

## Social values in the book of Obadiah

Phil J Botha (UP)

### **ABSTRACT**

*This paper presents a poetic and social-scientific analysis of the book of Obadiah. It suggests that the social and theological problems to which the book forms a response is the attempt of the people of Judah to come to terms with Edom's betrayal of them. This breach of loyalty by an ally is interpreted as an act of arrogance against Judah's patron God, Yahweh. The community of believers is urged to find consolation in the faith and hope that Yahweh will restore his honour, and that of his people, by completely shaming the Edomites in the international arena.*

### **A INTRODUCTION**

This paper presents an attempt at interpreting the book of Obadiah from a social-scientific perspective. The presupposition is that the book in its final form<sup>1</sup> should be viewed as a response to a specific social and theological situation in the history of the people of Israel. As such the way in which the book was composed to elicit a specific social and theological response on the part of its 'audience' will be investigated. It also aims at establishing who the audience was and what its response was supposed to be. All of this could be described as a search for the *strategy* of the text of Obadiah<sup>2</sup>.

The interpretational model that will be used in this investigation is that of social scientific criticism as described inter alia in Malina (1981); Pilch and Malina (1998) and Rohrbaugh (1996). According to this model, honour and shame were 'core' values of the peoples of the Ancient Mediterranean. A number of other social values generally served to obtain and maintain honour and can therefore be described as 'means values'. The article by Saul Olyan (1996), who has described the role of honour and shame in covenant relations, will also be used as a frame of reference.

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<sup>1</sup> Usually three time-layers are supposed to be visible in the text, namely 1-15 with exception of 15a; 15-18 with exception of 15b, and 19-21. Rudolph (1971:296) considers the first two sections both to be from Obadiah but on different occasions. The last section he describes as prose and considers it to be at least partially from the hand of an editor.

<sup>2</sup> Cf Elliott (1993:54) who explains that the 'strategy' of a text is the way in which it was designed not simply to communicate ideas, but to move a specific audience to some form of concerted action.

The hypothesis is that the social and theological problem that the book of Obadiah addresses is the effort of the people of Judah to come to terms with the betrayal by Edom, a people to whom they were related according to tradition but who acted contrary to accepted cultural protocols. The strategy of the author is to unmask Edom's breach of loyalty to Judah as an act of arrogance against their (Judah's) patron God, Yahweh. They expected Yahweh to punish Edom, so that Yahweh's honour – and that of the Judaeans – will be restored by shaming the proud and over-confident Edomites. Through an analysis of the social values discernible in Obadiah, this paper aims to show that all sections of the book (in its final form)<sup>3</sup> constitute a coherent whole dedicated to one purpose, namely the restoration of the honour of Yahweh and his covenant people.

## B THE LITERARY STRUCTURE OF OBADIAH<sup>4</sup>

			hyd]b[lo-zj}	1a	The vision of Obadiah.
I	A	1	μ/daθ, hwbyθyndae} rmaAñKo	b	So says the Lord Yahweh regarding <sup>5</sup> Edom:
			hwbyθtameWn [mV; h [WmV]	c	We heard news from Yahweh
			j Lvμpy/GB' ryxwθ	d	and a messenger was sent among the nations:
		2	hm]qrmθWm]q	e	Stand up and let us get ready
			.hmj :i M]l' hyl ;L;	f	for war against her!
II	B	3	μy/GB' θyTithθ=fq; h]lhi	2a	Behold, I made you small among the nations,
			.dam] hT'a' yllzB;	b	you are utterly despised.
		4	θayVhi θB]l i-/dzθ	3a	The pride of your heart has deceived you,
			[I SAy]θ] b] ynk]vo	b	you who live in the rock clefts
			/Tb]vi μ/rm]	c	whose dwelling is so high,

<sup>3</sup> Cf the remark by Wehrle (1987:357-358): 'Es wurde aber deutlich, daß ursprünglich selbständige mündliche und schriftliche Texte oft schon so in ein Textganzes eingearbeitet wurden, daß eine einwandfreie und problemlose Trennung in sogenannte literarkritische Einheiten nicht mehr möglich ist, ohne daß man den Sinn des jetzigen Textes (oder eines Teiltexes) entstellen würde'.

<sup>4</sup> The structure as it is presented here, is based on the Masoretic markers printed in *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*. It was compared with the analysis of Renkema (2000) and found to be largely concordant with his delimitation, which is based also upon traditions of delimitation found in pre-Masoretic manuscripts and the manuscripts of various ancient translations. The strophes correspond to his delimitation of strophes and the stanzas to his delimitation of 'canticles'. In a number of places, however, Renkema rearranged or changed the text apparently with too much boldness. Cf his emendations and changes in vv 7 and 19. Allen (1976:140-143) provides a helpful overview of the major attempts in the past to determine the structure of the book.

<sup>5</sup> The preposition |] is ambiguous in this construction. It can be rendered with 'to Edom' or 'concerning Edom'. Ben Zvi (1996:25) remarks that the expression creates an ambiguity that would capture the attention of its audience.

		5	/B B  rmeao .Ara: yndr/y ym	d	the one who says in his heart:
			rv K' HyBq A uai	e	Who can bring me down to earth?
C		6	òlleqi pyci pybk/K -yBA uai	4a	Though you soar <sup>6</sup> like an eagle
			.hwhyA uanòdd yr/a μVmi	b	and though your nest is made among the stars,
				c	from there I will bring you down, declares Yahweh.
III	D	7	òl A aB: pyb C A uai h  y ' ydcl/v A uai	5a	If thieves came to you,
			h  tyme h  Jyae	b	or robbers of the night –
		8	μYD' Wbrq  a /h	c	Oh, what a disaster awaits you –
				d	would they not steal only as much as they needed?
	E	9	J : W aB: pyrix BA uai .t / t  q o Wryay ' a /h	e	If grape-pickers came to you,
			wc:[e w C P ] h C Jyae	f	would they not leave a few grapes?
		10	.wynPax n' W  b h	6a	But how will Esau be ransacked,
				b	his hidden treasures pillaged!
IV	F	11	ò j  L v  t  W ò h Ad ' ò tyr b  yvæ ' t  Ko	7a	To the border will they force you
			ò    W  k : ò Way v h	b	all your allies,
		12	òm  μ  yvæ '	c	they will deceive and overpower you <sup>7</sup>
			òy j   ' r zm: W nycj: òmj   '	d	your friends.
	G	13	. B  h mlò t  -yae	e	Those who ate with you <sup>8</sup> will set a trap <sup>9</sup> for you,
				f	without your knowing it.
V	H	14	h wh y  μ a ò a l h'  μ YB' a /h  μ dat ne μ ym k  j y t d p a h w	8a	Will I not in that day, declares Yahweh,
			.wc:[e  r h me  h mlò t v	b	destroy the wise people of Edom,
				c	and understanding from the mountain of Esau?
	I	15	-my te òyr B gl W t j  w  wc:[e  r h me  vya A t r K y  -[m t ]	9a	Your warriors, O Teman, will be terrified,
				b	for every man will be cut down from Esau's mountain.

<sup>6</sup> The text only speaks of 'make high', 'exalt' without specifying an object.

<sup>7</sup> Rudolph's remark (1971:304 n 7a) that 'Die Worte stehen fast ebenso in Jer 38,22 und sind aus strophischen Gründen als Randzitat von dort anzusehen' is a gross misrepresentation of the truth. The verb *tws* is used in Jr 38:22 and the meaning of the phrase there is the opposite of this one: 'your friends have incited and overpowered you'.

<sup>8</sup> This is vocalised by some to read *òymj| |* (cf Rudolph 1971:307). It is probably better to understand this as a case of ellipsis ('the men of your food') is understood, cf the previous foot. This would refer to the ritual of the sacrificial meal that confirmed a treaty (cf Gn 31:54; Ex 24:11; Ps 41:10; Rudolph 1971:307).

<sup>9</sup> The translation of this word is based on the ancient translations rather than on insight. Cf Allen (1976:150 n 28).

		16	bqd y' öyj ä: smj' me <sup>10</sup> .l fQmi	10a	Because of the slaughter, because of the violence against your brother Jacob,
			.pl / [l] Trk w hv w b s k t	b	you will be covered with shame and destroyed for ever.
VI	J	17	dg mi ödm: [ ] µ/y B	11a	On the day you stood aloof
			/l yj e pyr z  t/bv  µ/y B	b	on the day when strangers carried off his wealth <sup>10</sup>
		18	wyr: [v]  w a B: µyrk w	c	and foreigners entered his gates
			l r/g  w Dy' µ l  w ry A  [w	d	and cast lots for Jerusalem
			.µhme dj 'a k  h T a µ G %	e	you were like one of them.
	K	19	öyj äAµ yb  ar:  A  a w	12a	You should not have looked on in the day of your brother <sup>11</sup>
			/r k t  µ/y B	b	in the day of his misfortune <sup>12</sup> ,
		20	hd w hy ä y nb   j m c   A  a w	c	you should not have rejoiced over the people of Judah
			µdb ä: µ/y B	d	in the day of their destruction.
		21	öy P   D g   A  a w	e	And you should not have opened your mouth so wide
			.hr x: µ/y B	f	in the day of trouble.
VII	L	22	y mi  'A r  [v b  a b T A  a'	13a	You should not have entered through the gates of my people
			µdy äe µ/y B	b	in the day of their disaster <sup>13</sup> ,

<sup>10</sup> Literally 'on the day when strangers captured his power'. Some take this as a reference to the army or leaders (so Rudolph 1971:303; Renkema 2000:240). 'Power' can, however, also be rendered with 'wealth' and this is probably what is meant. Edom did not take part in capturing soldiers, but shared the spoils of war. The same word is used in v 13 in an expression ('reaching for') that seems to confirm the interpretation of 'goods'. There is then no objection to view the 'gates' as the gates of Jerusalem, although Rudolph (1971:305 n 11a) might be correct when he understands it as referring to the cities of Judah.

<sup>11</sup> This and the following jussives are evidently a castigation of what Edom has *already* done, not a prohibitive for the future as Renkema's (2000:241) translation seems to suggest. Verse 11 and v 15b also clearly speak of what happened in the past (tyc[.]). See also Rudolph (1971:310), who argues that the grammatical construction can be used to prohibit something that *could* or *should not* have happened. He is right when he sees this as a technique of enlivenment through which the prophet displaces himself in the spirit back to the time of the catastrophe, pleading with the Edomites. So also Allen (1976:156).

<sup>12</sup> From r|k|n| r|k|ne n[m] misfortune, calamity. Renkema (2000:240) at first does not translate these two words, which he prints as part of the previous foot. Later on, he translates it as 'the day he became a foreigner (to you)' (Renkema 2000:275).

<sup>13</sup> Rudolph (1971:305 n 13a) suggests that this might be wordplay on Edom.

		23	/t[rB] hTaaugkar,TAI a'	c	you too should not have looked down on them in his calamity
			/dyae μ/yB]	d	in the day of his disaster,
		24	/I yj b] hnj] l v]TAI aW	e	or have extended it <sup>14</sup> to his wealth
			./dyae μ/yB]	f	in the day of his disaster.
	M	25	qrPhAI [' dmd]TAI aW	14a	You should not have waited at the crossroads
			wfyl P'Ata, tyrkh]l]	b	to cut down his fugitives
		26	wdyric] rGsjTAI aW	c	or have handed over his survivors
			.hrx: μ/yB]	d	in the day of trouble.
VIII	N	27	b/rqAyKI μy/GhAI KAI [' hwhyaμ/y	15a	For the day of Yahweh is near for all nations.
			JL: hc,lyt tycl; rvaK'	b	As you have done, it will be done to you;
			.ovarB] bWvy; ol hW	c	your deeds will return upon your own head.
	O	28	yvdq; rhAI [' μtytM] rvaK' yKI	16a	For just as you drank <sup>15</sup> on my holy mountain,
			dymit; μy/GhAI k; W] vjl	b	so all the nations will drink continually;
		29	W] l W] W] vW	c	they will drink and swallow down
			.Wyh; a/I K] W] hW	d	and be as if they had never been.
IX	P	30	:/Yxi rhhW]	17a	But on Mount Zion
			hfyl p] hyk]l'i	b	will be escape;
			vdcq; hyhW	c	it will be holy,

<sup>14</sup> The strange second person plural form is resolved by substituting the feminine ending with an emphatic particle or, better yet, with an energetic suffix hnj] l v]TAI with ellipsis of 'hand' (Allen 1976:157 n 11). The latter solution would also smoothen the transition to 'his wealth'.

<sup>15</sup> Rudolph (1971:312) understands this as being spoken to Judah. This would mean ignoring the parallel between 15bc and 16ab and is the consequence of Rudolph's having removed 15b from its place to form the conclusion of the previous section. The meaning of the text as it stands seems to be that the nations will rejoice as Edom rejoiced when they celebrated the downfall of Judah. This rejoicing will, however, be like swallowing the judgement of Yahweh, since they (the nations) will also cease to exist. According to Ben Zvi (1996:180-183), the text is ambiguous on purpose. One possibility of understanding is that Edom is addressed and that the occasion was a joyful one for Edom, namely the fall of Jerusalem (Ben Zvi refers to Lm 4:21 where Edom is ironically encouraged to rejoice since the cup of judgement is coming her way). This path of interpretation is halted, however, when the following lines are read since it becomes clear that the only divide exists between Israel and the other nations, including Edom. This leads then to Judah's being identified as the addressee in v 16a and the drinking as referring to the cup of judgement of Yahweh.

		31	bq[ly' tyBeWvrjw]	d	and the house of Jacob will possess
			.phyvr/m tae	e	their inheritance <sup>16</sup> .
Q		32	vae bq[ly'Atybe hyhw]	18a	The house of Jacob will be a fire
			hbhl, 'sdy tybW	b	and the house of Joseph a flame;
		33	vq[ ]wc:[e tybW	c	and the house of Esau will be stubble,
			µwl kaW' µhb: Wq[ ]hw	d	and they will set it on fire and consume it.
		34	dyric: hyh[Aal µ]	e	And there will be no survivors
			wc:[e tybd ]	f	for the house of Esau,
			.rBBI hwhydYKI	g	for Yahweh has spoken.
X	R	35	bg[h' Wvrjw]	19a	And people from the Negev will occupy
			wc:[erhAta,	b	the mountain of Esau <sup>17</sup> ,
			µyTiv[ ]PAta, h[ ]p[hw]	c	and people from the Shephelah Philistea.
		36	µyr[pa, hdeAta, Wvrjw]	d	They will occupy the fields of Ephraim,
			:/rmjvohde[ ]taW	e	and the fields of Samaria
			.d[ ]h[Ata, =mjnbW	f	and Benjamin (will possess) Gilead.
	S	37	l arcyl ynb[ ] hzhAl j h' t[ ]gw	20a	And this company of Israelite exiles
			tprxAd [ ' µyn[ ]hKArva)	b	who are in Canaan as far as Zarephath;
		38	drpsBi rva) µ[ ]Wryd t[ ]gw	c	and the exiles from Jerusalem who are in
			.bg[h' yrd; taeWvrj]	d	will possess the towns of the Negev.
	T	39	:/Yxi rhB[ ] µy[ ]m W[ ]w	21a	And rescuers will go up on Mount Zion
			wc:[erhAta, fPw[ ]i	b	to govern the mountain of Esau.
			.hkllW Mh' hwhyl ' htyhw]	c	And the kingdom will belong to Yahweh.

### C THE AUTHOR AND AUDIENCE OF OBADIAH

Nothing is known about the author of the book other than that his name was possibly Obadiah<sup>18</sup>. He seems to have composed the book during the exilic period or shortly afterwards, since the emotional scars of the conquest of Jerusalem are still very deep<sup>19</sup>. The greater part of the book is presented as a

<sup>16</sup> Or 'that from which they have been dispossessed' if the hi part of vry is understood.

<sup>17</sup> The last few verses are also treated as poetry. This should be compared to Renkema's (2000:276) similar rendering based on pre-Masoretic Hebrew manuscripts and manuscripts of translations. Cf also the remark of Rudolph (1971:317) that v 21 can be read as a 4+3+3 tristich.

<sup>18</sup> It is not certain how the name was pronounced (Rudolph 1971:295). But it was a common name and is regarded by some as merely symbolic (Allen 1976:136). Robinson & Horst (1964:109) regards it as futile to get to know anything about the prophet, perhaps especially because he considers the book to be a collection of sayings.

<sup>19</sup> This can be seen inter alia in the detailed description of the fate of Jerusalem and its inhabitants when the city fell. The described crimes of the Edomites can also fit only into these circumstances. So also Rudolph (1971:298, 309). According to Watson (1986:40), the book should be dated together with Malachi in the post-exilic period

prophetic announcement of Yahweh addressed to Edom, a people living in the area to the east of the rift valley and south of the Dead Sea, more or less between the brook Zered and the Red Sea. However, although the book addresses Edom in the second person, the modern reader should not be fooled into thinking that the people of Edom were the primary intended audience (Allen 1976:147). The book is rather primarily an attempt at addressing the issues that troubled the people of Judah in the post-exilic period<sup>20</sup>, an attempt to console their feelings and convey a theological perspective to them rather than to threaten or warn the Edomites<sup>21</sup>. The people of Israel are therefore the implied audience. It was probably foreseen that the contents of the book would eventually become known to some Edomites, but the very existence of the document and its inclusion in the Hebrew Bible suggest that it had a purpose within the post-exilic Judaeans and more general Israelite society<sup>22</sup>. For that reason it is not necessary to detach the last part of the book that directly addresses the people of Judah or Israel from the first section that seems to address the Edomites<sup>23</sup>. A comparison of the epithets used in the book for the people of Edom and the people of Judah/Israel shows that these two peoples and the relationship between them form the focus:

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at about 450 BC. There are indeed similarities between Obadiah and Malachi (note the antagonism against Edom in *Mal* 1:3-4), but that what is prophesied by Obadiah (the destruction of Edom) is used as proof of Yahweh's covenant love in Malachi. Cf my article (Botha 2001:392-403). Wehrle (1987:255) notes that it seems that Edom became sparsely inhabited already during the Persian period because of the rise of Arabian tribes. He says (Wehrle 1987:255): 'Aus den spärlichen archäologischen Funden läßt sich zumindest die Erkenntnis gewinnen, daß mit dem ausgehenden 6. Jh. v. Chr. ein langsamer, aber steter Zerfall der edomitischen Kultur eintrat'.

<sup>20</sup> Rudolph (1971:297) argues convincingly that Obadiah vv 1-4 and 6 are older than the parallel verses in *Jr* 49, but that the Jeremiah parallels are post-exilic additions to Jeremiah and contribute nothing to the debate about the date of Obadiah.

<sup>21</sup> The address of Yahweh to Edom (עֲדוֹמָיִם) in v 1b is juxtaposed with the news 'we heard 'from Yahweh' in v 1c. The parallel text in *Jr* 49:14 has 'I heard' instead of 'we heard', and so has the LXX. But there is little doubt that MT is correct here and, as Ben Zvi (1996:31) remarks, it is more in accordance with the tendency found in Obadiah to 'grasp the attention of the (re)readers by means of ambiguity and probable lasting indeterminacy than those created by יָרִיבָהּ?.

<sup>22</sup> Cf 'this company of Israelite *exiles*' mentioned in v 20a.

<sup>23</sup> Rudolph, for instance (following Wellhausen), is certain that vv 1-14, 15b should be separated from vv 15a, 16-21 (Rudolph 1971:305 n 15a). He remarks that 'Diese Zweiteilung ist heute weithin anerkannt' (Rudolph 1971:296). One of his arguments is that 'in 1ff. sind die Angeredeten die Edomiter, in 16 die Juden' (Rudolph 1971:296). The fact that v 15 must be split up and rearranged – with a disregard for its poetic features – to fit this separation, already argues for caution against such a division.

	Edom	Judah
Epithets	Edom (1b); Esau (6a); Edom (8c); the mountain of Esau (8d); Teman (9a); the mountain of Esau (9b); the house of Esau (18c); the house of Esau (18f); the mountain of Esau (19a); Gilead (19e); the mountain of Esau (21b) <sup>24</sup> .	Jacob (10a); Jerusalem (11d); the people of Judah (12c); my people (13a); my holy mountain (16a); Mount Zion (17a); the house of Jacob (18a); the house of Joseph (18b); the Negev (19a); the Shephelah (19b); Benjamin (19e); this company of Israelite exiles (20a); who are in Canaan as far as Zarephath (20b); the exiles from Jerusalem who are in Sepharad (20c); the Negev (20d); Mount Zion (21a).

The people of Judah and Israel<sup>25</sup> who live in Jerusalem and the surrounding areas, but also further afield in Phoenicia (Zarephath) and in Asia Minor<sup>26</sup> (Sepharad), form the intended audience. The epithets furthermore seem to suggest two things: The historical or covenantal relationship between the two peoples plays an important role in the book and the topography of the two areas also seems to play an important role in its strategy. In support of the first statement the use of epithets referring to the ancestral brothers Esau and Jacob can be mentioned<sup>27</sup>, and in support of the second, the fourfold use of ‘mountain’ with regard to Edom and the two references to ‘Mount Zion’ with regard to Judah can be enumerated. The reference to the ‘Shephelah’, the foothills (v 19b), is also important in this regard since it has a connotation of ‘lower in honour’<sup>28</sup>.

<sup>24</sup> Note the importance of altitude in the epithets: Mount; mountain; and Shephelah. Mt Zion is approximately 800 m above sea-level and the highest peaks of Mt Seir in Edom are about 1700 m above sea level (Aharoni & Avi-Yonah 1968:map 8).

<sup>25</sup> ‘Joseph’ cannot be a mere parallel to ‘Jacob’. It is probably used together with ‘Jacob’ to refer to the northern tribes, as is the case in Ps 77:15 and Zch 10:6. Cf also Allen (1976:167).

<sup>26</sup> The best explanation of Sepharad is that it refers to Sardis, the capital of Lydia in the west of Asia Minor. Cf the evidence provided by Allen (1976:171). See also the discussion and references in Wehrle (1987:304-306). An Aramaic inscription seems to have proved the presence of a rich Jewish family in Daskyleion at 450 BC. Daskyleion was the neighbouring satrapy of Sparda (= Sepharad). The Jewish settlers in Sardis seem to have come from Babylonia and the ruins of a large synagogue that was excavated there, dating from at least the first century BC, indicates a strong Jewish presence there that must have originated centuries before (Wehrle 1987:306).

<sup>27</sup> Note also the reference to Judah as the ‘brother’ of Edom in v 10a. The tradition that the two peoples (Israel and Edom) are related because their lineage goes back to the brothers Jacob and Esau, is found in Gn 25:23. The strained relations between Israel and Edom during the exodus are mentioned in Nm 20:14-21.

<sup>28</sup> The head, height, and being high are generally associated with honour in the Bible, while the feet, being low, and prostrating oneself are generally associated with



From these epithets and the book as a whole, it is easy to establish the fact that the Edomites form the ‘out-group’ and the Israelites the ‘in-group’. Terms of endearment in the speech by Yahweh, like the epithets ‘my people’ and ‘my holy mountain’ as references respectively to the people of Judah and the temple mound in Jerusalem indicate the associative preferences of the author<sup>29</sup>. The author presumes that his audience shares certain particular traditions and beliefs with him. The most important of these are the belief in the future dominion of Yahweh (v 21c); the acceptance of the fact that land was promised to Israel (‘their inheritance’ in v 17d, cf also vv 19a, 19c, and 19d)<sup>30</sup>; and belief in the ability of Yahweh to inflict punishment on people who violate social codes of conduct through the *lex talionis*<sup>31</sup> (cf vv 15a-c).

The social situation of the implied audience is not very positive. This is not stated directly, but it is implied in the expectation that the Israelites who are far from home in Phoenicia and Mesopotamia will return to ‘inherit’ or ‘possess’ their rightful territory (including some adjacent areas). There is a dispute among scholars about how verse 19 should be understood. It is not sure who the subject of this particular phrase is. In general, however, the (re-) possessing should be seen as a process of extending the borders of the Holy Land towards the east, west, and northeast<sup>32</sup>. The Negev is more or less to the west of the ‘mountain of Esau’ which its inhabitants will possess; the Shephelah is directly to the east of the area of the Philistines to which it will be extended; and it will also be extended to the north into the area of Ephraim and Samaria (v 19cd); and Benjamin will extend its territory to Gilead in the Trans-Jordan on the east. On the other hand, the Israelites<sup>33</sup> living in exile in the north (Zarephath and as far as

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shame. The Shephelah is the hill country that forms the abrupt transition to the coast on the western side of Judah. As such it ranks lower in prominence than Jerusalem, but is also involved in the promise of status promotion. Cf Seeman (1998:166-170) on the concept of prominence and prominence reversal.

<sup>29</sup> As Ben-Zvi (1996:182) remarks, the in-group is characterised ‘from a Jerusalem/Zion centered perspective’.

<sup>30</sup> The root *vry* ‘ist außerdem beliebt in der dtn. – dtr. Sprache, wo sie mit den verschiedensten Objekten (bevorzugt mit *Āra*) vorkommt’. Wehrle (1987:287).

<sup>31</sup> Wehrle (1987:281) provides a very enlightening list of paradigmatic terms that are used in the Bible in connection with the syntagma (ū)var(b) b<sub>iv</sub>(y). Included are: (ū)lmg (Ob 15); l<sub>w</sub>mg (Jl 4:4, 7); μva (Nm 5:7); h[r (Jdg 9:57; 1 Sm 25:39; 1 Ki 2:44); μd (1 Ki 2:33); l m[ (Ps 7:17); hbvj m (Es 9:25); and hprj (Neh 3:36).

<sup>32</sup> So also Rudolph (1971:316), although he rearranges and changes the text to read in v 19c ‘und Jerusalem das Gefilde von Edom’ and v 20 to read ‘Aber die israelitischen Exulanten – das ist Chalach – werden das Land der Kananiter bis nach Sarepta in Besitz nehmen, und die Jerusalemer Exulanten, die in Sefarad sind, werden die Städte des Südländes in Besitz nehmen’.

<sup>33</sup> According to Wehrle (1987:301), the mentioning of the names Ephraim and Samaria in v 19 increases the probability that the l arvy ynb refers to the exiles of the northern kingdom.

Sepharad in Asia Minor) will possess the towns to the far south in the Negev. The picture painted by this vision is that very little of Judah is presently under the control of Israelites/Judaeans. Similarly, it can be concluded from verse 17d that Mount Zion is not ‘holy’ at the time of writing and that it needs to be ‘delivered’ according to verse 21a.

From the obvious desire (expressed as a prophecy of retribution for participating in the shaming of Judah) that Edom would be shamed in the presence of the ‘nations’ (vv 1d and 2a), one can possibly make the deduction that the in-group has not yet experienced any form of reparation.

#### **D THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN YAHWEH, EDM, ISRAEL, AND THE NATIONS**

The relationship between Yahweh and Edom is strained because of the breach of Edom’s relationship with Israel and with the people of Judah in particular. Edom is accused of being arrogant. Arrogance is registered when an individual or a body of people claim greater honour than the audience is willing to acknowledge<sup>34</sup>. The audience in this case is made up of Israel and the nations<sup>35</sup> and the claim to honour is expressed in the book through words from the semantic field of ‘high; being high; height’<sup>36</sup>, but also through words more obviously coming from the semantic fields of honour, arrogance and shame. The following quotes should illustrate the point: ‘I made you *small*<sup>37</sup> among the nations’ (v 2a); ‘utterly *despised*’ (v 2b); ‘The *pride* (עוֹדֵז) of your heart deceived you’ (v 3a); ‘you who live in the *clefts of the rocks*’<sup>38</sup> (v 3b); ‘in the *heights*’ (עוֹמֵר, v 3b)<sup>39</sup>; ‘who say in your heart: Who can *bring me down* (dry hi) to earth?’ (v 3cd); ‘I will *bring you down*’ (v 4c); ‘you soar like an *eagle*’ (v 4d); ‘your *nest* is made *among the stars*’ (v 4b); ‘you will be *covered with shame, destroyed* for ever’ (v 10b); and ‘you *opened your mouth wide*’ (v 12e). The root of this arrogant attitude is located in the (inaccessible) physical height of Mount Seir, described four times in the book as ‘the mountain of Esau’, in Edom’s tradition of having had many wise people

<sup>34</sup> ‘It is public opinion that determines a person’s reputation, for a person who claims honor that is not publicly recognized claims only vanity’ (Simkins 1994:49).

<sup>35</sup> Cf vv 1-2.

<sup>36</sup> According to Wehrle (1987:237), ‘So läßt sich in Obd 2-4 mit Hilfe semantischer Merkmale eine antonymische Anordnung von Lexemen feststellen, die vorwiegend auf den konträren Begriffen ‘tief vs hoch’ (oder umgekehrt) basiert’.

<sup>37</sup> Rudolph (1971:306) notes that ‘Kleinheit bedeutet die Dezimierung der Volkszahl, die Verachtung den Verlust der Ehre und des Ansehens ...’. In general, however, big also equalled honour and smallness shame. Cf for instance Job 3:19.

<sup>38</sup> Allen regards this as an allusion to Sela, Edom’s capital, which was situated on the high plateau of Umm el-Biyara (Allen 1976:147).

<sup>39</sup> Ben Zvi (1996:56) notes that עוֹמֵר ‘is often considered the place where YHWH (rightfully) “dwells” ... or as place that belongs to God ...’.

(v 8bc  $\mu\text{ymkj}$  and  $\text{hmbt}$ ) and brave soldiers (v 9a)<sup>40</sup>, and in their actions toward the people of Judah.

It seems that a covenantal relationship is supposed to have existed between Israel and Edom<sup>41</sup>. It is true that the word ‘covenant’ ( $\text{tyrb}$ ) is not used in Obadiah to describe the relationship between Edom and Israel, but this relationship is twice referred to as a *brotherhood*: Verse 10a speaks of the ‘slaughter’, the ‘violence against your *brother* Jacob’ and verse 12a refers to the ‘day of your *brother*’. This of course refers to the genealogical relationship between the two peoples, but such a relatedness necessitated compliance with a certain protocol irrespective of a history of animosity<sup>42</sup>. Allen comments that ‘Agreements between groups, as between individuals, were held to be sacrosanct and breaking them was viewed with abhorrence’<sup>43</sup>. According to Olyan (1996:204 n.2), one ‘might argue for a covenant context based on the presence of love/hate terminology, curse/blessing, the rhetoric of brotherhood, friendship, goodness, or some combination of these’. Besides these, the values of honour and shame are also closely associated with covenant contexts as Olyan illustrates in his article (Olyan 1996). Honour is gained through military victory and lost through defeat and exile, where it is replaced by shame (Olyan 1996:204). The inscription of shame often had the function of externalising nonconformity to covenant stipulations (Olyan 1996:205)<sup>44</sup>. It seems that lack of loyalty on the part of Edom to Judah would be punished and the Edomites reduced to shame through a military campaign. In this campaign, all the surrounding nations will take part (v 1 speaks of a messenger sent among the nations to call for war against Edom). But the people of Judah and Israel will play a more prominent part in this diminishing, since it is said that the house of Jacob will be a *fire* and the house of

<sup>40</sup> Honour is associated with a value cluster that includes strength, courage, daring, valour, generosity, and wisdom (Plevnik 1998:107).

<sup>41</sup> Wehrle (1987:320) remarks that it is not possible to deduce from the text of Obadiah itself that the book refers to a direct contravention of a treaty (‘ein regelrechter Vertragsbruch’), but that the possibility that this was the case increases if one considers a text like Jr 27:3ff together with the references in Obadiah. Jr 27 refers to the messengers from Ammon, Moab, Edom, Tyrus, and Sidon who visited king Zedekiah. Edom is mentioned first in this list.

<sup>42</sup> Rudolph (1971:318) says ‘Was das Verhalten der Edomiter so verdammenswert macht, ist die Tatsache, daß sie das Brudervolk Israels waren, durch Bande des Blutes mit ihnen verbunden, so daß ihre Handlungsweise nicht nur gegen die Menschlichkeit, sondern auch gegen den göttlichen Schöpferwillen verstieß und ihre Bestrafung eine gerechte göttliche Vergeltung war’.

<sup>43</sup> He (Allen 1976:151) also refers to the promise of retribution in Am 1:9 to those who forget ‘the covenant of brotherhood’.

<sup>44</sup> A well-known biblical example is the treatment of an unfaithful wife (cf Hs 2:1-12) and another is the treatment of rulers who contravened treaty stipulations (cf Hezekiah in Jr 52).

Joseph a *flame* and the house of Esau will be *stubble* (v 18)<sup>45</sup>. People from the Negev will also *occupy* the ‘mountain of Esau’ (v 19a).

The idea that the diminishment of Edom is related to a shaming because of a breach of covenantal relations or expected behaviour is strengthened by the mentioning of the fact that the *covenant partners* of Edom will participate in the conquest and shaming of Edom<sup>46</sup>. Verse 7 says that Edom’s ‘allies’ (òtyrb yvna), his ‘friends’ (òml v yvna), and those who ‘share his table’ (òmj l [yvna])<sup>47</sup> will not only participate, but will be the important instigators. They will force Edom’s people to his borders; their friends will deceive and overpower them, and they (the allies) will set a trap for the people of Edom without their detecting it.

Between Edom’s arrogance and eventual shaming came the atrocities against Judah and the shaming of the people of Judah in which Edom played an important role<sup>48</sup>. There is a contrast between the ‘strangers’ and ‘foreigners’ (v 11) who initiated the atrocities, and Edom, the ‘brother’ who at first passively witnessed the violence, but later took part in it and thus became like one of them (v 11e). Shame and eternal destruction are specifically linked to the participation of Edom in the ‘slaughter’ and ‘violence’ against his ‘brother’ (v 10).

One might ask: How is Yahweh’s honour concerned in the dispute between Israel and Edom? The answer to this is that ‘Israel’s claim to honor is its special relationship to the Lord’ (Plevnik 1998:108). National defeat, such as took place at the conquest of Jerusalem, usually was interpreted by the prophetic books as proof of God’s abandonment of his covenant people with resultant shame for Israel<sup>49</sup>. But national defeat would also lead to shame for Yahweh, since in the eyes of the victors he seems to have been unable to save Israel<sup>50</sup>. Yahweh’s honour is intertwined with that of Judah and Israel, since it is he who was seen to

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<sup>45</sup> The key terms ‘fire’ and ‘stubble’ often refer to God’s judgement in the Bible (Allen 1976:167). Cf Ex 15:7 (Pharaoh’s army) and Is 10:17 and 29:5f. (the Assyrian army). Allen (1976:167) also refers to Mt 3:12 and Lk 3:17 in this regard.

<sup>46</sup> Rudolph (1971:307) describes this as ‘Spiegelstrafe’: since the Edomites acted ‘unbrüderlich’ against Judah, they would experience the betrayal of their own treaty partners.

<sup>47</sup> ‘Your bread’ should be seen ‘als eine zusätzliche Ergänzung zu yvna von ùml v yvna’ (Wehrle 1987:246).

<sup>48</sup> The honour of Judah depended on their status as a nation in relation to their neighbours. The destruction of Judah is repeatedly described in the Bible as a source of shame while the absence of God was considered to be shameful since it demonstrated their vulnerability before the nations (Simkins 1994:51).

<sup>49</sup> Cf Ps 44:13-16, Plevnik (1998:108).

<sup>50</sup> Desecrating the temple of a people’s god was an appropriate way to show disrespect for their god and to shame them. Cf the destruction of the Jews’ place of worship in Elephantine as recorded in the papyri from there. Cf also Allen (1976:163).

control their existence<sup>51</sup>. Edom's participation in the shaming of Judah therefore is tantamount to mockery of Yahweh<sup>52</sup>. Military campaigns against a people were seen as a challenge to the honour of that people, but also as a challenge to the honour of their god or God<sup>53</sup>. For that reason, in order to reclaim<sup>54</sup> his honour, Yahweh will punish Edom and give dominion to the Israelites over the territory of Edom after the covenant relationship between himself and Israel has been repaired. And the shaming of Edom would go hand in hand with the restoration of honour for the people of Judah and Israel when they reclaim ownership of the promised land. When the temple is sanctified and rededicated and when the sovereignty belongs once more to Yahweh, satisfaction will be complete<sup>55</sup>.

There are thus two covenants involved: the treaty or protocol of expected behaviour between Edom and Judah, and the covenant of Yahweh with Israel. The destruction of Jerusalem and the temple has touched Yahweh also. That is why the deliverance and restoration of holiness on Mount Zion (v 17) are mentioned in parallel. And that is why it is Yahweh who will make Edom small and despised among the nations (v 2), who will bring them down from their nest 'among the stars' (v 4); but it is the house of Jacob and Joseph who will be the fire and the flame that consume Edom (v 18). In the end not only Edom, but also all nations will be judged by Yahweh. Israel will occupy the territory of Edom, but also that of the Philistines and Ammonites. Only when the kingdom belongs to Yahweh (v 21c) will Yahweh's honour be fully restored and will Israel regain its standing in the theatre of regional powers.

<sup>51</sup> Cf Malina (1981:38). The injustice against Judah is therefore also described as a 'drinking' of the people of Yahweh on his holy mountain (v 16a). The second person singular must refer to Edom as in v 15bc. If v 16's context is not removed from its vicinity as Rudolph and Allen do, this is evident. Cf a similar image in Ps 14:4 of the wicked who 'eat' up Yahweh's people. Ben Zvi (1996:181) has argued that v 16 is ambiguous on purpose: 'The texts clearly disallows a (re)reading that suggests an image of "all the nations" (except Edom) rejoicing continually, with no end seen. In fact, the plain claim of the text is that they (including Edom) will be utterly destroyed, according to the principle of reversal and of "tit for tat" retribution suggested elsewhere in the book. ... Had the first (re)reading path been allowed, then the connotation will be that the main, or at least, a main divide exists between "the nations" and Edom, rather than between Israel and "the nations".'

<sup>52</sup> For that reason, the words that imply Edom's arrogance are not simply inserted to warn Edom that they will not be able to hide in their mountain strongholds, but form part of the justification for the announcement of judgement (contra Rudolph (1971:306) who sees no connection in this regard between vv 2-9 and vv 10-14).

<sup>53</sup> That is why various nations are reprimanded in the Old Testament for arrogance against God (cf 2 Ki 19; Is 14; Jr 50-51; Ezk 26-28; 29-32. Cf also Robinson & Horst (1964:113).

<sup>54</sup> Or 'vindicate' (Allen 1976:163).

<sup>55</sup> The process of restoring the situation after the deprivation of honour is called 'satisfaction' or 'getting satisfaction' (Malina 1981:39).

## E THE STRATEGY AND PRAGMATIC AIMS OF OBADIAH

One of the most important strategies of the author of Obadiah is to counter-balance the shame of Judah during its destruction with the shame and destruction Edom will experience. The first ten verses are a description of Edom's arrogance and the expected shame his people will experience through the treachery of their allies. The theme of these verses can be described as 'haughtiness is punished with shame'. Every aspect of pride is balanced through an element of shame. He who boasts 'Who can bring me down to earth?' (v 3d) will be brought down by Yahweh (v 4c). His wealth will be pillaged and he will be ransacked (v 6). He who puts (μϣ) his nest between the stars (v 4b) will have snares laid (wmycy) for him (v 7e). The wise people who brought Edom honour will be destroyed (v 8bc) and the brave warriors will become terrified (v 9a). The climax comes in verse 10 where the reason for the punishment is provided (violence against a 'brother') and the effect of the campaign against Edom is summarised with the words 'you will be covered with shame and destroyed for ever'. This forms an envelope figure or *inclusio* with verse 2 where the coming shame was first mentioned<sup>56</sup>.

From verse 11 to verse 16, the author describes the role Edom played in the shaming of Judah in detail. What strikes the reader is the similarity between the detail of Judah's shame and Edom's coming destruction and shame<sup>57</sup>. As Judah's wealth was carried away by strangers and foreigners (v 11), with Edom taking part in the pillaging (v 13e), so Edom's hidden treasures will be ransacked and pillaged (v 6). Edom's greedy stretching out (hl v) of a hand to the property of Judah (v 13e) is answered with the sending (j | v) of a messenger who calls for war against Edom (v 1d) (Allen 1976:158). However, it will not be 'strangers' and 'foreigners' who do the damage to Edom as was the case with Judah (v 11); it will be their allies, friends, and treaty partners (v 7)<sup>58</sup>. Since Edom took part in cutting down the fugitives of Judah (v 14), every man from Edom will be cut down (v 9). Since Edom handed over the survivors of Judah to the enemy (v 14), Edom's allies will force his people to the border, perhaps driving them back when they come to seek help (v 7a, cf Allen 1976:151) so that there will be no survivors from Edom (v 18). Since he acted treacherously against his 'brother', his own allies will be responsible for his downfall, adding insult to injury (v 7).

Rhetorical techniques are used to good effect in the description of Edom's pending downfall. The author uses *rhetorical questions* to portray Edom's haughtiness (v 3 'Who can bring me down...?') as well as his complete destruction (vv 5-6, 8). In the latter case, some of the questions take the form of *cries of woe*<sup>59</sup>: 'How will you be destroyed...' (v 5); 'How will Esau be

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<sup>56</sup> So also Rudolph (1971:308).

<sup>57</sup> Also noted by others, for instance Rudolph (1971:305).

<sup>58</sup> The word 'your food' probably refers to a meal that was shared when a treaty was made. Cf Wehrle (1987:246-247).

<sup>59</sup> Cf Rudolph (1971:306-307): 'Das zweimalige Jya ist für das Klagelied typisch'.

ransacked ...' (v 6). This ensures a lively style<sup>60</sup>, portraying the contrast in mental attitude before and after disaster strikes the Edomites. In verses 11-16, the most important technique is that of *repetition*. The words or phrases that are repeated, are 'on the day' and words from the semantic field of calamity: 'his misfortune', 'their destruction', 'their trouble', 'their disaster', 'their calamity', 'their disaster', 'their disaster', and 'their trouble'. Behind the repetition of words and ideas, which serve as the backbone of this section of text, there is the gradual increase in the severity of the crime of which Edom is accused. The words that are repeated constitute 'a series of verbal hammerblows designed to drive the message vigorously home' (Allen 1976:156). The people of Edom are accused that they: 'Stood aloof', 'looked on', 'rejoiced', 'opened (their) mouth so wide', 'entered through the gates of my people', 'looked down on them', 'seized their wealth', 'waited at the crossroads to cut down their fugitives', 'have handed over their survivors'. At the end of this long list of crimes, the author or redactor repeats the verdict: 'As you have done, it will be done to you; your deeds will return upon your own head'. Verses 15 and 16 form a stanza of their own. This stanza refers to both the preceding and the following sections of text, but in a chiasmic way: verse 15ab introduces the theme of the judgement on all nations<sup>61</sup>, which is worked out in the second half of the prophetic composition; verse 16 is a concluding remark of the first half which describes Edom's crimes. But verse 16 can also only be understood *after* verse 15. The whole stanza is therefore designed to form a pivot between what precedes and what follows.

The strategy of the last section, verses 17-21, is to describe the restoration of the honour of Israel through repetition of the words 'and it will be' (vv 17x2; 18x2; 21) and the names of tribes and places connected with the verbs 'occupy' or 'possess'. The author makes a strong appeal on the covenantal promise of Israel inheriting a land of its own. This does not present an after-thought, but is integral to the social values of wholeness, holiness, and dyadism that all serve to restore and preserve honour.

Through these measures, the author provides an opportunity to the audience to contemplate the fate of Jerusalem and the people of Judah once again, but also to appreciate the prospect of seeing Edom retaliated in kind. Through making a comparison of what Edom has done with what his people will experience, he stresses the idea that justice according to the *lex talionis* will be done and that Yahweh will restore his own honour and that of his people by stepping in. In a world where honour was a limited commodity that could only be gained by diminishing the honour of someone else, Yahweh would rearrange the scales. His people would have satisfaction for the injustices that Edom did to them. They

<sup>60</sup> This is a technique of the author, not 'Ein isoliertes Fragment' originating from an unknown author as Robinson & Horst (1964:113) suggests.

<sup>61</sup> As Wehrle (1987:322) notes, there is also a link between the theme of war in v 1 and the theme of the day of Yahweh in v 15a, since this day was always seen as the beginning of a period of 'hereinbrechender Kämpfe und Auseinandersetzungen'.

would take possession of what was rightfully theirs. Their land would once again be whole. They would govern the area belonging to Edom. By shaming the Edomites among other nations, Yahweh would also restore his own honour. The temple in Jerusalem would once again be recognised as the holy quarters of Yahweh, the dominion would belong to him and he would make their land whole once more.

## F CONCLUSION

Through an analysis of the social context of Obadiah, it was established that the audience of the book had a common desire to see that Edom is punished and shamed in the international arena and that Israel's honour is restored. This desire was not born simply from a human search for vengeance. It was born from the belief that life could be meaningful only if Yahweh restored his honour and reign in the world and all the peoples of the ancient world acknowledged it. The honour of Yahweh and his people is not mentioned in one part of the poem only. Seen from a social perspective, all segments form an integrated whole with the same purpose of restoring wholeness, holiness, order, justice, and consequently honour.

The proof that Israel had been punished, that Yahweh had forgiven them, that he was still interested in them as his special people and Jerusalem as his special dwelling, would begin when Edom (and the nations) would be shamed and reduced to nothing. The author ensures his audience that this will indeed happen. In doing so, he confirms their trust in Yahweh as the righteous judge who will honour his covenantal obligations of giving his client Israel a land of their own and a rightful place among the nations. He assures them that Yahweh will punish Edom for tarnishing his honour, but eventually also all the nations<sup>62</sup>. Israel will consequently take possession<sup>63</sup> of all the surrounding areas, the exiles will return, Mount Zion will once again be sacred and the dominion will truly belong to Yahweh<sup>64</sup>. To the realisation of this new dispensation, the author dedicates his text.

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<sup>62</sup> The shift from judgement on Edom to an (eschatological) judgement of all nations does not imply that vv 15-18 should be dated much later. Even Rudolph (1971:313) who separates vv 1-14, 15b from vv 15a, 16-18, finds no reason to suppose another author or a different time for the origin of the more eschatological section. Rudolph (1971:313) acknowledges that 'allerlei Fäden' run to and fro between the two sections.

<sup>63</sup> Allen (1976:165) sees a play of sounds in the similarities of *וּבְרָיִם* and *מִיָּל וּבְרָיִם*.

<sup>64</sup> 'The fortunes of Jerusalem and the land of Israel are inextricably linked together. Worship in the temple of the holy city was the key to the blessing of the whole land.' (Allen 1976:165).



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Phil J Botha, Department of Ancient Languages, University of Pretoria, Pretoria 0002, South Africa. *E-mail*: phil.botha@up.ac.za