THE CHIASTIC STRUCTURE OF AMOS V 1-17

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It has long been recognized that Amos v 1-17 forms a discourse unit 1). Three mutually reinforcing arguments are decisive in this respect: (1) Amos iv 4-13 is a rhetorical unit in itself and v 1 introduces a completely new topic by means of the formula šim‘û haddāhār ba‘zejeb; (2) Amos v 18-20 appears to be a unit that has a clear structure with an introductory woe-pronouncement, opening and closing rhetorical questions and embedded short narrative material 2). Though some secondary relationship may exist between 18-20 and 1-17 in that both sections share the theme of death (perhaps one of the reasons why they have been linked together in the actual composition), it should be observed that in 18-20 the theme of death is only implied and connected with the new, central theme of the yôm yahwe; (3) Amos v 1-17 is both opened and closed, in verses 1 f. and verses 16 f. respectively, by the same theme of mourning which encloses all the other sayings.

It has likewise been recognized that the “poetic” 3) function and operation of Amos v 1-17 present considerable problems. Earlier critics have spoken of a “structure tres enchevetée” (Touzard, p. 39), of “een opvallende dooreenmenging van verschillende elementen” 4) and of sayings which are “schwer deutbar ineinander verschlungen”


3) The term “poetic” is used here in the Jakobsonian sense of involving the particular manner in which a message is formulated. So it involves the structure of the discourse, including the highly structured features of poetry as well as any and all elements which make up the formal structure of any oral or written utterance. See Roman Jakobson, “Closing Statement: Linguistics and Poetics” in Thomas A. Sebeok (ed.), Style in Language (Cambridge, Mass., 1960), pp. 350-377, and idem, Main Trends in the Science of Language (New York, 1974), p. 44.

4) “A remarkable mixture of various elements”. So L. H. K. Bleeker, Hosea, Amos (Groningen, 1932), p. 89.
171 (Wolff, p. 271). Nevertheless, it is the aim of the present article to make an attempt to clarify this complex structure. Such an attempt implies that the final, literary composition of v 1-17, as known from the transmitted text, will be in focus throughout. Research into the "prehistory" of the text or endeavours to disentangle the layers of textual tradition will only occasionally be helpful. Such studies 5) have their own merits, though it should be noted that in the past decisions in these domains have often been taken on the basis of a supposed lack of meaningful relationships within a given discourse. In modern times, in which research into the meanings of discourse structures has increasingly become the joint concern of both linguists and philologists, scholars are much more careful and it is to be hoped that nobody wants any longer to defend the thesis that meaningful relationships do not exist since they have not yet been discovered. In order to clarify the complex structure of Amos v 1-17, it is essential to see how this discourse unit can be divided into sub-units or paragraphs.

Verses 1-3 can be taken as a first paragraph, though its unity is certainly not self-evident. The first two verses clearly belong together as introduction to the qînāḥ and the qînāḥ itself, but the link between the statement of verse 3 and the preceding qînāḥ is less clear in view of, for example, the difference in subject matter 6). It is true that on the surface level the unity seems to be guaranteed by the introductory ki of verse 3, but it is a well-known fact that this particular particle is often used as a literary device to connect independent sayings. Nevertheless, the formal and semantic arguments in favour of this unity seem to be stronger. Formally, the typical qînāḥ meter 3 + 2 is continued in the first two lines of verse 3 7), and semantically, this verse functions as the ground of the qînāḥ 8).

Verses 4-6 can be isolated as a second sub-unit. In spite of the


7) For the first line this is true only when the transposition of the prepositional phrase *l'hêt gînâ'el* is made. However, such an operation is not simply arbitrary so as to assure a 3 + 2 meter which would otherwise be lacking. The counterpart in the opening formula of verse 4 is in favour of the transposition.

8) For additional arguments see especially Wolff, pp. 271 f.