome shift has taken place from a focus on individual, named prophets to the scribal circles which transmitted and fashioned written prophetic material. Reinhard Kratz (2015: 34) in particular has been at the forefront of this development, emphasizing the distinction between the historical reality of prophecy on the one hand, and its literary instantiations on the other. As Kratz (2015: 33) notes,

> Even the earliest material is not an exact transcription but rather a new interpretation of the original prophetic oracle. If the prophet is the author and thus his own interpreter, it is difficult to decide which interpretations can be ascribed to him and which have to be accredited to a later scribe.

For social historians and theorists, this shift is liberating. In leaving behind the totalising, individual 'prophet', we can move further from the shadow of so-called 'Great Man' historiography. Our analysis, instead, can focus not on the idiosyncrasies of individuals, but on corporate social groups; in this case Judah, or Yehud's, administrative-bureaucratic classes. In this sense, the decentring of the prophet makes the issue of class still more pertinent.

However, studies in the continental historical-critical tradition have rarely if ever explored the significance of an apparent alignment in the class interests of peasants and prophetic circles. The concern of elites with social discord, and, apparently, the plight of the peasantry, is *itself* a point of interest. Thus focusing on the stated profession of the prophet in Amos 1.1 is not an attempt to discover the class position of some chimeric 'historical Amos'. Rather, it is an exercise in deducing what the prophetic circles behind this secondary insertion are trying to signal about their own class position. From this, we can also deduce something about both the class character of the social critiques themselves, and the broader class politics of Judah's countryside.

In the remainder of this study, in order to firmly establish the class-character of the נֹקֵד, the translation of the term as a manager of livestock will be justified. Then, the redaction of 1.1 will be discussed, and specifically the probability that נֹקְדִים was actively inserted into a preexisting superscription. Finally, this paper will proffer a tentative reading of two examples of social critiques in Amos. Whilst it is difficult to establish priority between the edited superscription and the 'social critique' present in the prophetic oracles, these passages, in chs. 2 and 4, align well with the class interests of middle-managers, even in their support of the peasantry.

II. The meaning of נֹקֵד

The term נֹקֵד[8] is a near *hapax legomenon*: it appears once in the singular, in 2 Kgs 3.4, and once in the plural, in Amos 1.1. However, a relatively common Ugaritic cognate, and

6. See, for instance, Van der Toorn 2009: 75–108.
7. See §II, 'The meaning of נֹקֵד.'
8. Conventionally defined (e.g., by *HALOT*, s.v. 'נֹקֵד') as a 'shepherd' or 'sheep-breeder'; the present article suggests a more precise definition on the lines of '*manager* of flocks'.

a less common (though chronologically closer) Akkadian cognate may shine some light on the specific meaning of the Hebrew word. A near-consensus position understands both of these terms to refer to a functionary who managed flocks on behalf of a major landowner (a palace or temple), lower in status than the owner of the flocks, but higher than a shepherd.

The Ugaritic cognate *nqd*, a senior shepherd,[9] and its plural form *nqdm*, appear in ten administrative texts, as well as the *Baal Cycle*'s concluding colophon.[10] In the administrative texts, we have four lists of professions and four additional documents that deal with taxation and grants. In the profession lists, *nqdm* is consistently followed by *khnm* (priests).[11] For Ivan Engnell (1967: 87) and other earlier commentators, this implied that the נֹקְדִים of ancient Israel were specifically temple functionaries,[12] perhaps even hepatoscopers.[13]

This, however, infers rather too much from the evidence: it is not clear that we should associate *nqdm* with *khnm*. The word that consistently precedes it, *tnnm*, likely means 'archers', as Peter C. Craigie (1982: 31) notes. Craigie further observes that the self-evidently cultic term *qdšm* invariably follows *khnm* in these lists. Given this, he posits that one might more naturally group *nqdm* with *tnnm*—a pair of secular roles, followed by a pair of cultic roles.

The waters are muddied, though, by the *Baal Cycle*'s scribal colophon:

spr .ilmlk šbny

lmd . atn. prln . rb

khnm rb . nqdm

tʿy . nqmd . mlk ugrt

adn . yrgb . bʿl . trmn

(*KTU* 1.6.vi.54–55)

The scribe is Ilimilku the Shebenite,

student of Attenu the diviner, chief

of the priests, chief of the nqdm,

tʿy *of Niqmadū king of Ugarit,*

lord of yrgb, *master of* trmn.[14]

9. See *DULAT* , s.v. 'nqd'.
10. *KTU* 1.6.vi.55.
11. *KTU* 4.68.71; 4.126.5; 4.745.4.
12. See, for instance, Hammershaimb 1970: 17–18; Mays 1969: 19.
13. This marginal view was put forward by Milos Bič (1951) and in short order comprehensively refuted by A. Murtonen (1952).
14. Translation the author's own. Following Mark S. Smith and Wayne T. Pitard (2009: 706, 726–27) I read *spr* as active participle (vocalized as *sāpiru* by Smith and Pitard (706)). As Smith and Pitard (2009: 726) note, *spr* could be read as a passive participle ('Written by') or a 3ms *qtl* verb ('he wrote'), though the context of a list of titles favours their reading.

Critically, Attenu (or perhaps the scribe Ilimilku himself—the syntax is somewhat ambiguous),[15] is both a 'chief of the priests' and 'chief of the *nqdm*'. Engnell (1967: 87) and Erling Hammershaimb (1970: 17–18) have taken this to be a further indication that the Israelite נֹקֵד was a temple functionary. Again, this is something of an over-extrapolation: the colophon does not indicate that the *nqdm* themselves had a specific role in the maintenance of the cult. At most, it implies that these particular *nqdm* managed flocks owned by, or perhaps merely *overseen* by, high-ranking cultic officials. This is more indicative of the fact that priests, and in this case, *scribes*,[16] had both 'secular' and 'cultic' responsibilities, than any notion that *all* roles carried out by priestly/scribal elites were primarily 'cultic' or 'religious' in character.

Ilimilku and Attenu, of course, were themselves closely affiliated with and directly under the command of the king of Ugarit,[17] so it remains possible that the flocks managed by their *nqdm* were in the final instance owned by the king. Indeed, Craigie (1982: 32) gives us good reason to think that for the most part, the *nqdm* of Ugarit were associated with the palace directly. First, the lists of professions themselves were discovered in the west archives of the royal palace and a house adjoining the palace. Second, texts documenting taxation and land grants to *nqdm* also record them as being bestowed with weaponry—an indication that they were called upon for military service, likely by the palace. In addition, Craigie notes that one of these documents places 'a group of *nqdm*' in the same tax-bracket as an entire village, presumably as a form of renumeration. Craigie (1982: 32) deduces, therefore, that the *nqdm* were, much like their superiors, 'royal dependant[s]': a category that could also include cultic and military personnel (the *khnm* and *ṯnnm* respectively). A reasonable supposition, building on Craigie's point, might be that the *nqdm* of Ugarit had a clientelistic relationship with the monarchy. That is to say, land grants and tax benefits were given in exchange for periodic military service, and then presumably a steady, regulated supply of sheep and their secondary products from the royal estates. Given the asymmetric nature of clientelism, a clear class distinction remained between the *nqdm* and the ruling elites: they were, in effect, middle-men.

Uses of the Akkadian cognate, *nāqid*, are also instructive. Though the *nāqidū* mentioned in Old Babylonian texts tend to be, more generically, herdsmen, they appear to have formed a middle stratum in the management of Uruk's temple flocks in the neo-Babylonian period, with the *rab būli*, their superiors, and the *rêʾû*, the shepherds themselves.[18] From this evidence—which in the case of the neo-Babylonian texts is close in time to the composition of the book—we might infer that the נֹקֵד outranked the רֹעֶה in Judah.

15. On this colophon alone, it would be reasonable to assume that *rb nqdm* and *rb khnm* were titles of Ilimilku's distinguished teacher, Attenu (Curtis 2013: 13); though as Donna F. Freilich (1992: 23–24) notes, the shorter colophons found in *KTU* 1.4.viii.45 and 1.16.vii.55 give *Ilimilku* the title *ṯʿy* (Attenu is not mentioned). Extrapolating from these examples, Freilich thus contends that Ilimilku and not Attenu must be the *ṯʿy* in question in the longer colophon, too, with 'Student of Attenu', an item in the list of his titles—an honorific that Freilich compares to academic post-nominals.
16. A possible indication of an overlap between the role of the scribe and the management of flocks; see further discussion below.
17. See Freilich 1992: 25; Curtis 2013: 15. Note also the title *ṯʿy … mlk ugrt* in *KTU* 1.6.vi.55.
18. See the uses noted in *CAD* 11, s.v. 'nāqidu', and discussion in San Nicolò 1948: 284ff.

It therefore seems likely that the Israelite נֹקֵד managed flocks on the behalf of those in political centres. They likely did not own the flocks themselves, and worked within royal estates, or at least, estates that had an obligation to supply agricultural surpluses to political or cultic centres. In Marxist terms, the נֹקֵד had a different relationship with the mode of production than either peasants on the one hand, or landlords on the other.[19]

III. The insertion of נקדים into the text of Amos 1.1

The redaction-history of Amos 1.1 gives us further reason to suspect that Amos's profession is not incidental, but a pointed inclusion, added into a pre-existing superscription. The verse is as follows in the Masoretic Text —

דִּבְרֵי עָמוֹס אֲשֶׁר־הָיָה בַּנֹּקְדִים מִתְּקוֹעַ אֲשֶׁר חָזָה עַל־יִשְׂרָאֵל בִּימֵי עֻזִּיָּה מֶלֶךְ־יְהוּדָה וּבִימֵי יָרָבְעָם בֶּן־יוֹאָשׁ מֶלֶךְ יִשְׂרָאֵל שְׁנָתַיִם לִפְנֵי הָרַעַשׁ

The words of Amos, who was among the shepherds of Tekoa, which he saw concerning Israel in the days of King Uzziah of Judah and in the days of King Jeroboam son of Joash of Israel, two years before the earthquake.[20]

As Hans Walter Wolff (1977: 117–18) and more recently Reinhard Kratz (2003: 57) have noted, the syntax of the verse is somewhat peculiar. The first relative clause, אֲשֶׁר הָיָה בַּנֹּקְדִים appears to disrupt the relationship between 'Amos' and 'from Tekoa', so looks to be a later insertion. There is further circumstantial evidence for this reading. Wolff (1977: 117) notes, for instance, that the second relative clause in the verse expands Amos's career to roughly forty years; this sits in some tension with the temporally specific remark about the earthquake at the verse's conclusion.[21] This may further indicate that the superscription has been tampered with by later redactors.[22]

19. A potential counterpoint may be found in the one other use of *n-q-d* in the Hebrew Bible, in 2 Kgs 3.4. Here, Mesha, the king of Moab, is a נֹקֵד, delivering 100,000 lambs and the wool of 100,000 rams to the king of Israel. Again, the נֹקֵד appears to have a role in the distribution of herds and their supply to a local patron; naming Mesha a נֹקֵד, then, functions as a way of ironically relativising his power and status in relation to that of the king of Israel.
20. Translations are NRSVUE unless otherwise indicated.
21. Wolff (1977: 117) further observes that the prophet Jeremiah likewise has a forty year career, a possible indication of an intertextual connection between the superscriptions in Jer. 1.1–3 and Amos 1.1. This interconnection is possibly present on both redactional layers observable in the superscription: Wolff's reconstruction, אשר בתקוע is in part informed by Jer. 1.1's אֲשֶׁר בַּעֲנָתוֹת (Wolff 1977: 117, and earlier literature). Göran Eidevall (2017: 93) also proposes a literary relationship between Amos 1.1 and Jer. 1.1, noting the similarity between the broader relative clause in Jer. 1.1, אֲשֶׁר בַּעֲנָתוֹת בְּאֶרֶץ בִּנְיָמִן, and that in Amos 1.1. If this is an instance of Jeremianic influence, we might tentatively suggest a *terminus post quem* for this redactional insertion in the neo-Babylonian period.
22. This, incidentally, undermines Francis I. Andersen and David Noel Freedman's (1989: 188) supposition that Amos's status as merely 'one of' many נֹקְדִם in the small town of Tekoa implies that the נֹקְדִם were lowly shepherds. If 'Tekoa' and נקדם belong to different redactional layers, then the phrase cannot be taken to be a historically reliable picture of the class composition of the village of Tekoa in the eighth century BCE. Rather, it reflects the social world and class position of the scribe(s) who composed this secondary insertion.

For Wolff (1977: 117) and Kratz (2003: 57), inserting a reference to Amos's profession and the time of his ministry was likely an attempt to expand on the biographical material on Amos in the prose narrative in 7.10–17, in which Amos confronts Amaziah, a priest at Bethel. The reference to the נֹקְדִים, then, is inserted as a consequence of the description of Amos as a בּוֹקֵר or cattle herder in 7.14, and a 'follower of the flock' in 7.15. Wolff (1977: 117) rationalises the change from בּוֹקֵר to נֹקֵד on the basis of the relative commonality of the two phrases—בּוֹקֵר is a *hapax legomenon*, whereas נֹקֵד has one other use. This is unconvincing: one can hardly conclude that נֹקֵד was more common on the basis of a single extra usage, and בּוֹקֵר, indeed, has a more obvious etymology (from בָּקָר, cattle), so would have been easily understood.[23] Most importantly, whilst 1.1 presents Amos as a relatively prosperous manager of livestock, 7.14–15 positions him as socially marginalized: a seasonal worker, outside of any prophetic guild. Amos 1.1 and 7.14–15, then, actually imply *different* class positions for the prophet, so were likely composed separately.[24]

Though priority cannot be established with any degree of certainty, 7.10–17 likely postdates the updated superscription[25] and is, in all likelihood, one of the later

23. The very fact that בּוֹקֵר refers to cattle herding might further imply that it would not have been interchangeable with נֹקֵד, though as Shalom M. Paul (1991: 34, 247–48) notes, in at least the Code of Hammurabi, a *nāqidu* is a herder of both cattle and sheep (*LH* 261.21–24).

24. It would be remiss not to mention Andrew R. Davis's (2022: 16) similar contention that Amos's designation as a herdsman in 7.14–15 is likewise a strategy on the part of scribes to align themselves with a hypothetical rural audience. In a newly ruralized Persian period Yehud, Davis argues that 'the scribes created a prophetic persona that could bridge the gap between their elite urban context and the rural setting of their external audiences'. The precise social and historical setting proposed by Davis for 7.10–17 is plausible, though perhaps overconfident: whilst Persian period Yehud was comparatively rural and sparsely populated, the majority of the population was still essentially agrarian in other periods too. Nevertheless, the argument is highly plausible, not least in light of this article's contention that 1.1 and 7.14–15 imply distinct class positions for the prophet, which merit explanation.

25. It is worth considering the possibility that these traditions originated independently of one another. Recent approaches that have emphasized materiality in the process of literary growth have challenged traditionally held assumptions of linearity in the composition of biblical books. Nathan Mastnjak (2023: 15–23), for instance, notes extensive evidence of ancient works being spread across multiple short papyrus scrolls. The longer prophetic works (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel), at least, were effectively 'Multi-volume work[s]' for the duration of the Persian period, with their compilation into single animal-skin scrolls occurring only in the Hellenistic period (2023: 45–55). Indeed, even in the Hellenistic period itself, works spread across multiple papyri continued to be the norm even as this process of compilation was underway (2023: 41–45). Amos, of course, is a considerably shorter work than Isaiah, Ezekiel, or Jeremiah. It is no wonder that when discussing his model in relation to the minor prophets, Mastnjak (2023: 113–20) principally applies it to the formation of the Twelve as unit, and not its constituent books. Amos itself could fit on a single papyrus scroll, assuming an average size of somewhere between 3.4 or 4 metres (2023: 18). It should be emphasized, though, that Mastnjak's (2023: 224) model does allow for much smaller units of text being preserved as part of a prophetic collection—'Rather than imagining the literary work that would eventually become a book as a single scroll, we should imagine it as a shelf— or a jar or proverbial shoebox—full

additions to the book. As numerous commentators have noted, the episode interrupts Amos's visions, and is likely a redactional insertion. Indeed, as H. G. M. Williamson (1990: 104, 121), Kratz (2003: 47), Ludwig Schmidt (2007: 222) and more recently Davis (2022: 9–11) have contended, 7.10–17 appears to both presuppose and exposit elements of the preceding and following oracles.[26] Kratz (2003: 58) further adds that the unit appears to be a retooling of the tale of the unnamed man of God from 1 Kgs 13. Both prophets hail from Judah, and come to Bethel to prophecy doom, the 'man of God' during the reign of Jeroboam I and Amos under Jeroboam II; thus a further line of literary dependence might be inferred.

Crucially, both the texts seemingly utilized by 7.10–17—Amos 7.7–9 and 1 Kgs 13—are themselves late. 1 Kgs 13, and more broadly the traditions surrounding Jeroboam I, are increasingly understood to be artificial literary constructs, and the 'man of God' narrative specifically secondary in this already late literary complex.[27] Amos 7.1–9, meanwhile, introduces a theme of hope, with YHWH relenting from his judgement upon Israel in 7.3, 6; this appears to be a theological development relative to the core material in Amos 3–6.[28] Given that 7.10–17 appears to lift from 7.1–9, a relatively late part of Amos,

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of scrolls, sheets, and scraps'. It is quite plausible that some early incarnation of 7.10–17 was such a 'scrap': thus, a simple linearity in the composition of the book cannot necessarily be *assumed*. Thus, though we will argue below that 7.10–17 is intimately connected to, and builds upon, the visions either side of it, this does not *ensure* that the author of the verses was necessarily fully aware of the superscription in 1.1. It should be noted that Mastnjak's model does not abnegate editorial agency, nor does it eliminate the possibility that particular papyrus sheets may have been composed with knowledge of other, preexisting material. Nevertheless, it stands as a useful corrective to overconfidence concerning priority, and should be considered in future, longer-form studies of the redaction-history of prophetic texts.

26. As Williamson (1990: 103) has noted, despite disagreements over the original context of 7.10–17, it was commonly held that the unit became adjoined to the third vision due to a lexical similarity between v. 9b and v. 11 (the so-called 'catchword principle'). Though as Williamson (1990: 103–4) further contends, v. 9 appears to have numerous additional semantic and lexical similarities to vv. 11, 13, 16 and 17. He thus suggests, following Wolff (1977: 295), that 7.10–17 was a redactional insertion building on and developing the preexisting vision reports. Specifically, Williamson (1990: 116, 121) understands 7.10–17 to be a *Deuteronomistic* insertion, presenting Amos as the plumb-line (אנך) of 7.8. The addition, then, establishes that the rejection of the *prophet* by Amaziah is itself an underlying cause for the destruction of Israel promised in v. 17 (and then in the fourth vision, in Amos 8).
27. The wordplay between Rehoboam and Jeroboam is particularly suspect. They are, as Frevel (2016: 151) cannily renders it in German, the 'Volksweiter' and 'Volkstreiter' (see also Krause 2020: 111–12), or, as Davies (2007: 141) more bluntly puts it, 'Tweedledum and Tweedledee'. For further doubt about the historicity of the reign of Jeroboam I, see Finkelstein and Singer-Avitz, 2009: 43, and Ernst Axel Knauf's (2017) and Thomas Römer's (2017) intriguing proposal that the career of Jeroboam I was constructed from traditions that originally pertained to Jeroboam II. For the secondary nature of the 'man of God' narrative in 1 Kgs 13, see Gomes 2006: 17–19.
28. Eidevall, 2017: 16, 25. See also Kratz 2015: 47.

and 1 Kgs 13, a relatively late part of 1 Kgs, we can reasonably date the passage close to the end of Amos's compositional history.[29]

The secondary insertion of אשר־היה בנקדים could still postdate the prose narrative in 7.14–15, though if the redactors had presupposed 7.14–15, they presumably would have described Amos as hailing from the בוקרים* and not נקדים of Tekoa; in not doing so a needless tension is introduced into the text. More likely, 7.14–15 is an expansion that sought to add further detail to the prophet's biography—and perhaps downplay Amos's middling social status.

IV. The class character of social critique in Amos

Given the social critiques embedded in the subsequent oracles, one may suppose that marking out Amos's social class is not accidental. The class-position of a scribe would have been similar, if not the same, as a נֹקֵד. Settlements in Judah were never able to support significant populations of non-producers, that is, those with no physical role in agricultural production.[30] It is highly likely, then, that scribes 'doubled up' in administrative

29. *Contra* Schmidt (2007: 225–29), who, whilst maintaining that 7.10–17 was dependant on the visions, contends that the account is nevertheless pre-exilic, composed during the reign of Jeroboam II. This particular claim has two grounds. First, the rejection of the title נָבִיא, Schmidt (2007: 228) supposes, can only be understood if the broader text is considered pre-exilic. It is unclear why: it seems within the context of the passage that Amos's equivocation is at least in part an expression of a low social status. Second, Schmidt (2007: 229) notes that v. 11 predicts a violent death for Jeroboam, contrasting with his fate in 2 Kgs 14.29—thus placing the composition of the passage before the king's death. Schmidt omits, however, that v. 11 contains *Amaziah's* report of Amos's words to Jeroboam, and not an unmediated oracle of Amos himself. Indeed, Amaziah's account of Amos's words serves as a justification for the charge of conspiracy that he levies against the prophet in v. 10. Thus, following Eidevall (2017: 207), we might understand the prophecy of Jeroboam's death to be a deliberate play on v. 9, in which YHWH promises to put the בֵּית יָרָבְעָם (i.e. the Israelite royal dynasty) to the sword. Further arguments for a Persian period dating have recently been advanced by Davis (2022). Davis (2022: 4–6) has noted both probable LBH features in the language of 7.10–17, and more broadly contends (2022: 8–10) that the passage presents a 'scribal' form of prophecy that emerged in the post-exilic period. Davis (2022.9) finds evidence in v. 10: the implied object of וַיִּשְׁלַח being a *written* report. Problematically for Davis, the verse also implies that the report is not the work of Amos the prophet but Amaziah the priest (it opens with a screed against Amos, and the near-repetition of v. 9b in v. 11, as argued above, may be a deliberate misquotation). This is not to fully rebut Davis's case: he highlights numerous examples of inner-interpretation and reinterpretation in 7.10–17, and compellingly contrasts this with the distinctly less self-reflective visions either side of the prose narrative (2022: 11). One should merely note that his case is not necessarily conclusive.

30. Boer (2015: 123) notes both the likely small number of non-producers and the insufficiency of agricultural surpluses to even meet tax and tribute burdens—let alone support a large non-producer population (Boer 2015: 176–77).

roles, including estate management and the managing of supply to the political centre.[31] If they were not themselves נְקֻדִים, all but the highest ranking scribes, even in political and cultic centres, would likely have had similar economic and political interests.

In light of this, one can read the social critiques of the wealthy in Amos as a rhetorical and literary effort to align the class interests of lower-ranking non-producers with the peasantry. The figure of Amos, then, is positively identified with the נְקֻדִים to try and construct an agrarian solidarity between *managers* of livestock and the shepherds themselves, building a sense of shared opposition against the *owners* of estates.

This careful balancing of the interests of the peasantry on the one hand, and the interests of the petty bureaucrats and administrators on the other, can be detected in the book's prophetic oracles. Crucially, Amos rarely, if ever, criticises institutions *per se*. For instance, with regards to the cult, the promise to destroy the altars of Bethel in 3.14 stems not from a claim that this was an illegitimate 'high place'. Rather, it is a punishment for the endemic social ills in Israel detailed in 2.6–16. Nor, indeed, do we find critiques of the monarchy or other governmental institutions. Instead, what we tend to find are critiques of the scale and extent of certain practices, undergirded by a moralistic condemnation of excess. This is unsurprising: scribes and administrators relied, to some extent, on the maintenance of these institutions and patronage from the true ruling classes. These denunciations, then, are not an unequivocal promotion of the material interests of peasants. Rather, *intersections* between the class interests of the peasantry and petty bureaucratic elites are being foregrounded.

One example of this political balancing act may be found in the treatment of debt slavery in 2.6. Here YHWH famously declares

I will not revoke the punishment,

because they sell the righteous for silver

and the needy for a pair of sandals

31. Indeed, the semantic reach of סֹפֵר in Biblical Hebrew seems to cover a number of administrative-bureaucratic roles in the palace and temple. Van der Toorn (2009: 81–82), building on Schams (1998), observes 'that 'scribes' were often village scribes, copyists, or government officials' in the Second Temple Period, though he posits that 'the biblical evidence intimates that the scribes behind the Hebrew Bible were attached to the temple as an institutional and intellectual center'. Whilst the latter point is no doubt true in the main, it should be noted that Judah, both in the monarchic period and under neo-Babylonian rule, had a number of administrative and cultic centres. In the neo-Babylonian period, Mizpah, indeed, was the capital of Judah; Bethel, certainly in the monarchic period and perhaps later, was a major cultic centre. Recent archaeological research has also revealed greater cultic diversity in Judah than was previously imagined. Most notable is the temple at Tel Moẓa, a major complex seemingly absent from the biblical text (see Kisilevitz and Lipschits 2020). This may complicate the traditional assumption that scribes were necessarily aligned with hegemonic narratives emanating from the Jerusalem palace/temple complex, though admittedly these ultimately won out in the complex ideological conflicts that lie behind the composition of the Hebrew Bible.

As Eidevall (2017: 114–15) notes, this functions as a critique of an abuse of the system, and not the system itself. His subsequent analysis of vv. 7–8 is also useful in this regard. The reference to 'perverting 'the way of the needy' in v. 7 has a clear parallel with the references to perverting the course of justice in Exod. 23.6 and Prov. 17.23. Eidevall (2017: 115) thus suggests that 'corruption' is the key issue at play in this verse—something that then resurfaces in v. 8, which details another 'abuse of the legal system', this time the consumption of wine bought with money from fines (Eidevall 2017: 116).

We can also look to 2.7–8 to further develop Eidevall's argument. Verse 7 condemns sexual immorality, v. 8 disrespect towards cultic installations, all uttered in the same breath as the critique of abuse of the needy in v. 6. The fundamental problem, then, is not necessarily oppression of the poor in itself, though this does appear to be a concern of the authors and might have been rhetorically useful to foreground. Rather, the core problem is excess, and by extension, its natural corollary: the breaking of ethical and legal norms.

Another example of this tendency to criticize excess might be found in Amos 4.1, where the author(s) condemn the wealthy women of Samaria as

> *you cows of Bashan*
>
> *who are on Mount Samaria,*
>
> *who oppress the poor, who crush the needy,*
>
> *who say to their husbands, 'Bring something to drink!'*

The women of Samaria are critiqued in this verse for their over-indulgence and lack of social conscience. However, this moralistic condemnation should not be equated with an institutional critique of the class system of ancient Israel. Rather, on a close reading, it appears that the author(s) are simultaneously attacking the behaviour of elite women, and offering them *deference*. This can be observed in the use of the phrase 'cows of Bashan'. It would be easy to assume that this curious moniker was derogatory, even misogynistic. However, as Eidevall (2017: 138) notes, the connotation was likely a positive one: there are references to Bashan's bounteous livestock in Deut. 32.14, Jer. 50.19, Ezek. 39.18, and arguably Ps. 22.13. Brian Irwin (2012: 235–36) even goes as far as to argue that this metaphor specifically connotes beauty. Irwin points to the surfeit of animal imagery in the Song of Songs, and additionally, a broader association between beauty and the bovine in ancient southwest Asia, exemplified by, for instance, the Egyptian goddess Hathor.[32] The social critique in this verse thus exists in tandem with a respect for, and rhetorical maintenance of, the social order.

The interests of the peasantry, therefore, are only represented in so far as they intersect with the interests of the lower strata of petty elites: the bureaucratic classes tasked with the organisation and administration of land holdings. These individuals would not themselves have had significant land holdings, though their role in the physical

32. In addition to Irwin and Eidevall's examples, one might also consider the 'beautiful' heifers of Pharaoh's dream in Gen. 41 (פָּרוֹת יְפוֹת, Gen 41.2).

production of agricultural products would have been largely indirect. Given their privileged position, they would have a stake in the maintenance of the existing social order. Over-consumption in the political centre may have, in fact, been a threat to this order, and ultimately, the class position of these petty elites. Over-consumption, after all, may have led to a number of destabilizing economic practices: the over-extraction of meagre agricultural surpluses, the unsustainable proliferation of debt slavery, encroachment by larger estates on smaller landholdings. Over-extraction in particular would have placed an additional administrative burden upon petty elites, and, as with all these practices, would have created the potential for social unrest. In this sense, peasant and petty-elite interests would have coincided. Furthermore, rhetorical alignment with the peasantry in the construction of counter-hegemonic discourses may have been *politically* efficacious. Even if the ultimate class interests of the petty administrators and peasants were distinct, temporary alliances forged in relation to specific material interests may have offered strength in numbers, or at least given the impression of this to elite audiences, if such alliances only existed rhetorically and in the literary imagination of scribes. Perhaps more importantly for local administrators, such rhetoric may have been a way of disassociating themselves from 'state' actors demanding tax, fines, and debt repayments from the broader populace.

In this sense, Yee's (2007: 23) suggestion that 'prophets were considered class traitors by the elite' has some force, though we should nuance this statement in two regards. First, this was more likely an elite perception of those responsible for these particular *written traditions*, not necessarily any actual, historical prophets. Whether or not the social critique originated in an early, pre-exilic version of the text,[33] or a post-exilic recension,[34] its present form is a *literary* product that comes to us only through a complex process of *Fortschreibung*.[35] We may not be able to infer much, or anything, about the 'historical' Amos, but one can say something of the class position of scribal circles. Second, these scribes were not, in fact, renouncing their petty-elite class interests. Indeed, the authors of these parts of Amos were arguing not for a dismantling of the status quo, but its maintenance through the limitation of specific abuses.

33. The view of, for instance, Eidevall (2017: 25) and Barton (2012: 30). A particularly insightful paper by Hutton (2014) compelling correlates the geopolitical and economic context of the neo-Assyrian period with the content of the oracles against the nations. Hutton's political-economic analysis has been taken up by scholars in the Marxist tradition, most notably Yee (2016: 496–501).
34. Kratz (2015: 45, 47, 48) places the oracles of the nations firmly outside of the book's core material, and detects some 'rework[ing]' and 'elaborat[ion]' at the very least in some of the social critique material present in chs. 4 and 5.
35. Whatever the precise relative dating of the insertion of the first relative clause in 1.1, and the social critiques found in chs. 2 and 4 in particular, it is clear that this latter material at the very least predates the much later biographical material in 7.10–17. Given the likelihood that the edited superscription predates this prose narrative, it at the very least belongs to a similar milieu to the social critiques.

v. Conclusion

Placing the character of Amos amongst the נֹקְדִים, then, was a political and literary 'tell', aligning the class position of the authors with that of the eponymous prophet: that of bureaucrats and administrators. These functionaries were still of the elite, non-producer classes, and wealthy relative to the vast majority of the population. Nevertheless, they were *comparatively* poor compared to the highest-ranking priests, scribes, and governmental officials. When reading the prophetic oracles in conjunction with the superscription, then, one might observe that the social critique emphasises economic and social problems that afflicted both the peasantry and these petty elites. More speculatively, the social critique in Amos may represent a rhetorical attempt to forge, or at least imply, an agrarian solidarity between נֹקְדִים and peasants. Amos 1.1, then, gives us something of an insight into scribal class consciousness, and specifically, the divergences and areas of alignment between peasant and petty-elite class interests.

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