GÖRAN EIDEVALL

Prophecy and Propaganda

Images of Enemies in the Book of Isaiah

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Göran Eidevall

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1. On enemy images

> In the beginning we create the enemy. Before the weapon comes the image.[1]

This quotation, with its unmistakable biblical allusion, is taken from a seminal work written by Sam Keen, *Faces of the Enemy: Reflections of the Hostile Imagination*. The point made by Keen is that warfare presupposes the existence of enemies—or, to be more precise, the existence, within a group, of shared *images* of alleged enemies. Throughout the human history, such images have been created, spread, and maintained with the help of oral, written and pictorial propaganda. Important stages in this history of "the hostile imagination" have been documented by Keen, in his thought-provoking study.[2] Despite (or, perhaps, because of) the depressing and frightening character of much of the material, the author ends on a hopeful note, presenting a "potpurri of possibilities",[3] and advocating the abolition of enemy images and "the education of *Homo Amicus*."[4] However, during the decades following the publication of Keen's study, the worldwide production of propagandistic images of various enemies has continued, like an everflowing stream—with no signs of abating.[5] There are, sadly enough, good reasons to assume that the hostile imagination is

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[1] Keen (1986:10).

[2] Keen (1986:15-144). Keen's presentation spans over several centuries and a large number of cultures. Cf. also Wagenlehner (1989), with documentation and discussion of enemy images used in propaganda from World War II and its aftermath.

[3] Keen (1986:145-178, quote on p. 145).

[4] Keen (1986:183-189, quote on p. 183, emphasis as in the orig.)

[5] I will leave it to the reader, to make her/his own connections between theories, texts, and themes discussed in this study and political developments at the beginning of the 21th century.

deeply rooted in the human nature, and linked to some of the most basic mechanisms of group behaviour.[6] This has been well expressed by Keen:

> We human beings are *Homo hostilis*, the hostile species, the enemy-making animal. We are driven to fabricate an enemy as a scapegoat to bear the burden of our denied enmity. From the unconscious residue of our hostility, we create a target; from our private demons, we conjure a public enemy. And, perhaps, more than anything else, the wars we engage in are compulsive rituals, shadow dramas in which we continually try to kill those parts of ourselves we deny and despise.[7]

Although the phenomenon denoted by the concept ‘enemy image’ is of ancient, probably pre-historical, origin, the concept itself is a modern creation. In fact, the linguistic expression ‘enemy image’, representing an attempt to translate the German term *Feindbild*, is a neologism within the English language.[8] It has, however, become part of the academic terminology, and is nowadays used in the international discussion within several disciplines.

There is a vast literature on the subject of enemy images, above all within the fields of psychology and sociology. In addition to attribution theories[9] and ingroup/outgroup theories,[10] developed within social psychology, there are—to mention just a few examples—sociobiological theories,[11] and theories inspired by Jungian psychology, and in particular by Jung’s concept of “the shadow.”[12]

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[6] Cf. Rieber and Kelly (1991:7): “The logic of group action intertwines with the emotional needs of the individual under stress to produce a shared image of the enemy.”

[7] Keen (1986:10-11).

[8] Originally, the German term *Feindbild* seems to stem from military vocabulary. See Schmal (1995:17-18). An alternative English translation, “image of (the) enemy”, is also used in scholarly discussions.

[9] On attribution theory, see, e.g., Kelley and Michela (1980), or almost any handbook in psychology. For applications in the study of enemy images, see, e.g., Silverstein and Flamenbaum (1989) and Sande et al. (1989). See also Bathurst (1993:1-22) and Ottosen (1994:84-86), the latter relating the theory propounded by Lee Ross.

[10] For a discussion of the relevance of ingroup/outgroup theories for the study of enemy images, and for further references to literature see Fiebig-von Hase (1997:15-19) and Schmal (1995:19-24).

[11] See Spillmann and Spillmann (1997).

[12] On the “shadow” (*Schatten*), see Jung (1951:22-26, cf. also 1957:29-34). On its use in theories about enemy images, see Rieber and Kelly (1991). The following definition of the Jungian concept of the shadow is given by Rieber and Kelly (1991:10): “It consists of all those inclinations which do not fit the image of the persona and are thus

In the following, I will not make any attempt to cover the history of research or the current scholarly debate.[13] In place of a detailed theoretical introduction, I will discuss a couple of definitions, in order to clarify how I intend to use the term 'enemy image' in this study.

In her introduction to the anthology *Enemy Images in the American History*,[14] Ragnhild Fiebig-von Hase has offered the following definition:

> [A]n enemy image is a culturally influenced, very negative, and stereotyped evaluation of the 'other'—be it individuals, groups, nations, or ideologies. 'Others' are classified as 'enemies' if their appearance is coupled with some extreme threat perception.[15]

This definition underlines that, basically, enemy images can be seen as a special kind of images of "the other(s)."[16] The distinctive features of this subcategory, the factors that, so to speak, transform "the other" into "the enemy" are:

(1) *Negative stereotypes* (which may not correspond at all to the actual attitudes and behaviour of the group or individual in question).[17]

(2) The notion of a *perceived threat* (rather than the "objective" existence of a "real" threat).[18]

All kinds of "bad" traits and values can be attributed to (or projected onto) others, in the process of "enmification."[19] In the words of Keen, "[w]hatever a

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suppressed—and projected." Cf. also Keen (1986:11-13). Others take their point of departure in Freud's theories. See, e.g., Kennedy (1997).

[13] For helpful surveys, see Fiebig-von Hase (1997) and Silverstein and Holt (1989). Cf. also Holt and Silverstein (1989), and Ottosen (1994:84-91).

[14] Fiebig-von Hase and Lehmkuhl (1997).

[15] Fiebig-von Hase (1997:2).

[16] Cf. Kennedy (1997:349): "we might say that all enemies are others, but not all others are enemies. To this it might be added that the degree of otherness does not in and of itself determine the degree of enmity."

[17] Stereotypes are cognitive schemata which are not quickly or easily altered by new information. They are the building blocks that prejudices are made of. On stereotypes, as related to enemy images, see Fiebig-von Hase (1997:7-8) and Schmal (1995:15-17). On prejudices, see the classical study by Gordon Allport (1954) and the contributions in Karsten (1978). Cf. also Eiser (1986:125-170).

[18] As pointed out by Kennedy (1997:340-341), referring to George Kennan, "'enmity' has little or nothing to do with objective reality " (1997:340). Kennedy adds: "Rather, it has everything to do with the internal political requirements of the group that, in effect, 'invents' its enemy" (1997:341).

society considers bad, wrong, taboo, profane, dirty, desecrated, inhumane, impure, will make up the epithets assigned to the enemy."[20] Hence, "enemies" are, almost by definition, (thought to be) what "we" are *not*. Several writers on the subject have stressed the function of enemy images in the process of *identity construction*.[21] There is, in other words, an interesting relation between enemy image and (collective) *self-image*.[22] It is, further, of vital importance to recognize the political and *ideological* functions of enemy images. As pointed out by Fiebig-von Hase, "the image of an external enemy can help to legitimize the power structure of a state and enforce the loyalty of its citizens."[23]

At this point, I find it appropriate to cite another definition of 'enemy image', in order to supplement (but by no means supplant) the one that was cited above:

> An enemy image is a negative, stereotype description of a nation/state, religion/ideology, or a regime/leader. The enemy image is expressed through the use of metaphors and images, or by means of other verbal, visual or graphic effects which create expectations of inhuman, aggressive, or hostile actions.[24]

This definition, borrowed from Rune Ottosen, has several advantages. It emphasizes the propagandistic use of enemy images in various contexts. In addition, it mentions a number of means whereby such images are communicated. Among these, I would like to stress the importance of

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[19] The term "enmification" has been introduced by Rieber and Kelly (1991:4, n.1, cf. also on p. 6).

[20] Keen (1986:28). Cf. also Silverstein and Flamenbaum (1989:53, emphasis as in the orig.): "The basic process whereby established enemy images affect subsequent perception and cognition is quite simple: *Whenever there is ambiguity, assume the worst about the enemy*."

[21] See, e.g., Sande et al. (1989) and Schmal (1995:18).

[22] Kennedy (1997:355) refers to "Freud's notion that there is a relationship between self-imagery, or identity, and enemy imagery." Cf. also Rieber and Kelly (1991), who speak of "a process of self-inflation", where "the inflated self wants to know only its virtues; its vices are relegated to some nether world. There they readily form the raw material for projections onto the image of one's enemies, real or imagined" (1991:11).

[23] Fiebig-von Hase (1997:3). Cf. similarly Rieber and Kelly (1991:12): "the internal organization of a society, its authority structures and its legitimizing myths, can exercise a decisive role in the process of enmification. In general, the less coherent a society's values, and the less secure the position of its leadership, the more virulent its appeal to processes of enmification."

[24] Ottosen (1994:103), in my own translation of Ottosen's Norwegian text.

metaphors.[25] A rich variety of metaphorical vehicles can be used. The main types used in war propaganda have been listed by Robert Ivie, who found that enemies have been described "as if they were snakes, wolves, and other kinds of dangerous predators, and as if they were primitives, brutes, barbarians, mindless machines, criminals, lunatics, fanatics, and the enemies of God."[26]

The metaphorical representations used in propagandistic enemy images are peculiar, in several respects. I will summarize some central aspects with the help of two key concepts. The first one is *distortion*.[27] As a rule, proportions are manipulated, in one direction or the other—depending on situation and purpose. Sometimes it may seem necessary to picture the enemy as superior (in strength and ferocity, and/or in numbers), but in most cases the allegedly hostile "others" are depicted as inferior (also in the sense of being morally inferior).[28] This has to do with one of the primary psychological functions served by enemy images in warfare: to facilitate the act of killing.[29] Some of the most efficient techniques that have been developed to attain that goal, are closely connected to the second key concept, *dehumanization*.[30] This means that the status (and value) of an allegedly hostile and dangerous group of human beings, is reduced to a, so to speak, sub-human level. The adversaries can be spoken of, or depicted graphically, as if they were dispensable things, or as if they belonged to some despised animal species that ought to be exterminated (rats, snakes, insects, etc, varying from culture to culture).[31] The enemy is thus deprived of all human

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[25] For a detailed discussion of modern metaphor theories and their relevance for biblical studies, see Eidevall (1996:19-49). On the use of metaphors in the construction of enemy images, see Ivie (1990a and 1990b). Cf. also Ottosen (1994:104-105).

[26] Ivie (1990a, quote on p. 74). Cf. also Ivie (1990b).

[27] On distortion as a key element in enemy images, see, e.g., Silverstein and Flamenbaum (1991:52-53). Cf. also Fiebig-von Hase (1997:8).

[28] These two seemingly contradictory processes, where the strength of the enemy is either magnified or diminished, should be regarded as complementary. Cf. Keen (1986:44): "The barbarous enemy is likely to be portrayed as either larger or smaller than normal." Cf. further Eckhardt (1991:88): "Enemy images are most readily adopted by those who most need to feel superior to others, because enemy images, which necessarily make the enemy seem inferior—and especially morally inferior (bad or evil)—fill this need most admirably."

[29] See, e.g., Eckhardt (1991).

[30] On the crucial role of dehumanization in propagandistic enemy images, see Keen (1986:12-13, 24-26). Cf. also Rieber and Kelly (1991:15-17, quote on p. 15): "… the element of dehumanization…is the ultimate omega point for all forms of enmification."

[31] Cf. Keen (1986:61): "The lower down in the animal phyla the images descend, the greater sanction is given to the soldier to become a mere exterminator of pests."

dignity. At the same time, however, the battle becomes less heroic.[32] For that reason, propagandists often use the related method of *demonization*, foregrounding the immensely dangerous and uncannily evil character of the adversaries.[33] Alternatively, the enemies can be likened to destructive, "decivilizing", natural forces, such as storms and floods.[34] In all these cases, however, one factor remains constant: The enemy is depicted as, in some sense, non-human (or: not really human).

In this study, the term 'enemy image' will henceforth be used as a way of referring to *textual (or, sometimes, pictorial) descriptions of groups or nations, where negative, stereotype characterization is combined with the notion of a perceived threat*.

1.2. Enemy images in texts from the Ancient Near East

In a study which takes interest in historical matters, like the present one, the texts from the Hebrew Bible need to be related to their wider Ancient Near Eastern context. As will be demonstrated, comparisons with relevant extra-biblical texts, containing similar depictions of enemies, are in some cases capable of shedding new light on the enemy images found in the book of Isaiah. However, the vast literature from different cultures in the Ancient Near East should not be reduced to a store of potential "parallels" to difficult biblical passages. Texts from Egypt, Assyria, and other ANE cultures, must be interpreted on their own premises. As an isolated enterprise, the identification of similar expressions in otherwise disparate texts may at times seem rather pointless. What interests me, in the first place, is the possibility to compare the ideological perspective of the texts in Isaiah (as reconstructed by myself), with ideological perspectives from other ANE cultures (as reconstructed by other scholars). Are they related, at all? How can the relationship be described, in terms of contrast and continuity? In that perspective, some extra-biblical texts become more interesting than others.

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[32] Cf. Keen (1986:61): "The use of bestial images seems initially to be one of the better ways of dehumanizing an enemy because it allows soldiers to kill without incurring guilt. But the problem is that it allows the warrior-became-exterminator little sense of dignity or pride in his skill in battle."

[33] On demonizing enemy images, see Keen (1986:109-112). Cf. also Fiebig-von Hase (1997:11) and Ottosen (1994:89-91).

[34] Ivie (1990a:74) speaks of "decivilizing terms that categorize the enemy with natural menaces such as floods, tides, cold winds, and fire."

In order to avoid complete arbitrariness, comparisons should be made between roughly contemporaneous texts, which originated in cultures that had contact with each other. Preferably, these texts should also belong to closely acquainted genres. It goes without saying that prophetic texts dating from the 8th century BCE and onwards are particularly interesting, in this case. However, royal inscriptions and other instances of official propaganda can be regarded as equally relevant. For the purposes of the present investigation, a further requirement can be added, as regards the texts selected for comparisons: The extra-biblical texts should, ideally, be drawn from the very culture/nation that is being depicted as "hostile" in the biblical passage studied. Then it becomes possible to address the following questions: Does the biblical text contain allusions to ideas, customs, or events associated with that specific nation/culture? Does it even allude to specific texts? Can it be understood as a deliberate response to propaganda emanating from the nation which it describes as an enemy? In most cases, however, the possibilities to answer such questions are utterly restricted.

Research on ANE enemy images has only begun. Vast areas remain unexplored. No monographs on the subject have as yet appeared. Broad, systematical, studies, informed by modern theories concerning enemy images, are called for. Nevertheless, I have been able to profit from a number of valuable studies, dealing with various aspects of the subject. Below, I will offer a brief survey for each of the major cultures/empires. I will mention the main primary and secondary sources which I have used as resources. In some cases, I will also indicate in what respect they have aided me in my tentative attempts to reconstruct relevant contexts, inter-texts, and ideological frameworks for the study of enemy images in the book of Isaiah.

Egypt

Depictions of various enemies are found in a large number of royal inscriptions and other official documents from Ancient Egypt. Some of these passages have been commented by Lori Rowlett, in the context of a discussion on "conventional language of war in the Ancient Near East."[35] Several works have been written on Egyptian ideology and theology.[36] However, as far as I know, the only major study dealing with enemy images in ancient Egyptian literature is Zandee's work on images of "death as an enemy."[37] Moreover, only a small

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[35] See Rowlett (1996:71-120 [Egypt: pp. 76-87], quote on p. 71).

[36] See, e.g., Assmann (1995) and Hornung (1982 [1971]). Cf. also Frankfort (1948).

[37] Due to its special topic (which excludes political enemies), and its textual basis (mostly ritual texts), the otherwise excellent work of Zandee (1960) is only of marginal relevance in this context. A brief, but helpful survey of Egyptian enemy depictions is

amount of the potentially relevant texts can be regarded as roughly contemporaneous with the oracles in the book of Isaiah. In one of these texts, *The Victory Stela of King Piye* (25th dynasty, end of 8th century BCE), the protagonist (Piye) is depicted as panther-like in his rage, whereas his adversary, Tefnakht, is portrayed as a coward, speaking “cajoling words.”[38] On another victory stela, that of Psamtik II (beginning of the 6th century BCE), the Nubians are described as rebels, “full of rage.”[39]

Assyria

During the last decades, the ideological dimensions of the literary and iconographic remains from the Assyrian empire have been explored from various angles. Important contributions to our understanding of the official Assyrian worldview and self-image have been made by, among others, Liverani and Machinist.[40] The Assyrian war ideology has been discussed by Rowlett.[41] Recently, several scholars have taken an interest in the propagandistic use of pictorial and glyptic art.[42] For instance, both Barbara Porter and Christoph Uehlinger have analyzed different aspects of the “figurative policy” (Uehlinger) during the reign of king Esarhaddon.[43] In the following, however, I will mainly discuss the extant textual sources, and some scholarly studies relating to the enemy images found in them.

Mention must, first of all, be made of the corpus of Neo-Assyrian oracles, which was found in the royal archives of Nineveh.[44] This collection of prophetic texts from the reigns of Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal in the 7th century BCE offers unique comparative material for the study of the prophetic literature in the

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provided in the article on ‘Feindsymbolik’ by Wilding (1977). Mention should further be made of an interesting work by Schoske (1996), focusing on Egyptian pictorial representations of defeated enemies.

[38] Lichtheim (1980:66-84, quote on p. 79.).

[39] Lichtheim (1980:85).

[40] See Liverani (1979) and Machinist (1993). Cf. also Pongratz-Leisten (2001 and 1994:7-36) and Tadmor (1981).

[41] See Rowlett (1996:100-120, 181-183).

[42] See, e.g., Berlejung (1998), Seidl (2000), and Winter (2000). Cf. also the remaining contributions in Uehlinger (2000).

[43] See Porter (1993) and Uehlinger (1997).

[44] The complete collection of “Assyrian prophecies” (some of them had already been published separately), was first published by Parpola (1997). This collection is usually referred to as SAA 9. A new translation of these “Nineveh oracles” is now available in Nissinen (2003:97-132). For an introduction to various issues related to the oracles, including a brief discussion of the historical contexts and a speculative reconstruction of the underlying religious doctrines, see Parpola (1997:xiii-lxxi). On the socio-religious context of the oracles, see Nissinen (2000b).

HB, including the Isaianic collection of oracles.[45] A number of interesting enemy images can be found in these Assyrian prophecies. To cite just a few examples from an oracle delivered to Esarhaddon by a (female?) prophet, speaking in the name of Ishtar of Arbela: "Your enemies will roll before your feet like ripe apples…I will flay your enemies and give them to you."[46] In another oracle, the enemies—probably Esarhaddon's adversaries in the domestic power struggle—are depicted as some kind of rodents.[47] However, only in a few cases can descriptions of enemies in the book of Isaiah be elucidated by formulations in the Neo-Assyrian oracles.[48]

An even more important resource for the study of imperial ideology in general, and enemy images in particular, is provided by the extensive body of Assyrian official documents. Above all, the royal inscriptions contain numerous depictions of nations and rulers that were considered foes of the Assyrian state. Central traits in the characterization of these adversaries have been described and discussed by Fales and Zaccagnini, in two brief but truly pioneering studies.[49] Although the Assyrian scribes often included observations regarding distinctive ethnic traits and cultural habits of other peoples in the reports, the descriptions of various enemies follow an established pattern.[50] As remarked by Fales, the adversaries seem to be virtually exchangeable.[51] Attitudes that were regarded as improper or intolerable were regularly attributed to the enemies. The following standardized *topoi* in the enemy images of the royal inscriptions were identified by Zaccagnini: "the enemy as a rebel, as an impious, unrighteous and unfaithful subject, as a coward."[52] Additional recurring motifs have been recorded by Fales. According to Fales, the typical enemy is depicted as "insubmissive" and "insolent", and as trusting "in human or natural factors to

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[45] Arguably, the temporal proximity makes the Neo-Assyrian oracles even more useful to biblical scholars than the prophetic texts among the Mari letters. The latter are now also available in Nissinen (2003:13-77). On the relevance of the Neo-Assyrian oracles for the study of prophetic texts in the HB, see Nissinen (1993). See also Weippert (1981, 1985, and 1988).

[46] SAA 9.1, lines 8-10, 19-20, cited from the translation in Parpola (1997:4).

[47] SAA 9.7, lines 3-7. The identification of the animal species mentioned is uncertain. While Parpola (1997:9) translates as follows, "I will cut the conspiring weasels and shrews to pieces before his feet," Nissinen (2003:108) suggests "conspiring polecats and rats."

[48] See, e.g., the analyses of Isa 7:20 and 14:29, in ch. 2.2. below.

[49] See Fales (1982) and Zaccagnini (1982).

[50] Cf. Zaccagnini (1982:417-418).

[51] Fales (1982:425) formulates it thus: "there is only one Enemy."

[52] Zaccagnini (1982:410).

oppose Assyria."[53] In addition, he is seen as "treacherous…wicked; hostile; rebellious; murderous; an outlaw."[54]

There is a far-reaching continuity between Sumerian, Old Babylonian, and Assyrian ideological traditions. Recently, Beate Pongratz-Leisten has demonstrated that one may speak of a Mesopotamian tradition regarding conceptions of "the other" and of "the enemy."[55] In her analysis of enemy images in both Sumerian and Assyrian texts, she discusses the prominent features of "mythologization" and "dehumanization."[56]

Similes and metaphors employed in the Assyrian depictions of different enemies have been listed and commented by Simonetta Ponchia.[57] The examples cited by Ponchia include portraits of enemies as slaughtered sheep, crushed ants, swarming locusts, and fleeing birds. The scribes appear indeed to have had a predilection for animal metaphors.[58] In many cases, this should probably be understood as a dehumanizing technique, common in war propaganda. According to Mario Liverani, the fact that war, in the official Assyrian sources, often "assumes…hunting aspects", may be "due in particular to the sub-human, animal-like character of the enemy."[59]

For the purposes of this investigation, an article written by Peter Machinist, "Assyria and Its Image in First Isaiah", is of special interest.[60] In this article, Machinist introduces a fresh methodological approach, focusing on possible echoes and reworkings of Assyrian propaganda in a number of oracles in chapters 1–39 in Isaiah.[61] Some of Machinist's results and hypotheses will be

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[53] Fales (1982:428).

[54] Fales (1982:429).

[55] Pongratz-Leisten (2001).

[56] Mythologizing, dehumanizing, and demonizing aspects of Assyrian enemy images are elucidated by Pongratz-Leisten (2001:224-230). In this context, mythologization entails that the enemies are viewed as threats against the cosmic order. For a discussion of the function of dehumanizing images, see Pongratz-Leisten (2001:207-209).

[57] See Ponchia (1987:233-245).

[58] A large amount of animal similes and metaphors have been recorded by Marcus (1977). For a more extensive survey of metaphorical expressions in the royal inscriptions, see Schott (1926).

[59] Liverani (1979:312).

[60] Machinist (1983).

[61] In some cases, Machinist concludes, the prophetic writer "sought to deflect and rework the Assyrian propaganda he encountered" (1983:734). In his textual analyses, Machinist moves from examples that seem to reproduce Assyrian propaganda (1983:722-724) to instances bearing the stamp of creative reworking (1983:726-728). Futher, Machinist (1983:729-733) adduces arguments for the view that it is likely that central

discussed in the course of my ensuing analyses of Isaianic oracles dealing with Assyria.

Babylon(ia)

Babylon (the city, the empire, and/or its ruler) is the target of some of the most uncompromising and spectacular enemy images in Isaiah (see Isa 13:1–14:23; 47:1-15). The scarcity of immediately useful comparative Neo-Babylonian texts that contain elaborated enemy images must therefore be regarded as a major difficulty. A certain "apolitical tenor" can, moreover be seen as characteristic for the royal inscriptions.[62] As a consequence, scholarly studies dealing with the ideology of the Neo-Babylonian empire, or with its enemy images, are more rare than in the case of the Assyrian empire. However, these issues have recently been treated by D.S. Vanderhooft, in his valuable work, *The Neo-Babylonian Empire and Babylon in the Latter Prophets*.[63] Outlining the main contours of the official Neo-Babylonian ideology, Vanderhooft demonstrates that it differed from the Assyrian tradition in several respects.[64] Among the central tenets in this distinctly Babylonian ideology, one finds the ruler's (especially Nebuchadnezzar's) claim to be the "protector of humanity",[65] as well as the notion of Babylon as the "center of the world."[66] References to enemies are, as a rule, general and formulaic. Vanderhooft suggests that "concrete data about particular foes of the state" may have been left out for ideological reasons, "because the legitimate king who fulfils the task of the gods and is granted rule over all humanity…cannot have rivals or enemies."[67]

Vanderhooft's work is, moreover, of immediate relevance to the exegetical part of the present investigation, since it contains analyses of a wide range of passages from the prophetic books in the HB. His method can be called comparative, since he studies both Babylonian and biblical images of the Neo-

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motifs in the Assyrian propaganda, whether communicated orally or via written and visual media, were known in pre-exilic Judah.

[62] Vanderhooft (1999:40).

[63] Vanderhooft (1999). On Babylonian ideology, see esp. pp. 8-51. For references to a few previous works of some relevance, see n.4 on p.3.

[64] See Vanderhooft (1999:51): "it is reasonable to conclude that the Babylonians were not indebted to Assyrian ideas of empire. On the contrary, they took pains to avoid such ideas. The degree of continuity between Assyria and Babylonia in military and administrative procedures is quite another issue…" The Old Babylonian era seems to have been a primary source of inspiration. According to Vanderhooft (1999:50), the Neo-Babylonian scribes "drew heavily on language and ideas from the dynasty of Hammurapi."

[65] Vanderhooft (1999:41-45, quote on p. 41).

[66] Vanderhooft (1999:45-49, quote on p. 45).

[67] Vanderhooft (1999:49)

Babylonian empire, as they are reflected in two different sets of propagandistic literature. However, Vanderhooft's approach differs from traditional comparative studies. He treats the biblical texts as responses to Babylonian praxis and ideology, reflecting or challenging the imperial self-image disseminated by the Babylonian propaganda.[68] Some of Vanderhooft's results and hypotheses will be discussed in the course of my analyses of texts in Isaiah that contain images of Babylon(ia).

Persia

Not one single text within the Isaianic corpus describes Persia as an enemy. Hence, the scarcity of potentially relevant Persian texts might perhaps be regarded as a minor problem.[69] However, since the editing of the book of Isaiah, and the writing of substantial parts of the book, took place during the Persian era, it is necessary to examine the extent of Persian influence. While some ostensively pro-Persian oracles, as well as the anti-Babylonian passages, may echo Persian propaganda, there is also the possibility that other post-exilic passages criticize Persia in a covert fashion. As a consequence, issues pertaining to Achaemenid ideology are of importance for this investigation. Some recent studies of such issues draw exclusively on iconographical material.[70] The chapter on royal ideology in Pierre Briant's history of the Persian empire, which is based primarily upon documents and reliefs from the reign of Darius I, shows that the king's enemies were typically depicted as hunted animals.[71]

Greece

Greece may, as part of the Eastern Mediterranean cultural sphere, be included in an extended version of the Ancient Near East concept. However, Greece is not mentioned in the book of Isaiah. It is, moreover, unlikely that the prophetic writers were influenced by Greek official propaganda. Still, I have found Stephan Schmal's *Feindbilder bei den frühen Griechen* very useful.[72] Schmal

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[68] See Vanderhooft (1999:1-7, 203-209). Vanderhooft (1999:2) describes his project as follows: "…this study investigates Babylonian imperialism from two complementary perspectives: from native sources, which project the Babylonian imperial self-portrait, and from the writings of the biblical prophets, which provide a portrait from the perspective of a subjugated population." Vanderhooft's approach is obviously inspired by the work of Machinist. This indebtedness is acknowledged by Vanderhooft (1999:2).

[69] A number of propagandistic royal inscriptions—e.g., Darius I's inscription at Behistun—are certainly of some relevance.

[70] See Garrison (2000) and Nunn (2000).

[71] Briant (1996:217-265).

[72] Schmal (1995).

offers a valuable theoretical discussion on enemy images and related concepts.[73] In addition, his analyses of (more or less) propagandistic texts, issuing in discussions of *Barbarenbild* (images of the Persians as barbarians) and *Spartanerbild* (images of Sparta, produced in Athens) represent an important advance towards a methodology for the study of enemy images in ancient texts.[74] Some of Schmal's conclusions, especially concerning the connections between enemy images and the (trans)formation of national identity, seem to be generally applicable.[75]

1.3. Enemy images and biblical exegesis: Perspectives on previous research

The scholarly discussion on images of "enemies" in the Hebrew Bible (HB) has been almost exclusively concentrated to issues pertaining to one particular biblical book, viz. the Psalter. During the first decades of the 20th century, the following question was at the centre of the debate: Who were the enigmatic enemies that are mentioned in the Psalms? More precisely, the interest was limited to one *Gattung*, the individual psalms of lament. (In the communal laments, the enemies are often easily identified as hostile nations.) Numerous theories have been propounded and defended. It has thus been suggested that the adversaries that allegedly attacked and mocked the speaking "I" were demons, sorcerers practising black magic, members of a hellenizing party in the Maccabean period, hostile armies, or, more down to earth, malevolent persons in the supplicant's neighbourhood.[76] Perhaps needless to point out, no consensus has been reached. It is likely that these prayers, far from being accurate

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[73] Schmal (1995:9-40).

[74] See Schmal (1995:74-247).

[75] Cf. Schmal (1995:258): "In vielen Facetten…scheint das Feindbilddenken einen nicht unwesentlichen Beitrag zur Standortbestimmung und Orientierung einer sich wandelnden Gesellschaft geleistet zu haben." Cf. also the following comment on basic, recurring patterns in the enemy images studied by Schmal: "Dahinter steht das offensichtliche Bemühen, sich selbst abzugrenzen und aus dem Anderen ein Gegenbild zur eigenen Seite herauszulesen bzw. dieses dort hineinprojizieren" (1995:247).

[76] For summaries of this debate, see Anderson (1965/66), Kraus (1992:125-136), and Ringgren (1977:126-128). Cf. also Keel (1969:11-33). According to Mowinckel (1951 and 1982), the enemies were either sorcerers or demons. One of Mowinckel's students, Birkeland (1933 and 1955) argued that the "I" in the so-called individual psalms represented the people, and that all enemies mentioned were to be understood as hostile nations.

descriptions of one specific situation, were intended for continual re-use in shifting situations.[77] At any rate, because of the standardized, formulaic, and heavily metaphorical language, every quest for ascertained reference and identity is probably bound to fail.[78]

Using scientific methods, we cannot determine whether the psalmist's enemies actually *were* demons. It is, however, possible, to determine whether they are *described in terms of* such destructive and fiendish forces—that is, to examine the rhetorical feature of *demonizing* the enemies (whoever they once might have been). Within the exegetical study of the Psalms, and generally, it is necessary to move from the elusive *enemy* (the question: Who?) to the tangible *image* (the question: How?).[79] A first important step in that direction was taken by Othmar Keel, in his book *Feinde und Gottesleugner: Studien zum Image der Widersacher in den Individualpsalmen*.[80] In this ground-breaking work, Keel brought such notions as enemy image, self-image, projection, and "shadow" (Jung) into the field of biblical studies.[81] In a later work, Keel has juxtaposed biblical enemy depictions with ANE iconographic material, in a rather illuminating way.[82] Throughout, however, Keel's main focus has been on the so-called individual psalms.

This focus on the Psalter has been retained in the most recent contributions to the discussion on enemy images in the HB. Important hermeneutical issues, related to the interpretation of such passages in the Psalms, have been addressed by Bernd Janowski.[83] In a truly impressive work, Peter Riede has analyzed all metaphorical depictions of enemies in the Psalms, uncovering their background and discussing their function.[84]

What about the rest of the Hebrew Bible? So far, no major studies treating enemy images in the Pentateuch, the Deuteronomistic History, or the prophetic

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[77] See, e.g., Lindström (1994:49-51).

[78] Thus already Widengren (1936:203). See further, e.g., Miller (1986:48-52) and Ringgren (1977:217-218).

[79] Cf. similarly Riede (2000:5).

[80] Keel (1969).

[81] See Keel (1969:36-60, esp. pp. 51-63). As to the relation between enemy image and self-image, cf. the following remark: "Es ist auffallend, wie sehr das Bild, das die Beter von Ps 22; 41 und 55 von ihrer treulosen Umwelt entwerfen, mit ihrer Selbstdarstellung korrespondiert" (Keel 1969:147).

[82] Keel (1984.68-97).

[83] Janowski (1995). Cf. also the discussion on similar hermeneutical issues in Zenger (1993, see esp. pp. vii-viii on the function of enemy images).

[84] Riede (2000).

literature, have appeared.[85] The present volume is thus intended to fill a gap (one gap of many). It would, however, be misleading to speak of a void. Much relevant research has in fact been done, but often without recourse to theories concerning enemy images. Some scholars have studied how neighbouring nations are described by the biblical authors.[86] Even more important for the present work are some recent studies of prophetic portraits of the Neo-Babylonian empire. Besides Vanderhooft's broad study of such images,[87] which has already been discussed, mention should be made of John Hill's study of Babylon images in the book of Jeremiah.[88] In addition, portrayals of empires and nations in the book of Isaiah have been discussed by several scholars.[89] Finally, some studies discussing the background and function of the sub-genre "oracles against the nations" are of relevance for this investigation into enemy images in the book of Isaiah.[90]

1.4. On the book of Isaiah as object of the investigation

My main reason for choosing the book of Isaiah (BI) as object for the present investigation, is that this prophetic book can be described as a rich repository for enemy images. A wide spectrum of adversaries are being depicted or addressed. One finds a large number of interesting portraits of other nations, ranging from mighty empires to relatively small neighbouring states. There are named as well as unnamed enemies. Numerous passages polemize against anonymous adversaries of various kinds. In many cases, these can be understood as "inner" foes, i.e. as belonging to groups that were in opposition to the group(s) represented by the authors/editors of the oracles. In other words, there is enough material for a comprehensive study of prophetic enemy images. A further aspect

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[85] Some questions are raised, and some important observations are recorded, in a short article by Ivo Meyer (1991).

[86] See, e.g., Axskjöld (1998) on Aram as an "enemy friend", and Hübner (1992:283-326) on biblical images of the Ammonites as enemies. On Edom, see Bartlett (1989), with brief discussions of biblical perspectives, and Cresson (1972), who focuses on the anti-Edom passages. Cf. also Cohn (1994) on the Canaanites as "others."

[87] Vanderhooft (1999).

[88] Hill (1999).

[89] On the general topic of other nations in the book of Isaiah, see G.I. Davies (1989). On Babylon images in this prophetic book, see Begg (1989) and Franke (1996).

[90] As shown by Raabe (1995, with a helpful chart on p. 238), the oracles against other nations that have been collected in Isaiah 13–23 may have served a wide range of different purposes. See also Christensen (1989).

makes BI even more interesting: this prophetic book covers an enormous time span. Most scholars would agree that it contains oracles from four consecutive centuries (from the late 8th century through the 5th century BCE), some would even add two or three centuries to that figure. Enemy images imbedded in pre-exilic, exilic, and post-exilic prophecies have thus been brought together in BI. This leads us over to the editorial history of the book, a complex issue which I will deal with very briefly, in order to state my position on these matters.

It is widely recognized within the current scholarly discussion, that the gradual growth of BI was a much more complex process than one might deduce from the customary tripartite division of the book (from Duhm and onwards) into Proto-, Deutero-, and Trito-Isaiah (chs. 1–39 / 40–55 / 56–66).[91] The most important stages in this process are listed below. At the same time, there is also an emerging consensus that it is possible to speak of unity in Isaiah 1–66, despite the tripartite division. Above all, the consistent attention on the destiny of Zion contributes to an undeniable sense of thematic coherence.[92] These two viewpoints, one stressing plurality and the other uniformity, are easily reconcilable, once it is acknowledged that we have to do with redactional (as opposed to authorial) "unity."[93] This need not entail that texts with quite disparate ideological perspectives were harmonized by the editors. On the contrary, it is possible to detect traces of ideological continuity, indicating the existence of an "Isaianic" tradition, or perhaps even a prophetic school.[94] I find it likely that the oracles now found in BI were composed, transmitted, and edited within circles that were closely associated with the temple in Jerusalem.[95]

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[91] Thus already Duhm (1922:7-22), who thought that several passages were written during the Hasmonean era.

[92] See Clements (1997), Laato (1998), and Seitz (1991).

[93] See, e.g., Seitz (1988b and 1991), Sweeney (1996:39-60), and Vermeylen (1989b). Cf. also Lack (1973:142-145) and Steck (1991). The resulting degree of unity and coherence has been evaluated in divergent ways. Whereas Seitz (1988b:107-109) uses the metaphor of a farmhouse where new rooms and sections have been added, indicative of a rather well-planned process, Davies (1989:106) draws a different picture, as he suggests that "the book is more like a billboard on which different political parties or religious groups daub their slogans one on top of the other than a corpus which has a unified perspective."

[94] This holds also for the relation between chapters 40–55 ("Deutero-Isaiah") and 1–39*. See e.g. Seitz (1991:1-35) and Blenkinsopp (2000:88).

[95] With several other scholars. Cf. Clements (1997:9): "Mowinckel's suggestion that the tradition of Isaiah's prophecies was maintained by a group of cult-prophets from Jerusalem would seem to be not wide of the mark. We can therefore better grasp the nature of the growth of the book of Isaiah by recognizing the work of a plurality of authors from a Jerusalem temple circle." See also Davies (1989:107-108). Sweeney

There is thus a scholarly consensus that the the compositional and redactional history of BI was lengthy and complex, starting in the monarchic era and reaching into the Second Temple era. However, this consensus is coupled with strong disagreement when it comes to details. Here, then, is my short version of the major stages in the growth process of the book of Isaiah:

(1) *The last decades of the 8th century BCE*, presumably the period when a prophet named Isaiah ben Amoz was active. However, it should be noted that the name Isaiah occurs only in a few passages.[96] Although all commentators agree that parts of chapters 1–39 contain oracles from the 8th century, the extent of this original "core" is a hotly disputed issue.[97] Uwe Becker has argued—quite convincingly, in my opinion—that the 8th century prophet mainly delivered salvation oracles, in support of the ruling dynasty in Jerusalem.[98]

(2) *The last decades of the 7th century:* It seems likely that a major revision and expansion of the original collection of oracles took place during the reign of Josiah.[99] The perspective of this redactional layer is distinctly anti-Assyrian.

(3) *The exilic period*, in the 6th century: There can be little doubt that chapters 40–55 (Deutero-Isaiah) were composed towards the end of the exile.[100] In addition, some passages in 1–39 should probably also be dated to the exilic period.[101]

(1996:55) suggests "a Levitical context for the preservation and reinterpretation of the Isaiah tradition."

[96] Cf. Blenkinsopp (2000:84, emphasis as in the orig.): "apart from titles, certainly inserted at a late date (1:1; 2:1; 13:1), the name *Isaiah* occurs only in annalistic passages deriving from a Deuteronomistic author or from a source closely related to the History (7:3; 20:2-3; 37–39)." Cf. also Seitz (1988:121).

[97] Compare, e.g., the radical minimalism advocated by Becker (1997, with a helpful summary on p. 282) with what I would call the "mainstream" (or: moderately maximalist) positions of Fohrer (1960:5-11) and Sweeney (1996:51-60, esp. p. 59). Due to the successive overlayerings, it is probably impossible to reconstruct the original core with any certainty. In the words of Blenkinsopp (2000:90), "the eighth century B.C.E. prophet has been buried under an exegetical mountain, which at least testifies to the esteem in which his prophecies were held."

[98] See Becker (1997, *passim*, but see esp. pp. 286-287).

[99] Vermeylen (1977-78:678-688) and Barth (1977) advanced similar hypotheses, independently of each other. Barth's conception of an "Assur-Redaktion" was accepted, with minor modifications, by Clements (1980:5-6), who speaks of the "Josianic Redaction." For a more recent refinement of the theory, see Sweeney (1996:57-59).

[100] For arguments, see almost any commentary.

[101] See, e.g., Sweeney (1996:55-57) and Vermeylen (1977-78::693-709)

(4) *The post-exilic period*: The bulk of chapters 56–66 (Trito-Isaiah) appears to reflect conditions during the first century of Persian dominion over the province of Yehud.[102] Moreover, the decisive, formative, and in that respect "final" redaction of BI must have been achieved at some point during the Second Temple era. While some scholars date this redaction to the Persian era, and more precisely the 5th century (possibly in connection with the reforms of Ezra and Nehemiah), others opt for the Hellenistic era.[103] I find it likely that this editing took place during the Persian era, and that it was carried out by the circles that produced (or collected) most of the material in "Trito-Isaiah."[104] They created a symmetric, concentric structure in chs. 56–66,[105] as well as a framework for the entire BI, consisting of chapters 1 and 65–66.[106] However, this did not bring about a definitive closure. The process of *Fortschreibung* appears to have continued during the Hellenistic period, possibly well into the 2nd century BCE.[107]

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[102] Thus almost all commentators since the time of Duhm (1922:19). See, e.g., Westermann (1966:236-246) and Blenkinsopp (2003:43).

[103] Arguments for dating this "final" edition to the 5th century have been by adduced by Vermeylen (1989b:28-53) and Sweeney (1996:51-55). Cf. also Lack (1973:145). Steck (1991:38-40, 229) has argued that the final redaction (and, in effect, the composition of chs. 59-66) took place in the Ptolemaic era. Blenkinsopp (2000:85-86; 2003:27-60, quotes on p. 35) takes an intermediate position, dating 56–66* to the 5th century, but placing the final "bracketing or enveloping editorial process" to "the Hellenistic period when books in something like the modern meaning of the term were beginning to be produced."

[104] With Vermeylen (1989b:53) and Sweeney (1996:51-52). Hence, Trito-Isaiah never existed as an independent collection.

[105] See Emmerson (1996:18-20) and Blenkinsopp (2003:38-39, 60-63).

[106] Cf. Sweeney (1996:51-52, 59). Whereas chs. 65–66 were composed in their entirety by the late editors, ch. 1 may contain pre-exilic oracles. In addition, the editors inserted chs. 33–34 as a centrally placed bridge, connecting the major sections of BI. As regards the frame, a number of conspicuous links have been registered between parts of chs. 1 and 66. See Beuken (1991). According to Blenkinsopp (2003:35), the redactional framework consists primarily of 1:27-31 and 66:17-24.

[107] Cf. the discussion on the dating of Isa 19:16-25 and chs. 24–27 in the commentaries. See further Blenkinsopp (2000:84). According to Duhm (1922:15), the book of Isaiah was not completed until around 70 BCE.

1.5. Problems, goals, and methods

The primary aim of this investigation is to analyze a selection of passages in the book of Isaiah (BI) containing enemy images, and to demonstrate that such analyses can contribute significantly to our understanding of the phenomenon of enemy images in the Hebrew Bible (HB) in general, and within the prophetic literature in particular. In addition, this study represents an attempt, based on the analysis of enemy images, to elucidate ideological issues pertaining both to individual passages in BI and to the book as a whole—i.e., to the perspective of the final editors.

Prior to a more detailed account for the goals of the investigation, the principles governing the selection of texts need to be discussed. I will not analyze each and every passage in BI that might contain some features related to the phenomenon of enemy images. Rather, I have been looking for passages that match the following criteria. Firstly, the portrait of the adversary in question should be elaborate. As a consequence, only passages which are relatively rich in details—and, above all, in allegations and negative attributions—have been selected for detailed analysis. Secondly, the "enemy" should be well-defined, in order to enable intra-textual and extra-biblical comparisons. For this reason, I have concentrated upon images of named nations and empires, in the first place. However, images of various anonymous adversaries will also be discussed, but in lesser detail. Thirdly and finally, the depiction of "the other" should correspond to the working definition of "enemy image" that was given above (in 1.1.). As a consequence, I have not included all instances of oracles against other nations. In some cases, the element of negative characterization was judged to be too weak. The prophetic discourse concerning Moab in chapters 15–16 is a case in point. The predominant mode of this prophecy is that of a lament, expressing sympathy with the Moabite victims of a major disaster. However, due to the expressions of negative stereotypes in 16:6 and 16:12-14, the passage will be briefly discussed. In other cases, the element of a perceived threat against the nation of Judah, or the city of Jerusalem and its inhabitants (or: against certain groups among them), was seen as too weak, or as missing. For this reason, the oracle in chapter 23 against Tyre and Sidon has not been selected for detailed treatment. The oracle against Philistia, in 14:29-32, is another example. With regard to the last mentioned criterion, viz. that of a distinct notion of a threat, one might perhaps question the large space devoted to images of Egypt and Cush (Nubia) in the ensuing analysis. It will be argued, however, that the reliance on Egypt is depicted as a dangerous threat.

As a way of specifying some further important problems that will be addressed in this study, I supply a list of questions below. I will also indicate briefly how I intend to conduct the investigation, in order to provide (at least preliminary or provisional) answers to those questions. Thus, what follows is a combined inventory of problems addressed and of statements on methodological matters. At the same time, this short presentation may serve as a kind of itinerary to the ensuing chapters, since it will be structured in accordance with the mode of presentation.

(1) For each passage analyzed in part II, Investigation (esp. in **2.1-2.4.** and **3.1.-3.2.**):

(a) *What is said in this text?* How should it be rendered in English? As a first step, I will offer my own translation of the passage. Text-critical and linguistic problems will be treated very briefly, in appended notes.

(b) *What kind of text is this?* What needs to be said about its delimitation and structure? Can late additions or glosses be distinguished? These issues will be dealt with rather summarily, with the help of the standard tools of historical-critical exegesis, in a section called *The text*.

(c) *Is there an enemy image* (as defined in 1.1. above) *in this text?* How is the hostile other characterized? What accusations are made? Which negative stereotypes are employed? Can certain features in the description be regarded as specifically related to the ethnicity of the enemies, or to their (alleged) cultural habits? These issues are addressed in the main section of the analysis, *Characterization*. The interpretation will be based upon the theories concerning enemy images that were referred above (in 1.1.). Further, it will be informed by rhetorical criticism and ideological criticism, as well as metaphor theory. Hence, the following questions can be added: What rhetorical strategy is adopted by the author(s)? Which metaphors are used, and what message(s) do the convey? How can the ideological perspective be described? In those cases where relevant comparative material from the target empire/nation (or: culture) is available, I will also ask whether the passage in BI could possibly be seen as a response to propaganda from the "enemy" side.

(d) *Who is the enemy, and what can be known about the historical situation?* These issues are discussed in a section called *Contextualization*. In most cases, the dating of the passage is disputed, and the issue of the original setting more or less impossible to settle. Instead of opting for one uncertain hypothesis rather than the other, I have adopted a strategy, where several historical contexts are considered. Taking some reasonable *terminus post quem* as my point of departure, I proceed with a discussion of possible scenarios, based upon questions like: If this text really was written in the 8th century, as some suppose, how did it address the political situation of that time? Or: What

function did it serve in the late 7th century (or, in early post-exilic times, etc.)—either as a product of that period, or as a passage that was subject to continual reinterpretation and reapplication?

(e) *What does the overall picture of each "enemy" look like?* Can different images of one and the same nation, when combined, yield a coherent "portrait"? Is it possible to speak of a distinctly Assyrian (or: Egyptian, Israelite, and so forth) profile? If that be the case: Which are the most significant similarities and differences between these portraits, or profiles? These issues are discussed in the chapters that round off the detailed textual analyses (**3.4.** and **4.4.**). Some preliminary conclusions will be drawn concerning the function of different enemy portraits.

(2) As concerns the numerous references to anonymous adversaries in BI, a somewhat different approach will be applied (in **4.1.-4.4.**). Above all, the following question will be addressed:

Are there any connections between the images of various enemies and evildoers and the images of hostile empires and nations? In order to explore the possible points of contact between these two categories (4.3.), a survey of stereotypes employed (4.1.) is supplemented by a discussion focusing on a few key passages (4.2.). Finally, a macro-structural perspective on named and unnamed enemies is tentatively adopted (**4.4.**).

(3) In the concluding chapters (part III, Discussion), some aspects of the ideology and theology of BI are addressed. Although some sketchy reconstructions of diachronic developments are provided, the main emphasis is on the ideological perspectives of the final editors. In addition, I will attempt to explore the role of enemy images in identity construction, on the basis of the preceding analyses. These questions will be asked:

(a) *How do the roles of the enemies in BI relate to the role(s) of YHWH?* Is it possible to speak of interactions, or interconnections between enemy images and "God-images"? To begin with, the results from the preceding textual analyses are summed up in two chapters dealing with the two main roles of the hostile nations, either as YHWH's opponents (**5.1.**) or as YHWH's instruments (**5.2.**). Then I enter into a brief discussion on a couple of themes which might have yielded material enough for an entire monograph: the roles of YHWH as enemy of his own people (**5.3.**) or as "the enemy's enemy" (**5.4.**).

(b) *Is it possible to relate all enemy images in BI to some basic ideological pattern or paradigm?* In a somewhat speculative chapter (**6.1.**), I will attempt to demonstrate that the legendary version of the Assyrian siege of Jerusalem in 701 BCE serves as such a paradigm.

(c) *To what extent can the selected texts in BI be understood as political propaganda?* Is it possible to deduce a political agenda from decidedly propagandistic passages? Along what lines should pro-Assyrian, anti-Assyrian, anti-Babylonian, or possibly pro-Persian tendencies be explained? A tentative reconstruction of some major stages in the diachronic development will be offered (**6.2.**).

(d) *Can the enemy images tell us something about the "self-image" of the party endorsed by the final editors of BI?* It was maintained in the opening chapter (1.1.), that enemy images and self-images interact in interesting ways. But how can this theoretical supposition be applied in the case of BI? Is it possible to reconstruct implied editorial notions of the identity of an ideal "us", as opposed to "the others", the enemies? And: Can a focus on enemy images and propagandistic rhetorics yield new perspectives on the hotly debated issue concerning the identity of the party endorsed by the editors? A few provisional answers will be outlined in the concluding chapter (**6.3.**). Admittedly, this study ends on a speculative note. Still, I find it important to initiate a scholarly discussion on the biblical authors' use of enemy images in their constructions of ideal identities.

Chapter 2

Images of Empires

2.1. Isa 5:26-30: A Prologue to the Discourse on Empires

Isa 5:26-30

5:26 He will set up a standard for the nation[s]* from afar,
and whistle for it from the end of the earth.
Behold! Swiftly, rapidly it/he comes!
27 None in it is weary or stumbling, it/he neither slumbers nor sleeps.
Not a belt is loose, not a shoe string is broken.
28 Its/his arrows are sharpened, and all its bows are strung.
The hoofs of its horses are like flint, its wagon wheels like the whirlwind.
29 His/its roaring is like that of a lion, he roars like the young lions.
He growls and seizes prey, he carries it off and there is no one who can rescue.
30 He will growl over it on that day, like the roaring of the sea.
When one looks out over the land/earth, there is darkness and distress,
and the light (becomes) dark because of clouds.

* Cf. BHS app.

The text

Isa 5:26-30 can be classified as an announcement of disaster. A detailed description of an approaching army (vv. 26-28) culminates in a lion metaphor (v. 29). Whereas the commentators generally—and, I believe, correctly—regard v. 30, with its eschatological vision of a state of desolation and its loose catchword connection (וינחם) to the preceding utterance, as an addition, they find few if any traces of reworking within vv. 26-29.[1] However, a closer examination of the opening line, v. 26a, reveals that it is an amalgam of references to other passages in the book of Isaiah. Above all, the motif of whistling (שׁרק) is a rather strange element in its present context (but cf. Zech 10:8.). This could indicate that edito-

[1] See, e.g., Clements (1980:69-70) and Wildberger (1972:223-227).

rial activity has taken place both at the beginning (v. 26a) and at the end (v. 30) of this oracle.

The position and function of Isa 5:26-30 within chs. 1–66

It is a complicated procedure to assess the function of 5:26-30 within its literary context, since important elements of that context may have been displaced at some stage of the editorial process. The original textual order is often reconstructed as follows: 5:8-24 + 10:1-4; 9:7-20 + 5:25; 5:26-30; 6:1–9:6.[2] An alternative is to place the sequence 9:7-20 + 5:25 + 5:26-30 after 6:1–9:6.[3] In my opinion, though, such reconstructions miss the mark. There are strong connections between between 5:25 and the series of indictments in 9:7-20, and the links between the woe cries in 5:8-24 and 10:1-4 are equally conspicuous. However, once these connections are recognized, the interpreter's main task will be to explain the present structural arrangement. This is in fact characterized by a high degree of symmetry: The two "split up" series, (a) of indictments and threats (5:25, 26-30 // 9:7-20), and (b) of woe sayings (5:8-24 // 10:1-4), constitute a double frame around the section 6:1–9:6.[4]

There is more to be said about the place of 5:26-30 within the larger structure. It is likely that the passage originally referred to Assyria (see further the section "contextualization", below), but as it now stands, it does not contain explicit references to any specific empire. Still, as will be shown, it contains allusions to subsequent scenes featuring not only Assyria, but Egypt, Ethiopia, and Babylon, as well. It is noteworthy that this anonymous announcement is placed at the threshold, so to speak, to the vision of the power of YHWH in ch. 6. As observed by Jenkins,[5] Assyria is only mentioned by name after the pivotal ch. 6. The same holds for the other empires. Within the book of Isaiah, the section dealing with named empires comprises chs. 7–48. Considering both its strategical position within the macrostructure of the book and its rich intratextual ramifications, I propose that 5:26-30, in its "final form", was designed by the editor(s) to serve as a prologue to the discourse on empires (chs. 7–48). This prologue sets the standard, so to speak, by presenting all empires as virtually exchangeable. Seemingly invincible, they come and go, at the command of YHWH. Ultimately they will fall, and their land will become dark and desolate (v. 30).[6]

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[2] So, e.g., Wildberger (1972) and Blenkinsopp (2000).

[3] Thus Kaiser (1981:23, 115).

[4] Cf. also the extensive and insightful discussion in Sweeney (1996:128-129, 192-195).

[5] Jenkins (1989:240).

[6] Cf. Kaiser (1981:116).

Is there a corresponding epilogue to the section dealing with empires (chs. 7–48)? One might consider Isa 49:22-26. As pointed out by Davies, 49:22 looks like a "transformation" of 5:26, while 49:24-25, with its reassuring statement that there is rescue for the prey, can be read as a reversal of 5:29.[7]

Characterization

The depiction in Isa 5:26-28, of an approaching army from a distant country, is heavily hyperbolic. The soldiers and their equipment seem to be in an exceptionally perfect condition, to say the least. Childs speaks of a "superhuman hoard of robotlike raiders."[8] Arguably, there is something uncannily superhuman about an army who "neither slumbers nor sleeps" (5:27a). Exactly the same phrase, verbatim, is used about the protection offered by YHWH in Ps 121:4!

One particular trait in the characterization of the attacking army that deserves some consideration, is the consistent use of verb forms (and suffixes) in the singular. Although it is evident that the entity described—with its plurality of horses, wagons, and weapons—must consist of many soldiers, the aspect of number is not being stressed. The collective is described as if it were one individual. As a consequence, the notion of each soldier's individuality—and fallibility!—is entirely suppressed.

The ensuing description (v. 29) of a roaring lion, who seizes and carries off a helpless prey, is conventional in every detail. Similar metaphorical language was used throughout the Ancient Near East in depictions of deities, and in portrayals of kings and their armed forces.[9] Within its context, the lion metaphor in Isa 5:29 underlines the awe-inspiring and invincible qualities of the anonymous "enemy." In addition, the attacker's aggressiveness and mercilessness is emphasized. This need not, however, be taken as a negative characterization. In view of the intertextual ramifications of the lion metaphor, it would probably be more correct to speak of "neutral" characterization. The closest biblical parallels to Isa 5:29 include enemy images in the Psalms (Pss 7:3; 17:12), as well as depictions of divine agency (Hos 5:14; Isa 31:4-5; Ps 50:22) and more or less chauvinist pictures of Jacob/Israel (Mic 5:7; Num 23:24). To these can be added the extra-biblical praises of divine and royal power mentioned above.

In sum, there is an unmistakable element of exaggeration in Isa 5:26-29. The depiction of the anonymous attacker(s) focuses on perfection and aggressive

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[7] Davies (1989:115).

[8] Childs (2001:49).

[9] Sumerian references are listed in Heimpel (1968:280-326), Egyptian references in Grapow ([1924] 1983:69-73), and Assyrian references in Ponchia (1987:232, 241). See also Marcus (1977:87) and Schott (1926:86). An interesting discussion of the Mesopotamian material is provided by Cassin (1987:167-213).

determination in performance, which entails invincibility. One of the most conspicuous traits in this characterization is the complete absence of unambiguously negative attributes. We have to ask, then: Is there really an enemy image in this text? An alternative would be to regard it as an instance of propagandistic praise. It is a matter of perspective. It all depends on how we choose to answer these questions: Who is the anonymous enemy? Who is being threatened? Whose enemy is being described?

Contextualization

The identity of the attacker is not revealed. In fact, all actors remain anonymous. We are told that someone will summon the military forces of an unnamed "nation from afar", presumably in order to launch an attack against some other nation. Although such a secretive mode of presentation is a typical trait of oracular discourse in general, and predictions of disasters in particular (cf., e.g., Hos 4:19; Amos 3:11; Jer 4:6-7; 5:15-17), most commentators of this passage have felt compelled to come up with a positive identification of the parties involved. Like detectives, they have been searching the context for clues of various kinds. Given the relative proximity to passages dealing with the Syro-Ephraimite crisis (7:1–8:8), as well as the connection between the preceding oracle in 5:25 and the indictments against the neighbouring state Israel in 9:7-20, it is not surprising that almost all commentators have opted for the following interpretation: The Assyrians are approaching.[10] Their army will attack Israel (and/or Judah), on YHWH's command.

On the assumption that (the earliest version of) Isa 5:26-30 can be dated to the 8th century, such a reading is indeed plausible. Assyria was, after all, the great empire of the time. The depiction of a roaring, rapacious lion would fit in very well, since lion metaphors were employed by Assyrian rulers, in order to evoke the image of themselves and their soldiers as invincible.[11] One could draw the conclusion, that the prophet re-used ingredients of the current Assyrian propaganda in formulating this announcement.[12] At the same time time, he probably gave the imperial propaganda a slight, but significant pro-Judahite twist. If the anonymous agent in v. 26a, the one who gives the signal of attack, is to be identified with YHWH (and who else could it be?), then Assyria is virtually reduced to a marionette in the hands of Judah's national deity.

[10] See, e.g., Wildberger (1972:223-227) and Sweeney (1996:129-131).

[11] See Ponchia (1987:232, 241), with textual references. Cf. also Marcus (1977:87).

[12] This is a possible conclusion, but not a necessary one. Cf. Machinist (1983:728), who correctly points out that the lion metaphor, though cherished by the Assyrians, was frequent throughout the Ancient Near East.

What function could such a statement have had within the propaganda war during the Syro-Ephraimite crisis? Paradoxically, this threat might have had the intent to reassure the people and the leaders of Judah—if it was directed against the nation's prime enemy in this conflict, Israel. In that case, what we have here, is not an image of the enemy. It is an image of the enemy's enemy. This would account for the propagandistic flavour, and the absence of negative attributes in the characterization.

This is a possible reconstruction of the oracle's original context and intent. It is, however, purely hypothetical. We must, at any rate, reckon with a wide range of possible reinterpretations, in the light of subsequent events. After the fall of Samaria (and, perhaps, even earlier), the passage could be taken as a threat directed against Juda. Later on, the description of an anonymous attacker may have been applied to other nations than Assyria. Nothing in the wording of the text would have precluded an identification of the terrifying army on march with the Babylonians.[13] It is also conceivable that later generations read the oracle as referring to imminent attacks against Judah launched by the Persians, the Macedonians, or the Seleucids.

Such a process of continuous re-contextualization, made possible by the anonymity of the attacker and the attacked, would have been further facilitated by the following links between formulations in 5:26 and other passages in the book of Isaiah. The motif of the raised banner (נשׂא + נס) establishes a link to Isa 13:2, which introduces a prophecy concerning the fall of Babylon, and to 18:3, which is attached to an oracle concerning Cush (Ethiopia/Nubia).[14] As regards the somewhat unexpected motif of whistling (שׁרק) in 5:26, it is probably best understood as a conscious allusion to 7:18, where YHWH is said to whistle (שׁרק) for the bees of Assyria.[15] It follows that Isa 5:26-29 can be said to make tacit reference to more than one empire. There is, in sum, a strong Assyrian

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[13] Cf. Clements (1980:70). According to Kaiser (1981:116-117), the oracle (dated to the 5th century) *originally* referred to the Babylonians.

[14] Further possible inter-texts within the book of Isaiah include 11:12, which states that someone "will set up a standard for the nations" (ונשׂא נס לגוים) as a signal for Judah's and Ephraim's war of revenge, and 49:22, a promise of future restoration for the people of YHWH.

[15] There is, furthermore, a possible connection between the phrase מקצה הארץ, "from the end of the earth", in 5:26, and expressions found in 7:18: "at the end (בקצה) of Egypt's streams", "in the land (בארץ) of Assyria." Sweeney (1996:157) has called attention to these striking similarities between 5:26 and 7:18. I do not agree, however, with his conclusion that 7:18-19 represents a case of "inner-biblical exegesis", where formulations from 5:26 are being re-used. I find it more likely that the whistling motif was imported from 7:18, where it seems to be part of a bee-keeper metaphor, to 5:26, where it appears to be redundant.

connection, but there are probably Egyptian (and Cushite) and Babylonian connections, as well.

As indicated by the addition of v. 30, the later stages of reinterpretation probably involved an "eschatologizing" tendency. Rather than referring to specific nations or situations, the passage would then have achieved a universal scope. In this perspective, even the strange plural form of the MT in v. 26, "nations" (לגוים), might take on some significance.[16] Together with the cosmological connotations evoked by v. 30, with its motifs of the roaring sea, and the light becoming darkness, such details contribute to the process of de-historicizing the passage. On such premises, Isa 5:26-30 may have been read as a description of "a final eschatological judgment, ushered in by a terrifying enemy."[17]

2.2. Images of Assyria

Isa 7:18-19

> 7:18 On that day, YHWH will whistle for the flies at the end of Egypt's streams and for the bees in the land of Assyria.
> 19 They shall come, all of them, and settle down in the steep wadis and in the clefts of the rocks, on all the thornbushes and on all the pastures.

The text

The interpretation of the saying in Isa 7:18-19 is fraught with difficulties. The dating is uncertain, the connection to the present literary context rather loose, and the exact extent of later expansions (apart from the clearly editorial introduction, "on that day") is difficult to determine. Whereas there is wide agreement that the original oracle described the Assyrian army by means of a bee metaphor, the appearance of (the flies from) Egypt on the scene has caused

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[16] In the commentaries, לגוים מרחוק is usually explained as the result of a "misdivision" of an original לגוי ממרחק, an expression that occurs in Jer 5:15. Cf. BHSapp. This may be correct. However, I suspect that the change from singular ("nation") to plural ("nations") is due to more than just a mechanical mistake.

[17] Childs (2001:49).

scholarly discussion.[18] However, that problem will be dealt with later.[19] The following analysis, focusing on the image of Assyria, takes the present form of the text as it point of departure.

Characterization

According to what appears to be the most likely reading of Isa 7:18-19, the invading Assyrian army is portrayed as a swarm of bees (paralleled by an Egyptian hoard of flies), spreading all over the country and settling down in every imaginable location.[20] This can be seen as an instance of the metaphorical concept "enemies are (like) insects", known from wartime propaganda throughout the ages. Generally, the implications of insect imagery would be that the enemies are harmful and annoying, but not really human. According to Keen, the purpose of such propaganda, at least in the modern era, is to give "sanction … to the soldier to become a mere exterminator of pests."[21] Interestingly enough, a passage in the Neo-Assyrian prophecies refers to the annihilation of enemies in terms of turning "wasps into a squash."[22] In the case of Isa 7:18-19, however, all such implications seem to be suppressed, if not entirely absent. The intent of this particular instance of insect imagery was hardly to encourage soldiers to fight against the hostile army thus depicted.

This oracle does not appear to describe the invaders as inferior to (other) human beings. The fact that insects are small is *not* being stressed, as it is in some other biblical passages (e.g., Num 13:30-33).[23] Instead, the most prominent aspect of the swarm described in Isa 7:18-19 is the incredible *multitude* of bees (and flies). The point would appear to be that the invading army will be invincible, because of its vast superiority in numbers.

But why bees (and flies)—and not locusts? The image of an immense hoard of migrating locusts was the standard metaphor for describing seemingly innu-

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[18] Cf. the differing assessions made by, e.g., Barth (1977:199-200), Sweeney (1996:155-156), and Wildberger (1972:302-303).

[19] See the analysis of the Egypt image in 7:18-19, in ch. 2.3. below.

[20] It is generally assumed that the depiction is metaphorical. Theoretically, the text could of course be read non-metaphorically, as a description of an insect plague. However, the suggestion made by Riede (2000:255-256), who refers to Neufeld, that Isa 7:18-19 might reflect ancient practices of biological warfare, fails to convince me.

[21] Keen (1986:61).

[22] SAA 9.7., r. 2; quoted from Parpola (1997:39). In the following lines (SAA 9.7., r. 3-4), the Assyrian army invading Egypt appears to be described metaphorically as a centipede!

[23] Cf. Lerner (1999), who interprets Num 13:33 as a case of irony, based on the circumstance that an individual grasshopper is small and weak, whereas a hoard of locusts constitutes a real danger.

merable invaders and plunderers (Isa 33:4; cf. Judg 6:5; Joel 1:4).[24] As distinguished from locusts, bees are not known to destroy the crops on the fields. Moreover, since honey was a highly esteemed product, a multitude of bees could be seen a good thing! On the other hand, being persecuted or surrounded by angry bees, each armed with a sting, is an annoying—and potentially dangerous—experience. This aspect is emphasized in the two remaining instances in the Hebrew Bible, where enemies are pictured as bees (Deut 1:44; Ps 118:12). However, as far as I can see, it is not foregrounded in Isa 7:18-19.[25] The problem would rather seem to be that the bees (and the flies), having settled down someplace, are not easily chased away.[26]

There is, of course, one possibility to get rid of a bee-swarm: A bee-keeper might know how to lead them in the desired direction. This might be the reason why the invading Assyrian army in Isa 7:18-19 is represented as a swarm of bees and not, say, locusts: Bees can be commanded, or allured.[27] As argued by Wildberger, YHWH could be portrayed as a bee-keeper, who—in accordance with ancient ideas on the matter—only had to whistle for his swarm to come (v. 18).[28] However, this admittedly attractive interpretation is flawed by its failure to account accurately for the presence of the flies (whether secondary or not) in this context. It is therefore perhaps preferable to interpret the whistling motif in v. 18a more generally, as a summoning signal. However, the implication would still be that the invaders are seen as inferior—though not to the inhabitants of the occupied country, but to YHWH!

In sum, the bee metaphor in Isa 7:18-19 characterizes the invading Assyrian army as exceedingly numerous, potentially dangerous, and difficult to drive

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[24] Extra-biblical examples can also be adduced. Assyrian attestations of locust metaphors referring to armies (the Assyrian army *or* the enemy's!) are listed by Marcus (1977:98-99), Ponchia (1987:237, 240), and Schott (1926:88, 97). For Egyptian examples, see Grapow (1924:98).

[25] Several commentators nevertheless seem to take for granted that the metaphor in Isa 7:18-19 carries the same connotations as the bee similes in Deut 1:44 and Ps 118:12. Blenkinsopp (2000:236) speaks of "a plague of killer bees." See also Wildberger (1972:304). For a detailed discussion of Ps 118:12, and related texts, see Riede (2000:254-265).

[26] Cf. Clements (1980:90): "Everywhere would be covered with them, and Ahaz would prove quite unable to rid himself of them."

[27] An alternative explanation for this choice of metaphor might be that Mesopotamia was famous for its large populations of bees. Thus Duhm (1922:77) and Wildberger (1972:303). The validity of this argument has, however, been disputed by Barth (1977:199).

[28] Wildberger (1972:304). Cf. similarly Kaiser (1981:171).

away. At the same time, the mighty attackers are depicted as dependent upon the will of YHWH.

Contextualization

It is often taken for granted that Isa 7:18-19 describes an invasion of Judah, in the aftermath of the Syro-Ephraimite crisis. Most commentators maintain that Isaiah condemned king Ahaz's demand for assistance from Assyria as an offence against YHWH, the national patron deity. Therefore, the argument goes, YHWH would lead the Assyrian forces in a punitive campaign against all the parties involved in the conflict—including Judah, contrary to Ahaz's vain expectations.[29] However, this is not the only possible interpretation. As observed by Blenkinsopp, "whether the prospective victim is the kingdom of Samaria with its ally or Judah is not explicitly stated."[30] The literary context, where memoirs and oracles from the 8th century have been overlayered by later (re)interpretations, creates a situation of ambiguity concerning Isaiah's position. There can be no doubt that the saying in 7:16 predicts an Assyrian attack on Ephraim/Israel and Aram, as well as the ensuing devastation of these countries (cf. 7:1-9 and 8:1-4!). The following utterance, in v. 17, reads like a threat against king Ahaz and Judah. This is, however, largely due to the addition of the phrase "the king of Assyria." As pointed out by Sweeney, this gloss "changes a reassurance into a threat."[31] It is thus conceivable that Isa 7:18-19, if uttered in the 730s, originally presaged an invasion, not of Judah, but of Israel and/or Aram. In that case, it would contain an image of Assyria (and Egypt?) as the enemy's enemy, acting on the command of Judah's patron deity, YHWH.

It is, however, unlikely that this prophecy, with its introductory "on that day", typical of later additions, can be ascribed to the 8th century prophet.[32] Hence, the threat might, after all, be directed against Judah. Sweeney has argued that Isa 7:18-19 in its entirety originated in the Josianic era, since that was a period when both Egypt and Assyria represented potential threats against Judah.[33] In this way, his interpretation manages to account for the circumstance that the text seeems to envisage either a combined Assyrian–Egyptian attack, or a clash between Egyptian and Assyrian armies on Judean territory. Still, if the

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[29] See, e.g., Clements (1980:90) and Wildberger (1972:302-303).

[30] Blenkinsopp (2000:235).

[31] Sweeney (1996:155).

[32] According to Wildberger (1972:302-303), the introductory formula is editorial, but not the ensuing prophecy (which, however, has been displaced and heavily glossated). It seems preferable to regard 7:18-19, with Blenkinsopp (2000:235), as the first in a series of "four addenda."

[33] Sweeney (1996:155-156).

designation used by Sweeney, "inner-biblical exegesis",[34] can be seen as appropriate, this might indicate that the passage should be given an even later date. According to Becker, the entire section 7:18-25 represents a chain of post-exilic redactional expansions.[35]

The issue of dating is not easily settled. It is possible to find a large number of historical situations, ranging from the 8th century and into the post-exilic period, which could match the implied setting of Isa 7:18-19, insofar as there existed (at least, potentially) a double threat against Judah (or Yehud), from Egypt and from "Assyria" (which could stand for Persia).[36] Leaving the vexed problems of dating aside, we may safely conclude that this prophecy would have lent itself to a process of continual reinterpretation and re-application. In the Hellenistic era, it was probably interpreted as a reference to the double threat posed by the Seleucid and Ptolemaic imperial policies towards Palestine.

Isa 7:20

> 7:20 On that day the Lord will shave, with the razor hired beyond the River, with the king of Assyria, the head and the pubic hair, and it will take away the beard as well.

The text

The syntatictal construction of the short oracle in Isa 7:20 is conspicuous, to say the least. In the space between the predicate (יגלח, "will shave") and its object (הראשׁ, "the head", etc.) we find a chain of lengthy appositions with vague, or ambiguous, relations to the other components of the statement. Even if "with the king of Assyria" is cut off as a late epexegetical gloss, the remaining text of 7:20a is open to a number of competing interpretations:

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[34] Sweeney (1996:157).

[35] Becker (1997:34-35, 299) uses the German term *Fortschreibungskette*. Cf. also Kaiser (1981:169-173, 177-178) who apparently would date Isa 7:18-19 (and the rest of 7:18-25) to the early Persian period.

[36] Dietrich (1976:121-122) points to the situation around 713 BCE. Cf. Blenkinsopp (2000:236) who suggests that "[t]he editor may have been thinking of the pro-Assyrian policy of Shabako of the twnty-fifth Nubian dynasty (ca. 716-702)." Sweeney (1996:155-156) has argued for a setting in the latter half of the 7th century. Arguably, several events during the Persian period might have occasioned prophecies dealing with a perceived threat from Egypt, in combination with a threat from Persia. For suggestions, see Kaiser (1973).

(1) YHWH will shave with a razor, which has been hired in the land beyond the River (Euphrates).
(2) YHWH will shave with a razor—which has been hired—in the land beyond the River (Euphrates).
(3) YHWH will shave with a hired razor, i.e.,with the help of a mercenary army from the land beyond the River (Euphrates).
(4) YHWH will shave with a hired razor—i.e.,with the help of a mercenary army—in the land beyond the River (Euphrates).

Against alternatives (1) and (2) speaks the problematic incongruity of an adjective in the feminine (השׂכירה) being attached to a masculine noun (תער).[37] One might therefore consider taking שׂכירה as a noun denoting a company of "hired" soldiers, as in Jer 46:21.[38]

This would leave us with alternatives (3) and (4). From a syntactical point of view, alternative (4), which takes "beyond the River" (בעברי נהר) as the location for the activity of shaving, arguably emerges as a somewhat stronger candidate.[39] However, from another perspective, this interpretation can be seen as highly problematical. It is generally assumed (a) that the text (with or without the gloss in v. 20aβ!) identifies the razor used by YHWH with (the king of) Assyria, and (b) that the phrase "beyond the river" designates the area beyond the Euphrates, i.e. Mesopotamia.[40] In order to avoid the preposterous conclusion that the oracle presages an act of Assyrian self-destruction, one of these two assumptions has to be challenged. Hermann Barth has questioned the first assumption. According to Barth, the final form of the text represents a radical reinterpretation of the original oracle (which threatened Judah with an Assyrian attack), turning it into a threat against Assyria.[41] In this process, the role attributed to the Assyrian ruler is said to have undergone change: from being YHWH's instrument the king of Assyria has become the target for YHWH's attack. Barth spells out the sense of 7:20a (final form) as follows: "Jahwe

[37] Many modern translations, e.g., NRSV, and several scholarly commentaries, e.g., Kaiser (1981:172) and Blenkinsopp (2000:235), nevertheless opt for some version of alternative (1). Representatives of alternative (2) are harder to find, but Sweeney (1996:158) seems to advocate a solution along those lines. As suggested to me by Sten Hidal (oral communication), the apparent incongruity between a masculine noun and a feminine adjective may perhaps be explained in terms of "syntactical shift of gender."

[38] Clements (1980:91), Wildberger (1972:302).

[39] With Barth (1977:198, n. 48), who points out that בעברי נהר is an unlikely apposition to a noun.

[40] See, e.g., Duhm (1922:77) and Wildberger (1972:301-302, 305-306).

[41] Barth (1977:198, n. 48).

'rasiert *im* Gebiet jenseits des Stromes', und darum '*am* König von Assur'."[42] But Barth's reading fails to convince, since it is based upon a couple of questionable presuppositions: The preposition ב in במלך has to be taken as adversative, contrary to expectation, and בעברי נהר has to be regarded as an even later interpolation than במלך אשׁור.

A more promising attempt, as I see it, to outline a coherent interpretation along the lines of alternative (4) above, has been made by Sweeney. He argues rather convincingly that עברי [ה]נהר, with the variant form עבר הנהר, otherwise designates Aram, not Mesopotamia, and that the oracle thus originally had YHWH sending the Assyrian army against the kingdom of Aram![43] Further implications of Sweeney's hypothesis will be discussed below (in the section "contextualization").

The ensuing analysis of enemy characterization in Isa 7:20 is based upon the near consensus view, that (the king of) Assyria is pictured as a razor in the hand of YHWH.

Characterization

In order to serve as an efficient razor (תער), a knife would have to be extremely sharp. Such a small and light knife is a potentially dangerous weapon. These aspects are foregrounded in Ps 52:4 (Eng. 52:2), where the enemy's tongue is said to be "like a sharpened razor (כתער)." This kind of metaphor may also, interestingly enough, have an Assyrian background, as indicated by the following lines from an oracle addressed to Esarhaddon, where the king seems to be likened to a light and sharp weapon: "O Esarhaddon, king of Assyria, cup filled with lye, axe of two shekels!."[44] In that case, we might have a case of re-use of Assyrian propaganda. Although the quality of sharpness is not emphasized in Isa 7:20, it is certainly implied, since the razor is described as being capable of removing the hair from all parts of the body. The attacking army is, in other words, depicted as a highly efficient instrument—a strikingly ambiguous characterization of Assyria (and its king): Efficient, yet *only an instrument*. This great power with its impressive military force, the oracle seems to say, cannot

[42] Barth (1977:198, n. 48, emphasis as in orig.). Cf. the Targum.

[43] Sweeney (1996:157-158).

[44] SAA 9.1.6, lines iv. 11-13. Translation quoted from Parpola (1997:8). Nissinen (2003:108, n. e) comments the metaphors used in the following way: "The point of these curious metaphors may be that the cup and the 'axe' of two shekels (only 32 gr.!), harmless as they seem, contain destructive power." Cf. also the footnote to line 13 in Parpola (1997:8): "Cf. Isa 7:20 and 10:15, where the king of Assyria functions as the 'razor' and 'axe' of God. A deified axe (^{d}*ka-la-pu*) of Aššur was kept in the god's temple…in the present passage, Esarhaddon is the personification of this divine weapon, called to annihilate the god's enemies."

really act on its own. It is in the hands of YHWH. Deprived of its autonomy, Assyria is thus reduced to a utensil employed by Judah's national deity. The Assyrian army can be regarded either as Judah's enemy or as the enemy's (Aram's?) enemy. However, according to 7:20 the real agent, acting in the behind, is YHWH. But what kind of events are described?

The nation under attack is possibly personified as an individual.[45] In that case, the act of shaving might be understood as a metaphor for the collective punishment/purification of the people, or for the devastation of the country. According to Antti Laato, it is simultaneously about both:

> Yhwh uses the Assyrian king to purify the people. The king of Assyria is a razor, by means of which the land will be desolated, even the head of Judah, i.e. Jerusalem. [46]

Alternatively, the scene in 7:20b can be seen as a realistic description of the Assyrian regular treatment of male prisoners of war—a description designed to underscore the utter disgrace awaiting the population of the conquered country.[47]

Contextualization

There can be no doubt that Isa 7:20 is an announcement of disaster. But whom would the disaster befall? It is generally assumed that this oracle was uttered by Isaiah in the context of the Syro-Ephraimite crisis. According to a vast majority among the commentators, the prophet delivered it as a threat against Judah. King Ahaz would soon regret that he had requested Assyrian "assistance." Yahweh would, so to speak, wrest the knife out of Ahaz's hand, in order to use it (i.e., the "hired" Assyrian army) as a razor against Ahaz and Judah.[48]

This scholarly consensus has been challenged recently, by Sweeney. As mentioned above, he has provided weighty arguments for regarding Aram as the intended victim of the Assyrian attack.[49] Interpreted as a threat against one of Judah's chief enemies, 7:20 would be perfectly in line with the reassuring

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[45] Thus Duhm (1922:77). Clements, on the other hand, claims that it is about an individual, viz. king Ahaz: "the metaphor simply intends to affirm that the Assyrians would leave Ahaz with nothing, not even the hairs left on his body" (1980:90).

[46] Laato (1998:103). Cf. Kaiser (1981:172), who finds a possible allusion to the cleansing of a leprous person as described in Lev. 14:8-9, but still maintains that the message conveyed by the (retrospective!) oracle is that Judah will be depopulated.

[47] Wildberger (1972:305). Cf. also Blenkinsopp (2000:236).

[48] See, e.g., Wildberger (1972:305-306) and Clements (1980:90-91).

[49] Sweeney (1996:157-158). Cf. above ("the text"). Cf. also Høgenhaven (1988:99), who suggests that the oracle was originally directed against Israel.

oracles in 7:4-9 and 7:17. If Sweeney's hypothesis is correct, this oracle was fulfilled without delay. In 732 BCE, Aram was defeated, and incorporated, by the Assyrian empire.

In due course, for instance in the context of Sennacherib's campaign in 701 BCE, the oracle was probably reinterpreted as a threat against Judah. After the fall of Damascus and Samaria, Jerusalem was apparently next in line to receive a shave from YHWH's "razor." As witnessed by the Targum, Isa 7:20 was eventually read as an announcement that also Assyria would be punished by YHWH (as explicitly stated in Isa 10:24-27; 14:24-28; 30:27-33). Such a reinterpretation might have taken place in the Josianic era, or in some subsequent period, when "Assyria" probably served as a code name for Persia or the Seleucids.

Isa 8:6-8

> 8:6 Since this people has rejected the waters of Shiloah that flow gently and rejoicing, together with Rezin and the son of Remaliah,
> 7 therefore, the Lord is about to bring up against them the mighty and abundant waters of the River, the king of Assyria in all his splendour, and it will rise above all its channels and overflow all its banks,
> 8 and it will sweep on into Judah, in a flood, until it reaches up to the neck—and its outspread wings will fill the breadth of your land, Immanuel.

The text

The description of an Assyrian attack in Isa 8:6-8 is reminiscent of 7:20, in more than one respect. In both cases, the interpretation is made difficult by a series of textual expansions which have resulted in syntactical oddities, thus adding to the obscurity of the passage—on all levels.

In 8:6, the MT appears to contain the somewhat strange statement, that "this people" are "rejoicing" together with the leaders in Aram and Israel. If the expression "this people" (העם הזה) is taken as a reference to the population of Samaria (and/or Damascus), the oracle would connect perfectly well to the preceding passage, 8:1-4, to which it has been attached by the editorial v. 5.[50] On the other hand, such an interpretation would make the reproach in v. 6, as well as the ensuing threat against Judah (v. 8a), rather pointless.[51] It has been

[50] As pointed out by Rignell (1956:41), the case of Isa 9:15 shows that the expression העם הזה need not be seen as reserved exlusively for the people of Judah. The utterance in 9:15 probably refers to the people of Ephraim/Israel.

[51] Cf. Wildberger (1972:323).

suggested by Blenkinsopp, that Isaiah here addressed a Jerusalemite "faction, no doubt well represented", who were "in favor of joining the anti-Assyrian coalition."[52] However, if there was such a party, it is not mentioned in the context. Besides, "this people" would be a curious way of referring to a political faction.[53] Among modern commentators, the most popular solution to the problem has been to read ומס[ו]ס, "and melt" in place of ומשׂוש ("a joy" or "rejoicing").[54] The emerging scenario, with the people of Judah and its leaders "melting" in fear of Rezin and Pekah, is admittedly credible, and immediately compatible with 7:1-9. This attractive option is, however, flawed by two serious shortcomings: It lacks support from Qumran or the ancient versions, and it requires further emendations in order to produce a smooth syntax.[55]

There is, perhaps, a better solution. Since the phrase "with Rezin and the son of Remaliah" looks like a later addition, it seems preferable to take משׂוש, in the sense of "rejoicing, gently" (or: "a joy"), as part of the preceding description of the waters of Shiloah. This remedy has been advocated by Sweeney.[56] The resulting interpretation would accord well with the assumption that 8:6 alludes to cultic-mythological conceptions related to Zion, the temple mount in Jerusalem.[57] The same configuration of motifs (Jerusalem, waters, joy) is found in Ps 46:5: "a river whose streams make glad the city of God" (NRSV).[58]

The reference, in v. 7, to the king of Assyria and his "splendour", is commonly regarded as a gloss (cf. 7:17, 20).[59] This is probably correct. Although this insertion does not affect the overall interpretation, since the attacker would have to be Assyria anyway, it should not be dismissed as redundant or insignificant. The expression כל כבודו, "all his glory/ splendour", invites the reader to consider other passages in the book of Isaiah (e.g., 4:5; 6:3) as possible inter-texts. As noted by Machinist, it may also allude to the Akkadian

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[52] Blenkinsopp (2000:240).

[53] Rignell (1956:42) put forward these arguments against earlier proponents of a view similar to Blenkinsopp's.

[54] Thus Childs (2001:69), Duhm (1922:80), Kaiser (1981:178), and Wildberger (1972:321).

[55] Blenkinsopp (2000:240).

[56] Sweeney (1996:171-173). Cf. Clements (1980:96), who reads ומסוס, but translates "gently."

[57] See, e.g., Duhm (1922:80) and Blenkinsopp (2000:240-241).

[58] Cf. also Ps 48:3 "the joy (משׂוש) of the whole earth." One can add the observation that the similarity between Isa 8:6 and Ps 46:5 would be even more striking, if one adopts the reading of 1QIsa[a], משׂיש, apparently a Hiphil participle ("causing to rejoice", or the like).

[59] See, e.g., Barth (1977:198), Blenkinsopp (2000:240), Duhm (1922:80), and Wildberger (1972:321).

concept *melammu*, which stands for the “divinely endowed effulgence” of the Assyrian king.[60]

The concluding line of the oracle, v. 8b, starts with the syntactically disruptive והיה and finishes with the curiously ambiguous עמנו אל, “Immanuel / God with us.” Hence 8:8b is often treated as a later addition.[61] The impression that there is a break between vv. 8a and 8b is strengthened by the observation that some kind of shift takes place on the metaphorical level. However, this is far from certain.

Characterization

In Isa 8:6-8, an imminent attack by the Assyrian army is depicted as a river that first rises and overflows its banks, and then (accompanied by a storm wind?) sweeps over the country—a very apt metaphor for a military invasion, indeed. The inundation imagery conveys, in a vivid fashion, the impression of a swiftly advancing “natural” force, irresistible and capable of occupying—as well as destroying—vast areas.

This kind of imagery was, above all, frequently used in the official Assyrian propaganda. According to Simonetta Ponchia, inundation is the primary metaphor in the neo-Assyrian royal inscriptions, when it comes to descriptions of the victorious Assyrian army in action on the battlefield.[62] The Assyrian kings are depicted in a similar way. Obviously, this was the self-image that the Assyrian rulers wished to communicate: the appearance of being irresistible, like a flood. In several cases, the Akkadian word used for “flood” is *abūbu*.[63] As pointed out by Machinist, this is a term with mythological connotations, “recalling the primeval Flood.”[64] Also storm metaphors are used. The following quotation from Sennacherib’s annals comes close to Isa 8:8: “I swept over his entire land like a storm.”[65] In this connection, something should also be said about the metaphor in v. 8b. The phrase “its outspread wings” (מטות כנפיו) is open to a large number of interpretations. Some scholars maintain that this phrase implies a bird metaphor, which can be seen as depicting either YHWH’s protection or the enemy’s aggression.[66] Others suggest that the underlying idea is analogous to the concept

[60] Machinist (1983:727). Cf. also Blenkinsopp (2000:240).

[61] Thus, e.g., Barth (1977:200-202), Childs (2001:73), and Clements (1980:97).

[62] Ponchia (1987:233-234).

[63] For textual references, see Machinist (1983:726, n. 40, and p. 727, n. 41.), Schott (1926:83-84), and Seux (1967:34, 72, 199).

[64] Machinist (1983:726),

[65] OIP 2, 59:28.Quoted from Buccellati (1976:63).

[66] Barth (1977:201) and Wildberger (1972:327) prefer the protective alternative, whereas Koenen (1995:179, n. 20) defends the view that the Assyrian army is pictured as a bird of prey.

of the "wings" of the wind (cf. Ps 18:11; Hos 4:19).[67] But could a river, or a flood, be pictured as a winged creature? This seems unlikely.[68] Alternatively, the author may have thought of (the outstretched wings of) a storm which accompanied the flood.[69] A possible parallel to Isa 8:8, an attacking enemy being pictured as a winged stormwind, is found in a Neo-Assyrian oracle: "What wind has risen against you, whose wing I have not broken?"[70] An equally attractive solution would be to regard the enigmatic expression in Isa 8:8b as an allusion to the winged solar disc in the Assyrian state emblem.[71]

There are, as shown above, interesting correspondences between the image of the invading Assyrian army in Isa 8:6-8 and the official Assyrian self-image. When coupled with the conspicuous absence of negative attributes in the characterization of the attacker, this observation may lead to the conclusion that the Isaianic oracle merely echoes the Assyrian propaganda of the time.[72] However, we should not forget "the waters of Shiloah that flow gently" (8:6). The comparison between this tiny brook (or channel) in Jerusalem and the great "River" in Mesopotamia (the Euphrates or, possibly, Tigris) introduces a new, ironic—and potentially subversive—dimension into the traditional, propagandistic picture. There seems to be a conscious contrast between the native, gentle stream and the wild, overflowing foreign waters.[73] To this comes the contrast between the insignificant outward appearance of Shiloah, on the one hand, and its importance for the cultic life of the city (and for its water supply, at least after the completion of Hezekiah's tunnel project), on the other hand. The point made by the text is probably: Appearances are deceptive. According to a common interpretation, the waters of Shiloah stand metaphorically for the protective power of YHWH, immense yet at times almost unnoticeable—a power which "this

[67] Such an interpretation is advocated by, e.g., Blenkinsopp (2000:240) and Liwak (1991:216). Sweeney (1993; cf. 1996:172-173) has put forward an alternative hypothesis, interpreting the wings as "skirts", and contending that Isa 8:6-8 employs sexual imagery. However, this fails to convince me.

[68] But cf. Childs (2001:73), who paraphrases "its channels (wings)." Cf. also Kaiser (1981:178, 180-181).

[69] Cf. Wildberger (1972:326), who suggests that the imagery perhaps shifts slightly already in v. 8a, from a flood to torrents of rain.

[70] SAA 9.1.1, lines 6-7. Quoted from Parpola (1997:4).

[71] See Parayre (1990). Cf. also Keel (1972:195-195, pictures nr 295 and 296) and Mettinger (1995:194). I am indebted to prof. Tryggve Mettinger (oral communication), for suggesting this interpretation of Isa 8:8b to me.

[72] Cf. the nuanced and insightful discussion offered by Machinist, who speaks of "an adaptation of Neo-Assyrian royal idiom" (1983:726-728, quote on p. 728).

[73] With Kaiser (1981:179). The Targumic interpretation of the waters of Shiloah as a metaphor for the Davidic dynasty is of some interest in this context.

people" had rejected.[74] Now, the expression "to reject someone's water" may have been a conventional metaphor for ungratefulness and disloyalty. In an Egyptian text from the 8th century BCE, *The Victory Stela of King Piye*, it is stated concerning Namart, a petty ruler who had joined Piye's enemies, that "he has rejected the water of his majesty."[75] If the phrase is used in a similar vein in Isa 8:6, those referred to as "this people" are pictured as foolish traitors. But what does this imply for the image of Assyria? I suggest that there is a subtext to this oracle, an undercurrent of Judahite nationalism and theology, saying that Assyria may seem ever so irresistible and invincible, but that its power is limited, and controlled by YHWH.

The role of YHWH in Isa 8:6-8 is ambiguous. The rejected helper is said to "bring up" the flood (and the storm). Judah will be submerged, but only up to a certain limit, "until it reaches up to the neck" (v. 8). This could be indicative of a hope for a "last minute" salvation of the nation, or at least of a remnant.[76] According to Antti Laato, the point is that Assyria "fails to conquer Jerusalem which is seen as the peak of the mountain that withstands the waters of chaos."[77] Some implications of this interesting suggestion will be discussed below.

Contextualization

Despite the manifold interpretative problems in Isa 8:6-8, there is a consensus among the commentators regarding two crucial issues: (a) that the oracle should be dated to the time of the Syro-Ephraimite crisis, and (b) that the attacker is Assyria.[78] As regards the identity of the accused party ("this people", v. 6) and the victim(s) of the attack, the scholars are divided into two camps. Some believe that the focus is on Judah.[79] Others make a distinction between two stages in this invasion, described as an inundation: An initial manoeuvre (v. 7), directed against Aram and Israel (= "this people"), is then followed by a second "wave" which reaches Judah (v. 8).[80] Something like the latter scenario—a

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[74] Duhm (1922:80) offers the following interpretation: "So gering dies Wasser, so gering ist auch in den Augen der Judäer … Jahwes Macht." Rignell (1956:41) speaks of "die nach aussen bisweilen unmerkliche und doch unerhörte Kraft des Herrn." According to Childs (2001:73), "[t]he prophet uses the figure of this trickle of water to depict the seeming weakness of the divine promise in contrast with the awesome strength of Assyria, whose aid Ahaz sought." Cf. similarly Wildberger (1972:323-325).

[75] Quoted from the translation in Lichtheim (1980:68-69).

[76] Cf. Rignell (1956:43).

[77] Laato (1998:104).

[78] Except for Kaiser (1981:177-178), who dates 8:5-8 to the beginning of the Persian period. The reference would be to the Babylonians.

[79] See, e.g., Clements (1980:96-97) and Wildberger (1972:322-326).

[80] Thus Høgenhaven (1988:100-101), Laato (1998:104) and Rignell (1956:41-43).

large-scale Assyrian campaign first affecting other territories and then eventually Judah—seems indeed to be implied by the two-step construction of the flood metaphor in vv. 7-8. It is, however, of vital importance to recognize that the threat against Judah (v. 8a) constitutes the climax of the drama.[81]

Still, Isa 8:6-8 does not look like an unconditional announcement of total defeat for Judah. On a closer examination, the depiction of the Assyrian invasion is framed by expressions related to cultic-mythological (and nationalist) conceptions of the inviolability of Zion-Jerusalem, the city of God. Both the prelude in v. 6, with its conspicuous configuration of motifs (Jerusalem - water streams - joy), and the final chord, "Immanuel / God with us", echo the so-called Psalms of Zion (Pss 46; 48). This theme is further elaborated in 8:9-10, an addition with an almost chauvinist perspective. As mentioned above, Laato has made the ingenious suggestion that the depiction of Judah being submerged "up to the neck" (v. 8) implies that Jerusalem, the peak (or: "head" = capital!) of the country, will not be conquered by the Assyrians.[82] On this reading, Isa 8:6-8 can be seen as a strange blend of threat and reassurance.

Although it is conceivable that the prophet Isaiah actually authored and delivered such a message in the 730s, one may consider other alternatives. If the reference to "Rezin and the son of Remaliah" in v. 6 is a later addition (cf. the discussion above), motivated by the present literary context (8:1-4!), nothing precludes the supposition of a later date. In my opinion, the situation in 701 BCE is a given candidate: On that occasion, the Assyrian invasion of Judah culminated in the siege of Jerusalem, but the city was not captured. Isa 8:6-8 may, I suggest, be read as a prediction/depiction of that event. As the text now stands, it nevertheless refers explicitly to the Syro-Ephraimite crisis. One might perhaps characterize the picture presented as a kind of double exposure. Thus, if the oracle was not composed around 701, it was certainly (re)interpreted (as shown by 8:9-10), and possibly reshaped, in the light of that traumatic, yet apparently edifying episode within the history of Judah and Jerusalem.

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[81] With Wildberger (1972:326-327). Contra Watts (1985:117-118) and Rignell (1956), who read Isa 8:6-8 as a threat (primarily) against Ephraim/Israel and Aram. Rignell contends that the point where the invasion/inundation reaches Judah (8:8), far from constituting a climax, "muss als eine Feststellung mehr *en passant* angesehen werden" (1956:42, emphasis as in orig.).

[82] Laato (1998:104). Note that the oracle in Isa 7:8-9 refers to Damascus and Samaria as "the head of Aram" and "the head of Ephraim", respectively.

Isa 10:5-15

10:5 Woe to Assyria, the rod of my anger,
the staff – it is in their hands – of my fury!
6 Against a godless nation I send him,
and against the people of my wrath I command him,
to take spoil and to seize booty,
and to trample them down like mud in the streets.
7 But he does not reckon it so, his mind does not see it that way.
What is in his mind is to destroy, and to cut off not a few nations.
8 He says/thinks: "Are not my commanders all kings?
9 Is/was not Calno like Charchemish?
Is/was not Hamath like Arpad, Samaria like Damascus?
10 Since my hand has grasped the kingdoms of the idols
with more images than those of Jerusalem and Samaria,
11 shall I not do to Jerusalem and its images
what I have done to Samaria and its idols?"
12 When the Lord has completed all his work on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, he* will punish the arrogant mind of the king of Assyria, and his haughty pride.
13 For he says/thinks: "By the strength of my own hand I have done it,
and by my own wisdom, for I have understanding.
I have removed* the boundaries of peoples, and plundered their treasures,
like a bull I have laid low* the inhabitants.
14 My hand has plundered the wealth of the nations like a nest.
As one gathers abandoned eggs, so I have gathered all the earth,
and there was none that flapped a wing, or opened its mouth to peep."
15 Should the axe vaunt itself over the one who hews with it,
or the saw magnify itself against the one who wields it?
As if a rod would wield him who lifts it,
or as if a staff should lift the one who is not wood!

* Cf. BHS app.

The text
It has been demonstrated by Hermann Barth that Isa 10:5-15 is a neatly balanced composition. This is a modified version of the chart provided by Barth:[83]

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[83] Cf. Barth (1977:25).

5 Assyria as the instrument of YHWH
    6-7 Accusations against Assyria
        8-9 + 11 Speech by the Assyrian king (fictitious quotation)
    12b Accusations against Assyria
        13-14 Speech by the Assyrian king (fictitious quotation)
15 Assyria as the instrument of YHWH

According to Barth, the following parts of the text should be regarded as later expansions: in v. 5 הוא בידם, "it is in their hands", apparently a gloss attempting to modify the metaphor (from Assyria being a staff in the hands of YHWH to the staff being in the hands of the Assyrians); v. 10; in v. 11 the references to "its idols" and "its images"; v. 12a; v. 15bβγ.[84] Other scholars treat vv. 11 and 12 in their entirety as additions.[85] The difference between these positions need not detain us, since it is of little importance for the analysis that follows.

Characterization

The portrait of Assyria in Isa 10:5-15 meets all the requirements of an enemy image (in contradistinction to Isa 5:26-30; 7:18-19, 20; 8:6-8). Here, for the first time in the book of Isaiah, decidedly negative characteristics are attributed to the Assyrians. Accusations, mainly concerning arrogance, are interfoliated with lengthy fictitious quotations which purport to reveal the secrets in the enemy's mind—a technique well-known from the enemy portraits in the Psalms.

The bulk of the section focuses on the Assyrian king. He is charged with arrogance and despotism in general (vv. 7, 12b, 13-14). More specifically, he is being accused for his alleged disobedience vis-à-vis YHWH, the national deity of Judah! According to vv. 6-7, the Assyrian ruler had not followed the order given by YHWH to the letter. On the contrary, he had exceeded his authority. The entire section 10:5-15 can be regarded as a refutation of the Assyrian interpretation of the mandate given them by YHWH.

In this way, the text dramatizes an ideological conflict. Whereas the interests of Assyria and Judah could sometimes coincide on a purely pragmatic level, the official Assyrian ideology, which aspired to attain world dominion at the command of Aššur, was irreconcilable with the pro-Judahite Isaianic theology, which was inspired by a Zion-centered vision of YHWH's universal dominion. Isa 10:5-15 appears to use a strategy that is common in propaganda wars: to pick up elements from the enemy's propaganda, distort them, and then re-use them as rhetorical weapons directed against the enemy. In a discussion of this and

[84] Barth (1977:22-24).

[85] Clements (1980:111-112), Wildberger (1972:392, 401-403).

related passages (e.g., Isa 10:16-19; 14:24-27), Peter Machinist has made the interesting comment, that "the Assyrian becomes in Isaiah what the 'enemy' was in his own inscriptions, who 'trusted in his own strength' and 'did not fear the oath of the gods'."[86] In other words, traits from the Assyrian enemy image were projected onto its official self-image. The effect was a caricature.

Both in its details and in its overall structure, the shaping of the prophetical discourse in Isa 10:5-15 seems to have been dictated by such an anti-Assyrian propaganda warfare agenda. The use of metaphors is a case in point. In the second "quote" (vv. 13-14), the Assyrian king is represented as boasting over his own strength and cleverness. Here he is "overheard" describing himself metaphorically, first as a fierce bull (v. 13) and then as a plunderer of birds' nests (v. 14).

The bovine metaphor in v. 13bγ, "like a bull (כאביר) I laid low",[87] has numerous counterparts in the Assyrian tradition of royal self-praise. A particularly close parallel is found in an inscription where Shalmaneser III describes a campaign with the words "I trampled down his land like a wild bull (*kīma rēmi*)."[88] The bull simile in v. 13 can thus be seen as an echo of Assyrian propaganda, without any noticeable distortion.[89] Yet one may sense a touch of irony in the ambiguous phrase: ואוריד ... יושׁבים. In the context of a genuine self-praise, it would be natural to take this as a reference to the heroic deed of throwing down rulers from their thrones (cf. the translation in NRSV: "I have brought down those that sat on thrones"). Alternatively, יושׁבים should be taken in the sense "inhabitants." In that case, the victims of the "bulldozing" activity were not the king's equals, but ordinary, defenceless civilians. As far as I can see, the literary context gives precedence to the latter, less flattering, interpretation.

The elaborate simile in v. 14 combines several traditional topoi from the Assyrian propaganda, but the resulting picture is best described as a parody. In their annals, and on their reliefs, the Assyrian kings were often represented as successful hunters and adventurous explorers.[90] Defeated and fleeing enemies

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[86] Machinist (1983:734). Cf the textual references adduced by Machinist on p. 734, n. 97-99. On the official Assyrian enemy images, see further Fales (1982) and Zaccagnini (1982).

[87] In my opinion, this reading (the Ketiv. of the MT), and this translation of אַבִּיר ("bull"), suits the context better than other alternatives ("mighty one", "hero", or the like). No emendation is necessary. With, e.g., Blenkinsopp (2000:252) and Watts (1985:145-146). Cf. also NRSV.

[88] KB 1, 166:52. Quoted from Marcus (1977:87).

[89] Thus also Gallagher (1999:81-82), who adduces three quotations from Sennacherib's annals.

[90] See, e.g., Keel (1984:78) and Machinist (1983:723).

were typically portrayed as swiftly flying birds.[91] However, in the case of Isa 10:14, the defensive capacity of the conquered countries appears to be a bit too much downplayed, and the element of serendipity too heavily stressed. Honestly, what courage does it take to steal eggs from birds who are too scared even to chirp in protest? In this way, the biblical author represents the foreign king (or: has him present himself) as avid and unscrupulous—and possibly blasphemous, as well. It has been suggested by Koenen, that the king of Assyria is here represented as mocking various deities (among them YHWH) for failing to protect the inhabitants of the conquered nations.[92]

The Assyrian ruler's exaggerated boasting (vv. 13-14) is countered by a set of metaphors which constitute the frame of the passage. The "instrumental" imagery employed in vv. 5 and 15 deprives Assyria of its authority and independence (on the rhetorical-ideological level, at least). A rod, a staff, an axe or a saw—they are all instruments, in the hands of someone else, wielded by the user as (s)he wishes. These metaphors express the Jerusalemite vision of Assyria's subordination to YHWH. At the same time, they manage to insinuate that the Assyrian disinclination to accept these terms was something unprecedented and unnatural. Rebellion and insubordination would have been unacceptable at all events, but the image of a tool that revolts against its user and starts thinking and acting on its own (v. 15) would (at least to people living before the era of robots and computers!) amount to a reversal of the very order of things in the universe.[93]

The choice of metaphors in vv. 5 and 15 may need some further comment. The axe metaphor would seem to have an interesting background in contemporaneous Assyrian royal propaganda.[94] Above all, however, the images of the axe and the saw (v. 15) were probably selected because of their connection to tree felling, a cherished motif in the records of the great deeds performed by various

[91] For examples and references, see Marcus (1977:97-98), Ponchia (1987:235, 242), and Schott (1926:96-97).

[92] According to Koenen (1995:183-184), the metaphorical language in Isa 10:14 implies the image of the deity as a bird, possibly an eagle, spreading out the wings to protect its nest. This seems speculative. The point, that the patron deities appear to be absent and/or powerless, is nevertheless well taken.

[93] Cf. similarly Wildberger (1972:401). Also Høgenhaven (1988:117-118) speaks of Assyria's alleged violation of the divinely decreed world order, but he differs from other interpreters in one respect. According to Høgenhaven (1988:118), Assur is here portrayed as a "tragic" person, who is a victim of his own illusions.

[94] See SAA 9.1.6, lines iv. 11-13, and the comments made by Parpola (1997:8), in his footnote to line 13.

Mesopotamian rulers.[95] In Isa 10:15, then, the status of the proud Assyrian king (the former tree-feller) has been reduced to that of a tool in the woodcutter's hands.

A similar shift of roles can be observed as regards the rod/staff metaphor in v. 5. The two lexemes used, שׁבט, "rod", and מטה, "staff", share about the same set of denotations.[96] Both are frequently attested in the Hebrew Bible, but the combination of the two into a word pair is a rare phenomenon, mainly associated with the Isaianic tradition—and especially with its image of Assyria![97] In Isa 10:5, the phrases "rod of my anger" and "staff of my fury" carry a wide range of connotations. It is perhaps possible to trace an allusion to the metaphorical notion of YHWH as a shepherd here.[98] From that perspective, one might say that the comforting rod (שׁבט) and staff (משׁען) from Psalm 23 have been replaced by utterly discomforting counterparts. At any rate, the ruler of Assyria is depicted as some kind of instrument or weapon—possibly a stick used for flogging—in the hands of YHWH. In this connection, it is worth noticing that both שׁבט and מטה can denote the royal sceptre.[99] As a consequence, the metaphor in Isa 10:5 could be related to the conception (or: root metaphor) of YHWH enthroned as king.[100] The sceptre was an important symbol for the authority of the Assyrian king, as shown by the following quotation from the Cylinder inscription of Sargon II:

> The population of the four (quarters), of foreign tongue and divergent speech, inhabitants of mountain and plain, all whom the Light of gods, the lord of all, shepherded, whom I had carried off with my powerful scepter by the command of Aššur, my lord – I made them of one mouth and put them in its (= Dur-

[95] This Mesopotamian tradition was, more precisely, concerned with the felling of cedars and other precious trees in the distant and mountaineous regions of Lebanon. See, e.g., Machinist (1983:723) and Nielsen (1989:74-75, 160-162). Cf. *ANET*, pp. 275-276.

[96] Both lexemes can denote: a stick or rod (etc.); a royal sceptre; a tribe. Cf. the relevant entries in any Hebrew lexicon.

[97] Out of the 11 instances where שׁבט and מטה appear together, six are found in the book of Isaiah (9:3; 10:5, 15, 24; 14:5; 28:27). In each case there is a possible reference to Assyria. The remaining attestations in the Hebrew Bible can be divided into two groups: (a) the allegory in Ezek 19:10-14 (stem - sceptre; Ezek 19:11, 14), and (b) occurrences of the sense "tribe", or the like (Num 18:2; 36:3; Josh 13:29).

[98] This was suggested to me by Peter Barvestedt (oral communication).

[99] The sense "sceptre" is attested for שׁבט in, e.g., Gen 49:10 and Ps 45:7, and for מטה in, e.g., Jer 48:17 and Ps 110:2 (in both cases, the construction is מטה עז, "staff of power").

[100] Cf. Wildberger (1972:394). On "God is king" as a biblical root metaphor, see Brettler (1989). Cf. also Eidevall (1996:232) and Mettinger (1989:139).

> Šarrukin's) midst. Assyrians (lit., sons of Assyria), versed in all the proper culture, I ordered as overseers and supervisors to give them instruction in fearing god and king.[101]

Isa 10:5-15 presents a divergent picture, as it insinuates that the Assyrian ruler (Sargon?) is the one who needs to be taught good manners, including the fear of God. In this ideological redescription of reality, the Assyrian king is not even allowed to hold his own sceptre. Instead he is being wielded, by the hand of YHWH, the ruler of the universe—not as a sceptre, but as a rod, an instrument used in divine disciplinary actions.

The portrait of Assyria in Isa 10:5-15 is not altogether negative, after all. The instrument imagery conveys the notion of Assyria fulfilling an important function. The king of Assyria is condemned for having misused the limited mandate given by YHWH. However, this presupposes that he really had such a mandate. Apparently, the brutal wars conducted by the Assyrians were tolerated (or even endorsed), as long as they were seen as serving Judahite interests. But this had changed, the rod had made rebellion. It remains to consider possible answers to the question: What Assyrian action in which historical situation could have provoked this reaction from prophetical circles in Jerusalem?

Contextualization

The allusions in 10:9, to the Assyrian conquests of a number of cities, point to a *terminus a quo* around 717 BCE for the composition of (the original version of) Isa 10:5-15.[102] It seems much more difficult to determine a *terminus ad quem*. It is probably futile to search for *the* event which would have called for such a prophetical response, since the western campaigns succeeded each other almost ceaselessly during the reigns of Sargon II and Sennacherib. I suggest that Isa 10:5-15 can be seen as an attempt to come to grips with the new situation in the region, at some point of time after the fall of Samaria, perhaps in close connection to the events in 701 BCE.[103]

As mentioned above, the evaluation of Assyrian foreign policy contains both praise and blame.[104] To begin with, according to this prophetical discourse,

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[101] The Cylinder text, lines 72-74. Quoted from Machinist (1993:95).

[102] For detailed arguments, see Wildberger (1972:393-394, 397-398). Cf. also Barth (1977:26) and Clements (1980:109-110). Sweeney (1996:206-207) has argued that Sargon's campaign in 720 is a likely setting, contending that "[a]lthough Carchemish did not fall to Sargon II until 717, both Carchemish and Carno had been subjugated by Tiglath-Pileser as early as 742."

[103] Gallagher (1999:86) has argued that the passage to 701 BCE. This seems quite likely.

[104] Cf. Childs (2001:91).

the Assyrians had done their job: As an (unwitting) instrument, they had been commissioned to carry out YHWH's punishment of Judah's northern neighbour states, in the aftermath of the Syro-Ephraimite crisis. Since the section 10:5-15 stands at the end of a long row of passages concerned with the fate of Ephraim/Israel (7:1-9, 16-17, 18-19[?]; 8:1-4, 23), culminating in a series of indictments directed against the leaders in Samaria (9:7-20; 10:1-4[?]), it is likely that the expression "a godless people/nation (גוי חנף) in v. 6 refers to Ephraim/Israel, in the first place.[105] At any rate, the author of 10:5-15* apparently approved of the Assyrian punitive expeditions against Aram and Israel in the past.

However, when the threat from these neighbour states had been removed, it gradually dawned upon the observers in Judah that they were themselves facing the threat of an Assyrian invasion. According to vv. 7-9, the problem was that the Assyrians did not know where to stop: "First we take Samaria (721), then we take Arpad (720), then Carchemish (717)…." The text does not state exactly when and where they went too far. It is possible to read 10:7 as a general critique of Assyria's imperialistic ambitions, and its brutal treatment of defeated peoples, including mass deportations. This critique is nevertheless Jerusalem-centred. We can thus safely assume that the accusations for arrogance and blasphemy (vv. 12b, 15) were directly linked to a perceived threat against Judah and Jerusalem (v. 11).[106] At the end of the day, having wiped out Ephraim/Israel as a nation, Assyria turned out to be another—and much more terrifying—"godless nation." It is worth noticing that the indictments in 10:1-4 can be read in two different ways: (a) as a continuation of the "outstretched hand" series (9:11, 16, 20; 10:4), and thus directed against the leaders in Samaria, or (b) as the first of two woe-sayings (10:1, 5) addressed to the Assyrians, incriminating them as oppressors.[107]

As indicated above, it is likely that a first draft of Isa 10:5-15 originated prior to, or shortly after, the Assyrian siege of Jerusalem in 701. This piece of anti-Assyrian propaganda must, however, have been the object of renewed and intensified interest in the wake of that event, as evidenced by the "re-use" of 10:9 in 36:19 (cf. 2 Kings 18:34).[108] Hardmeier has propounded the theory, that the narrative in Isa 36–37 (= 2 Kings 18–19) is really about the Babylonians (in the guise of Assyrians!) and their siege of Jerusalem in the years 589-587 BCE.[109] At any rate, it is likely that the indictments against the arrogance of

[105] Barth (1977:25, see especially n. 45).
[106] Cf. Childs (2001:92).
[107] Thus Bäckersten (2007:151-160).
[108] See Hardmeier (1990:400, 403). Cf. also Clements (1980:112).
[109] Hardmeier (1990:169-170, 287-302).

Assyria in Isa 10:5-15 were applied to the Babylonians, in the course of exilic re-readings. Later on, this prophetical discourse was subject to further "up-datings", as evidenced by the additions made to the text (in vv. 10-12 + 15, see the section "the text" above). In post-exilic times, "Assyria" could probably be interpreted as a code name for the present oppressive power: Persia or the Seleucids.[110]

Isa 10:16-19

> 10:16 Therefore the Lord YHWH of the hosts will send
> consumption among its/his fat parts,
> beneath its/his splendour a burning will be kindled, like a fire.
> 17 The light of Israel will become a fire and its Holy One a flame,
> and it will burn up and consume its thorns and briers in a single day.
> 18 The glory of its forests and orchards will be destroyed*,
> both body and soul, as when a sick person wastes away.
> 19 The remaining trees in its forest will be so few that a child could count them.
> * Cf. BHS app.

The text

Although Isa 10:16-19 is attached to the preceding section (vv. 5-15) as a verdict (introduced by לכן, "therefore") following upon the indictment, there are good reasons to regard the larger "unit" 10:5-19 as a secondary, redactional creation. Due to its midrash-like character, 10:16-19 is often regarded as considerably later than 10:5-15.[111] The interpretation of this oracle is made difficult by its strange conflation of metaphorical (and possibly non-metaphorical) motifs.[112] An attempt to loosen the tangle must nevertheless be made.

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[110] Cf. Vermeylen (1977:256-258).

[111] According to Vermeylen (1977:259) and Wildberger (1972:408), the oracle in 10:16-19 originated in the post-exilic period. Barth (1977:34) and Clements (1980:113) ascribe it to a redaction in the Josianic era. Sweeney (1996:207, 209) seems to situate it in the 8th century.

[112] The commentators have made strongly divergent evaluations of the stylistic qualities. According to Duhm (1922:101), this passage cannot derive from Isaiah, nor from any other skilled writer. Wildberger (1972:407) speaks of a pupil ("ein Diaskeuast") combining disparate elements into a "Gerichtsgemälde." Cf. similarly Blenkinsopp (2000:255). Kirsten Nielsen (1989:194-201), on the contrary, believes that the author might have been the prophet Isaiah. According to Nielsen's inspired speech for the

Characterization
Before entering into the thicket-like textual landscape of Isa 10:16-19, consisting of inextricably interwoven metaphorical expressions (each of them admitting multiple interpretations), it is advisable to obtain an overall view. It can thus be said with a high degree of certainty that arrogant Assyria (cf. 10:5-15) here is characterized as weak and vulnerable (possibly due to internal strife), despite its apparent "glory" (vv. 16b, 18a), and hence as defenceless when confronted with some sort of calamity sent by YHWH. To deliver a detailed interpretation is, however, a far more complicated matter.

One of the most disturbing uncertainties concerns the topic: What kind of disaster is predicted/described? It is possible to discern two dominant semantic fields, forest fire (16b, 17, 18a, 19) and bodily sickness (16a, 18aβ, 18b). The most simple solution would be to assume that one of these two semantic fields constitutes the topic domain. This would leave us with two alternatives: (a) a sick person is pictured as a forest on fire, or (b) the devastation of a landscape is described in terms of a disease consuming a person's body. Intuitively, the latter seems more likely. In v. 18, the destruction of forests and orchards is apparently likened to the wasting away of a sick person. Moreover, the burning down of woodlands in Assyria could be seen as an appropriate punishment for the arrogance of its ruler (cf. 10:5-15), in the light of the well-known propensity of Assyrian kings to boast about their tree-felling activities in other countries (cf. Isa 37:24).[113]

However, the forest fire motif may, in its turn, stand metaphorically for something else. As pointed out by other scholars, the author of 10:16-19 seems to have drawn on the oracles now found in Isa 9:17-18 and 17:4-6.[114] In both instances, a national catastrophe befalling Ephraim/Israel is depicted metaphorically. While 17:4 contains a portrait of personified "Jacob" facing a drastic loss of "fat" (cf. 10:16a), 9:17-18 uses the motif of a forest fire (destroying the entire landscape, even thorns and briers, as in 10:17) as a metaphor. These observations may lead to the conclusion that the topic in 10:16-19 is defeat in war (or some other disaster affecting people rather than trees), expressed by

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defence, other scholars "misjudge the oracle in seeing it as a more or less fortuitous [sic] hotchpotch of different images", since it "constitutes a quite sophisticated chain of images utilizing the argumentative power of imagery" (1989:200). Cf. in a similar vein Barth (1977:32-33) and Childs (2001:93).

[113] Both Barth (1977:33-34) and Wildberger (1972:408-410) have outlined interpretations along these lines: literal deforestation, metaphorical fatness and fever.

[114] See the extensive discussion in Nielsen (1989:194-197). Cf. also Kaiser (1981:228). Barth (1977:30-32) registers the links to 17:4-6 and 9:13, but fails to mention 9:17-18.

means of a double metaphor (forest fire + bodily sickness).[115] But the identification of topic and vehicle field(s) is just the beginning. The tangle is still there. Several formulations remain confusingly ambiguous. In v. 16a, the expression משמניו could refer either to (a) fat parts of a person's body, or to (b) fat (i.e., fertile) regions of a country, or, perhaps, to (c) well-built warriors in an army.[116] Both (a) and (b) could be given various metaphorical interpretations. In v. 16b, the fire could stand for fever (or vice versa!?), and so on. Making a virtue out of necessity, one might consider the possibility that these expressions were chosen because of their allusive and elusive character.

One particular phrase in this opaque oracle needs some further comment: "the light (אור) of Israel will become a fire and its Holy One (קדושו) a flame" (v. 17a). This is usually taken as reference to divine agency: The power of YHWH will bring about the destruction of Assyria. But there are perhaps other nuances to this statement, as well. Whereas "the Holy One of Israel" is frequently attested in the Isaianic tradition as an epithet for YHWH (5:19, 24; 10:20, etc.), the expression "light of Israel" is unique within the Hebrew Bible. As argued by Wildberger, "light" could symbolize the protection offered by YHWH.[117] However, in Isa 49:6, the designation "light (אור) of the nations" is given to the servant of YHWH (in 49:3 this servant is named "Israel"). I suggest that Isa 10:17 contains (once again in a strange blend!) both an image of YHWH and a somewhat veiled self-image. In contrast to the enemy, seemingly invincible but extremely vulnerable, the "Israel" of this text (representing the post-exilic community?) would then characterize itself as seemingly small, yet strong and victorious (with YHWH on its side), like the spark that sets an entire forest on fire. There is, after all, more than a faint resemblance between Isa 10:17a and the openly chauvinist oracle in Obad 18: "The house of Jacob shall become a fire, and the house of Joseph a flame, and the house of Esau stubble, and they shall burn them and consume them" (NRSV).

Contextualization

In its present literary context, where the initial לכן ("therefore") clearly refers back to 10:5-15, the oracle in Isa 10:16-19 must be understood as proclaiming YHWH's punishment of Assyria. Theories concerning a prior setting, where this

[115] Thus most modern commentators. See, e.g., Childs (2001:93), Clements (1980:113-114), and Kaiser (1981:228). However, Wildberger (1972:408-410) seems to interpret the depictions of deforestation in this passage more literally.

[116] Cf. the differing translations and interpretations offered by, e.g., Blenkinsopp (2000:255) "the most prosperous of his people"; Kaiser (1981:227), "sein Fett", the plural denoting "die Fetten Körperteile"; Wildberger (1972:405), "seine fetten Landstriche"; and NRSV: "his stout warriors."

[117] Wildberger (1972:409-410).

passage functioned as a threat against Ephraim/Israel or Judah, have to be rejected as sheer speculations.[118] The intriguing lexical and metaphorical links between 10:16-19 and the depictions, in 9:17-18 and 17:4-6, of disasters befalling Ephraim/Israel, are probably best understood in terms of a conscious reversal, in accordance with some kind of deed–consequence pattern.[119] As the Assyrians had treated others, so they would now themselves be treated.

Barth has suggested a dating shortly before the fall of Nineveh.[120] The Josianic era, with its revanchist spirit, would certainly have been a suitable setting for a message like this. Others have argued for a post-exilic dating, mainly on stylistic grounds.[121] In that case, the author of 10:16-19 would have read "Assyria" in 10:5 as a code name for some contemporary oppressive power, in the first place Persia or the Seleucids. By the same token, "Israel" in 10:17 could refer either to pre-exilic Judah in Josiah's time (with ambitions to "liberate" the territories of former Ephraim/Israel from Assyrian oppression), or to the post-exilic temple community. In virtue of its opacity, this announcement of disaster will have been open to ever new reinterpretations and re-applications.

Isa 10:24-27a

> 10:24 Therefore, thus says the Lord, YHWH of the hosts: "O my people dwelling in Zion, do not fear Assyria when he/it beats you with a rod and wields his/its staff against you, in the same way as Egypt (did).
> 25 For in a very short while my* wrath will come to an end, and my anger will be (directed) at their destruction.
> 26 And YHWH of the hosts will wield a whip against him/it, as when Midian was struck at the rock of Oreb. His staff will be over the sea, and he will lift it, in the same way as (he did in) Egypt.
> 27a On that day his/its burden will depart from your shoulder, and his/its yoke from your neck."
>
> * Cf. BHS app.

[118] With Wildberger (1972:406-407), who criticizes the position of Procksch and others. Contra Nielsen (1989:197-201) who contends that Judah was the original addressee.

[119] Cf. Barth (1977:31) and Kaiser (1981:228).

[120] Barth (1977:34). He is followed by Clements (1980:113).

[121] Thus, e.g., Vermeylen (1977:259) and Wildberger (1972:408).

The text

Isa 10:24-27a would seem to constitute a textual unit.[122] This passage represents a palpable case of inner-biblical exegesis.[123] After the introductory messenger formula (v. 24aα) comes an exhortation (24aβ), followed by commentaries on—or instances of "re-cycling" of elements drawn from—other Isaianic passages, above all 10:5 (24bα, 25) and 9:3 (24bα, 26a, 27a).[124] These re-readings and expositions are interfoliated by allusions to the exodus tradition (24bβ, 26b). The purpose of this passage was evidently to encourage its addressees, living in Jerusalem, who were oppressed by "Assyria."

Characterization

The image of Assyria in Isa 10:24-27a is a thoroughly negative one. A closer look at the relation between this passage and its source texts reveals that elements taken from 10:5 have been transformed in significant ways, when adapted to this new context. The portrait of Assyria in 10:24-27a, as a tormentor of prisoners whose power will be broken, is more in line with 9:3 (and 14:25).

Assyria is no longer the "rod of anger" (10:5), used by YHWH to punish other peoples. According to 10:25, the suffering of YHWH's own people has come to an end, and the divine anger will be re-directed against their oppressors. There is, however, no hint as to a divine mandate given to Assyria. A clear distinction is made between the rod beating those who dwell in Zion (v. 24b) and the whip wielded by YHWH (v. 26a), between the staff lifted by Assyria (v. 24b) and the one lifted by YHWH (v. 26b). Assyria and YHWH are pictured as opponents, equipped with similar weapons, but far from equal. When YHWH strikes, Assyria is apparently unable to strike back. The references in v. 26 to the exodus from Egypt and the legendary victory over the Midianites (cf. Judges 7) recall conceptions of "holy war." (On the yoke metaphor in 10:27, see the analysis of 14:24-27 below.)

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[122] On the delimitation of this unit, the corrupt status of the text in v. 27b, and the solutions that have been suggested, see the commentaries, e.g., Blenkinsopp (2000:259, n. "a").

[123] Cf. Kaiser (1981:231-232) and Wildberger (1972:419).

[124] The following lexemes are shared by 10:24-25 and 10:5: מַטֶּה ,שֵׁבֶט , זַעַם, and אַף. The correspondences between 9:3 and vv. 24b + 26a + 27a include the reference to the defeat of Midian and the occurrence of these words: שׁבט, מטה, סבל, שׁכם, and על. The conspicuous similarities between 10:27a and 14:25b indicate literary dependency, but in which direction? According to Kaiser (1983:42), the glossator responsible for 14:25b quoted 10:27a. It should however be noted that v. 27a (introduced by "on that day") looks like a later addition to 10:24-26. See, e.g., Barth (1977:19) and Wildberger (1972:421-422).

Contextualization

Most commentators agree that Isa 10:24-27a originated in the post-exilic period.[125] As a consequence, "Assyria" has to be understood as a chiffre for another great power, presumably Persia or the Seleucid empire. It does not seem possible to tie this text to a particular situation, since its formulations would have been applicable to innumerable incidents during centuries of foreign dominion over Jerusalem.

Isa 14:24-27

> 14:24 YHWH of the hosts has sworn: As I have designed, so will it be,
> as I have planned, so will it come to pass:
> 25 to crush Assyria in my land, and trample it/him down on my mountain.
> Its yoke will depart from them, and its burden from his shoulder.
> 26 This is the plan devised for the whole earth,
> and this is the hand that is stretched out over all the nations.
> 27 For YHWH of the hosts has planned, and who can frustrate?
> His hand is stretched out, and who can turn it back?

The text

Within the well-balanced and thematically coherent unit 14:24-27, only v. 25b has the character of a later addition.[126] Several scholars assume that 14:24-27* originally belonged together with material now found in ch. 10, but that it was displaced in the course of editing.[127] In its present position within the book, this passage nevertheless seems to serve as the closure of a larger section dealing with Assyria (and Babylonia), which begins in ch. 5.[128] The ensuing analysis will concentrate on the image of Assyria in v. 25a.

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[125] Thus, e.g., Barth (1977:48-49), Blenkinsopp (2000:258), Kaiser (1981:231-233), Vermeylen (1977:264-265), and Wildberger (1972:419). Deviant positions are taken by Clements (1980:116), who opts for the time of Josiah, and by Sweeney (1996:207-209) who apparently dates the passage to the 8th century.

[126] With Kaiser (1983:42) and Wildberger (1978:570-571).

[127] See, e.g., Kaiser (1981:227 and 1983:42), Sweeney (1996:209, 233), and Vermeylen (1977:252-254). Cf. also Barth (1977:109-117).

[128] Blenkinsopp (2000:289-290), Clements (1980:145-146).

Characterization

In Isa 14:25a, Assyria is depicted as a defeated and subdued enemy. The image of "trampling down" one's enemies was conventional.[129] In this context, it amounted to a reversal of the official Assyrian self-image. It is worth noticing that the Assyrian army is represented not only as powerless, but as entirely passive. Although it is clearly presupposed that they have entered Judah ("my land"), nothing is said about any activities or plans on their part. In this drama, the sole actor on the scene is YHWH, treating the Assyrians as if they were stage properties.

In v. 25b, the Assyrians are accused of burdening the YHWH's people with forced labour (cf. 9:3; 10:27a). The divine act of "crushing" Assyria (25a) is thereby interpreted, and legitimized, as an act of liberation from vassalage and oppression. Even though the "yoke" was a conventional metaphor for oppression, it is possible to interpret v. 25 (and hence also Isa 9:3; 10:27) as a response to Assyrian propaganda. In the official reports concerning conquered territories, the Assyrian rulers frequently used phrases like "I imposed upon them my yoke."[130] This metaphor implied, generally, that the Assyrians had subdued the inhabitants. At the same time, it referred to the vassalage of the city or nation (and its ruler). In several cases, such expressions also referred, more concretely, to various burdens—taxes, tributes, and corvée—which had been imposed on the inhabitants in such territories.

Contextualization

Despite divergent opinions on the dating of Isa 14:24-27*, most commentators would agree that the situation in 701 B.C.E. constitutes the primary point of reference. Some scholars contend that this was one of the last oracles delivered by the prophet Isaiah, around 701.[131] According to others, this prophecy originated later, probably in the Josianic era.[132] The latter alternative seems to be the most likely setting. At that time, the legend had turned the uncompleted siege of Jerusalem ("on my mountain") into a miraculous victory over the Assyrian army (in Judah, "my land"), and the downfall of the Assyrian empire was within sight. Later reinterpretations would have regarded the fate of Assyria as a paradigmatic event, reading 14:24-27 as presaging that *every* arrogant empire—be it

[129] See, e.g., Pss 44:6; 60:14. For Assyrian attestations, see Seux (1967:123-124).

[130] See Machinist (1993:86). Cf. the entries for *abšānu* and *nīru* in AHw and CAD.

[131] Thus, e.g., Wildberger (1978:567-568). Cf. also Vermeylen (1977:252-254).

[132] Thus Barth (1977:117-119), followed by Clements (1980:146). But cf. also Kaiser (1983:40-42), who seems to have an even later period in mind.

Babylonia, Persia, or the Seleucid empire—would eventually be crushed, in accordance with the universal scope of YHWH's plan (cf. v. 26).[133]

Isa 14:29

> 14:29 Do not rejoice, all of Philistia,
> now that the rod which struck you is broken;
> for from the snake's root an adder will come forth,
> and its fruit will be a flying serpent.

The text

A detailed discussion of the complicated redaction critical problems related to Isa 14:28-32 would be excessive, since the present investigation focuses primarily on the enemy image contained in v. 29. Suffice it to say that whereas v. 28 is blatantly editorial, and vv. 30 and 32 may contain later additions, v. 29 (together with v. 31) is generally held to be an original part of 14:28-32*.[134]

Characterization

According to a widely accepted interpretation of Isa 14:29, this saying addresses the situation following the death of an anonymous (probably Assyrian) ruler, an event that inevitably gave rise to speculations as to the character of his successor.[135] Alternatively, the reference might be to the downfall of an entire empire (most likely Assyria), which was expected to be replaced by another (the neo-Babylonian empire).[136] In either case, the report that the Philistines were rejoicing would make perfect sense.

In v. 29a, a ruler or an empire is pictured as a שׁבט, a "rod" or "sceptre", which had beaten the people in the Philistine cities. This metaphorical depiction recalls the ruler portraits in Isa 10:5-15 and 14:4b-21. With regard to the presence of the construction with שׁבט being followed by מכה ("striking", ptc. of נכה), and the absence of the idea that YHWH is holding the rod, the

[133] Cf. Blenkinsopp (2000:290).

[134] For detailed discussions, with partly divergent conclusions, see, e.g., Barth (1977:14-15; v. 30 added), Clements (1980:148; vv. 30a and 32b added), Kaiser (1983:44; vv. 30 and 32 added), Vermeylen (1977:297-303; v. 30 post-exilic), and Wildberger (1978:579, 586; v. 30a added). Cf. further the brief analysis of 14:28-32 in ch. 3.3. below.

[135] Thus, e.g., Clements (1980:148-149) and Wildberger (1978:577-579).

[136] Cf. Childs (2001:124).

similarities between 14:29a and 14:5-6 must be seen as particularly strong (or: striking).

In v. 29b the metaphorical language suddenly shifts, as the oppressive king/nation is likened to a snake (נחשׁ). Now the focus is on sinister prospects for the future. Apparently, the tyrant's/empire's successor(s) will be even worse (cf. 1 Kings 12:10-11, 14): the "fruit" coming out of the snake's "root" will be like a venomous "adder" (צפע), denoting a viper with a lethal venom), or like a "winged serpent" (שׂרף), denoting a mythic, demoniac being).[137] The imagery is conventional. For obvious reasons, dangerous enemies were often pictured as poisonous snakes (Pss 58:5; 140:4).[138] In pictorial art from the Ancient Near East, the primordial chaos monster is often represented by some kind of serpent.[139] In some cases, such a snake-monster may in effect symbolize a hostile nation, e.g., a rebellious vassal.[140]

The interpretation of the metaphors in 14:29 which has been outlined above can probably be deemed as rather uncontroversial. However, one interesting question (a question which is rarely raised by the commentaries) has so far been left unanswered: Is there a significant connection between the two metaphors used, the rod/sceptre (v. 29a) and the snake (v. 29b), or have they simply been juxtaposed?[141] As evidenced by the episode in Exod 7:8-13, where Aaron and

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[137] As pointed out by Wildberger (1978:581), it is possible to regard 29ba and 29bb as parallel. This would mean that the oracle speaks only of two generations, not (as commonly assumed) of three. Cf. also Kaiser (1983:45). For a survey of terms for different kinds of snakes in biblical Hebrew, and a discussion of which species they designate, see Riede (2000:231-232). According to Riede (2000:231), צפע denotes *vipera xanthia*, the most dangerous snake in Palestine. His suggestion that שׂרף in Isa 14:29 refers to a poisonous cobra, *naja nigricollis* (p. 232), is harder to believe. Winged seraphs belong to the realm of mythology, rather than zoology. Such beings are also mentioned elsewhere in the book of Isaiah, in 6:2, 6 (the heavenly court: angelic) and in 30:6 (the desert: demoniac). See further Wildberger (1972:581).

[138] An extensive discussion of the biblical (and some extra-biblical) instances of enemies depicted as snakes is found in Riede (2000:231-253). In addition to the examples discussed by Riede, I suggest that Jer 8:17 might be interpreted as a metaphorical depiction of human enemies. As mentioned by Riede, Assyrian and Egyptian kings sometimes described themselves, not their enemies, as snake-like. See Marcus (1977:99-100) and Grapow (1924:96).

[139] See Keel (1972:42-45).

[140] According to the interpretation made by Keel (1972:96), the chaos serpent on a stele from the reign of Tukulti-Ninurta II represents an Aramean city, Laq´, which attempted a revolt, and thus threatened the stability and order in the Assyrian empire.

[141] The suggestion that Isa 14:29 alludes to some proverbial expression is often repeated in the scholarly literature. See, e.g., Clements (1980:149) and Wildberger

the Egyptian magicians convert staffs into snakes, this combination of motifs (no doubt arising out of perceived similarity, as regards the physical shape of the items/creatures involved), was traditional—and associated with the symbolism of power. It is well known that the sceptre (and the staff) symbolized royal authority. As to the serpent, I suggest that it could represent one particular, and sometimes hidden, aspect of power—its inherent destructive capacity. This is indicated by an interesting passage in one of the Neo-Assyrian prophecies:

> I have come from the [m]ace. I have pulled out the snake which was inside it, I have cut it in pieces, and I have broken the mace.[142]

According to these words concerning the fate of Elam, spoken to Assurbanipal on behalf of an unnamed deity, a snake was found *inside* the mace. This seems to mean that some kind of particularly dangerous, rebellious forces within Elam had been identified, and subsequently—by means of the actions described, cutting the snake into pieces and breaking the mace—neutralized. It is stated plainly in the conclusion of the oracle, that “I [the deity] will destroy Elam; its army shall be levelled to the ground.”[143] Reverting to the discussion of Isa 14:29, the most interesting feature of this Neo-Assyrian oracle is that it conveys, within the context of an enemy image, the notion that *a sceptre may contain a serpent*. One might perhaps trace a similar conception behind the combination of metaphors in 14:29. In that case, the message to the Philistians could be paraphrased in the following way: You rejoice without any good reason. A king is dead (or: an empire is fallen), but that is of no avail—the destructive potential represented by that enemy is still intact. The rod is broken, but the snake (which lay inside?) lives on, in its offspring.

The characterization in Isa 14:29, of the enemy of Philistia, can thus be summed up as follows: In the rod/sceptre metaphor, notions of instrumentality and utility are suppressed, whereas the detrimental potential of the rod is prominent. By means of the snake metaphor, with its demoniac overtones, the dangerousness of the enemy is given further emphasis. The depiction of the snake’s offspring expresses continuity as well as escalation. After a short eclipse, due to the death of a ruler, the enemy will become even more dangerous. As shown above, this may be a case of deliberate re-use of motifs drawn from Assyrian propaganda, in an anti-Assyrian oracle. If the image of a

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(1978:581). That supposition may be correct, but it begs the question why exactly these motifs were combined.

[142] SAA 9.8, lines 5-7. Quoted from Parpola (1997:40).

[143] SAA 9.8, lines 8 + e. 9 + r. 1. Quoted from Parpola (1997:40).

poisonous snake was intended to be a portrait of Assyria (or: one of its rulers), it is, at any rate, worth noticing that it is strikingly similar to the standard Assyrian image of its own enemies, as deceptive and menacing creatures.

Contextualization

Since the superscription (v. 28), almost per definition, has to be regarded as secondary, it does not seem possible to date the prophecy in Isa 14:28-32* with any precision.[144] On the assumption that v. 29 refers to the death of an Assyrian king, several options are available. Tiglath-Pileser III would certainly match the description, but so would each of his successors, too. However, it is not ascertained that the reference is to an Assyrian ruler.[145] It may hence be wise to search for a more general reference. Blenkinsopp has suggested that "the author is taking the long view, retrospectively and prospectively, on the contrasting destinies of Philistines and Judeans."[146] It is worth noticing that the rod/sceptre metaphor in 14:29 may allude to both 10:5 and 14:6-7, and that the present literary context of 14:28-32 (14:4b-21, 24-27) is preoccupied with the continuity between the Assyrian and neo-Babylonian empires. As it now stands, this prophecy appears to describe Babylonia as even worse than its predecessor.[147]

As mentioned above, several scholars have argued that later expansions have been made to 14:28-32*.[148] This is indicative of an active process of reinterpretation and up-dating, which continued into the late post-exilic period.[149] It is conceivable that this prophecy came to be applied to such a major event as the battle at Issos 333 B.C.E., but I find it less likely that Isa 14:28-32 in its entirety should have originated around that time.[150]

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[144] Contra Sweeney (1996:233-234). Among other things, the circumstance that 14:28 has been modeled on 6:1 militates against the supposition that it provides reliable information concerning the dating of this prophecy. Cf. Blenkinsopp (2000:292). On the basis of 14:28, Sweeney (1996:233-234) submits the hypothesis that the rod–snake imagery in v. 29 refers to Ahaz and Hezekiah! However, this theory is far from new. Weighty arguments against it have been put forward by, e.g., Wildberger (1978:577). This cannot have been the original reference. On the other hand, the secondary, editorial juxtaposition of (1) a reference to the year of Ahaz's death (v. 28), and (2) an oracle dealing with the expectations arising in the wake of a tyrant's death, must have opened up for such readings. Cf. the messianic interpretation in the Targum.

[145] See Blenkinsopp (2000:292). Cf. Clements (1980:148).

[146] Blenkinsopp (2000:293).

[147] Cf. Childs (2001:124, 128).

[148] See the section with the title "the text" above.

[149] See Vermeylen (1977:297-303).

[150] This hypothesis, once defended by, e.g., Duhm (1922:124-125) and more recently restated by Kaiser (1983:46), fails to explain why an even later editor—the one

Isa 30:27-33

30:27 See, the name of YHWH is coming from afar;
his anger is burning and his load* [or: pronouncement of judgement?] is heavy*.
His lips are full of indignation, and his tongue is like a devouring fire.
28 His snort is like an overflowing stream that reaches up to the neck:
to sift [?] nations with a sieve [?] of destruction,
and (to place) a bridle that leads astray on the jaws of the peoples.
29 For you there will be singing, as in a night when a festival is being celebrated,
and joy of heart, as when one sets out to the sound of the flute, to go up to the mountain of YHWH, to the rock of Israel.
30 And YHWH will make his majestic voice heard, and one will see his arm descend in furious anger, with a flame of devouring fire; with cloudburst, torrents of rain, and hailstones.
31 Assyria will be terrified at the voice of YHWH; by a rod he will be stricken*.
32 And every stroke of his staff of correction* that YHWH lays upon him (will be) to (the sound of) tambourines and lyres, with dances [?]* of offering [?]; he fights against it.
33 For his tophet* has long been prepared; yes, for the king/Molech it has been made ready, wide and deep, a fire place and plenty of wood; the breath of YHWH, like a stream of sulphur, will kindle it.

* Cf. BHS app.

The text

The passage 30:27-33 is notoriously difficult to translate and interpret. Excising suspected glosses (in vv. 27, 29, 32, 33) does not help much, since the remaining text in several places appears to be corrupt, beyond repair. Any translation of vv. 28b, 32, and 33a (including the one presented above) has to be based on

responsible for adding the introductory label in v. 28!—evidently read this prophecy as referring to the Assyrian era.

educated guesses.[151] It is nevertheless possible to regard this passage as a composition with a certain degree of thematic coherence.[152]

Characterization

An analysis of the characterization of Assyria in Isa 30:27-33 needs to take the passage's intratextual ramifications into consideration. Apparently, a main concern of its author/editor(s) was to comment, or correct, those passages within the extant Isaianic tradition which projected an image of Assyria as strong and victorious, even as an instrument of YHWH. All such images are dismantled and de-constructed in 30:27-33. To this end, a particular technique is used: Traditional metaphorical designations are reversed.[153]

According to the perspective of this passage, Assyria is not an instrument whereby YHWH punishes other peoples. Instead, Assyria appears to stand first in line for punishment, when the nations are being judged ("sifted"[?], v. 28bα) by YHWH. As suggested by Wildberger, the scope of this judgement need not be universal, since the plural forms "nations" (גוים) and "peoples" (עמים) in v. 28 could refer to the multi-ethnic character of the Assyrian army, with its large number of mercenary soldiers.[154] In that case, the metaphor in v. 28bβ pictures these soldiers and officers, responsible for the deportations of vast populations, as cattle about to be led away—even: astray (cf. Isa 37:29). The end of the great empire seems to be near. Hence these reversals: Once threatening like an overflowing river (8:7-8), Assyria is now being threatened by an overflowing stream, that reaches—exactly as in 8:8—"up to the neck" (30:28a). As if being submerged by water was not bad enough, this stream—a metaphor for the wrath of YHWH—turns out to consist of sulphur (v. 33). No longer a rod/sceptre in the hand of YHWH (10:5), Assyria will itself be stricken by the divine rod (vv. 31b-32a). So many cities had been burnt by the Assyrian troops, but now a burning place has been prepared for them. Whether the opaque formulations in v. 33 refer metaphorically to some kind of holocaust sacrifice (an offering of the "Molech" type, at the Tophet site in the Hinnom Valley), or literally to the burning of corpses left on the battlefield, cannot be established.[155]

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[151] See the extensive textual apparatus in Wildberger (1982:1207-1210). Cf. also Barth (1977:93-96). It is instructive to compare the differing renditions in various Bible translations and commentaries.

[152] Cf. Barth (1977:97-98).

[153] This has, of course, been noted by others. See, e.g., Barth (1977:101-102), Clements (1980:252-253), and Wildberger (1982:1222).

[154] Wildberger (1982:1218-1219).

[155] Cf. the divergent interpretations produced by, e.g., Blenkinsopp (2000:424), Clements (1980:253-254), and Wildberger (1982:1223-1224).

Another noteworthy aspect of the characterization is the extent to which the description of Assyria's decline and fall is modelled on depictions of the fate of Ephraim/Israel, one of this empire's victims. The combination in 30:27-33 of the motifs "being stricken" (vv. 31b-32a), "being led astray" (v. 28), and "being devoured by fire" (vv. 27, 30, 33) has its closest counterpart in 9:7-20 (vv. 12, 15, 17-18), a passage dealing with the decline and fall of Ephraim/Israel.

In Isa 30:27-33, the downfall of the Assyrian empire is presented as an occasion for cultic celebration. While the Assyrians are being tortured, the spectators are expected to react by singing and dancing, as if they were taking part in a festival procession. The picture is admittedly bizarre, perhaps even repulsive to a modern reader. Should not such "joy of heart" (v. 29) be termed malicious joy? I agree with Blenkinsopp that the scene depicted in v. 32, of "instrumental music keeping time to a victim being flogged", can be regarded as an "unpleasantly sadistic image."[156] But how should this be understood? Although there can be no doubt that the vehemence with which Assyria is condemned indicates a strong desire for vengeance, I believe that this passage first and foremost expresses relief. On this interpretation, its sometimes grotesque imagery reflects the terror which "Assyria" (whatever that stands for, see below) had spread among the members of the community addressed by the unknown author(s). In the midst of this remarkable—and, at times, macabre—agglomeration of metaphors, it is therefore stated, quite plainly, that "Assyria will be terrified" (v. 31a). The rest of 30:27-33 can be seen as revolving around that reversal.

Contextualization

Several scholars have argued that Isa 30:27-33* originated in the Josianic era, when the disintegration of the Assyrian empire had begun and expectations as to its ultimate downfall were aroused.[157] In addition, the possible allusions to a centralized Passover celebration (v. 29) and to the "Tophet" (v. 33) might indicate a close connection to the cultic reforms allegedly carried out by Josiah (cf. 2 Kgs 23:10, 21-23).[158] However, other scholars have pointed out that the general outlook of the passage suggests a setting in the Second Temple

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[156] Blenkinsopp (2000:423). Note, however, that the translation of v. 32 is extremely uncertain.

[157] Thus, e.g., Barth (1977:102-103), Clements (1980:252), and Sweeney (1996:395-396). The arguments adduced by Wildberger (1982:210-216) for the "authenticity" of 30:27-33* (with exception for vv. 29 and 32) are not conclusive. To the contrary, the profuse "re-use" of Isaianic material—in the form of reversals!—militates against the supposition that Isaiah was the author of this prophecy.

[158] See Sweeney (1996:396). Cf. also Barth (1977:102-103).

period.[159] In that case, the events of the late 7th century would constitute the retrospective point of reference, but not the setting, for this prophecy. Quite possibly, "Assyria" here stands as a prototype for the actual objects of the post-exilic author's and the addressees' hatred and fear (perhaps the Persians?).

Blenkinsopp has recently strengthened the case for a post-exilic dating. He has called attention to the similarities between 30:27-33 and passages that doubtless belong to one of the latest redactional strata in the book of Isaiah (66:15-16, 24).[160] In its present form, at least, the passage is thus almost certainly post-exilic. If there ever was a pre-exilic kernel, it can hardly be reconstructed.[161] At any rate, Isa 30:27-33 must have been the subject of successive re-interpretations. It is likely, for instance, that "Assyria" was read as a code name for the Seleucid empire in the 2nd century BCE.

Isa 31:8-9

31:8 Assyria will fall by a sword of a non-mortal,
a sword of a non-human will consume him.
He will flee from the sword,
and/but his young warriors will be put to forced labour,
9 his rock will pass away in terror,
and his officers will panic (and take to flight) away from the standard.
This is a saying of YHWH,
whose fire is in Zion, and whose furnace is in Jerusalem.

The text

Several scholars contend that the original core of 31:8-9 comprised only v. 8a. Hence, they treat vv. 8b-9 as a later addition.[162] This could be correct. Although the motifs of death by sword and flight otherwise can be seen as complementary, the way they are combined in this passage creates a strange effect: Surprisingly enough, the text further seems to convey the notion that (some of) the Assyrians would be able to escape from a supra-human sword-bearer! This unexpected modification of v. 8a is perhaps best explained in terms of redactional activity,

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[159] Thus, e.g., Becker (1997:268), Blenkinsopp (2000:423-424), Kaiser (1983:243-244), and Vermeylen (1977:416-418).

[160] Blenkinsopp (2000:423-424).

[161] Cf. Vermeylen (1977:416-418).

[162] Thus, e.g., Barth (1977:81-90), Becker (1997:259), Duhm (1922:232-233), and Kaiser (1983:253).

or *Fortschreibung*.[163] Nevertheless, the ensuing analysis will have the resulting, somewhat complex unit as its object.

Characterization

The characterization of Assyria in 31:8-9 can be summarized in three words: helplessness, defeat, and humiliation. This depiction of a military defeat, with forced labour awaiting the survivors, can be read as a reversal of several preceding passages, where the Assyrian army is described as invincible (5:26-29; 7:18-19, 20; 8:6-8).

Some formulations seem to allude particularly to 5:26-30. According to a likely reading of that prophecy, it pictures the approaching Assyrian army not only as invincible, but as endowed with uncannily supra-human qualities. The portrait of the Assyrian warriors in 31:8-9 provides a striking contrast. They are human, in the sense of being weak and mortal. Now they will be slain by the sword of a supra-human agent (31:8a). Their strong and well-equipped soldiers (5:27-28) will flee in disorder. This time, their officers will not come and gather around the standard raised by YHWH (5:26). To the contrary, they will run away from the standard in panic (31:9a).

A couple of metaphors deserve further comment. The expression "his/its rock (וסלעו)" in v. 9a must stand for some source of Assyrian trust. One obvious option would be to see this as a designation for the military and political leadership (cf. Isa 32:2).[164] Alternatively, it could be taken as a divine epithet (cf. Pss 18:3; 31:4; 42:10; 71:3). In the latter case, the rock that passed away—out of fear for YHWH?—could be seen as a caricature of Ashur, the national deity of Assyria. At any rate, the enemies are depicted with heavy irony, as trusting in something illusory—a transient rock![165] In the concluding line of this prophecy, the addressees are encouraged to place their trust in YHWH, "whose fire (אוּר) is in Zion, and whose furnace (תנור) is in Jerusalem." This fire/furnace metaphor recalls 10:16-19 and 30:27-33, two passages which threaten the Assyrians with devouring fire. Hence, the main thrust of v. 9b seems to be that

[163] Thus several other scholars, e.g., Barth (1977:81-90) and Becker (1997:259). However, the original unity of v. 8 is defended by others, e.g., Clements (1980:256, 258) and Wildberger (1982:1239, 1245-1247).

[164] Wildberger (1982:1245-1246) suggests a reference to military commanders and/or elite troops. Cf. Blenkinsopp (2000:246) who translates "his leaders."

[165] Duhm (1922:233) once directed the following sharp criticism against biblical scholars trying to make sense of the MT: "ein Fels, mag er bedeuten was er will, läuft nicht davon und geht nicht vorüber … eine solche Absurdität darf man keinem Schriftsteller zutrauen (Exegeten ausgenommen)." However, if the expression in 31:9a is interpreted as ironical, Duhm's irony becomes pointless.

YHWH's presence on the temple mount entails both the protection of Jerusalem and the destruction of attacking enemies.[166]

Contextualization

Despite great differences when it comes to dating the passage, it is possible to speak of consensus among the commentators concerning one issue: Isa 31:8-9 refers to the Assyrian siege of Jerusalem in 701 BCE, in some way or other. Some scholars claim that this prophecy was uttered by Isaiah on that occasion, as a prediction of an imminent Assyrian defeat.[167] This seems unlikely, with regard to the affinities between 31:8-9 and the legendary account in 37:36, according to which an angel (a "non-human") killed 185.000 Assyrians.[168] A late 7th century setting is certainly more probable, as suggested by others,[169] but a post-exilic date cannot be excluded.[170] It is conceivable that these words concerning "Assyria" came to be applied to other enemies who were seen as threatening Jerusalem on later occasions, such as the Babylonians, the Persians, the Ptolemies, or the Seleucids.

Isa 37:22b-29

> 37:22b The virgin daughter Zion despises you and mocks you,
> the daughter Jerusalem tosses her head behind you.
> 23 Whom have you scorned and reviled?
> Against whom have you raised your voice
> and haughtily lifted your eyes?
> Against the Holy One of Israel!
> 24 Through your servants you have scorned the Lord,

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[166] Cf. Wildberger (1982:1246-1248).

[167] Thus Sweeney (1996:407-408) and Wildberger (1982:1239, 1245-1247).

[168] If this is a case of literary dependence, it is difficult to determine in which direction. Whereas Becker (1997:218, 223) and Kaiser (1983:252-253) contend that 31:8-9 presupposes the legend in chs. 36ff., Blenkinsopp (2000:428) suggests that the author of 37:36 was inspired by 31:8-9. As I see it, that question cannot be settled. However, the affinities between the passages seem to indicate that both were composed at a distance from the actual events, in a time when the retreat of the Assyrian troops had been transformed into a miraculous victory, staged by YHWH.

[169] Barth (1977:88-90) argues that the addition in vv. 8b-9 originated in the Josianic era. Clements (1980:256, 258) dates 31:8-9 in its entirety to that period.

[170] I prefer leaving the question open, with Blenkinsopp (2000:427). A post-exilic dating is preferred by, e.g., Becker (1997:218-219) and Vermeylen (1977:423-424).

and you have said: "With my many chariots
I have ascended the heights of the mountains,
to the far recesses of Lebanon;
I have felled* its tallest cedars, its choicest pines;
I have reached* its highest peak, its densest orchard.
25 I have dug (wells), I have drunk foreign* waters,
and with the sole of my foot I have dried up all the streams of Egypt."
26 Have you not heard?
I made (or: devised) it a long time ago,
I created (or: planned) it* from days of old,
and* now I have brought it about:
to lay waste fortified cities (and turn them into) dilapidated ruins.
27 Their inhabitants, deprived of strength, are dismayed and ashamed.
They have become (like) plants of the field and (like) green grass,
(like) grass on the housetops, blighted* by the east wind*.
28 I know your rising up* and your sitting down, your coming and going;
29 your raging against me* and your arrogance* have reached my ears.
I will put my hook in your nose, and my bit in your mouth;
I will turn you back on the way by which you came.

* Cf. BHS app.

The text within its narrative context

The narrative section in chapters 36–39 is no longer seen as an erratic block within the book of Isaiah. Recent studies have demonstrated (a) the affinities between these legends and material in chs. 1–35 and 40–55, as well as (b) the strategical function of this section, which serves as a bridge between "Proto-Isaiah" (with Assyria as the major enemy) and "Deutero-Isaiah" (with the neo-Babylonian empire in that role).[171] The classical hypothesis which held that the

[171] On the function of chs. 36–39 within the book of Isaiah, see the helpful summaries and surveys offered by Childs (2001:260-266) and Sweeney (1996:454-460), with references to further literature. Childs underlines the complexity of the issue, but he admits that "in the present form of chapters 36–39 this collection does fit better with Isaiah than with Kings" (2001:262). There are numerous inter-textual links between Isaiah 36–37 and other parts of the book (esp. chs. 1–35, but also 40–55). But how are they to be evaluated? Some scholars have drawn the conclusion that the author/redactor of Isa 36–37 was acquainted with some kind of collection of Isaianic prophecies. According to Blenkinsopp (2000:460), "[i]t is fairly clear … that whoever put these stories together was acquainted with a compilation of sayings attributed to Isaiah, in whatever form they then circulated." Cf. similarly Wildberger (1982:1391-1392). Becker

Isaiah legends in Isa 36–39 were, as a whole, imported from the Deuteronomistic History, has been challenged by scholars arguing that the direction of influence may in fact have been the opposite, for the whole section or for parts of it.[172] Further aspects of the complex issue concerning the interconnections between Isaiah 36–39 and the virtually parallel text in 2 Kings 18:13–20:19 must be bracketed, since a thorough analysis would require an entire monograph.

For obvious reasons, the scope of the present investigation will be restricted to the narrative(s) dealing with the Assyrian threat, comprising chs. 36–37. It is commonly recognized that this account of the Assyrian siege of Jerusalem, account "B" (as distinguished from account "A" = 2 Kgs 18:14-16), is made up

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(1997:217-221), on the other hand, has argued that the "Assyria-texts" ("Assur-Texte") in chs. 1–35 *presuppose* the legend(s) in chs. 36–37.

[172] The original formulation of the classical hypothesis (which gave priority to the setting in 2 Kings 18–20 over against Isaiah 36–39) is usually attributed to Gesenius, in the year of 1821. It has had many followers, e.g., Duhm (1922:258), Kaiser (1983:291), and Wildberger (1982:1370:1374). Clements has, however, abandoned the position (= the classical hypothesis) that he defended in his commentary (1980:277). In a more recent study (1991:69), he has argued that these legends were incorporated into the Deuteronomistic History at a late stage, suggesting that they may have been taken over from the book of Isaiah. Such an alternative theory (that the legends were imported from Isaiah to Kings) has been propounded by Smelik. For a summary of the criticism offered against this theory, see Childs (2001:260-262). The picture that emerges from recent discussions is that the process may have been complex. According to Childs (2001:262), "what now seems evident is that from an original nucleus the tradition was shaped in different ways by the editors of both Kings and Isaiah." Childs draws the conclusion that "[t]he shaping process … moved in both directions" (2001:262). Also according to Becker (1997:220-222), it is likely that the process went in both ways: Whereas the legends now found in Isa 36–37 most probably were taken over from the Deuteronomistic History, the legends about Hezekiah's sickness and recovery and about Merodach-baladan's visit may have been imported from the book of Isaiah to Kings. I find this hypothesis attractive. Especially Isaiah 39, which introduces the Babylonian threat at the threshold to "Deutero-Isaiah", appears to have been composed directly for its present literary context within the book. Yet another interesting hypothesis has been developed by Sweeney (1996:454-457, 476-487, 496-502, 508-510), who reckons with the following stages: (1) An earlier version of the legend now found in Isaiah 36–37 was part of the Josianic edition of Isaianic oracles, (2) a later version was incorporated in the Deuteronomistic History, (3) that version was taken over into the book of Isaiah, where it underwent further changes, (4) the legends now found in chs. 38 and 39 were also imported from Kings, and elaborated in a way that accentuated the idealization of Hezekiah.

of two versions, B^1 (Isa 36:1–37:9a + 37:37-38) and B^2 (37:9b-36).[173] The analysis below will mainly concentrate on the prophetical “counter-taunt” in 37:22b-29 (embedded within, and perhaps secondarily inserted into B^2),[174] the only part of the narrative containing explicit, propagandistic enemy images of Assyria. Initially, however, some attention will be paid to the indirect characterization of Assyria in the remaining parts of chs. 36–37.

Characterization

The composite narrative in Isaiah 36–37 describes a propaganda war.[175] According to both versions (B^1 and B^2), the most fearful aspect of the Assyrian assault on Jerusalem would seem to be the *verbal* attacks which threatened to weaken the morale among the defenders. Even though the opening remark made by the Rabshakeh (36:5) seems to make the point that words are of little importance in view of the military superiority of the Assyrian army, the only weapons used by the actors in this drama are of a purely rhetorical nature. According to B^1, Hezekiah is driven to desperate action by the *words* of the Rabshakeh (36:22; 37:4), and the salvation oracle delivered by Isaiah exhorts the king not to fear the *words* that he has heard (37:6).[176] A similar picture is presented by B^2 (37:17, 21-22a). Despite the difference in genre, the speeches of the Rabshakeh and the letter from Sennacherib can be compared to the fictitious enemy quotations in the Psalms (e.g., Pss 3:3; 22:9; 42:4, 11).[177] In both cases, a

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[173] I follow the division made by Childs (1967:73-76; 2001:271-272) and Clements (1980:278, 280). The lines between the versions are drawn a little differently (especially around 37:37) by Kaiser (1983:298-314) and Wildberger (1982:1374-1377). On the difficulties involved in attempting to locate the “precise point of suture”, see Blenkinsopp (2000:469, 475-477, quote on p. 475).

[174] I have borrowed the label “counter-taunt” from Blenkinsopp (2000:477). Several scholars have argued, quite convincingly, that the passage 37:22b-29 is a later interpolation within B^2. The same holds for 37:30-32. See, e.g., Blenkinsopp (2000:476-477), Clements (1980:285), Kaiser (1983:314), and Wildberger (1982:1420-1421, 1428-1430). For a similar analysis of the parallel text in 2 Kings 19, see Würthwein (1984:426-432).

[175] It is a great virtue of Hardmeier’s monograph (1990), that he brings this aspect of the narrative to the fore. The following succinct comment is worth quoting: “Offensichtlich wird jedenfalls in der ganzen Jerusalemszene die assyrische Bedrohung Jerusalems völlig einseitig auf den propagandistischen Aspekt des Kampfes reduziert” (1990:323).

[176] As aptly observed by Hardmeier (1990:322).

[177] It has been demonstrated by Gallagher (1999:174-215) that the Rabshakeh’s speeches have affinities to both ancient and modern instances of the genre “enemy propaganda.” However, contrary to the claims made by Gallagher, this does not

pious individual's and/or a faithful community's faith in YHWH is under attack. Hezekiah's prayer in 37:16-20 adopts a rhetorical strategy reminiscent of the psalms of lamentation: The supplicant's enemies are said to be the enemies of YHWH. In that way, the deity is given an additional (and, it is certainly thought, a particularly strong) reason to intervene.

Throughout chs. 36–37, the Assyrian enemies are characterized as arrogant. More specifically, the main accusation that is directed against the Assyrian king (and his emissaries) concerns *blasphemy* vis-à-vis YHWH (37:4, 6).[178] This theme is elaborated further in the prophetic "counter-taunt" in 37:22b-29. Initially, the personified city of Jerusalem, the "virgin daughter Zion" (v. 22b), mocks the addressee (identified with Sennacherib by the literary context), who appears to be pictured as a rejected seductor.[179] In v. 23, the blasphemy charge is given a poignant formulation. The exemplification which follows, in the form of a fictitious quotation, has the Assyrian ruler boasting of various great explorations and exploits (cf. 10:8-10, 13-14). As demonstrated by Machinist, the topos of the "journey to the west for wood" (including cedars and junipers from Lebanon, cf. v. 24), is also attested in Assyrian royal inscriptions.[180] However, there is one fundamental difference between the speech of "Sennacherib" in Isa 37:24-25 and the following authentic quotation from Sennacherib's annals:

> At that time Aššur and Ištar, who love my priesthood (and) call my name, showed me cedar beams which since days long gone had grown exceedingly large and thick, hidden in the Sirara mountains.[181]

In Isa 37:24-25, a reference to divine assistance and guidance is missing. The implication is that this foreign ruler is a person who puts his trust in himself (cf. the consistent use of the 1st person singular) and in military strength (cf. the chariots in v. 24a), but not in the gods (above all: not in YHWH). In other words, he is accused of being impious (in contrast to Hezekiah).[182] This particular enemy of Judah, *the king of Assyria*, is thus *characterized in a way that recalls the stereotypes used about almost any enemy of Assyria*. These

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necessarily indicate that the biblical text contains accurate records of authentic speeches held by an Assyrian official in 701 BCE.

[178] See further Clements (1994).

[179] As noted by Blenkinsopp (2000:477) and Clements (1980:285).

[180] Machinist (1983:723).

[181] D. Luckenbill, *The Annals of Sennacherib* (1924), 107:47-53 = 120:35-42. Quoted from Machinist (1983:723).

[182] Cohen (1979:39).

stereotypes have been succinctly summarized by Fales: “insubmissive; insolent; proud; haughty; he trusts in human or natural factors.”[183] In addition, the Assyrian ruler seems to be pictured as a megalomaniac liar: Who could climb mountains with chariots (v. 24), or dry up the waters of the Nile with his/her feet (v. 25)?[184]

In vv. 26-29, where the speaker (or: the “I” of the discourse) is YHWH, this projected Assyrian self-image is refuted. The rhetorical strategy involves the following steps: (1) To begin with, all the Assyrian conquests are said to have been devised and, in effect, also accomplished by YHWH, the national deity of Judah (v. 26). (2) In the next step, the deeds of the arrogant foreign ruler are presented as far from valiant, since it is implied that the inhabitants of the conquered cities were lacking the strength to defend themselves (v. 27a). It is possible that Assyria is depicted as the scorching east wind, but how heroic is it to blight grass growing in a minimum of soil (v. 27b)? (3) Finally—and this is the *coup de grace* of this rhetorical attack on Assyrian imperialist ideology—the Assyrian king is himself humiliated: He is pictured as a helpless creature, controlled by YHWH (vv. 28-29a), equipped with bit and hook (v. 29b). Like a run-away calf, the proud king will be led back by YHWH (the owner?). The motif of being led away like cattle, by a rope attached to a nose ring, was not arbitrarily chosen. It was employed by the Assyrians themselves, in portraits of captured enemy kings, both in textual metaphors and in pictorial representations on reliefs.[185] Although the imagery is a conventional way of expressing subordination and humiliation, it may carry additional connotations in a context preoccupied with the dangerous power of words. In the world projected by Isa 37:22b-29, that power is denied the Assyrian king. At first, the words are put into his mouth (vv. 24-25). In the end, a bit is put into his mouth. A more literal translation of v. 29bα than the one given above would be: “I will put a hook in your nose and a bit *through your lips* (בשׂפתיך).” Could not that be regarded as an efficient way to silence the arrogant king, and to put an end to his blasphemous boasting once and for all?

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[183] Fales (1982:428). See further the rich documentation and discussion in this short study by Fales (1982). Cf. the examples adduced by Cohen (1979:40-41). As noted by Cohen, the “stereotypic phraseology describing the behaviour of Assyria’s enemies and rebellious vassals almost invariably involves the usage of the verb *takālu*, ‘to trust’” (1979:39), implying that their trust was misplaced. Cf. also Gallagher (1999:190-191).

[184] Cf. Wildberger (1982:1432): “So kann nur ein Wahnsinniger sprechen.”

[185] For references to similes in Assyrian imscriptions, see Marcus (1977:91). One attestation is found in Sennacherib’s annals (OIP 2, 45:86-88). For an iconographic example from the time of Esarhaddon, see *ANEP*, picture n:o 447. Cf. also Wildberger (1982:1434).

Contextualization

As regards the dating of Isaiah 36–37, there can be no doubt that Sennacherib's siege of Jerusalem in 701 BCE marks the *terminus a quo*. It seems likely that these legends developed in successive stages over a long period.[186] Several scholars suggest that at least version B^1 contains a pre-exilic core.[187] However, in its present literary shape—and as part of its present literary context—this composite narrative is commonly regarded as exilic or post-exilic.[188] On a closer examination, its perspective on the events of 701 BCE appears to have been coloured by the experiences of the Babylonian siege(s) more than a century later, culminating in the sack of Jerusalem in 587 BCE.[189]

In a thought-provoking study, Christof Hardmeier has argued that this narrative about Sennacherib, Hezekiah, and Isaiah was composed in the summer of 588, during an intermission in the siege, as a contribution to the on-going internal Jerusalemite debate.[190] According to Hardmeier, what appears to be anti-Assyrian propaganda is in fact a kind of veiled polemics against the pro-Babylonian party and, above all, against the position taken by the prophet Jeremiah![191] In my opinion, the weakness of Hardmeier's hypothesis is that he draws more exact and precise conclusions than allowed by the evidence. It seems wiser to follow Clements, who recognizes within this narrative (which is treated as a post-587 composition) "a conscious concern to contrast what happened to Jerusalem in 701 with what took place later in 587 BCE."[192] The narrative can be said to take a broad perspective, telescoping both these

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[186] Cf., e.g., Childs (1967; 2001:262-266), Clements (1994:245-246; cf. also 1980:277-280), Sweeney (1996:454-487), and Wildberger (1982:1391-1393, 1421-1422).

[187] See, e.g., Childs (2001:263-264, "postexilic core" on p. 263 must be a scribal error!?) and Wildberger (1982:1391-1399, 1421). It is in fact difficult to find a commentator who denies this possibility. Even Becker (1997:221) concedes that "allenfalls die ältere Grundlage der ersten Version (B^1) wäre noch spätvorexilisch denkbar." Cf. similarly Kaiser (1983:292, 305). In this respect, then , there is a near consensus among scholars. Not surprisingly, though, their opinions diverge widely as to the extent, and the historical reliability, of such a pre-exilic core tradition. A particularly optimistic position is taken by Gallagher (1999:254), who considers "the basic outline" of version B in its entirety as "reliable", i.e. as a fairly accurate account of the events that it describes. He even finds it likely that it was composed in 701 (1999:237-238).

[188] Thus, e.g., Childs (2001:262-266), Clements (1994:245-246), Kaiser (1983:291), and Wildberger (1982:1393).

[189] Clements (1994). Cf. also Wildberger (1982:1422).

[190] Hardmeier (1990:161-286).

[191] Hardmeier (1990:287-392).

[192] Clements (1994:246).

events—and perhaps others, as well.[193] As stated by Clements, "the theological ideology of this narrative is rooted in Israel's experience of Mesopotamian imperialism."[194] It is conceivable that the edifying legend in Isaiah 36–37 came to be read as a refutation of all foreign imperialist ideologies, and that its portraits of Sennacherib and his Rabshakeh came to be re-applied to representatives of later empires (the Persian, the Ptolemean, and the Seleucid empire) during subsequent crises, and perceived threats against Jerusalem, in the post-exilic period.[195]

Further passages which may contain enemy images of Assyria

In several instances, the image of an anonymous enemy can be interpreted as referring to Assyria. One such passage, Isa 5:26-30 has already been analyzed at length. Some further texts will be treated very briefly below. My ambition is not to discuss every single passage that might refer to Assyria.[196] In each case, the discussion will centre around one single question: Does this text offer any significant contribution to the portrait of Assyria in the book of Isaiah?

[193] Such a duplicity of reference (both 701 and 587) was apparently facilitated by the manifold parallels between these historical situations, as pointed out by Hardmeier (1990:2, 169). See also Kaiser (1981:19).

[194] Clements (1994:243). As pointed out by Clements, the portrait of the arrogant Sennacherib appears to draw on some knowledge about official Assyrian documents, such as Sennacherib's Chronicle. Cf. the observations made above in the analysis of 37:22b-29. Affinities between certain features in the speech of Rabshakeh and frequent motifs in the official Assyrian propaganda texts have been recorded by Cohen (1979). These observations testify to the ideological concern of the author(s)/redactor(s) behind Isaiah 36–37. However, contrary to the opinion expressed by Cohen (1979:34), I do not believe that such observations necessarily indicate that the biblical narrative was "based on an authentic oral or written tradition" preserving the *ipsissima verba* of the Rabshakeh.

[195] For suggestions as to post-exilic events that might have occasioned such re-reading of Isaiah 36–37, see Kaiser (1973). Cf. also Hardmeier (1990:2, n. 8).

[196] Cf. the impressive listing of possible Assyria-passages in Isaiah 1–39 that is provided by Barth (1977:6-10). Barth divides all these texts into three groups: (1) instances where it is ascertained that the text refers to the Assyrian empire, (2) instances where the name "Assyria" apparently refers to some other entity, and (3) possible, or ambiguous instances. In some cases, however, I find Barth's categorization somewhat arbitrary. Some anonymous and—arguably—ambiguous cases, such as 1:4-8; 6:11; 8:14-15 and 17:1-6 are thus included in the "ascertained" subdivision.

Isa 9:3

It is generally assumed that the oppressive power referred to in 9:3, by means of yoke and rod metaphors, should be identified with Assyria.[197] The perspective (most likely indicating a date of composition during the reign of Josiah) is thus the same as in the closely related passages 10:24-27 and 14:24-27 (cf. also 14:25b): The downfall of the Assyrian empire is interpreted as a moment of liberation, and an occasion of jubilation.

Isa 10:33-34

Due to its present position within the literary context—placed between the obscure passage 10:27b-32, which appears to describe a military invasion of Judah, and the vision in 11:1-9 of a new, prosperous and peaceful era for Judah—the fragmentary oracle in 10:33-34 is open to strongly divergent interpretations. There can be no doubt that it proclaims that YHWH will punish some unnamed enemies, apparently because of their pride. That the hubris motif is of central importance is indicated by the tangible reverberations of mythological notions associated with Lebanon as a "garden of God."[198] But who are these arrogant enemies of YHWH? Against the background of the row of anti-Assyrian prophecies in 10:5-27a, the answer would almost have to be: the Assyrians.[199] On such an interpretation, the tree-felling motif in 10:33-34 takes on a particular significance, as a reversal of the axe and saw imagery employed in 10:15: Now YHWH will wield an axe against the Assyrians, and hew them down as trees in a forest. In addition, this could be seen as an appropriate way of phrasing an oracle of judgement against a nation whose rulers were known to boast of their tree-felling activities (cf. 37:24).[200] However, several scholars have argued that the oracle in 10:33-34 (at least, originally) constituted a threat against the inhabitants/leaders of Jerusalem.[201] Such a reading would seem to be consonant with the perspective of 10:27b-32.

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[197] Thus most commentators. See also Barth (1977:172). For comments on the yoke and rod metaphors, see the analyses of Isa 10:5-15 and 14:24-27 above.

[198] See Barth (1977:70-72) and Nielsen (1989:82-84, 126-128). See further Stolz (1972).

[199] Isa 10:33-34 is interpreted as an unambiguous threat against Assyria by, e.g., Blenkinsopp (2000:261-262), Clements (1980:120-121), and Vermeylen (1977:267-268).

[200] Cf. Blenkinsopp (2000:261-262). For further discussion of the tree-felling motif, which is frequently attested in the official records of Assyrian and other Mesopotamian rulers, see the analyses above of the following passages: Isa 10:15; 10:16-19; 37:24.

[201] Thus Barth (1977:70-72, but only for vv. 33b-34), Kaiser (1981:238), and Nielsen (1989:124-138).

So far, two main alternatives have emerged. The anonymous enemies in 10:33-34 could be identified either with the Assyrians or with the inhabitants (and/or: the leaders) of Jerusalem. But there are other options, as well. Why not the Babylonians? They are depicted as arrogant enemies of YHWH elsewhere (13:1-22; 14:4-23), and nothing in the wording of the oracle precludes a post-587 dating. On the assumption that the passage is pre-exilic, it could still have been reinterpreted as a proclamation that YHWH would punish those who had ravaged Jerusalem and its temple. Alternatively, the setting might be internal strife within the post-exilic community. In that case, the reference would be to some group of allegedly arrogant opponents to the group responsible for the composition or reinterpretation of 10:33-34. To sum up, the possibilities are *legio*. The issue cannot be settled with any high degree of certainty. Perhaps it is preferable to regard the passage—in its present context—as programmatical, and to presuppose a more general reference: As part of the preparations for the new era (11:1-9), YHWH will humble and "cut down" all enemies.

17:5-6

It is perhaps possible to detect an oblique reference to Assyria in Isa 17:5-6, within the context of a prediction of disaster directed against Ephraim/Israel.[202] On such a reading, the Assyrian soldiers would be represented as agricultural workers, reaping grain and beating down olives from the trees. However, the focus of this metaphorical depiction seems to be on the characterization of the victims (pictured as harvested grain and fruit), and on the fewness of the survivors, rather than on the characterization of the aggressors.[203]

18:1-6

It has been suggested that Assyria, though not mentioned by name, is referred to in the passage 18:1-6. Some scholars have suggested that the proclamation in 18:3-6 of judgement, pictured as a harvest, was directed primarily against Assyria.[204] Others assign the role of executing the judgement to the Assyrians, who—so the argument goes—are contracted by YHWH in 18:2.[205] However, nothing can be said with certainty about any putative role played by Assyria within this passage.[206]

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[202] Cf. Barth (1977:7, 31-32).

[203] See further the analysis of 17:1-6 below, in chapter 3.1.

[204] Thus Duhm (1922:138-139). For further references, see Wildberger (1978:690).

[205] Thus, e.g., Barth (1977:13, with n. 45).

[206] See further the analysis of 18:1-7 below, in chapter 2.3.

28:2-4

According to the MT of Isa 28:2, “the Lord” has at his disposal someone, who is described as “mighty and strong.” Who is this someone? Since the oracle in 28:1-4, addressed to “Ephraim”, appears to presuppose an 8th century context, Assyria is the most likely candidate. The opening line of 28:2 would even seem to imply that Assyria here is assigned the status of YHWH’s servant![207] The metaphorical depiction in 28:2 of a tempest with “mighty, overflowing waters” (מים כבירים שׁטפים) recalls the description of an Assyrian invasion in Isa 8:7-8, where similar expressions occur (8:7: את־מי הנהר העצומים והרבים, “the mighty and abundant waters of the River”; in 8:8: שׁטף, “flood” or “overflow”). Hence it is reasonable to assume that 28:3, which states that “the proud crown/garland of Ephraim’s drunkards” (most likely a derogatory circumlocution for the city of Samaria) will be “trampled under foot”, refers to the trampling feet of an Assyrian army on march. It is, finally, possible that Assyria is being personified in 28:4, as a passer-by who stops at the sight of a delicious fig (a metaphor for Samaria or Ephraim/Israel), and swallows it. Alternatively, and perhaps more likely, the point made by 28:4 is that the capital of the northern neighbour will become so vulnerable that it might be pillaged by virtually anyone.[208]

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[207] However, if it is given a different vocalization (guided by the variant reading in the Peshitta), the text only mentions one agent: YHWH (“the Lord”), endowed with strength and power. Cf. BHSapp. Does this mean that a minor text-critical operation could efface every notion of an Assyrian participation in the course of events? I do not think so. It would still be difficult to avoid the conclusion that the disaster envisaged by this oracle, which would befall Ephraim/Israel, was conceived of as a military attack by the Assyrians. See most recently Bäckersten (2007:29, 46).

[208] See further the analysis of 28:1-4 below, in chapter 3.1.

2.3. Images of Egypt and Cush

Isa 7:18-19

> 7:18 On that day, YHWH will whistle for the flies at the end of Egypt's streams and for the bees in the land of Assyria.
> 19 They shall come, all of them, and settle down in the steep wadis and in the clefts of the rocks, on all the thorn bushes and on all the pastures.

The text

In their commentaries on Isa 7:18-19, Kaiser and Wildberger contend that the reference to the flies from Egypt is secondary.[209] However, on this point their argumentation does not seem to be solid enough. It is perhaps possible, as argued by some scholars, that the relative clauses in vv. 18aβ and 18bβ represent later textual expansions.[210] Still, even such a comprehensive—and, in my opinion, unwarranted—operation, as the excision of 18aβ and 18bβ as glosses, is not enough to get rid of the annoying flies, since they are introduced already in 18aα! Why, then, is the presence of the Egyptian flies seen as problematical in this context? As pointed out by Sweeney (and several others), it is indeed possible to find historical situations when both Egypt and Assyria constituted potential threats against Judah.[211] The problem perceived by Kaiser and Wildberger would rather seem to be related to the metaphor(s) in the text. In 7:18aα it is stated that "YHWH will whistle (ישרק) for the flies." Why whistle for flies? Wildberger has argued that this expression makes better sense with the bees as its object, since it would be in line with ancient conceptions that a bee-keeper could attract a swarm with the help of sounds.[212] Although I find such an interpretation of the bee metaphor attractive, I cannot see that this is a valid reason for treating לזבוב, (lit. "for the fly") in 18aα as an addition.[213] If our

[209] Kaiser (1981:169-170); Wildberger (1972:302-303).

[210] Thus, e.g., Barth (1977:199-200, 281-282), who basically reiterates the judgement made by Duhm (1922:76-77).

[211] Sweeney (1996:155-156).

[212] Wildberger (1972:303-304). See also Kaiser (1981:171).

[213] Cf. the arguments against Wildberger's and Kaiser's position that were adduced by Barth (1977:199, n. 53). I do not, however, agree with Barth's analysis in all details. He contends that both metaphors (the flies and the bees) originally referred to Assyria (1977:199-200), but he fails to present arguments that would convince me.

decisions on matters of textual criticism and redaction criticism were to be dictated by our own wishes for a logically consistent text, where would that lead us? Besides, there is no firm evidence that the verb שׁרק should have been a technical term for the alluring sound made by a bee-keeper. It seems preferable to assume that the expression in Isa 7:18a is used in a more general sense, denoting the activity of giving a call signal to someone (as in 5:26!).[214] It seems to be a fact, at all events, that the notion of YHWH whistling for a hoard of flies made sense to the author/redactor, i.e. the one who was responsible for the present shape of the text. In the ensuing analysis, I will make an attempt to interpret the text as it now stands.

Characterization

According to the most likely reading of Isa 7:18-19, this prophecy contains a metaphorical depiction of two invading armies. While the Egyptian army is portrayed as a hoard of flies, the Assyrian troops are pictured as a bee-swarm.[215] Both images can be seen as instances of the metaphorical concept "enemies are like insects."[216]

How does the image of a hoard of flies contribute to the characterization of Egypt? Contrary to what is likely to be a modern reader's first impression, this metaphor need not carry any pejorative connotations. Other biblical texts indicate that one of the notions associated with the land of Egypt (and the adjacent region of Cush, as well) was its alleged abundance of winged insects (see Exod 8:12-28 [= Eng. 8:16-32]; Isa 18:1). Obviously, this "commonplace" about Egypt could have been a decisive factor behind the choice of metaphor. Another interesting fact can be adduced: As a reward for bravery, an Egyptian soldier could be decorated with a lion statuette—or with a golden fly![217] This implies that the mention in Isa 7:18 of flies from Egypt might have evoked notions of aggressiveness, endurance, and bravery. In this way, the fearful aspect of the imminent military invasion would have been underscored. Several scholars have suggested that the reference here is to some species that is harmful to human beings (e.g., the gadfly). This cannot, however, be established. Neither

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[214] With Barth (1977:199, n. 53).

[215] For a supplementary perspective on the characterization of Assyria in 7:18-19, see the analysis of this passage above, in the chapter 2.2.

[216] On the use of insect imagery in wartime propanda, and on possible implications for the interpretation of Isa 7:18-19, see the discussion of this text above, in the chapter 2.2.

[217] Grapow (1924:97, with textual references) speaks of "die Verwendung goldener Fliegen als Auszeichnung für tapfere Krieger, die man ähnlich wie die daneben vorkommenden Löwenfigürchen als Symbol für den Eifer und die Unermüdlichkeit im Angriff gedeutet hat."

the lexeme used (זבוב) nor the description of the behaviour of this insect (in v. 19) would seem to highlight the aspect of individual dangerousness. Rather, the emphasis appears to be on the numerousness of the flies (זבוב in v. 18a being a collective singular form!), since v. 19 states that they would settle down almost everywhere in the country. Such an invasion of insects could certainly be regarded as a plague.

As regards the somewhat puzzling motif of YHWH whistling for the hoard of flies (v. 18a), the point seems to be that the Egyptian army had to obey the command of Judah's national deity (rather than obeying some other deity, or political leader). Indeed, a tiny signal given by YHWH would be enough: Just a little whistle, and the catastrophe would be coming.

In sum, then, the passage 7:18-19 characterizes the Egyptian army as exceedingly numerous, as potentially dangerous, and as dependent upon the will of YHWH.

Contextualization: See the discussion of 7:18-19 above, in chapter 2.2.

Isa 18:1-7

18:1 Woe to a land of whirring wings,
beyond the rivers of Cush,
2 sending envoys by sea, in papyrus vessels over the water!
Go, swift messengers, to a nation tall and smooth-skinned*,
to a people feared near and far,
a strong (or: strangely speaking?)a and conquering nation
whose land is divided by rivers.
3 All you inhabitants of the world, you who live on the earth,
when the banner is raised on the mountains, look!
When the trumpet sounds, listen!
4 For this is what YHWH said to me:
"I will remain calm and watch from my dwelling,
like dazzling heat in sunshine,
like a cloud of dew in the heat of harvest."b
5 For before the harvest, when the bloom is over,
and the flower becomes a ripening grape,
he/one will cut off the shoots with pruning hooks,
lop off and remove the spreading branches.
6 They will all be left to the mountain vultures
and to the beasts of the earth.

The birds of prey (will feed) on them in the summer,
and all the animals of the earth in the winter.
7 At that time tribute will be brought to YHWH of the hosts
from* a people tall and smooth-skinned*, and from a people feared near and far,
a strong (or: strangely speaking?) a and conquering nation, whose land is divided by rivers,
(it shall be brought) to the place of the name of YHWH of the hosts, mount Zion.

* Cf. BHS app.
a On the possible sense(s) of קו קו (or: קוקו) in this context, see the commentaries, e.g., Blenkinsopp (2000:308-309) and Wildberger (1978:680).
[b] For a number of reasons, v. 4b is notoriously difficult to translate. On the syntactical level, ambiguities arise because the particle כְּ can serve more than one function. In the translation given above, it is taken as a marker of (metaphorical) comparison. Since this particle may also have a temporal function, an alternative rendition would be: “while the heat is dazzling in the sunshine, while the dew falls in the heat of harvest.” Semantical uncertainties are primarily concentrated to v. 4bα. It has been suggested, on the basis of an inscription from Arad, that צח signifies one of the summer months in the calendar. Thus, e.g., Kaiser (1983:78) and Lubetski and Gottlieb (1998:377). The expression עלי אור, literally “over the light”, is particularly puzzling. If an ingenious emendation is adopted, involving only a different word division in the consonantal text (and the removal of the diacritical mark), one may attain the phrase על יאור, “over the Nile.” Elegant, but does a reference to the Nile make sense within the narrow context of v. 4? According to Lubetski and Gottlieb (1998:377-379) it does. However, I am hesitant. For a more extensive discussion of problems and possibilities in Isa 18:4, see the commentaries, e.g., Blenkinsopp (2000:308-309) and Wildberger (1978:678, 680-681).

The text

Since Isa 18:1-7 is placed within a section of the book (chs. 13–23) which consists mainly of oracles against other nations, it is reasonable to assume that 18:1—with its opening הוי (*hôy*), followed by a reference to a foreign country

(Cush)—introduces a woe oracle against Cush (Ethiopia/Nubia).[218] The question is: How far did the original woe oracle extend? It is widely acknowledged that v. 7 represents a late, reinterpreting addition.[219] Some scholars regard 18:1-6 as a unified composition.[220] Others reckon with a more complex process of textual growth. According to Wildberger, additions (or glosses) are to be found in vv. 2bβ, 3, and 6b.[221] A more radical stance is taken by Becker, who constricts the compass of the original woe oracle to v. 1 and the first two hemistichs of v. 2.[222] In my opinion, the evidence that has been adduced for the alleged secondary status of material within 18:1-7 is conclusive only in the case of v. 7.[223] However, the disturbing perspectival discontinuities within vv. 1-6 (especially from v. 3 and onwards), and the resulting uncertainties concerning the identity of the agents and patients involved (most notably in vv. 5-6), call for extreme caution when it comes to drawing conclusions about the message(s) conveyed by this passage.

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[218] With, e.g., Barth (1977:13), Becker (1997:275-276), Blenkinsopp (2000:309), Clements (1980:163-164), Kaiser (1983:75-76), and Wildberger (1978:681-683, 688). Otherwise, e.g., Sweeney (1996:257) who contends that "the *hôy* is nothing more than an opening interjection or recognition", and that the threat is directed against Israel, not against Cush. Concerning the geographical extent of Cush (which encompassed parts of modern Ethiopia, Sudan, and Somalia), and its role in the political history of the Levant, see, e.g., the informative excursus in Wildberger (1978:686-688).

[219] For arguments, see, e.g., Blenkinsopp (2000:311), Clements (1980:166), and Wildberger (1978:681, 694-695).

[220] Thus, e.g., Barth (1977:12-14), Blenkinsopp (2000:309-311), and Kaiser (1983:75-79). Note, however, that Kaiser dates the entire composition (18:1-6) to the post-exilic period.

[221] Wildberger (1978:681-682). He is followed by Clements (1980:165), as regards v. 3.

[222] Becker (1997:275-277). It should be noted that Becker's view is reminiscent of the one defended by Vermeylen (1977:317-320), the main difference being that Vermeylen regards v. 4 as part of the original oracle. As reconstructed by Becker (1997:275-277), the oracle looks fragmentary, to say the least. What is missing is an announcement of disaster. Does this mean that the original conclusion has been lost? Becker does not comment upon this issue. The observation that v. 2 appears to speak of two different sets of emissaries is a cornerstone in Becker's argumentation. However, this observation does hardly in itself warrant the far-reaching conlusions drawn by Becker. Cf., e.g., Barth (1977:12-14) and Blenkinsopp (2000:309-310). As I see it, it is conceivable that the author simply wished to illustrate that the diplomatic traffic went both ways. Alternatively, there is a conscious contrast involved: The envoys (צירים) sent by Cush will then be outmanoeuvered, one may infer, by other messengers (מלאכים), perhaps carrying the message contained in vv. 4-6.

[223] Blenkinsopp (2000:309-311) seems to hold a similar view on the matter.

Characterization

This text is unique within the book of Isaiah, inasmuch as it contains, in v. 2, an attempt at an ethnic characterization of a foreign people. The description of the inhabitants of Cush (Ethiopians/Nubians) as "tall and smooth-skinned" is highly stereotypical, as indicated by the fact that Herodot used similar phrases about the Ethiopians.[224] It is worth noticing that the observations concerning the physical appearance of the Cushites do not entail any kind of negative value judgement (in contradistinction to the racial prejudices of a later era).[225] One might perhaps view Isa 18:2 as an instance of ancient fascination at the exotic. However, this brief description did hardly emerge solely, or primarily, out of ethnographic interest. Although the motif of otherness is quite prominent, the main emphasis lies on strength, rather than strangeness. Above all, the ability of this foreign people in warfare is underlined.[226] The implication is that the people of Cush would be a fear-inspiring military opponent to any other nation. In other words, the element of ideological distortion operative in this enemy image consists in exaggeration of the enemy's military strength.

In v. 3 the scenery changes. All the nations of the world (except for Cush?) are summoned by the signal of a raised banner (cf. Isa 5:26; 13:2), and by the sound of a trumpet. According to a possible interpretation, they are summoned to war. In that case, YHWH is implicitly pictured as the commander of this in-

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[224] Herodot III 20 and 114. Cf. further Kaiser (1983:77) and Wildberger (1978:689)

[225] Hence, I disagree with the thrust of the following comments made by Blenkinsopp: "The writer is not well disposed to this country. Not only is it insect-infested … and its people hairless and anomalously elongated in height … but it engages in profitless political scheming" (2000:309); "The tone would be sarcastic. Far from believing the Nubians to be 'a people feared far and near, a nation strong and conquering,' the author would have shared the opinion of the Assyrian generalissimo that they were a broken reed providing no support (36:6)" (2000:310). Dietrich (1976:128 with n. 82, cf. also n. 45 on p. 97) registers, more to the point, a difference between the respectable tone used about Cush in 18:2 and the derogatory tone in other sayings directed against Egypt – Cush. Wildberger (1978:689) finds traces of a certain admiration of Cush in 18:2: "eine gewisse Bewunderung für das neu in die Weltgeschichte eintretende, noch jugendfrische Volk." As regards the issue of (apparently non-existing) racial prejudice, the connotations carried by the word (מ)מורט are of some importance. It is usually translated as above, "smooth-skinned". A consultation of dictionaries and commentaries gives at hand that it is possible, but far from certain, that this expression alludes to the black skin colour of the Cushites. The recent Swedish translation Bibel 2000 has "svartglänsande", which is roughly equivalent to "shining black." If such an allusion is made, it is worth noticing that it is made in a context which stresses the capability, perhaps even superiority—not the inferiority—of the people thus described.

[226] As observed by Kaiser (1983:77).

ternational force. Alternatively, the inhabitants of the world are invited to become witnesses of what is going on. After the enigmatic interlude of v. 4, which portrays YHWH as a relaxed spectator of the events on earth, there follows a depiction/prediction of some kind of disaster (vv. 5-6).

On the assumption that vv. 5-6 depict the defeat of Cush—which seems likely, yet cannot be proven beyond reasonable doubt—the point is that, at the end of the day, the impressive strength of this nation (v. 2) would turn out to be illusory, or at least sadly insufficient. In this extended simile, the Cushites (or some other people[s]?) are likened to branches that are cut off from the vine, prior to the vintage, in order to increase the produce of grapes on the remaining tendrils.[227] An allegorizing, and hence somewhat speculative, interpretation may be attempted. Since pruning can be described as the removal of excessive outgrowth, and never aims at the destruction of the plant itself, this might be a metaphorical way of saying that the territorial expansion of Cush would be efficiently stopped.[228] In this connection, it is worth noticing that notions of extension and expansion are prominent in both v. 2 and v. 5 (two key utterances which otherwise have little or nothing in common): Ships and envoys are sent out (v. 2, expansion); the individuals of this people are described as exceptionally tall (v. 2, extension); the branches are spreading out from the vine (v. 5, note that נטישׁה, "branch, tendril", is related to the verb נטשׁ, "to extend"!). It is thus possible to see a connection between the contrasting characterizations given of Cush in this text, first as strong and victorious (vv. 1-2), and then as utterly helpless and defenceless (vv. 5-6, if the victims are to be identified with the people of Cush). What kind of disaster that would befall Cush is not explicitly stated. A military defeat seems to be the most likely scenario, since the motif of vultures and beasts (v. 6), which is rather abruptly introduced, evokes the image of slain corpses left at the battlefield.[229]

[227] For further details concerning the pruning of vine in biblical times, see Kaiser (1983:78-79) and Wildberger (1978:692).

[228] The following remarks made by Wildberger seem to be informed by a similar interpretation of the pruning metaphor: "es ist ihm … wichtig zu betonen, daß die weit ausgreifenden, wild wuchernden Ranken Äthiopiens, wenn die Zeit gekommen ist, weggerissen werden … Vom Untergang Äthiopiens ist expressis verbis nicht die Rede. Aber es wird außerhalb seines Stammlandes auf die Dauer nicht die Rolle einer führenden Macht spielen können, und mit der momentanen Herrlichkeit der äthiopischen Herrschaft wird es bald einmal ein Ende haben" (1978:693).

[229] Arguably, the vine – pruning – branches simile of v. 5 does not continue into v. 6. The somewhat surprising appearance of both birds and beasts is best understood as a motif associated with the topic domain, which is defeat on the battlefield. Cf. similarly Wildberger (1978:693): "Offenbar vermischen sich dem Propheten Bild und real gemeintes."

Curiously enough, nothing is said about the agent(s) of destruction. Should the anonymous subject hidden in the 3rd person singular verb forms in v. 5 be identified with YHWH? If this prophecy envisaged that Cush would be defeated with military means, then by whom? Did the writer have Assyria or some other nation in mind? We will probably never know. Instead of indulging in endless speculations, I prefer leaving these questions unanswered. Apparently, the focus in vv. 5-6 is entirely on the fate of the branches (i.e., the victims). As a consequence, the role of YHWH is not easily determined. It has been suggested that the national deity of Judah is portrayed as a passive and neutral observer, not only in v. 4, but throughout this text.[230] According to others, v. 4 pictures YHWH as calmly awaiting the right moment for punitive action (described in vv. 5-6).[231] Due to the reticence of the author/editor on this matter, no certain conclusion can be drawn. However, with a view to the genre and literary context of this prophecy, it seems likely that divine agency in some form or other is being implied.

Only in v. 7—a late addition to 18:1-6, which can be regarded as an early interpretation of this prophecy—is the relationship between Cush and YHWH made explicit. According to this eschatological postscript, a transformation will take place "at that time." The Cushites (those who survived the catastrophe) will learn their lesson and assume their proper place, as servants of YHWH. Viewed in this perspective, the prophecy in vv. 1-6 becomes an edifying story about the rise and fall of an arrogant nation (Cush)—a story to which v. 7 provides the happy end, at least from a Jerusalemite point of view. It needs to be stressed, finally, that the vision of the Cushites bringing tributes to Zion is an openly nationalist one. It is thus implied that in the coming era the Cushite nation, once strong and victorious, will become the vassal of a new, Jerusalem-centered empire.

Contextualization

During the reign of Shabaka (716-702), belonging to the 25th dynasty, Cush (Ethiopia/Nubia) succeeded in establishing control over the whole of Egypt.[232]

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[230] Clements spells out this position of divine (and hence exemplary!) neutrality as follows: "He will be neutral … Yahweh will neither support Egypt-Ethiopia, nor yet uphold Assyria, so that Hezekiah could in no way rely on Yahweh's support if he joined the revolt" (1980:165). In a similar vein, Blenkinsopp interprets v. 4 (and this has implications also for vv. 5-6) as "a prophetic communication that states, in effect, that Yahweh knows what is going on but will not intervene" (2000:310).

[231] Thus, e.g., Dietrich (1976:129). Cf. also Kaiser (1983:78) and Wildberger (1978:691-693).

[232] On the struggle in Egypt between rivalling dynasties during this period, see, e.g., Currid (1997:232-239).

For a short while—culminating with the battle of Elteqe (in the year 701) where the army led by Shabaka's successor, Shebitku, was defeated by the Assyrians—distant Cush, *due to its dominion over Egypt*, became a nation of importance, even from a Judahite perspective. Within the lengthy time span covered by the book of Isaiah, only this period would seem to provide a suitable setting for Isa 18:1-6.[233] It can therefore be concluded, with a high degree of certainty, that if this prophecy was not actually written during the last two centuries of the 8th century, that period nevertheless represents its most likely point of reference. But which message was conveyed by Isa 18:1-6 in relation to that specific historical context?

Several scholars have sketched a scenario with the following ingredients: Efforts to form an anti-Assyrian coalition were actively supported by the Nubian Pharaoh Shabaka. In this situation, the prophet Isaiah warned Hezekiah that participation in such an alliance would have disastrous consequences: Cush would be crushed (presumably by the Assyrians, acting as the instrument of YHWH), and so would those who relied on its assistance.[234] An alternative hypothesis, popular among earlier exegetes, holds that vv. 5-6 presage the defeat of Assyria.[235] The point would then be that YHWH planned to punish the Assyrians, anyway. Hence, alliances with Cush or any other nations were unnecessary. However, since no other nation is mentioned by name, it seems preferable

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[233] With the majority of commentators. For further arguments, see Blenkinsopp (2000:309-311) and Wildberger (1978:683, 686-688). Note that Kaiser (1983:76-77), who regards 18:1-6 as a post-exilic piece of eschatologizing prophecy, does not come up with an alternative historical setting. He postulates that the author, for some reason, missed a prophecy dealing with Cush within the Isaianic compilation of oracles against the nations (chs. 13–23*), and therefore resolved to produce one. Also the hypothesis put forward by Sweeney (1996:257), according to which Isa 18:1-7 refers to king Hoshea's diplomatic activities in the 720s, suffers from serious weaknesses. The Pharaoh who is called "So" by the biblical author (2 Kgs 17:4) has been variously identified, but it is highly unlikely that Shabaka's Nubian predecessor Piankhy is meant—or, that Cush should have been mentioned as a power centre already in the 720s. Cf. Wildberger (1978:686-687). Moreover, Ephraim/Israel is not explicitly mentioned. Sweeney (1996:257) has to presuppose that there is an "overall concern … with Israel" in Isa 17:1–18:7.

[234] Some scholars, e.g., Clements (1980:163-164) and Dietrich (1976:127-129), opt for a reference to conspiracies that took place prior to the revolt that broke out in 713 BCE. However, as argued by Blenkinsopp (2000:310) and Wildberger (1978:687), it is more likely that 18:1-6 refers to the efforts to form an anti-Assyrian alliance subsequent to Sargon's death in 705. Only on the latter occasion is there positive evidence for an active participation from Cush–Egypt.

[235] Thus, e.g., Duhm (1922:138-139). Several other scholars defending such an interpretation have been enumerated by Wildberger (1978:690).

to assume that the threat in 18:5-6 is directed against Cush. As pointed out by Becker, it is conceivable that Cush–Egypt, with its expansionist ambitions, was regarded as a potential threat against Judah.[236] As argued above, it is likely that *Cush-Egypt is portrayed as an enemy* in this passage.

That this prophecy was the object of continual reflection well into the Second Temple period, is evidenced by the addition in 18:7 (cf. also Ezek 30:9). Although Cush no longer played a decisive role in the struggle for dominion over the Levant, this distant ethnic entity could still be seen as a representative, or a model, for all peoples in the world. According to the perspective of this post-exilic author, all nations were ultimately destined to become servants of YHWH—which, it seems, would entail a status of vassalage vis-à-vis Jerusalem.

Isa 19:1-15

19:1 A message concerning Egypt.
See, YHWH is riding on a swift cloud,
he is coming to Egypt.
The idols of Egypt tremble before him,
and the heart of Egypt dissolves within it.
2 "I will stir up Egypt(ians) against Egypt(ians),
and they will fight each other, neighbour against neighbour,
city against city, kingdom against kingdom.
3 The spirit/mind of (the) Egypt(ians) will be emptied out*,
and its plan I will confound.
They will consult the idols and the ghosts,
the spirits of the dead and the mediums.
4 I will deliver the Egyptians into the hands of a hard overlord,
a fierce king will rule over them",
says the Lord, YHWH of the hosts.
5 The waters of the sea (= the Nile) will be dried up,
the river will become parched and dry.

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[236] Becker makes the following thoughtworthy reflection: "Die Expansion des Äthiopiers Schabaka nach Ägypten konnte auch eine Gefährdung für das judäische Königreich bedeutet und einen Spruch wie 18,1-2* provoziert haben. Denn die Schlacht bei Altaqū / Elteqe zwischen dem ägyptischen und dem assyrischen Heer zeigte in aller Deutlichkeit, daß die Ägypter auch Palästina als ihre Domäne betrachteten; sie werden jedenfalls kaum allein deshalb gekommen sein, um dem kleinen Juda gegen die Assyrer zu Hilfe zu eilen" (1997:277).

6 The channels will stench*,
the branches of the Nile of Egypt will abate and dry up.
Reed and sea weed will decay.
7 (There will be) bare places(?) at the mouth of the Nile.
Everything sown by the Nile will wither, whirl away, and be no more.
8 The fishers will lament,
all who cast angles in the Nile will mourn,
and those who spread nets on the surface of the water will languish.
9 The flax workers will despair,
the carders and weavers grow pale*.
10 Its weavers will be dejected,
all who work for wages will be despondent.
11 The princes of Zoan are nothing but fools,
the wise counsellors of Pharaoh give stupid advice.
How can you say to Pharaoh,
"I am a son of sages, the descendant of ancient kings"?
12 Where are they now, your sages?
Let them tell you, then, and make known*
what YHWH of the hosts has planned against Egypt.
13 The princes of Zoan act as fools,
the princes of Memphis are deluded/misled;
the chiefs of its tribes have led Egypt astray.
14 YHWH has poured into them* a spirit of confusion;
They have made Egypt stagger in all its doings,
as a drunkard staggers in his vomits.
15 Nothing can be done for Egypt,
neither by head nor tail, by palm branch or reed.

* Cf. BHS app.

The text

The anti-Egypt prophecy in Isa 19:1-15 has an easily recognizable tripartite structure (vv. 1-4 // 5-10 // 11-15). Whereas vv. 1-4 and 11-15 have much in common—shared topic (internal political disorder), vocabulary (עצה, רוח), and shared intertextual links (both sections display conspicuous connections to Isa 9:10-15, see "characterization" below)—the middle section stands apart, with its focus on ecology and economy, and its rather idiosyncratic terminology (including several *hapax legomina*).[237] Since the ensuing analysis will concentrate

[237] An alternative understanding of 19:5-10 has been proposed by Currid (1997:229-246). According to his analysis, the depiction of an ecological catastrophe is

upon the opening and concluding sections (or, stanzas), theories concerning the possibly secondary status of vv. 5-10 need not be discussed at length.[238]

Characterization

There can be no doubt that the passage 19:1-15 describes the collapse of the Egyptian nation on all levels; politically, ecologically, economically, intellectually, and spiritually.[239] This does not, however, necessarily imply an unequivocal characterization of Egypt as weak and vulnerable. It is conceivable that the author/redactor presupposed the existence of an opinion which held the opposite, viz. that Egypt was powerful and prosperous, a seat of wisdom—an image that s/he wished to confute. Alternatively, the purpose was to "explain" a process of internal destabilizing in Egypt, which had already become manifest to observers on the outside.

Prior to a more detailed analysis, the question has to be raised, whether it is appropriate to speak of an enemy image in the case of 19:1-15. There is not the faintest allusion that Egypt might jeopardize the security of Judah (or Yehud, if the passage is post-exilic). The allegations that are made against the Egyptian politicians concern their failure to lead *their own* people (vv. 13-14). Moreover, it is explicitly (and repeatedly) stated that all negative traits in this portrayal of Egypt—confusion and superstition, internal strife or civil war, various ecological and economical catastrophes, folly within the field of political decision-making—are somehow caused by YHWH (vv. 2-3, 14a). This observation may indicate that Egypt here is implicitly depicted as an *enemy of YHWH*. In this connection, it is worth noticing that the description of YHWH's arrival in Egypt "riding on a swift cloud" (v. 1ba) evokes mythological notions associatied with

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metaphorical, the real topic being political turmoil and collapse. However, I cannot see that Currid's thesis, that "[t]he conquest of Egypt by Nubia is figuratively expressed in Isaiah 19:5-10 as the drying up of the Nile River" (1997:240), is backed up by valid linguistic or literary arguments.

[238] Blenkinsopp (2000:314) analyzes 19:1-15 as a poem divided into three stanzas, but he appears to allow for the possibility that "the middle stanza (5-10)" has been "spliced in between 1-4 and 11-15." According to Wildberger (1978:703-707), vv. 5-10 and v. 15 represent later additions, whereas vv. 1-4 and 11-14 go back to the prophet Isaiah himself. Also Vermeylen (1977:320-323) regards vv. 5-10 as a later (post-exilic) interpolation, but he assigns the original prophecy (vv. 1-4 + 11-15) to the exilic era. Clements, likewise, concludes that "it seems uncertain that any of vv. 1-15 derive from Isaiah", yet he "does not rule out a pre-exilic date" (1980:166-167, quotes on p. 167). Cf. also Kaiser (1983:81-82), who defends a dating in the post-exilic period for 19:1-15 in its entirety.

[239] Cf., e.g., Kaiser (1983:81).

theophany depictions (cf. Pss 18:11; 68:5, 34; 104:3).[240] It is thus possible, I suggest, that Isa 19:1-15 alludes to the conception Egypt as some kind of primordial chaos monster (cf. Isa 30:7).

Another noteworthy feature of this prophecy is its relative scarcity of metaphorical representations.[241] In fact, only one clear-cut instance can be found: In v. 14b, the Egyptian population is personified as a staggering drunkard. However, this graphic and apposite depiction of a nation in a state of decay and degeneration is possibly drawn from Isa 28:7-8. The impression that 19:1-15 does not contain a distinctive metaphorical portrait of Egypt is strengthened by the observation that several expressions in vv. 1-4 and 11-15 recall formulations in 9:10-15 and, hence, may derive from that passage.[242] This may look like a disappointing conclusion in a study largely focusing on the use of metaphors. However, in this particular case, the very lack of suggestive and powerful metaphors can be said to contribute positively to the characterization of Egypt as a nation on the verge of collapse, i.e., as a nation about to lose its identity.

Contextualization

As regards the search for the historical context of the passage Isa 19:1-15, and the discussion concerning its date of origin, the difficult situation facing the scholar has been aptly described by Blenkinsopp:

> Though the author seems to be well informed on Egyptian affairs, the only specific historical allusion is to conquest by a foreign nation (4). The taskmaster and powerful king in question has been identified with such an extremely wide range of individuals, from Sargon II or Py (Piankhy) in the eighth to Antiochus III in the second century B.C.E., that a consensus is unlikely to emerge…But even when the range is narrowed to rulers who not only inflicted defeat on the Egyptians but conquered and occupied the country it is still difficult to decide among several possible candidates—the Ethiopian Py (Piankhy), the Assyrian Esarhaddon, the Persians Cambyses and Ataxerxes

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[240] In the Ugaritic texts, Baal is given the epithet "cloud-rider" (*rkb 'rpt)*. See further Wildberger (1978:709).

[241] Otherwise Currid (1997:245), who regards the depiction in vv. 5-10 of "[t]he death of the Nile" as a powerful metaphor for "the dissolution and downfall of civilization." This reading of 19:5-10 fails to convince me.

[242] To begin with, exactly the same phrase, ראשׁ וזנב כפה ואגמון, "head and tail, palm branch and reed", occurs in both 19:15 and 9:13 (cf. also 9:14). Lexical correspondences between the passages include the following: 19:2 – 9:10 (סכך in Pilp.); 19:3 – 9:12 (דרשׁ) and 9:15 (בלע); 19:13, 14 – 9:15 (תעה in Hiph.). In combination, these intertextual connections become rather conspicuous.

> III, and the Macedonian Alexander. As is so often the case, there is no well-marked path for the interpreter to follow from text to historical realia.[243]

No definite decision can thus be made. It is possible that Blenkinsopp is correct in suggesting—albeit with hesitation—that the passage may refer to "the situation leading up to the establishment of the Napatan regime (the twenty-fifth Nubian dynasty) in the last quarter of the 8th century B.C.E.."[244] However, Kaiser has made a strong case for the Persian period. He has, more precisely, been able to demonstrate that the description in Isa 19:1-15 would match the conditions that prevailed within Egypt in the years 404-343 BCE.[245] Leaving the question of exact dating unsettled, I suggest that 19:1-15 can be read as an evaluative statement about Egypt, which encompasses and condensates several centuries of recurring periods of internal unrest and/or foreign occupation.

Isa 19:16-17

> 16 On that day the Egyptians will become like women. They will tremble and fear before the raised hand of YHWH of the hosts, as he lifts it over them.
> 17 And the land of Judah will become a horror for Egypt. Everyone to whom it is mentioned will fear, because of the plan which YHWH of the hosts is devising concerning it/him.

The text
Isa 19:16-17 is the first of five additions, or instances of *Fortschreibung*, that have been appended to 19:1-15.[246] In contradistinction to the four sayings that follow (but in accordance with the tenor of 19:1-15), this short prophecy expresses an unequivocally negative view on Egypt as well as the Egyptians.

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[243] Blenkinsopp (2000:314).

[244] Blenkinsopp (2000:314). See also Wildberger (1978:707-708), who opts for the same period, at least as concerns vv. 1b-4 + 11-14. According to Currid (1997:239), the situation "just prior to the Nubian Shabaka's invasion of Egypt in 712 B.C." constitutes "the historical backdrop" of chs. 18–20 in general, and hence of 19:1-15, as well.

[245] Kaiser (1983:81-82).

[246] Cf., e.g., Blenkinsopp (2000:317) and Clements (1980:169-170).

Characterization

In Isa 19:16-17, the Egyptians are depicted as weak and cowardly. The phrase "to be(come) like women" (v. 16) seems to have been a conventional way (within a patriarchal cultural framework) of describing unwarlike and cowering behaviour among (enemy) soldiers (cf. Nah 3:13, referring to the Assyrians). Possibly, this is a conscious re-use of a common motif in Egyptian propaganda, since Egyptian rulers sometimes depicted defeated enemies as woman-like.[247] Evidently, the biblical author envisaged that some kind of reversal would take place in the future. A prediction like "the land of Judah will become a horror for Egypt" (v. 17) would, arguably, only make sense against the background of a situation where the opposite was the case.

Although this short prophecy focuses on the fate of Egypt, it contains an implicit "self-portrait" of Judah. According to v. 17, the very mention of Judah would be enough to bring about panic among the Egyptians. Fear for YHWH (v. 16b) and fear for Judah (v. 17a) appear to be parallel phenomena in this text. Indeed, Judahite supremacy seems to be equated with the realization of YHWH's plan (v. 17b). In other words, it would seem that the references in this text to the rule of YHWH are intimately linked to a nationalist—and imperialist—vision of future Jerusalem-centred world dominion.

Contextualization

Although a precise setting for 19:16-17 cannot be identified (Jerusalemite control over Egypt was certainly not in sight at any occasion during the biblical period), I agree with Clements that one "should regard a post-exilic origin as assured."[248]

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[247] Cf. the following line from The Victory Stela of King Piye, occurring in a concluding adulation, addressed to the victorious Piye: "You made bulls into women" (quoted from the translation offered by Lichtheim 1980:80). For further attestations of this kind of rhetorics in official Egyptian texts, see Grapow (1924:131). The practice of using "woman" as synonymous with "cowardly" (a sexist practice, no doubt), appears to have been widespread, as part of an international stock of phrases. According to one of the curses in the treaty between Assurnirari V. and Mati-'ilu of Arpad, the latter's soldiers would become women, in the event of a contract breach. See *ANET*, pp. 532-533.

[248] Clements (1980:170-171, quote on p. 170).

Isa 20:1-6

20:1 In the year during which the commander in chief, having been sent by Sargon, king of Assyria, came to Ashdod and fought against it and took it;
2 at that time YHWH spoke througha Isaiah ben Amoz: “Go, untie the sackcloth from your loins and take your sandals* off your feet.” And he did so, walking naked and barefoot.
3 YHWH then said: “Just as my servant Isaiah has walked naked and barefoot, for three years, (as) a sign and a portent concerning Egypt and Cush,
4 so shall the king of Assyria lead away the Egyptians into captivity and the Cushites into exile, both young and old, naked and barefoot, with their buttocks uncovered, (to) the shame of Egypt.
5 They will be dismayed and ashamed because of Cush, their hope, and because of Egypt, their pride.”
6 The inhabitants of this coastland will say, on that day: “See them now, those in whom we hoped, and to whom we fled for help, in order to be delivered from the king of Assyria. How could we escape?”

* Cf. BHS app.
a With a view to its function in other instances, “through” or “by” would seem to be the most apt translation of the compound preposition ביד, but that sense appears somewhat strange in this context. An alternative rendering would be ‘to’, a solution that finds support in LXX.

The text
Isa 20:1-6 consists of three parts: (a) an annalistic introduction followed by a report concerning a prophetical symbolic act (vv. 1-2); (b) an oracle which interprets the sign-act as a way of prefiguring the fate of Egypt and Cush (vv. 3-4) and as a warning directed to some unidentified group (v. 5); and (c) a concluding saying focusing on the reactions and prospects of “the inhabitants of this coastland” (v. 6). Whoever tries to read this passage as a historiographical-biographical account has to concede that it is replete with inconsistencies.[249] It is

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[249] It is thus, for instance, remarkable that the oracle in v. 3, presumably delivered by Isaiah, speaks of the prophet in the 3rd person. Some scholars have suggested that the present form of the text goes back to an original autobiographical report in the 1st person mode. See Barth (1977:9, n. 18), cf. also Dietrich (1976:132) and Duhm (1922:148). However, such a hypothesis—which must remain unproven—does not offer any remedy to the chronological and logical inconsistencies in the present form of Isa 20:1-6. As it now stands, this passage appears to present the following sequence of events: (1) YHWH

therefore not surprising that many commentators have regarded 20:1-6 as composite, reckoning with more than one layer of editorial expansions and transpositions (chiefly within vv. 1-2 and 5-6).[250] Alternatively, as argued by Kaiser, the entire passage (which contains several formulations with an unmistakably deuteronomistic "flavour") should be classified as a late legend, comparable to those in chs. 36–39.[251] I find the latter solution attractive. It then becomes possible to explain the disturbing chronological inaccuracies with

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commissions Isaiah to perform a symbolic act in 711 BCE; (2) Isaiah acts accordingly, parading naked (more or less undressed?) for three years (intermittently?)—which would mean that this demonstration continued until 709, although the Assyrians had crushed the Ashdod rebellion already in 711; (3) an interpretative oracle, which warns against making alliances with Egypt–Cush, is delivered only after this period of three years (i.e., 709 or later). Several commentators attempt to reconstruct some alternative, allegedly more reasonable order of events. Among other things, they presuppose that the sign-act was accompanied by a verbal interpretation at an earlier stage. Wildberger adds this comment: "Wenn einer drei Jahre lang 'nackt' umhergeht und nicht sagen kann, was das bedeuten soll, wird er zu einen komischen Figur" (1978:757). The implication seems to be that an editor, inadvertently, created this image of the venerable prophet as a "comic figure." It is, as I see it, better to refrain from reconstructions of the "real" events. As pointed out by Kaiser (1983:95), the prophet's walking naked for three years makes better sense as a literary motif ("erzählerisches Motiv") than it would as a real performance.

[250] Whereas Wildberger (1978:749-751) regards vv. 1 and 6 as secondary, Clements (1980:175) and others argue that v. 5 is an addition. Several commentators have also voiced suspicions regarding the status of v. 2. See, e.g., Duhm (1922:148). According to Kaiser (1983:93), v. 2 must be treated either as an addition or as a parenthesis. The position defended by Becker (1997:277-278), viz. that the original (and possibly Isaianic?) core consisted of vv. 3-4, can therefore be seen as the logical conclusion of previous scholarly efforts. However, as pointed out by Dietrich (1976:131-132), who regards vv. 4-5 as an Isaianic kernel ("etwas wie 'jesajanisches Urgestein'", p. 131), the oracle (in this case, v. 4f) would seem to presuppose some kind of narrative introduction. As argued above, it is probably preferable to regard 20:1-5 as a late legend (and, hence, as a unified composition!) to which v. 6 has been added.

[251] Kaiser (1983:92-96). Although Kaiser himself does not use the term 'legend', I think that genre label captures his position well, since he suggests that Isa 20:1-6 represents "eine volkstümlichere Überlieferung aus späteren Zeit … wie sie uns ähnlich in den Kapiteln 36–39 begegnet" (1983:95). More recently, Blenkinsopp (2000:321) has argued that 20:1-6 is "of Deuteronomistic origin" and "excerpted from the same annalistic source" as chs. 36–39. The presence in this passage of terminology typical of deuteronomistic texts is an undeniable fact, and it is extensively recorded by Blenkinsopp (2000:321-322). Cf. also Dietrich (1976:130). This fact can, however, be interpreted in more than one way. Whereas Wildberger (1978:758) speaks of some pre-dtr stage, one cannot exclude the possibility that 20:1-6* is post-dtr, shaped in "the same historiographical mode" (Blenkinsopp 2000:321) as numerous passages in Kings.

recourse to the temporal distance that separated the author from the purported setting of the (fictional or factual?) sign-act (see further "contextualization" below).

The ensuing analysis concentrates on the characterization of Egypt and Cush in vv. 3-6. Apart from the gloss "(to) the shame of Egypt" at the end of v. 4, no accretions to the text are being postulated within vv. 3-5. As regards v. 6, there are good reasons to regard it as a secondary addition (e.g., the formula "on that day" and the abrupt introduction of new speakers/addressees).[252] Still, the analysis takes its point of departure in the extant, edited, form of the text.

Characterization

In this analysis of Isa 20:3-6, Egypt and Cush will be treated together, without any attempt to differentiate between their "images." Throughout this passage (with exception for the gloss in v. 4b) they appear in tandem. They seem to be depicted as equals, or even as the two halves of one entity (which accords well with the historical context indicated by 20:1). The differences that can be found amount to no more than stylistic variations. The sign (i.e., the symbolic act allegedly performed by Isaiah) concerns both Egypt and Cush (v. 3). The same sinister prospects are held out for both countries (or: for both parts of the united kingdom of Cush–Egypt): An Assyrian conquest, followed by the deportation of captives in large numbers (v. 4). According to v. 5, this scenario would cause great disappointment to some unidentified group. The reference is probably to pro-Egyptian circles in Judah.[253] In v. 6, we learn of the despair among "the inhabitants of this coastland", presumably the Philistines, as they realize that Cush–Egypt will not be able to rescue them from the Assyrian threat.[254]

The portrait in 20:3-6 of Egypt and Cush is dominated by the theme of "physical appearance." To begin with, there is the motif of nakedness, which may operate on more than one level. In a literal sense, it probably refers to the Assyrian practice of depriving war prisoners of their clothes, thus adding to their

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[252] Further arguments for regarding v. 6 as secondary have been adduced by Becker (1997:277 with n. 28), Dietrich (1976:131), and Wildberger (1978:751, 759).

[253] This identification is almost universally accepted among commentators. See, e.g., Becker (1997:277-278), Clements (1980:175), and Wildberger (1978:759).

[254] In view of v. 1, which focuses on Ashdod, it is reasonable to assume that the expression "this coastland" (האי הזה) in v. 6 refers to Philistia. For a brief discussion—and rejection—of other suggestions (including Cyprus and Phoenicia), see Wildberger (1978:759). Cf. also Clements (1980:176), who concludes that "although the primary reference must be to Philistia, the obvious relevance to Judah is clear." Moreover, as pointed out by Wildberger (1978:759), it is conceivable that "Assyria" here serves as a code name for some other great power (Persia?).

humiliation.[255] On the metaphorical level, nudity might signify national disgrace. After the Assyrian attack, one may infer, the military weakness and impotence would be disclosed, and for everyone to see. Egypt and Cush would stand there, exposing their bare buttocks—a cross-cultural metaphor for abasement and shame. It is thus possible, I suggest, that the gloss "(to) the shame of Egypt" (ערות מצרים), at the end of v. 4, has captured an essential dimension of the message, viz. disgrace at the national level.[256]

The theme of "physical appearance" continues into v. 5. According to the MT, Cush is called מבטם, an expression which basically means something like "the object of their look/gaze", and hence the object of their expectations (= "their hope", as above). In this context, it is also worth noting that the lexeme תפארת, which is used as a designation for Egypt—translated by "pride" above, and occurring in conjunction with several enemy images within the book of Isaiah (cf. 10:12 [Assyria]; 13:19 [Babylon]; 28:1, 4 [Ephraim])—carries the senses "splendour" and beauty", and that it can denote precious ornaments (cf. Exod 28:2, 40; 2 Chr 3:6). On the basis of these observations, I suggest that Egypt and Cush in v. 5 are depicted as beautiful, desirable objects (or persons). The point would be that appearances are deceptive. This theme is then further elaborated in v. 6, where the sad state of "the object of our look/gaze" (מבטנו) is being deplored.

In sum, the characterization of Egypt and Cush in Isa 20:3-6 stresses the notions of disability, disgrace and delusion. As the text now stands, it is doubtful whether the label "enemy image" is applicable.[257] These two nations are described as *potential allies*. However, from that perspective they are portrayed as harmful, because of their illusory strength. The message might be paraphrased as follows: Beware of Cush–Egypt, they may seem "attractive" (as coalition partners), but in the end the "naked" truth will be that they let you down. As in

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[255] Cf. *ANEP* 366. It is, however, uncertain whether this was a regular practice. Cf. Wildberger (1978:756). Perhaps the notion of Egyptian and Ethiopian-Nubian deportees parading naked should be regarded as a rhetorical exaggeration.

[256] A laconic expression which is loosely attached to its context is, of course, always open to various interpretations. Still, I find the interpretation outlined above more plausible than the proposal made by Blenkinsopp (2000:321), who conjectures that the gloss was produced "with the purpose of replacing dorsal with frontal nudity." Some kind of perspectival shift may nevertheless be involved, since this gloss focuses on Egypt, leaving Cush aside.

[257] However, the depiction in vv. 3-4 comes close to an enemy image. If the hypothesis put forward by Becker (1997:277-278) should happen to be correct, the original oracle (20:3-4*) indeed constituted a straightforward threat against Egypt and Cush.

several other passages in the book of Isaiah, Egypt (and Cush) is here pictured as the *helpless helper* who brings disaster upon those who hoped for assistance.

Contextualization

It is difficult to define the historical setting of Isa 20:1-6. Whereas v. 1 places the events described in the time of the anti-Assyrian revolt led by Ashdod in 713-711 BCE, several scholars have argued that the message conveyed by the sign-act and the prophecy would make better sense within the context of the next major revolt in this region, which took place in the years 705-701.[258] It has been suggested that the military defeat of the Egyptian army (led by a Cushite Pharaoh!) in 701 at Elteqe marked a "fulfilment" of this prophecy.[259] However, in order to find a situation matching the scenery prefigured by the prophetical sign-act, one would probably have to extend the temporal scope even further, to 671 (when Memphis was taken by Esarhaddon's troops) or 663 (when Assurbanipal's campaign against Egypt issued in large deportations).

Whether or not it goes back to an actual sign-act performed by the prophet Isaiah and/or to an original oracle delivered in the 8th century, the 3rd person annalistic-legendary mode of presentation betrays that the passage 20:1-6* was *composed* considerably later than 711 (the date indicated by v. 1).[260] The setting of this literary composition should therefore be sought in the 7th century, or later. Sweeney has argued that the passage, with its anti-Egyptian bias, "serves the interests of the Josianic redaction."[261] As to the date of origin, he suggests that 20:1-6 "may well stem from opponents to Manasseh's policy."[262] Kaiser, too, discusses the Manasseh era.[263] In addition, he mentions the reign of Zedekiah (597-587) as a likely setting for the composition of a narrative warning against alliances with Egypt.[264] In other words, the suggestions are *legio*. And nothing precludes the possibility of a date in the exilic or post-exilic period, since Egypt continued to be an important factor and, time and again, a potential ally, throughout the entire time span covered by the book of Isaiah.

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[258] See, e.g., Blenkinsopp (2000:322) and Clements (1980:173-174). According to Clements, "the present form of the prophecy must be related to the revolt of 705-701, rather than to that of 713-711 to which Isaiah's original sign-action was related" (1980:174).

[259] Thus, e.g., Clements (1980:175).

[260] This is conceded by several commentators who claim that the events reported actually occurred (in some way or other). See, e.g., Dietrich (1976:130) and Wildberger (1978:754).

[261] Sweeney (1996:272). According to his analysis, "Egypt presented the most formidable obstacle to Josiah's plans for re-establishing the Davidic empire" (1996:273).

[262] Sweeney (1996:275).

[263] Kaiser (1983:96).

[264] Kaiser (1983:97).

Isa 30:1-5

30:1 Woe to the rebellious children, says YHWH,
who make plans, but not from me,
and pour out libations, but without my spirit,
thus heaping sins upon sins,
2 who set out to go down to Egypt, but without consulting me,
to take refuge* in the protection of Pharaoh,
to seek shelter in the shadow of Egypt;
3 but the protection of Pharaoh will become your shame,
and the shelter in the shadow of Egypt (will become your) humiliation.
4 For though his officials are at Zoan
and his envoys reach Hanes,
5 they will all be disappointed*
on account of a people that cannot profit them,
(bringing) neither help nor profit, only shame and disgrace.

* Cf. BHS app.

The text
Within 30:1-5, v. 3 is sometimes seen as secondary.[265] However, since repetition may be a stylistic device, serving a rhetorical purpose—in this case, underlining the contrast between expectation (v. 2) and outcome (v. 3)—I see no compelling reason why v. 3 should be regarded as an addition.[266]

Characterization
The image of Egypt in 30:1-5 is consonant with the images of this nation that are found in 19:1-15 and (together with Cush) in 20:1-6. Once again, the role assigned to Egypt is that of *the helpless helper*. The analysis will therefore be brief, focussing on those aspects which may add some further nuances to the portrait.

An intertextual investigation yields the interesting result, that all formulations used about Egypt (or Pharaoh) in this text are closely connected to the

[265] Thus, e.g., Kaiser (1983:225, 228).
[266] With Clements (1980:244) and Wildberger (1982:1149).

cultic domain.[267] The expressions in vv. 2b-3, to take refuge in someone's "protection" (מעוז), and to "seek shelter" (חסה) in someone's "shadow" (צל), echo the language of prayer (cf. Pss 2:12; 5:12; 7:2; 27:1; 28:8; 36:8, etc.). In this case, however, we learn that the "rebellious children" (v. 1) of Judah (the political elite?), who disregard YHWH's advice, go to Egypt (v. 2a), not to the temple in Jerusalem, hoping to find shelter in Pharaoh's "shadow" (v. 2b), not in YHWH's protective presence (cf. the cultic phrase "take refuge in the shadow of your wings", Pss 36:8; 57:2). In other words, seeking Egyptian help is condemned as a kind of apostasy, or idolatry.[268] Pharaoh is implicitly pictured as a divine being—and the same seems to hold for the entire nation of Egypt—but the irony cannot be missed: This is a worthless "god", unable to help (v. 5). Those who are foolish enough to entreat such a fake deity, seeking shelter and protection there, will only bring "shame" (בשת) and "humiliation" (כלמה) on themselves (v. 3), i.e., they will suffer the fate reserved for the enemies and the wicked in the Psalms (cf. Pss 35:26; 109:29; 132:18).

Since it must have been well known in Jerusalem that the state ideology of Egypt ascribed divine status to Pharaoh, Isa 30:1-5 can be regarded as a piece of prophetical polemics, directed against the official Egyptian propaganda (and against those in Judah who apparently believed in such propaganda).[269]

Contextualization

The passage 30:1-5 (or, sometimes, 30:1-5*) is almost unanimously assigned an 8th century origin, and ascribed to the prophet Isaiah, by the commentators.[270] This prophecy is, moreover, usually regarded as a pointed critique of Hezekiah's foreign policy 705-701 B.C.E. According to this near consensus view, Isaiah

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[267] This has, of course, been observed by others. See, e.g., Kaiser (1983:227) and Wildberger (1982:1153-1154). However, these commentators do not spell out the possible implications for the interpretation in great detail.

[268] This is the main drift of 30:1-5. Accordingly, the "sins" spoken of in v. 1 should probably be interpreted as sins against YHWH, in the first place. It has been suggested by some scholars, e.g., Blenkinsopp (2000:412) and Wildberger (1982:1151-1153), that certain formulations in v. 1 allude to paragraphs in Assyrian vassal treaties, the implication being that Hezekiah had "sinned" against the Assyrian overlord. However, the point made by vv. 2-5 is hardly that one should seek shelter in Sennacherib's shadow!

[269] For documentation and discussion concerning the king's divine status according to official Egyptian ideology, see Frankfort (1948:3-212). Although Pharaoh was regarded as divine in some respects, the state theologians appear to have made a subtle distinction between the king and the transhuman deities. Cf. Hornung (1982:135-142).

[270] Thus, e.g., Blenkinsopp (2000:411), Clements (1980:243-244), Dietrich (1976:137-140), Kaiser (1983:225), Vermeylen (1977:409-410), and Wildberger (1982:1150-1151).

ben Amoz warned that the diplomatic efforts to ensure assistance from Egypt (ruled by Shabako, or Shebitko) in the revolt against Assyria were futile, and that this policy would lead to disaster—a correct estimate, as shown by the outcome of the battle at Eltekeh.[271] However, the common supposition that this oracle represents a pragmatic comment on contemporary politics, is not immediately compatible with the observation that its vocabulary and imagery has a strikingly cultic-theological character (see "characterization" above). Alternative theories are therefore worth considering.

According to Uwe Becker, who provides a sustained argumentation for his thesis, 30:1-5* can be classified as a late (post-exilic), "sin-theological" reflection, arising out of a "relecture" of 31:1-3.[272] This hypothesis seems to be at least as credible as the (near) consensus view referred to above. Once again, dating proves to be an extremely difficult matter. In my opinion, an origin in the early exilic period is a likely option.[273] If an exilic (or post-exilic) date is posited, the point of reference could still, in retrospect, be Hezekiah's politics. In addition, this prophecy would then contain a reflection on the disastrous outcome of Zedekiah's pro-Egyptian and anti-Babylonian politics. According to Isa 30:1-5, Egypt played a negative and destructive role in the history of Judah: Above all, it represented a constant temptation to commit apostasy (by seeking help from Pharaoh/Egypt, and not from YHWH).

Isa 30:6-7

> 30:6 An oracle/burden concerning the animals of the Negev:
> Through a land of hardship and distress,
> of lioness and roaring* lion, viper and flying serpent,
> they carry their riches on the backs of donkeys,
> their treasures on the humps of camels,
> to a people that cannot profit (them).
> 7 Egypt's* help is vain and worthless.
> Therefore I call it, "Rahab, who has been silenced."

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[271] For more details, see, e.g., Blenkinsopp (2000:411-412) and Kaiser (1983:225-226).

[272] Becker (1997:245-257).

[273] This possibility is mentioned by Kaiser (1983:225), who then fails to adduce strong arguments against it, contending that there is no reason to doubt Isaianic authorship.

The text

Within this brief and enigmatic oracle, the most intriguing textual problem concerns the reading of its very climax, viz. the name given to Egypt (v. 7b).[274] The translation above ("Rahab, who has been silenced") is based upon a widely accepted emendation.[275] However, the analysis below would be compatible also with the most likely sense of the MT ("Rahab, who sits still").

Characterization

Since the statement made in v. 7a reiterates the by now firmly established characterization of Egypt as a helpless helper (cf. 20:5-6; 30:2-5), the analysis will concentrate on the image of Egypt that is implied in v. 7b. Here Egypt is given a nickname, presumably by YHWH. Judah's mighty neighbour in the south is called by the name of a mythical monster, "Rahab", to which has been added an ironical apposition, "who has been silenced" (or: "who sits still", cf. above).

The connection made in 30:7, between Egypt and Rahab, is by no means unprecedented. Generally speaking, enemies of a given nation—and this would seem to apply to almost any nation known from history—are typically perceived as representatives, or embodiments, of chaos.[276] Grottanelli, who has devoted a study to texts in the Hebrew Bible that depict foreign kings and/or nations as monsters, speaks of "a biblical leitmotif."[277] That Egypt came to be associated with sea-monsters, such as Tannin (Ezek 29:3-7; 32:2b-6) and Rahab (Ps 87:4

[274] It has been suggested, e.g., by Dietrich (1976:141-143), that v. 7b belongs more closely together with vv. 8f. than with vv. 6-7a. With Wildberger (1982:1159-1160) and several other modern commentators, I find such a solution less satisfactory.

[275] The reading adopted here, *hammošbāt* (Hof. ptc. of שבת), which involves an alternative division and vocalization of MT:s consonantal text (המשבת in the place of שבת המ), is advocated by several modern commentators, e.g., Clements (1980:245) and Wildberger (1982:1158-1159). For further suggestions, see the enumerations of proposed emendations in Blenkinsopp (2000:413) and Wildberger (1982:1158).

[276] One and the same basic idea, viz. that external enemies represent forces of chaos threatening the civilized order, was expressed in various ways in ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia, and Palestine (Israel and Judah). See Riede (2000:378-379, with references to literature). See also the discussion in Keel (1984:89-97) of attestations found in biblical texts (primarily the Psalms) and Ancient Near Eastern pictorial art. Examples from more modern ages are easily found. Cf. Keen (1986).

[277] Grottanelli (1999:47-72, quote on p. 51). Among the examples discussed by Grottanelli, the following can be mentioned: Egypt as a monster in Psalm 68; Pharaoh as Tannin (Ezek 29:3-6; 32:2-8); Nebuchadnezzar as Tannin (Jer 51:34); Babylon as a mythical monster (Jer 51:55).

and Isa 30:7), may perhaps be explained with reference to the exodus tradition, as suggested by Blenkinsopp:

> In the course of time these dramatis personae of primordial myth were drawn into the heroic narrative of national origins in which the defeat by divine power of Egypt and subduing of the sea, the Papyrus Sea, featured prominently. It was therefore not surprising that the names Rahab (also in Ps 87:4) and Tannin (Ezek 29:3; 32:2) stuck to Egypt as Chaos personified, the evil empire par excellence.[278]

Since Rahab was a personification of chaos (cf. Ps 89:10-11), it is conceivable that an allusion is being made in 30:7 to chaotic conditions pertaining within the Egyptian kingdom at the time of writing (whenever that was, cf. below). However, the immediate context does not contain any explicit references to internal strife in Egypt. Anyway, apart from the possibility of a faint allusion to some notion of chaos, the utterance in v. 7 does not foreground any putative "monster-like" qualities of Egypt or its ruler, such as fierce aggressiveness, primordial dangerousness, or immense power. On the contrary, Egypt is here portrayed as an "ex-monster", or, in the words of Childs, "a monster incapable of doing anything…'a paper tiger'."[279] There is a striking, almost comic contrast between the dangerousness of the creatures inhabiting the desert region through which the envoys are travelling—the bestiary in v. 6 includes rapacious lions, poisonous snakes and demoniac dragon-like beings (שרף מעופף; cf. Isa 14:29)[280]—and the harmless character of the quiescent "monster" (Pharaoh?) awaiting at their destination.

Contextualization

The prophecy in 30:6-7 is usually regarded as stemming from the 8th century prophet called Isaiah. It is then assumed that reference is made to certain efforts to obtain Egyptian assistance during Hezekiah's revolt against Assyria in 705-701 BCE. In other words, 30:6-7 is connected to the same context as the preceding passage (30:1-5).[281] However, this popular hypothesis would seem to rest

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[278] Blenkinsopp (2000:414).

[279] Childs (2001:226).

[280] For a more detailed discussion of the animals mentioned and their connection with the Negev, see, e.g., Wildberger (1982:1162-1163).

[281] To be more precise, the prophecy in 30:6-7 is often connected to the final stage of the revolt, ca. 701 BCE. Thus, e.g., Clements (1980:244-245), Kaiser (1983:230-231), and Wildberger (1982:1160-1161). Such precision in dating is rather astounding in view of the vagueness that characterizes the formulations in this oracle.

on a shaky foundation. In itself, this brief and enigmatic oracle does not provide any explicit hints to a specific historical situation. Since it has been demonstrated that an exilic or post-exilic date of origin is a strong possibility in the case of 30:1-5,[282] it follows that a considerably later date than 701 BCE would be a realistic option in the case of 30:6-7, too.[283] At any rate, the succinct statement made about Egypt in 30:7b has the character of an evaluating summary, concentrating centuries of historical experiences in a few words.

Isa 31:1-3

31:1 Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help!
They rely on horses,
they put their trust in chariots because they are many
and in horsemen because they are very strong,
but they do not look to the Holy One of Israel
nor do they seek YHWH.
2 Yet he too is wise and brings about disaster;
he does not take back his words,
but will rise against a house of evildoers,
and against the help(ers) of those who work iniquity.
3 The Egyptians are human, not divine,
their horses are flesh and not spirit.
When YHWH stretches out his hand
the helper will stumble, the one helped will fall.
All of them will perish together.

The text

Within the easily definable unit 31:1-3, v. 2 with its more generalizing outlook is sometimes seen as a secondary addition.[284] However, whether or not this

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[282] See the section “contextualization” in the analysis of 30:1-5 above.

[283] Cf. Becker (1997:251), who posits a late post-exilic date for 30:6-7, without any detailed argumentation—apparently because such argumentation would be superfluous?

[284] That v. 2 is a secondary interpolation has been argued by Childs (1967:34) and Donner (1964:135-136). More recently, Kaiser (2000:204-208) has furnished further arguments for this position (which differs a little from the analysis in his commentary, 1983:248, where only v. 2a was considered as an addition). Other commentators defend

should be the case is immaterial to the ensuing analysis, which centers on vv. 1 and 3.

Characterization

Generally speaking, the characterization of Egypt in 30:1-3 is reminiscent of some previous passages (20:3-6; 30:1-5, 6-7). Egypt is portrayed not as an enemy in the proper sense, but as an *unfit helper*. What was conveyed implicitly by several formulations in 30:1-5, is made explicit in 31:3: Neither Pharaoh nor the Egyptian people possess divinity. They are human beings. Hence, to trust in them is here regarded as an offence against the national patron deity, YHWH (v. 1b). For that reason, the initial "woe" (v. 1aa) is directed to some group or party of pro-Egyptian Judeans, and not to the Egyptians. One can add the interesting observation, that "those who go down to Egypt for help" (v. 1a) are described in a way which recalls the standard attribute given to enemies in official Assyrian documents, viz. reliance on human beings (and/or weaponry, fortifications, etc.) in defiance to the gods.[285]

According to the concluding threat in v. 3b, one and the same fate awaits the would-be "helpers" (i.e., the Egyptians) and the ones "helped" by them (the pro-Egyptian, hence apostate, Judeans): They will "stumble" (כשל) and "fall" (נפל), a standard metaphor when it comes to describing the inevitable outcome of folly and wickedness (cf. Isa 8:15; 28:13; Jer 50:32; Hos 5:5; Ps 27:2; Prov. 4:19; 24:17). It is thus implied that both the Egyptians and those who put their trust in them will be regarded, and treated, as *enemies of YHWH*.

Contextualization

In terms of theme and topic, the passages 31:1-3 and 30:1-5 have much in common. It is therefore not surprising that the scholarly discussion concerning the situational context follows a similar pattern in these two cases. To be more precise, a consensus view relating and dating 31:1-3 (or 31:1-3*) to the situation in (or shortly before) 701 BCE has been challenged by Uwe Becker, who regards the Persian period as a likely time of origin.[286] The issue is not easily decided. However, even if it should be pre-exilic (as assumed by a majority of

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the integrity of 31:1-3 Thus, e.g., Barth (1977:79-80), Blenkinsopp (2000:427), Clements (1980:255), and Wildberger (1982:1228-1229).

[285] See Fales (1982) and Cohen (1979:40-41).

[286] This prophecy, or its original core, is dated to ca 701 BCE by, e.g., Clements (1980:254), Dietrich (1976:144-147), Kaiser (1983:248-249), and Wildberger (1982:228-230). Breaking new ground, Becker (1997:257-263) assigns 31:1-3 to the "Assur-Redaktion", a stratum which he dates approximately to the early post-exilic period (1997:212-219).

commentators), this prophecy must later have been interpreted as a comment on the disaster that took place in 587 BCE.[287]

Isa 36:6

> 36:6 So you are relying on Egypt, on the support/staff of that broken reed, which will run through and pierce the hand of anyone who leans on it? Such is Pharaoh, king of Egypt, to all who rely on him.

The text

The saying about Egypt in Isa 36:6 (= 2 Kgs 18:21), which is part of the Assyrian Rabshakeh's first speech, contains no serious textual problems. On the legends in chs. 36–39 (esp. chs. 36–37) and their function within the book of Isaiah, see further the discussion above concerning Isa 37:22b-29 and its narrative context.[288]

Characterization

From a formal point of view, the saying in 36:6 is unique within the book of Isaiah, inasmuch as it represents an instance of *the enemy's image of another enemy*—a rare phenomenon in the Hebrew Bible.

According to the narrative framework, the derogatory statement about Egypt in Isa 36:6 (= 2 Kgs 18:21) was uttered by an Assyrian officer, the Rabshakeh, during the siege of Jerusalem in 701 BCE. It is indeed possible to find a genuine echo of official Assyrian propaganda in this utterance, since the theme of Egypt's unability to help its allies is attested in a document from the time of Sennacherib's predecessor, Sargon II.[289] As demonstrated by Chaim Cohen, there is an Assyrian background even to one specific metaphorical expression that is employed in Isa 36:6, viz. "the broken reed" (הקנה הרצוץ).[290] From a survey of the extant attestations of a closely related Akkadian phrase, *kīma qanê ḫuṣṣuṣu*, "to break (the enemy) like a reed", Cohen draws the conclusion that this is "a typical expression for defeating Assyria's enemies in the Neo-Assyrian

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[287] Cf. Kaiser (1983:248).

[288] In chapter 2.2.

[289] The text was originally published by Winckler (*Sargon II*, 188:33-36). In the translation provided by *ANET*, p. 287, "Pir'u, king of Egypt" is called "a potentate who could not save them" (= the Hittites). Cf. further the discussion in Cohen (1979:43).

[290] Cohen (1979:41-43). See also Gallagher (1999:191).

annals."[291] Hence the expression "broken reed" would designate Egypt as "an enemy defeated in the past by Assyria."[292] Contrary to the claims made by Cohen, the occurrence of such "Neo-Assyrian reflexes" need not imply that the biblical account is an accurate report, "based on an authentic oral or written tradition which was at least partially influenced by the actual words of the Biblical רבשקה."[293] Yet such observations do seem to indicate, as suggested by Clements, that "the author(s) of the narrative must have witnessed, and been incensed by, the brash and arrogant claims of Assyrian victory inscriptions."[294]

The circumstance that the "Assyrian" image of Egypt in Isa 36:6 largely coincides with the "Isaianic" view on that empire, as expressed in other passages in the book (20:3-6; 30:1-5; 30:6-7; 31:1-3), is sometimes seen as problematical. According to Blenkinsopp, there is "a rather basic disjunction between the prophetic profile of the sayings and the profile of the *legenda*", with regard to the evaluation of the official Judean foreign policy around 701 BCE.[295] Whereas the passages mentioned above can be read as condemnations of Hezekiah's foreign diplomacy, and above all his active participation in Egypt-led anti-Assyrian conspiracies, the Isaiah of the legends appears to endorse Hezekiah's politics unreservedly. However, as I see it, the conflict discussed by Blenkinsopp is largely a scholarly creation. There is, of course, a historical problem: How did Hezekiah act, and how did Isaiah react?[296] Still, within the literary universe of Isaiah 1–66, there is no contradiction on this point. According to the final edition of the book, Hezekiah was a model king.[297] Others may have erred (e.g., Ahaz, and the leaders of Samaria), seeking Pharaoh's advice instead of YHWH's, but Hezekiah never went wrong. If Rabshakeh's words in Isa 36:6 contain an accusation, the narrator's standpoint is perfectly clear: Hezekiah was not guilty. He put his trust in YHWH, not in Egypt.[298] Hence, the passages that criticize those who rely on Egyptian help cannot, on the editorial level, be taken as referring to

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[291] Cohen (1979:42). Cf. Schott (1926:94, 136), who registers the first attestation in a text from the reign of Ashurnasirpal II.

[292] Cohen (1979:43).

[293] Cohen (1979:34). In the introduction to his study, Cohen (1979:32-34) states that his purpose is to supply additional argumentation for a hypothesis put forward in an encyclopedia article by Tadmor, viz. that the biblical Rabshakeh was an Assyrian officer of Aramean or Israelite ethnic origin.

[294] Clements (1994:243).

[295] Blenkinsopp (2000:461).

[296] For differing perspectives on this problem, see, e.g., Becker (1997) and Dietrich (1976). Cf. also the various commentaries on Isaiah 1–39 or 1–66.

[297] See, e.g., Sweeney (1996:457-459), with further references.

[298] Trust (*b†“*) is evidently the main theme of Isaiah 36–37, with Hezekiah serving as a paradigm of piety. Cf., e.g., Kaiser (1983:301-302).

any initiative on Hezekiah's part—despite the fact that such a reading would accord well with our present knowledge of Judah's actual foreign policy at that time.

According to Hardmeier, the saying in 2 Kgs 18:21 / Isa 36:6 is "really" a contribution to the internal Judean political debate in the 580s BCE. He contends that the Rabshake of the legend is a disguised Ezekiel/Jeremiah, and that 2 Kgs 18:21 (= Isa 36:6) indirectly polemicizes against the anti-Egyptian party (with Jeremiah and Ezekiel as its front figures and spokesmen), by representing their message as enemy propaganda.[299] Hardmeier's elaborate and interesting hypothesis has to be rejected, for the following reasons: (1) Although the conspicuous correspondences between Isa 36:6/2 Kgs 18:21 and Ezek 29:6-7 may indicate that this is a case of direct literary dependence, it seems more likely that Rabshake's words were picked up by the Ezekiel passage, than the other way round.[300] (2) Hardmeier fails to account for the intra-textual situation within Isaiah 1–66. Thus, if his theory were correct, it would follow that Isa 36:6 incidentally, or accidentally, denounces several other passages within the same book (20:3-6; 30:1-5; 30:6-7; 31:1-3) as hostile and godless propaganda. (3) Hardmeier's theory seems to rest on an inaccurate assessment of the Rabshake's role within the narrative, and of the rhetorical strategy associated with this character. He is forced to conjecture that the Assyrian official, having at first represented the pro-Babylonian party (Ezekiel, Jeremiah and co) and their opponents in Isa 36:6, suddenly takes up an entirely different position in 36:7—a position which happens to coincide with the views of Jeremiah's and Ezekiel's opponents![301] I would like to propose an alternative analysis. Within the narrative world of chs. 36–37, the Rabshakeh's role (as a fictional character, pri-

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[299] Hardmeier (1990:321-394).

[300] Thus, e.g., Kaiser (1983:307). See further Zimmerli (1978:710). The arguments adduced by Hardmeier (1990:339-346) for the primacy of the Ezekiel passage fail to convince me.

[301] Hardmeier (1990:392-399) is aware of the dilemma. Having discussed several options as regards 2 Kgs 18:22 (= Isa 36:7), including the possibility that the Rabshakeh suddenly represents some group of opponents to Josiah's reforms and to prophets like Jeremiah and Ezekiel, he proposes that the Rabshakeh's argument here is "erzählfiktives" (1990:398). In other words, it is dictated by the internal logic of the narrative. It is a pity that Hardmeier does not analyze the Rabshakeh's speech in its entirety from that angle. As it now is, his ambitious attempts at a rhetorical analysis (1990:333-336) is flawed by the specific and speculative premises that are built into his theory. Attempts to account for the Rabshake's rhetorical strategy are occasionally found in the commentaries, but these attempts are of a fragmentary nature. See, e.g., Kaiser (1983:306-307) and Wildberger (1982:1400). A systematic study would be needed.

marily) is that of an eloquent seductor. Accordingly, the task assigned to the ideal reader is to see through the propagandistic smoke screens, and to realize that this representative of a hostile empire is a blasphemer advocating apostasy.[302] In his efforts to break down Hezekiah's and his courtiers' faith in YHWH, the Assyrian official adopts the following rhetorical strategy throughout his speech(es) in Isa 36:4-20: An appeal to something that would have been familiar to the audience (and to the informed reader), and thus uncontroversial—such as the notorious unreliability of Egypt (v. 6; cf. 30:1-5; 31:1-3), Hezekiah's removal of the high places (cf. 2 Kgs 18:4), or the apparent failure of the gods of Hamath and Arpad to save their cities (v. 19, cf. 10:9)—leads up to a conclusion concerning YHWH's unwillingness and/or inability to save. Needless to say, the conclusions drawn by the Rabshakeh are impermissible, from the narrator's point of view, since they amount to apostasy.

What we have here, then, is the biblical author's version of the Assyrian image of Egypt, within a highly legendary account of the events in 701 BCE. This image overlaps with a current prophetical evaluation of Egypt, but it is hardly surprising that two parties in a conflict should share certain opinions concerning a third party (in this case, Egypt). Viewed from the perspective of its contribution to the overall characterization of Egypt in the book of Isaiah, the utterance in 36:6 does not come up with anything substantially new. Once again, Egypt and Pharaoh appear in the role as the *helpless helper* (cf. 30:1-5; 31:1-3). Still, the image of the broken reed/cane (הקנה הרצוץ) adds some more nuances to the portrait. This traditional metaphor has here undergone an innovative development. The picture of a splintered cane, which threatens to perforate the hand of the one who tries to use it as a walking-stick or as a supporting staff, highlights one particular aspect of Egypt's weakness—its fatal consequences for those who rely on Egyptian support. In a rhetorically skilled manner, with the help of a memorable metaphor, the Rabshakeh (as a spokesman for the narrator) manages to portray Egypt/Pharaoh as simultaneously ridiculous and dangerous.

Contextualization

There are good reasons to assume that the legend in Isaiah 36–37 is a post-587 composition, at least as we now have it.[303] It is therefore likely that the Rabshakeh's words about Egypt in 36:6, with their admixture of accusation and warning, serve the author's/editor's purpose of creating a contrast between Hezekiah and other kings, as well as between 701 BCE, when Jerusalem was miraculously rescued, and subsequent events. According to the legend (but

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[302] Cf. Clements (1994).

[303] See the section "contextualization" in the analysis of 37:22b-29 in chapter 2.2. above.

apparently in some tension with historical reality), Hezekiah saved the city of Jerusalem by virtue of his trust in YHWH (as opposed to trust in Egypt), whereas—the reader may infer—Zedekiah did not stand the test, since he relied on Egypt (and hence not on YHWH). In this way, despite the fact that this event is not mentioned, the disaster in 587/6 BCE, when Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians, is given a "rational" explanation. At the same time, (the legendary version of) the 701 BCE drama is elevated to the status of an explanatory pattern, or a paradigm.[304]

2.4. Images of Babylon

Isa 13:1-22

13:1 An oracle concerning Babylon, (this is) what Isaiah ben Amoz saw:
2 Raise a standard on the bare hill, shout aloud to them,
wave the hand, that they may enter the gates of the nobles.
3 I myself have commanded my consecrated ones,
I have summoned my warriors, my proudly exultant ones,
to (execute) my anger.
4 The sound of a tumult on the mountains,
as of a great horde,
the sound of the uproar of kingdoms,
of nations gathering together.
YHWH of the hosts is mustering an army for war.
5 They come from a distant land, from the skyline,
YHWH and the instruments of his wrath,
to destroy the entire earth/land.
6 Lament, for the day of YHWH is near,
it will come like devastation from Shaddai!
7 Therefore all hands will fall limp,
and every human heart will dissolve,
8 they will be terrified …*
Convulsions and pangs will seize them,
they will writhe like a woman in labour,

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[304] See further chapter 6.1. below.

they will look aghast at one another, their faces aflame.
9 See, the day of YHWH approaches,
cruel, (with) fury and burning anger,
to make the earth/land desolate,
and to extirpate its sinners from it.
10 For the stars in the sky and their constellations
will not let their light shine,
the sun will be dark at its rising,
the moon will not shed its light.
11 I will punish the world for (its) evil*,
and the wicked for their iniquity;
I will put an end to the pride of the insolent,
and subdue the arrogance of tyrants.
12 I will make mortals more precious than pure gold,
human beings (more rare) than gold from Ophir.
13 Therefore the heavens will tremble*,
and the earth will be shaken out of its place,
at the fury of YHWH of the hosts,
on the day of his burning anger.
14 Like a hunted gazelle,
like sheep with no one to herd them,
all will turn to their own people,
all will flee to their own land.
15 Whoever is caught will be stabbed,
whoever is captured will fall by the sword.
16 Their infants will be dashed to pieces before their eyes,
their houses will be plundered, and their women raped.
17 See, I am stirring up the Medes against them,
they do not care for silver, nor do they delight in gold.
18 The young men's bows* will be broken*
They will have no mercy for the fruit of the womb,
their eye will not pity the children.
19 And Babylon, the most glorious of kingdoms,
the proud splendour of the Chaldeans,
will be like Sodom and Gomorrah when overthrown by God.
20 It will never be inhabited,
nor settled for generations to come.
No Arabs will camp* there,
no shepherds will let (their flocks) lie down there.
21 But desert animalsa will lie down there,
howling creaturesb will fill their houses;
ostriches will live there, goat-demonsc will dance there.
22 Hyenasc will howl in its citadels*,

jackals in its pleasant palaces.
Its/her time is close at hand, its/her days will not be prolonged.

* Cf. BHS app.
a Translation uncertain. Cf. Wildberger (1978:501, 504 [demons]) and Blenkinsopp (2000:276 [wild cats]).
b Translation uncertain. Hyenas? Owls? Cf., e.g., Gosse (1988:165), Blenkinsopp (2000:276), and Wildberger (1978:501).
c Translation uncertain.

The text
After an editorial heading (13:1), which apparently applies to ch. 14 as well, there follows a lengthy prophetical anti-Babylon poem in 13:2-22. This poem can be divided into four or five stanzas (vv. 2-5 [or: 2-3//4-5] // 6-8 // 9-16 // 17-22).[305] There is, however, no reason to follow Clements in treating these stanzas as separate prophecies, related to different situations and displaying contrasting views on Babylon.[306] As the text now stands, it consists of a quasi-apocalyptic prologue (vv. 2-16) where no referents are named, and a climax (vv. 17-22) where the identity of the city/empire and the attackers is disclosed. It seems futile to speculate as to earlier stages behind the present composition. Moreover, as shown by Blenkinsopp, the different parts are held together by their shared literary dependence on Jeremiah 50–51.[307]

Characterization
Although the heading in 13:1 expressly introduces an “oracle concerning Babylon”, the ensuing prophecy (13:2-22) contains very little that might contribute to a distinct characterization of the neo-Babylonian empire. Babylon is only mentioned by name towards the end, in v. 19. In vv. 19-22 the topic is the desolation of the city, but from now on nothing is said about its (former) inhabitants or about its ruler. The preceding verses, which most likely deal with

[305] Cf., e.g., Blenkinsopp (2000:274-280).
[306] According to Clements (1980:132-138), the prophecies in Isaiah 13 reflect both the rise and the fall of the neo-Babylonian empire. At first, the Babylonian army is summoned by YHWH (vv. 2-3). This new empire is destined to overthrow Assyria (vv. 4-5) and to carry out YHWH’s judgement upon Judah and Jerusalem (vv. 6-8). After an eschatological interlude (vv. 9-16), the destruction of Babylon is predicted (vv. 17-22). In this way, Clements has managed to read a lot of history into a text that is almost void of concrete historical references. For further arguments against Clements’s analysis of Isaiah 13, see Blenkinsopp (2000:276-279).
[307] Blenkinsopp (2000:277-279).

the fate of these inhabitants (vv. 14-18), yield a rather one-dimensional picture. In fact, the reader seems to get more information about *the enemies' enemies*, the ruthless Medes, who are depicted as exceedingly brutal (vv. 17-18, cf. also vv. 15-16).

Even if the depiction in vv. 2-16 is to be read, in retrospect, as pertaining to the same event as vv. 17-22, viz. to an (imminent?) attack on Babylon—and this seems to be the most reasonable reading—the picture that emerges can be described as a portrait lacking distinctive features: The ruling élite of the neo-Babylonian empire would then be denounced as "wicked" (רשׁעים), deserving to be punished because of "their iniquity" (עונם, v. 11a)—sweeping accusations, indeed. Whereas the words about the "arrogance of tyrants" (גאות עריצים, v. 11b) may refer primarily to some Babylonian ruler(s), they also recall characterizations elsewhere of Assyrian rulers (10:12; 37:28-29), of the people of Samaria (9:8b), and of anonymous attackers (29:5). Hence, it is not possible, on the basis of this text alone, to differentiate between the images of Babylon and Assyria, or between the neo-Babylonian empire/ruler and some stereotyped notion of empires/tyrants in general.

It looks like a paradox: Within this lengthy poem, expressly concerned with the fate of Babylon, almost every notion of Babylonian singularity is suppressed. How should this be explained? It may of course have been the intention of the anonymous poet(s) to portray the Chaldeans as inheritors to the Assyrians. The point would be that, since the neo-Babylonian empire did not represent anything new, it would surely fall just like its predecessor. Such a reading can draw support from the observation that the language in Isaiah 13 largely consists of standardized formulations with generalizing reference.[308] Moreover, the intertextual ramifications of this text are impressive. As shown in great detail by Bernard Gosse, the author(s) must have had recourse to a comprehensive collection of prophecies, dealing with various nations or empires.[309] From one perspective, then, this text is a "bricolage", and its picture of Babylon blurred and indistinct. However, the quasi-apocalyptic overture (esp. vv. 2-13), with its amassment of expressions carrying cosmological overtones, seems to indicate

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[308] Cf. this remark made by Vanderhooft (1999:126): "The fact that the imagery is not specifically tied to either Assyria or Babylon … seems to show that there could be a free interchange of imagery in connection with the Mesopotamian empires."

[309] See Gosse (1988:110-169), with extensive documentation and discussion. The prime inter-texts identified by Gosse include: Isa 5:14-30; 10:5-34; 21:1-10; 34; Jer 4:6-8; 6:22-24; 50–51; Ezekiel 32; Amos 5:18-20; 9:8-10; Zephaniah 1–2; Lam 4:1-3. See also Blenkinsopp (2000:277-280). As mentioned above, Blenkinsopp points to the correspondences between Isaiah 13 and Jeremia 50–51 as particularly comprehensive and conspicuous.

another kind of image: *Babylon as the epitome of evil*, housing the "sinners" of the world (חטאיה, v. 9).

Interestingly, the portrait of Babylon in Isaiah 13 is not entirely negative. In vv. 14-18, there is a sharp contrast between the savage Medes, who are described as void of ordinary human emotions, and their vulnerable, hence truly human victims, viz. the inhabitants of Babylon. Although it is conceivable that this vision filled some contemporary readers with malicious joy, the very mention of raped women and killed infants would almost inevitably evoke a sense of empathy in ancient (as well as modern) readers. This is an *atypical enemy image*, inasmuch as the almost compulsory feature of disproportionate characterization is missing. In other words, this seems to be an enemy image without those constituve elements which create distance in order to obstruct feelings of solidarity and sympathy.

The apparent notion of an inherent *ambivalence* in this text's image of Babylon and the Chaldeans can be further explored—and to some extent problematized—by an analysis of the metaphor in v. 19. Here Babylon is said to be—or, perhaps, rather to have been—"the most glorious of kingdoms (צבי ממלכות), the proud splendour (תפארת גאון) of the Chaldeans." Since the lexical sense of צבי is "ornament", one might as well translate the phrase צבי ממלכות with "crown/jewel among kingdoms." This sounds like a piece of panegyric—an impression that is strengthened by the fact that similar phrases occur in other prophetical texts, as part of descriptions of Canaan as the promised land (Jer 3:19: Ezek 20:6, 15). Within this context, the ornament metaphor takes on an ironical dimension (cf. the more obviously satirical use of צבי in combination with תפארת in 28:1, 4), the main point being that Babylon's pride (v. 19a) will lead to its ruin. This will take the form of a disaster comparable to the "overthrowing" of Sodom and Gomorrah (v. 19b). Clearly, this analogy implies that Babylon was a place of wickedness.[310] However, in order to grasp the full impact of the catastrophe being announced, the reader is required to imagine the former "splendour" of the city: the beauty of its buildings, and so on. Thus, at this juncture the text presents a mixed picture of Babylon as magnificent, yet doomed.

The occurrence in v. 19a of the phrase צבי ממלכות deserves some further comment. By means of assonance, it creates an associative link back to the expression צבי מדח in v. 14a. This would seem to be a case of deliberate word play (on the editorial level, at least), involving two homonyms: one with the sense

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[310] According to Vanderhooft (1999:127), the comparison with Sodom and Gomorrah "implies that Babylon's crime is archetypal: it is destroyed not because of a specific crime against Judah, but because its very existence is somehow an affront to the moral order of Yahweh's creation."

"ornament", the other denoting an animal species, "gazelle."[311] In 14a, some unidentified fugitives are said to be "like a hunted gazelle, like sheep with no one to herd them." Whereas the sheep metaphor recalls the people's, or the temple community's, self-descriptions in several biblical texts (e.g., Num 27:17; Pss 44:12; 100:3; Jer 50:6-7, 17-19), the motif of the hunted (or, rapidly running) gazelle is found elsewhere as a metaphor for the sage's pupil (Prov. 6:5), or for the young woman's beloved (Cant 2:9, 17). These metaphors are therefore unlikely to occur in a depiction of enemies. Most probably, Isa 13:14 refers to the inhabitants of Babylon, trying to escape the attacking Median army. Since it is stated in v. 14b that "all will turn to their own people, all will flee to their own land", one may infer that this is, more precisely, a depiction of the flight of non-Chaldeans—mercenaries and merchants, but perhaps primarily deportees (including those from Judah)—from the multiethnic city (cf. Isa 48:20; Jer 50:16).[312] If vv. 14 and 19 are read together, one might venture the following allegorizing paraphrase: The splendour of Babylon will depart, together with the fleeing deportees; those who remain will face (well-deserved?) destruction. According to vv. 20-22, the cityscape will become a wilderness inhabited by wild animals and demons, but void of human beings.[313] Still, the fact remains that the few metaphors that are actually used about the city/empire of Babylon in this text, and about its inhabitants, have one thing in common: They carry positive connotations.

Against this background, I would suggest that a kind of mirroring process is going on within Isaiah 13. This prophecy threatens the inhabitants of Babylon with the same kind of atrocities that the Jerusalemite population suffered in 587 BCE. Although Babylon is clearly regarded as the capital of an evil empire, its representation is yet to some extent modelled on traditional images of

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[311] As observed by Gosse (1988:153).

[312] Cf. Wildberger (1978:519).

[313] Blenkinsopp (2001:39-40) cites this passage as evidence that parts of Isaiah 1–35 express an "anti-urban animus" (quote on p. 40). This may be true to some extent. However, the textual material presented by Blenkinsopp does not support the thesis that this "animus" was directed against urban civilization *in general*. In Isa 13:20-22 (and in 14:22-23, as well), the threat is directed specifically against Babylon. There is no reason to assume that the author/editors intended to include Jerusalem in a vision of doom over all cities. On the contrary, Babylon is condemned to devastation because it was the capital of an empire that had devastated Jerusalem. In other words, it would be more accurate to speak of an "anti-Babylon animus." As regards the motif of a city/nation being transformed into an uncivilized area, it can probably be seen as belonging to the repertory of the OAN (oracles against the nations) genre; cf. Isa 34:9-15 (Edom) and Zeph 2:13-14 (Nineveh). This motif is also attested in treaty curses from the Ancient Near East. See Hillers (1964:44-54). Cf. also Vanderhooft (1999:127).

Judah/Jerusalem and its people.[314] And despite its character of threat, this prophecy (vv. 14-22, in particular) shows affinities to the city lament genre.[315] As a consequence, its image of Babylon becomes less enemy-like—it may even arouse some empathy in its readers.

Contextualization
The setting for Isaiah 13 should probably be located in the 6th century BCE. An earlier date of composition would seem to be ruled out by the intertextual ramifications of the text, as well as by the role played in it by the Medes.[316] Since this prophecy appears to expect (and welcome) an imminent attack on Babylon, several commentators opt for a date somewhere in the decade preceding the Persian conquest in 539.[317] However, it is possible that it was composed, or at least edited, somewhat later. Gosse has suggested that the edition of Isaiah 13:1–14:23 took place after the events in 521, when the troops of Darius I, in order to quench a revolt initiated and headed by Babylon, undertook punitive measures against that city.[318]

Isa 14:3-23

[314] Cf. the representation in Isa 47:1 of Babylon as the anti-type of Zion (see the analysis below). Cf. also the interesting analysis made by Hill (1999:172-180) of Babylon and Judah as “parallel figures” within portions of the book of Jeremiah.

[315] Dobbs-Allsopp (1993:123). See also the discussion in Vanderhooft (1999:126-127, n. 26).

[316] On the role of the Medes, see, e.g., Clements (1980:137) and Wildberger (1978:511). Cf. also Vanderhooft (1999:124). For details concerning the intertextual ramifications, see Gosse (1988) and cf. the sections “the text” and “characterization” above. Conspicuous affinities with Jeremiah 50–51 have been demonstrated by Blenkinsopp (2000:277-280). It is worth noting, that those traits in Isaiah 13 that seem to indicate temporal closeness to the events of 587 (the passionate anti-Babylon tone, and the parallelism of the fate experienced by Jerusalem and the expected fall of Babylon, etc.) can be explained in terms of literary dependence of this text vis-à-vis Jeremiah 50–51.

[317] Thus, e.g., Blenkinsopp (2000:277) and Sweeney (1996:231).

[318] According to Gosse (1988:83-84, 248, 274), this edition—and indeed, the overall outline of Isaiah 13–23—may have been influenced by (copies of) the Behistun inscription.

14:3 On the day YHWH has given you respite from your toil and turmoil,
and from the hard labour laid upon you,
4 then you shall take up this taunt song about the king of Babylon:

See how the tyrant has met his end, how the onslaught* has ceased!
5 YHWH has broken the staff of the wicked, the rod/sceptre of rulers,
6 that struck peoples in wrath with unceasing blows,
ruling nations in anger, persecuting* relentlessly.
7 The whole earth rests and relaxes; they break out into exultation.
8 Even the cypresses and the cedars of Lebanon rejoice over you:
"Now that you have been laid low, no one comes up to cut us down."
9 Sheol below is stirred up, to greet you at your arrival,
arousing the shades to (meet) you, all the princes of the earth,
making all (who were) kings of the nations ascend from their thrones.
10 All of them will address you, saying:
"Now you too have become weak, as we have,
you have become like us!
11 Your pomp has been brought down to Sheol,
the sound of your harps.
Maggots are the bed* under you, and worms are your covering."

12 How you have fallen from the heavens,
Morning Star (Helel), son of Dawn (Shachar)!
You have been felled to the ground,
you who laid low the nations!
13 But you thought in your heart:
"I will ascend to the heavens,
above the stars of El I will set up my throne,
I will take my seat on the mount of assembly, in the far north.
14 I will ascend to the heights of the clouds,
I will become like the Most High (Elyon)."
15 Alas, you have been brought down to Sheol,
to the bottom of the Pit.
16 Those who see you stare at you, they examine you:
"Is this the man who made the earth tremble,
who caused kingdoms to quake,
17 who turned the world into a desert,
and tore down its cities,
the one who would not set his prisoners free to go home?"
18 All the kings of the nations lie in glory, each in his tomb,
19 but you have been cast out of your grave,
like a detestable branch.
You are clothed with the slain, those pierced by the sword,

those who sink to the stones of the Pit,
like a corpse trampled underfoot.
20 You will not be joined with them in burial,
for you destroyed your land, killed your own people.
May the offspring of evildoers never be mentioned again!
21 Prepare a slaughtering place for his sons,
because of the guilt of their father(s)*,
lest they rise and possess the earth, filling its surface with cities.

22 "I will rise up against them", says YHWH of the hosts, "and I will cut off from Babylon name and remnant, offspring and progeny", says YHWH of the hosts.
23 "I will make her/it a possession of bitternsa, and water pools, and I will sweep it/her away with the broom of destruction", says YHWH of the hosts.

* Cf. BHS app.
a Translation uncertain.

The text

Within the section 14:3-23, one may at first make a division between the poem or song, comprising vv. 4b-21, and the two short prose passages which serve as introduction (vv. 3-4a) and conclusion (vv. 22-23). In terms of genre, the poetical passage 4b-21 (which is introduced in v. 4a as a *māšāl*, משל) could perhaps be designated as a satirical dirge, or as a taunt in the guise of a lament.[319] This poem, which is to a large extent composed in the Qinah meter (3+2, typical for dirges), displays only few traces of secondary expansion. In my opinion, the most conspicuous case is v. 5a, where the name of YHWH (who is not mentioned elsewhere in 4b-21) disrupts the Qinah rhythm.[320] In addition, the

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[319] Many commentators have made suggestions in a similar vein, e.g., Barth (1977:125-126), Blenkinsopp (2000:285-286, "ironic lament" p. 286), Clements (1980:139-140, "mocking lament" p. 140), Franke (1996:108-109), Kaiser (1983:29, "Spottklage"), and Sweeney (1996:228-229). The Hebrew label used in v. 4a, משל (*māšāl*), can—at least, from a modern analyst's point of view—denote a variety of genres: proverb, parable, simile, etc. According to Wildberger (1978:539), משל as a genre label is used both in a general sense ("Spruch, Sprichwort") and in a more specialized sense, "Spottspruch."

[320] It seems likely that the name of YHWH has been secondarily inserted into the text of v. 5a. Thus Kaiser (1983:25) and Wildberger (1978:533-534, 545). Other scholars, e.g., Barth (1977:127-129), Blenkinsopp (2000:285), and Clements (1980:140), regard v. 5 in its entirety as an interpolation, but I cannot see that this is a necessary conclusion.

concluding lines in vv. 20b-21 may represent an expansion aiming at a collective reinterpretation of the taunt song.[321]

Since the editorial framework (vv. 3-4a, 22-23), when compared to the poem, is marked by a strikingly different perspective (see the section "characterization" below), it is not surprising that several scholars have speculated as to the function of the poem before it was inserted into that frame. According to a common theory, the satirical dirge was originally about an Assyrian ruler (see further the section "contextualization" below). However, as part of its present literary context this poem is certainly designed to make a contribution to the overall portrait of Babylon in the prophetical corpus of Isaiah 1–66. That observation is the point of departure for the ensuing analysis.

Characterization

Before entering into a discussion of details in the Babylon image drawn up by this text, it is necessary to spell out some of the implications of the peculiar relation between the poem (vv. 4b-21) and the editorial frame (vv. 3-4a + 22-23). The differences in outlook are conspicuous, and this creates a tension, which every interpretation has to take seriously.

Whereas the perspective of the poem is general and universal, the frame's perspective is specific and particular. The poem is in itself characterized by strict anonymity. Neither the identity of the tyrant nor the name of the nation/empire ruled by him is disclosed. Detached from its present literary context, this could be read as a depiction of almost any tyrant known from the history of the Ancient Near East. If there had not been an editorial frame, nothing would have prompted us to read this satirical dirge as a piece of anti-Babylonian propaganda. Its perspective is not even outspokenly Jerusalemite or Yahwistic. Judah/Israel is not mentioned. On the contrary, it is stressed that all nations were oppressed by the tyrant (vv. 6, 12, 16-17). Correspondingly, the whole world is said to be rejoicing out of relief at the news of his death (v. 7). Only at one occasion is there a reference to a particular people—to the tyrant's own maltreated people (v. 20)! Whereas the poem, and especially the section comprising vv. 12-15, is replete with allusions to Canaanite mythology—mention is made of deities such as El, Elyon, and Shachar—the national deity of Judah, YHWH, is strangely absent. There is, moreover, as argued above, a strong possibility that the single explicit reference to YHWH within vv. 4b-21, viz. in v. 5, is due to secondary expansion of the text.

[321] Thus Barth (1977:127-129) and Clements (1980:144). Cf. also Kaiser (1983:27, n. 9; perhaps only changes from sg. to plur.) and Wildberger (1978:537; only v. 21 is seen as secondary).

The surrounding prose sections (vv. 3-4a, 22-23), which constitute the frame, offer a distinctly contrasting perspective. Here YHWH is clearly the protagonist. The enemy is identified as Babylon. Accordingly, the *māšāl* in vv. 4b-21 is presented as being "about the king of Babylon", to be performed as a taunt song by the "you" addressed in vv. 3-4a (probably to be identified with the post-exilic temple community). In the concluding section, vv. 22-23, the focus shifts to the city of Babylon, and its future transformation into an uninhabitable area (cf. 13:20-22). The frame thus brings about a radical change in the way the poem is read: It becomes less open-ended, less general and universal.

It does not follow from these observations, however, that the application of this ironical lament to a Babylonian ruler should be seen as something arbitrary or accidental, and hence of secondary importance. One can always speculate as to the existence of earlier versions, or alternative interpretive frames, but the fact is that this poem has been handed down to us in this version only, provided with an anti-Babylonian frame. As it now stands, it belongs firmly together with ch. 13, as the second part of a diptych depicting the downfall of the neo-Babylonian empire in two scenes, one centring upon the devastation of the city of Babylon and the other focusing the fate of one of its rulers.[322] How, then, does 14:3-23, the poem taken together with its frame, contribute to the Babylon image in the book of Isaiah?

To begin with, the use of a poem which in itself appears to have a universal scope brings about an important transformation of the image of Babylon. Rather than being one enemy among others, or one in the row of empires that come and go, it becomes the *archenemy*, the foe *par excellence*. Babylon is here pictured not only as the oppressor of all nations (vv. 5, 12, 16-17), but as a force threatening the whole earth (v. 7). I suggest that the cypresses and cedars in v. 8 can be viewed as spokesmen for the devastated creation.[323]

Some motifs in this text recall depictions of Assyrian rulers elsewhere in the book of Isaiah. The motif of felling cedars and cypresses in the mountaineous regions of Lebanon (v. 8; cf. 37:24) is a case in point. More precisely, this can be viewed as an expression for Assyrian-Babylonian continuity, since both empires formed part of a distinct Mesopotamian tradition where this motif was held in high esteem.[324] At first sight, it would seem that the (re-)use of the staff and rod/sceptre metaphor (v. 5; cf. 10:5) should be interpreted entirely along the

[322] See further the detailed study of Isa 13:1–14:23 provided by Gosse (1988).

[323] Gosse (1988:211-212) has proposed that the trees in 14:8 stand, symbolically or allegorically, for human kings, but this interpretation seems to be unwarranted.

[324] On the significance of the tree felling motif, see further the analyses of Isa 10:5-15 (v. 15) and Isa 37:22b-29 above, in chapter 2.2.

same lines. However, this metaphor functions as a marker of both continuity and contrast. Indeed, on a closer examination, some small but significant variations in its elaboration and application attest to a vital difference between the images of Assyria and Babylon in the book of Isaiah. According to 10:5, (the king of) Assyria was regarded as an instrument of (the wrath of) YHWH, at least as long as Assyrian expansionism was kept within certain limits, allegedly stipulated by YHWH's mandate. Something similar is never said about (the king of) Babylon in the book of Isaiah.[325] In 14:5, the anonymous ruler, whose death is being either celebrated or anticipated, is referred to as "the staff of the wicked, the rod/sceptre of rulers." Whereas "the rod/sceptre of rulers (שׁבט משׁלים)" looks like a rather neutral expression for the exercise of power, the preceding phrase, "the staff of the wicked (מטה רשׁעים)" is clearly derogatory, suggesting that the tyrant in question is really in the hands of others, at the service of "the wicked." At the same time, it can be read as part of a *demonizing* strategy. Far from being granted the status of an instrument (or, at least, of an ex-instrument) in the hands of YHWH, the Babylonian ruler—and, by implication, the neo-Babylonian empire—is here described as an *instrument of evil*.

Although the ruler in question remains anonymous, in the sense of being unidentified, he is nevertheless given a name. In v. 12 he is addressed as *Hêlēl ben Šāchar* (הילל בן־שׁחר), "Morning star (or: brightly shining one), son of Dawn." It seems likely that allusion is made to some myth. But which one? A number of suggestions have been made by scholars during the past century. In the evaluation of recent commentators, these two come out as the strongest candidates: (a) some version of the story about the abortive attempt made by Athtar (who was associated with Venus, the morning star) to take seat on the cosmic throne, an episode known from the Ugaritic Baal epic, or (b) a Northwest Semitic version of the Greek myth about Phaeton, the son of Eos, and his attempt to drive the sun chariot, a celestial expedition with fatal consequences.[326] Another interesting suggestion has been made by Hermann Barth. According to Barth, Isa 14:12-15 alludes to the same mythological background as Ezek 28:11-19, viz. a story about the hubris and fall of primordial man, a royal figure who ascended to the mountain/garden of the gods only to be cast down to earth.[327]

[325] In contradistinction to the book of Jeremiah. Cf. Jer 25:9; 27:6 (MT).

[326] For a more detailed discussion of these (and other) alternatives, with references to the ancient sources, see Gosse (1988:229-232), Kaiser (1983:34-36), and Wildberger (1978:551-552). See also Barth (1977:132-134).

[327] Barth (1977:134-135). On the affinities between Isa 14:12-15 and Ezekiel 28 (and, in addition, Ezekiel 31–32), see further Gosse (1988:225-228, 232).

Each of these hypotheses has its advantages and weaknesses. At our present state of knowledge, the matter cannot be decided with any certainty. Still, for the purposes of this analysis it suffices to acknowledge the presence of mythological allusions in the text, as well as the prominence of the hubris theme. The implications, as I see it, are twofold: The role of the "bewailed" ruler is *both aggrandized and belittled*. To begin with, the anonymous tyrant takes on the proportions of a semi-divine figure involved in a megalomaniac project that might threaten the cosmological order, as he aspires to dethrone the supreme deity (vv. 13-14). When read in conformity with the perspective of the frame, the poem with its mythological motifs appears to portray "the king of Babylon" (v. 4a) as an enemy—perhaps even as *the* enemy—of YHWH.

On the other hand, it might be said that the power of the tyrant has been exaggerated in order to make his fall greater: The one who shook the earth as if he were a god (v. 16; cf. 13:13!), the one who reached for a position in the highest heavens (vv. 13-14), he ends up in the lowest stratum of the netherworld (v. 15)! If there is a main theme to this poem, I suggest that it is the humiliation of the one who once was so mighty. The guiding principle behind the selection and combination of motifs and metaphors appears to be *reversal*, or retaliation. The notorious beater (v. 6) is himself broken (v. 5); the excessive tree-feller (v. 8) is hewn down, felled to the ground (v. 12b); the one who subdues kings and nations (vv. 4b-6, 12b) becomes weak like other deceased kings (v. 10), indeed, stripped of all honour and glory and denied a proper burial, he becomes *less* than their equal (vv. 11, 18-20); the power that destroyed cities and turned civilization into wilderness (v. 17) will not be able to build up new cities for its own purposes (v. 21b), indeed, the city of Babylon will itself be transformed into a marshland (vv. 22-23), as the author of the postscript adds, with unmistakable satisfaction.

Though very few explicit metaphors are employed in the characterization of the anonymous tyrant, it is possible to trace a thematic thread, made up of various tree metaphors, that runs through the composition. On its own, the tree felling motif in v. 8 may be interpreted non-metaphorically. However, in v. 12bα, the verb employed, גדע ('hew down', 'fell'), seems to indicate the presence of an implicit metaphor. The haughty tyrant—formerly a famous wood-cutter (v. 8)—would then himself be pictured as a tall tree that is felled to the ground (cf. 10:33). A further development of this theme can, I suggest, be detected in v. 19. The expression כנצר נתעב, "like a detestable branch", is generally regarded as obscure, or even as nonsensical. Hence the text is often

emended.[328] But the branch metaphor in the MT could make sense as a way of indicating the terminal stage in the tyrant's transformation: The tree-feller has himself been felled, only to end up like a worthless branch that is thrown away.

One further observation may be added. The lexeme נצר might serve as an intertextual marker. In Isa 11:1, the coming ideal ruler, inaugurator of an era of everlasting peace, is referred to as a "branch" (נצר), growing out of the roots of Jesse's tree (or stump). Interestingly enough, the tree-felling motif occurs in the immediate context (Isa 10:33-34). The depiction of the tyrant in Isaiah 14 can, I suggest, be regarded as an antithetical contrast to the portrait of the ideal ruler in ch. 11.[329] Far from being elected as the branch that would give rise to a new dynasty, this ruler is to be rejected as a "detestable branch", and his dynasty will be cut off (vv. 20b-21).

According to the perspective of the concluding prose section (vv. 22-23), the divine retaliation will not only concern the tyrant and his descendants. It will bring about the ruin of the entire Babylonian civilization. The area once occupied by the imperial capital will become an uninhabitable marsh. Not a trace will be left of its former magnitude, or of its historical significance. That must be the point of the somewhat opaque metaphor implied by this expression in v. 23: "I will sweep it/her away (וטאטאתיה) with the broom (במטאטא) of destruction."

Contextualization

It was shown in the analysis above, that a number of expressions and metaphors used about the unnamed tyrant have close counterparts in passages dealing with Assyria. It is therefore customary among commentators to posit that the satirical dirge in Isa 14:4b-21 originally referred to an Assyrian ruler.[330] As might have been expected, though, the issue of identification has engendered much scholarly speculation, but little unanimity. For a number of reasons, but perhaps chiefly due to the text's allusions to abnormal circumstances of death (or, rather: burial), Sargon II has emerged as the prime candidate.[331] On a later stage (most

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[328] Guided by the Greek versions, several scholars have recently arrived at the following solution: Instead of נצר they read נפל, which they translate 'untimely birth' or 'carrion'. See, e.g., Blenkinsopp (2000:284, 285) and Wildberger (1978:535-536). Cf. also NRSV.

[329] In a similar vein, Franke (1996:120) regards the king of Babylon in Isaiah 14 as "a foil to the idealized messianic king of Isaiah 11."

[330] Thus, e.g., Barth (1977:135-136), Clements (1980:139-140), Sweeney (1996:232-233), and Vanderhooft (1999:128). See further the references in Kaiser (1983:27-28) and Wildberger (1978:541-543).

[331] That Sargon provides the best match, has been argued by, e.g., Barth (1977:136-138), Gallagher (1999:87-90), and Sweeney (1996:232-233). According to Blenkinsopp (2000:286-287), Sennacherib would be a more likely candidate. However, Blenkinsopp

probably during the 6th century), the prose frame was attached, and thereby the poem was transformed into an ironic lament over a Babylonian king. That is, roughly, the content of the predominant theory. Its probability has not, however, been established beyond reasonable doubt.

The intertextual and linguistic data adduced by Bernard Gosse seem to indicate that the poem (and not just the frame) was composed in the 6th century, at the earliest.[332] If writing during or after the exile, the author of the *māšāl* may indeed have had a Babylonian ruler in mind. Here the prime candidate would have to be Nebuchadnezzar, the ruler responsible for the siege of Jerusalem and the subsequent pillage of the city in 587 BCE.[333] I find this likely. It is, however, important to remember that the poem in vv. 4b-21 is anonymous. In addition to the two possibilities mentioned so far—(a) original reference to (a) an Assyrian king, or (b) a Babylonian ruler—there is a third one: The composition might have originated as a general (and eschatological?) discourse on the fate of any tyrant daring to challenge YHWH.[334] At any rate, it was most probably interpreted along such lines, during the periods of Persian and Hellenistic rule.

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prefers leaving the issue of identification unsettled. As pointed out by Kaiser (1983:28) and Wildberger (1978:543), all speculations based upon the actual circumstances concerning the death and (non-)burial of various rulers (as far as these are known to us), are flawed by the fact that the poem could have been composed in *anticipation* of a certain tyrant's ignominious end.

[332] Gosse (1988:201-246, conclusions on p. 246) points to Ezekiel 32 and Isaiah 36–37 (2 Kings 18–19) as sources of inspiration for the author. He settles for an early post-exilic date (1988:246). Several other scholars, e.g., Kaiser (1983:27-29), Vermeylen (1977:292-294), and Wildberger (1978:541-543), concur with Gosse in ruling out Isaianic authorship, and in suggesting an exilic or post-exilic dating.

[333] In that case, Assyrian rulers like Sargon and Sennacherib may nevertheless have served as models. Gosse (1988:275) summarizes his findings as follows: "le tyran du chapitre 14, s'il est à rapprocher de Sennacherib sur le plan des sources littéraires, doit être identifié à Nabuchodonosor sur le plan historique." In his textual analysis of Isaiah 14, Gosse (1988:239) suggests that the phrase in v. 19, כנצר נתעב ("like a detestable branch"), may contain an allusion to the name of Nebuchadnezzar (in Hebrew spelling: נבוכדנאצר). This may seem a bit far-fetched. Cf. Wildberger (1978:542). When it comes to the more modest claim, that the redactional frame primarily evokes the image of this ruler, it is possible to draw upon more substantial—but still circumstantial—evidence. According to Vanderhooft (1999:129), "the title, 'king of Babylon', occurs 132 times in the HB, and of these 118 refer to Nebuchadnezzar."

[334] The text's eschatological character has been stressed by Kaiser (1983:28). According to Wildberger (1978:542), the trait of anonymity might indicate that the author "überhaupt nicht von einer bestimmten historischen Persönlichkeit sprechen will … sondern vom Repräsentanten der Weltmacht überhaupt, wie ja für den Diaskeuasten

Leaving these speculations aside, it is important to recognize the fact that the prose frame expressly refers to Babylon. This editorial arrangement has had far-reaching consequences. Hence, on the redactional level, this text now makes a substantial contribution to the image of Babylon in the book of Isaiah. Moreover, within the history of interpretation (and, more generally, the history of ideas), this text has contributed to the development whereby "Babylon" was made into a chiffre for any oppressive power, or even into a name for *the* empire of evil.

Isa 47:1-15

1 Step down and sit in the dust, virgin daughter Babylon!
Sit on the ground without a throne, daughter of the Chaldeans!
For no longer shall they call you "tender and delicate/spoiled."
2 Take millstones and grind meal!
Take off your veil,
lift the hem of your skirt, bare your legs,
wade through streams!
3 Your nakedness shall be exposed and your shame shall be seen.
I will take revenge, no one may interfere.a
4 Our redeemer, YHWH of the hosts is his name, the Holy One of Israel.
5 Sit/dwell in silence, enter into darkness, daughter of the Chaldeans!
For no longer shall they call you "queen/mistress of kingdoms."
6 I was angry with my people, I defiled my heritage,
and I gave them into your hand.
You showed them no mercy;
on the elderly you made your yoke exceedingly heavy.
7 You said/thought: "I will be queen/mistress forever."
You did not take these things to heart,
or consider their outcome.
8 But listen now to this, you lover of luxury,
sitting/dwelling/throning in security,
and thinking in your heart: "I, and no one besides me;
I will not sit as a widow, nor will I experience childlessness."

'Babel' zur Chiffre für die Weltmacht überhaupt geworden ist." He adds: "Das heißt allerdings nicht, daß nicht doch mit einem geschichtlichen Bezug zu rechnen wäre, auch die Apokalyptik spricht nicht in einen geschichtslosen Raum hinein. Aber es bedeutet doch, daß dieser Bezug letzlich unwichtig ist: es geht um den Typus, nicht um die konkrete geschichtliche Gestalt." (1978:542-543).

9 Both these things will come upon you,
suddenly, and on one and the same day:
The loss of children and widowhood
will come upon you in full measure,
in spite of your many sorceries and the great power of your spells.
10 You felt secure in your wickedness,b you said/thought: "No one can see me."
Your wisdom and your science, they led you astray,
and you thought in your heart: "I, and no one besides me."
11 But evil will come upon you,
and you will not know how to charm it away.
Disaster will fall upon you,
and you will not be able to ward it off.
A catastrophe will come upon you suddenly,
and you will not know (the time).
12 Persist, then, in your spells and your many sorceries,
with which you have laboured since your youth.
Perhaps you may succeed, perhaps you may inspire terror.
13 You have exhausted yourself with all your consultations.
Let them stand up and save you now,
those who study* the heavens and observe the stars,
those who predict, month by month, what is going to befall you.*
14 See, they have become like stubble,
the fire consumes them.
They cannot save their lives from the power of the flames.
No coal for warming oneself (is this), no fire to sit by!
15 Thus they have become for you, your traders/sorcerersc
with whom* you have laboured since your youth.
They have gone astray, each in his own direction,
there is no one to save you.

* Cf. BHS app.

a Reading 3 p. sg., יפגע, as suggested by BHS app. Alternatively, one might retain MT:s אפגע (1 p. sg.) but vocalize it as a passive form (Nif. or Hof.), as suggested by Hermisson (2003:148-149).

b Or: "you trusted in your knowledge", 1QIsa has בדעתך.

c MT:s סחריך is usually taken to mean "your traders." However, if a quite plausible emendation into שׂחריך is made, it is possible to translate "your sorcerers." Thus, e.g., Baltzer (2001:275). According to Blenkinsopp (2002:278), no emendation is needed, since "there is probably a double entendre with another meaning i.e. 'magician'."

The text

The poem in Isa 47:1-15 can be regarded as the second half of a diptych, comprising chapters 46 and 47.[335] While ch. 46 delivers a verbal attack against the gods of Babylon, ch. 47 addresses Babylon itself (probably both the city and the empire). This taunt song (cf. 14:4-22) can be divided into four stanzas, each beginning with an imperative form: 1-4 // 5-7 // 8-11 // 12-15.[336] A couple of later additions can be identified, in vv. 4 and 14b.[337]

Characterization

The taunt song in Isa 47:1-15 is primarily a verbal attack on the city of Babylon, but arguably the capital city "of the Chaldeans" (v. 1b) stands metonymically for the entire neo-Babylonian empire.[338] From the very start, where the city is addressed with the words "virgin daughter of Babylon", and throughout the entire poem, Babylon is personified as a woman (as indicated by the consistent use of verbal forms in the 2nd p. sg. fem., as well as nouns with sg. fem. suffixes). The female personification is maintained throughout, but it is particularly prominent in the first three stanzas (vv. 1-9). Moreover, there is a certain degree of variation in the use of this metaphorical language. Babylon appears in a number of shifting female roles, including that of the "tender and delicate/spoiled" woman of high social rank (v. 1), the hard-working female slave of the lowest possible social rank (vv. 2-3), the queen or mistress (vv. 5-7), and the married woman who suddenly becomes a childless widow (vv. 8-9). Each of these roles deserves further commentary, but before entering into a more detailed analysis, I will try to put the image of Babylon as a woman in a wider perspective.

To begin with, the female imagery permeating this text is well in line with ancient conventions. Female personification of cities is a widely attested motif in both biblical and extra-biblical texts.[339] Hence, as a standard stylistic device,

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[335] Cf. Childs (2001:367).

[336] Cf. similarly Blenkinsopp (2002:278-279), who supplies a discussion of various alternative subdivisions that have been suggested. Cf. also Hermisson (2003:156-157).

[337] According to Hermisson (2003:158-162), the amount of later additions (made in three successive stages) is considerably more extensive.

[338] With Franke (1994:108).

[339] See, e.g., Biddle (1991) and Fitzgerald (1972 and 1975). A large number of text examples from Hebrew Bible, including passages from the Psalms, Lamentations, and from the prophetical writings (many of them belonging to the "oracles against the nations" genre) are discussed by Dobbs-Allsopp (1993). According to all the scholars referred to in this footnote, there is a connection between the conventional representation of cities as women and the Ancient Near Eastern concept of the city goddess. A special

the fact that the city of Babylon in Isaiah 47 is pictured as a woman does not seem remarkable at all. However, it takes on greater significance, when its function within the literary context is taken into consideration. It has been demonstrated by other scholars, that the female representation of cities is an easily recognizable thematic thread in the book of Isaiah as a whole, running through all three of its traditional subdivisions (Proto-, Deutero-, and Trito-Isaiah).[340] Of more immediate relevance for the interpretation of 47:1-15 is the observation that the rivalry between two female figures, Lady Babylon and Lady Zion (Jerusalem), constitutes a major theme in the latter part of the Deutero-Isaianic corpus.[341] These two women, *Zion and Babylon*, are in some respects very similar, *almost like twin sisters*. Yet they are opponents. In the words of Mark Biddle, "the Babylon portrayed in Isaiah 47 is the polar opposite of the Jerusalem depicted in 49; 51–52; and 54."[342] Still, the humiliation of Babylon is not simply contrasted against Zion's future restoration and glory. According to

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case, the correlation between the Mesopotamian motif of the weeping goddess and the personification of Zion/Jerusalem as a female figure in biblical laments, is discussed by Dobbs-Allsopp (1993:75-90, 167-182).

[340] On the metaphor "the city as woman" in Isaiah 1–39, see Schmitt (1997). On this motif's structuring function within chs. 40–55 and 56–66, see Biddle (1996).

[341] Biddle (1996:129-133) has shown that almost every detail in the portrait of Lady Babylon in ch. 47 (especially vv. 1-9) has its counterpart in the portraits of Lady Zion in chs. 49–54 (49:14-26; 51:17–52:10; 54). According to the analysis presented by Franke (1996:119-120), the figure of Daughter Babylon "is a foil to that of Daughter Zion" (1996:119). The binary opposition between Babylon and Zion, both represented as women, has of course also been observed by several commentators on Isaiah 47. In the words of Koole (1997:522), "'Babylon' and 'Zion' are antipodes." As pointed out by Whybray (1990:119), the passage 47:1-4, where "Babylon, the queen of the nations, is brusquely commanded to descend from her throne and to join the ranks of the lowest class of slave", makes "a striking contrast with those other passages, especially 52:1-2, in which Zion/Jerusalem, now a slave, is to become a queen." A more comprehensive range of correspondences is listed by Blenkinsopp (2002:279, emphasis as in orig.): "the female *persona* of Jerusalem-Zion is presented as a mirror image of the dishonored queen of Babylon: whereas the latter sits in the dust, the woman Zion is told to to get up off the ground (52:2); and whereas the Babylonian is forced to expose herself, Zion is told to put on beautiful clothes (52:1). The one is widowed and bereaved of children, the other will no longer be bereaved and will have numerous children (49:20-21; 54:1). The one is shamed, the other will no longer experience shame (54:4)."

[342] Biddle (1996:133).

the perspective of the author(s)/editor(s) of Isaiah 40–55, the former would seem to be an important precondition for the latter.[343]

As regards the characterization of Lady Babylon in 47:1-15, it is possible to discern two main themes: *humiliation* (vv. 1-3, 5) and *hubris* (vv. 7-10). In the first stanza, a process of degradation is described, step by step. The downward movement is graphically depicted, with the help of the initial "Go down!" (v. 1a, imperative of ירד), followed by repeated imperative forms of the verb ישב (meaning "sit down", but ironically also "throne").[344] To begin with, the queen has to leave her throne (v. 1). Then she is forced to do the work of a servant, namely to grind meal (v. 2a). But it gets worse. Her humiliation becomes total, as her nakedness is exposed (vv. 2b-3a). Here the language becomes sexually explicit, and the imagery disgustingly sexist (possibly implying that the woman is raped).[345] One might perhaps regard this as a *rhetoric of revenge*, keeping in mind that women often were raped in war, and that war prisoners often were stripped naked, in order to humiliate them.

In vv. 8-9, the female personification is given a new twist. Here Lady Babylon is pictured as a well-to-do wife and mother, who will have to face widowhood and bereavement. It is probably wise to abstain from an allegorizing interpretation.[346] Suffice it to say, that it is implied that the leaders in Babylon are about to lose everything: riches, allies, dominion over other nations, as well as over the city of Babylon and its population, and so forth.

According to the logic of Isaiah 47, all disasters that befall the personified Babylon can be seen as punishments for her hubris. In accordance with the conventions of Mesopotamian propaganda, the enemy is accused of misplaced trust.[347] Foolishly, Lady Babylon has put her trust in human consultants and in various divinatory techniques (vv. 11-13, 15), rather than in YHWH. However, the most severe accusation against the leaders in Babylon concerns their alleged blasphemy. Lady Babylon's declaration in v. 8, "I, and no one besides me" is an

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[343] Cf. Franke (1996:119), who points out that the depiction of the humiliation of Babylon in ch. 47 "is the key to the reversal of fortune of Daughter Zion" (1996:119).

[344] Baltzer (2001:270-271) makes an interesting comparison with the myth recounting Inanna's descent into the netherworld. However, he tends to overemphasize the importance of such analogies.

[345] For more detailed discussions of the imagery in vv. 2b-3a, see, e.g., Koole (1997:527-528) and Blenkinsopp (2002:280)

[346] Caution is certainly called for. Cf. Hermisson (2003:177-178), whose critical discussion with other exegetes is replete with exotic examples of identifications of the husband and the children. However, a more positive stance towards such allegorizing is taken by Koole (1997:537-538) and Baltzer (2001:276).

[347] On this topos in Assyrian depictions of various enemies, see Cohen (1979:40-41) and Fales (1982).

almost verbatim echo of YHWH's self-presentation in 46:9 (cf. also 45:5, 6, 14, 18, 21, 22). Further comments are probably superfluous.

The most crude and uncompromising image of Babylon in this taunt song is found near its end, in v. 14a, in a notable exception from the otherwise consistently maintained female personification. Here, an anonymous collective is depicted as straw or stubble (קַשׁ), about to be consumed by fire. Belonging to the stock imagery of the prophetical writings (cf. Isa 5:24; 33:11; Joel 2:5; Obad 1:18), the stubble metaphor can be seen as a typical, i.e. stereotypical, enemy image. The "others" are *dehumanized*, and described as both worthless and powerless. Like straw set on fire, the author seems to indicate, they could (and should) be annihilated swiftly—and without any feelings of pity or remorse. This pejorative portrait could be taken as a general reference to the fate that would befall all the inhabitants of Babylon. However, the immediate context suggests that the city's experts in astrology and magical practices (who are derided in vv. 12, 13, and 15) are the main targets for the brutal satire.

Finally, there is more to be said about the relation between Babylon and YHWH in this discourse. Babylon appears to be *both enemy and allied*. The interesting statement in v. 6, "I gave them into your hand (ואתנם בידך)", comes close to a recognizig the neo-Babylonian empire as an instrument for the implementation of the will of YHWH. Yet (and this is significant!) such a notion is not expressed explicitly. The language concerning Babylon's role is indirect and imprecise. What exactly is implied by the divine act described? That YHWH actively appointed the Babylonians and made them attack and conquer Judah—or merely that YHWH abandoned the people of Judah, withdrew his protection, and that the Babylonians took advantage of that situation?[348] I find the latter option the most likely. What the Babylonians actually did—capture Jerusalem, destroy the temple, and deport parts of the population—remains an almost unspeakable and utterly inexplicable trauma within the literary world of Isaiah 1–66. In 47:6a, an attempt appears to be made to offer an explanation, or excuse, issuing from the mouth of YHWH: "I was angry with my people, I defiled my

[348] As might be expected, diverging interpretations are found in the commentaries. Some stress the analogy between Assyria (cf. 10:5) and Babylon as divine instruments. Thus, e.g., Whybray (1975:121) and Blenkinsopp (2002:281). Others emphasize the contrast. According to Fohrer (1964:108), Babylon is not regarded as an instrument of YHWH in Isaiah 47: "Babylonien war nach der Ansicht des zweiten Jesaja offenbar nicht das Werkzeug Gottes, das die Strafe vollstrecken sollte, sondern Gott hatte die Eroberung und Deportation nur zugelassen und stillschweigend gestattet" (1964:108). I tend to agree with Fohrer. However, Fohrer's position is refuted by Koole (1997:534), who argues that נתן ביד "is an 'Übereignungsformel'." Hence, according to Koole, Isa 47:6 implies that "Babylon was given military and also legal authority over Israel" (1997:534).

heritage." However, the reader is not told which of Judah's sufferings that might be explained in such a manner, or to what extent other factors are thought to be involved. In 47:6b, Babylon is accused of mercilessness, exemplified by their alleged maltreatment of the elderly (among the deportees?).[349] Again, this might very well indicate that the Babylonians had some kind of mandate which they misinterpreted and/or exceeded. The text is, however, as already mentioned, very vague on this issue. Why?

I would like to suggest a possible explanation. You can hardly hate your patron's obedient servant, or a mere instrument. It was therefore of vital importance that Babylon should be given the status of an independent agent. At the same time, the text's underlying theology would seem to require that YHWH was controlling the course of events. Hence, the utterance in v. 6 seems to balance on a thin rope. On the one hand, the Babylonian capture of Jerusalem was in accordance with YHWH's plan, but on the other hand, the Babylonians were not supposed to act cruelly against the defeated population. This does not seem perfectly logical, but the point made by the author is probably that Babylon—not YHWH!—ought to be blamed for all vicissitudes suffered by the people of Jerusalem and Judah.

In this text, mixed emotions of hatred and envy are given expression. I believe there is a subtext, which has to do with the suppressed notion of YHWH's complicity in the people's sufferings. Lady Zion had been abandoned, rejected. Someone else appeared to have been chosen. This suppressed envy helps to explain the portrayal of Lady Babylon as a temptress, a "mistress of kingdoms" (v. 5), and a "lover of luxury" (v. 8). That brings us back to the beginning of this analysis. Babylon is, in a way, pictured as Jerusalem's beautiful, successful and ruthless twin sister—both a look-alike and a rival. That is why the humiliation (including the undressing) of Babylon, in Isaiah 47 (and within chs. 40–55 as a whole), appears to be synonymous with the redress of Zion.

Contextualization

Although an exact date for the composition of Isa 47:1-15 cannot be given, it is rather safe to assume that this taunt song originated either shortly before or shortly after the collapse of the neo-Babylonian empire, and the Persian occupation of its capital in 539 BCE. Much of the scholarly debate has centred on the question whether this prophecy should be classified as a prediction or as a statement *post festum*. On the one hand, the author appears to be eagerly antici-

[349] Why is this example singled out? Nothing is said about all other crimes and atrocities that inevitably accompanied warfare in those days (and in our own time).

pating the downfall of Babylon.[350] On the other hand, Blenkinsopp has suggested that "Isaiah 47 falls into the category of the taunting of the conquered by the victors."[351] Before or after 539, then? We will probably never know. During the centuries that followed, this piece of anti-Babylonian propaganda must have lent itself to a series of reinterpretations and reapplications, as new oppressive empires emerged.

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[350] Hence, a date prior to 539 is often taken for granted for by the commentators, without any elaborate argumentations. Thus, e.g., Westermann (1966:152) and Whybray (1975:118-119). I agree with Childs (2001:365), that Westermann seems to have overlooked the poem's character of a literary composition, designed for its present context within chs. 40–55. Hermisson (2003:167-168) has adduced a number of arguments for the position that the core ("Grundschicht") of Isaiah 47 was composed before 539.

[351] Blenkinsopp (2002:278).

2.5. Empire portraits: Comparisons and conclusions

Assyria

As shown in the preceding analyses, there are interesting points of contact between the official Assyrian self-image, as it can be deduced from the extant textual material, and the images of Assyria in the book of Isaiah. Thus, the Assyrian army is depicted as a devastating storm or flood (see 8:7-8 and 28:2), and possibly also as a flock of rapacious lions (5:29). In some cases, the role of the Assyrian empire appears to be that of *the enemy's enemy*, an allied of sorts. Assyria is even regarded as an *instrument implementing the will of YHWH* (10:5). This should be understood against the background of the so-called Syro-Ephraimite crisis, when the leading circles in Jerusalem seem to have regarded the kingdoms of Israel and Aram as their primary enemies. Accordingly, Assyrian "aid", in the form of punitive expeditions against these neighbouring nations, was welcomed. However, during the century of vassalage that followed, Assyria assumed the role of Judah's enemy *par excellence*. This shift in attitude is reflected in 10:5-15, where an anonymous Assyrian ruler is accused of misusing the mandate he was given by YHWH. Somewhat paradoxically, this passage describes a tool (axe or saw) that makes revolt against its owner.

In several anti-Assyrian oracles, containing full-fledged enemy images, common topoi in the Assyrian propaganda are turned against the Assyrians. For instance, the motif of tree-felling (occurring in boastful royal reports), serves to depict the Assyrian kings as godless, ruthless and arrogant (37:24, cf. also 10:12-15, and possibly 10:33-34). From the perspective of "Isaianic" ideology, such arrogance deserved to be punished by YHWH. According to some passages, probably deriving from prophetic circles during the reign of Josiah, YHWH would crush Assyria and free his people from the "yoke" (10:16-19, 24-27; 14:24-27), another topos in the Assyrian propaganda. In 30:27-33, a passage which is probably of post-exilic origin, "Assyria" apparently stands as a code name for another (or, perhaps, for just any) oppressive, "evil" empire.

Egypt

In several respects, Egypt is a special case. The predominant image of Egypt in BI contrasts against the depictions of the immense and almost invincible strength of Assyria. Egypt is often depicted as weak and helpless. More precisely, the main role assigned to Egypt is that of *the helpless helper* (see 30:1-7; 31:1-3; cf. also 20:5-6). On one occasion, Egypt is personified as a chaos monster. Significantly, however, this creature turns out to be harmless: "Rahab, who has been silenced" (30:7). Since the notion of threat is downplayed, or ab-

sent, in several passages, one may ask whether it is possible to speak of enemy images, at all. However, the very helplessness is pictured as a threat. Or, rather: The Egyptians are described as deceitful and utterly unreliable. The consequences of trusting in Egyptian aid, we learn, are always disastrous for the help-seeking party. Arguably, this Jerusalemite anti-Egyptian polemic was based on bitter experiences. In the first place, it can be connected to two specific occasions, viz. Hezekiah's revolt in 705-701 and Zedekiah's revolt in the 580s. In both cases, Egyptian assistance was an important ingredient in the scheme. Although the outcome for the city of Jerusalem was not the same (spared in 701, but destroyed in 587/6), these two historical events had something in common: The Egyptian cavalry never came to rescue Jerusalem. It is, moreover, interesting to notice that this "Isaianic" perspective on Egypt largely concurs with the official Assyrian perspective, which is reflected in the speech of the Rabshakeh, in 36:6. As a fit punishment for Egypt's false advices and empty promises, YHWH would strike the country with a "spirit of confusion" (19:14).

However, there are other images of Egypt, beside the (dangerously) "helpless helper." In one passage, 7:18-19, announcing an imminent invasion (of what country?), the Egyptian military forces are depicted as equally numerous and threatening as the Assyrian army. This might be seen as an isolated case. However, the images of Cush (Nubia/Ethiopia) need to be drawn into the discussion, since Egypt was ruled by a Nubian dynasty (the 25th) during the final decades of the 8th century, and the first half of the 7th. The oracle against Cush in 18:1-6 would seem to indicate that Cush-Egypt was indeed regarded as a potential threat against Judah. In addition, this enemy image alludes to some distinct ethnic traits of the Nubian people, but in a largely positive and admiring manner (18:1-2). One may add the observation that the oracle against Egypt in 19:1-15 refers to numerous aspects of Egyptian geography, culture, and industry. In other words, despite all negative stereotypes, the portrait of Egypt has a distinctly Egyptian touch.

Babylon

It is more difficult to find specifically "Babylonian" (or, Chaldean) traits in the images of the neo-Babylonian empire. Several passages within Deutero-Isaiah take a polemical interest in Babylonian religion. However, as regards the use of motifs and metaphors in the enemy images analyzed in this study, one may speak of a continuity between the anti-Assyrian and the anti-Babylonian prophecies. A case in point is 14:4-21. According to a popular theory, the author of this taunt song had an Assyrian ruler in mind. Later on, it was re-applied to an anonymous Babylonian king (presumably Nebuchadnezzar). This hypothesis,

right or wrong, is based upon hard facts, namely the occurrence of motifs which are otherwise associated with Assyria.

How, then, should the distinct character of Babylon in BI be described? Perhaps as *the evil empire*. Babylon is neither a useless instrument or a helpless helper. In an even higher degree than Assyria (to say nothing of Egypt), Babylon is depicted as a dangerous and hated enemy. Babylon is *the* archenemy of Judah. In this connection, I would like to draw attention to the intimate relationship between the images of Babylon and Zion in Isaiah 47 (and in chs. 40–55 as a whole). They are implicitly portrayed as twin sisters. A similar mirroring effect was discussed in the analysis of 13:14-22. Due to the process of projection, Babylon was turned into *the negative counterpart of Judah and Jerusalem*. This may be an additional reason why the portrait of Babylon seems to lack distinctly Babylonian features.

Babylon is not only regarded as Judah's enemy *par excellence*. In addition, this empire assumes the role of the prototypical enemy of YHWH. Babylon is pictured as a political power that challenged the divine power of Judah's national deity. In other words, according to Isaianic ideology, it threatened the order of the universe. The blasphemous hubris ascribed to the Babylonian rulers, in passages like 14:13-14 and 47:7-8, surpasses everything that had been attributed to the Assyrians. Hence, the humiliation of Babylon became a theme of central importance (14:15-19; 47:1-3, 5). Moreover, the Babylonians were dehumanized in a particular way—they were "mythologized" (14:4-21).[352] In this connection, it is worth noticing that the announcement of Babylon's destruction in 13:14-22 is set within an eschatological framework (13:2-13). Babylon became the name of an evil power that would be defeated by YHWH in the last days. It is significant, I suggest, that the post-exilic author(s) of the remarkably universalistic vision(s) in 19:23-25 chose to speak of a future alliance between Egypt (the Ptolemaic kingdom?), Assyria (the Seleucid kingdom?) and Israel (primarily referring to Judah?).[353] Apparently, Babylon was not considered worthy of such a rehabilitation.

[352] For this use of the term "mythologization", cf. Pongratz-Leisten (2001).
[353] On the universalism in 19:25, see Sawyer (1986).

Chapter 3

Images of Neighbouring Nations

3.1. Images of Ephraim/Israel and Aram

Isa 7:1-9

7:1 In the days when Ahaz, son of Jotham son of Uzziah, was king of Judah, Rezin, who was king of Aram and Pekah, son of Remaliah, who was king of Israel, went up to fight against Jerusalem. But they* were unable to prevail against it.
2 When it was reported to the house of David that Aram had allied itself with Ephraim, his heart and the heart of his people trembled as the trees of the forest shake in a storm.
3 And YHWH said to Isaiah: "Go out to meet Ahaz, you and your son Shear Yashuv, at the end of the conduit of the Upper Pool by the road to the Fuller's Field.
4 Say to him: 'Take heed and stay calm. Do not be afraid or fainthearted on account of these two stumps/tails of smouldering firebrands, at the heat of the anger of Rezin and Aram and the son of Remaliah.
5 Because Aram has plotted evil against you, (together with) Ephraim and the son of Remaliah, saying 6 "Let us attack Judah and terrify it, and conquer it for ourselves, and let us then make the son of Tabeel king in the midst of it,"
7 therefore, thus says the Lord YHWH:
"It shall not stand, and it shall not (continue to) be,
8 that the head of Aram is Damascus,
and the head of Damascus is Rezin,
within sixty-five years Ephraim will be crushed, without a people,
9 that the head of Ephraim is Samaria,
and the head of Samaria is the son of Remaliah.
If you do not believe, you will not endure."

* Cf. BHS app.
a For this translation, see Blenkinsopp (2000:229).

The text

The passage 7:1-9 forms part of a narrative, comprising 7:1-17. Within this section, the ensuing analysis concentrates on the salvation oracle in vv. 4-9.[1] In a style reminiscent of several of the Neo-Assyrian prophecies, king Ahaz is here assured by the prophet that his dynasty has divine support, whereas his enemies are doomed. A couple of glosses (in vv. 5b and 8b) have been added by some later reader(s).[2]

Characterization

The salvation oracle in 7:4-9 offers an unmistakably Jerusalemite perspective on the so-called Syro-Ephraimite crisis. This is a paradigmatic instance of *prophecy in the service of political propaganda*. Against the background of perceived military threat (vv. 1-3), the leaders of the hostile nations—in this case, Aram and Israel—are condemned as traitors. They have "plotted evil" against Judah (v. 5), planning to depose its legitimate ruler (v. 6). But in so doing, they have challenged Judah's patron deity, YHWH, which means that they will soon be deposed themselves (vv. 7-9). As regards the characterization of the two hostile rulers, Pekah of Samaria and Rezin of Damascus, the utterance in v. 4 deserves special attention.

In v 4, Pekah and Rezin are described as "smouldering firebrands." Clearly, the portrait is strongly satirical and derogatory. According to the prophet, king Ahaz has no reason to fear the "heat" (חרי) of his opponents. The conventional metaphor, "anger is heat/fire/smoke,"[3] has here been given an unexpected twist. Only one aspect is highlighted, viz. that those burning with fury run the risk of being consumed by their own fire. Thus, the point of the metaphor might be paraphrased as follows: The aggression of these two neighbouring nations, personified by their leaders, represents a real threat—to the attackers themselves, but not to Judah! Pekah and Rezin may seem ever so dangerous at the moment, but they will soon be burnt out. In the wake of the on-going political process, they and their nations will inevitably be destroyed, since they are merely "fire-brands."

To be more precise, Pekah and Rezin are, pejoratively, called "stumps" of fire-brands. According to this oracle, then, they are petty figures, consumed by their own improductive anger. Who cares about a smouldering log, anyway? Kings were sometimes pictured as huge trees. In order to diminish the impor-

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[1] On Isa 7:1-9 as a salvation oracle, and on this subgenre more generally, see Wildberger (1972:270-272). Cf. also Blenkinsopp (2000:231) and Becker (1997:37).

[2] Cf. Clements (1980:84-85) and Kaiser (1981:135-136).

[3] On this metaphorical concept, see Lakoff (1987).

tance of these hostile kings, the author uses an expression emphasizing small size. But perhaps there is even more satire to be found in the expression used in 7:4. Literally, the two rulers are said to be “tails” (זנבות) of firebrands. Now, “head” (ראשׁ) and “tail” (זנב) constituted a conventional word pair (cf. Isa 9:13-14; 19:15). Rulers were often referred to as “heads.” An instance of this conventional usage is found in 7:8-9. According to my interpretation of those lines (cf. the translation above), the position of Pekah and Rezin as “heads” of their states is seriously jeopardized. The oracle proclaims their imminent fall. In this prophecy, we may therefore detect a satirical use of the traditional word pair head - tail. As spelled out by vv. 8-9, the hostile, aggressive rulers are denied the status of “heads” (= chiefs, leaders). Indeed, they have been reduced to “tails” (v. 4). Unable to dictate the course of events, they will simply have to follow the lead of others (ultimately, of YHWH), until they are gone—vanished, as smoke.

The portrait in 7:4 of Pekah and Rezin provides an excellent example of the ideological mechanisms at work in the construction of enemy images. In the service of propaganda, *proportions are distorted*. In this case, the power of the enemies appears to be grossly understated. Not only the leaders of the two hostile nations, but implicitly also their combined military forces, are pictured as virtually harmless. Leaving realistic assessments of striking power aside, the potential threat represented by Israel and Aram is described as negligible. Quite possibly, there is an underlying expectation that Assyria would crush Judah’s enemies. At any rate, the outspoken purpose of this oracle is to overcome fear among the own ranks. According to v. 2, king Ahaz and the leadership in Jerusalem had begun to panic. The oracle (to be) delivered by the prophet begins: “Do not be afraid or fainthearted...” (v. 4). And it ends on a note of admonition: “If you do not believe, you will not endure (אם לא תאמינו כי לא תאמנו)” (v. 9b). This famous utterance, stressing the importance of faith, has often (and for obvious reasons) been interpreted as a dictum of great theological significance. However, these words might perhaps also be read as an indication that oracles like this one, containing extremely derogatory enemy images, could function as weapons in psychological warfare. “If you do not believe, you will not endure”—in other words: The enemies can be defeated, if (and only if) you really believe it.

Contextualization

There can be no doubt that Isa 7:1-9, including the salvation oracle in vv. 4-9 that was analyzed above, refers to the so-called Syro-Ephraimite crisis in the years 734-732 BCE. According to many commentators, this passage was com-

posed shortly after these dramatic events.[4] However, the embedding of the salvation oracle within a narrative of the prophetic legend type would seem to indicate that the present shape of the text is the result of later redactional work, perhaps during the reign of Josiah.[5] Becker and Kaiser regard the entire passage as early post-exilic, since it betrays Deuteronomistic influence.[6] In my opinion, the salvation oracle in 7:4-9* is probably pre-exilic. The narrative framework may, however, have been composed at a later stage.

Isa 9:7-20

9:7 The Lord has sent a word against Jacob,
and it will fall on Israel.
8 The entire people will experience it
—Ephraim and the inhabitants of Samaria—
who say, in pride and arrogance of mind:
9 "Bricks have fallen, but we will rebuild with dressed stone,
sycamores have been cut down, but we will replace them with cedars."
10 YHWH supported their adversaries* against them,
he stirred up their enemies:
11 Aram from the east and the Philistines from the west,
and they devoured Israel with mouth open wide.
For all this his anger did not abate,
still his hand is/was outstretched.
12 But the people did not (re)turn to the one who struck them,
they did not seek YHWH of the hosts.
13 So YHWH cut off from Israel head and tail,
palm branch and reed, (in) one day.
14 Elder and dignitary—that is the head,
and the prophet teaching lies—that is the tail.
15 The leaders of this people have become such who lead astray,
and those who are/were led (by them) have become confounded/devoured.
16 Therefore YHWH had no mercy* on his/its young people,
no compassion on his/its orphans and widows,
for everyone of them is/was godless and wicked,

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[4] Thus, e.g., Wildberger (1972:273), Clements (1980:78-81), and Blenkinsopp (2000:229-231).

[5] As suggested by Sweeney (1996:149-150).

[6] Kaiser (1981:143) and Becker (1997:21-60, esp. 59-60).

and each mouth is/was speaking foolishness.
For all this his anger did not abate,
still his hand is/was outstretched.
17 Wickedness burned like a fire,
which consumes briers and thorns.
It has set aflame the thickets of the forest,
and they whirl upward in a column of smoke.
18 The land was scorched by the wrath of YHWH of the hosts,
and the people became like fuel for the fire.
They do not spare one another.
19 They gorged on the right, but they were hungry (still),
they ate on the left, but they were not satisfied.
Everyone devours the flesh of his own arm/offspring*.
20 Manasseh (devours/devoured) Ephraim, and Ephraim Manasseh,
and both of them together against Judah.
For all this his anger did not abate,
still his hand is/was outstretched.

* Cf. BHS app.

The text

The poem in Isa 9:7-20 is held together by a refrain, appearing at regular intervals (vv. 11b, 16c, 20b). It has the character of a historical retrospect, concerned with the fate of the Northern Kingdom, Israel/Ephraim (initially, in v. 7, also referred to as Jacob).[7] The theme is divine punishment, taking the form of various national catastrophes. So far, all interpreters of the passage would probably agree. But what is the end of it? Does v. 20 really function as a suitable conclusion to the poem? One might expect that the series of disasters eventually should culminate in some kind of climax, proclaiming final and total doom and destruction. According to a widely accepted hypothesis, the original ending has been displaced (for one reason or other), and can now be found in 5:25 (with the same refrain).[8] This may very well be true. However, since we simply do not know whether there ever existed a text where the passages now known as 9:7-20 and 5:25 were united, and since the utterance in 5:25 does not contribute in any

[7] Cf., e.g., Sweeney (1996:192) and Blenkinsopp (2000:217-219).

[8] See, e.g., Clements (1980:66) and Blenkinsopp (2000:217). According to Wildberger (1972:208), it is not certain that the displaced fragment now found in 5:25 once concluded the historical retrospect in 9:7-20.

significant way to the characterization of Israel/Ephraim as an enemy, I prefer leaving 5:25 outside this analysis.

As the text now stands, the poem appears to continue in 10:1-4, since the refrain recurs in 10:4. However, as pointed out by many scholars, there are good reasons to regard this link between 9:7-20 and 10:1-4 as a late redactional arrangement.[9] As a consequence, I will not deal with the woe-saying in 10:1-4 (containing indictments directed against some anonymous group of corrupt oppressors) in connection with the analysis of 9:7-20.

Characterization

The description of Israel/Ephraim in Isa 9:7-20 is at one and the same time highly specific and quite general. With its repeated mentioning of Judah's northern neighbour state, making use of almost all available names (Israel in vv. 7, 11, 13; Ephraim in vv. 8, 20 [together with Manasseh]; Jacob in v. 7; Samaria in v. 8), and with its many allusions to various aspects of that nation's turbulent history during the 8th century BCE, this text cannot be made to apply to any other nation. Still, the characterization of Israel/Ephraim as an enemy state, which we come across here, is far from specific. The chief accusations that are directed against its people and its leaders concern their alleged arrogance (vv. 8-9), impiety (vv. 12, 16), and moral depravation, including cannibalism (vv. 16-19). A comparison with enemy images in extra-biblical texts shows that these are standard attributes. In the royal inscriptions from Assyria, in particular, the enemies are often claimed to be exceedingly pride and arrogant, putting their trust in their own strength and not in the gods.[10]

It is important to notice that the depiction of Ephraim/Israel in 9:7-20 says very little about the real causes of the conflict between the two neighbouring states. What appears to be the main issues, the allegations concerning arrogance and ungodliness, should—according to my analysis—not be viewed primarily as roots of the enmity, but rather as consequences from it. The underlying logic would seem to be: *Since the inhabitants and leaders of Israel/Ephraim are our enemies, they have to be proud and impious, because that is the true nature of any enemy*. In other circumstances (or, at least, in the modern world), the attitudes and actions referred to in v. 9—faith in the future, and willingness to rebuild—might have been esteemed as exemplary ways of handling a major catastrophe.[11] Here, however, these (self-)confident utterances are cited as evidence against the northerners, in order to prove that they are guilty of "pride and

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[9] See, e.g., Wildberger (1972:200, 207-208) and Clements (1980:66). Cf., however, Sweeney (1996:192-195), who outlines a modification of the established theory.

[10] See the studies by Fales (1982) and Zaccagnini (1982).

[11] As noted by Blenkinsopp (2000:218) and Clements (1980:67).

arrogance of mind" (v. 8). Not until v. 20, towards the very end of the unit, is the reader given a hint that aggression against Judah might be a major reason for condemning Israel/Ephraim.

The metaphors that are used to characterize Israel/Ephraim in this text tend to emphasize notions of passivity and weakness. In v. 14, the nation seems to be pictured first as an animal that is cut up (head and tail are separated from the body), and then as vegetation (palm trees and reeds) that is cut down. No signs of resistance. Likewise, the scenery in vv. 17-18 evokes *an image of utter helplessness*. Apparently, this description of a forest fire has more than one level. In v. 17a it is stated that what is burning is really "wickedness" (רשׁעה). What follows should therefore probably be interpreted as a metaphor for a state of moral corruption, and for its consequences. At another level, though, it can be taken literally, as referring to real vegetation. The only plants that are mentioned are "briers and thorns" (שׁמיר ושׁית), which suggests that the once fertile country, cursed by its divine protector, has been overgrown by weeds (cf. Isa 5:6, with the same expression). In v. 18, the metaphorical depiction takes a new turn. Here, the inhabitants of Israel/Ephraim are pictured as helpless victims, they are said to be "like fuel for the fire" (כמאכלת אשׁ). Thus, these victims (being "enemies") are *dehumanized and depersonalized*, and turned into an inanimate collective. Playing on two different notions conveyed by the fuel metaphor, namely usefulness and vulnerability, the utterance in v. 4 seems to convey the following message: In the end, due to their alleged wickedness (vv. 16-17), the people in Ephraim/Israel were only useful as means of their own destruction. Additional grim associations can be uncovered, when one recalls that the noun מאכל is related to the verb אכל, "eat." Hence, one might translate "*food* for the fire," the implication being that the poor inhabitants of Ephraim/Israel were at least good to eat. In this way, a link is created between the fire motif and the ensuing, and even more horrible, motif of cannibalism (v. 19). According to the author(s), then, the destruction of Israel/Ephraim should be regarded as well-deserved.

In this description of severe catastrophes, the author hardly expresses any sympathy with the suffering people of Israel/Ephraim. In my opinion, this *lack of compassion* for fellow human beings is one of the most striking features of Isa 9:7-20. After all, the inhabitants of the northern kingdom were not just Judah's neighbours—they were close relatives of the Judahites, as regards culture and religion. However, in this unsentimental and satirical discourse, the very act of suppressing emotions of empathy is sanctioned in the name of religion. According to v. 16, YHWH, the patron deity of Israel/Ephraim, would not even show mercy towards the most vulnerable groups of civilians, such as orphans and widows. Indeed, the idea behind vv. 16-20 seems to be that YHWH in his

anger brought about a state of corruption and confusion, of internal division and mutual hatred, which led to a chaotic, self-destructive, civil war.

As a noteworthy consequence of the ideology displayed in this discourse, Israel/Ephraim is in the first place depicted as an *enemy of YHWH* (vv. 7-19). Only secondarily, and almost in passing, is Ephraim placed in the category of Judah's enemies, as well (v. 20, where the mentioning of Manasseh together with Ephraim refers to internal division and strife within Israel). One should keep in mind that Israel was *Judah's equal and rival* in religious matters, since both states honoured YHWH as their national deity. According to the opinion held by the author(s)/editor(s) who created the poem in 9:7-20, YHWH had good reasons to withdraw all protection and blessing from the people of the Israel/Ephraim. With their arrogance, they had provoked the deity's anger. All disasters described in this discourse are interpreted as divine punishments. To make things worse, the leaders in Samaria had failed to draw the proper conclusions. Instead of promoting repentance, they had continued to neglect the cult of YHWH (v. 12). In this ideological scenario, where the northern neighbour nation is consistently viewed as an enemy of YHWH, those who attack Israel become YHWH's allies (or: instruments of his wrath). It is even claimed that the Philistines, the most legendary among Israel's archenemies, received support from YHWH (vv. 10-11). The same applies to the Arameans (and this is noteworthy, since Aram elsewhere in the book of Isaiah is referred to as Israel's coalition partner). Although not mentioned by name, Assyria should probably also be ranked among the enemies of Israel which, according to v. 10, acted on the command of YHWH. The threat posed by the Assyrian empire looms large in this survey on the final decades of the kingdom of Israel. And there is more to be said about the relation between Israel/Ephraim and Assyria in this text.

Adding the parts together, the portrait of Israel/Ephraim in 9:7-20 shows striking resemblances with depictions of Assyria in other parts of the book of Isaiah. Important ingredients making up the hostile image of Israel in 9:7-20—such as moral assessments made, or metaphors used—have close counterparts in chapter 10, where they are applied to the Assyrian empire. Thus, the expression used to describe the pride of the Israelites in 9:8, גדל לבב (literally, "greatness of heart," that is, haughtiness of the mind), recurs in the reference to Assyrian arrogance in 10:12. And the divine punishment against Ephraim/Israel is in 9:17-18 described (metaphorically) in terms of a devastating fire consuming briers and thorns, exactly as in 10:16-18, where Assyria is the victim of YHWH's punitive wrath. Thus, at some stage of the complex editorial process, a remarkable degree of analogy was achieved between Israel/Ephraim and Assyria. A major implication would seem to be that these two nations—in spite of huge differences in religion, culture, military strength, and strategic interests—are placed on the same level. According to the editorial perspective, Israel should not be granted

any privileged status, despite its cultural and religious affiliation with Judah. Acting as Judah's enemy, its arrogance equalled that of the Assyrians. And therefore, it deserved a similar divine punishment.

If my analysis of the poem in Isa 9:7-20 is correct, it is a piece of Jerusalemite anti-Samaria propaganda. This text addresses crucial ideological issues, such as competing claims of religious legitimation. It attempts to answer questions like the following: If the rulers in Judah and those in Israel/Ephraim had the same patron deity (YHWH), how could they be political enemies? How should the repeated catastrophes befalling the northern neighbour be explained? If Israel/Ephraim was protected by YHWH, how could it be defeated? Would not this indicate that YHWH was unable to withstand the gods of other nations (Assyria) and, hence, that Jerusalem might fall into the hands of attacking forces, exactly as Samaria? According to the perspective taken by the author(s)/editor(s) of 9:7-20, YHWH was not overcome by other deities. On the contrary, YHWH was the protagonist, causing all calamities that had afflicted Ephraim/Israel. The leaders in Samaria claimed that they had YHWH on their side, but because of their arrogance, they were targets of YHWH's punitive wrath.

Contextualization

As mentioned above, Isa 9:7-20 can be categorized as a historical retrospect. It covers major events in the history of the kingdom of Israel, during the second half of the 8th century BCE.[12] In addition, however, the passage can be classified as a piece of anti-Israelite propaganda, directed against the leaders in Samaria. With several other commentators, I think it was composed prior to the fall of Samaria in 722 (an event to which the text does not seem to allude).[13]

Isa 17:1-6

17:1 An oracle (concerning) Damascus.
Behold, Damascus will cease to be a city,
and will become a heap of ruins.
2 The cities of Aroer (will be) deserted,a

[12] For details, see Wildberger (1972:207-222), Clements (1980:66-69), and Blenkinsopp (2000:217-219).

[13] With Wildberger (1972:210-212), Clements (1980:67), and Sweeney (1996:193-196). According to Blenkinsopp (2000:207-208), this passage shows literary dependence on some early collection of the oracles of Amos. However, Blenkinsopp apparently dates Isa 9:7-20 to the 8th century.

they will become (places) for herds.
They will lie down, and no one will frighten (them).
3 The fortress will disappear from Ephraim,
and the kingdom from Damascus.
The remnant of Aram will be like the glory of the Israelites.
A word of YHWH of the hosts.
4 On that day
the glory/weight of Jacob will diminish,
and the fat of his flesh will waste away.
5 It will be as when a reaper* gathers standing grain,
and his arm harvests the ears;
as when one gleans the ears of grain
in the Valley of Rephaim.
6 (Only) gleanings will be left in it,
as when one beats an olive tree:
Two or three berries on the very top,
four or five on its fruitful boughs.
A word of YHWH, the God of Israel.

* Cf. BHS app.
a Or: "its/her cities will be deserted forever," see BHS app. However, Blenkinsopp (2000:302, 304) has argued that MT:s reference to Aroer would make perfect sense in an 8th century setting.

The text
Placed in the midst of a collection of oracles against other nations (chs. 13–23), the passage 17:1-11 has been provided with a heading that describes it as "an oracle concerning Damascus" (Damascus standing, one may infer, metonymically for the entire kingdom of Aram). This designation is, however, misleading, since the prophecy that follows is concerned with both Israel/Ephraim and Aram. On a closer examination, 17:1-11 consists of a string of loosely attached sayings (note the "on that day" formula in vv. 4, 7, and 9!). Within this conglomerate, only the first major section, vv. 1-6, contains enemy images of interest for the present study.[14] This smaller unit consists of two separate announcements of disaster, comprising vv. 1b-3 and 4-6, which have been conjoined, perhaps via the principle of catchword connection (כבוד in vv. 3 and 4).[15] While the

[14] A dividing line should clearly be drawn between vv 1-6 and 7-11. See Wildberger (1978:639) and Clements (1980:156-157).
[15] On the subdivision into vv 1-3 and 4-6, see Wildberger (1978:639) and Blenkinsopp (2000:303).

first saying (vv. 1b-3) deals chiefly (but not exclusively) with the fate of Damascus/Aram, the second (vv. 4-6)—which will be the primary object of the ensuing analysis—appears to focus solely on Israel/Ephraim (here called Jacob).

Characterization

In the short announcement of disaster that opens this passage, comprising 17:1b-3, the fates of Aram and Israel (and of their capitals, Damascus and Samaria) appear to be closely connected to each other—as elsewhere in the book of Isaiah (7:1-9; 8:4). The message seems to be that, since these two nations (at least for a while, in the 730s BCE) formed a coalition—primarily directed against Assyria, but also, indirectly, against Judah—they were not only worthy of similar depictions, but bound to face a common destiny. Here, in vv. 1b-3, this message is conveyed by standard depictions of destruction, such as the great city becoming a desolated heap of ruins (v. 1b). In the following oracle, vv. 4-6, dealing exclusively with Israel/Ephraim, more vivid enemy images are found. The analysis will focus on them.

Far from being just a matter of poetic variation, the occurrence of the name 'Jacob' in 17:4 deserves special attention. It is uncertain whether an allusion is made to events or character traits associated with the eponymous hero. However, functioning as the name of an individual, 'Jacob' here indicates that the northern neighbour state is being personified. In the context of enemy images, *personification of a nation contributes, paradoxically, to the process of depersonalization*. All individuals in the hostile nation are treated as one collective entity, as one 'person', without any differentiation regarding responsibility for political decisions, etc. In this case, the nation of Israel/Ephraim is pictured as a man losing weight, presumably due to some kind of disease. In order to understand this metaphor correctly, we need to grasp one important presupposition (which is incompatible with the ideals propagated by health authorities, and commercial advertisements, in our own time): In the world of the biblical authors and their addressees, corpulence was regarded as an outward sign of both health and wealth. A fat person was enviable, and most certainly blessed by his/her god. Here, in v. 4, personified Israel (Jacob) is portrayed as unhealthily thin and weak, perhaps even dying. Hence, this 'Jacob' (in contrast to the hero and receiver of blessings known from the stories in Genesis) appears to be a weak man, stricken by some kind of curse.

There is more to be said about the metaphor used in 17:4. It revolves around the multiple connotations attached to the concept of כבוד (*kābôd*). Whereas the depiction in v. 4b exploits the potential of one particular sense, namely 'weight', the statement in 4a, "the כבוד of Jacob will diminish" probably alludes to almost all available senses of כבוד: glory, honour, majesty, wealth, etc. The man losing weight serves, I suggest, as a metaphor for a nation losing all its manifestations

of ‘glory’: flourishing agriculture, economical growth, architectural splendour, military strength, political power, and sovereignty.

After v. 4, the personification is dropped. It is replaced by agricultural imagery. In the pair of harvest metaphors that dominate the continuation of the oracle, the inhabitants of Israel/Ephraim are pictured first as grain (v. 5), and then as olives (v. 6). In both cases, the activity of gleaning is described. However, the main focus is not placed on the gleaners or their work, but on the result. When the ears of grain have been gleaned, almost nothing remains.[16] Likewise, when one has beaten the branches of the olive trees, only very few berries are left. It is not difficult to grasp this oracle’s message concerning the fate of Israel/Ephraim: a coming catastrophe (most probably a military invasion) will almost wipe out its population. How does the harvest imagery contribute to the characterization of Israel/Ephraim? I suggest that it stresses notions of helplessness and passivity. Like ears of grain, or berries on a branch, the inhabitants of Israel will be unable to defend themselves. In other contexts, the images of standing grain and ripe olives might convey other notions, such as utility (grain was a major source of survival) and desirability (olive oil was a cherished produce). However, in this context, all positive values usually associated with harvesting grain and olives seem to be efficiently suppressed.

Despite shifting imagery, the passage 17:4-6 is held together by the recurring theme of sudden, drastic loss. Soon and very soon, Israel/Ephraim will lose everything: its power and wealth, along with substantial parts of its population. By means of various metaphors (a sick person, gleaned grain, beaten olives), *the northern neighbour is consistently portrayed as a weak and helpless enemy*. However, the formulation of the threat against it—that it is about to lose its כבוד—gives *a glimpse of a radically different image* of this kingdom, one associated with glory and power. The image of Israel/Ephraim contained in this text can thus be described as rather complex, since the very insistency on future weakness seems to imply actual strength. Because of the satirical tone, and the absence of any expression of sympathy with the victims, I do not hesitate to use the label enemy image here. Still, one should notice that this enemy image is deficit. Important ingredients are missing. No accusations are made, no reasons are given why the people of Israel/Ephraim had to be punished in this way. Indeed, it is not even stated explicitly that the coming catastrophe should be regarded as a divine punishment. But the reader is certainly expected to infer that much. In a last stroke of irony, the concluding formula, stating that this

[16] With Wildberger (1978:647-649). The point made by these metaphors is about massive destruction, not about the miraculous salvation of a chosen minority. It is therefore surprising that Blenkinsopp (2000:304) speaks of “the idea of a faithful remnant” in his comment on v 5.

oracle emanated from YHWH, uses the epithet “God of *Israel*” (v. 6b). For the editor responsible for v. 6b this could, I suggest, be a way of saying: The enemies in and around Samaria are cursed by YHWH. They have lost their right to call themselves “Israel.”[17] *The true centre of Israel is not Samaria, but Jerusalem.*

Contextualization

With several other commentators, I regard an 8th century setting for the two oracles analyzed above, 17:1-3, 4-6, as the most likely option. A date prior to the fall of Samaria in 722 seems preferable.[18] However, the combination of these two oracles into one unit may be due to a later redactional arrangement.[19]

Isa 28:1-4

28:1 Woe to the proud crown/garland of the drunkards of Ephraim,
and to the fading flower of his/its beautiful ornament,
which is on the head of a fertile valley,
of those overcome with wine.
2 See, the Lord has one who is powerful and strong.
Like a hailstorm, a destructive tempest,
like a storm of mighty, overflowing waters,
he will hurl (it? them?) down to the earth with violence.a
3 It will be trampled underfoot,
the proud crown/garland of the drunkards of Ephraim.
4 And the fading flower of its beautiful ornament,
which is on the head of a fertile valley,
will be like an early fig before the summer:
Whoever sees it swallows it,
as soon as it is in his hand.

a Literally: with (his) hand.

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[17] Cf. similarly Wildberger (1978:649).

[18] With Clements (1980:156-7), Sweeney (1996:259-261), and Blenkinsopp (2000:303-304). According to Kaiser, both 17:1-3 and 17:4-6 should be dated to the Hellenistic period. However, he fails to produce conclusive arguments for this position. Becker (1997:282) dates the core of 17:1-3 (vv 1b + 3) to the 8th century.

[19] The “on that day” formula in v 4 was probably added in this redactional process. See Wildberger (1978:640, 646).

The text

Within the unit 28:1-6, vv. 5-6 are easily recognized as a later addition.[20] The original oracle, comprising 28:1-4, can be categorized as an announcement of disaster, introduced by a woe-exclamation (cf. 18:1-6).

Characterization

The characterization of Ephraim/Israel in this woe oracle is dominated by an exceptionally enigmatic, complex and multi-layered metaphor, which is presented immediately at the outset (v. 1), and then repeated almost *verbatim* in vv. 3b-4a. The announcement of disaster in vv. 2-3a is thus sandwiched between more or less identical depictions of ornaments, fading flowers, and fertile valleys. The repetition does not, however, create a sense of redundancy, since the metaphor is given an unexpected twist in v. 4b. But how should this dominating metaphor be interpreted? How does it contribute to the overall portrayal of the northern neighbour state in the book of Isaiah? And how does it relate to the depiction in vv. 2-3a of an anonymous attacker, an "enemy of the enemy," at YHWH's disposal?[21]

One of the difficulties involved in the interpretation of the metaphorical depiction in v. 1 (which continues in vv. 3b-4a) concerns its topic.[22] It seems to oscillate between the city of Samaria and its population. This problem is especially connected to the parallel expressions עטרת גאות ("proud crown/garland") and צבי תפארתו ("his/its beautiful ornament"). As indicated in the translation above, the lexeme עטרה can denote either "crown" or "garland." Which sense does it convey in this context? Perhaps both. In my view, this looks like an advanced case of *double entendre*. At first, in v. 1aα, the people—or, perhaps more likely, the leaders—of Ephraim/Israel are apparently depicted as a company of notorious drunkards, adorned with garlands, perhaps for some festivity. The image of people indulging in excessive wine-drinking recurs in 1bβ. We are not told what they are supposed to be celebrating (if there is a celebration at all), but we get information about one detail: the "fading flower (ציץ נבל)" (v. 1aβ). In this portrait, the element of satire is palpable. The people/leaders of Samaria are depicted as drunkards, decorated with withering

[20] See, e.g., Wildberger (1982:1044) and Clements (1980:224-225).

[21] Cf. the discussion of 28:2-4 in the concluding section of chapter 2.2. above.

[22] The difficulties involved can be illustrated by the fact that Bäckersten (2007:28-40), using a similar method, offers an interpretation of the metaphors in 28:1-4 which differs in several respects from the one outlined here.

flowers. But one might ask whether inebriety really is the issue here.[23] To begin with, it is important to notice that the ornament they carry is said to be a "crown/garland of pride (עטרת גאות)" (v. 1aα). This formulation might indicate that the chief accusation directed against the leaders in Samaria concerns their pride, rather than their drinking habits. Insobriety could be an apt metaphor for self-indulgence, folly, and confusion. Hence, it is possible that the leaders of Israel/Ephraim here are pictured as intoxicated by their arrogance. A further note may be added on the choice of the motif of wine-drinking. A number of biblical texts indicate that there was a conventional association between the vine and the kingdom of Israel, perhaps to the extent that the vine may be regarded as a national symbol.[24] Excessive wine-drinking could therefore be seen as an especially appropriate ingredient in an attack on the national pride of the northern neighbour. *The nation with the vine as its symbol is here pictured as a company of degenerated drunkards*.

In v. 1ba, a new dimension is added, as we learn that the "beautiful ornament" is placed "on the head (ראשׁ) of a fertile valley." This phrase evokes a visual impression of the city of Samaria, viewed from a distance. Situated in the midst of a mountaineous region, and close to a fertile valley, Samaria might be described exactly in this way: as some kind of ornament placed upon a head (ראשׁ), i.e. on a mountain top.[25] Having arrived thus far, then, the reader will have to reconsider the contextual meaning of עטרה. Since the topic has changed, from the people/leaders to the city itself, the sense 'crown' suddenly demands priority. Firstly, there is arguably a perceptible resemblance, in terms of geometrical shape, between a royal crown and a city encircled by walls. And secondly, the metaphor "a city is (like) a crown" was probably well known to the first readers of this text. As shown by Mark Biddle, this metaphor is attested in both Mesopotamian and biblical texts.[26] Moreover, the "mural crown," as a way of representing a city (and its religious significance), was a frequent motif

[23] It has been forcefully argued by Bäckersten (2007:26-36) that the motif of drunkenness here is used as a metaphor. Hence, it is not the topic of this passage.

[24] See Ps 80:9-12; Isa 5:1-7; Hos 10:1.

[25] Quite possibly, there is an allusion here to a conventional metaphor, of a country's capital (capit-al) as the head (ראשׁ) of the nation's body (cf. Isa 7:8-9). In this case, however, the capital city appears rather to be likened to an object placed upon someone's head.

[26] See Biddle (1991:178-185). He lists Sumerian and Akkadian quotations (1991:178). The biblical texts cited by Biddle (1991:183-185) are primarily drawn from prophetical books (e.g., Jer 13:18-21 and Ezek 21:25-27). Two passages from the book of Isaiah, viz. Isa 54:11-13 and 62:1-5, are discussed by Biddle. In both cases, Jerusalem is likened to a royal crown, or a valuable jewel. The image of Samaria in Isa 28:1-4 is only briefly mentioned by Biddle (1991:185).

in glyptic art from various parts of the Ancient Near East.[27] However, in the case of Isa 28:1, the author's purpose is hardly to praise the beauty of Samaria, or to assert that the city was under divine protection. On the contrary, the complex syntactical arrangement results in a depiction drenched with irony. In a kind of double exposure, the true nature of the crown, representing the city, is revealed: It is just a garland with fading flowers.

How should the multi-layered metaphor in v. 1 be interpreted? Although every paraphrase inevitably says both too little and too much, I will make an attempt. The leaders in Samaria are arrogant fools, acting like drunkards. Because of their arrogance, YHWH has withdrawn his protection. Despite its city walls, Samaria will fall. Its beauty will soon be gone, like a fading flower.

In the lines that follow, vv. 2-3, the focus shifts. Here the action of an anonymous attacker (Assyria) is described, with the help of inundation imagery.[28] This depiction of a violent invasion army, crushing everything in their way, contains an indirect portrait of Israel/Ephraim, and its subdued population, as utterly passive and helpless. The image of Samaria and its citizens as a garland/crown is reintroduced in v. 3b, but now as an object that can be thrown away (v. 2b) and trampled upon (3a).

Yet another transition takes place in v. 4, where it is said that the "fading flower" will become "like an early fig before the summer." Apparently, such figs would mean an irresistible temptation to anyone who happened to discover them. This fig metaphor has an interesting intertextual connection to a passage in the book of Hosea. In Hos 9:10, YHWH is said to have "found" Israel, or its "fathers," "like grapes in the desert," or "like early figs on the fig tree."[29] The parallels between Hos 9:10a and Isa 28:4b are obvious: A passer-by is attracted by the delicious early figs.[30] Yet the contrast is stark. If the simile in Hosea tells a story about divine election, the simile in Isa 28:4 seems to declare that Israel/Ephraim has been abandoned by its patron deity, YHWH. As a consequence, Samaria will be an easy victim for any army (e.g., the Assyrian) that "passes by." And it will all happen very quickly, as when one picks a fig and then, without pausing to think it over, just swallows it.

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[27] The evidence adduced by Biddle (1991:179) includes Mesopotamian and Hittite iconographical material. The "mural crown" was often placed on the head of a city goddess. According to Biddle, this motif symbolized the allegedly divine status of a certain city.

[28] See further the analysis of 28:2-4 above, in the concluding section of chapter 2.2.

[29] For an extensive commentary on the imagery in Hos 9:10a, see Eidevall (1996:149-151).

[30] Cf. similarly Beuken (2000:28).

This text's portrait of Israel/Ephraim is heavily *satirical*. The opening woe-cry sounds more scornful than sad. The leaders in Samaria are ridiculed, pictured as delirious drunkards. However, the message intended is hardly that one should abstain from wine. It is rather something like "pride goes before a fall." Arrogance, I suggest, is here regarded as the main reason why Israel/Ephraim deserved to be punished by YHWH (using the Assyrians as his instrument). Once again, while the main emphasis lies on the swift and encompassing destruction of the northern neighbour state, there is no sign of compassion for the victims.[31] However, the metaphors used are not of a completely negative character. Repeatedly, they seem to ascribe such qualities as beauty, attraction, and desirability to Israel/Ephraim and/or its capital Samaria. This could, of course, be a way of indicating the width of the extent of the catastrophe. But this positive aspect of the characterization could perhaps also be seen as a symptom of the author's *deep ambivalence* towards the "enemies" in Samaria. In several respects, after all, they could be seen as close relatives.

Contextualization

The anti-Samarian oracle in 28:1-4 is usually dated to the 8th century. Some scholars defend a date shortly before the fall of Samaria in 722 BCE.[32] Blenkinsopp prefers a setting in the last decade of the 8th century, when the province of Samerina participated in the anti-Assyrian uprisings in the region.[33] According to Kaiser, features like the use of garlands indicate a date during the Hellenistic era.[34] However, Kaiser's arguments fail to convince me.[35] As argued by Vermeylen, 28:1-4 may rather have been slightly reworked in the post-exilic period, in the course of an anti-Samaritan recension.[36] At any rate, it is likely that these words achieved renewed actuality in the Hellenistic era, in the context of the so-called Samaritan schism. Blenkinsopp has outlined a number of conceivable recontextualizations of Isa 28:1-4 as follows: "It may be readily admitted that anti-Samarian diatribe originating in the eighth century Judah would have been reread with reference to the Samaria of the Sanballat dynasty,

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[31] Cf. the analysis of 17:1-6 above.

[32] Thus, e.g., Wildberger (1982:1045-1046) and Clements (1980:224).

[33] Blenkinsopp (2000:387).

[34] Kaiser (1983:189-190). Kaiser speaks of the eschatological, even proto-apocalyptical, character of 28:1-4. In my opinion, such a classification is only valid for the addition in 28:5-6.

[35] For a pointed critique of Kaiser's argumentation, see Blenkinsopp (2000:387).

[36] See Vermeylen (1977:386-388).

opponents of Judah in the Achaemenid period and, later still, in the light of Judean-Samaritan hostility in the Hasmonean period."[37]

3.2. Images of Edom

Isa 34:1-17

34:1 Draw near, nations, to listen! Peoples, pay attention!
Let the earth and what fills it hear, the world and what comes from it!
2 For YHWH is enraged against all the nations, and furious at all their hosts.
He has devoted them to destruction, destined them for slaughter.
3 Their slain will be thrown out, and the stench will rise from their corpses.
The mountains will melt with their blood.
4 All the heavenly host will rot, and the skies will be rolled up like a scroll.
All their host will wither away, like a leaf that withers from the vine,
like (a fruit) that withers from the fig tree.

5 "My sword is seena in the skies.
See, it will descend upon Edom, for judgement,
upon the people I have doomed to destruction.
6 YHWH has a sword, it is full of blood, gorged with fat,
with the blood of lambs and goats, with the fat from the kidneys of rams.
For YHWH has a sacrifice in Bozrah, a great slaughter in the land of Edom.
7 Wild oxen will go down with them,
young steers together with mighty bulls (or: mighty ones).
Their land will be soaked with blood, their soil saturated with fat.
8 For YHWH has a day of vengeance,
a year of recompense for Zion's cause.
9 Its/her (Edom's) streams will be turned into pitch, its soil into brimstone,
its land will become burning pitch.
10 Night and day it will not be quenched,
its smoke will go up forever.
From generation to generation it will lie waste,

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[37] Blenkinsopp (2000:387).

forever and ever no one shall pass through it.
11 The pelicanb and the bitternb will possess it,
owlb and raven will dwell in it.
He will stretch the measuring line of chaos over it,
and the weights of emptiness.
12 Its nobles ...c
They shall proclaim no kingdom there, and all its princes will become nothing.
13 Thorns will grow in its palaces, nettles and thistles in its fortresses.
It will become the haunt of jackals, an abode for ostriches.
14 Desert animals will meet with hyenas, goat-demons will cry to each other.
There also Lilith will settle, and find for herself a resting place.
15 There the arrow snakeb will nest and lay eggs,
she will brood and hatch in its shade.
There too the kites will gather, each with its mate.

16 Consult the book of YHWH, and read:
Not one of these will be missing, none of them without its mate,
for the mouth of YHWH has commanded, and his spirit has gathered them.
17 He has cast the lot for them,
his hand has distributed it to them with the measuring line.
Forever they will possess it, from generation to generation they will dwell there.

a Reading תראה with 1QIsa; MT has רותה, "is sated."
b Translation uncertain.
c Words missing? See BHS app.

The text
Within the present shape of the book of Isaiah, chapters 34 and 35 form a diptych.[38] However, this does not necessarily entail shared authorship. According to Beuken, these two chapters were brought together in the course of the final redaction of BI.[39] As regards the structure of 34:1-17, I suggest a tripartite division: vv. 1-4 // 5-15 // 16-17.[40] The central section (vv. 5-15), containing an announcement of disaster directed against Edom, is thus framed by a prologue (vv. 1-4) and an epilogue (vv. 16-17). In the epilogue, v. 16, with

[38] Cf. Blenkinsopp (2000:450) and Childs (2001:253, 255-256).
[39] Beuken (2000:283-285).
[40] Cf. similarly Wildberger (1982:1333).

its peculiar perspective and its reference to "the book of YHWH" (= the book of Isaiah?), looks like a later addition.[41]

Characterization

Despite the fact that the description of Edom's fate in Isa 34:5-15 is rich in details (and some of these details are quite gruesome), one of the most striking aspects of the enemy image in this text is what is missing. *Virtually nothing is said about the attitude and behaviour of the Edomite people*, or their leaders. No attributes are attached to them, no charges or allegations are put forward. In other words, it is difficult to detect any instances of explicit characterization of the enemy. However, this does not mean than that the text does not contain any characterization at all. Somehow, this prediction of an environmental disaster conjures up an image not only of the Edomite territory, but of its (former) inhabitants. One might perhaps speak of *an indirect mode of characterization*, where various aspects on different levels—such as, the choice of metaphors, other rhetorical devices, and intertextual markers— evoke a set of associations that may shape an enemy image in the mind of the reader. In the following analysis, I will discuss some such aspects of the indirect characterization of Edom in Isa 34, starting with the prologue in vv. 1-4.

The opening panorama view provided by 34:1-4, with its worlwide outlook, is followed by a close-up shot, showing us the place of the ensuing drama: Edom (v. 5). According to this analysis, the main function of the apocalyptic scenario in vv. 1-4 is to set the stage for the divine attack on Edom, which is launched in v. 5. Although the reader at first gets the impression that all nations are doomed, the implementation of the sentence turns out to be limited to only one of them (but the immediate and severe punishment of Edom is probably meant as a warning to the rest of them, since in v. 1 all nations are summoned to listen and learn).[42] Exactly as in Isaiah 13, then, where the name of the enemy is

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[41] For somewhat divergent evaluations of v 16, see Wildberger (1982:1332), Blenkinsopp (2000:454), Beuken (2000:287-290), and Childs (2001:257).

[42] The analysis presented here coincides largely with the position of Wildberger (1982:1331-1332), who refers to Duhm for a similar understanding of the function of 34:1-4 in relation to 34:5-15. According to Wildberger (1982:1341), the opening address in v 1 should be understood as a summons to the nations to gather and witness the destruction of Edom, carried out as an act of divine judgement. On the whole, I find Wildberger's arguments convincing. Still, I believe his analysis needs to be supplemented, concerning the role of the nations. They are not merely witnesses—they are also being charged. As pointed out by Beuken (2000:284), the judgement is "intended as a lesson for the nations." Hence, the punishment of Edom "serves as a warning to all the nations that YHWH exercises power over them" (2000:284). Cf. the similar analysis presented by Sweeney (1996:438-444). However, when it comes to the overall

Babylon, an announcement of disaster concerning one specific nation is prefaced by a passage depicting a judgement scene of apparently universal scope. In both cases, the effect of this "cosmic contextualizing"[43] is a heightened focus on the culpability of the named adversary (Babylon in ch. 13, here: Edom). Among all the nations of the world, one is singled out as the primary target of YHWH's wrath. Why? The implication seems to be that this special treatment is motivated by sinfulness of an extraordinary degree. Hence, in ch. 34 Edom stands out as *the very epitome of evil*, a close analogy to the role of Babylon in ch. 13. The aforementioned connection between chs. 13 and 34 is strengthened by a number of lexical and thematic links.[44] Hence, there can be no dubt that the author(s) of Isaiah 34 regarded Edom as Babylon's successor, in one important respect: To them, Edom was the enemy *par excellence*.[45]

In vv. 5-15, and especially in vv. 5-10, the main topic is the total destruction of Edom. Even trained scholars have been appalled by these grotesquely horrific pictures of a great massacre and a huge ecological catastrophe, featuring soil

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understanding of Isaiah 34, I disagree with Sweeney. While I regard vv 1-4 as a prologue, introducing the punishment of Edom as the main theme of the discourse, Sweeney (1996:438-444) evidently wants to have it the other way round: "Contrary to common opinion, the object of this passage is not the judgment of Edom but YHWH's capacity to judge the world at large" (1996:444). Thus, the vivid depiction of Edom's destruction is reduced to the status of an instructive example which illustrates some general principle. However, as I see it, Sweeney's conclusion is to some extent undermined by his own analysis, since he demonstrates that there were strong reasons for picking out Edom, and that several features in the description in vv 5-15 seem to have been designed for an oracle against exactly that nation. See Sweeney (1996:444-446). In other words, Edom was not a random choice. According to the author(s)/editor(s) of Isaiah 34, and to several other biblical writers in the post-exilic period, it was *the* enemy. This is, correctly, emphasized by Beuken (2000:286). However, Beuken's analysis is blurred by his insistence that "the role of Edom is both symbolic and concrete" (2000:285), and that "Edom no longer represents herself alone" (2000:286).

[43] Blenkinsopp (2000:452) uses the term "cosmic contextualizing" to descibe the stylistic and structural phenomenon represented by Isa 34:1-4 (in relation to vv 5-15), listing further examples within the book of Isaiah: 13:1-13; 24:1-6; 30:27-28.

[44] See Sweeney (1996:443) and Vermeylen (1977:440-441). Cf. also Blenkinsopp (2000:451). One of the most conspicuous correspondences concerns the lists of future inhabitants of the desolated country. The creatures (animals and demons) enumerated in 34:13-15 are thus almost identical with those mentioned in 13:21-22. Note also the link (*qippºd*) between 34:11 and 14:23 (another depiction of ruined Babylon). Cf. Beuken (2000:300).

[45] In the words of Beuken (2000:284), "the identity of the enemy of God's people underwent a typological shift from Babylon, which is characterised as such in ch. 13, to Edom."

soaked with blood and a landscape covered by burning pitch.[46] Indeed, the very vehemence of the depiction brings about a kind of indirect characterization of the destested enemy. There is a certain element of "overkill," a sense of redundancy arising from the accumulation of extreme exaggerations, such as the notions of eternal fire and absolute, everlasting absence of human beings (v. 10). It is a relevant readerly question to ask: "What on earth did the Edomites do, in order to deserve this?" Although indirect incrimination seems to be the principal strategy adopted by the author(s), it is perhaps possible to detect a concrete accusation in v. 8. According to a plausible reading of v. 8b, a reason is given for YHWH's desire for revenge and retribution: "Zion's cause (ריב ציון)" (reading with MT). This could be taken as an allusion to the Edomites' allegedly reprehensible attitudes and/or actions in connection with the Babylonian capture and pillage of Jerusalem in 587 BCE (cf. Ps 137:7; Obad 10-14).[47] However, the expression ריב ציון could also refer more generally to any injury done to "Zion," standing as a metonymy for the people of YHWH. From a Jerusalemite perspective, the well-attested Edomite infiltration into (or, occupation of) the eastern Negeb (eventually resulting in the province of Idumaea) certainly counted as a severe violation of Judean territorial interests.[48] In my opinion, this longstanding territorial dispute can be seen as an essential backdrop to the depictions in 34:11-15. However, before commenting further on vv. 11-15, I

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[46] See Pope (1998:205-210), who explicitly expresses his moral indignation. Cf. also the evaluative comments made by scholars like Blenkinsopp (2000:450-453), Kaiser (1983:281), and Wildberger (1982:1350-1351).

[47] So far, there exists no conclusive evidence concerning the (active or passive) role(s) played by the Edomites in the destruction of Jerusalem around the year 587 BCE. Did they merely stand by as spectators exhibiting malicious joy (Ps 137:7; Obad 12), or did they partake actively in the plundering of the city and the temple (as indicated by Obad 13, and explicitly maintained in 1 Esd 4:45)? Did the Edomites give shelter to refugees from Judah (as one may deduce from Jer 40:11), and/or did some of them take advantage of the fugitives (Obad 14)? See the discussion in Bartlett (1989:151-157). According to Bartlett (1989:157), "Edom cannot be held responsible" for the destruction of Jerusalem. Others conclude, contrariwise, that Edomites participated actively in the plundering. Thus, e.g., Cresson (1972:143-144) and Glazier-McDonald (1995:28-29). Cf. also Wildberger (1982:1337-1338).

[48] The gradual process of Edomite penetration into the Negeb appears to have begun in the 7th century BCE. On the archeological evidence, see Beth Arieh (1995). Due to pressure from Arabian tribes, Edomite westward migration was intensified in the centuries that followed. By the end of the 4th century BCE, the Nabateans were in control of Petra and the heartland of the former kingdom of Edom. As a consequence, the geographical label Edom was transferred to the new homeland of the Edomites, Idumaea. See Bartlett (1989:140-174), Blenkinsopp (2000:452-453), Cresson (1972:132-133, 145), Edelman (1995b:5-11), and Wildberger (1982:1335-1338).

will discuss the following aspects of the depictions in vv. 5-10: (a) the function of the *chērem* (חרם) motif in v. 5, (b) the possible ambiguity or metaphoricity of the animal terms in vv. 6-7, and (c) the intertextual ramifications of vv. 9-10.

On two occasions, this prophetical discourse alludes to the ancient war practice of *chērem*, the "ban," which meant a radical renunciation of the taking of booty. Above all, it meant that all defeated enemies had to be killed (everyone, without exception), because they had been "devoted to destruction"—that is, consecrated as a gift to the deity of the winning side.[49] This motif is introduced already in v. 2, where it is said that YHWH has devoted all nations to destruction. In v. 5, the scope of the divinely decreed extermination is considerably narrowed. Edom is here referred to as עם חרמי, "the people of my חרם—i.e., the people that YHWH has selected as victims of the planned massacre. Now, the notion of annihilation could be expressed in other ways. Why is this specialized term employed? What aspects of the *chērem* motif are possibly being alluded to in this context? How does this effect the image of Edom?

It is important to notice that Isaiah 34 cannot be read as a call for military action. No human agent is mentioned, only the sword of YHWH (vv. 5, 6). Nevertheless, some reflections on the function of the *chērem* motif in war contexts can be brought to bear on the ideological dimension of the text. In order to avoid misunderstandings, I would like to point out that the following argumentation does not presuppose that the Israelites practised the "ban" on any historical occasion. My considerations rest solely on matters of intertextuality and the history of traditions. To begin with, the notion of חרם can be seen as an intertextual link to the conquest traditions in the book of Joshua, implying that *the Edomites now will have to play the part of the Canaanites*. In other words, their removal (or, rather, annihilation) would then be regarded as a prerequisite for the implementation of YHWH's plan. In the context of actual warfare, the ideology attached to the practice of the "ban" would probably serve an important *legitimizing* function. Since the military order to commit a massacre rested on a holy oath, it was not negotiable. What might look like an act of savagery was,

[49] The traditional translation "ban" is thus somewhat inadequate. For an insightful discussion of the sense of the Hebrew noun חֵרֶם and of the related verb חרם, with an extensive survey of the use of these lexemes in various biblical texts, see Lohfink (1986). In many of the cases reported in the Deuteronomistic History, both human beings and animals were killed, and thereafter burned together with the material booty. In some cases, though, valuable property was transferred to the temple treasury (Josh 6:19). However, the חרם texts in the Deuteronomistic History may to a large extent be fictional rather than factual. On the historical and hermenutical problems involved, see Collins (2003:4-14) and Lüdemann (1997:36-54). Cf. also Niditch (1993).

according to this ideology, really an act of devotion, almost like a sacrifice.[50] Thus, it is conceivable that the concept of חרם could function as a factor that, on a psychological level, facilitated the killing of defenceless civilians—an act that most soldiers otherwise would find repulsive. Although the prophetical discourse in Isaiah 34 appears to be far removed from the realities of the battlefield, the *chērem* motif seems to serve a similar function here. According to the text's ideology, the massacre on Edomites should not be seen as murder, but as a commendable act. *The key lies*, as always, *in the process of de-humanizing the enemy*. If the "others" are declared to be property of the deity, it becomes possible to regard them not as individuals, but rather as things, as tabooed objects that must be destroyed. Above all, however, the *chērem* ideology would seem to erase the dividing line between human beings and (other) animals, since they are all to be slaughtered in the same way. This leads over to a discussion of the slaughter/sacrifice scenery depicted in vv. 6-7. Some of the animal terms occurring in vv. 6-7 (עתוד, איל, אביר) could also be used to designate human leaders.[51] Hence, it is possible that the slaughter scene should be interpreted as a metaphorical depiction of a massacre on the ruling élite in Edom.[52] Alternatively, the author envisioned a bloodbath, where no distinction between human and animal victims was made.[53]

From v. 9 and onwards, the focus lies on the total devastation of the land of Edom. In vv. 9-10a, one can hardly fail to notice the allusions to the Sodom and Gomorrah tradition. The essential ingredients are there: the overturning (הפך), the brimstone, the fire and the rising smoke (cf. Gen 19:24-25, 29; Deut 29:22).[54] In this way, the enormous extent of the impending catastrophe is indicated. In addition, an incriminating analogy is implied: *Edomites are just like Sodomites*.

The ensuing depiction of a depopulated country (in vv. 10b-11, 13-15), haunted by animals associated with uncivilized regions and by demons, recalls the description of decivilized Babylon in 13:20-22.[55] One might speak of *a particular type of "demonization"* here: The land of the enemies is pictured as the abode of demons. It is perhaps even possible to detect a sinister pun in v. 14: Edom, frequently referred to as שׂעיר, Seir, (see, e.g., Gen 32:3), will henceforth

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[50] A distinction should, however, be made between *"´rem* and sacrifice proper. In support of such a distinction, Lohfink (1986:184) refers to 1 Sam 15:15-23. Later on he concludes: "The 'sacred' is thus a kind of countersphere to the *"´rem*" (1986:184).

[51] Cf. the entries for these lexemes in a Hebrew dictionary.

[52] Cf. the Targum. See also Beuken (2000:296).

[53] Thus Blenkinsopp (2000:452).

[54] Cf. Beuken (2000:284, 298-299).

[55] See the detailed discussion in Beuken (2000:300).

be the place where שעיר, a hairy goat-demon, "cries to his neighbour" (according to a more literal translation than the one given above). In addition, the theme of dehumanizing the enemy is given yet another twist: First human beings are slaughtered as if they were sacrificial animals (vv. 6-7), then the human population of Edom is actually replaced by animals!

How, then, can the characterization of Edom in Isaiah 34 be summarized? One might perhaps put it this way. The image of Edom represents the final and most extreme stage in the development of an enemy image, a stage where almost everything you could call an "image" (in the sense of likeness) has become effaced. Indeed, *the enemy has become faceless*, reduced to a representative of everything that is regarded as evil, without any distinct ethnic or cultural identity. This is the definitive humiliation: to deprive the enemy of his/her identity. In the imaginary universe conjured by Isaiah 34, all that remains is a name, "Edom," attached to a waste land. The Edomites are gone. However, the text does not manage to eradicate their memory altogether. Perhaps inadvertently, the author of v. 12 reminds the reader of Edom's proud traditions of political independence, when he proclaims that "they shall proclaim no kingdom there, and all its princes will become nothing." Thus, *a counter image emerges*, suppressed yet discernible, of Edom as a place for kings and princes.

Contextualization

The oracle against Edom in Isa 34:1-17 is representative of a major trend in the exilic and post-exilic prophetic literature: the condemnation of Edom (cf. Obadiah; Jer 49:7-22; Ezek 25:12-14; 35:1-15; Joel 4:19 [Eng. 3:19]; Mal 1:2-5).[56] Due to their alleged complicity in the destruction of Jerusalem in 587, and their infiltration into the southern parts of Judah, the Edomites became *the* enemies. Isaiah 34 fits into this larger pattern. With regard to its proto-apocalyptic character, this anti-Edomite diatribe should probably be dated to the post-exilic period.[57] Since the Nabateans gradually took over the former homeland of the Edomites during the 5th and 4th centuries BCE, one may surmise that both Nabateans and Edomites were destined to be victims of the presaged massacre (vv. 5-7). However, such ethnic distinctions were perhaps of subordinate interest to the author. In later Jewish writings and readings, at any rate, "Edom" became a code name for evil powers and peoples in general, and for Rome in particular (as evidenced by the Targumic rendition of 34:7).

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[56] See Cresson (1972).

[57] Thus many commentators. Sweeney (1996:444) argues for a setting in the 5th century. However, an even later date of composition cannot be excluded.

A short note on Isa 63:1-6

Despite the strong anti-Edomite tendency of Isa 63:1-6, this passage does not contain a clear-cut enemy image, with Edom cast in the role of the dreaded foe. Rather, it presupposes the existence of (other texts that contain) such images. In my opinion, 63:1-6 does not add any further aspects to the characterization of Edom as an enemy that was supplied by 34:1-17.[58] As a consequence, Isa 63:1-6 will not be subject to a detailed analysis here. A couple of short remarks may suffice.

In 63:1-6, Edom is the location for an eschatological battle. On his return from the Edomite territory, the divine warrior reports that he has massacred a large number of helpless human enemies, referred to as "peoples" (v. 6). One may deduce that Edom was considered an appropriate place for such ghastly scenes (as in 34:1-7), but nothing further is said about the land of Edom or its inhabitants. The ethnic identity of the enemies is not disclosed. Still, the fact that the rather repelling winepress imagery that dominates the passage is based upon a pun involving the words Edom (אדום) and "red" (אדם)—red being the colour of human blood, here metaphorically pictured as grape juice—indicates that the author of 63:1-6 was driven by a fierce anti-Edomite animus.

3.3. Images of other neighbouring nations

Images of Moab

Isa 15:1–16:14

Within Isaiah 13–23, which is mainly a collection of oracles against other nations, a large section, comprising chapters 15 and 16, is devoted to texts dealing with Moab. Nevertheless, it is difficult to find enough material for an enemy image analysis.

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[58] There are interesting connections between these two anti-Edom passages. For instance, the phrase "day of vengeance" from 34:8 reappears in 63:4. However, the implications of these intertextual links cannot be explored here. See further Blenkinsopp (2000:450-453 and 2003:248-249) and Childs (2001:516-517).

The predominant mode of the Moab oracles in 15:1–16:14 is that of the lament. Presumably in the context of some kind of national disaster that had befallen Moab, the fate of the victims is deplored.[59] Several scholars regard 15:1b-8 as a genuine lament, expressing sympathy with the Moabite population.[60] According to Sweeney, the laments in 15:1b-8 and 16:6-11 are quoted in order to support the appeal to Judah on behalf of Moabite refugees, voiced in 16:1-5, which constitutes the centrepiece of the composition.[61] In the context of a survey of biblical passages portraying Moab as a despicable enemy, Meyer comments on Isa 16:1-5 as a rare exception, evidencing true solidarity with a neighbouring country in times of distress.[62] However, this is not the whole picture. Adjoining the lamentations one finds an obscure threat (15:9) and an accusation (16:6)—the latter concerning alleged arrogance, the standard "crime" of all enemies in the book of Isaiah. Hence, it becomes possible to (re-)read the lamenting passages as ironical and mocking pamphlets against Moab.[63] Yet, at least 15:1b-8 still looks like a lament proper, in spite of the appended threat in 15:9 (which most probably represents a post-exilic addition).[64]

As a result of this textual admixture of genres and attitudes, the portrait of Moab in 15:1–16:11 can be seen as deeply *ambiguous*. Indeed, that may be a major reason why later scribes found it necessary to add two postscripts: 16:12 and 16:13-14. While the author of 16:12 emphasises that Moab cannot be saved by any laments or rites, the author of 16:13-14 looks impatiently forward to witnessing the total and final devastation of Moab in his own lifetime.

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[59] Despite great scholarly efforts, it has not been possible to determine which historical event(s) (if any) that occasioned the composition of these lamenting passages. Our knowledge of Moab's history is too incomplete to permit any certain conclusions. Many suggestions have been made, covering an enormous time span from the 8th to the 2nd century. For valuable surveys and discussions, see Kaiser (1983:53-55) and Wildberger (1978:595-598, 603-611). Recently, Sweeney (1996:248) has argued for the Assyrian campaign in the years 734-732 BCE as the most likely point of reference. However, this should be regarded as no more than a good guess.

[60] Thus, e.g., Wildberger (1978:611, 615) and Clements (1980:151-153). Clements makes the following comment: "Throughout there is expressed a deep sensitivity to the sufferings of the Moabites, to whom the Israelites were closely related…There is no gloating over the defeat of the Moabites" (1980:151).

[61] Sweeney (1996:245-246).

[62] Meyer (1991:58).

[63] Thus Blenkinsopp (2000:298) and Kaiser (1983:51, 57, 61).

[64] With Clements (1980:151-155) and Wildberger (1978:599, 611-615).

Isa 25:10b-12

There can be little doubt that the anti-Moabite oracle in Isa 25:10b-12 is of post-exilic origin.[65] Within its present literary context, the so-called apocalypse of chs. 24–27, this brief passage stands out as an apparently misplaced fragment.[66] It was probably inserted at a rather late stage in the process of redaction (or *Fortschreibung*), in order to supply something that the editors (or a single scribe) felt was missing in the collection of Isaianic prophecies: a clear and unambiguous condemnation of Moab.[67] On the basis of such passages as Deut 23:3-6 and Neh 13:23-27, one may postulate that there was a strong anti-Moabite tendency within influential strands of post-exilic Judaism, a tendency paralleling, and at times perhaps even surpassing, the widely attested hatred against Edom (compare Deut 23:7 with 23:3-6!).[68]

Accordingly, it is hardly surprising that the oracle in Isa 25:10b-12 depicts Moab as a despicable foe, destined for ruin. To be more precise, the neighbouring nation is personified as a man about to drown in a cesspool (vv. 10b-11). Struggling for his life, trying to swim, he is mercilessly pressed down again (by whom? YHWH?)—trodden down, like straw. This grotesque metaphor foregrounds the notion of helplessness. When the disaster comes, the inhabitants of Moab will not be able to prevent the destruction of their fortifications (v. 12).[69] There is also another aspect to the imagery in vv. 10b-11. Moab is here deprived of all dignity, presumably as a just divine punishment for its pride (v. 11b).

Images of Phoenicia

Isa 23:1-18

Despite its superscription, which concentrates on Tyre, the prophecy in Isa 23:1-14(15-18) addresses both Sidon and Tyre. These two cities can be seen as

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[65] So most commentators. Blenkinsopp (2000:364) suggests the time of Nehemiah. However, it seems wise to be less precise. With Clements (1980:210), I regard this oracle as “late post-exilic.”

[66] See, e.g., Wildberger (1978:900).

[67] In other words, the author of 25:10b-12 may have been dissatisfied with chs. 15–16 (or: 15–16*). Cf. Kaiser (1983:164). As regards the ambiguities involved in the portrait of Moab in Isaiah 15–16, see above.

[68] According to Blenkinsopp (2000:364), “hostility to Moab seems to have run even deeper” than animosity vis-à-vis Edom.

[69] In the post-exilic era, the region known as Moab was to a large extent inhabited by other peoples than the Moabites, as pointed out by Wildberger (1978:974).

representing Phoenicia as a whole.[70] Although it is evident that the oracle (originally comprising vv. 1-14) refers to a recent disaster that had befallen these cities (most likely a siege and/or a military defeat), it has not been possible to determine the historical setting with any certainty. Suggestions range between the 8th and the 3rd century.[71] An initial exhortation to lament (vv. 1b-4) is followed by a prophetic declaration interpreting the disaster as a punishment from YHWH (esp. vv. 8-9). Hence, the lament should probably be taken as ironical (cf. the Moab oracles in chs. 15–16). I agree with Blenkinsopp that "[t]he note of *Schadenfreude* is even more in evidence here than in the Moab poem."[72] Still, it is difficult to find a distinct enemy image in 23:1-14. Phoenicia is seemingly not perceived as a threat. Negative attributions are sparse. One indirect accusation is made, concerning alleged pride (v. 9). The fate of Sidon and Tyre seems to serve as a warning example, illustrating the principle that YHWH strikes against all proud people. As regards the female personification of the city of Sidon (vv. 4 and 12), it is in line with ancient literary conventions (cf. Isa 37:22b and 47:1-9).

In an addition to the poem in 23:1-14, the city of Tyre, in its capacity of a centre for international trade, is indirectly compared to an aged harlot (vv. 15-16). This characterization comes close to qualifying as an enemy image. However, in a second (probably late post-exilic) postscript (vv. 17-18), the metaphor of prostitution is given an unexpected twist. We learn that YHWH will allow the prostitute to take up her business again, and that her incomes will supply the temple servants in Jerusalem with food and clothing. Implicitly, then, YHWH and his priests are portrayed as pimps! Was the scribe aware of this unfortunate consequence of his careless use of metaphor?[73]

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[70] Thus, e.g., Blenkinsopp (2000:343-345) and Clements (1980:191-196).

[71] For various suggestions and further references, see Blenkinsopp (2000:344-345), Clements (1980:191-192), Sweeney (1996:307-309), and Wildberger (1978:862-866).

[72] Blenkinsopp (2000:343).

[73] Most commentators fail to spell out the pimp-and-prostitute imagery. Are they too embarrassed? According to Wildberger (1978:883), the author of 23:17-18 is to some extent excused, since Jerusalem was frequently plagued by poverty and famine during the post-exilic era. However, I doubt that the priesthood was starving at any point of time. Anyway, in my opinion, nothing could excuse the author of Isa 23:17-18. He is responsible for a cynical display of chauvinism—and for a blatant misuse of metaphor.

Images of Philistia

Isa 14:28-32

The prophecy against Philistia in Isa 14:28-32 does not contain any palpable enemy image—except for the portrait in v. 29 of an anonymous ruler (most probably Assyrian) who had oppressed the Philistines, and whose successor would do the same, contrary to Philistine expectations.[74] The Philistines are depicted as victims, without reason to rejoice, rather than as perpetrators. They are not explicitly identified as enemies of Judah. Rather, Judah and Philistia would seem to have one enemy in common: Assyria. Hence, they are potential allies. Issued in the wake of the death of an Assyrian ruler, the oracle in 14:28-32* can be read as a warning addressed to Hezekiah, that it would be foolish to join the Philistines in an anti-Assyrian revolt.[75] It is likely that an original oracular core from the 8th century, comprising vv. 29-31*, has been expanded in successive stages in the post-exilic era.[76]

3.4. Neighbouring nations: Comparisons and conclusions

Ephraim/Israel and Aram

As a consequence of their temporary anti-Assyrian alliance in the 730s BCE, the two neighbouring nations of Israel and Aram tend to appear in tandem in the book of Isaiah. For pragmatic reasons, they were treated as a couple in the textual analyses above. In the following discussion, however, the focus will be almost entirely on Israel. This decision is easily defended. Although the Aramean kingdom was regarded (and condemned) as a dangerous threat, it was apparently assigned a less prominent role. In the Jerusalemite propaganda, as reflected within the textual universe of Isaiah 1–66, Aram seems to lack an individual profile. Whenever the Arameans are accused or described, the Israelites are accused and described in a similar way. Thus, in 7:1-9 and 17:1-6,

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[74] On the enemy image in 14:29, see the analysis of 14:28-32 in ch. 2.2. above.

[75] Thus, e.g., Clements (1980:148-150) and Sweeney (1996:233-234).

[76] Besides the obviously editorial superscription in v 28, at least two other expansions can be identified, in 30a and 32. Cf. Blenkinsopp (2000:293) and Clements (1980:148).

both Aram and Israel are characterized as *weak enemies*, destined for imminent destruction.

It seems, however, reasonable to assume that Jerusalemite observers of the political events in the 730s BCE regarded *Israel* (reduced to the heartland surrounding the capital of Samaria, and hence often referred to as Ephraim) as their *primary opponent*. Important passages as Isa 9:7-20 and 28:1-4 deal exclusively with Israel/Ephraim.[77] The fact that the inhabitants of Judah and Israel had much in common, in terms of language and culture, may have aggravated the conflict. Israel/Ephraim was more than a hostile neighbour—this nation was a *rival*. In this context, one circumstance deserves particular attention. The two kingdoms of Jerusalem and Samaria worshipped one and the same deity, YHWH, as their national god. But how could YHWH possibly act as the patron of both parties in a conflict? On the ideological level, therefore, it was of utmost importance for the leaders in Jerusalem to claim that YHWH—the deity known as the Holy One of Israel! (cf., e.g., 1:4; 5:19, 24; 10:17, 20)—was on *their* side. This purpose is evident in the case of Isa 7:1-9. Further, in 9:7-20, YHWH's unabating anger against Israel is a central theme. To readers in Judah the message would have been clear: Having abandoned the treacherous leaders in Samaria, YHWH was now prepared to defend Judah and Jerusalem against *all* enemies, including Israel.

The passages dealing with Israel/Ephraim contain references to that nation's history (9:7-11), as well as allusions to its topography (28:1). When it comes to depictions of the fate of Israel, imagery associated with vegetation is clearly predominant: palm tree (9:13), briers and thorns (9:17), trees in a forest (9:17), fading flower (28:1), early fig (28:4). Such metaphors contribute to the characterization of the northern neighbour as frail and perishable. If, as was suggested above, the vine served as a national symbol for Israel, one may detect a satirical allusion in 28:1. In addition, it is possible to draw 5:1-7, a passage that was not analyzed above, into the discussion. According to Sweeney, the famous vineyard parable originally functioned as a piece of anti-Israelite propaganda.

During the Syro-Ephraimite crisis in the 730s BCE, the animosity against Israel/Ephraim (and Aram) even led to a positive evaluation of the role of Assyria—in its capacity as the enemy's enemy. With the fall of Samaria in 721, things changed. From now on (if not earlier), Assyria replaced Israel as Judah's primary enemy. There is, in fact, a certain *isomorphism between the characterizations of Israel/Ephraim and Assyria*. Both nations are portrayed as a person wasting away from sickness (10:18 Assyria; 17:4 Israel), and both nations are said to be punished by means of a devastating forest fire (9:17-18 Israel; 10:16-19 Assyria).

[77] In 9:11, Aram is mentioned, but as one of Israel's arch enemies.

As time went by, the name Israel was, as is well known, eventually appropriated by circles in Judah, and used by them as a self-designation. However, the rivalry between Samaria and Jerusalem persisted throughout the centuries. At some point of time during the post-exilic era, the schism between Samaritans and other Jews became definitive. It is therefore likely that a passage like 28:1-4 achieved renewed significance in the post-exilic period.

Edom

More than any other enemy mentioned in the book if Isaiah, even more than Babylonia, Edom is depicted as detestable and worthy of destruction. In the analysis of Isaiah 34 above, it was shown that the common rhetorical techniques of demonization and dehumanization have been taken to extremes in this piece of anti-Edomite propaganda. Edom is portrayed both as the *faceless enemy* and as the *epitome of evil*.

The striking parallels between chapters 13 and 34 indicate that the editors of the book of Isaiah made a strong *connection between Babylonia and Edom*. More precisely, they probably regarded Edom as Babylon's successor. In the post-exilic period, when Babylon had been conquered by the Persians, the prophetic circles in Jerusalem needed a replacement, another foe embodying everything evil. They settled for Edom, probably due to this nation's alleged complicity in the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 BCE. Thus, Edom appears to have taken over Babylon's role as the most hated enemy. However, these two nations—one enormous empire and one petty neighbour—were not characterized in exactly the same way. Whereas Babylon is depicted as active, powerful, and blasphemous, Edom is portrayed as passive, as a *victim*.

In terms of language and culture, Edom and Judah had much in common. However, the reader of Isaiah 34 (and 63:1-6) looks in vain for any hint in that direction. Elsewhere in the HB, the closeness between these two nations is construed in terms of kinship: Esau/Edom and Jacob/Israel were regarded as twin brothers (cf. Genesis 25–28; 33; Mal 1:2-3). But that tradition is completely suppressed in Isaiah 34. Most probably, it was known by the author, since he alludes ostentatively to another Pentateuchal tradition, concerning the destruction of the cities on the plain (Genesis 19; Deut 29:21-23). Thus, according to the author/editor(s) of Isaiah 34, the Edomites were not respectable siblings (as they were, according to Deut 23:8), but detestable creatures, sinners deserving to be destroyed like the legendary inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah. Further, Isaiah 34 tends to focus on the territory rather than its population. This may be due to the fact that the original Edomites had, to a large extent, been replaced by the Nabateans. In the end, Edom is reduced to a name, a label applicable to almost any group or nation accused of being an enemy of YHWH and his people.

Moab

The most striking feature of the portrait of Moab is its profound ambiguity. In this respect, it can be seen as unique within the book of Isaiah. No other nation is described as *both friend and foe*. In the Moab oracles in chapters 15–16, indictments and threats stand next to what appears to be genuine expressions of empathy and solidarity. This almost perplexing ambiguity can perhaps be explained in terms of redactional criticism. For instance, the threat in 15:9 looks like a secondary addition to the lament in 15:1b-8. However, the end result, the extant portrait, is still worthy of consideration. Are not the mixed emotions displayed in Isaiah 15–16 typical for relations between neighbouring nations? The Moabites are regarded as *both siblings and rivals*. Despite the ambiguities, the characterization of Moab is not entirely inconsistent. On the contrary, the alternating attitudes toward this neighbour can be related to one constant concern: that other peoples should acknowledge the supremacy of Zion (i.e., of Judah and YHWH). The declared willingness to welcome Moabite refugees (pictured as pilgrims heading for Zion) seems to be closely linked to the prospect of their subjection to the Davidic ruler (16:1-5). It is, of course, unlikely that this Jerusalemite perspective was shared by the Moabite leaders and people. Hence, it makes some sense that the vision of Moabite subordination (16:1-5) is immediately followed by an accusation toward Moab, concerning its alleged arrogance (16:6).

In 25:10b-12, all sympathy with Moab has vanished. Here this neighbour is pictured as evil and, hence, as worthy of complete humiliation and annihilation. The aim of the author was probably to place Moab in the same category as Edom. However, in the book of Isaiah as a whole, the Moab portrait remains intriguingly ambiguous.

Phoenicia and Philistia

Ships, harbours, commerce—such topographical and cultural ingredients supply the prophecy in Isaiah 23 with an unmistakably Phoenician imprint, at least as regards the scenery which it evokes. When it comes to enemy characterization, it is difficult to detect a distinct Phoenician profile. There is, however, a marked element of malicious joy. Taking that into account, it is perhaps possible to view Phoenicia as an instance of the *enviable neighbour*—a kind of neighbour who is often regarded as an enemy. On the whole, though, it is my impression that the two cities of Sidon and Tyre mainly serve as warning examples, illustrating the general "Isaianic" principle that all human hubris will be punished by YHWH.

In the case of Philistia, the textual basis is too small to permit any far-reaching conclusions concerning a distinct profile. In 14:28-32, the Philistines are pictured as deluded and powerless. I suggest, therefore, that this might be a

remote parallel to the portrayal of Egypt as a *helpless helper*. In the last decades of the 8th century BCE, Philistia was a potential ally in the struggle against Assyrian oppression. According to a likely interpretation of 14:28-32, Philistia is depicted as weak, and therefore unreliable and dangerous (as an ally).

Chapter 4

Anonymous Enemies

In this chapter, I will use the term "enemy" in a broad sense, covering both "external enemies", including foreign aggressors and oppressors, and "inner foes", including various groups within pre-exilic Judah or (above all) post-exilic Yehud, which are being criticized or condemned by the authors/editors on account of their attitude or their behaviour. The latter are often referred to, very generally, as "evildoers." Deliberately downplaying the aspect of a perceived threat (which is, admittedly, essential to any definition of the concept of hostility), I will include them all in the concept of "anonymous enemies." My main reason for doing this is that the authors/editors seem to treat them all as enemies. Allegedly, they have all, in one way or other, opposed YHWH (according to the party represented by the editors). And because of that, they are said to deserve severe punishment, or even extermination (cf. 1:31; 5:24-25; 29:20-21; 66:24).

In the book of Isaiah, passages mentioning or addressing anonymous enemies and evildoers of various kinds are plentiful, to say the least. I am not going to present an analysis of all references to nameless opponents (such a study would easily fill a huge monograph). Nor will I make an attempt to identify the historical contexts and the original addressees of all relevant passages.[1] My aim in this chapter is more modest, and directly related to the analyses of images of named enemies (empires and neighbouring nations) found in the preceding chapters.

To begin with, I will present a brief survey of some central aspects of characterization, based on an extensive scanning of all references to unnamed opponents that are scattered throughout chapters 1–66. Perusing all relevant portions of text, I have been looking for recurring features in the characterizations of the anonymous enemies, such as epithets, accusations, motifs, and metaphors. I found that a number of "key passages" stood out from the rest, since they had several features in common, including a distinctly programmatic character. Subsequent to the presentation of central features in the characterization of the anonymous enemies, I will focus on the intertextual connections between anonymous and named enemies. Taking my point of departure in the selected key passages, I intend to demonstrate the existence of various links (lexical,

[1] Speculations as to the identity of the anonymous authors/editors and their anonymous opponents will be postponed until the concluding chapter (6.3.).

thematical, and metaphorical) to passages dealing with specific nations and empires. These links indicate, in my opinion, that the final editors tried to create analogies between different kinds of enemies. Otherwise obsolete oracles concerning empires of the past could thus be re-used and redirected against contemporary adversaries within the post-exilic community. In the section that concludes this chapter, I will discuss some possible implications of the relations between named and unnamed opponents, viewed from a macrostructural perspective.

4.1. Rebels and stubble: Characterization of anonymous enemies

Within the Isaianic corpus, the labels that are given to the anonymous adversaries of YHWH (and/or of the interests represented by the editors) are often very general. On a number of occasions, they are simply referred to as “enemies” and “adversaries” (איב 1:24; 42:13; 59:18; 66:6, 14;צר 1:24; 26:11; 59:18; 63:18; 64:1), as “sinners” (Qal ptc of חטא 1:28; 33:14) or “evildoers” (שקדי און 29:20; פעלי און 31:2; מרע 1:4; 31:2; cf. also 32:6-7). Among the remaining epithets, the most frequently employed are “wicked” (רשע 3:11; 5:23; 11:4; 26:10; 48:22; 55:7; 57:20-21), “rebels” (Qal ptc of פשע 1:28; 66:24; of סרר 1:23; 30:1; 65:2), “oppressors” (עריץ 29:5, 20; 49:24-25), and “traitors” (Qal ptc of בגד 24:16; 33:1). There is nothing unique, or even faintly particular—so to speak, distinctly “Isaianic”—about the terminology used. On the contrary, this enumeration of epithets recalls, on the whole, the stock vocabulary used about various (but invariably anonymous) enemies in the Psalms.[2] These similarities are hardly surprising. In one very fundamental respect, I suggest that the anonymous enemy passages in Isaiah were constructed with the same purpose as the prayers in the Psalms: They were to be re-used in new situations. Therefore, the labels had to be general enough to be reapplicable to almost anyone. Anyone who acts as an enemy of the faithful ones. Anyone who appears to belong to YHWH’s opponents (as defined by the authors/editors).

What are they accused of, these enemies and evildoers? Which activities and attitudes are criticized or condemned? The accusations are often rather sweeping, but in several cases the alleged crimes are described in some detail. When it comes to committed acts, the most specific charges concern legal corruption (e.g., 1:21, 23; 5:23; 29:21), excessive drinking (e.g., 5:11-12, 22), and a

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[2] Cf. the comprehensive table of terms used about enemies and evildoers in the Psalms, which is provided by Keel (1969:94-98).

variety of cultic activities, which the authors/editors held to be illicit (e.g., 1:29; 2:8, 18; 8:19-22; 17:7-8; 57:3-13; 65:2-4, 11-12). In other instances, the target for the verbal attack is a certain attitude, e.g., mockery (28:14, 22; 29:20) or misplaced trust (30:12; 31:1). Exactly as in the official Assyrian texts, the enemies are accused of trusting human rather than divine assistance, and of being arrogant.[3] It is, moreover, a well-known Isaianic theme that all human pride and hubris will end in humiliation. Some of these passages can, arguably, be read as indirect accusations against anonymous opponents for being arrogant (see., e.g., 2:11-17; 5:15; cf. also 10:33-34, a passage that probably should be interpreted metaphorically). In this connection, it is interesting to notice that the book of Isaiah opens and closes with references to rebellion (1:2; 66:24). This seems to indicate that *the final editors regarded rebellion against YHWH as the most severe crime committed by the anonymous enemies*, and perhaps also as a common denominator for all their misdeeds. I suggest, then, that *arrogance could be seen as a hallmark of both anonymous and named adversaries* (cf., e.g., 10:5-15 and 37:22b-29, two passages attacking the arrogance of Assyrian kings).

Thus far, I have outlined a picture of the anonymous enemies in Isaiah which is made up of a set of standard epithets, accompanied by what might be termed the standard allegations and invectives. Still, it is possible speak of a distinct, Isaianic profile, as regards the combination of various aspects of characterization. The next aspect to be discussed is the choice of metaphors. It is perhaps significant that the opening metaphor, in 1:2, depicts *YHWH's adversaries as disobedient children*. In this way, they are branded as rebels and traitors. At the same time, they are depicted as weak, ignorant, and defenceless—being children. A further aspect of this metaphor is that it appears to focus entirely on members of the people of YHWH. However, apart from the parent-child imagery (which resurfaces in 30:1, 9; cf. also 57:3-4; 58:1; 63:10; 65:2), *the vehicles used in metaphorical depictions of anonymous enemies*—"inner" foes as well as foreign nations—*are often drawn from the domain of vegetation*. Adversaries of diverse kinds are pictured as withering plants (1:30), as easily burning grass and stubble (5:24; 33:11; cf. also 1:31), or as dust and chaff which is carried away by the wind (5:24; in several instances about unnamed kings and nations: 17;13; 29:5; 40:24; 41:2). *With the help of such "inanimate" vehicles,*

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[3] The following standardized *topoi* in the enemy images of the Assyrian royal inscriptions were identified by Zaccagnini (1982:410): "the enemy as a rebel, as an impious, unrighteous and unfaithful subject, as a coward". Additional recurring motifs have been recorded by Fales. According to Fales (1982:428), the typical enemy is depicted as "insubmissive" and "insolent", and as trusting "in human or natural factors to oppose Assyria". See further the section on Assyria above in ch. 1.

the enemies are efficiently dehumanized. They are turned into passive and petty opponents, and we learn that they are hopelessly helpless when confronted with the power of YHWH, depicted as devastating fire or an equally devastating storm wind.

Whereas these portrayals of helpless enemies have close counterparts in other prophetical books (e.g., Nah 1:10; Obadiah 18), they contrast starkly with the dynamic and graphic depictions of cunning hunters or carnivorous animals that we find in the Psalms.[4] These conspicuous differences between the genres of prophecy and cultic poetry, as regards the choice of metaphors, are perhaps best explained in terms of different rhetorical situations. While the psalmist is addressing YHWH, trying to persuade the deity that "my enemies are your enemies, too", the prophet (or: the author/editor of oracles) is (or: professes to be) speaking the words of YHWH, trying to persuade the community that the deity's enemies are *their* enemies, too. If the primary purpose is to provoke divine intervention on behalf of the supplicant—and this I take to be the case in the so-called individual psalms of lamentation—then the element of threat must be stressed. Hence, the enemies are preferably described as extremely powerful and dangerous. If, on the other hand, the purpose of the final editors of the Isaianic corpus was to discourage opposition against YHWH and his allies (the nation protected by the deity, or a certain party, defining themselves as the faithful ones), it was probably in their interest to underline the weakness of the enemies, and thus to predict their inevitable defeat.

A short summary of some main features in the characterization of the anonymous enemies might look like this: They have (allegedly) made rebellion against YHWH, and they will therefore perish like burning stubble. At any rate, that is how the career of YHWH's enemies is summarized in a few key passages, to which we now turn.

4.2. Key passages

During my search for recurring features in the characterization of anonymous enemies, I identified a group of passages that seemed to have several things in common. One might speak of "family resemblance." To begin with, they share a set of epithets, accusations, and metaphors. In addition, these textual units are

[4] On the use of metaphors in the enemy images in the Psalms, see the comprehensive and up-dated study by Riede (2000). Cf. also Keel (1984:68-97).

situated—most probably, deliberately placed—in what appears to be strategical positions within the larger composition of Isaiah 1–66. I call them "key passages", since I am convinced that they hold important keys to the ideology of the editors. The passages in question have a programmatic and paradigmatic character. In these passages, the authors/editors seem to have formulated what they held to be essential truths about their/YHWH's enemies: This is what they are like, and this is how they shall end, all of them.

The selected group of programmatic texts includes, in the first place, the following passages, belonging to the editorial framework of this prophetical book, namely chapters 1 and 66: 1:2-4, 24, 28-31; 66:6, 14-16, 24. In some of these key passages, the anonymous enemies are branded as rebels (1:2, 28; 66:24). In other passages, the main theme is YHWH's rightful revenge and retribution (1:24; 66:6, 14-16; cf. also 59:18; 65:6-7). As concerns the fate of the enemies and evildoers, we learn that they will face destruction, either by the sword (66:6) or, above all, by fire (1:31; 66:15, 16, 24). On two occasions, the fire metaphor has a particularly ominous character. In 1:31, it is said that they shall "burn … with no one to quench (כבה) them" (1:31). This expression finds a close counterpart in 66:24, where it is stated about those who have rebelled against YHWH, that "their fire shall not be quenched (כבה)."

Although it is possible to find a number of similarities and correspondences between anonymous enemy sayings in chs. 1 and 66, one important difference in perspective should not be overlooked. Whereas the scope of the key passages in ch. 1 seem to be confined to (apostate) members of "the people of YHWH" (i.e., the pre-exilic nation of Judah, and/or the post-exilic Jewish community in the province of Yehud), the passages in ch. 66 seem to reflect a broader definition of the enemies, possibly including foreign nations. Still, all the key passages contain formulations which open up for continual recontextualizations and reapplications.

In addition to these passages from the editorial framework (chs. 1 and 66), several other texts dealing with enemies and evildoers might qualify as "key passages." I would like to draw attention to one such passage: 5:24-25. Arguably, its position is a strategical one, placed immediately before the first passage dealing with the threat posed by aggressive empires (5:26-29). To this one may add that it is likely that 5:25 originally belonged together with 9:7-20, a series of indictments directed against Ephraim/Israel.[5] This means that the collocation of 5:24 and 5:25 appears to be the result of a secondary rearrangement. In other words, the "passage" 5:24-25 was created by the editors! As regards the content, the crude picture in v 25, of corpses lying "like refuse in the

[5] See, e.g., these commentaries: Wildberger (1972), Kaiser (1981), and Blenkinsopp (2000).

streets", closely parallells the ghastly scene described in 66:24, where the dead bodies of the rebels are perpetually plagued by worms and fire. Further, 5:24 is slightly reminiscent of 1:31, since in both instances the evildoers seem to be depicted as easily burning materials. In 5:24, however, they are explicitly likened to "stubble (קש)" and "dry grass (חשש)." As if that was not enough, it is also stated that "their root will become rotten, and their blossom go up like dust (אבק)." The imagery used in 5:24 is picked up later on, in passages concerned with the collective fate of all hostile nations and tyrants: 29:5 (אבק); 40:24 (קש); cf. also 17:13.

It has thus already been shown that anonymous enemy passages contain links to passages dealing with nations and empires. Hence, although these programmatic statements concerning anonymous enemies and evildoers appear to be directed primarily against "inner" foes, it would be wrong to conclude that nations and empires are exempted from the sweeping judgements that are pronounced. On the contrary, I find it likely that the editors made deliberate efforts to create analogies between their contemporary opponents and the legendary enemies from earlier epochs, such as the Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian empires. As will be shown below, it is possible to trace interesting connections between characterizations of anonymous enemies in these key passages and characterizations of named nations in other passages.

4.3. Links to images of nations and empires

There are links of different kinds between the selected key passages (and other anonymous enemy passages) and passages dealing with named nations and empires: lexical links, as well as thematic and metaphorical connections. Starting with the use of labels, one can notice that one of the epithets employed in 1:2-4, viz. "evildoers" (pl. of מרע) in 1:4, recurs both in 9:16, within a series of incriminations against the people of Israel/Ephraim, and in 14:20, in a context denouncing the ruling dynasty in Babylon. A further link between the passages 1:2-4 and 14:20-21 is provided by the concept of "guilt" (עון), surfacing in 1:4 and 14:21. Also the label "sinners" (Qal ptc pl. of חטא), which is used in 1:28, seems to have a Babylonian connection. Although 13:9 declares that all sinners in the world will be destroyed, the immediate context (esp. 13:20) suggests that

the saying primarily refers to the sinners in Babylon.[6] For some reason or other, the central epithet "rebel" (ptc of פשע) is never applied on a named nation. However, the Assyrian rulers are accused of defying YHWH in their arrogance (10:12; 37:23-24, 29). In addition, accusations concerning pride and arrogance are directed against Israel (9:8) and Tyre (23:9).

Moving on to features in the metaphorical characterization, one can trace a connection between the depiction of anonymous adversaries in 1:28-31 and the portrait of people and leaders in Samaria in 28:1-4. The link consists in the shared motif of leaves that are "withering" (נבל), occurring in 1:30 and 28:1 (repeated in 28:4). Introducing another vegetational metaphor, the oracle in 5:24 depicts the enemies as burning "stubble" (קש). In 47:14, the same image is applied on the inhabitants of Babylon.

YHWH's impending revenge on his enemies constitutes another motif of central importance. Readily applicable to all hostile nations, this motif is nevertheless especially tied to Edom. In two instances, 34:8 and 63:4, formulations recalling those used in the selected key passages (in the first place, 1:24 and 66:6) are used in depictions of divine retribution against Edom. As concerns the destiny of the adversaries, it is repeatedly stated that they will be completely annihilated. But when it comes to the means of destruction, there is a certain measure of variation. In 66:16, two forms of divine destruction are mentioned: sword and fire. The sword of YHWH, which is mentioned in 66:16, provides a link to passages describing the fate awaiting Assyria (31:8) and Edom (34:5-6). However, in the key passages, the dominant metaphor for the destructive power of YHWH is fire (1:31; 5:24; 66:15-16, 24). Not surprisingly, this image appears in several texts dealing with nations and empires, as well. Thus, in the case of both Israel/Ephraim (9:18-19) and Assyria (10:16-19; cf. also 30:30, 33), the divine punishment assumes the shape of devastating fire.

Finally, there is much to be said about 66:24, an oracle containing connections to several passages describing the fate of specific nations. Here, in the book's very last statement on the issue of enemies, the reader is invited to inspect the battlefield, watching "the dead bodies (pl. of פגר) of the people who have rebelled against me (i.e. against YHWH." Similar scenes, displaying the "dead bodies (pl. of פגר)" of slain enemies of YHWH, are found in 34:3 and 37:36. Although the corpses mentioned in 34:3 appear to represent a variety of nationalities (cf. 34:2), the context (34:5-15) suggests that many of them should be identified as Edomites. In the case of 37:36, by contrast, the reader is informed about the nationality of the victims, and even of their number: 185.000 Assyrians. Thus the saying in 66:24, the final vision of Isaiah 1–66, recalls the

[6] Cf. also the occurrence of the epithet "wicked" (רשע) in 13:11, an epithet frequently applied on anonymous enemies (3:11; 5:23; 11:4, etc.).

legend in chs. 36–37, according to which Jerusalem was miraculously rescued by a killer angel, acting as an instrument of YHWH. On my interpretation, this means that *a forceful analogy is created between the anonymous enemies of "Trito-Isaiah" and the final editors, on the one hand, and the nation's historical adversaries, represented by the Assyrian empire, on the other hand*.

Detailed descriptions of perpetual decay and torment make the scenery in Isaiah 66:24 exceptionally grim. The reader/spectator is told that "their worms (תולעתם) shall not die." This crude image recalls the taunt song in ch. 14, with its depiction of a Babylonian ruler's descent into Sheol. Down there, the covering of his bed will consist of "worms (תולעה)" (14:11). As if the notion of immortal worms was not scary enough, the author of 66:24 adds the motif of eternal fire: "their fire shall not be quenched" (לא תכבה)" (cf. similarly 1:31). Once again, the formulations used indicate an analogy between the anonymous enemies and the Edomites. In 34:10, it is stated that the flames consuming the nation of Edom "shall not be quenched" (לא תכבה).

To sum up, it has been demonstrated that *the selected key passages contain connections to passages depicting the fate of the following nations: Israel/Ephraim, Edom, Babylon, and Assyria.* Within this quartet, the three last mentioned have one important thing in common—they are intertextually connected to the final vision reported in 66:24, by means of the following motifs: the display of dead bodies (Assyria), the worms (Babylon), and the punishment by means of perpetual fire (Edom).

Next, I will discuss some further aspects of the relation between named and unnamed opponents within the overall structure of the book of Isaiah.

4.4. Named and unnamed enemies in a macrostructural perspective

How are the passages dealing with named and unnamed enemies distributed within the macrostructure, or the overall composition, of Isaiah 1–66? Studying the structure of the book from this fresh angle, one can make some interesting observations. *While references to anonymous enemies are found in all major sections of the book, references to named enemies (nations) are conspicuously absent from some sections*. In the first chapters of the book, all enemies or evil-doers mentioned are anonymous. The same holds for the concluding chapters. It is thus possible to detect a certain *envelope structure*. Is this sheer coincidence? I do not think so.

Let us take a closer look at the opening sections. All references to enemies in chs. 1–6 are characterized by strict anonymity. By contrast, references to named nations and empires (chiefly to Ephraim, Aram, Assyria, and Egypt) become quite frequent from the beginning of ch. 7 and throughout chs. 7–12. This appears to be a deliberate compositional device. As pointed out earlier, it is likely that the anonymity of the attackers in 5:26-29 has to do with the passage's place within the structure, before the pivotal ch. 6. Thus, prior to the report of the celestial vision, the self-revelation of YHWH, and the commissioning of the prophet, no opponents are mentioned by name. In the remaining parts of Isaiah 1–39, no such restrictions seem to be applied (with the notable exception of chs. 24–27). In the sections usually referred to as Deutero- and Trito-Isaiah, however, references to named opponents become more scarce. Already in 48:20, the oppressive Neo-Babylonian empire is mentioned (i.e., mentioned explicitly, by name) for the last time. And in the concluding chapters 64–66, after the reference to Edom in ch. 63, strict anonymity once again becomes the rule—as in the opening chapters.

This leaves us with the following picture: sections with references to world empires and neighbouring nations are framed by sections where the enemies are anonymous, including the key passages that were discussed above.[7] What is the significance of this structural arrangement, beyond the obvious fact that it creates a kind of *inclusio*? Of course, no certain answer can be given. But I find it likely that this envelope structure was deliberately created by the final editors. As concerns their purposes, my preliminary conclusions are the following:

(1) The structural arrangement expresses *a certain view on world history, according to which no great political power lasts forever*. Empires rise and fall. The present structure of Isaiah 1–66 seems to imply that, as there was a period before Assyria's rise to power and glory, there would also come a time when Babylon was no more. For each empire there is a 'before' and an 'after'. In the end, there is only one everlasting power: YHWH's rule, with Zion as the world centre.

(2) At the same time, this structural arrangement seems to serve *a certain hermeneutical strategy, according to which the prophetic words concerning named nations last forever*—owing to the principle of reapplicability. Since Assyria, and Babylon, was simply one of many instantiations of human powers opposing YHWH, the prophetic denunciations would retain their force and relevance even after the downfall of the empire to which they were originally addressed. Hence, oracles of judgment once directed against Assyria, or Babylon, could be applied to other opponents. Quite possibly, they were redi-

[7] Cf. the similar observations made by Brueggemann (1997:35) and Begg (1989:124), both focusing on the distribution of texts dealing with Babylon.

rected against new foreign powers. Above all, however, they seem to have been applied on certain groups within the post-exilic community.

Editorial interest in such a process of continuous recontextualization and redirection may actually have been the main reason why oracles against nations were framed by oracles against anonymous enemies. *Anonymity brings about ever new applicability*. However, in order to achieve this effect, the editors had to create some kind of analogy between the named nations of past times and their own contemporary, anonymous opponents. According to my analysis, that is exactly what they did. As demonstrated above, some conspicuous connections can indeed be found between, on the one hand, the images of empires and nations, and, on the other hand, the characterizations of anonymous enemies in a number of selected key passages. In this way, the editors of the book of Isaiah managed to build up an analogy between named nations and various anonymous foes—between the past, the present, and times to come.

Chapter 5

The Enemies and YHWH

5.1. Enemies of YHWH

All the diverse enemies and adversaries that are depicted in the book of Isaiah have at least one thing in common: They are presented as opponents of YHWH. This is true of anonymous enemies (particularly evident in 1:24-31 and 66:6, 14-16, 24), as well as of named nations and empires. Although the latter are not always explicitly described as YHWH's adversaries, it is nevertheless in many cases obvious that they are regarded and treated as such. As a rule, the oracles directed against a hostile nation (which have been analyzed in chapters 2 and 3 above), assert that YHWH himself will bring about (or: already has brought about) that nation's destruction (on Assyria: 10:16-19, 24-27; 14:24-27; 30:27-33; on Egypt: 19:1-15, 16-17; Babylon: 13:1-22; 14:3-23; 47:1-15; on Israel [or Ephraim]: 9:7-20; 28:1-4; Edom: 34:5-15). According to my analysis, this phenomenon—that each enemy is pictured as YHWH's enemy (and not primarily, or exclusively, as enemy of the nation of Judah, or of the group represented by the writers)—is a prominent, defining feature in the characterization of adversaries in BI.

The same pattern is repeated, over and over again: *Since the enemies have offended YHWH, they shall accordingly be punished by YHWH*. Now, it is hardly surprising that the relation between the enemies and YHWH should be foregrounded in this way. On the contrary, this is exactly what one might expect within prophetic literature. After all, it is constitutive for the genre that human affairs are evaluated from the perspective of a deity, speaking through his/her mouthpiece(s). Still, I think it is worthwhile to examine this aspect of the Isaianic enemy portraits more closely: What ideological mechanisms are at work, when opponents of various kinds are branded as enemies of YHWH?

To begin with—and most importantly—*the strictly human*, or "earthly", *side of the matters discussed is consistently played down*. Conflicts between antagonistic states or parties are, so to speak, being transferred to a higher, divine or "heavenly" level. Hence, they would seem to have been elevated to a sphere far removed from the petty quarrels and power struggles fought by human beings. According to this prophetic ideology, the reason why the adversaries had to be condemned was that they had committed severe crimes of a religious—or, perhaps better: sacrilegious—nature. However, this does not entail

that a modern observer would categorize all their (alleged) "crimes" as belonging to the sphere. The very point to be made here, is that *it was possible for the Isaianic authors/editors to interpret almost everything they disliked*, and not just cultic transgressions and the like, *in terms of apostasy. Opposing their point of view was to them*, I conjecture, *equivalent to opposing YHWH*. It is thus significant that one of the recurring allegations directed against the (leaders of) nations and empires concerns their arrogant and blasphemous attitude (see, e.g., 9:8; 10:12; 14:13-14; 37:29; 47:7-10). Contemporary audiences may indeed have regarded this trait in the characterization as a sufficient cause of divine wrath. And, *according to the Jerusalem-centred theology that has shaped most of the material in the book of Isaiah, arrogance and defiance towards the deity residing on mount Zion meant nothing less than an outrageous revolt, threatening the foundations of the world order*.

At this point, my earlier statement concerning the deliberate underestimation of the strictly human side of the conflicts needs to be modified. By means of the rhetorical strategy described above, the agency of *one* human party in the conflict is consistently concealed—and that is the party endorsed by the prophetic writers. Throughout, *the political and religious interests that generated and shaped the discourse are disguised as something else*, at times they are even almost made invisible. Although the identity of the text-producing (and text-preserving) collective shifted over time, the basic ideological mechanisms stayed the same. Thus, in the pre-exilic period (or: in texts dealing with that period), offences and threats against Judah and/or Jerusalem were transformed into offences against YHWH, the patron deity. In a similar vein, opposition against the post-exilic party supported by "Trito-Isaiah" (chs. 56–66)—i.e., by those responsible for the final editing of the book of Isaiah as a whole—was labelled rebellion against YHWH. From a modern historian's point of view, this has to be analyzed as an attempt to conceal the real roots of the conflict. Further, it would seem that some of the strongest incentives behind the production of enemy images in these prophetic circles—such as Judean nationalism, or the aspirations of a certain "orthodox" Jerusalemite faction—have been efficiently suppressed.

However, the suppression of nationalism and factionalism is by no means total. These motives are readily recognizable, and they do surface at various junctions in the text (cf. 8:9-10; 11:13-14; 41:14-16; 60:1-16; 66:5). Reverting to the issue of genre, it is interesting to notice that the narrative portions of the Isaianic corpus tend to convey a more complete, and less distorted, picture of the conflicts that engendered the enemy images—in one respect, at least, as concerns the representation of the human antagonists involved in the controversy. Here we get a glimpse of both sides. I am not suggesting that the narrative sections show a lesser extent of ideological bias than other sections. Indeed, it would be grossly misleading to speak of realistic descriptions of historical events (cf. 37:36!). Yet, I suggest that the narrative genre, when compared to the

oracular form, allows for a higher degree of interaction between the human parties involved in a certain conflict, for instance between the leaders in Jerusalem, with special focus on the attitudes and actions of the king (an Ahaz or a Hezekiah), and foreign rulers or other leaders of hostile military forces (see 7:1-9; 36:1–37:35). However, the differences between the narrative sections and other sections of the book should not be overstated. As we move from oracular poetry to the prose of prophetic legends, one central feature remains intact: The enemies are portrayed as enemies of YHWH.

So far, I have tried to demonstrate the pervasiveness and efficacy of the rhetorical strategy whereby the opponents of a certain group are transformed into "personal" enemies of a deity. However, those who employ such strategies may find some of their effects undesirable. In this case, the focus on the human-divine conflict appears to have at least one disadvantageous consequence. *By necessity, images highlighting the blasphemous character of the enemies, and the hostility between them and YHWH, tend to portray the adversaries as autonomous and powerful agents, even capable of challenging the authority of YHWH. In a sense, then, the rhetorical strategy studied here can be said to jeopardize the very notions that it set out to defend: the supremacy and sovereignty of YHWH. For that reason, I suggest, it was necessary to supplement it with a strategy that made the enemies look less autonomous, while emphasizing the supreme power of YHWH—the strategy of picturing other nations as instruments controlled by YHWH.*

5.2. Enemies as instruments in YHWH's service

According to the biblical prophetic literature, YHWH, the patron deity of Judah could sometimes employ other nations as instruments, in order to implement the divine plan. Within the Isaianic literary universe, this idea is primarily, but not exclusively, associated with the Assyrian empire. In this respect, Babylon stands out as the opposite of Assyria. For some reason, the Neo-Babylonian empire is not granted the status of a useful tool, in the hands of YHWH. This issue will be explored at length. However, to begin with, I will discuss the case of Assyria in some detail, since it illustrates both the strength and the shortcomings of the particular rhetorical strategy under discussion.

In the following, I will try to analyze the concept "Assyria is an instrument in the service of YHWH" as an expression of pre-exilic prophetic propaganda. As always, when speaking of propaganda, it is basically a question of perspectivizing, and of manipulating proportions. At the end of the 8th century BCE, and at the beginning of the 7th, the Assyrian army might appear to be ever so

strong, even invincible, but its strength was in fact—according to the Isaianic ideology—contingent upon its role within YHWH's plan. Assyria was just a tool, in the hands of YHWH. Although it is only stated explicitly on one occasion—in 10:5, where Assyria is depicted as a rod wielded by YHWH—this notion is arguably present in other passages, as well.

In 7:18-19, the Assyrian army is pictured as a swarm of bees, commanded by a whistling YHWH. It should be noted that on this rare occasion the status of an instrument/servant of YHWH is also granted to Egypt (the Egyptian soldiers being pictured as flies). According to 8:6-8, it is YHWH who brings up the devastating flood, which metaphorically represents the Assyrian army. A similar idea is expressed in 28:2, where it is said that "the Lord has one who is powerful and strong." Although this someone remains anonymous, both contextual and intertextual factors (the storm and inundation imagery) indicate that the author had Assyria in mind. To this list of texts conveying the notion of Assyria as YHWH's instrument we may perhaps also add 5:26-29, a passage that is often interpreted as referring to an Assyrian military invasion.

From the vantage point of Zion-centered religious nationalism, the rhetorical strategy under discussion, describing hostile nations as YHWH's instruments, could be regarded as problematic, or at least as audacious. After all, it entailed that hostile nations, or potential enemies, had been, so to speak, elected by YHWH. And, at times, the depictions of the relations between the divine master and the other nations, his instruments, implied a certain degree of intimacy. They were almost portrayed as allies. *Yet, this strategy had some obvious advantages. While minimizing the autonomy of powerful enemies, it defended the central theological tenet, that YHWH (and no other deity) had the ultimate power*. Thus, the fear-inspiring Assyrian empire was reduced to a marionette controlled by YHWH. Most importantly, *this strategy combined rhetorical force with explanatory potential*. It provided answers to questions like these: How can the Assyrian empire be so victorious? Are their gods and goddesses mightier than ours? All that talk about YHWH's world dominion, what was it worth? The prophetic circles answered: Assyria is nothing more than a rod, or an axe or a saw, handled by YHWH (10:5, 15). *However, some situations were more difficult to explain. Would it not be confusing and counterproductive to maintain that other nations obeyed the express orders of YHWH, when they threatened Jerusalem with its temple, the abode of YHWH?*

It was therefore necessary to introduce the notion of a limited mandate. This is the main theme of Isa 10:5-15. According to the author(s) of this diatribe, Assyria had, in its arrogance, overstepped the limits set up by YHWH. The task given to the Assyrians was to punish "a godless nation" (Israel/Ephraim?) that had provoked YHWH's wrath (10:6), but certainly not to attack Jerusalem (10:7-12). The allegedly preposterous character of the Assyrian behaviour is

brought to the fore by a concluding series of rhetorical questions and exclamations: "Should the axe vaunt itself over the one who who hews with it, or the saw magnify itself against the one who wields it? As if a rod would wield him who lifts it, or as if a staff should lift the one who is not wood!" (10:15). At this point, the reader is expected to infer, YHWH decided to dispose of the annoying, unworkable tool. The instrument had become expendable, fit for destruction. From now on, Assyria could only be treated as YHWH's personal enemy (see 10:16-19, 24-27; 14:24-27; 30:27-33). However, an analytical reader may also observe that 10:15 is the point where the "logic" of the instrument metaphor breaks down. Tools like rods and axes cannot act on their own. Hence, they cannot be blamed. Yet, this is what happens in 10:15. At this point, the autonomy of the enemy has to be affirmed, in order to legitimate the proclaimed divine punishment.

As illustrated by the case of Assyria, the inherent problems attached to the "instrument of YHWH" strategy become manifest as soon as a potential enemy becomes an actual enemy. And for a Zion-centered ideology, the problems become acute when Zion is threatened. This brings us to the case of the Neo-Babylonian empire, responsible for the destruction of YHWH's temple in Jerusalem in the year 587 BCE. How should its role be evaluated and depicted? A survey of the Babylon images in the book of Isaiah shows that different "Isaianic" writers in the exilic and post-exilic periods dealt somewhat differently with this traumatic issue. However, *Babylon is nowhere in BI expressly granted the status of YHWH's instrument or servant*. Whereas Assyria, as we have seen, is portrayed as an initially useful tool which eventually revolted against its master (10:5-15), the reader gets the impression that Babylon was at no point employed in such a way by YHWH. Not surprisingly, we learn instead that Babylon's enemies were commanded by the national deity of Judah. According to 13:17-18, YHWH is the one "stirring up" the Medes, renowned for their cruelty, so that they could accomplish a special mission: to destroy Babylon and slaughter its inhabitants.[1] In the section called Deutero-Isaiah (chs. 40–55), we find an extremely benign portrait of Cyrus, the Persian general whose troops eventually captured Babylon.[2] Cyrus is not merely regarded as an instrument used by YHWH. He is given such honorary titles as YHWH's "shepherd" (44:28) and "servant" (45:1). Babylon, on the other hand, is depicted as an arro-

[1] This depiction of the role of the Medes is, as is well known, not entirely historically correct. However, it seems to be a fact that Babylonian-Median relations deteriorated, and turned into open animosity, at the beginning of the 6th century. See, e.g., Vanderhooft (1999:132).

[2] The following passages, at least, comment favourably on the career of Cyrus: 41:2-3; 41:25; 44:28–45:6; 45:13.

gant and blasphemous enemy of YHWH, in both “Proto-” and Deutero-Isaiah (see 14:4b-21; 47:1-15).

This uncompromisingly negative portrait of Babylon may have served several functions—channelling hatred and desire for revenge, uniting the faithful with the help of the notion of a diabolic enemy, etc. However, it might become problematic in the context of a theological discourse on the deeper causes of the national disaster in 587 BCE. The dilemma confronted by the Isaianic circles can be described in this way. On the one hand, they opposed the view that the Babylonian empire had been assigned a role in YHWH’s plan. The Babylonians (or Chaldeans) had plundered and burnt the temple. Because of that, they should not be given any honorary titles. No intimate relations between them and YHWH were conceivable. On the other hand, the autonomy of Babylon could not be stressed too much. *YHWH’s apparent passivity had to be explained, without insinuating that YHWH had been incapable of defending his city and temple. One way of handling this dilemma was, of course, simply to neglect it. This is probably a major reason why large parts of Isaiah 1–66 are silent on the events of 587/6 BCE*. However, in Deutero-Isaiah, a section ostentiously dealing with the exilic situation, the subject could not be avoided. Here the problem is solved in the following way: YHWH is given an active role, whereas the role of the Babylonians is characterized by ambiguity and obscurity. In accordance with a common pattern, well attested in the HB and in other ANE texts, the catastrophe is explained with recourse to the national deity’s anger, provoked by sins and transgressions committed by the people and their leaders. In other words, YHWH deliberately abandoned his people, leaving the city of Jerusalem unprotected, even allowing the temple to be profaned (see 42:24-25; 43:27-28; 47:6). But what was the role of the Babylonians? Here the picture becomes very vague, probably because of the ideological dilemma discussed above. According to 47:6, YHWH “gave” away his own people, leaving them at the (non-existing) mercy of the Babylonians. This can be interpreted in two different ways: (a) The Babylonians were given a mandate, the extent of which is not defined (but which must have had severe limitations, since the divine utterance in 47:6 condemns the Babylonians for their cruelty against civilians—were they expected to overtake the city without using violence?), or: (b) They had no divine mandate, they just took advantage of the situation, by attacking a city abandoned by its patron deity. At any rate, Babylon is not pictured as YHWH’s instrument or servant. Thus, *a strong anti-Babylonian line is maintained throughout the entire book of Isaiah*.

It is, finally, instructive to make a comparison with the image(s) of Babylon in the book of Jeremiah. In a recent monograph, devoted to the study of the “figure” of Babylon in the MT version of Jeremiah, John Hill has drawn attention to the co-existence of two strongly divergent images: “the conventional

understanding of Babylon as a figure essentially evil and opposed to Yhwh and Judah" and, on the other hand, "an unexpectedly positive understanding, in which Babylon is metaphorically identified with Judah."[3] Especially the existence of the latter, pro-Babylonian, image is of interest, since it is conspicuously absent in the consistently anti-Babylonian Isaianic literary universe. Several passages in the book of Jeremiah indicate a close association between YHWH and the Babylonian ruler.[4] According to Jer 21:1-10, Nebuchadnezzar had an explicit divine mandate to destroy Jerusalem, without showing any mercy towards the defeated population (see esp. 21:7). In Jeremiah 27, further dimensions are added. Here it is proclaimed that Nebuchadnezzar has received world dominion as a gift from YHWH (Jer 27:1-11). Speaking through the prophet, YHWH even refers to the Babylonian ruler as "my servant" (Jer 27:6 [MT]).[5] Somewhat surprisingly, then, *the role of Nebuchadnezzar in (parts of) the book of Jeremiah corresponds to the role accorded to Cyrus in Deutero-Isaiah*. As pointed out by Hill, Cyrus was, from the perspective of the community of YHWH's worshippers in Jerusalem, an instrument for the "restoration of the community", whereas Nebuchednezzar was an "instrument of the community's destruction."[6]

How can the striking differences between the Babylon images of these two prophetical books be explained? Regarding the book of Jeremiah, Hill may be correct in assuming a connection with its distinctively positive view on the exile.[7] As for the book of Isaiah, I would like to suggest that *the absence of expressions picturing Babylon as an instrument or servant of YHWH has to do with a distinctive view on the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 BCE. For the the Isaianic circles, this event seems to have remained an unbearable and virtually unspeakable trauma. Ascribing a divinely decreed role to Babylon, in connection with this event, would have implied that YHWH had become an enemy of his own people*. Apparently, the Isaianic writers attempted, as far as possible, to avoid such images of YHWH.

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[3] Hill (1999:1).

[4] According to Hill, this perspective is prominent within parts of chapters 21–24. See Hill (1999:75-82, and especially p. 79).

[5] For a detailed discussion, see Hill (1999:127-159). The honorary title "my servant" is also bestowed upon Nebuchadnezzar in Jer 25:9 (MT). See Hill (1999:106-111).

[6] Hill (1999:109).

[7] See Hill (1999:203-218). According to Hill, one of the peculiar traits of the book of Jeremiah is found in its "contribution to a theology of the unended exile" (1999:210-211).

5.3. YHWH as enemy

Depictions of YHWH as the enemy of his own people are not uncommon in the Hebrew Bible. For devotees plagued by illness or hit by major disasters, but still clinging to the belief that YHWH had the power (to help), one way of dealing with the situation was to accuse YHWH (rather than a third party) for acts of open hostility. Perhaps the best known examples of such accusations are found in Job's speeches (see Job 3; 6–7, 9–10, etc.).[8] This kind of "Gott-Klage" (Westermann) is an important formal and thematic element in the psalms of lament.[9] In a pioneering study, Fløysvik has explored various aspects of the image of YHWH as enemy within a subdivision within the psalms of lament, the complaint psalms.[10]

Within the book of Isaiah, depictions of YHWH as an enemy of his own worshippers constitute a marginal phenomenon. Substantial parts of the book (in the first place, parts of chs. 1–5 and 28–33) contain threats against the people (or: groups within the people) of Judah and Jerusalem—the very people that YHWH was supposed to protect. However, the dominant metaphors used, picturing YHWH as a parent or a judge (see, e.g., 1:2-4, 12-23; 3:8; 5:1-7; 30:1, 9), indicate that YHWH was entitled, or even expected, to punish those who had been disobedient. Occasionally, though, the depictions of YHWH's agency approach the notion of the deity as an enemy, acting more or less passionately and irrationally (as opposed to the image of the serene judge), and determined to destroy his own worshippers.

There are only a few clear-cut examples of such enemy images, with YHWH in the role of the enemy. In 38:12-13, in the context of a complaint occasioned by serious sickness, king Hezekiah pictures YHWH as a merciless attacker, with the help of vivid metaphors, such as "like a lion he crushes all my bones" (38:13). In 63:10, in the introduction to a communal lament, it is explicitly stated that YHWH, for a while, became the enemy of his own people. In the concluding section of the same communal lament, 64:7-11, the concept of the national deity as his own people's adversary is implicit, but unmistakable (note, however, the somewhat softening effect of the father metaphor in 64:7!).

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[8] On the relevant Job passages, see Westermann (1984:97-99, 103) and the Job commentaries. The book of Job is, however, by no means unique in this respect. Cf., e.g., Jer. 20:7-17, part of the private dialogues (the so-called "confessions") ascribed to the prophet Jeremiah.

[9] See Westermann (1984:80-81).

[10] Fløysvik (1997). The selected group of "complaint psalms" studied by Fløysvik comprises Pss 6; 44; 74; 88, and 90. See Fløysvik (1997:13-14).

It is hardly a coincidence that these unambiguous instances of images of YHWH as enemy all are found in prayers that have been incorporated in the book. To a certain extent, then, the distribution of this particular kind of enemy images can probably be explained in terms of differences between genres.

There are, however, reasons to assume that the scarcity of this type of images of YHWH as enemy has to do with the ideology entertained by the Isaianic circles, as well. On some occasions, pictures of YHWH attacking his own people/nation/city are embedded in contexts drenched with ambivalence and ambiguity. In 29:1-8, YHWH is both the one who besieges Jerusalem (29:1-4), presumably as high commander of the hostile armies involved, and the one who "suddenly" (v 5!) rescues the city and defeats the enemies (29:5-8). In 31:4-5, two seemingly irreconcilable metaphors for divine agency are juxtaposed: the rapacious lion attacking Zion (31:4) and the hovering birds protecting the city (31:5).[11] Such ambiguity, in my opinion, signals a hesitant, or reluctant, attitude towards images of YHWH as an enemy of his own people. At any rate, this must be regarded as a relatively marginal motif. Within the book of Isaiah as a whole, it is overshadowed by another conception: YHWH as the enemy's enemy.

5.4. YHWH as the enemy's enemy

The predominant perspective on the enemies and YHWH in the book of Isaiah can be summarized in two, closely correlated, statements:

(1) *All adversaries of Judah, and/or of the party endorsed by the editors, are enemies of YHWH.*
(2) *In his capacity of patron deity, YHWH will always be the enemy's enemy.*

Having already discussed various aspects of the former statement (see 5.1. above), I will now add some comments regarding the latter.

The notion of YHWH as the enemy's enemy can, I suggest, be regarded as a governing principle behind much of the material in the book of Isaiah. To begin with, it is evident that all passages announcing or describing punitive actions carried out by YHWH against other nations (i.e., against Judah's actual or potential enemies) can be related to this overarching principle (see, e.g.,

[11] For divergent interpretations of Isa 31:4-5, a notoriously difficult passage, see the commentaries. See further the analysis and discussion in Eidevall (1993). Cf. also Barré (1993).

10:16-19, 24-27; 14:4b-21, 24-27; 17:1-6; 19:1-15; 30:27-33; 31:8-9; 34:1-15). Arguably, its impact can also be traced in passages that condemn "sinners" and "rebels" within Jerusalem and Judah/Yehud (1:2-31; 2:6-22; 3:1-15, etc.), to the extent that these groups could be regarded as opponents to, or oppressors of, the party supported by the editors (see 1:24-31; 57:1-10; 65:1-7; 66:1-6, 22-24).

Finally—and this is perhaps the most interesting aspect—the principle "YHWH is the enemy's enemy—is applicable also to those passages where a foreign nation is pictured as YHWH's instrument. For instance, we are told that YHWH would use the Medes to punish one of Judah's arch-enemies, viz. Babylon. By the same token, Cyrus, the commander of the Persian army that put an end to the Neo-Babylonian empire, is said to have been elected by YHWH. In other words, when foreign nations are enrolled in the service of YHWH, they are supposed to strike against the enemies of Judah and Jerusalem. This is evident in 10:5-15. As soon as Assyria started threatening Jerusalem, it was criticized for having overstepped the limits of its divine mandate. According to a likely interpretation of several passages (5:26-29; 7:18-20; 8:5-8; 28:1-4), the "Isaianic" view (perhaps originating with the prophet Isaiah himself) on the historical mission of Assyria in the 8th century BCE regarded this empire as a useful weapon wielded by YHWH, in his capacity of Judah's national patron deity. Hence, this weapon was to be directed against Judah's enemies, and in the first place against the kingdoms of Israel/Ephraim and Aram.[12] Soon, however, Assyria itself took over the role of Judah's archenemy. During the centuries that followed, new adversaries replaced the old ones. However, the role of YHWH remained the same. According to the authors and editors of BI, their deity was, first and foremost, a fierce enemy of every enemy who dared to threaten Zion.

[12] See further the detailed analyses of the following passages in chapter 2 above: Isa 5:26-29; 7:18-20; 8:5-8; 28:1-4.

Chapter 6

Enemy Images, Ideology, and Identity

6.1. The Zion-centered perspective and the 701 paradigm

It is far from controversial to define the ideological outlook of the authors and editors of the book of Isaiah as Zion-centered. There is a wide consensus among scholars that the overarching, and unifying, theme of the book of Isaiah is the destiny of Zion, the temple mount in Jerusalem.[1] Virtually all oracles and narratives in this prophetic book are somehow connected to topics like Zion endangered, Zion delivered, Zion restored, etc. Indeed, according to visions that are strategically situated near the beginning and the end of the overall composition, 2:1-5 and 66:18-21, Zion is the very centre of the world—and this shall once be recognized by all peoples.[2] Hence, it hardly needs to be demonstrated that all enemy images in BI have been shaped within a Zion-centered perspective.

In the following, I will attempt to defend a more specific thesis: *Most enemy images in BI are, on the editorial level, connected to what I will refer to as "the 701 paradigm."* A short explanation is probably called for. To begin with, the original idea behind the cryptic formulation "the 701 paradigm" is not mine. In a study dealing with "the ideological-historical context" of the book of Isaiah,[3] Antti Laato has suggested that "the destruction of the Assyrian army in Isaiah 36–37 provides a paradigm for the whole Book's message about a new world order centered around Zion."[4] According to Laato, the legend in Isaiah 36–37 (= 2 Kgs 18:13–20:19) also serves as "a paradigm for the hubris of foreign nations which oppose Yhwh's power."[5] In other words, the incorporation of this narrative into BI, near the very centre of the composition, was congenial to the overarching ideological perspective of this prophetic book. The magnitude of the events of the year of 701, within the conceptual framework of the final edition of BI, is indicated by the fact that, despite Deutero-Isaiah (chs. 40–55) and all other passages referrring to the situation of the exile, the chronology of the book

[1] See, e.g., Clements (1997) and Seitz (1991).
[2] Cf. Davies (1989:93-95).
[3] Laato (1998).
[4] Laato (1998:95).
[5] Laato (1998:117).

appears to have been “frozen” at that point of time. Subsequent historical events are not recounted, they are merely implied. Moreover, *the book both begins and closes with descriptions that evoke sceneries from the year of 701*: While Zion in 1:5-9 is pictured as the only remaining “shelter” (1:8) in a desolated country, the displayal in 66:24, of the corpses of all those who rebelled against YHWH, is strongly reminiscent of the depiction in 37:36 of the slain Assyrian soldiers.[6] In addition, a couple of opaque visionary reports, 29:1-8 and 31:4-5, re-use the basic story-line of the 701 legend, in what appears to be paradigmatic depictions of both the past and the future (from the standpoint of the authors).[7]

My hypothesis, then, is that the (largely fictional) account of the Assyrian siege of Jerusalem in the year 701 BCE, and of the miraculous deliverance of the city, served as a matrix for the principal conceptions in BI concerning the relations between YHWH, Zion, and the enemies. According to the Isaianic authors and redactors, I suggest, the event of 701 BCE—i.e., the event *as they knew it*, from the legend, as distinct from what really happened, historically speaking[8]—was *the* event which was able to throw light on all preceding and subsequent events. *When Jerusalem was under attack from the Assyrians, the divine plan governing the course of history was disclosed. When the city was*

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[6] Cf. Laato (1998:117): “The loyal inhabitants of Jerusalem can come to see the dead bodies of these rebels just as in the time of Hezekiah”,

[7] On the links between Isa 31:4-5 (as well as 29:1-8) and the legend about the deliverance of Jerusalem in 701 BCE, cf. Laato (1998:109): “The portrayal of Yhwh as lion (v 4) is a motif derived from the word Ariel…As the lion does not leave its prey when a muster of shepherds is called out against it, so Yhwh does not leave his own prey, Jerusalem, with the Assyrian clamour against it!…The bird image in verse 5 explains how Jerusalem belongs to Yhwh and is under his protection. Isa 31:4-5 explains, on the one hand, how the Assyrian threat is regarded as a cleansing whereby the sinners are annihilated from Zion and, on the other hand, how Assyria cannot conquer the city.”

[8] For an up-dated discussion on the issues involved in historical reconstructions of Sennacherib’s campaign against Judah in 701 BCE, see the contributions in Grabbe (2003a). See especially Becking (2003:65-69), Ben Zvi (2003), Grabbe (2003b), and Knauf (2003). Cf. also Gallagher (1999). It appears to be ascertained that a large-scale Assyrian military campaign against Judah really took place in that year, and that a large naumber of cities and towns were destroyed. But what about Jerusalem? According to Knauf (2003:145-146, quote on p. 145), “[t]here never was a siege of Jerusalem”, only an expedition involving some cavalry troops. Cf. Grabbe (2003b:8-9). At any rate, all versions (both ancient and modern) agree on this point: Jerusalem was not taken by the Assyrians. But why? Whereas the legendary account in Isa 37:36 (= 2 Kgs 19:35) speaks of a divine miracle (in the form of a massacre!), most modern scholars believe that king Hezekiah was forced to pay heavy tribute to rescue his city, in line with 2 Kgs 18:14-16 (an alternative version, missing in Isaiah!) and the official Assyrian version in the annals of Sennacherib.

delivered, the true nature of YHWH, as Zion's defender, was revealed. All other "helpers", with Egypt as the prototype, were shown to be of no avail. Because of their exemplary trust in YHWH, Hezekiah and Isaiah were elevated to the status of role models for good leaders. At the same time, *Assyria became a prototype for all enemies*. In the bold speeches of Rabshake and Sennacherib, the true—that is, arrogant, blasphemous, rebellious, immoral and savage—nature of all Zion's adversaries was revealed. Here the line was clearly drawn between useful instruments, in the service of Judah's patron deity (cf. 10:5-6), and despicable enemies who deserved to be destroyed (cf. 10:7-19, 24-27). All adversaries in subsequent periods were to be measured, so to speak, by the Assyrian measuring-rod. As long as they attacked other nations, acting as the enemy's enemy, all was well. But if they threatened Zion, YHWH wouls surely punish them. There are good reasons to assume that "Assyria", after the fall of Nineveh, came to be used as a code name for its oppressive predecessors among world powers, such as the Babylonians, the Persians, the Ptolemeans, and the Seleuchids.[9] Moreoever, within the conceptual world of the final editors of BI, there was, basically, no difference between distant empires and infidel Jews in their vicinity. *In the minds of the redactors, the horrible fate of the Assyrian army (as recounted in 37:36) prefigured the fate of all who dared to oppose YHWH, and/or the party supported by the redactors (cf. 66:24)*.

It is not true, however, that all enemy images in BI can be directly related to the 701 paradigm. The portrayal of the neo-Babylonian empire must have caused the Isaianic writers great problems, due to the fact that the Babylonians actually captured Jerusalem and destroyed its temple. From their point of view, this act was not merely reprehensible. It was utterly incomprehensible—there was no room for it within the paradigm. Thus, if the Jerusalem's deliverance in 701 was *the* event, the disaster in 587/6 had to be treated as a *non-event*. For the Isaianic circles, it remained largely an untouchable trauma. This can, I suggest, be seen as a major reason why the explicit references in BI to the Babylonian siege and pillage of Jerusalem are so few, in fact only two (63:18 and 64:9-10 [= Eng. 64:10-11]).[10] Significantly, these two allusions are found within a communal lament—and they fail to mention the Babylonians by name.

Among all the enemies that are described or denounced within BI, two stand out from the rest, because of the uncompromisingly negative way they are portrayed. These two are Babylon and Edom. One may ask: What did they have in common? My answer is: their association with the outrageous events of the

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[9] Cf. the discussion of the following passages in chapter 2.2. (for each passage, see the section titled "Contextualization"): Isa 30:27-33; 31:8-9; 37:22b-29.

[10] One might also mention the following passages: 42:22-24; 43:26-28; 47:6. However, in these passages nothing is said about the destruction of the city or the temple.

year 587 (or 586). The Babylonians, of course, were the perpetrators. Hence, that strong hatred against Babylon which characterizes the book of Isaiah.[11] But Edom? In other biblical texts, from the exile and onwards, the Edomites are accused of some kind of complicity (see Ps 137:7; Obad 11-14).[12] Against that background, it is understandable why Edom apparently became the new arch-enemy, after the fall of Babylon. Arguably, all of this has to do with the impact of the 701 paradigm. One might perhaps put it this way: *When the Babylonians tore down the city walls of Jerusalem and violated the sanctuary (with or without assistance from Edom), they threatened more than a city and a temple. They endangered the ideological foundation of the symbolic universe inhabited by the members of the Isaianic school, they attacked the core of the 701 paradigm: the conviction that YHWH would always defend and deliver Zion.*

6.2. Prophecies as political propaganda

Throughout the main part of the preceding textual investigation (chapters 2 and 3), passages in the book if Isaiah have been interpreted as instances of propagandistic literature. In this short chapter, I will sketchily outline a possible historical reconstruction of some major stages in the diachronic development of the Isaianic tradition, with regard to this particular aspect.

In *the initial phase*, around the time for the so-called Syro-Ephraimite crisis in the 730s BCE, Isaiah ben Amoz (or some other 8th century prophet[s] in Jerusalem) apparently perceived a strong threat emanating from the two neighbouring nations to the north that had formed an anti-Assyrian coalition: the kingdom of Israel, often referred to as Ephraim, and the Aramean kingdom. Hence, *the prophetic propaganda was primarily directed against the leaders in Samaria and Damascus*. YHWH, the patron of Jerusalem and Judah, would punish them. This is clearly evidenced by Isa 7:1-9 and 17:1-6, two passages announcing the demise of these rulers and the destruction of their kingdoms. It is worth noticing that one of these ridiculed and dehumanized enemies was Israel. *YHWH was*, in fact, *revered as national deity of both parties in the conflict. Against that background, it was necessary to describe the people and leaders of*

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[11] Cf. the following comment made by Begg (1989:124): "In looking back over the book of Isaiah's references to Babylon, one is struck by their intensely and virtually unrelievedly negative character."

[12] See further the section "contextualization" in the analysis of Isa 34 above, in ch. 3.2.

Samaria as wicked, arrogant, and godless. This is what happens in 9:7-20. YHWH is, here so to speak, given good excuses for rejecting the neighbouring nation which he was supposed to protect, and for punishing it by sending a series of great disasters. It is possible that the famous vineyard song (or parable) in 5:1-7, a passage which is usually interpreted as criticizing *both* Israel and Judah, originally served a similar function within the anti-Israelite propaganda.[13] According to 5:7, the vineyard stands for Israel, whereas Judah is YHWH's "pleasant planting" (NRSV). As keenly observed by Sweeney, "[o]nly the vineyard is the focus of punishment."[14]

As a consequence of this anti-Israelite and anti-Aramean bias, Assyria was granted a positive role, as the enemy's enemy. In some passages, the depictions of the Assyrian army even seem to echo the official Assyrian propaganda![15] Thus, an Assyrian invasion is pictured as an inundation in 8:6-8. In a similar vein, the oracle against Samaria in 28:1-4 speaks of someone who is like "a hailstorm, a destructive tempest, like a storm of mighty, overflowing waters" (28:2). At least in the case of 28:2, but probably also in the case of 8:6-7, these echoes of Assyrian propaganda occur in instances of Jerusalemite propaganda directed against Israel, with Assyria cast in the role as an instrument for YHWH's punitive wrath.[16] Soon, however, *this pro-Assyrian stance was replaced by a strong anti-Assyrian animus*. In the aftermath of the Syro-Ephraimite affair, Judah became an Assyrian vassal, forced to pay heavy tributes. It is conceivable that the notion of Assyria as an oppressive and threatening power grew stronger in Judah, after the fall of Samaria in 722/721. From a Jerusalemite perspective, the Assyrian empire could no longer be regarded as a useful instrument in the hands of YHWH. During the reign of Hezekiah, several attempts were made to receive assistance from Egypt in the formation of anti-Assyrian alliances among the small vassal states in the area. This development culminated in the years 705-701 BCE, with the death of Sargon, Judah's participation in a revolt which sought to exploit the situation, and the Assyrian retaliation in the form of Sennacherib's campaign—a campaign that resulted in the destruction of a large

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[13] With Sweeney (1996:130-131).

[14] Sweeney (1996:130). In the following comment made by Sweeney, what is said about Isa 5:1-24 (as a redactionally created unit), clearly applies also to 5:1-7 as a self-contained unit: "The intention of 5:1-24 is clearly to convince the people of Jerusalem and Judah that the Assyrian invasion of Israel during the Syro-Ephraimite War is an act of YHWH to punish the country for its failure to maintain its standards of justice and righteousness." (1996:130).

[15] For a more detailed discussion of echoes of Assyrian propaganda in the book of Isaiah, see Machinist (1983).

[16] Cf. the textual analyses of these passages above (in chapter 2). As regards the interpretation of 8:6-7 as referring to an invasion of Israel, cf. Laato (1998:104).

amount of towns and cities in Judah, although Jerusalem was spared. Some of the prophecies depicting Assyria as an oppressive enemy might have originated during Hezekiah's reign—for instance, Isa 10:5-15, a passage condemning Assyria for overstepping the limits of its divine mandate (i.e., YHWH's mandate, not Ashur's). However, *there are good reasons to assume that the bulk of oracles containing starkly negative portraits of Assyria were either composed or reworked in the 7th century, and more precisely during Josiah's reign, shortly before or after the fall of Nineveh.*[17] In these pieces of anti-Assyrian propaganda, one may discern a recurring pattern: an announcement of an imminent disaster sent by YHWH, which will befall Assyria is coupled with a proclamation of Judah's approaching liberation from the Assyrian "yoke" (see 10:16-19 + 24-27; 14:24-27; cf. also 9:3). Interestingly enough, the metaphorical expression "the yoke of A ur" was frequently used by the Assyrian rulers themselves in their annals.[18] Further examples of deliberate re-use of topoi from the Assyrian propaganda, in rhetorical attacks directed against that empire, can be found in Isa 37:22b-29.[19]

In the wake of Nineveh's fall in 612 BCE, another aggressively expansive empire, the neo-Babylonian, appeared on the stage, ready to replace Assyria. It is likely that the Isaianic writers, and other observers in Judah, perceived a strong element of continuity between these two Mesopotamian world powers.[20] At any rate, one may speak of a literary continuity, as regards the use of motifs and metaphors in various prophecies in BI. In the case of the taunt song in 14:4b-21, traditionally Assyrian topoi appear to have been applied to the depiction of a Babylonian ruler.[21] Conversely, it has been suggested that the narrative about the Assyrian siege in Isaiah 36–37 (= 2 Kgs 18:13–19:37) was written at the time of the Babylonian siege, more than a century later, and that the Babylonian ruler Nebuchadnezzar was "disguised" as the Assyrian king Sennacherib.[22] These theories may be debatable, but that is not the issue here. The point to be made is rather that such theories are based upon a valid observation, viz. that *the move from the anti-Assyrian to the anti-Babylonian stage of prophetic propaganda was characterized by a high degre of continuity.*

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[17] On the so-called "Assur-Redaktion", see Barth (1977). On the whole, I find the hypothesis convincing. However, in the case of 30:27-33, a post-exilic dating seems more likely, as argued by Blenkinsopp (2000:423-424).

[18] See, e.g., Machinist (1993:86).

[19] For details, see the analysis above in chapter 2. See also Machinist (1983).

[20] Cf. Clements (1994:242-246).

[21] According to a widely accepted hypothesis, the entire poem was originally about an Assyrian king. However, this is uncertain. See the discussion of Isa 14:3-23 above, in chapter 2.4., the section with the heading "contextualization."

[22] Thus Hardmeier (1990).

However, this does not mean that the images of Assyria and Babylon in BI can be regarded as identical. There is one great difference between them: Whereas some passages depict the historical mission of Assyria in rather positive terms (as the enemy's enemy, an instrument wielded by YHWH), the image of Babylon is thoroughly negative, without the slightest exception. In the previous chapter (6.1.), it was suggested that this irreconcilable attitude towards the Babylonians can be explained as emanating from a Zion-centered ideological perspective. At this point, a supplementary hypothesis might be added: *The anti-Babylonian tendency is consonant with the consistently pro-Persian bias of the final edition of the book of Isaiah*. Especially in Isaiah 40–55, there seems to be a close relation between anti-Babylonian and pro-Persian utterances. Moreover, there are some points of contact between the Behistun inscription and the anti-Babylonian oracles in BI.[23] Still, it would probably be misguided to interpret the latter as nothing else than echoes of pro-Persian propaganda. As regards the authors of such passages as 13:1-22 and 47:1-15, genuine hatred towards Babylon may well have been a more important factor than dependance on official Persian rhetoric.[24] In the 6th century BCE, both Persians and Judeans had good reasons to regard the Babylonian empire as their worst enemy. The fact that they had a mutual enemy in Babylon need not imply that their perspectives concurred in other respects.

It is difficult to draw any certain conclusions concerning the attitude(s) towards Persia among the Isaianic circles from the 6th century and onwards. *Except for the extremely positive portrayal of Cyrus in some passages in chs. 40–48, there are no explicit references to the Persian empire at all in the book of Isaiah*. Hence, it would be possible to interpret the image of Cyrus as the instrument and servant of YHWH—a servant who is given such extraordinary honorary designations as "shepherd" (44:28) and "anointed/Messiah (!)" (45:1)—as applicable also to his successors. On the other hand, it is likely that "Deutero-Isaiah",[25] in assigning this role to Cyrus, had a very special mission in mind: This Persian general had been elected by YHWH, in order to inaugurate the era of restoration and salvation. As soon as his troops had "liberated" Babylon, the people of YHWH (those who were not in Judah already) would be free

[23] See e,g, Gosse (1988:84, 274).

[24] Cf. Begg (1989:124-125): "the peculiar portrait of Babylon developed throughout the book of Isaiah is most readily explainable as deriving from a moment when Jewish passions regarding the city would have been at their most intense, i.e. the years just before and after its surrender to Cyrus."

[25] I am not assuming that Isaiah 40–55 is the product of one single author. According to Kratz (1991:175-191), the passages that mention Cyrus by name belong to a specific redactional strand, "Kyros-Redaktion", which he dates to the reign of Darius I.

to return, in a new exodus, to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem. In other words, Cyrus's mission was limited to one particular situation. Hence, there is no compelling reason to assume that post-exilic writers within the Isaianic school regarded subsequent Persian rulers as chosen and "anointed" by YHWH. In fact, they made no mention of Darius or the others. How, then, should that silence be interpreted? There are two main alternatives. On the one hand, it is indeed possible that the circles behind "Trito-Isaiah" (and the final edition of BI) were intent on maintaining good relations with the Persian overlords (both Ezra and Nehemiah had been commissioned by the Persian authorities).[26] On the other hand, Persia was an oppressive empire, as its forerunners.[27] One should therefore seriously consider the possibility that some post-exilic passages challenge the Persian rulers' claim to world dominion. Above all, *the visions of all peoples pilgriming to Zion* (see 2:2-4; 60:1-16; 66:18-21) *can be read as couched anti-Persian propaganda*: According to these passages, Jerusalem, not Susa, would be elevated to the status of centre of the world.[28] Moreover, it is conceivable that some instances of pre-exilic anti-Assyrian propaganda were reinterpreted in an anti-Persian direction, without the need for alteration in the wording of the texts (it sufficed to know that "Assyria" should be read as a code name for Persia).[29] However, this can be no more than speculations. After all, it is a fact that the book of Isaiah is void of explicit anti-Persian propaganda.

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[26] Thus, e.g., Schramm (1995:75): "From Isaiah 56–66 itself we learn little of a 'political' nature other than that the Persian hegemony over Judah was taken for granted. Second Isaiah had elevated Cyrus to the status of messiah, as one who ruled and conquered by the will of YHWH, the God of Israel. It would have been a short step to view Cyrus's empire as divinely mandated as well. As I see it, this helps to explain the lack of any anti-Persian polemic in biblical prophetic texts." Cf., in a similar vein, Sweeney (1996:52). Cf. further Gottwald (2001:101): "The biblical profile of Cyrus as a benign ruler and benefactor of the Judahites, in contrast to the nearly total dislike, even abhorrence, of Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian kings, sets the tone for a largely positive assessment of Persian hegemony throughout the biblical traditions."

[27] Cf. Ackroyd (1990a:217).

[28] I owe this idea to Ackroyd (1990b:6).

[29] In the case of Isa 30:27-33, the author may indeed have used "Assyria" as a code name for Persia, since this passage appears to be of post-exilic origin. Cf. Smith (1984:275).

6.3. On enemy images and implied self-images

It was maintained at the outset of this study (in 1.1.), that there is an intricate and interesting relation between enemy images and self-images. This is so, because the formation of conceptions of "the other" is an important ingredient in identity construction. This applies to both individuals and groups. We define ourselves in relation, and often in opposition, to others. In the case of enemy images, the underlying logic can be formulated thus: The enemies are (pictured as being) what "we" are *not* (or, rather: what "we" claim that we are not). *Since the negative stereotypes that are attributed onto various "enemies" presuppose the existence of positive counterparts, every enemy image can be regarded as a mirror showing us the speaker's or writer's implicit, and often heavily idealized, self-portrait*. It can be instructive to compare such self-images with other extant, and in some sense external portrayals of the person, group, or nation in question.

The question is, however, to what extent the discussion above is applicable in this special case. What interests me is the possibility to reconstruct the self-image of the final editors, those who not only composed most of chs. 56–66, but left their imprint on Isaiah 1–66 as a whole. Can it be done? The problem is that we do not know who these anonymous writers/editors were. We have no names, no dates, no explicit information concerning their social function(s) or position(s). In the last eleven chapters of BI, explicit references to historical events and named persons are conspicuously absent. Sadly enough, very little is known about parties involved in the power struggle in Jerusalem during the Persian era.[30] As a consequence, there is plenty of room for speculative theories. In my opinion, these anonymous editors probably belonged to post-exilic circles closely associated with the temple in Jerusalem.[31] However, this is no more than a qualified guess. Hence, this project runs the risk of slipping into circular reasoning, where the reconstructed self-image is used to corroborate the hypothetical identification on which the process was based. Nevertheless, I believe it is worthwhile to run a test on this slightly novel approach to issues of authorial/editorial identity construction on the biblical texts. In a first step, a reconstruction of the implied ideal (self-)image will be outlined. Then I will make an attempt to shed some new light on the debate regarding the party represented by the final editors: Who were they? By necessity, this involves a high degree of conjecture. However, let us start with what we actually have—the texts, and the enemy images that can be found in them.

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[30] Cf., e.g., Blenkinsopp (2003:42-44, a chapter with the telling title "The poverty of our knowledge").

[31] See further 1.4. above.

The enemy images in BI can, according to the above argumentation, be regarded as mirrors, showing reflexions of ideals that were highly esteemed by the final editors. By means of a process of inversion, one may thus reconstruct an implied conception of the ideal community of people worshipping YHWH. This is easily done. The most prominent and recurring negative stereotypes used in diverse enemy images in BI were listed and discussed above (in chapters 4.1. and 4.3.).[32] If these hostile attributions are brought together, we get the following picture of typical foes: They are wicked and corrupt. They are sinners, oppressors, and traitors. In addition, the adversaries can be accused of heavy drinking, or of involvement in illicit cultic activities. Above all, however, all enemies are arrogant, and hence guilty of hubris and blasphemy. In one word, the typical enemy is a rebel. Conversely, the ideal members of the YHWH-worshipping community should be good, honest, and righteous citizens. Rather than oppressing others, they tend to be victims of oppression and injustice. They are peaceful and reliable persons. Moreover, they are expected to be strict (and sober) observers of (some version of) orthodox Judaism. Above all, though, they should be humble and meek (cf. 66:2b!), rather than proud and arrogant. *In one word, the ideal members of the community were supposed to be loyal (not rebels!)—loyal servants of YHWH (meaning loyal supporters of a certain party?).*

This tentatively reconstructed image of an ideal should not be confused with a manifest editorial self-portrait. Still, it might perhaps aid us in the quest for the elusive party endorsed by the final editors of BI? In the current debate regarding the "Trito-Isaiah" party, there are two poles. The profile of this group is described as either sectarian or mainstream. Paul D. Hanson has characterized this party as an apocalyptic and "visionary" sect, persecuted by—and hence vividly polemizing against—the pragmatic "hierocratic" party in control of the recently rebuilt temple.[33] The most controversial part of his theory is the supposition, based upon Hanson's interpretation of Isa 66:1-2, that the Trito-Isaiah party was

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[32] For attestations of these negative attributes in various texts in the book of Isaiah, the reader is referred to chapters 4.1. and 4.3. above, where ample textual examples are given.

[33] See Hanson (1979:10-177 and 1988). The terms "visionary" and "hierocratic" were introduced in Hanson (1979 [1975], see esp. 1979:10). The main mechanisms at work in this hypothetically reconstructed schism, have been described in the following way by Hanson (1988:98, cf. also 1979:408-409): "Internally, we see the conditions developing that have typically fomented apocalyptic movements. As one group sees its power to influence the social and political structures slipping away, and experiences deprivation and disenfranchisement, it quite naturally uses the symbols of its faith to envision imminent vindication in terms of God's direct intervention and ruthless judgment of the adversary party." Quite naturally? Perhaps.

against the restoration program endorsed by those returning from the *golah* (led by Haggai, Joshua, and Zerubbabel), with its insistent claim that the rebuilding of the temple was the first priority.[34] Somewhat later, one may infer, these visionaries would also become fierce critics of the religious reforms initiated by Ezra and Nehemiah. Not surprisingly, the validity of this hypothesis has been questioned by several other scholars. It has thus been convincingly argued that 66:1-2 need not be interpreted as voicing opposition against the temple building project.[35] Moreover, Brooks Schramm and Marvin Sweeney have demonstrated that there is wide-ranging aggreement on central issues between Isaiah 56–66 and the agenda of Ezra.[36] Hence, according to Hanson's critics, the members of the Trito-Isaiah party were part of (what was to become recognized as) the mainstream orthodox, strictly torah-observing and monotheistic movement. It is noteworthy that the most concrete accusations against their opponents concern their (alleged) participation in syncretistic or otherwise "illicit" cultic activities (cf. 57:4-9; 65:3-4, 7, 11). To this one may add the observation that the text appears to contain a couple of self-designations used by the Trito-Isaiah party. As pointed out by Joseph Blenkinsopp, the expression in 66:5, החרדים אל דברו, "those who tremble at his word", which occurs also in 66:2 (with a slight variation), provides a conspicuous link between this group and the supporters of Ezra (cf. Ezra 9:4; 10:3).[37] In addition, the members of the Trito-Isaiah group referred to themselves as עבדים, "servants" (65:8-9, 13-15; 66:14), the very opposite of the abominable "rebels" (65:2; 66:24.[38]

Who were they, then, these "tremblers" and "servants"? Schismatic or orthodox? Apocalyptic-minded or rigid legalists? A marginalized minority, or a

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[34] See Hanson (1979:174-176 and 1988:96).

[35] The most likely interpretation of Isa 66:1-2 would seem to be that this passage, by means of rhetorical questions and hyperbolic statements, expresses basically the same idea as a Deuteronomistic passage like 1 Kgs 8:15-30 (compare Isa 66:1 with 1 Kgs 8:27!). See Schramm (1995:164-165), Emmerson (1996:57-58), and Blenkinsopp (2003:86). It is further unlikely that Isa 66:3 should be read as a total rejection of all sacrificial temple cult. Cf., e.g., Emmerson (1996:58).

[36] See Schramm (1995:112-182) and Sweeney (1996:51-55). As regards the issue of admittance (or non-admittance) of foreigners into the cultic community, the positions of Ezra and Nehemiah (cf. Ezra 9–10 and Neh 13:23-31) and of Trito-Isaiah (56:1-8; 66:18-24) need not be regarded as mutually exclusive. See Sweeney (1996:53-54).

[37] See Blenkinsopp (2003:51-53).

[38] For a detailed discussion of the possible implications of this usage of the designation "servants", which can be interpreted as signalling both continuity (even in terms of discipleship?) and discontinuity vis-à-vis chs. 40–55, see Blenkinsopp (1997; cf. also 2003:33, 52). I agree with the following conclusion drawn by Blenkinsopp (2003:52), viz. that the חרדים and the עבדים "are clearly one and the same entity."

party closely allied with the authorities? Perhaps both? According to Blenkinsopp, the Trito-Isaiah party was "an eschatologically oriented sect."[39] They were poor and persecuted, at times even excommunicated from the temple worship (cf. 66:5) by their mighty rivals.[40] In Blenkinsopp's hypothetical reconstruction of the course of events, the circumstance that this sect supported the reform movement led by Ezra and Nehemiah may have provoked retaliation from their opponents.[41] Eventually, this led to "the exclusion of the group from the cult community and its consequent social and economic marginalization."[42] I find this reconstruction unlikely. If this group was excluded from the temple, how and why were its testimonies included in the final version of the book of Isaiah? Like Hanson, Blenkinsopp is faced with the difficult task of explaining how these sectarian prophecies "came to be preserved by the very hierarchy which they originally attacked."[43] Schramm has adduced an interesting, and rather convincing, practical and economic argument against the view that Isaiah 56–66, a section linked to the final redaction of BI, should be regarded "as dissident literature produced by an out-of-power, disenfranchised group."[44] Small groups without power could not produce large books! Schramm's detailed argumentation goes like this:

> This is because the production of the unified book of Isaiah was one of the major accomplishments of post-exilic Judaism. The compositional complexity of the unified book of Isaiah is rivaled only by that of the Pentateuch itself, and such a massive undertaking would have required close access to the religious power structures of the day.[45]

On the whole, I tend to sympathize with Schramm's and Sweeney's position on the matters discussed above.[46] My own contribution to this debate takes its point

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[39] Blenkinsopp (2003:65).

[40] Blenkinsopp (2003:51-54, 63-66).

[41] See Blenkinsopp (2003:52-54, 65-66). According to Blenkinsopp (2003:54), since Ezra probably "succeeded only in alienating the priestly and lay aristocracy…his supporters would have been exposed to the kind of hostility reflected in the last two chapters of Isaiah." Blenkinsopp continues (2003:54): "Their excommunication would be repayment for the ostracism and confiscation of property threatened against those who stood aloof from Ezra's reforming measures (Ezra 10:8)."

[42] Blenkinsopp (2003:66).

[43] Hanson (1979:46).

[44] Schramm (1995:109).

[45] Schramm (1995:109).

[46] See Schramm (1995) and Sweeney (1996:51-55).

of departure in the unmistakably propagandistic character of many passages in Isaiah 56–66 (and in the remaining parts of BI).

The opponents are depicted as embodying all kinds of vices. Needless to point out, such portrayals tend to contain severe distortions of the actual state of affairs. Hence, enemy images should not be interpreted as neutral reports. Nor should images of the ideal human being, or of the ideal community. By the same token, *the implied editorial self-portrayal*, which can be extracted from "Trito-Isaiah", *should not be taken at face value*. When the group associated with the "we" of the text is pictured as a persecuted and marginalized minority, *we* (the readers) have every reason to be suspicious, recalling that *the manipulating of proportions is a standard ingredient in all propaganda* (see 1.1. above). As indicated by 66:5, this party may perhaps at some time (probably prior to the arrival of Ezra and Nehemiah on the scene) have been outmanoeuvered by their rivals in the internal power struggle, which centered on the control over the temple cult in Jerusalem. Yet, at the time of writing, they may well have had the upper hand in the conflict. Even if they did not speak for the majority, I find it likely that they were in the position to dictate the rules to be followed by the majority. In my opinion, the fact that their opponents are labelled "rebels" strongly suggests that *the circles endorsed by the final editors of BI had (or: used to have) close access to the power structures*. They refer to themselves as humble "servants" of the deity, in keeping with the phraseology used in propagandistic royal self-presentations throughout the ancient Near East. Hence, I find it likely that, on the level of the final redaction in the 5th century BCE, the enemy images in the book of Isaiah served the purpose of supporting the religious politics of Ezra and Nehemiah and their followers.[47] Above all, they were probably used to legitimize harsh measures against their allegedly less orthodox opponents. However, this can be no more than speculations.

At any rate, *the book of Isaiah testifies to the almost universal human need for enemy images*. Without the notion of external enemies, on whom we may project all our own negative traits, life gets more complicated. *For groups adhering to idealistic and dualistic ideologies, a world without enemies is hardly conceivable—despite the fact that they frequently dream about such a new world. This is illustrated by the ending of the book of Isaiah*. It is significant, I suggest, that the magnificent vision of "new heavens and a new earth" in 66:22-23, which looks like a perfect finale, is not allowed to be the last word (or vision), after all. It is immediately followed by the gruesome vision of "the dead bodies of the people who have rebelled" against YHWH (66:24) and, one may infer, against the party represented by the editors. *Paradoxically, the message conveyed by the text, over and over again, viz. that all enemies will disappear, is*

[47] With Sweeney (1996:51).

contradicted by the structural arrangement. The enemies do not disappear! On the contrary, they re-appear, in the very last vision. Indeed, it seems as though they will be there forever, since the display of their destruction is described as a never-ending spectacle: “their worm shall not die, their fire shall not be quenched” (66:24). In a sense then, the enemies must not be completely ex-tinguished. They have to stay, because “we” need them. It seems appropriate to close this study with the following question—a question worthy of profound reflection: What would the world look like without enemies?

Chapter 7

Summary

The primary aim of this study has been to identify and analyze enemy images in the book of Isaiah. In the introductory chapter (1.1.), the term “enemy image” was introduced, and defined as *a textual description of a group or nation, wherein negative, stereotype characterization is combined with expressions conveying the notion of a perceived threat*. The book of Isaiah was chosen as the object of investigation, since it contains a rich variety of enemy images from a time span of at least four centuries (1.4.). A model for the ensuing textual analysis was presented (1.5.), focusing on the characterization of the enemy, the rhetorical strategy adopted, the text’s function in its historical context(s), and the ideology of the author(s) and/or editor(s).

The main part of this study consists of textual analyses (chs. 2-4). At first, passages dealing with hostile empires (Assyria, Egypt, Babylonia) were discussed (ch. 2). Some of the most important findings were summed up in attempted reconstructions of the overall profile, or portrait, of each empire (2.5.). As regards the portrait of Assyria, several features—for instance, accusations of arrogance and hubris, and certain metaphors (storm, flood, yoke, etc.)—echo the contemporary Assyrian propaganda. In connection with the Syro-Ephraimite crisis in the 730s BCE, the Assyrian empire was regarded as the enemy’s enemy, an allied of sorts. Metaphorically, the Assyrian ruler was depicted as an instrument in the hands of YHWH. Later on, however, Assyria was perceived as the primary threat against Judah.

Egypt, by contrast, is mainly pictured as a helpless helper: weak and treacherous, and hence potentially dangerous in the role of an ally. This portrait is probably based on historical experiences (Hezekiah´s revolt in 705-701 BCE, as well as Zedekiah’s revolt in the 580s). One may, furthermore, note that this image of Egypt as unreliable has close parallels in Assyrian propaganda. However, the portrait of Egypt in the book of Isaiah is ambiguous. For instance, the oracle in 18:1-6 concerning Cush seems to indicate that Egypt was perceived as a real threat at some occasion during the period of Nubian rule (the 25th dynasty).

In several respects, the portrait of the neo-Babylonian empire is modelled on the image of Assyria. Several motifs and metaphors are re-used. However, one may speak of both continuity and contrast. Babylon is pictured as the evil empire and as the archenemy of both Judah and YHWH. Unlike Assyria, Babylon is not granted the status of an instrument implementing YHWH’s plan. In

Isaiah 47 (and in other parts of chs. 40–55), "daughter" Babylon is portrayed as a negative counterpart of "daughter" Zion. As concerns the portraits of the empires, one may finally note that a post-exilic passage, Isa 19:23-25, envisages a future alliance between Israel, Assyria, and Egypt. It is probably significant, that the book of Isaiah does not contain any vision of a similar "rehabilitation" of Babylon.

In a subsequent section (ch. 3), passages containing enemy images of Judah's neighbouring nations were analyzed. Several passages in the book of Isaiah allude to the Syro-Ephraimitic crisis in the 730s BCE. As a consequence, the two nations that formed a hostile alliance against Judah, viz. Ephraim/Israel and Aram, are often mentioned in conjunction. These northern neighbours are consistently characterized as weak enemies, destined for imminent destruction. It is, however, evident that Israel (often referred to as Ephraim) was seen as the primary opponent. Officially revering the same national deity as Judah, this nation was arguably seen as a rival. From a Jerusalemite point of view, it was thus of vital importance to establish that YHWH was on Judah's side (Isa 7:1-9), having abandoned arrogant and sinful Ephraim/Israel in his anger (9:7-20). It is, moreover, likely that oracles directed against Samaria (e.g., 28:1-4) took on new significance in the post-exilic era, due to the emerging schism between Samaritans and other Jews. Whereas the portrait of Moab is intriguingly ambiguous, the picture of Edom is uncompromisingly negative. In Isaiah 13, Edom is depicted as the epitome of evil. The rhetorical strategies employed have the effect of utterly dehumanizing the Edomites.

Passages addressing anonymous enemies of various kinds – in most cases, probably enemies within the people of Judah/Yehud – are treated in chapter 4. A number of recurring features in the characterization are discussed (4.1.). Thus, the anonymous opponents are often characterized as rebels deserving severe punishment. Moreover, these enemies and evildoers are typically pictured with the help of vegetation metaphors: dehumanized and defenceless. Evidently, the final editors wanted to discourage a wide range of actions and attitudes which, according to their standards, amounted to opposition against YHWH. A closer examination of a few selected key passages (4.2.) revealed some striking analogies between images of anonymous enemies and images of empires and nations (4.3.), implying that they would all meet a similar destiny. On the basis of macro-structural observations (4.4.), it is further suggested that the final editors of the book of Isaiah adhered to a principle of re-applicability: oracles of judgment once directed against Assyria or Babylonia could be redirected against new foreign powers, or against rival groups within the post-exilic community.

Various constructions of the relation between the deity, YHWH, and enemies of different kinds are treated in chapter 5. The discussion focuses on the rhetorical strategies and ideological mechanisms involved. In the textual world

of Isaiah 1-66, conflicts between human antagonists are consistently, so to speak, transferred to a higher level. All enemies of Judah and/or of the post-exilic religious-political faction endorsed by the editors are depicted as enemies of YHWH (5.1.). According to this ideology, opposition against the standpoint of the authors/editors is equivalent to blasphemy and apostasy. However, images portraying the enemies as powerful agents, capable of challenging YHWH, had to be balanced by a rhetorical strategy that downplayed the autonomy of the adversaries. Hence, the mighty Assyrian empire is pictured as an instrument in YHWH's hands (5.2.). For some reason, however, Babylon is not described in similar terms. On the basis of a comparison with the outlook of the book of Jeremiah, it is suggested that the absence of expressions picturing Babylon as an instrument or a servant of YHWH is linked to a distinctive anti-Babylonian attitude among the Isaianic circles. For these circles, moreover, the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 BCE seems to have been an almost unspeakable trauma. Some passages in the book of Isaiah do depict YHWH as an enemy of his own people (5.3.), but the language of these passages is often heavily ambiguous. Those passages that portray YHWH as the enemy's enemy (5.4.) are clearly more consistent with the dominant ideology of this prophetic book.

Further ideological aspects, viz. the Zion-centered perspective and the possibility that the legendary version of the events in 701 BCE serves as a paradigm throughout the book, are discussed in the first part of the concluding chapter (6.1.). In the subsequent section (6.2.), I discuss to what extent the prophecies in the book of Isaiah can be understood as instances of contextually determined (and continually re-worked and reinterpreted) political propaganda. Finally, the issue of the identity of the final editors is addressed (6.3.). Did they belong to, or endorse a certain party in post-exilic Yehud? What self-image is implied by their use of enemy images? How can the analysis of that self-image contribute to recent theories concerning the identity of the parties involved in the conflicts that seem to underlie Isaiah 56-66? Some highly tentative conclusions are drawn. It is suggested that the final editors belonged to a party supporting the religious politics of Ezra and Nehemiah. Although they describe themselves as humble servants, and as marginalized victims of persecution, I find it likely that they actually represented circles with access to the power structures of their time.

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Prophecy and Propaganda:
Images of Enemies in the Book of Isaiah
by Göran Eidevall

Isaiah contains a variety of enemy images from a time span covering at least four centuries. Eidevall's textual analysis in Prophecy and Propaganda focuses on the characterization of the enemy, the rhetorical strategy adopted, the text's function in its historical context(s), and the ideology of the author(s) and/or editor(s). The main part of the study consists of textual analyses of (1) passages dealing with the hostile empires of Assyria, Babylon, and Egypt. (2) Judah's northern neighbors, Ephraim/Israel and Aram, formed another hostile alliance against Judah; oracles directed against Samaria took on new significance in the postexilic era, due to the emerging schism between Samaritans and other Jews. The portrait of Moab is intriguingly ambiguous, but the picture of Edom is uncompromisingly negative. (3) Anonymous enemies of various kinds are often characterized as rebels deserving severe punishment. The final editors wanted to discourage a wide range of actions and attitudes that, according to their standards, amounted to opposition against YHWH by YHWH worshipers themselves.

Ideological language, such as the Zion-centered perspective and the legendary version of the events in 701 BCE, is paradigmatic in Isaiah, raising the question to what extent the prophecies therein can be understood as instances of contextually determined (and continually reworked and reinterpreted) political propaganda. The final editors belonged to a party supporting the religious politics of Ezra and Nehemiah. Although they describe themselves as humble servants and as marginalized victims of persecution, it is likely that they actually represented circles with access to the power structures of their time.

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