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Cyprien Comte

► **To cite this version:**

Cyprien Comte. From the Pleiades to 'Apocalypse Now': Amos 5:8-9, A Hymn to the Transforming God. Proceedings of the Irish Biblical Association, 2021, 43-44, pp.1-23. hal-04597165

**HAL Id: hal-04597165**

**<https://hal.science/hal-04597165>**

Submitted on 6 Jun 2024

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*Proceedings of the Irish Biblical Association (PIBA) 43-44 (2020-2021),*

**edited by Fearghus Ó Fearghail, p. 1-23**

## From the Pleiades to ‘Apocalypse Now’: Amos 5:8-9, A Hymn to the Transforming God<sup>1</sup>

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From published abstract:

In this issue Cyprien Comte (Institut catholique de Toulouse) argues that Amos 5:8-9, which shows Yahweh as the majestic and powerful creator of the cosmos, controller of its times and spaces, destroyer and transforming agent, addresses Israel with a veiled, ironic threat, re-using and transforming the literary genre of doxology in a paradoxical prophetic adaptation.

Am 5, 8-9, qui montre YHWH comme le majestueux et puissant créateur du cosmos, contrôlant ses temps et espaces, agent destructeur et transformateur, adresse à Israël une menace voilée et ironique, réutilisant et transformant le genre littéraire doxologique dans une adaptation prophétique paradoxale.

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<sup>1</sup> I am grateful for the invitation to deliver an earlier form of this paper during the General Meeting of the Irish Biblical Association in Maynooth (15th February 2020). A draft was presented at the Institut Catholique de Toulouse (20th February 2019) and discussed with several colleagues. I also thank my Research Unit (U. R. CERES) in Toulouse for supporting this work. Luke Macnamara OSB deserves many thanks for helping me, esp. with my English, and also Virginie Mathieu for several suggestions.

Every four Thursdays, whoever reads the Latin catholic *Liturgia Horarum* during Ordinary Time<sup>2</sup> finds three brief sections of the Book of Amos, rightly called “doxologies”.<sup>3</sup> These contain lists of divine attributes, often expressed with active participles. The three pericopes are marked by the refrain יהוה שְׁמוֹ, calling the God of Israel with his proper name and showing him as the majestic and powerful master of all the cosmos, the creator and controller of heaven and earth. Thus writes Amos in chapters 4, 5, and 9:<sup>4</sup>

#### **Amos 4:13**

“For lo, the one who forms (יִצְרָר) the mountains, creates (וּבְרָא) the wind, [...]

YHWH, the God of hosts, is his name! (יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יְצַבְאוֹת שְׁמוֹ)”

#### **Amos 5:8-9**

“The maker (עָשָׂה) of the Pleiades and Orion, [...] YHWH (is) his name (יְהוָה שְׁמוֹ)!

the one making destruction flash out (הַמְבַלֵּיג) against the strong [...]

#### **Amos 9:5-6**

“The Lord, YHWH of hosts (יְהוָה הַיְצַבְאוֹת) (וְאֵדֹנָי יְהוָה הַיְצַבְאוֹת), he who touches (הַנוֹגֵעַ) the earth and it melts,

[...] [...] who calls for (הַקּוֹרֵא לְ) the waters of the sea, and pours them out (וַיִּשְׁפֹּכֵם) upon the surface of the earth— YHWH is his name (יְהוָה שְׁמוֹ).”

These three doxologies are set with more or less ease in their immediate context.<sup>5</sup> The two verses of Amos 5:8-9, in addition to a surprising location for the refrain “YHWH is his name” (יְהוָה שְׁמוֹ),<sup>6</sup> are the most difficult to link to the surrounding verses, so that most commentators consider them as an editorial interpolation. This second doxology, it has been written, “interrupts the connection between verse 7 and verse 10 [...]. This awkward insertion favours the theory that the hymn fragments were not composed or inserted by the prophet, but put in, *almost at random*, by an editor.”<sup>7</sup> The Codex of Leningrad<sup>8</sup> even has a *setouma* signal after v. 8, which questions the link with v. 9. Different transpositions have been proposed to re-establish an identifiable logic.<sup>9</sup>

Many exegetes<sup>10</sup> evoke a “hymnological layer” among the different “strata” composing the book of Amos in its final state. Without examining the complex *Redaktionsgeschichte* of the book<sup>11</sup>,

<sup>2</sup> Week I, Thursdays: Office of Terce (Am 4:13), Sext (5:8), and None (9:6).

<sup>3</sup> Amos 5:8-9 is one such, although André Néher, *Amos: Contribution à l'étude du prophétisme* (Paris: Vrin, 1981), 103, n. h, thinks otherwise.

<sup>4</sup> Biblical quotations (with my replacement of “the LORD” by “YHWH”) are taken from the *NRSV*, except my own translation of Am 5:8-9.

<sup>5</sup> See James L. Crenshaw, *Hymnic Affirmation of Divine Justice: The Doxologies of Amos and Related Texts in the Old Testament*, SBLDS 24 (Missoula, Montana: Scholars Press, 1975), 124; Robert Martin-Achard, *Amos: L'homme, le message, l'influence* (Genève: Labor et Fides, 1984), 59-63.

<sup>6</sup> The refrain comes at the end of v. 8 instead of v. 9 and the conclusion of the whole doxology.

<sup>7</sup> Henry McKeating, *Amos, Hosea, Micah*, CBC (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 40. Emphasis mine.

<sup>8</sup> After v. 8, this *setouma* is absent from the Codex of Aleppo and that of the Prophets of Cairo.

<sup>9</sup> Émile Osty's Bible (1973) notes the proposal to read v. 7 after v. 9, preceding with “Woe” as in 5:18 and 6:1. Hans W. Wolff, *Dodekapropheton*, vol. 2, BKAT XIV/2, 2nd edition (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1975), 282, 284, also displaces v. 7 after v. 9. Shalom M. Paul, *Amos*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1991), 167, n. 85, lists several proposals and admits that no consensus has been reached. His p. 168-9 submit proposals for changing the position of יהוה שְׁמוֹ. Luis Alonso Schökel – José Luis Sicre Díaz, *Profetas*, vol. 2 (Madrid: Cristiandad, 1979), 975, 979 suggest the transposition of v. 8-9 after v. 17. Stefan Paas, *Creation and Judgment: Creation Texts in Some Eighth Century Prophets*, OTS 47 (Leyde, Brill, 2003), 263-4 organizes the proposals into three options: Amos 5:8-9 has been “lost” in the book of Amos, or in Am 5, or belongs in its present place.

<sup>10</sup> Aaron Schart, *Die Entstehung des Zwölfprophetenbuchs: Neubearbeitungen von Amos im Rahmen schriftenerübergreifender Redaktionsprozesse*, BZAW 260 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1998), quoted by Simon Buttica, “Amos”, in *Introduction à l'Ancien Testament*, MoBi 49, 2nd edition, ed. Thomas Römer, Jean-Daniel Macchi, Christophe Nihan (Genève: Labor et Fides, 2009), 486-96, here 489.

we will try to understand this apparent intrusion. Why is this hymnological fragment “sandwiched” inside an oracle of woe? Their genres and subjects seem totally different. This paper will explore the coherence of these two verses in their current place, by stressing the importance of the theme of transformation. My aim is to demonstrate that the theology expressed in Amos 5:8-9 is linked to the teaching of the context, esp. the surrounding chapter inviting the prophet’s audience, to stay alive by “looking for the Lord”, as God himself commands them in 5:4, 6. Amos 5:8-9 not only states the power of YHWH over the universe as an invitation to glorify him, he also seeks to warn Israel against the disastrous consequences of their social misbehaviour.

Here is a structured presentation of the two verses according to the Masoretic Text (MT), with my literal translation.

5:8α	עֲשֵׂה כִּימָה וּכְסִיל	The maker of the Pleiades and Orion,
5:8αβ	וְהִפְךָ לְבֹקֵר צִלְמוֹת	and turning into the morning deep darkness,
5:8αγ	וַיּוֹם לַיְלָה הַחֲשִׁיד	and day into night darkening,
5:8βα	הַקּוֹרֵא לְמֵי הַיָּם	the one calling for the waters of the sea,
5:8ββ	וַיִּשְׁפֹּךְ עַל-פְּנֵי הָאָרֶץ	and pours them out on the surface of the earth,
5:8βγ	יְהוָה שְׁמוֹ: ס	YHWH (is) his name!
5:9a	הַמְבַלֵּיג שָׂדַי עַל-עֵז	the one making destruction flash out against the strong,
5:9b	וְשָׂדַי עַל-מְבָצָר יָבוֹא:	so that destruction upon the fortification comes.

This paper studies the ironic transformation of a hymn of praise into a doxology of judgment. It first examines how v. 8-9 fit into their context (1). Then I read v. 8 as a praise to YHWH, the Lord creator (2) who is also transformer (3). V. 9 shows how his behaviour in history transforms violently the fate of peoples (4). Actually, the presence and use of these two verses carry out a subversion of literary genre (5).

<sup>11</sup> It is widely accepted that the doxologies are additions to the book of Amos, see John Barton, “The Theology of Amos”, in *Prophecy and the Prophets in Ancient Israel: Proceedings of the Oxford Old Testament Seminar*, LHBOT 531, ed. John Day (New York: T & T Clark, 2010) 188-201, 188, n. 1.

## 1. How do v. 8-9 fit within the structure of Amos 5:1-17?

Within the section on the oracles against Israel (Amos 3-6), 5:1-17 are called by the text itself (v. 1) a קִינָה – lamentation, dirge or funerary hymn. The chapter starts with this command: “Hear this word that I take up over you in קִינָה, O house of Israel” (Am 5:1). A few verses later, the text continues:

7 “Ah, you that turn justice to wormwood, and bring righteousness to the ground!  
8 The maker of the Pleiades and Orion, and turning into the morning deep darkness [...],  
YHWH (is) his name! [...]  
10 They hate the one who reproves in the gate, and they abhor the one who speaks the truth.  
11 Therefore [*announcement of punishment*]”

Three observations shed light on the current place of v. 8-9 in the prophetic text: they repeat a catchword, fit a pattern of alternating human and divine subjects, and belong in a larger concentric structure.

### 1.1 A “catch-word” or “link word”: verb הפך

In the Hebrew text, a catchword unites v. 7 and v. 8: the *qal* participle הפך meaning ‘to change’, ‘to transform’, ‘to (over)turn’. The wordplay on הפך is already noted by Ibn Ezra in the 12th century.<sup>12</sup> This verb occurs 97 times in the Hebrew Bible, as in Ps 114:8 where the divine action “turns the rock into a pool of water” or in Jon 3:4 where the famous, rebel prophet Jonah preaches in Nineveh saying that the city is to be “turned” (נִהְפָּכֶת) – but it is not clear if Nineveh will “change” for good or be “overturned/overthrown”.<sup>13</sup> In both occurrences of verb הפך in Amos 5, we have a *qotel*, active, participle but the subject is not the same. In 5:7 as in 6:12, the Israelites are accused of “turn(ing) justice to wormwood” whereas 5:8 has YHWH for subject, with a more positive meaning. This repetition of the verb with an inflexion in its sense displays a “use of prophetic irony”.<sup>14</sup> Israel and YHWH are “turning”, “changing” the order of things, but the former deserves a reproach for perverting justice, whereas in the end of each night, the latter turns “into the morning deep darkness”, a daily sign of hope which deserves praise.

Another word, הָאָרֶץ, is present in v. 7 and 8. But this word is so common in the Hebrew Bible<sup>15</sup> that it could hardly be called a catchword by itself; its presence may only reinforce the link created by the repetition of הפך.

<sup>12</sup> Gregorio Ruiz González (ed.), *Comentarios hebreos medievales al libro de Amos: Trad. y notas a los comentarios de Rasi, E. de Beaugency, A. 'ibn 'Ezra', D. Quimhi, J. 'ibn Caspi* (Madrid: Universidad Pontificia Comillas, 1987), 148.

<sup>13</sup> In the Hebrew Old Testament, the substantive מְהִפְכָּה always signifies destruction: its 6 occurrences concern Sodom and Gomorrah – except in Is 1:1, 8 where Jerusalem is mentioned, not without a link to those two overwhelmed cities in v. 9-10. However, the verb הפך is more ambiguous. For example, its use in 5 places in Amos is usually, but not always, connotated negatively. The Vulgate translates it once by *subvertere* (4:11) and four times by *convertere* (5:7; 6:12 about the subversion of right and justice by Israel; 8:10 about the transformation of the feasts into mourning by YHWH; the other occurrence is in 5:8). See Klaus Seybold, “הפך”, in *TDOT*, vol. 3, 423-7.

<sup>14</sup> Jeffrey J. Niehaus, “Amos”, in *The Minor Prophets: An Exegetical and Expository Commentary*, ed. Thomas E. McComiskey (Grand Rapids MI: Baker, 2009), 315-494, here 418-9.

<sup>15</sup> With 2505 occurrences of the noun אָרֶץ in the Hebrew Bible, it is not surprising that the *NRSV* does not consider it a catchword and uses two different words in v. 7 and 8: “the ground” and “the earth”.

### 1.2 Alternating Human and Divine Subjects

V. 4b starts a discourse of YHWH to Israel, which extends till v. 15. Inside this divine speech, the alternance of plural and singular verbs from v. 4b to 15 shows the behaviour of YHWH answering the deeds of Israel – real or hoped for. Amos 5:4-6a concern Israel; v. 6b, YHWH; 7, Israel<sup>16</sup>; 8-9, YHWH; 10-11, Israel; 12a, YHWH; 12b, Israel; [13]; 14a, Israel; 14b, YHWH; 14c-15a, Israel; 15b, YHWH; 15c, Israel. This alternance does not prove that v. 8-9 are now in their original place. But, even if they interrupt considerations regarding the unjust conduct of Israel (fighting against judgment, righteousness and hating a rightful speaker of reproaches), they can be seen as fitting well in the context. The ways of YHWH oppose those of Israel, and such a tormented speech contributes to this blatant contrast. Indeed, “verses 7 and 10 constitute a parody of vv 8-9, to show how completely opposite to God humans have become”.<sup>17</sup> From this perspective, too, the location of v. 8-9 is appropriate.

In addition, Amos seems familiar with the apparent, unexpected mention of divine acts between references to the Israelites’ behaviour. Such is the case in Amos 2:6-16, where 6-8 and 12 express bad actions of the people; 9-11: reminder of YHWH’s wonderful deeds in favour of Israel; 13-16: oracle of judgment against Israel.<sup>18</sup>

In summary, the positive use of the catchword *הפך* in 5:8 with a divine subject (whereas it was used negatively in 5:7, with a human subject), expresses the contrast between YHWH and Israel’s behaviour.

### 1.3 A concentric structure

Göran Eidevall, in his recent Anchor Yale commentary, evokes “a wide scholarly consensus that the section 5:1-17, which constitutes the centerpiece of the composition, displays an artistically crafted concentric structure”,<sup>19</sup> being part of a wider concentric structure of 4:1 to 6:7.

<sup>16</sup> The brutal change of grammatical subject – singular in v. 8, God, as opposed to the people, plural, in v. 7 –, without an explanation, is highlighted by James R. Linville, *Amos and the Cosmic Imagination*, SOTSM (Burlington: Ashgate, 2008), 105. The syntactic difficulty generated by this break in the syntax is all the more blatant when one refers to the LXX. As Chris Fresch remarked during a “Cambridge LXX Seminar” held on 28th April 2020, Amos 5:7 LXX starts with a *plus* (κύριος) and then has two singular verbs with κύριος as subject: participle ποιῶν and finite ἔθηκεν, thus with an easier reading (grammatically speaking) since the Lord is then subject of all verbs in v. 6b-9. So, v. 7 (and not v. 8 as in the Hebrew) starts the doxology in the LXX, which helps understand the probable addition of κύριος by the translator. We can follow Francis I. Andersen and David N. Freedman, *Amos*, AB 24A (New York: Doubleday, 1989), 484, for whom this blending of v. 7 with v. 8-9 shows the difficulty to understand this alternance of subjects and the attempt to resolve it by interpreting v. 7 “not as a Woe against the unjust, but as a celebration of the justice of God.”

<sup>17</sup> Maureen Jeffrey, private communication quoted by Andersen and Freedman, *Amos*, 483.

<sup>18</sup> See Nicodème Bakimani Kolani, *Le livre d’Amos: La place et la fonction des éléments supposés tardifs*, BZAW 510 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2019), 229-31, with references to Thomas E. McComiskey, “The Hymnic Elements of the Prophecy of Amos: A Study of Form Critical Methodology”, in *Journal of Evangelical Theological Society* 30 (1987) 139-57, esp. 145-6.

<sup>19</sup> See Göran Eidevall, *Amos*, AB 24G (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017), 10, and Jan de Waard, “The Chiastic Structure of Amos V 1-17”, *VT* 27 (1977) 170-7; Nicholas J. Tromp, “Amos V 1-17: Towards a Stylistic and Rhetorical Analysis”, *OTS* 23 (1984) 56-84; Joachim Jeremias, *Der Prophet Amos*, ATD 24/2 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1995), 62. Eidevall, following Tchavdar S. Hadjiev, *The composition and redaction of the book of Amos*, BZAW 393 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2009), 179-84, finds a “sufficiently [...] convincing” concentric structure from 4:1 to 6:7. It can be added that Eidevall’s hesitation about accepting a wider concentric structure between 3:1 and 6:14 as indicated by Dirk U. Rottzoll, *Studien zur Redaktion und Komposition der Amosbuch* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1996), makes us even more confident as to the center of this structure, which interests our study. Rottzoll’s overall “ring structure” is reproduced and discussed in John L. McLaughlin, “Review of D. U. Rottzoll, *Studien*”, in *Biblica* 78/4 (1997) 568-71.

### A. 5:1-3 Lamentation

v. 1 “Hear this word that I take up over you in lamentation (קִינָה)”

### B. 5:4-6 Exhortation: Seek!

v. 4 “For thus says YHWH to the house of Israel: Seek me and live”

### C. 5:7 Injustice

v. 7 “Ah, you that turn justice to wormwood, and bring righteousness to the ground!”

### D. 5:8a-bβ Doxology

### E. 5:8by Divine name

### D’ 5:9 Doxology of Judgment

### C’ 5:10-13 Injustice

v. 10,11,13 “They hate the one who reproves in the gate, and they abhor the one who speaks the truth. [...] you have built houses of hewn stone, but you shall not live in them [...] it is an evil time.”

### B’ 5: 14-15 Exhortation: Seek!

v. 14 “Seek good and not evil, that you may live[...] the God of hosts, will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph.”

### A’ 5:16-17 Lamentation

v. 16-17 “in all the streets they shall say, ‘Alas! alas!’ [...] for I will pass through the midst of you, says YHWH.”

The central location of v. 8-9 stresses their importance, such a pattern being widely accepted. It may be said that they could hardly find another place in the text, although other proposals for the section’s structure (and center) exist.<sup>20</sup> This “central kernel”,<sup>21</sup> though, is not necessary to the text: without it, the center of the structure would become v. 7, 10-13 with a different stress and meaning, but would not be incoherent.

## 2. v. 8: A Praise to the Lord Creator

### 2.1 Comparison with Amos 5:8 LXX

Instead of MT עֲשֵׂה כִּימָה וּכְסִיל (bearing the names of two constellations), v. 8 (LXX) starts with ποιῶν πάντα καὶ μετασκευάζων, “making all things and transforming them”.<sup>22</sup> μετασκευάζω means transforming, changing clothes. The motivation for this very different reading is difficult to ascertain.<sup>23</sup> It is noteworthy that in Job 9:9 and 38:31, LXX agrees with MT in naming כִּימָה and כְּסִיל. Another important difference occurs in the end of v. 8. In the LXX, instead of MT יהוה, the name of God is more developed: κύριος ὁ θεὸς ὁ παντοκράτωρ, “the Lord God, the ruler of all” (a

<sup>20</sup> For instance, Pietro Bovati and Roland Meynet, *Il libro del profeta Amos, Seconda edizione rivista*, RBS 21 (Leuven: Peeters, 2019), 177-208 call Amos 5:1-17 their “B4 Sequence”, centered on v. 10. Their proposal stresses the Israelites’ hatred towards the one who speaks the truth and condemns injustice (192). But their description of the structure (202) does not prove v. 11-12 to be parallel to v. 8-9, which encourages our reading them in a central position. Furthermore, they admit (187) that the composition of v. 7-13 lacks clarity.

<sup>21</sup> Stefan Paas, *Creation and Judgment: Creation Texts in Some Eighth Century Prophets*, OTS 47 (Leuven: Brill, 2003), 265.

<sup>22</sup> See W. Edward Glenny, *Finding Meaning in the Text: Translation Technique and Theology in the Septuagint of Amos*, SVT 126 (Leiden: Brill 2009), 50, explaining the replacement of the constellations’ names with πάντα by the ignorance of the translator. Furthermore, LXX μετασκευάζων καὶ ἐκτρέπων is a “double translation” of MT הִפְּחָהּ.

<sup>23</sup> See Anthony Gelston’s comments in *Biblia Hebraica Quinta, Fascicle 13: The Twelve Minor Prophets* (Stuttgart, Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2010), also giving the other Greek readings, which are much closer to the MT.

translation of אֱלֹהֵי-צְבָאוֹת (יהוה), which occurs 13 times in the LXX, 10 of which in Amos!<sup>24</sup> The shorter reading יהוה שמו, more original, should be preferred to the LXX reading which probably appeared by assimilation to v. 14. The LXX reading, notwithstanding the creative activity, “focuses on God’s judgment, transcendence, and sovereignty”.<sup>25</sup> In other contexts, the creating god was the great god *par excellence*, as we shall see.

Anyway, even if it is stressed by this long name in the LXX, we can assume that “the absolute sovereignty of Yahweh is communicated in at least three ways [which are...] a progression through the spheres, [...] the repetition of terms from the previous verse [...] a progression in tone.”<sup>26</sup>

## 2.2 Participial Titularies

Amos uses a common genre in the Ancient Near East: “the divine or royal titulary, that is, the naming of the god (or king), followed by a series of epithets that describe him”.<sup>27</sup>

Indeed, the prologue to the laws of Hammurabi (18th or 17th century B. C.) contains such a royal titulary:

“I am Hammurabi, the shepherd, selected by the god Enlil,  
 he who heaps high abundance and plenty,  
 who perfects every possible thing for the city Nippur, [...] the restorer of the city Eridu,  
 the purifier of the rites of the Eabzu temple, [...] who provides abundance for the Egishnugal temple, [...] the warrior, who shows mercy to the city of Larsa,  
 who renews the Ebabbar temple for the god Shamash his ally, the lord who revitalizes the city of Uruk, [...] the protecting canopy of the land, who gathers together the scattered people of the city of Isin, [...] the enemy-ensnaring throw-net, [...] the fierce wild bull who gores the enemy, [...] the one who makes the city of Borsippa exult, [...] who proclaims truth,  
 who guides the population properly,  
 who restores its benevolent protective spirit to the city of Assur; who quells the rebellious, [...] the pious one, who prays ceaselessly for the great gods, [...] who spreads light over the lands of Sumer and Akkad,  
 king who makes the four regions obedient, favored of the goddess Ishtar, am I.”<sup>28</sup>

<sup>24</sup> The longer form may have been copied here by assimilation to 4:13; 5:14,27. The short divine name in Hebrew also corresponds to the “triple” form in 9:6 LXX; but 9:15, Na 3:5 and Zech 10:3 have 2 words in Hebrew and 3 in Greek. See Cécile Dogniez, “Le Dieu des armées dans le Dodekapropheton: Quelques remarques sur une initiative de traduction”, in *IX Congress of the International Organization for Septuagint and Cognate Studies, Cambridge, 1995*, SCS 45, ed. Bernard A. Taylor (Atlanta GA: Scholars Press, 1997), 19-36. Dogniez, *ibid.*, 21, n. 3, notes that this “plus” is rare even in Amos LXX: three times, 5:8, 9:6, 9:15, two of which occur in the doxologies.

<sup>25</sup> Glenny, *Finding Meaning*, 188.

<sup>26</sup> Mark D. Carroll R., *Contexts for Amos: Prophetic Poetics in Latin American Perspective*, JSOTS 132 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992), 229.

<sup>27</sup> Niehaus, “Amos”, 323-4, along with other examples of the same device.

<sup>28</sup> William L. Hallo, *The Context of Scripture* (Leiden: Brill, 1997-2002) (COS) 2.131, lines i.27-v.13. Dominique Charpin, *Hammu-rabi de Babylone* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2003), 154-7, indicates that Amorite kings were often pictured as warriors, and sometimes as piously standing in presence of a god. These illustrations partially concur with the prologue of the Code of Hammurabi on the kingly portrait.



By analogy, Amos' goal seems obvious: the author of the doxology wants to stress YHWH's power and sovereignty, "just as Babylonian and Assyrian titularies stressed the sovereignty and power of their gods and kings."<sup>29</sup> In the Western-Semitic pantheon, we find another example of such titularies: a cosmic, primordial god named El, can also be called "the 'god' by antonomasia". Two inscriptions use a participle to call El "the creator of earth", אל קן ארץ. From this creative power probably stems the parallel found in Palmyra between El and Poseidon, the god shaking the earth.<sup>30</sup> Such a destructive power is also found in Amos 1:1, and in another way, in 5:9. In Amos as in those two inscriptions, the god's power allows him to create and also to destroy. The use of such a divine titulary in Amos 5 (see also the 1st and 3rd doxologies) suggests the power and the glory of YHWH. In comparison to MT, the *plus* present in the LXX (not only κύριος but also ὁ θεὸς ὁ παντοκράτωρ)<sup>31</sup> is a fair rendering of the effect of such a literary genre.

### 2.3 A hymn to the Lord creator

In the Hebrew Bible as in Amos 5:8, the verb עָשָׂה is one of the two preferred verbs to express creation, for example in Gen 1-2.<sup>32</sup> The first verse refers to God as the "Maker" of stars, but the text continues by stressing his authority on the times of the day and the movement of the waters. The power of the Creator is a common theme in biblical and other ancient texts, as we have seen in the two inscriptions mentioning *EL QN'*.

Other studies explore the links to the two other doxologies present in Amos 4 and 9. Another parallel is the anti-idolatric polemic in Deutero-Isaiah. For example, Isa 42:5-8, includes 4 participles insisting on the divine name:

5 "Thus says God, the LORD, who created (בּוֹרָא) the heavens and stretched them out (וּנְוֹטִיָּהֶם), who spread out (רָקַע) the earth and what comes from it, who gives (נָתַן) breath to the people upon it and spirit to those who walk in it:

6 I am the LORD (אֲנִי יְהוָה) [...] 8 I am the LORD, that is my name (אֲנִי יְהוָה הוּא שְׁמִי); my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to idols."

It can be generally assumed that "the hymns of auto-glorification of Yhwh exalt his name."<sup>33</sup> There may be an echo of anti-idolatric polemic in the doxologies of Amos. But what is more striking in our pericope is the use of titularies and the insistence on the divine Name to point out the contrast between YHWH and his people. The creature is not the creator, hence Israel must listen and look for the Lord in order to live! Straying or staying away from the creator amounts to choosing death. The contrast of divine power with the vain pretensions of man is recurring in the Hebrew Bible and in later Hebrew liturgical poetry.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Niehaus, "Amos", 324.

<sup>30</sup> I thank Corinne Bonnet for these insights. See the Karatepe inscription, dating from the 8th century B.C. (contemporary of Amos), in *Kanaanäische und aramäische Inschriften (KAI)* 2002, 5th edition, 26:III:18, and also a Leptis Magna inscription dating from the 2nd century C.E., in *KAI* 129. See Corinne Bonnet, « La religion des Phéniciens », in Corinne Bonnet and Herbert Niehr, *La religion des Phéniciens et des Araméens: Dans le contexte de l'Ancien Testament*, Le Monde de la Bible 66 (Genève: Labor et Fides, 2014) 14-210, 71.

<sup>31</sup> See W. Edward Glenny, *Amos: A Commentary Based on Amos in Codex Vaticanus*, Septuagint Commentary Series (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 24: Vaticanus has only κύριος.

<sup>32</sup> עָשָׂה is used 9 times in the first account of creation and once in the second, whereas the 7 appearances of בָּרָא are restricted to the first account.

<sup>33</sup> Stéphanie Anthonioz, "À qui me comparerez-vous ?" (*Is* 40, 25): *La polémique contre l'idolâtrie dans le Deutéro-Isaïe*, LD 241 (Paris: Cerf, 2011), 77-100, here 95. Those "participial self-descriptions" by YHWH concern "cosmic and creative activities" in *Isa* 41-51, esp. 44:24b-28, as claimed in Katie M. Heffelfinger, *I Am Large, I Contain Multitudes: Lyric Cohesion and Conflict in Second Isaiah*, BIS 105 (Leiden: Boston, 2011), 163-4, and n. 122. Other such participial formulas are found in *Isa* 51:15 and *Jer* 31:35.

<sup>34</sup> See Lawrence Zalcman, "Astronomical Illusions in Amos", *JBL* 100/1 (1981) 53-8, 58.

### 3. v. 8: The Creator is also Transformer

#### 3.1 Two constellations

בְּסִילִי וּבִימָה are clearly identified by contemporary scholars as the Pleiades and Orion.<sup>35</sup> The Pleiades (בִּימָה), whose Hebrew name's primary meaning is "cluster", are well-known to be stars signalling the change of seasons: "All over the world people looked to the stars of the Pleiades to signal the beginning and end of the seasons, to tell them when to collect and gather food, when to sow and to harvest, when to expect rains and when to engage in festivities and ceremonies." It may even mean that "the star cluster acted as a calendar".<sup>36</sup>

Whatever the origin of Amos' text may be,<sup>37</sup> the parallel texts in Job 9:9 and 38:3 stress the wisdom and power of God. They are the only other texts mentioning בִּימָה and בְּסִילִי in the Hebrew Bible.<sup>38</sup> In addition, there is a striking parallel between the vocabulary and themes of Job 5:8-17, 9:5-9 and those of the three doxologies of Amos,<sup>39</sup> even though the tone and scope of the two books differ considerably.<sup>40</sup>

בְּסִילִי, "fool", is translated "Orion". This mythological character was an "insolent and outrageous hunter"<sup>41</sup> who was put to death for presumptuously offending Artemis, the goddess of the chase. The biblical use of בְּסִילִי as an adjective also has a very negative connotation, meaning "stupid (in practical things), insolent (in religion)".<sup>42</sup> The Arabic name of this constellation means "giant", which in turn may recall the legend of "the giant Nimrod transported to the sky"<sup>43</sup>. If this is known by the readers of Amos, they remember that YHWH himself has even created Orion, the Fool who defies his commands and could be a symbol for Israel. But Orion is also a constellation which disappears from the evening sky during the beginning of "summer drought", then its story is also "a seasonal myth".<sup>44</sup>

<sup>35</sup> See Marvin H. Pope, *Job*, AB 15 (New York: Doubleday, 1965), 70, on Jb 9:9; "בִּימָה", *HALOT*, vol. 2, 472 and "בְּסִילִי" II, *ibid.*, 489. The Vulgate translator's choices are discussed by Pierre Lardet, "Culte astral et culture profane chez S. Jérôme: À propos d'une tournure suspecte [*errore combibimus*] et d'allusions non élucidées du *Commentaire sur Amos*", in *Vigiliae Christianae* 35 (1981) 321-345, 336-340.

<sup>36</sup> Munya Andrews, *The Seven Sisters of Pleiades: Stories from Around the World* [e-book] (Spinifex Press, 2004), 319, downloaded on 27th May 2019.

<sup>37</sup> See the discussion by Hadjiev, *The composition*, 134: the similarities of the two doxologies (4:13 and 5:8-9) with Job 9:5-10 "most likely imply that a common hymnic tradition stands behind the hymnic portions used in both books" even though such a common original text is yet to discover. Hilary Marlow, "Creation Themes in Job and Amos: An Intertextual Relationship?", in *Reading Job Intertextually*, LHBOT 574, ed. Katharine J. Dell and William L. Kynes (New York: T & T Clark, 2013), 142-54, highlights the common vocabulary and themes, i.e. the presence of בִּימָה and בְּסִילִי, and also the use of verb הִפִּיךְ, and nouns צִלְמֹנָה, and חֶשֶׁךְ, as far as Job 9 and Amos 5 are concerned. Gavin Cox, "The 'Hymn' of Amos: An Ancient Flood Narrative", *JSOT* 38/1 (2013) 81-108 offers another useful discussion.

<sup>38</sup> The parallel is more difficult to establish in the LXX. As we have seen, Amos 5:8 LXX has no constellation names; it must be added that the Pleiades are present in both Job texts but that a different name comes along with them: Job 9:9 has ἄσπερον (accusative), "evening star", whereas 38:31 has Ὠρίωνος (genitive).

<sup>39</sup> Crenshaw, *Hymnic Affirmation*, 135, shows this parallel clearly in a chart.

<sup>40</sup> On the differences, see Marlow, "Creation Themes", 154: with a different tone, the book of Job invites reflection and questions some of the strong convictions expressed in the book of Amos.

<sup>41</sup> "בְּסִילִי II", *HALOT*, vol. 2, 489.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> Pope, *Job*, 70, with reference to Theodor H. Gaster, *Thespis: Ritual, Myth, and Drama in the Ancient Near East* (New York: Norton, 1977), 65, 263-266, who compares the myth of the Gigantic Heavenly Huntsman in several cultures, esp. with the West Semitic *Poem of Aqhat* or 'Aqhatu Legend, discovered at Ras Shamra (COS 1.103).

<sup>44</sup> Gaster, *Thespis*, 65.

Job 9:9 enumerates עֵשׂ כְּסִיל וְכִימָה וְהַדְרִי תַמָּן (NRSV: “the Bear and Orion, the Pleiades and the chambers of the south”). Job 38:31-32, within the answer of YHWH to Job, has another list which includes the Pleiades and Orion. Even if the mythological allusion can be contested,<sup>45</sup> it is clear that both those constellations “are [...] connected with the coming of rains”.<sup>46</sup> In addition, in chapter 38, YHWH rhetorically asks Job if he has created the world and wields the power to control the seasons and the weather: v. 34-35 even mention the possibility of commanding rain and lightning.

### 3.2 Daily changes in the natural order of the cosmos: an imperfect chiasm

According to Amos, “Yahweh establishes and maintains his own ‘natural order of things’ in every realm of the creation”,<sup>47</sup> and after alluding to the seasons, the text mentions the daily changes between day and night. The reader of Amos is reminded that YHWH, being in v. 8 “the master of rains and seasons”,<sup>48</sup> can make dry the pastures and the mountains (1:2) or withhold the rain and make fields wither (4:7). In quite the same way, he turns night into day and day into night, a “feat of majestic power [...] often found in Sumerian and Akkadian literature.”<sup>49</sup> In some contexts, YHWH can use his power to make the created cosmos return to chaos.<sup>50</sup>

V. 8αβγ has the form of a chiasm, ABC/C’B’A’.<sup>51</sup> It must be noted that in Hebrew, this parallelism between the phenomena occurring at the times of dawn and twilight is imperfect. Where the Vulgate, keeping the Hebrew word order, has quite a perfect chiasm, it has rubbed out the slight inflexion suggested by the last Hebrew word of each member (this table reads from left to right):

verb	destination	origin		origin	destination	verb
וְהִפְךָ	לְבֹקֶר	צִלְמוֹת	וְ	יוֹם	לַיְלָה	וְהִשְׁחִךָ
<i>convertentem</i>	<i>in mane</i>	<i>tenebras</i>	<i>et</i>	<i>diem</i>	<i>nocte</i> <sup>52</sup>	<i>mutantem</i>
transforming	into the morning	deep darkness,	and	day	into night	darkening
καὶ ἐκτρέπων	εἰς τὸ πρωῒ	σκιὰν θανάτου	καὶ	ἡμέραν	εἰς νύκτα	συσκοτάζων

Indeed, the chiasm in the Vulgate, ending with *mutantem*, has a more perfect parallelism than the MT, because וְהִשְׁחִךָ *hifil*<sup>53</sup> means “to darken” (*obscurare*) and not only “to change, to transform” (*mutare, convertere*): *mutantem* is a better parallel to *convertentem* than וְהִשְׁחִךָ to וְהִפְךָ.<sup>54</sup> This

<sup>45</sup> See David J. A. Clines, *Job 38-42*, WBC 18B (Nashville TN: Nelson, 2011), 1113.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 1112.

<sup>47</sup> M. D. Carroll, *Contexts for Amos*, 229.

<sup>48</sup> Bakimani Kolani, *Le livre d’Amos*, 233.

<sup>49</sup> Paul, *Amos*, 168, who provides examples, among which *Gilgamesh* XI:106, translated in *COS* 1.132, 459 col. 2: “Adad’s awesome power passed over the heavens, whatever was light he turned into darkness”, which precedes the deluge.

<sup>50</sup> This is also the case in Jer 5, according to Jean-Michel Poirier, “Comment ne pas revenir au chaos ? Revisiter Jérémie et Gn 1-3 à partir de *Laudato si*”, in *Laudato si’: Pour une écologie intégrale*, ed. Gilles Danroc and Emmanuel Cazanave (Paris: Artège, 2017) 275-89, esp. 276-8.

<sup>51</sup> This unambiguous construction of וְהִפְךָ *gal* with preposition וְ agrees with all its other uses in the Hebrew Bible, and I thank Jean-Michel Poirier for pointing this out to me. See JM 125w, about verbs with two accusatives, esp. n. 58. GKC 117ii quotes Am 5:8 in its paragraph about “verbs which express *making, preparing, forming into* anything”. Bovati and Meynet, *Il libro del profeta Amos*, 189, n. 33, note the “specular” construction of those two verses.

<sup>52</sup> The Vulgate’s translation may have been deemed unclear, see for instance the more explicit reading “*et diem in noctem mutantem*” in *Libri prophetarum* (Paris: Simon de Colines, 1537), 362.

<sup>53</sup> JM 112l point out this peculiar use of the *qatal* in some poetic texts celebrating the greatness of God, a phenomenon still without a satisfactory explanation.

<sup>54</sup> The Neo-Vulgate is closer to the MT, ending the chiasm with “*obscurat*” even if it keeps “*tenebras*” to translate צִלְמוֹת: Pontificia Commissio pro Nova Vulgata bibliorum edition, *Libri Prophetarum* (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1976), 436. The *NRSV* is lexically close to the Hebrew text, and the *NAB* nearly as close.

observation underlines the imperfection of the parallel in Hebrew, with a slight emphasis on darkness. In fact, YHWH is not as neutral as he seems! Furthermore, should it not be said that צְלִמְוֹת is darker than night (לַיְלִיָּה)<sup>55</sup> itself? The situation is already very dark, as testifies the recurring invitation to “look for YHWH and live” throughout the book of Amos. The divine anger (even if the word does not appear in our two verses) will be expressed more clearly in v. 9.

### 3.3 An ambivalent agent of transformation

A recent article sees the God of Amos as “the one who constantly settles down to maintain a just and harmonious order in the universe”.<sup>56</sup> Thus, Amos 5:7-13 shows that in the human realm, “injustices are acts of ‘de-creation’. They bring the society back to chaos.”<sup>57</sup> Amos’ readers cannot deny that YHWH is just. However, v. 8 does not show him as only aiming at harmony but also as exerting powerful and maybe violent means to eradicate injustice when the time has come. What we usually consider harmony in the cosmos is broken when a flood is caused by YHWH. Even though the reader cannot be sure that this is the sense of v. 8b, the ambiguity of the motif must make the interpreter cautious. YHWH’s sovereignty is here “characterized by deep ambivalence”.<sup>58</sup> V. 9 is definitely unambiguous about YHWH bringing destruction.

### 3.4 Calling the waters: Three explanations

The phrase about YHWH calling the waters of the sea and pouring them out on the earth is exactly the same as in 9:6 where it also ends with the rhyme יְהוָה שְׁמוֹ (“YHWH is his name!”). The proposition “and pours them out (וַיִּשְׁפֹּךְ)<sup>59</sup> on the surface of the earth” contains an alliteration between the verb שָׁפַךְ (to pour out) and the verb הִפְךָ (to change), the catch-word found earlier in v. 7-8, and the same can be said about the verb הִשְׁךָ *hifil* (to darken). Hilary Marlow notes that the waters obey YHWH’s call (as does the fire in 7:4), which is not the case of Israel. In fact, Earth cooperates with God and she proposes to call it another prophetic “voice”, provided that “like Amos it too only ever works at YHWH’s bidding, whether for destruction or for restoration”.<sup>60</sup> As far as Amos 5:8 is concerned, however, the waters obey indeed, but the other created beings’ relation with their Creator would rather lead to call them “objects”, or “signs”, of the divine power and will.

Three different hypotheses can explain the summoning of the waters. First, one may find here a reference to devastating climatic phenomena, which could be a close reminder of the earthquake mentioned in 1:1 and 9:1. The flood is a dreadful aquatic threat which YHWH should not allow again, according to Ps 104:6-9. However, *Sifré to Deuteronomy* probably sees in 5:8 a “reference to the flood in the time of Noah”.<sup>61</sup> The second hypothesis is “a local flood yet to come”.<sup>62</sup> In addition,

<sup>55</sup> The LXX also reads an imperfect parallel. Many translators oppose a long-believed mistake rendering צְלִמְוֹת by “shadow of death” and Paul, *Amos*, 168, prefers “pitch-darkness”, but David J. A. Clines, *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*, vol. 7, 125 proposes three possible meanings: “shadow of death, gloom, deep darkness”.

<sup>56</sup> Bakimani Kolani, “Pratiquer la justice sociale ou s’effondrer: L’actualité du message d’Amos (Am 5,7-13 ; 6,12)”, *Théologiques* 24 (2016) 15-36, here 28.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> Eidevall, *Amos*, 158.

<sup>59</sup> JM 118r see in this *wayyiqtol* וַיִּשְׁפֹּךְ a continuation of the participle קוֹרֵא, supposed to bear a present meaning. It could be more accurate to consider it as a continuation of a past action. GKC 111u evokes an action which “is being repeated”.

<sup>60</sup> Hilary Marlow, “The Other Prophet! The Voice of Earth in the Book of Amos”, in *Exploring Ecological Hermeneutics*, SBL Symposium Series 46, ed. Norman C. Habel and Peter L. Trudinger (Atlanta GA: SBL Press, 2008), 75-83, here 83.

<sup>61</sup> Jacob Neusner, commenting on *Sifré to Deuteronomy* 43:6:5, in his *Amos in Talmud and Mishnah: A Source Book*, (Lanham MD: University Press of America, 2007), 12. Same reference and meaning in *Mekhilta attributed to Rabbi Ishmael* 52:1:9: *ibid.*, 22-23; and in *Genesis Rabba* 5:51:1, *ibid.*, 36. But in *Genesis Rabba* 25:2:1, Am 5:8 is supposed to

“God’s ability to reverse his own acts of creation, in particular the separation of dry land from water (Gen 1:6-10)”<sup>63</sup> may be a possible interpretation, but this phenomenon could also happen by means of a flood. Following a third path, some exegetes think it more probable to find here a reference to normal rains.<sup>64</sup> The vocabulary used here invites the reader to choose by himself.<sup>65</sup> Even Prov 8:29, about the limits assigned to the sea, does not help here. I claim that a translation should keep the ambiguity, even in a glooming, pessimistic context. The ambiguous rendering “pours them out on the surface of the earth” is coherent with YHWH’s ambiguous activity. And such an interaction between human and divine causalities “suggests a moral order built into the very structure of creation.”<sup>66</sup> Divine retribution finds its way through the elements of creation which obey the divine Creator.

### 3.5 YHWH (is) his name

The final refrain raises many questions. “The praise of Yahweh the Lord of Hosts as Creator is found in ten of the passages using the refrain”<sup>67</sup> which occurs in several forms. Furthermore, the brief refrain puts the emphasis on YHWH as Creator, as opposed to longer forms which underline judgment, idolatry or swearing.

Reading the hymn’s two verses as the center of v. 1-17, and especially with the short form of the refrain “YHWH is his name” not ending the hymn (as is the case in the two others in Amos) but being located at the center of the hymn, suggests that it is a hermeneutical key. The Lord of Israel is creator and judge, even if this second role is stressed more openly by the longer form of his name in the LXX. The extended concentric structure 5:1-17 shows that “this entire social construction [he means the whole reality of Israel] is condemned to ruin. [...] The national yahwism must give way to Yahweh himself.”<sup>68</sup>

“The natural phenomena and rhythms of creation reveal the name and character of Yahweh in a profound way”<sup>69</sup> and they even are “a channel for Yahweh’s message”.<sup>70</sup> The normal and casual changes in nature convey a meaning which the prophet is able to decipher. Is this not one of the main functions of an Israelite prophet: to read and explain God’s ways, hidden to the crowds?

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refer to the daily tide of the waters. Carl Friedrich Keil, *The Minor Prophets*, Commentary of the Old Testament, vol. 10 (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1891 [reprint 2006]), 189, sees here a clear “allusion to the judgment of the flood”.

<sup>62</sup> Hilary F. Marlow, “Creation Theology”, in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Prophets*, ed. J. Gordon McConville (Downers Grove IL: IVP, 2012), 105-109, here 108.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> Jules Touzard, *Le livre d’Amos* (Paris: Bloud, 1909), 44, cf. Jb 12:15; 36:27-28; Am 4:7-8. See also Hans W. Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), 241. Bakimani Kolani, *Le livre d’Amos*, 233, also holds this view but his argument about the two participles expressing this action is not as convincing as the power of YHWH on rains and seasons stated elsewhere in Amos.

<sup>65</sup> פֶּשַׁח in Genesis (9:6 twice, and 37:22) never concerns water but only blood. In the Hebrew Bible, except Amos 5:8, 9:6, YHWH himself does not explicitly “pour out” (פָּשַׁח) water. The words used in the flood narrative, see Gen 6:17; 7:4, are different from פֶּשַׁח. This leaves the ambiguity open and I believe it is intentional.

<sup>66</sup> Marlow, “Creation Theology”, 108.

<sup>67</sup> Crenshaw, *Hymnic Affirmation*, 89. Three of the proposed texts are the doxologies present in the book of Amos. Later in his monography, Crenshaw states that “one can discern a development from appeal to Yahweh the God of Israel, through reference to Yahweh as one who gave deliverance at the Reed Sea, to the claim that Yahweh created heaven and earth” (p. 105). *Ibid.*, 75-105, he studies the use of the various forms of this refrain in Amos and Hosea.

<sup>68</sup> M. D. Carroll, *Contexts for Amos*, 240.

<sup>69</sup> Katharine J. Dell, “Amos and the Earthquake: Judgment as Natural Disaster”, in *Aspects of Amos: Exegesis and Interpretation*, LHBT 536, ed. Anselm C. Hagedorn and Andrew Mein (London: T & T Clark, 2011), 1-14, here 13.

<sup>70</sup> Marlow, “The Other Prophet!”, 77.

## 4. v. 9: The destructive God is also Master of History

### 4.1 The proposal of a wide (but too wise?) astronomical emendation

V. 9 is “very difficult to understand”<sup>71</sup> and may be incomplete. In the current state of the text, though, seven verbs are employed in v. 8-9 (5 in v. 8 and 2 in v. 9), which illustrates Amos’ love for the heptad.<sup>72</sup> Further astronomical references have been “discovered, or rather fabricated, in v. 9”,<sup>73</sup> in a way which is “ingenious but unconvincing”.<sup>74</sup> Although such a reading proposed by Alberto Soggin and others would solve many problems,<sup>75</sup> it demands many emendations, without any textual basis. This is why, in spite of the advantages, we consider that “far from requiring emendation, the verse makes perfectly good sense as it stands.”<sup>76</sup>

### 4.2 A destructive power

The participle opening v. 9, הַמְבַלִּיג, <sup>77</sup> has been understood by Aquila (ὁ μειδιῶν) and also Jerome’s Vulgate (*subridet*) as having a sarcastic connotation.<sup>78</sup>

The second verb, יָבוֹא, is a *qal*. The LXX, with all its ancient versions, has an easier reading.<sup>79</sup> But why change the verb to a *hifil* and make YHWH its subject? We choose to keep the MT<sup>80</sup> which makes sense as well: destruction “comes”, even if it is clear that it is YHWH who “brings” it “upon the fortification”. The repeated noun שָׂד (“destruction”)<sup>81</sup> is object of the first verb and subject of the second, which illustrates<sup>82</sup> YHWH’s transforming power. The distich has a chiasmic structure, starting with a participle (הַמְבַלִּיג) and ending with a finite verb (יָבוֹא):

	שָׂד עַל-עֵז	הַמְבַלִּיג
יָבוֹא	וְשָׂד עַל-מִבְצָר	

<sup>71</sup> *La Bible: Notes intégrales, traduction œcuménique* (Paris: Cerf, 2010; known in French as *TOB*), n. on Amos 5:9.

<sup>72</sup> See Paul, *Amos*, 167, n. 85, and Karl Möller, *A Prophet in Debate: The Rhetoric of Persuasion in the Book of Amos*, JSOTS 372 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003), 84-5. The heptad also appears in 2:6-7, 14-16; 4:4-5; 5:21-23 (7 *qatal* or *yiqtol* verbs); 9:1-4 (seven verbs in 1st person singular expressing YHWH’s punishment announced to his people). But the pentad also enters the author’s structuring pattern. See the five visions in Amos 7-9. In Amos 1-2 there are eight oracles against the nations, Judah and Israel, all of them starting with יהוה אֱמַר יְהוָה.

<sup>73</sup> Andersen and Freedman, *Amos*, 488.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 492.

<sup>75</sup> See J. Alberto Soggin, *The Prophet Amos. A Translation and Commentary* (London: SCM Press, 1987), 90-1.

<sup>76</sup> Zalcman, “Astronomical Illusions”, 55.

<sup>77</sup> On this rare בלג *hifil*, Ernest A. Hedghill, *The Book of Amos: With Notes*, Westminster Commentaries (London: Methuen 1914), 52 has the often-invoked reference to Arabic *balija* also mentioned by *BDB*. More interestingly, he points to the negative meaning of this verb occurring only here, whereas elsewhere in the Bible (Psa and Jb), its 3 *hifil* cohortatives, signify “gleam, smile”, translated “find comfort” (Jb 10:9 NRSV) or “breathe freely” (Psa 34:19 NJB). So, an ambiguously positive verb starts v. 9, being a suitable transition from v. 8.

<sup>78</sup> See Soggin, *Amos*, 90, who also adds Symmachus. Francis Ribera, *Commentarii sensum eorundem prophetarum* (Rome: James Tornerij, 1590), 385, sees an ironic threat in this smiling attitude: human ‘strength’ is nothing in comparison to YHWH’s. He draws a parallel with the overthrowing of the powerful in the *Magnificat*, quoting Lk 1:51-53.

<sup>79</sup> See Glenny, *Finding Meaning*, 89.

<sup>80</sup> With *NRSV*, *NEB*, *NKJV*.

<sup>81</sup> The cognate verb שָׂד is found 26 times in Jer but is absent in Amos. See David N. Freedman and Andrew Welch, “שָׂד, שָׂד”, *TDOT*, vol. 14, 412-8, 418: explicit mentions of YHWH himself as the destroyer “in 33 of 40 occurrences within the prophetic writings”. But the other occurrence in Amos (3:10) associates שָׂד with the violence exerted by the people of Israel in their own “citadels” (with a synonym of מִבְצָר, present in 5:9).

<sup>82</sup> Eidevall, *Amos*, 159, and Zalcman, “Astronomical Illusions”, 57.

This artfully crafted v. 9 has a regular rhythm 3+3. Lashing, like two slaps, humans and human-built symbols of strength, it shows YHWH not as a creator but as an agent of “destruction” (the repeated noun,  $\text{דָּש}$ ) in human history. Many biblical texts violently mention this divine de-creative activity. It is coherent with the possible reference to the Flood in v. 8 and fits well with the context of the whole book and the 8th century. It reminds the reader about the earthquake (mentioned in Amos 1:1),<sup>83</sup> “[Amos] had a vision of God’s power that could and would strike at the natural world and have long-term effects on the human world at the same time.”<sup>84</sup>

Divine activity cannot be restricted to the cosmos if it means excluding it from the unfolding of human history. YHWH who creates and leads the natural world also has authority to destroy human beings and buildings, as texts preceding the biblical writings already stated. In Mesopotamia too, the word of the god is presented as being able to change the course of events in the human sphere, likewise, for instance, the case of the god Enlil according to the curses ending the Code of Laws of Hammurabi.<sup>85</sup>

The same succession occurs elsewhere in the Bible, for example in Psa 135, about the wonders of the Lord acting in the cosmos (v. 6-7), and against the nations (v. 8-12). Psa 136:5-9, 10-25 follow a similar pattern: creation and rule of the elements of nature, and then victory against Israel’s enemies and protection of his people. Amos 5:9, although emended by many commentators because of its contrastive sense in the context of the three doxologies, makes sense as it stands. It concerns “the particulars of violent destruction inherent to warfare, especially the siege operations.”<sup>86</sup>

## 5. Ironic Revision of the Literary Genre

One cannot but notice the reuse of the “very words of the hymns and faith confessions of Israel, transforming them, with irony, into verdicts of condemnation”<sup>87</sup> as in 3:1. They can rightfully be called “Doxologies of Judgment”<sup>88</sup> by James Crenshaw, who adds that “the hymnic fragments have been put to a use in Amos significantly different from that of their inception”.<sup>89</sup> This pessimistic transformation of the hymnic v. 8 is consistent with the tone of v. 9 and, more widely, with Amos’ negative vision regarding Israel’s future.<sup>90</sup> I find in this peculiar use of a doxological style, vocabulary and themes an underestimated stratagem in the religious polemics<sup>91</sup> of the book of Amos. The whole creation is summoned by YHWH as an ally in the war he has declared upon Israel.<sup>92</sup>

<sup>83</sup> Da Silva, *Amos*, 25, ascribes to the earthquake the destruction of the “stronghold” but it could also be brought by an enemy army.

<sup>84</sup> Dell, “Amos and the Earthquake”, 12.

<sup>85</sup> *COS* 2.131, 352 threatens the man who will not obey king Hammurabi’s pronouncements with domestic disorder, and a fatal rebellion. The punishment which Enlil is called to cast on him includes “a reign of groaning, of few days, of years of famine, of darkness without illumination, and of sudden death”, to end with “the obliteration of his city, the dispersion of his people, the supplanting of his dynasty, and the blotting out of his name and his memory from the land.”

<sup>86</sup> Andersen and Freedman, *Amos*, 494.

<sup>87</sup> Bovati and Meynet, *Il libro del profeta Amos*, 442.

<sup>88</sup> Crenshaw, *Hymnic Affirmations*, 114.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 149.

<sup>90</sup> See Soggin, *Amos*, 19-20.

<sup>91</sup> The only mention of Amos 5:8-9 by the late Hans M. Barstad, *The Religious Polemics of Amos: Studies in the Preaching of Am 2, 7B-8; 4, 1-13; 5, 1-27; 6, 4-7; 8, 14*, SVT 34 (Leiden: Brill, 1984), esp. 76-126, “Religious polemics in Amos 5”, is found in pages 79-80, stating the break caused to the unity of v. 7-17 by the possible editorial introduction of v. 8-9. But should it not be said that using a hymnic form (if not a liturgical hymn) to warn people against the consequences of their behaviour, is a discrete polemic inside, and against, Israelite religion?

<sup>92</sup> See Aldina da Silva, *Amos: Un prophète “politiquement incorrect”* (Montréal: Médiaspaul, 1997), 24.



### 5.1 From poetic memory to prophetic irony

For lack of a biblical attestation of such a doxology as v. 8 or, better since, of a kind of *sefer tehillim* which could have been used in an Israelite sanctuary, it is unfortunately not possible to ascertain that Amos re-uses a pre-existing text. However, it seems probable that the prophet alludes to another text or at least to the literary and liturgical genre of doxologies.

As is the case for many texts, “the rhythmic-compositive memory”<sup>93</sup> plays an important role within the “*memoria letteraria*”.<sup>94</sup> Its aim is to awaken a common vibration between reader and poet. An Italian scholar, Gian Biagio Conte, stresses the important status of the art of allusion in the poetic (and we may add prophetic) construction. He has studied the simultaneous mutation and conservation of the literary genre in classical literature. He notes<sup>95</sup> the scandalous use of a verb which functions as a blasphemy in Lucan’s epic poem *Civil War* or *Pharsalia*, II, 113:<sup>96</sup> during a slaughter, a soldier carries a head cut from a dead body “*dum vacua pudet ire manu*”, i. e. “for shame of going empty-handed”. Internal subversion of a literary form leads from rhetoric to a more efficient *para-rhetoric*. It is all the more impressive to remember that Lucan had no hope for Rome, nor than remained for Samaria and Israel in most of Amos’ words. Is the prophet from Teqoa not accustomed to such a hopeless irony? He also caricaturizes *Torah* genre (priestly instruction) to contest allegedly religious conduct in Amos 4:4-5. Attentive readers cannot deny that the doxology in Amos 5:8-9 strengthens its speech by using “irony, a prophetic torsion of poetic memory.”<sup>97</sup>

### 5.2 Ridiculizing the “foe” as in a movie, ‘Apocalypse Now’

Another example taken from outside the Bible could illustrate our hypothesis. Wagner’s tune “Ritt der Walküren” or “Ride of the Valkyries”, the prelude to Act III in his opera, is all the more notorious since an acclaimed 1979 movie, *Apocalypse Now*. The music already has a “hegemonic and totalitarianist” style,<sup>98</sup> but its quotation by Francis F. Coppola suggests an interesting parallel with Amos’s second doxology. Coppola’s movie does *not* use it to magnify the power of the Army of his country as the Germans did under Hitler’s rule. In the context of the movie, the officer who plays the tune when he starts the attack on a Vietnamese village belongs to “a bunch of four-stars clowns”, as the hero says later. The American officers are ridiculous, and their overwhelming power is mainly directed at civilians. To army lovers, this misuse of power may even seem a kind of blasphemy, as also Amos’s ironic use of cultic themes and tone. Amos’ ironic tone addressed to Israel surfaces in 5:8-9, and even more clearly in other pericopes.<sup>99</sup> I do not believe that “the sarcasm of Amos 4 is gone”<sup>100</sup> but it is more subtle, lying especially in the ironic re-use of a literary genre, if not of a known text.

<sup>93</sup> Gian Biagio Conte, « Memoria dei poeti e arte allusiva », in Id., *Memoria dei poeti e sistema letterario* (Torino: Giulio Einaudi, 1974), 3-14, 10.

<sup>94</sup> Id., “Storia e sistema nella memoria dei poeti”, in Id., *Memoria dei poeti*, 15-74, 69.

<sup>95</sup> Id., “Mutamento e conservazione del genere”, in Id., *Memoria dei poeti*, 75-108, 82.

<sup>96</sup> Lucain, *La Guerre civile (la Pharsale)*, vol. 1, books 1-5, ed. Abel Bourguery (Paris: Belles-Lettres, 1926).

<sup>97</sup> I thank Riccardo di Giuseppe for this private communication (« L’ironie, torsion prophétique de la mémoire poétique ») and for his insights based on G. B. Conte’s works, including the link to Paul Beauchamp’s “deutérose” in *L’un et l’autre Testament: Essai de lecture* (Paris: Seuil, 1976), 150-163.

<sup>98</sup> Gérard Dastugue, personal communication. The use of this tune in the history of cinema has been studied in his chapter “*La Chevauchée des Walkyries au cinéma: Une citation en palimpseste*”, in *Du concert à l’écran: La musique classique au cinéma*, PUR-cinéma, ed. Stéphan Etcharry and Jérôme Rossi (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2019), 80-99.

<sup>99</sup> See for instance 3:13-16 or 4:4-5, the latter being explained by Soggin, *Amos*, 71. See also the well-known wordplay on פִּקְדוֹן (which may have had the same pronunciation in the dialect used in Samaria) in Amos 8:1-2, explained in Eidevall, *Amos*, 214, and in Soggin, *Amos*, 117-8.

<sup>100</sup> Linville, *Amos and the Cosmic Imagination*, 105.



## Conclusion

In the “Doxology of Judgment”<sup>101</sup> of Amos 5:8-9, YHWH appears as creator, worthy of praise.<sup>102</sup> But he is also presented, echoing Israel’s impious change, or better, subversion, of justice (v. 7) as “a changer and a destroyer”,<sup>103</sup> a judge, the latter being stressed by the longer form of the refrain, used in the LXX (κύριος ὁ θεὸς ὁ παντοκράτωρ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ). 5:8 LXX also starts with “he who makes everything and transforms” (i.e. the times, periods, and seasons during the days and years, but also the fate of the powerful). Indeed, these verses present the God of Israel as creator *and* destructor, all this time being a Transforming Agent.<sup>104</sup> Both creative and destructive power are already present in 5:8, which helps consolidate the link<sup>105</sup> with v. 9, focused on the latter.<sup>106</sup> This “confident proclamation of God’s relationship to the world” is later replaced in Job’s theology using the same celestial motifs (“the Pleiades and Orion”), with “a subtler understanding of God’s character and actions in the world.”<sup>107</sup>

YHWH is a powerful creator and destructor who acts by means of transformation; but how can he change (and save) the hearers of Amos if they refuse to seek him? What the prophet observes is that “the Transformer has not transformed!”<sup>108</sup> The people do not heed the messenger “who speaks the truth” (v. 10) and reminds them of the Torah. They are not willing to straighten their behaviour with others (v. 11). Under the form of a doxology, the prophet addresses Israel with a veiled, ironic threat. The concentric structure of 5:1-17 (and more widely) puts in evidence the destructive portrait of YHWH, a powerful God. “Those who are guilty of social inversion shall now witness and suffer cosmic inversion”.<sup>109</sup> These two verses fit rather well in the context<sup>110</sup> (close and large), saying in a discreet way: “Prepare to meet your God, O Israel.” (4:12) You rightly celebrate him as Lord of the cosmos. Do not forget that he also is the Master of history.

Our reading also sheds light on the interpretation of the concentric text of 5:1-17. In spite of Eidevall’s reading<sup>111</sup> of two possible, opposite readings depending on the reader’s stance, one must now admit that the current place of 5:8-9 in the composition definitely encourages a pessimistic reading. As v. 1-2 and 16-17 depict mourning and lament, the second doxology of Amos functions more as a warning. Thus, the command to seek good/YHWH in order to live, in v. 4, 6 and 14, expresses a fragile hope. Nevertheless, the ironic tone used in this paradoxical doxology could awaken the reader and help him heed the divine oracles better than Amos’ contemporaries did.

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<sup>101</sup> Friedrich Horst, “Die Doxologien im Amosbuch”, *ZAW* 47 (1929) 45-54, reprinted in Friedrich Horst, *Gottes Recht: Gesammelte Studien zum Recht im alten Testament* (München: Kaiser, 1961), 155-66, esp. 165-6.

<sup>102</sup> I believe we still lack a synthesis on participial doxologies, esp. in the latter Prophets.

<sup>103</sup> Douglas Stuart, *Hosea – Jonah*, Word Biblical Commentary (Nashville: Nelson, 1987) 348.

<sup>104</sup> The beginning and the end of v. 8 LXX summarize a facet of our theological interpretation, which could encourage considering Amos 5:8 LXX a more recent text than the MT.

<sup>105</sup> This constitutes a part of the answer to Werner Berg, *Die sogenannte Hymnenfragmente im Amosbuch* (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1974), who summarizes the debate.

<sup>106</sup> The *Liturgia Horarum*’s choice of reading v. 8 without v. 9 amounts to presenting a doxology magnifying the Creator without stressing his destructive power. It only keeps what Charles Hauret, *Amos et Osée* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1970), 64 calls a “magnificent *Laus Deo*”.

<sup>107</sup> Hilary Marlow, “Creation Themes”, 154.

<sup>108</sup> J. Alec Motyer, *The Message of Amos: The Day of the Lion* (Leicester: IVP, 1974), 113.

<sup>109</sup> Paul, *Amos*, 168.

<sup>110</sup> Then we can agree with Barstad, *The Religious Polemics of Amos*, 80, who considers that 5:8-9 could have Amos as author, given the overall intelligibility of his speech. He reminds us that “After all, the prophets were not systematic logicians, but emotional religious preachers.”

<sup>111</sup> Eidevall, *Amos*, 153.