

DIVINATION, POLITICS, AND
ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN EMPIRES





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DIVINATION, POLITICS, AND
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Edited by
Alan Lenzi
Jonathan Stökl



Society of Biblical Literature
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Table of Contents

Introduction <i>Jonathan Stökl and Alan Lenzi</i>	1
1. Propaganda, Prognostication, and Planets <i>Jeffrey L. Cooley</i>	7
2. The King at the Crossroads between Divination and Cosmology <i>Beate Pongratz-Leisten</i>	33
3. Divination as Warfare: The Use of Divination across Borders <i>Jonathan Stökl</i>	49
4. Revisiting Biblical Prophecy, Revealed Knowledge Pertaining to Ritual, and Secrecy in Light of Ancient Mesopotamian Prophetic Texts <i>Alan Lenzi</i>	65
5. <i>Chaoskampf</i> against Empire: YHWH's Battle against Gog (Ezekiel 38–39) as Resistance Literature <i>C. A. Strine</i>	87
6. Propagandistic Constructions of Empires in the Book of Isaiah <i>Göran Eidevall</i>	109
7. The Theological Politics of Deutero-Isaiah <i>Joseph Blenkinsopp</i>	129
8. The Yehudite Collection of Prophetic Books and Imperial Contexts: Some Observations <i>Ehud Ben Zvi</i>	145
9. Power, Politics, and Prophecy in the Dead Sea Scrolls and Second Temple Judaism <i>Alex P. Jassen</i>	171
Index of Ancient Texts	199
Contributors	209

SBL
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List of Abbreviations

AB	Anchor Bible Commentary Series
AB	Assyriologische Bibliothek
ABD	<i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i> , 6 vols.
AbrNSup	Abr-Nahrain: Supplement Series
AfO	<i>Archiv für Orientforschung</i>
AfOB	Archiv für Orientforschung Beiheft
AJEC	Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity
AJSR	<i>Association for Jewish Studies Review</i>
ANET	Pritchard, <i>Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament</i>
AOAT	Alter Orient und Altes Testament
AOS	American Oriental Series
ARM	Archives Royales de Mari
ATD	Das Alte Testament Deutsch
BAK	Hunger, <i>Babylonische und assyrische Kolophone</i>
BBR	Zimmern, <i>Beiträge zur Kenntnis der babylonischen Religion</i>
BCSMS	<i>Bulletin of the Canadian Society for Mesopotamian Studies</i>
BEATAJ	Beiträge zur Erforschung des Alten Testaments und des antiken Judentum
BET	Beiträge zur biblischen Exegese und Theologie
BETL	Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium
<i>Bib</i>	<i>Biblica</i>
BibIntSup	Biblical Interpretation Supplement
BibOr	Biblica et Orientalia
<i>BiOr</i>	<i>Bibliotheca Orientalis</i>
BIOSCS	<i>Bulletin of the International Organization for Septuagint Studies</i>
BKAT	Biblischer Kommentar, Altes Testament
BMes	Bibliotheca mesopotamica
BNP	<i>Brill's New Pauly</i>
BPO 3	Reiner and Pingree, <i>Babylonian Planetary Omens</i> , part three
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
CAD	<i>Chicago Assyrian Dictionary</i>
CBET	Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CBQMS	Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series
CDA	Black, George, and Postgate, <i>A Concise Dictionary of Akkadian</i>
CDLJ	Cuneiform Digital Library Journal
CDOG	Colloquium der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft
CHANE	Culture and History of the Ancient Near East

CM	Cuneiform Monographs
ConBOT	Coniectanea Biblica Old Testament Series
COP	Cambridge Oriental Publications
COS	Hallo and Younger, <i>The Context of Scripture</i> , 3 vols.
CRRAI	Compte Rendu, Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale
CT	<i>Cuneiform Texts from Babylonian Tablets in the British Museum</i> , 54 Vols.
CTH	Laroche, <i>Catalogue des textes hittites</i>
DDD	van der Toorn <i>et al</i> , <i>Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible</i>
DJD	Discoveries in the Judaean Desert
DNP	<i>Der neue Pauly: Enzyklopädie der Antike</i>
DSD	<i>Dead Sea Discoveries</i>
EE	<i>Enūma Eliš</i>
ESHM	European Seminar on Historical Methodology
ET	English Translation/Text
FAT	Forschungen zum Alten Testament
FLP	Tablet from The Free Library, Philadelphia
FM	Florilegium marianum
FOTL	Forms of Old Testament Literature
FRLANT	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments
GMTR	Guides to the Mesopotamian Textual Record
HANES	History of the Ancient Near East Studies
HSM	Harvard Semitic Monographs
HTR	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
IAH	Bremer, <i>Iurisprudentiae Antehadrianae</i> , 2 vols.
IAR ⁶	Huschke, <i>Iurisprudentiae Anteiustinae Reliquiae</i> , 6 th ed., 2 vols.
ICC	International Critical Commentary Series
IEJ	Israel Exploration Journal
JANER	<i>Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Religion</i>
JANER	<i>Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Religion</i>
JAOS	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
JBL	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
JCS	<i>Journal of Cuneiform Studies</i>
JHebS	<i>Journal of Hebrew Scriptures</i>
JJS	<i>Journal of Jewish Studies</i>
JNES	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>
JSJ	<i>Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman Periods</i>
JSJSup	Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism
JSNT	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
JSOT	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>

JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
JSS	<i>Journal of Semitic Studies</i>
KAT	Kommentar zum Alten Testament
KTU	Dietrich, Loretz, and Sanmartín, <i>Die Keilalphabetischen Texte aus Ugarit</i>
LAPO	Littératures anciennes du Proche-Orient
LHBOTS	Library of Hebrew Bible / Old Testament Studies
LSTS	Library of Second Temple Studies
LXX	Septuagint
MARI	<i>Mari: Annales de recherches interdisciplinaires</i>
MC	Mesopotamian Civilisations
MT	Masoretic Text
N.A.B.U.	<i>Nouvelle assyriologique brèves et Utilitaires</i>
NCBC	New Century Bible Commentary
ND	Tablets from Nimrud
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
NovT	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
OBO	Orbis biblicus et orientalis
OIP	Oriental Institute Publications
OIS	Oriental Institute Seminars
Or	<i>Orientalia</i> , new series
OTL	Old Testament Library
PAPS	Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society
PIHANS	Publications de l'Institut historique-archéologique néerlandais de Stamboul
PTSDSSP	Princeton Theological Seminary, Dead Sea Scrolls Project
RA	<i>Revue d'assyriologie et d'archéologie orientale</i>
REB	Revised English Bible
RevQ	<i>Revue Qumran</i>
RINAP 4	Royal Inscriptions of the Neo-Assyrian Period, Leichty, <i>Esarhaddon</i>
RMA	Campbell-Thompson, <i>Reports of the Magicians and Astrologers</i>
SAA	State Archives of Assyria
SAA 2	Parpola and Watanabe, <i>Neo-Assyrian Treaties and Loyalty Oaths</i>
SAA 3	Livingstone, <i>Court Poetry and Literary Miscellanea</i>
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SAA 13	Cole and Machinist, <i>Letters from Priests</i>
SAA 16	Luukko and van Buylaere, <i>Political Correspondence of Esarhaddon</i>

SAAB	<i>State Archives of Assyria Bulletin</i>
SAACT	State Archives of Assyria Cuneiform Texts
SAAS	State Archives of Assyria Studies
SAAS	State Archives of Assyria Studies
SBLMS	Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series
SBLSCS	Society of Biblical Literature Septuagint and Cognate Studies
SBLSymS	Society of Biblical Literature Symposium Series
SBLWAW	Society of Biblical Literature Writings from the Ancient World
SSN	Studia Semitica Neerlandica
STDJ	Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah
TBN	Themes in Biblical Narrative
TCL	Textes Cunéiformes du Louvre
TCS	Texts from Cuneiform Sources
TDOT	<i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</i>
TSAJ	Texte und Studien zum antiken Judentum
VAS 10	Vorderasiatische Schriftdenkmäler 10
VT	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
VTSup	Vetus Testamentum Supplements
WMANT	Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament
WO	<i>Welt des Orients</i>
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
ZA	<i>Zeitschrift für Assyriologie</i>
ZAW	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>



Introduction

Jonathan Stökl and Alan Lenzi

This volume is the result of a session of the Prophetic Texts in their Ancient Contexts seminar at the 2011 national meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature in San Francisco. The session was entitled “Divination, Propaganda, and Empire.” The aim of the session was to clarify the context of prophecy and other forms of divination within their respective political and/or theological empires. The essays by Jeffrey Cooley, Beate Pongratz-Leisten, Göran Eidevall, Joseph Blenkinsopp, and Ehud Ben Zvi in the present volume are revised versions of the original presentations in that session. To cover a wider spectrum of cases we invited Casey Strine and Alex Jassen to contribute to the volume, and we both added contributions of our own to the mix.

The question of how biblical and other ancient Near Eastern texts were shaped by their political setting(s) within a number of political and theological empires is extremely relevant in the current intellectual climate. Post-colonial theorists have carried out very valuable work on this and related questions, which is mostly related to the way that texts were used by empire builders to justify their actions and how those texts are read today in post-colonial settings.¹

Similar questions are also being asked in more historically oriented research on the empires of the ancient Near East, the territories which were ruled by them, and the literatures produced therein. This volume is part of this larger enterprise. The contributors examine divinatory texts of technical and intuitive origin to un-

¹ See among many others Homi K. Bhabha *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994) and idem (ed.), *Nation and Narration* (London: Routledge, 1990). The field of postcolonial reading of biblical texts is burgeoning. For a good introduction to the field see R. S. Sugirtharaja, (ed.), *The Postcolonial Biblical Reader* (Malden, MA / Oxford: Blackwell, 2006).

derstand how they interact with the ancient imperial settings in which they were conceived and read and in which they were used to construct meaning and to understand the surrounding reality.

The first essay by Jeffrey Cooley (“Propaganda, Prognostication, and Planets”) starts with an introduction to propaganda studies, serving simultaneously as a theoretical introduction to the entire volume. He reviews the recent literature on the topic and notes the important distinction between *integrative* and *agitative* aspects of propaganda. Following Ellul, Cooley suggests *integrative propaganda* aims to unify and stabilize the audience of the propaganda, while the purpose of *agitative propaganda* aims to change their behavior.² He goes on to look carefully at attestations of unusual interpretations of celestial omens by otherwise competent diviners in Neo-Assyrian texts. Adducing royal inscriptions which also include such unusual interpretations, Cooley shows that the diviners were likely influenced by their royal overlords.

The second essay by Beate Pongratz-Leisten (“The King at the Crossroads between Divination and Cosmology”) investigates the royal appropriation of divination as part of the mytho-political worldview of the ancient Near East, particularly in the so-called “historical omens.” After a review of the evidence for the historical omens, Pongratz-Leisten focuses on Assurbanipal and his demand to be entered into the tradition of historical omens. She argues that this represents Assurbanipal’s sidestepping of the traditional control of divine information through diviners, and that the claim represents Assurbanipal’s attempt to become the “epitome of the ideal king.”

Jonathan Stökl’s essay, “Divination as Warfare,” presents a study of the way in which information from the divine sphere—mostly but not exclusively gained through prophecy—was alluded to in diplomatic correspondence between Old Babylonian Mari and Aleppo as well as in 2 Kings 23 // 2 Chronicles 35 and 2 Kings 18–19 // Isaiah 37–39. The way in which a foreign god claims authority over a territory in some of these texts is interpreted as a necessary pre-condition and/or a by-product of universalistic theologies. The study compares the structure of the ancient Near Eastern and biblical diplomatic communication, specifically with regard to their use of divine information and the agency of gods in them, to the Roman rite *evocation*, in which the Romans claimed the support of the gods of a besieged city for themselves.

In his contribution (“Revisiting Biblical Prophecy, Revealed Knowledge Pertaining to Ritual, and Secrecy in Light of Ancient Mesopotamian Prophetic Texts”) Alan Lenzi returns to his monograph on *Secrecy and the Gods* to refine the explanation for the open communication of prophecy and divinely revealed knowledge

² Jacques Ellul, *Propaganda: The Formation of Men’s Attitudes* (New York: Knopf, 1965).

pertaining to ritual by prophets in the Hebrew Bible.³ In his monograph, Lenzi followed Holladay's idea that prophets in Israel/Judah began to communicate directly and openly to the people rather than the king due to the influence of the way in which Neo-Assyrian imperial messengers communicated with subdued populations.⁴ In the present essay Lenzi suggests that most ancient Mesopotamian prophetic oracles were in fact semi-public (with the possible exception of ARM 26 206); thus, they are similar to the open proclamations of prophetic oracles to the people as depicted in the Bible. Lenzi looks for a new explanation to explain the open communication of revealed knowledge pertaining to ritual in the Hebrew Bible in the potentially destabilizing nature of ancient Mesopotamian prophecy and in Seth Sanders' ideas of the "shift in horizons" in the writing of biblical history, law, and especially prophecy under the Western imperial pressures from the eighth century BCE on.⁵

Casey Strine ("*Chaoskampf* against Empire") offers a reading of the Gog of Magog pericope (Ezekiel 38–39), building on the work in which he and C. L. Crouch find allusions to the *Chaoskampf* tradition in this text and elsewhere in Ezekiel.⁶ He rejects recent attempts to date the pericope to the Hellenistic age and instead dates it to the sixth century and thus a Neo-Babylonian imperial context. Basing himself on the work of James C. Scott, Strine understands the references to the *Chaoskampf* as *hidden transcripts* of the Judean exiles against the Neo-Babylonian empire, thereby adding this important category to the debate about how prophetic and other divinatory texts react to and deal with the imperial situation in which they were conceived.

Göran Eidevall ("Propagandistic Constructions of Empires in the Book of Isaiah") asks how the book of Isaiah interacts with empire—whether it undermines or upholds it. Eidevall follows the initial Neo-Assyrian setting in which we find—as may be expected—signs of both mimicry and mockery, which is part of the ambiguity of colonial literature as identified by Bhaba. However, Eidevall identifies a third stage in this literature which moves away from ambiguity to a more single-minded propagandistic nature of the text criticizing Assyria. After an "Egyptian Interlude," the reader will find themselves in the setting of the Babylonian Empire,

³ Alan Lenzi, *Secrecy and the Gods: Secret Knowledge in Ancient Mesopotamia and Biblical Israel* (SAAS 19; Helsinki: The Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2008).

⁴ John S. Holladay, Jr., "Assyrian Statecraft and the Prophets of Israel," *HTR* 63 (1970): 29–51.

⁵ Seth Sanders, *The Invention of Hebrew* (Urbana/Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2009).

⁶ See C. L. Crouch, "Ezekiel's Oracles against the Nations in Light of a Royal Ideology of Warfare," *JBL* 130 (2011): 473–92 and C. L. Crouch and Casey A. Strine, "YHWH's Battle against Chaos in Ezekiel: The Transformation of Judahite Mythology for a New Situation," *JBL* 132 (2013): 883–903.

which is depicted with antipathy and ambivalence. Eidevall then looks into how the book reacts to the Persian Empire, concluding with an examination of the imperial enterprise in which YHWH is the overlord.

In his contribution on the book of Isaiah (“The Theological Politics of Deutero-Isaiah”), Joseph Blenkinsopp focuses on the figure of Cyrus as a Davidic figure, who replaces the “native” Judean kings as the divinely chosen leader. As Blenkinsopp shows, Isaiah 40–66 is the only mention of David in Isa 55:1–5. The reference to a “nation you do not know and a nation that does not know you will come in haste” (Isa 55:5) is explained as a reference to Cyrus (see, e.g., Isa 41:25; 42:6; 45:3, 4).

Ehud Ben Zvi approaches the prophetic corpus (“The Yehudite Collection of Prophetic Books”) as it would have been read by *literati* in the late Persian and early Hellenistic periods. After a short review of some recent studies on ancient empires, Ben Zvi turns to an introduction to social memory and the way that Persian period Yehudian (Judean) *literati* (re-)read their traditions, added to them, and constructed authors, authority, and their (hybrid) world. Ben Zvi asks why there is not more criticism of the Persian Empire in texts of the early Hellenistic period, since by then the necessity to express such criticism through *hidden transcripts* (a la Scott) would have ceased.⁷ Ben Zvi argues that the absence of a negative indictment on the Persian rulers and Cyrus in particular should be regarded as significant. Ben Zvi and Blenkinsopp follow similar lines of argumentation here, with the proviso that according to Ben Zvi Cyrus is only “partially Davidize[d].” Indeed, Ben Zvi sees Isa 55:5 as an “example of appropriation and reshaping of imperial memories.” However, Ben Zvi then goes on to ask why there is so little about Cyrus in the prophetic corpus, if he is understood as a new Davidide. Ben Zvi looks to the (partly pseudo-)historical setting of prophetic books in the pre-Persian period and more importantly to the trend to understand world history as moving toward a new empire to come, namely, YHWH’s empire. According to Ben Zvi this represents fairly standard “under-dog dreams of empire,” in which the rhetoric of the human political empire has been internalized. Against the historical “Arameanization” of Yehud stands the theological “‘Israelization’ of the entire world.”

The last essay in this volume (“Power, Politics, and Prophecy in the Dead Sea Scrolls and Second Temple Judaism”) by Alex Jassen moves the discussion yet further in time to the late Second Temple period. Jassen understands the various groups behind the Dead Sea Scrolls as generally being in a politically weaker position than other groups, such as the Hasmoneans and the Jerusalem priesthood.

⁷ This is particularly surprising as the royal historiographical tradition and criticism of certain rulers is very much part of the Hellenistic tradition in cuneiform. In Mesopotamia, the criticism takes the form of a *hidden transcript*. For an example see Caroline Waerzeggers, “The ‘Nabonidus Debate’ in Babylonia, c. 200 BCE,” in *Jewish Cultural Encounters in the Ancient Mediterranean and Near Eastern World Debate* (ed. M. Popovič; Leiden/Boston: Brill), forthcoming.

Significantly, the dynamics described by Jassen are similar in nature to those described for the late Persian and early Hellenistic period with their emphasis on eschatological retribution within a divine empire; what appears to be relatively new or at least given much more emphasis is the describing of prophets whose messages are not aligned with that of the author of the particular manuscript as “false prophets.”

The essays collected in this volume cover a wide scope: from diplomatic correspondence in second millennium BCE Mari to the eschatological hopes expressed in the Dead Sea Scrolls. The common goal is to understand how “empire” influenced prophetic and divinatory communication between the divine and human realms and how this was put to use as and influenced by propaganda from those in power.

We would like to thank de Gruyter for allowing us to print Beate Pongratz-Leisten’s essay on divination and cosmology, which forms part of chapter nine of her *Religion and Ideology in Assyria* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2014), as well as Eerdman’s Publishing for permitting us to print the essay by Joseph Blenkinsopp, which is nearly equivalent to chapter four of his *David Remembered: Kingship and National Identity in Ancient Israel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 54–70.

Finally, we would like to thank Ehud Ben Zvi, Roxana Flammini, and Martti Nissinen for accepting the volume into the *Ancient Near Eastern Monograph* series of the Society of Biblical Literature. We hope that publishing the studies through this venue will make them available to a wide readership.

February 2014

