

The Biographical Stories of the Prophets in the Writing of Yefet ben ‘Eli

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The Karaite Yefet ben ‘Eli ha-Levi Abū ‘Alī Ḥasan ibn ‘Alī al-Lāwī al-Baṣrī lived in the second half of the tenth century and into the early eleventh century. He wrote the “Book of Precepts,” which has not survived, and translated the Bible into Arabic and wrote commentaries on each of its books.¹

Yefet’s biblical commentaries often reflect two main exegetical approaches. One approach is the contemporary-symbolic approach, also known as the “messianic” or “actualizing,” approach, by which the text refers symbolically to the past, present and future of the Karaite movement. In essence, the Bible is not only a narrative source of information about the historical figures and their lives, but also an abundant source of data about the history and future destiny of the Karaites. This contemporary-symbolic approach is found mostly in Yefet’s biblical commentaries on the Song of Songs, Daniel and Psalms. However, it is much more limited in his commentaries to the Books of the Prophets.²

The second approach is the linguistic-contextual-literary approach, which is the more prominent method found in Yefet’s commentaries on the Prophets.³ Yefet interprets the words according to their syntactical role and the thematic connection in the verse, interpreting the verses according to the overall syntactical structure of the textual unit. He puts much emphasis on structure, using syntactic and lexical tools to illuminate the text within its context. He emphasizes the connection between the textual unit (word, expression, verse, or chapter) and the larger literary unit, i.e., its place in the verse, in the unit of verses on a given subject, in the chapter or book, and even its connection to

1 Marwick, “The Order”; Ben-Shammai, “Editions and Versions,” 29; Zawanowska, “Review.”

2 For further discussion of this approach, see Polliack and Schlossberg, *Yefet on Hoshea*, 20; Polliack and Nadler-Akirav, “Arabic Translations”; Polliack, “Historicizing Prophetic Literature”; Wieder, *The Judean Scrolls*, 53–67; idem, “The Dead Sea,” 75–76; Drory, *The Emergence*, 106–10.

3 For further discussion on the linguistic-contextual-literary approach, see Polliack and Schlossberg, *Yefet on Hoshea*, 2–21; Polliack, “Major Trends,” 391–402; Nadler-Akirav, *Yefet on Amos*, 5–57; Wechsler, *Yefet on Esther*, 13–40; Goldstein, “Arabic Composition 101,” 451–78; Zawanowska, *Abraham Narratives*, 111–88; Sasson, *Yefet on Proverbs*, 40–56.

other biblical books. When Yefet discusses a word or an expression that can be interpreted in two ways, he usually compares it with other biblical instances of the same word. Only rarely does he discuss the roots or grammatical significance of the words, in contrast to earlier Karaite grammarians, such as al-Fāsī,⁴ or contemporaries, such as Ibn Nūḥ,⁵ whose commentaries are primarily philological. As part of the linguistic-contextual-literary approach, Yefet employs a historical method, which is often found in his commentaries on the prophetic books. By using this method, he attempts to date or locate in a chronological timeframe the events mentioned in the prophecies and to learn about ancient Israelite society during the prophet's time.⁶ Yefet devotes substantial comments to the dating of the prophecies, which he does mostly by basing the events described in them on biblical "evidence" found in other biblical texts, outside of the prophetic book in question or in other chapters. This methodology recognizes that the Hebrew Bible's gradual editing process was effected by "inner-biblical interpretation" (as described in modern biblical criticism), namely, inner cross-references embedded within the different books, collections and layers of the biblical canon.⁷

As a part of his historical method, Yefet discusses the biographical stories of the Prophets. His commentaries open with information about the time of the prophecy. In some cases, according to the actual data he finds in the prophetic book in question, he defines not only the time of the prophet in years or periods pertaining to the reign of a specific king, but also gives a social

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- 4 David ben Abraham al-Fāsī was a lexicographer, grammarian, and commentator active in the tenth century; he wrote an Arabic dictionary of biblical grammar called *Kitāb Jāmi' al-alfāz – Sefer ha-Agron*. For more details, see Skoss, *Al-Fāsī's Dictionary of the Bible*, vol. 1, xxxii–xl. See also Mamman, "The Lexical Element."
 - 5 Hebrew grammar greatly interested the Karaites of the tenth century. One of the greater Karaite grammaticists was Abū Ya'qūb Yūsuf ibn Nūḥ, who lived in Jerusalem in the second half of the tenth century, and founded there the Karaite Dār al-'ilm. He wrote a grammatical exegesis of the Tanakh, named al-*Diqduq*. A critical edition of this book was made by Geoffrey Khan, see Khan, *The Early Karaite Tradition*. See also Goldstein, *Karaite Exegesis*.
 - 6 Yefet's interest in the historical method is not unusual among the Karaites. In 937, al-Qirqisānī wrote in the first chapter of his book *Kitāb al-Anwār wa-l-marāqib* about the history of the split of the Jewish sects, which began – according to him – already in the period of Jeroboam ben Nebet (see Nemoi, "Al-Qirqisānī," 322–30). Other Karaites from the time of Yefet, i.e. from the tenth and eleventh centuries, also show a great interest in Jewish history, and in particular in Karaite history, among them Salmon ben Yeruḥim and Sahel ben Maṣliāḥ.
 - 7 On inner-biblical interpretation see Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation*, 144–62. Historicization as a primary tool in Yefet's biblical commentaries is discussed at length in the studies of Polliack, see "Major Trends," 393–98; Polliack and Schlossberg, *Yefet on Hoshea*, 21–25; idem, "Historical-Literary."

description of the condition of the people and life in the time of the prophet. In the following, we will focus on Yefet's method of dating the prophets and his understanding of their biographical stories, as reflected in his commentaries on Haggai and Amos.⁸

The Time of Haggai's Prophecy

Yefet opens his commentary on Haggai with an extensive explanation about Haggai's chronological dating and his years as a prophet, and provides conclusions about the prevailing social situation and conditions in the prophet's time. He explains that Haggai 1:2: "Thus says the LORD of hosts. This people say the time has not yet come to rebuild the house of the LORD," is an authentic historical description of the people at the time Haggai received his prophecy, as described in verses 3–4: "Then the word of the LORD came by Haggai the prophet; 'Is it a time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, while this house lies in ruins?'" Yefet concludes from these three verses that the words: "This people say the time has not yet come to rebuild the house of the LORD" are not God's words but a historical narrative, that the authorial-narrator-editor of Haggai inserted into the prophecy, in order to explain the time in which the prophecy took place.⁹ This is how he phrases his conception:

הד'א אלפצל תחת היה דבר יי ביד חגי ואנמא אפצלה בויהי דבר יי לאן העם הזה
אמרו הו חכאיה והד'א הו רסאלה

This section is related to: "The word of the LORD came by Haggai" [1:3] but he set it apart by using [the clause] "then the word of the Sovereign of the Universe" [1:2] because "this people say" [1:2] is [in the form of] a narrative, whereas this [text] is [in the form of] a prophetic message.¹⁰

8 On the historical method in Yefet's commentary to Amos, see Nadler-Akirav, "The Literary-Historical Approach."

9 On the authorial-narrator-editor, see Ben-Shammai, "On Mudawwin"; Polliack, "Karaitic Conception." Though in this example he does not use the term *mudawwin*, but a third-person verb *afšalahu*, it seems likely that Yefet has in mind the concept of the *mudawwin* (the authorial-narrator-editor) of the prophetic book.

10 Ms Saint Petersburg, National Library of Russia, Yevr.-Arab. 1: 298 (433) (IMHM 54886) (hereafter Yevr.-Arab. 1: 298), fol. 229v. All English translations of this manuscript are my own. In verses 2–3, there is a description of God's words to Haggai. Yefet calls this description *hikāya*, a term that means "narrative story, plot," like the more common Arabic term *qiṣṣa*. We find the term *qiṣṣa* in salient narrative stories, plots, as the stories of Josef and Moses (names in Hebrew characters): *qiṣṣat Yosef* and *qiṣṣat Moshe* (see Polliack, "Biblical

In his commentary on Haggai, Yefet also describes the condition of the Judean populace at the time, trying to explain their motives. He supplies the historical background from the time of Cyrus, in accordance with the biblical sources in the Books of Ezra, Nehemiah and Chronicles, stating that during this time the people began the building of the Temple, though they did not succeed. Yefet believes that this is the reason why by the time of Haggai the people said: “the time has not yet come” (1:2). He offers two reasons for this statement: either they believed it to be God’s wish or they were afraid of failure due to their impecunious circumstances or to Darius’s disapproval:¹¹

אכד' ביין אי שי כאן דבר זיי פקו' העם הזה אמרו ולם יקל אתם אמרתם פיגוז אן זרבבל ויהושע כאנו ראג'בין פי אלבני ענד מא וגה דריוש ואטלק להם יבנו ואלגמאעה קאלו לא עת בא ואלסבב פי אנהם קאלו הדא אלקול' הו אנהם כאנו שרעו פי זמאן כורש ולם יתם להם פקאלו אנה לו גא אלוקת לקד כאן רב אלע' ימנע ענא אדא אלשמרונים פקד כאן יתם לנא אלבני וקד כאן אמרנא ארתחשסתא באלבנא ולם יכן ימנענא ונחן נכשא אן יכון אטלאק דריוש מת'ל אטלאק כורש ולם יכן אלוקת קד גא פהדא כאן סבב קולהם לא עת בא פקטעו רגאהם ולם ישתגלו באלבני ומע ד'לך פקד כאנו יתעד'רו באנהם פקרי' וליס ימכנהם אלבני

He began to explain what was “the word of the LORD” [1:3]. The [third person formulation] saying “this people have said” and not [the second person formulation] “you (people) have said,” points to the possibility that Zerub’abel and Joshua wanted the construction [of the Temple] at the time when Darius¹² approached them and granted them permission to build [the Temple], but the populace said: “the time has not yet

Narrative,” 114–19). In verse 4, there is a message that God asked Haggai to tell the people. Yefet describes those words as *risāla*, meaning a prophetic message that can even be an actual letter in the sense of an official address of the prophet to the people (see Polliack and Schlossberg, *Yefet on Hosea*, 59–60).

- 11 For a modern interpretation relating to the time of Haggai, see Meyers and Meyers, *Haggai Zachariah*, 3–13.
- 12 In his commentary, Yefet gives a historical review of the time of the kings, explaining the identity of Darius: “This Darius was the fourth king in the kingdom of Persia; the first king who reigned in Media and Persia was Darius the Mede who reigned for one year, and after him Cyrus king of Persia reigned for three years, and after him Ahasu-e’rus reigned for 13 years. After him Artaxerxes the Lesser reigned for a year, he being the one who commanded that they should not build the Temple, and after him reigned this king Darius” (Ms Yevr.-Arab. 1: 298, fol. 228r). We find a similar explanation in Yefet’s commentary to the Book of Esther, see Wechsler, *Yefet on Esther*, 165–67. However, Sa’adya Gaon considered Artaxerxes and Darius to be the same person (see Wechsler, *Yefet on Esther*, 166, comment 40; *Seder ‘Olam*, 136–37).

come" [1:2]. The reason they made this statement is that they had already planned this in the time of Cyrus but did not succeed. So they said that had the time truly come, the Sovereign of the Universe would have prevented the actions of the Samaritans against us and we would have succeeded in completing the construction. Artaxerxes already gave the command to us to construct [the temple]¹³ and did not prevent us [from doing so], yet we are afraid that the permission granted by Darius will be like the permission granted by Cyrus, and so "the time has not yet come" [1:2]. This was the reason they said: "the time has not yet come" [1:2]. And they lost hope and did not labor in the construction, and at the same time they rationalized this with the fact that they were impoverished and could not afford to carry out the construction.¹⁴

In this detailed manner, Yefet describes wider historical and social circumstances in which the Prophet Haggai prophesied, yet he does not describe nor conclude from the text how the people treated the prophet, due to lack of direct or indirect scriptural evidence to this effect.

The Biographical Story of the Prophet Amos

In his commentary on the Book of Amos, however, Yefet felt able to reconstruct from the biblical text some details about ancient Israelite society at the time of the prophet, and the position and standing of Amos as a prophet in this society. Amos's biographical story (7:10–17) constitutes the only prose section in the book apart from its title (Amos 1:1), and is narrated as part of the episode of the prophet's banishment from Bethel, the Israelite capital, to the Kingdom of Judah, by the priest Amaziah, upon the order of King Jeroboam II. Unlike some modern critics, Yefet does not consider this story to be an "external" source or tale inserted by a later redactor, but rather an integral and original part of this book of prophecy.¹⁵ In his commentary on Ecclesiastes, Yefet writes that the meaning of the title "the words of Amos" (Amos 1:1) is in fact the prophet describing events that he himself experienced at the hands of Amaziah:

13 See the Book of Ezra chapter 4.

14 Ms Yevr.-Arab. 1: 298, fol. 229r.

15 For modern studies on this issue, see Wolf, *Joel and Amos*, 306–16; Anderson and Freedman, *Amos*, 762–94.

דברי עמוס אלד"י ד'כר פי ספרה מא ג'רי עליה מן אמציה כהן בית אל

“The words of Amos” who mentioned in his book what happened to him with Amaziah the priest of Bethel.¹⁶

This comment reveals the importance Yefet attributed to the biographical account in chapter 7, in that he considered the opening words of the book to refer specifically to Amos’s account (in his own words, *sic!*) of the events recounted in Amos 7, thus turning the biographical account into an “autobiographical” one. In his interpretation of the account, Yefet attempts to explain the actions and thoughts of the three central characters – Amos, Amaziah, and Jeroboam – by answering the following questions: Why did Jeroboam choose not to respond to the words of Amaziah? And why did Amaziah ask Amos to leave Israel and to prophesy in Judah? While Yefet tries to understand the characters around whom the plot in Amos 7:10–17 revolves, he does not expand in any way on the thoughts and deeds of the people Amos mentions in the poetic sections of the book containing the prophecies themselves. This discrepancy may be due to the latter’s lack of historical traces, that is, specific references in the form of names of kings and other events known from elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, that can be construed in this way as “indicative” of the immediate historical context.

Yefet views the biographical story as part of the unfolding of specific historical events: after the prophet reported to the people his two first visions, the people did not respond, because Amos said: “The LORD repented” (7:3). After the third vision, about the plumb line (7:8), he did not say these words.¹⁷ Yefet explains that this angered the people but they did not dare kill the prophet, rather Amaziah, the High Priest sent [messengers] to tell Jeroboam about the prophecy, and asked for permission to kill him:

פערף אן אמציה ארסל אלי ירבעם יכברה בנבוה' עמוס וטלב פי ד'לך יאד'ן לה
בקתלה

He teaches that Amaziah sent [a message] to Jeroboam, letting him know about Amos’s prophecy, asking him for permission to kill him.¹⁸

16 See Bland, *Yefet on Ecclesiastes*, 2–3.

17 For additional information on Yefet’s visions, see Nadler-Akirav, “A Comparative Discussion.”

18 See Ms Yevr.-Arab. I: 298, fol.116r.

Yefet connects the various and sometimes disconnected events described in the biographical story (Amaziah's message to the king in Amos 7:11–12) with the dialogue between Amaziah and Amos (7:12–18), creating an integrative historical account to enable his readers to grasp the full historical picture. To assist, Yefet also explains the political position of Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, which is crucial for understanding his actions and for appreciating biblical society, as we will show in the following.

The Relationship between the Priest and the Prophets at the Time of Amos

Yefet presents two possible explanations for Amaziah's position as the "priest of Bethel" (7:10): The first, in the sense of "and David's sons were priests" (2 Samuel 8:18), meaning, a minister who serves the king and is responsible for Bethel, a sort of governor of Bethel;¹⁹ and the second, the priest in the temple, who was responsible for making sacrifices on the altars:²⁰

וקו' כהן בית אל יחתמל אנה כאן גליל מקדם פי בית אל פקאל לא יגוז אן אסמע
מת'ל הד'א אלכלאם יקאל פי עמלי ולא ארפעה אלי אלמלך פיכון תפסיר כהן בית
אל מקדם בית אל מת'ל ובני דוד כהנים היו או יכון כאן אמאם בית אל קדאם אלענגל

When it says: "The priest of Bethel" [7:10] this could mean that he was an important figure, the governor of Bethel. He said: I cannot possibly hear such things in my post and not convey them to the king. The interpretation of "priest of Bethel" [7:10] can be: Governor of Bethel, as in "and David's sons were priests" [2 Samuel 8:18]. Or it would be: He was a priest of Bethel before the calf.²¹

From Yefet's statement here we can see that he believes the king to have had ministers who were responsible for the different counties in the kingdom, while in the religious realm there were priests who were in charge of making sacrifices at the altar. His explanations about Amaziah's possible position are a starting point for the contemporary reader to understand his actions.

From Amaziah's threats to banish Amos, Yefet concludes that Amaziah believed Amos to have been one of the false prophets who made their living

19 Cf. Tanḥum Yerushalmi: *Raba le-beit el*, meaning that Amaziah was the leader of Bethel.

20 Abraham ibn Ezra explains: *Cohen ha-ba'al haya* (Simon, *Abraham Ibn Ezra*, 245, line 18).

21 The Judeo-Arabic text is cited from Ms Yevr.-Arab. 1: 298, fol. 116r.

from prophecy. Furthermore, Amos spoke harsh prophecies against Israel and Jeroboam before a large audience, and could have undermined Jeroboam's rule as king:

פעלמנא אן עמוס כאן ענדה במנזלה נביאי שקר אלדי כאנו געלו אלנבוה מעאיש להם פקאל לה אן כנת תריד תתנבא לטלבה אלמעשה פמ" אלי בלד יהודה ואנת תצל אלי מעישתך וליס עליך כ'זף לאן אלנבי כאן פי זמאן עזיה ועזיה כאן מלך טאיע ואלאנביא פי זמאנה פי אגל חאל

He teaches us that he considered Amos to be one of the false prophets, who turned prophecy into a livelihood. And he said to him: "if you want to prophesy for a living, then go to the land of Judah and you will have your livelihood, and you should not be afraid," because the prophet was in the days of Uziah, and Uziah was an obedient king and the prophets in his period had the most prestigious standing.²²

Yefet concludes from Amaziah's words to Jeroboam: "Amos has conspired against you [...] The land is not able to bear all his words" (7:10), that Amos's third prophecy was a heavy burden on many of the people and that it was made during "a period of assembly," that is, in a time of pilgrimage. The people had no choice but to listen to him, and so, as Amaziah saw it, Amos was trying to make the people rise up against Jeroboam. Yefet tries to understand Amaziah and to explain the reasons behind his words and deeds, though without making a moral or political judgment about the period:

וקו' קשר עליך עמוס יריד בה שק אלעצא עליך איהא אלמלך ולם יכן ד'לך מנה פי מוצ'ע כפי או קדאם קום קלילין פיתג'אפל לה בקרב בית ישראל והד'א צעב ג'דא' אנה תנבא בהד'א אלנבוה אלצעבה עלי אלמלך פי מא בין אלג'מע וישבה אן עמוס אכבר בהד'א אלנבוה פי וקת אלמוסם פכאנו ישראל קד חגו אלי בית אל פקאם אלנבי פי וסטהם ותנבא בהד'ה אלנבוה נט'יר מא כאנו יפעל ירמיהו פי דפעאת כת'ירה פלד'לך קאל בקרב בית ישראל

And by the words: "Amos has conspired against you" [7:10] he means: he caused contention about Your Majesty the King, and he did not do this in a hiding place or before a small group, and the House of Israel ignored him [the prophet]. [But] it is a great matter that he made this harsh prophecy about the king before the masses. Amos apparently made this prophecy during the High Holidays²³ when Israel had already gone up to

²² Ms Yevr.-Arab. 1: 298, fol. 117r.

²³ Blau, *Dictionary*, 765a.

Bethel. The prophet stood up in their midst and made this prophecy, just as Jeremiah did in many instances, and therefore he said: “in the midst of the house of Israel” [7:10].²⁴

Yefet does not seek to present Amaziah in a negative light, nor does he describe him as one of little faith or one who comes out against God’s prophet, but rather as a position-holder doing his duty, meaning, a loyal minister to the king or a loyal priest to the king in Bethel, whose role is to report about matters having to do with the county over which he is responsible, or with Bethel as a ritual site. Yefet explains that Amaziah’s preamble before telling of the prophecy “Amos is raising a conspiracy against you ... The land cannot bear all his words” (7:10), was clearly intended to influence the king:

וקו' לא תוכל הארץ יעני אנה אמר עטיים לים הו שי יחתמל אן אלנאס יתג'אפלו ענה
פקדם הד'יה אלמקדמאת ליוקע כלאמה פי קלב ירבעם פיחרד מן ד'לך לאן
אלמקדמאת מן שאנהא אן תות'ר אמר כביר פי אלנאס

The meaning of his words: “the land is not able to bear” [7:10] is that this is a huge matter and not something the people can ignore. And all of these introductions were in order to bolster his words in the heart of Jeroboam so that he would be angry because of this, because the purpose of the introduction is to have a great influence on people.²⁵

Amaziah’s goal, in Yefet’s opinion, was to draw attention to Amos’s infidelity so that Jeroboam would have him killed, fearing that the words of the prophet would influence the subjects and undermine the status of the king. Yefet claims that Amaziah banished Amos from Israel through his royal authority as governor of the county of Bethel or in his responsibility for the ritual site of Bethel, meaning, as the king’s representative there.

Even when explaining Amaziah’s words to Jeroboam, Yefet does not paint him unequivocally as a liar. Rather, he presents an interpretation that offers two possible causes for Amaziah’s words: “Jeroboam shall die by the sword” (7:11). In the first interpretation, Amaziah did not intend to lie by changing Amos’s words: “and I will rise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword” (7:9), but rather that he understood “the house of Jeroboam” to include Jeroboam himself. In the second possibility, Amaziah intentionally changed Amos’s words to induce the king to order the prophet’s killing:

²⁴ Ms Yevr.-Arab. 1: 298, fol. 116r.

²⁵ Ms Yevr.-Arab. 1: 298, fol. 116r.

פד'כר אלפאט' בכלאף קול עמוס לאן עמוס קאל וקמתי על בית ירבעם בחרב ולם יקל על ירבעם פיגוז אן יכון עלם אמציה אן ירבעם הו לאחק לאהל ביתה פד'כר אלמלך ולם יד'כר אהל ביתה לאנה אד'א ד'כר אלמלך פקד וצל אלי מראדה ויכון קו' וישראל גלה יגלה מעל אדמתו אסתכ'רגה מן מעני הנני שם אנך וג' ונשמו במות ישחק וג' או מן נבותה אלתי תקדמת ויגוז אנה סעא באלכד'ב פאדעא עליה אנה קאל בחרב ימות ירבעם ולם יכן לד'לך אצל ואנמא אראד אן ישנע עליה חתי יאמרה ירבעם בקתלה פהדא מא וגה בה אמציה אלי ירבעם אמא בכתאב או עלי יד רסול

He used different words than those used by Amos. Amos said: “and I will rise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword” [7:9]; he did not say “against Jeroboam.” So it could be that Amaziah knew that Jeroboam was one of the people of his house.²⁶ And so he mentioned the king and not his house, since when he mentioned the king he got what he wanted. And saying: “and Israel must go into exile away from his land” [7:11] – he concluded it from: “Behold, I am setting a plumb line in the midst of my people Israel” [7:8] etc., “the high places of Isaac shall be made desolate” [7:9] etc., or from his previous prophecy. And it could be that he deceitfully slandered him when he said: “Jerobo'am shall die by the sword” [7:11], and this has no basis, and all he wanted was to spread a rumour about him so that Jeroboam would have him killed. And this is what Amaziah conveyed to Jeroboam, whether by letter or by messenger.²⁷

While Yefet does not explicitly accuse Amaziah of slander, and gives another possible explanation by which Amaziah misunderstood Amos's words, this is not the case among other commentators. The rabbinic sages believed that Amaziah did indeed defame Amos, and that in fact Jeroboam became one of the kings of Judah because he did not accept Amaziah's defamatory speech. Sa'adya Gaon, in his commentary on Proverbs, accuses Amaziah of lying. Of “haughty eyes, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood” (Proverbs 6:17), he says: “and this [the lie] is the foundation of conflict and incitement, as Amaziah the priest of Bethel did when denouncing Amos for something he did not say in order to incite between him and Jeroboam son of Yoash.”²⁸ Later, Abraham ibn Ezra made a similar observation: “Amaziah lied in order to incite the king against him and have him killed. And lo, Jeroboam was silent and did not respond to Amaziah.”²⁹

26 Meaning that if anything happens to Jeroboam it will also befall the people of his house.

27 Ms Yevr.-Arab. 1: 298, fol. 116r-v.

28 Qafah, *Saadya on Proverbs*, 63.

29 Simon, *Abraham Ibn Ezra*, 246, vol. 2, 21–22.

The Attitude of the King and the People towards the Prophet Amos

We find two approaches in Yefet's commentaries regarding the attitude of the people towards the prophet and his prophecies.³⁰ In his commentary to Amos 2:12: "and he commanded the prophets, saying, 'You shall not prophesy,'" Yefet explains that the command to the prophets not to prophesy is a disrespect for the command of God and his message, yet he also gives a different explanation, that the people wanted the prophets to make good prophecies, and therefore requested they not prophesy in the name of God:

ערף אנהם ... אמרו אלאנביא אן לא יתנבו אסתכ'פאף מנהם לאמר אללה תע' ורסאלתה ... ואמא קולהם ללאנביא לא תנבאו פקד ד'כר ד'לך ג'ירה מן אלאנביא כמא קאל ישעיהו ע'ה אשר אמרו לראים לא תרא וקאל פי אנשי ענתות אנהם מנעו ירמיהו אן יתנבא בשם יוי לקו' לכן כה אמר יוי על אנשי ענתות וגו' וזדת פי אלעבארה לא תנבאו בשם יי לאנהם לא תנבאו סמוך ויריד בה לא תנבאו בשם יוי

He told that they ... ordered the prophets not to prophesy because of their disrespect for the command of God Almighty and his message.... As for their words to the prophets: "You shall not prophesy" [2:12] another prophet has already mentioned that, as Isaiah, peace be upon him, said: "who say to the seers, 'See not'" [Isaiah 30:10]. And he said about the people of Anathoth that they prevented Jeremiah from prophesying in the name of God, as he said: "Therefore thus says the LORD concerning the men of An'athoth" [Jeremiah 11:21], etc. And I added in the translation: "do not prophesy" [2:12] in the name of God because their prophecies were not forgiving. And he means: "do not prophesy in the name of God."³¹

Yefet points to similarities between the times of the prophets Amos, Jeremiah, and Isaiah – during the times of all the three prophets the people had pleaded with the prophets and asked them not to prophesy bad prophecies.³²

30 For a discussion on the religious customs in the time of Amos, see Nadler-Akirav, "The Literary-Historical Approach."

31 Ms Yevr.-Arab. 1: 298, fol. 93r-v.

32 In his commentary on Isaiah 30:10: "They say to the seers, 'see no more visions!'" Yefet explains that the people asked the prophets to say only pleasant things and not to rebuke them, claiming this to be their right and that they were unwilling to hear anything else: קולה כי עם מרי הוא ערף אנה מן אג'ל אן ישראל רוי בכל'אף אמר רב אלעאלמין אלאנביא אן יצעו כתבהם פי מא בינהם ווצף אפעאלהם אלקביחה ויהי כ'מסה אשיא ... ואלכ'אמס הו

Notwithstanding the above, Yefet concludes from the actions of the people – or more accurately, from their abstention from action – that the people at that time believed in God and in Amos as His true prophet. Yefet explains that although the people sinned and did not want to hear negative predictions, they did not dare rise up against the prophet and kill him:

פענד מא אכ'ברהם במא נט'רה פי אלדפעא אל-אלת'ה בקול תע' הנני שם אנך צעב
הד'ה אלקול עליהם ולם יגסרו עלי קתל אלנבי

And when he told them what he saw on the third time, in God's words: "I am setting a plumb line" [7:8], those words were difficult for them but they did not dare kill the prophet.³³

Yefet also concludes that Jeroboam believed Amos to be a true prophet, and that his words represent God's words. Yefet concedes a possibility that Jeroboam ignored Amaziah and did not dare order Amos harmed because he believed Amos was a prophet of God and that his words would come true:

אכ'תצר אלכתאב אן ידוון איש קאל ירבעם ענד מא ראסלה אמציה פיגוז אנה תג'אפל
ענה לאנה עלם אן עמוס הו נבי ואן קולה יתם לא סימא ... פעלם אן אנביא רב אלע'א
ליס יקולו קול אלא ען אללה תע' פסכת ותג'אפל ולם יגיב לאמציה בחרף ואחד

מנעהם ללאנביא אן יתנבו עליהם באלבאטל עלי רסם נביאי שקר ופי ד'לך קאל אשר אמרו
לראים לא וג' וקולהם לא תראו יחתאג' אלי זיאדה והו לא תתנבו עלינא בכלאם כשן צ'ד
חלקות ואלג'רץ' פיה הו אנה כאן יצעב עליהם כשף עוארהם ... -ואראדו מן אלנביא אן
יד'כרוהם בשם טוב ויזכוהם פי אפעאלהם. וקולה לא תחזו לנו נכחות אראד בה לא תתנבו
עלינא באלאשיא אלתי הי ענדכם נכחות בל תנבו עלינא במא ענדכם מהתלות לאנה הו אלדי
ענדנא חק והו אלדי נקבלה.

Saying: "because this is a rebellious nation" [Isaiah 30:9] he teaches that because Israel conveyed [things] in contravention [of the divine command], God commanded the prophets to put their books among them. And he described their bad deeds, which were five ... and the fifth was that they prevented the prophets from prophesying on them false prophecies as the false prophets did. About this he said: "That say to the seers: 'See not,'" [Isaiah 30:10], etc. And their words 'See not' [Isaiah 30:10] requires an addition, namely, do not bring us difficult prophecies against groups of people. And the purpose of this is that it was difficult for them to have their flaws revealed.... They wanted the prophets to speak well of them and to reward them for their deeds. And saying: "Prophecy not to us what is right" [Isaiah 30:10] means: do not prophesy about things that are *nəḵōhōt* ["right"] but rather present us with *mahātallōt* ("illusions") [Isaiah 30:10] because this is our right and it is what we will accept (Ms London, British Library, 280A (IMHM 6274), fol. 49r.

33 Ms Yevr.-Arab. I: 298, fols, 115v-116r.

The book was shortened to record³⁴ what Jeroboam said when Amaziah wrote to him. It could be that he ignored him since he knew that Amos was a prophet and that his words would certainly come to pass ... and he knew that the prophets of God say none other than what is from God. He was silent and ignored him, and did not respond to Amaziah, not even with a single syllable [7:12–13].³⁵

Conclusions

As part of his literary-historical approach, Yefet discusses the time of the prophet. He not only defines the years but also describes attitudes toward the prophet, his biographical story and the life of the people at that time, whenever and wherever he can glean information. In this way he concludes that the people at the time of Haggai believed him to be a true prophet, and did not reject his call to build the House of God, although they were poor and afraid.

As to the story of Amos, Yefet explains that the king's and the people's non-reaction to the words of Amaziah and that they refrained from hurting him, teach us that they believed in God and in Amos as his prophet. Yefet reaches the same conclusion from the people's request that the prophets should not prophesy. He believes that this request does not stem from a lack of faith in God or in the words of his messengers – the prophets – but rather because they were tired of the prophets' threats.

Moreover, even though Amaziah wanted to banish Amos, Yefet paints a positive portrait of him as a loyal priest or minister to the king in Bethel, whose role was to report about matters concerning the county over which he was responsible, or concerning Bethel as a religious place. Drawing on his royal authority he tried to banish Amos, believing Amos to be a false prophet who might harm the king.

To conclude, Yefet not only explains the meaning of the prophecies and their relevance as historical events, he also emphasizes the value of these prophecies in relation to the historical period and the bibliographical story of each prophet. He sees in the characters' actions or non-actions a source of information about their ways of life and their beliefs.

34 On the Arabic term *iḥṭāṣar*, see: Polliack, "Major Trends," 403–10; Ben-Shamai, "On Mudawwin," 73–110; Polliack, "The Unseen Joints."

35 Ms Yevr.-Arab. 1: 298, fol. 116v.

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