REFLECTIONS OF EMPIRE IN ISAIAH 1–39

Responses to Assyrian Ideology

Shawn Zelig Aster

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For Ariel

Contents

Preface

The prophetic literature of the Hebrew Bible aims to present the word of God to the human reader. The inherent difficulty of conveying messages from a force who transcends time and space to flesh and blood finds expression in the words of the prophets themselves:

> הלוא כה דברי כאש נאם י', וכפטיש יפצץ סלע
> Are not my words like fire, says the Lord, and like a hammer smashing a rock? (Jer 23:29)

The verse describes the overwhelming nature of the prophetic experience, and the imagery implies the difficulty of conveying its messages to humans.

One attempt at defining the nature of the prophetic experience, and the method of conveying these messages, is that of Maimonides. At the outset of his code (known as *Mishneh Torah*), he distinguishes between the prophetic experience of Moses and that of other prophets, and describes how the latter "see a prophetic vision only in a dream or a night vision, or by day after slumber falls over them," so that their intellect can understand what they see. Furthermore, "That which is made known to the prophet in a prophetic vision, is made known to him by means of a parable, and then immediately the meaning of the parable becomes engraved in his mind, and he is aware of this meaning" (Maimonides, *Hilkhot Yesode HaTorah*, chapter 7).

The messages of prophets other than Moses, then, are conveyed by unique sort of interaction between God's revelation and the prophet's own intellect. In this interaction, God conveys the parable, but the interpretation of the parable takes place in the prophet's own mind. Prophetic literature is therefore a process in which God's intentions become messages intelligible to humans limited in time and space.

This book focusses on interpreting the prophetic messages of Isa 1-39 within the specific time and space of Judah in the Assyrian period. No doubt much of the text we now call Isa 1-39 contains editorial additions, but as I argue throughout this book, very substantial parts of the text derive from the period noted.

Does the correlation of this text to this specific period limit its timeless messages? These passages originally belonged to a specific historical context, and understanding them within this context allows us to understand more fully how the prophet, living within his own historical period, chose to articulate the "meaning of the parable." Understanding the historical circumstances that caused the prophet to formulate his message as he did provides more insight into the "meaning of the parable." This insight allows us to better assess how this message can be applied in our own time.

This historically-motivated understanding of prophetic literature is characteristic of the classic medieval Jewish Bible interpreters. Fate, in the form of Assyriological and archaeological research, has given our generation a degree of understanding of the Assyrian period unsurpassed since antiquity. Following in the footsteps of these interpreters, this book applies this knowledge to our understanding of Isa 1-39. I sincerely hope that it will contribute to a fuller understanding of its messages.

Acknowledgements

When I described the present book-project to noted cuneiform scholar Paul-Alain Beaulieu, he remarked "Il faut se plonger dans les deux corpus."

That I have been able to dive into the Biblical and Assyriological corpora is thanks to many devoted teachers. I am grateful to my parents for encouraging my study of the Hebrew Bible, and to Rabbi Dr. Emanuel White, of Montreal, with whom I first studied Isaiah, and who kindly commented on parts of the manuscript for this book. I am grateful to Prof. Barry Eichler and Prof. Jeffrey Tigay, who directed my studies at the University of Pennsylvania, and who introduced me to Assyriology and to the study of the Hebrew Bible in its Near Eastern context. The groundwork for this book was prepared a decade ago, during a Kreitman Post-doctoral Fellowship at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev under the guidance of the late Prof. Victor (Avigdor) Hurowitz. The intellectual debt this book owes to the important studies of Prof. Peter Machinist will be obvious to the reader. The geographic discussions owe much to my studies with the late Prof. Anson F. Rainey.

I have had the privilege of teaching Isaiah in many different contexts over the past dozen years, and have truly learned more from my students than from nearly any other source. To my students at Stern Hebrew High School, at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, at Yeshiva College, and the Bernard Revel Graduate School of Yeshiva University, and at Bar-Ilan University, I extend my undying gratitude. Special thanks to Abraham Jacob Berkovitz for reading and commenting on several chapters, to Gilad Barach for his comments on earlier drafts, and to Tzvi Ari Lamm for his ongoing interest and encouragement.

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Dan'el Kahn of the University of Haifa, Prof. Joshua Berman of Bar-Ilan University, Prof. Aaron Koller of Yeshiva University, and Prof. Shalom Holtz of Yeshiva University for their helpful comments on parts of this book. I am grateful to Prof. Avraham Faust of Bar-Ilan University for discussing many of the historical points and for his bibliographic suggestions. I am grateful to Profs. Israel Eph'al and Izabela Eph'al-Jaruzelska, for their comments on parts of the book presented in an informal seminar at their home, as I am to the other participants in these seminars.

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During this semester, I was fortunate to be a fellow of the Azrieli Institute for Israel Studies at Concordia University, Montreal, and am grateful to the institute and its director, Prof. Csaba Nikolenyi, for the fellowship support and the supportive work environment. I am grateful to Ms. Jennifer Solomon of the Institute for her help in many ways and to the interlibrary loan staff of Concordia University for their ceaseless efforts in locating the relevant books and articles.

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Rothstein Aster, Miss Bat-El Adrijeo, Miss Gavriella Pollack, and Mr. Shem-Tov Sasson for preparing the indices.

Translations of all Hebrew and Akkadian texts in this book are my own, except where otherwise indicated. Citations from the Hebrew Bible are based on the text of the Aleppo Codex and parallel manuscripts, and are taken from the electronic corpus of Mechon Mamre (www.mechon-mamre.org). Relevant differences from the Leningrad Codex are noted. Unfortunately, due to style constraints of the SBL ANEM series, it has been possible to present only the consonantal text in most cases; the reader is encouraged to consult a full edition of the Hebrew Bible in reading this book. Where grammatical points are discussed, the vocalized text with cantillation marks is presented. Citations from medieval Jewish commentators are all taken from *Mikra'ot Gedolot 'HaKeter'*, a revised and augmented scientific edition of the rabbinic Bible, based on the Aleppo Codex and early medieval manuscripts, edited by Menachem Cohen (Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1996). The tetragrammaton is abbreviated as י throughout, and is translated as the Lord; the divine name *Adonai* (as in Isa 8:7) is abbreviated as ה and translated as God; the divine name *Ṣeba'ōṯ* is indicated with an apostrophe after its first letter and is translated "Hosts."

The normalization of the Akkadian texts follows the method used on the website of the Royal Inscriptions of the Neo-Assyrian Period project of the University of Pennsylvania (http://oracc.museum.upenn.edu/rinap), except that cases of secondary lengthening are indicated; thus, for example, a third-weak verb with enclitic *-ma* will contain length on its final vowel.

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Abbreviations

ANES	*Ancient Near Eastern Studies*
ArsOr	*Ars Orientalis*
BA	*Biblical Archaeologist*
BASOR	*Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*
Bib	*Biblica*
BN	*Biblische Notizen*
CAD	Gelb, Ignace J., et al. *The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago*. 21 vols. Chicago: The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 1956–2010.
CBQ	*Catholic Biblical Quarterly*
HUCA	*Hebrew Union College Annual*
IOS	*Israel Oriental Studies*
JANER	*Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Religions*
JANES	*Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society*
JAOS	*Journal of the American Oriental Society*
JBL	*Journal of Biblical Literature*
JCS	*Journal of Cuneiform Studies*
JEA	*Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*
JNES	*Journal of Near Eastern Studies*
JSOT	*Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*
JSS	*Journal of Semitic Studies*
MDOG	*Mitteilungen der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft*
NABU	*Nouvelles assyriologiques brèves et utilitaires*
NEA	*Near Eastern Archaeology*
Or	*Orientalia* (NS)
PEQ	*Palestine Exploration Quarterly*
RA	*Revue d'assyriologie et d'archéologie orientale*
RevBib	*Revue Biblique*
RIMA	The Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia, Assyrian Periods
RIMA 1	Grayson, Albert Kirk, ed. *Assyrian Rulers of the Third and Second Millennia BC (to 1115 BC),* Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia/ Assyrian Periods, vol. 1. Toronto: University of Toronto, 1987.
RIMA 2	Grayson, Albert Kirk, ed., *Assyrian Rulers of the Early First Millennium BC I (1114-859 BC*), Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia vol. 2. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991.

RIMA 3	Grayson, Albert Kirk, ed., *Assyrian Rulers of the Early First Millennium BC II (858-745 BC)* Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia vol. 3. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996.
RINAP	Royal Inscriptions of the Neo-Assyrian Period
RINAP 1	Tadmor, Hayim, and Shigeo Yamada. *The Royal Inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III (744-727) and Shalmaneser V (726-722) Kings of Assyria*. RINAP 1. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011.
RINAP 3	Grayson, Albert Kirk, and Jamie Novotny, eds., *The Royal Inscriptions of Sennacherib King of Assyria (704-689 BC) King of Assyria*. RINAP 3. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2014.
RINAP 4	Leighty, Erle, ed. *Esarhaddon, King of Assyria, d. 668 B.C.E. The Royal Inscriptions of Esarhaddon, King of Assyria (680-669 BC).* RINAP 4. With a contribution by Grant Frame, and the editorial assistance of Jamie Novotny, Matthew T. Rutz, and Amy E. Barron. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011.
SAA	State Archives of Assyria
SAA 1	Parpola, Simo. *The Correspondence of Sargon II. Part I: Letters from Assyria and the West.* SAA 1. Helsinki: University of Helsinki Press, 1987.
SAA 2	Parpola, Simo, and Kazuko Watanabe. *Neo-Assyrian treaties and Loyalty Oaths.* SAA 2. Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1988.
SAA 3	Livingstone, Alasdair. *Court Poetry and Literary Miscellanea.* SAA 3. Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1989.
SAA 4	Starr, Ivan. *Queries to the Sun God.* SAA 4. Helsinki: University of Helsinki Press, 1990.
SAA 7	Fales, Frederick Mario, and John Nicholas Postgate. *Imperial Administrative Records. Part 1.* SAA 7. Helsinki: University of Helsinki Press, 1992.
SAA 9	Parpola, Simo. *Assyrian Prophesies.* SAA 9. Helsinki, Helsinki University Press, 1997.
SAA 17	Dietrich, Manfred. *The Babylonian Correspondence of Sargon and Sennacherib.* SAA 17. Helsinki: University of Helsinki Press, 2003.
SAA 19	Luukko, Mikko. *The Correspondence of Tiglath-pileser III and Sargon II from Calah/Nimrud.* SAA 19. Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2012.
SAAB	*State Archives of Assyria Bulletin*
TZ	*Theologische Zeitschrift*
VT	*Vetus Testamentum*
WO	*Die Welt des Orients*
WZKM	*Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes*
ZA	*Zeitschrift für Assyriologie*
ZAW	*Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*
ZDPV	*Zeitschrift des deutschen Palästina-Vereins*

List of Illustrations

1

Introduction: The Assyrian Empire and the Study of Isaiah 1-39

1. The Empire Rises and the Dominated Respond

In the second half of the eighth century BCE, Assyria began an advance into Syro-Palestine that fundamentally changed the history of the Near East. The coronation of Tiglath-pileser III as king of Assyria in 744, and his resolute decision to expand his empire westward into southern Anatolia and the Levant marked the beginning of a new period in the region's political history. From around 1200 BCE until the reign of Tiglath-pileser III, Judah, Israel, and their immediate neighbours gradually developed into small ethnically-based nation states competing for hegemony. But from the reign of Tiglath-pileser III onward, these small nation states fell under the sway of the Assyrian empire and disappeared. From the time of Tiglath-pileser III until modern times, the Land of Israel, Syria, and adjoining lands were almost continuously controlled by empires whose centers lay outside the region.

In expanding Assyria's borders, Tiglath-pileser III was following a well-established historical pattern of Assyrian kings constantly expanding the empire. From a core area in the Tigris triangle, around the cities of Ashur and Nineveh, Assyria expanded throughout the second millennium, until it came to dominate northern Mesopotamia

and Eastern Syria.[1] By the middle of the fourteenth century, Assyria was considered a ranking world power, alongside Amarna-age Egypt, Kassite Babylonia, and Hatti.[2] Benefitting from its location at the nexus of trade routes linking Babylonia, Anatolia, the Levant, and western Iran, Assyria gradually developed its cities' dominance of trade into military force, which translated into imperial political control. Some late second-millennium kings expanded beyond northern Mesopotamia and eastern Syria, with Tukulti-ninurta I (1244–1208) dominating Babylon, and Tiglath-pileser I (1115–1077) reaching the Mediterranean, but the core area under Assyrian control at the close of the second millennium was more limited. Nevertheless, the potential for further expansion demonstrated by earlier kings excited Assyria's imagination. Between the reign of Assurnasirpal II (883–859) and that of Adad-nirari III (810–783), Assyria expanded to the west into Syria and to the north into Anatolia. Pride of place among these ninth- and eighth-century kings must go to Shalmaneser III (859–824), often considered the founder of the Neo-Assyrian Empire and, incidentally, the first Assyrian king to encounter Israel on the battlefield.[3] A short period of consolidation followed the reigns of these expansionist kings, with magnates sharing control of the kingdom with the kings.[4] But starting in

1. This discussion provides no more than a brief thumb-nail sketch of Assyrian history. Recent overviews of Assyria's political and ideological history include Frederick Mario Fales, "The Case of Assyria: The Historical Rise to a Chosen Status." Accessed April 12, 2016. http://www.academia.edu/14447804/2015_The_Case_of_Assyria_the_Historical_Rise_to_a_Chosen_Status_THE_ORIGINAL_ENGLISH_VERSION_of_2015_Il_caso_dell_Assiria._L_ascesa_storica_verso_uno_status_elezionista' and Eckhart Frahm, "The Neo-Assyrian Period," in *A Companion to Assyria*, ed. Eckhart Frahm (Chichester: John Wiley, 2017), 161–208. For a map of these areas, see Figure 1.1.

2. Some discussion of Assyria's emergence into the "The Great Powers Club" of this period appears in Carlo Zaccagnini, "The Interdependence of the Great Powers," in *Amarna Diplomacy: The Beginnings of International Relations*, ed. Raymond Cohen and Raymond Westbrook (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 2000), 141–53.

3. See the complete study by Shigeo Yamada, *The Construction of the Assyrian Empire: A Historical Study of the Inscriptions of Shalmaneser III* (Leiden: Brill, 2000).

4. The period between the end of the reign of Shalmaneser III and the rise of Tiglath-pileser III was often seen as a period of relative Assyrian weakness. This view was recently challenged by Luis R. Siddall, *The Reign of Adad-nirari III: An Historical and Ideological Analysis of an Assyrian King and His Times* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 81–132, who argues that this ought to be seen as a period of consolidation. While the reign of Adad-nirari III can perhaps be assigned to this period of consolidation, I have considered him among the expansionist kings in my brief sketch because of his domination of Aram-Damascus.

Figure 1.1. The Rise of the Kingdom of Assyria, ninth to seventh centuries BCE. Anson F. Rainey and Stephen Notley, *The Sacred Bridge: Carta's Atlas of the Biblical World* (Jerusalem: Carta, 2006), 235. Copyright, Carta Jerusalem.

744, Tiglath-pileser III centralized power in his own hands, and resumed the tradition of expansion. Reaching farther than any prior Assyrian king had reached, he first advanced westward to include all of Syria in his empire, and then southward to the borders of Egypt, as well as northward to Urartu (modern Armenia) and eastward to Elam (modern Iran).

These expansions can hardly be understood without reference to the ideology that both justified and motivated the campaigns to impose Assyrian rule on others. This ideology both developed from and encouraged Assyria's expansion, and simultaneously influenced the political thought

of the states Assyria dominated. All ideologies of empire seek to perpetuate the empire while simultaneously according it legitimacy, and Assyria's was no exception.[5] But Assyria's ideology was more clearly defined and effectively communicated than that of any previous empire. It was relentlessly broadcast using a deft combination of art, ritual performance, oral communication, and written text, all designed for the consumption of two audiences: the administrative personnel of the empire, and the states and regions it sought to dominate.[6] The goal of communicating this ideology to the courtiers and magnates who formed the central administration of the empire was to establish and justify the position of the king as supreme political leader, while the goal of communicating with other states was to legitimate the different roles of "Assyrians" and "others" in the world order the empire sought to establish.[7] Both administrative officials and representatives of states dominated by Assyria were required to swear loyalty oaths to the king, and Assyrian imperial ideology aimed to buttress the loyalty of both groups.[8]

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5. For aspects of shaping power common to different modern and ancient empires, see for example, Robert G. Wesson, *The Imperial Order* (Berkeley: University of California, 1967), 27–35, 374–406. "If the world of the great empire is to be consistent, it must profoundly alter the religious outlook" (ibid., 399).

6. For the intended audience for the royal inscriptions, see Hayim Tadmor, "Propaganda, Literature, Historiography: Cracking the Code of the Assyrian Royal Inscriptions," in *Assyria 1995: Proceedings of the Tenth Anniversary Symposium of the Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project,* ed. Simo Parpola and Robert M. Whiting (Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 1997), 325–39; for the audience for palace art, see John Malcolm Russell, *Sennacherib's "Palace without Rival"* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 295–306. A fuller discussion of this issue appears in my article, "Transmission of Neo-Assyrian Claims of Empire to Judah in the Late Eighth Century BCE," *HUCA* 78 (2007): 1–44.

7. For the distinction between Assyrians and others, see in particular Peter Machinist, "Assyrians on Assyria in the First Millennium," in *Anfänge politischen Denkens in der Antike: Die Nahöstlichen Kulturen und die Griechen,* ed. Kurt Raaflaub (Munich: de Gruyter, 1993), 77–104. A more general portrayal of Assyrian imperial ideology is Mario Liverani, "The Ideology of the Assyrian Empire," in *Power and Propaganda: A Symposium on Ancient Empires,* ed. Mogens Trolle Larsen (Copenhagen: Akademisk Forlag, 1979), 297–317; great detail and further bibliography can be found in Steven Winford Holloway, *Assur is King! Assur is King! Religion in the Exercise of Power in the Neo-Assyrian Empire*; Culture and History of the Ancient Near East 10 (Leiden: Brill, 2002). The special role of the king is also addressed in parts of Simo Parpola's seminal article, "The Assyrian Tree of Life: Tracing the Origins of Jewish Monotheism and Greek Philosophy," *JNES* 52 (1993): 161–208. He deals with the status of the king at 168, and with the role of Assur as a universal god at 184–85.

8. For loyalty oaths sworn by administrative officials, see Jacob Lauinger, "Neo-

Our focus here is on responses to this ideology in one particular state dominated by Assyria: Judah. Within ten years of the coronation of Tiglath-pileser III, Ahaz of Judah had joined other kings of the region in remitting tribute to Assyria and accepting its suzerainty.[9] Recent scholarship has debated the extent to which Assyria expected the kingdoms Tiglath-pileser III dominated to "Assyrianize." As Berlejung has pithily expressed, Assyria demanded: "obey and pay."[10] But Assyria provided all these kingdoms with ample reasons to "obey and pay." A primary reason was Assyrian military power, continuously on display in the region through Assyrian conquests, but a no less important reason was provided by the propagation of Assyrian ideology to dominated kingdoms. This ideology was propagated to elites in the dominated kingdoms with the goal of convincing them to support (or at least not to oppose) Assyrian power.[11] Without local cooperation, Assyria would certainly have been unable to establish vassal states, and there is ample evidence that Assyria propagated its ideology in order to generate such cooperation.[12]

Assyrian Scribes, 'Esarhaddon's Succession Treaty,' and the Dynamics of Textual Mass Production," in *Texts and Contexts: The Circulation and Transmission of Cuneiform Texts in Social Space*, ed. Jacob Lauinger and Paul Delnero; SANER 9 (Boston/Berlin: de Gruyter, 2015), 285–314, here 290–91 and references there, and a more general discussion in Frederick Mario Fales, "After Taʿyinat: The New Status of Esarhaddon's *adê* for Assyrian Political History," *RA* 106 (2012): 133–58. For oaths taken by all vassals (and not just those from newly-conquered territories, as had been proposed at one time) see Jacob Lauinger, "Some Preliminary Thoughts on the Tablet Collection from Building XVI at Tell Tayinat," *Journal of the Canadian Society of Mesopotamian Studies* 6 (2011): 5–14, here 10–11.

9. Hayim Tadmor, *The Inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III King of Assyria* (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1994), 277.

10. "There was not a single royal order for re-education, indoctrination, acculturation or assimilation. The simple message (as mirrored in the royal correspondence and administrative records) was: obey and pay (2012:51)!" (Angelika Berlejung, "The Assyrians in the West: Assyrianization, Colonialism, Indifference, or Development Policy?" in *Congress Volume Helsinki 2010*, ed. Martti Nissinen, VTSup 148 [Leiden: Brill, 2012], 21-60, here 55.) In contrast, Ariel M. Bagg discussed how native identities were often superseded by Assyrian identity, in "Palestine under Assyrian Rule: A New Look at the Assyrian Imperial Policy in the West," *JAOS* 133 (2013): 119–44, here 123.

11. Foucault calls this type of power "discipline," and others might term it "soft power." See Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of Prison*, 2nd ed.; trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 1995), 215.

12. This evidence is discussed in detail in chapter 2, in the context of Assyria's use of emissaries from vassal states.

Modern post-colonial writers such as Fanon have taken it as somewhat of an axiom that ideologies that set one group above another will sooner or later be challenged by the colonized.[13] Anthropologists have recognized a more varied and nuanced series of local responses to imperialism.[14] These include a full gamut of responses among different strata of society, from the use of imperial power to bolster the status of members of the elite, to appropriation and adaptation of imperial mechanisms in order to oppose imperial ideology.

The subsequent chapters of this study explore a range of responses to Assyrian imperialism in Judah found in many passages of Isa 1–39. These passages use language and motifs known to us from Assyrian imperial texts. Many of these challenge Assyrian ideologies, while others oppose a variety of Judahite responses to Assyrian ideology. The responses opposed, which will be discussed in detail in subsequent chapters, included attempts at cooption of Judahite elites by Assyria and the use of Assyrian power to bolster their status by some members of the political elite. Some passages also oppose plans for military rebellions against Assyria.

Key to identifying these responses in Isa 1–39 is the approach demonstrated by Peter Machinist in his 1983 study. A fuller summary of the scholarly debate over connections between Isa 1–39 and the Assyrian period will appear later in this introduction, and here I discuss only Machinist's approach, which is necessary before introducing the plan of the book. Machinist's approach focused on the linguistic evidence for Assyrian influence on formulations in Isa 1–39. Linguistic comparisons demonstrate that many verses in Isa 1–39 depend on language known to us from the Assyrian royal inscriptions. Machinist showed that these passages could not have been written without their author knowing the language of the Assyrian royal inscriptions. More

13. "The well-known principle that all men are equal will be illustrated in the colonies from the moment that the native claims that he is the equal of the settler" (Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington [New York: Grove, 1966], 36).

14. Discussions of such responses are found in Roger Owen and Robert B. Sutcliffe, *Studies in the Theory of Imperialism* (London: Longman, 1972). Much of the more recent discussion derives from study of models of interaction in the colonial period in Central America, but presents models that are universally relevant. Such studies include Frances F. Berdan and Michael E. Smith, "Imperial Strategies and Core-Periphery Relations," in *Aztec Imperial Strategies*, ed. Frances F. Berdan, Richard E. Blanton, Elizabeth Hill Boone, Mary G. Hodge, Michael E. Smith, and Emily Umberger (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1996), 209–17; Barbara L. Stark and John K. Chance, "The Strategies of Provincials in Empires," in *The Comparative Archaeology of Complex Societies*, ed. Michael E. Smith (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University, 2011), 192–237.

importantly, he noted that several passages seek to deflect and rework the Assyrian propaganda their author encountered.[15]

The literary interactions of these passages with the Assyrian royal inscriptions operate on several levels. One is the level of the individual motif, which cannot reasonably have been formulated absent reference to the Assyrian material. A second is the subversion of these motifs and their reformulation so as to impugn the ideas of Assyrian ideology. These two levels were convincingly demonstrated in Machinist's study and those of other scholars. A main goal of this book is to expose a third level of interaction, which shows that whole passages in Isaiah were constructed as part of a reaction to Assyrian imperial ideology. This third level is suggested by Machinist's second level, in which he demonstrates that these passages subvert motifs and reformulate them. These subverted motifs are part of larger literary units that polemicize against Assyrian ideology. These literary units can consist of any number of verses that cohere in advancing a common rhetorical goal. Therefore, the dialogue with Assyrian imperial ideology takes place not on the level of the individual motif, but on the level of the larger literary unit. This book exposes these larger literary units, and demonstrates the way in which they interact with both the larger ideas of Assyrian imperial ideology and the specific motifs in which that ideology was expressed.

2. Outline of the Book

This book does not pretend to study every passage in Isa 1–39 that has been seen as containing Assyrian influence. It focuses on several passages in which a clear and convincing case can be made for a complex reworking of Assyrian motifs, not only on the level of the individual verses, but in the argument presented by the larger rhetorical unit. The rhetorical units vary in size, as noted above, but each presents a clear and coherent argument that marshals reworked Assyrian motifs as part of a larger response to Assyrian claims of empire.

The second goal of this book is to try to correlate this polemic to the historical events of the period of Assyrian domination of Judah, and thereby localize it within the intellectual history of the period. Although the central core of Assyrian ideology remained relatively consistent throughout this period, each Assyrian king emphasized certain aspects of this ideology. These changes often reflected political needs, and led different kings to portray royal power in different ways. Therefore, certain motifs used to express

15. Peter Machinist, "Assyria and its Image in the First Isaiah," *JAOS* (1983): 719–37.

Assyrian ideology were current only during specific periods. These ideological changes provide us with valuable clues about the years when specific motifs were emphasized in the ideology Assyria propagated. Based on the different motifs emphasized in different years, and on the political events of the period, we can assign many passages in Isa 1–39, which subvert such motifs and/or refer to such events, to probable ranges of years.

Organizing these passages according to these probable dates reveals interesting developments in their responses to Assyrian claims of empire. Several of the passages that seem earliest and date to the reign of Tiglath-pileser III (744–727) focus on critiquing the collaboration between Assyrian imperial officials and the Judean elites and rulers. These include Isa 6:1–13, which relate to the experience of Judean ambassadors in the Assyrian court, and parts of Isa 7 and 8, which critique Ahaz's submission to Assyria. Anthropologists investigating responses to empire have noted that a common response among such elites and rulers, in different societies, is to collaborate with empire in order to guarantee their own position, a strategy known as "bolstering."[16] As I discuss in chapters 2 and 3, both the ambassadors and Ahaz bolstered their own position by collaborating with Assyria, and the author of these passages is acutely aware of this collaboration. Many passages, including both earlier ones such as Isa 6:1–13, and somewhat later passages, such as Isa 19:19–25 and Isa 31:1–7, and passages that appear still later, such as Isa 2:2–4 and Isa 2:5–22, adopt Assyrian motifs, subverting them in order to undermine Assyrian claims of empire. This adoption and subversion is similar to the strategy that anthropologists term "appropriation," in which provincial people adopt and modify imperial procedures or institutions, to further their own ends.[17] While some passages, such as 31:1–7, appear inexorably set against active rebellion against Assyria, the strategy of active resistance to Assyrian domination wins praise in Isa 36–37, one of the latest passages from a chronological perspective.

This progression in responses to Assyria can also be described by examining how these passages characterize the relationship between God and Assyria. Interestingly, these passages do not polemicize solely, or even primarily, against the Assyrian attempt to set Assyrians above non-Assyrians. Rather, they argue against what Israelites like Isaiah saw as Assyria's attack on Israel's "covenant tradition," which sees God as Israel's sovereign.[18] As I discuss

16. Stark and Chance, "The Strategies of Provincials in Empires." 193.

17. Ibid.

18. Ibid., 734. Throughout this work, I use the term "Israel" to describe the society composed of both Israel and Judah. Despite the important differences in political culture, archaeology shows important similarities in the material culture of the north and south starting in the early Iron Age, and epigraphic finds show that they

below, Assyrian ideology placed great emphasis on the universal lordship of the god Assur and the invincibility of his representative, the Assyrian king. In the passages I discuss, the author of these passages (whom I henceforth term "Isaiah") employs a variety of strategies to prevent these claims of supremacy from undermining his belief in the universal rule and omnipotence of Israel's God, YHWH.

In chapters 2 and 3, I discuss the first group of passages, which all seem to refer to events and motifs relevant in the reign of Tiglath-pileser III (744–727 BCE). These passages, which are found in Isa 6:1–13, in parts of Isa 7–8, and in Isa 19:19–25, all emphasize God's role in sending Assyria. They all describe Assyrian activities in different parts of the Land of Israel, without describing the breaking of Assyrian power. Assyria is nowhere described in these passages as the enemy of God. A positive view of the political developments caused by Assyrian power is expressed in some parts of these passages (19:19–25), a view consistent with the portrayal of Assyria as an agent of the divine punishment for Judah in 7:17–20.

Chapter 4 discusses two brief passages, 14:28–32 and 31:1–7. The contents of the former date it to 727 BCE, or shortly thereafter, and those of the latter to approximately 714 BCE. These passages, like those discussed in chapters 2 and 3, refrain from portraying Assyria as a divine enemy. Each of these passages emphasizes that Assyria's plans of conquest focus on Philistia, and the latter passage counsels against active resistance to Assyria. But both passages diverge from those described in chapters 2 and 3 in that they express the need for God to protect Judahites from Assyrian power, and connect this protection specifically to Jerusalem.

Chapter 5 discusses Isa 10:5–15, a dramatic depiction of Assyria as God's enemy, as well as the subsequent (and related) passages, through 10:34. In these passages, we find depictions of Assyria's impending downfall. Although these passages continue to view Assyria as God's emissary, like those discussed in chapter 3, they highlight the tension between master and emissary. They describe Assyria as unsubmissive to God, and this lack of submission obligates God to battle Assyria. Based on the Assyrian texts to which these verses refer, most of Isa 10:5-34 can be dated with a very high degree of certainty to the period 714–705 BCE. These passages therefore form the earliest depictions of Assyria as God's enemy, and are a crucial pivot point in understanding how Isaiah's attitude towards Assyria changed as Assyria deepened its hold on Judah.

Chapter 6 examines Isa 14:4–21 and Isa 36 and 37, which relate to events beginning with Sargon's death in 705 and ending with the invasion of his successor, Sennacherib, in 701. These passages emphasize the battle between God

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worshipped a common God.

and Assyria, and expect the total defeat of Assyria. There is no mention here of the previous "master-emissary" relationship. On the contrary, they portray Assyria instead as God's enemy, and express the desire for the utter destruction of Assyria.

The final chapter of this work, chapter 7, might perhaps be entitled "When the hurly-burly's done, when the battle's lost and won," or better, ואחרי כבלות הכל – לבדו ימלך נורא.[19] It discusses one passage that can clearly be dated to the post-701 period (Isa 1:2–20) and two others (2:1–4 and 2:5–22) that (perhaps intentionally) eschew any reference to specific historical events, while referencing and subverting Assyrian motifs. The events of 701, which cannot really be seen as a defeat for Assyria, proved traumatic for Judah. Moreover, the setbacks Judah experienced in this campaign challenged Isaiah's vision of divine victory. In the passages discussed in this chapter, a theology that responds to these setbacks is articulated. In contrast to Isa 36–37, Isa 1:2–20 (which also relates to the events of 701) does not speak of Assyria's defeat; nor do 2:2–4 and 2:5–22. Instead, they use Assyria's domination of and control of its vassals as a model for describing God's domination of Israel and of humanity. Because 2:2–4 and 2:5–22 portray God's domination over humanity as modelled on that of Assyria, I have included them with 1:2–20, which portrays God's dominion over the Israelites by comparison with Assyria's dominion over the kingdom of Judah.

The prophecies described here seem to move gradually from viewing Assyria's political domination as expressing Divine will, to seeing Assyria as enemy of God, and then to suggest that Assyria's political domination can be used as a model for God's dominion. This last stage, of course, requires accepting Assyria's temporary political domination. The prophet seems to move through a variety of political positions in these passages, without changing his fundamental theological axiom, viz., that God is the only ultimately powerful universal king.

In examining these gradual changes in Isaiah's view of Assyria, it is interesting that practical resistance to Assyrian domination is praised only in Isa 36–37. Much of Isaiah's response to Assyria focusses on resistance to Assyrian ideology, rather than on resistance to Assyrian power. It is the ideological threat posed by Assyria that motivates and energizes our prophet, and it is this threat that he explores and parries.

Historians have explored such "theologies of resistance" from the classical to the post-modern period.[20] But too little attention has been paid to

19. "And after all ends; He alone will rule and be feared," from the medieval Jewish liturgical poem known by its incipit, *Adon Olam.*

20. See the survey in Anathea E. Portier-Young's study of Jewish theologies of resistance in the Hellenistic period: *Apocalypse against Empire: Theologies of Resistance in*

the role that Isa 1–39, one of the earliest examples of such theology, plays in this context. Recognition of such a theology in Isaiah requires interaction between Assyriology and biblical studies. The remainder of this introduction presents the basis in each of these fields needed as a background for this book. I first discuss Assyrian imperial ideology and its transmission, and then briefly highlight some key trends in the scholarly study of Isa 1–39.

3. Assyrian Imperial Ideology

Our knowledge of Assyrian imperial ideology is based entirely on the texts and art that have been uncovered through excavations by adventurers and archaeologists.[21] The ideological drama these portray centers around two characters: the god Assur and the king, his representative. The link between these two is the most critical part of the ideology. Alone among Assyrian gods, Assur is associated with no particular natural phenomenon nor does he have a place in the family-tree of the gods. Lambert has shown that the god Assur is the deified city of Ashur.[22] He is identical with his city and with the state that evolved from the city. His role changed as the nature of the city changed. "When they (the citizens of Ashur) became military imperialists, he became a god of war."[23] As second millennium Assyria became an empire, attributes of Enlil, the traditional chief god of the Sumerian-Akkadian pantheon, became assimilated to Assur.[24] This process of assimilation was certainly complete by the thirteenth century BCE.[25] Assur became the chief god of the entire pantheon, just as Ashur became the capital of an empire. Thus, the theology of Assur became inseparable from the imperialist ideology justifying Assyrian dominion.

Throughout the centuries of Neo-Assyrian ideology, Assur's position as chief of the pantheon was used to justify the empire's claim to universal dominion. As chief of the pantheon, Assur's rule was geographically

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Early Judaism (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 1–27.

21. A history of these discoveries might fill several volumes; a good starting place for this discussion is Steven Winford Holloway, ed., *Orientalism, Assyriology and the Bible*, Hebrew Bible Monographs 10 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2006).

22. The two unusual characteristics noted piqued Lambert's interest, but he bases his conclusions on textual evidence from the Old Assyrian periods, in which Assur lacks stock epithets, descriptive material, and in which we find a lack of distinction between city and god when the name Assur is used: see Wilfred G. Lambert, "The God Assur," *Iraq* 45 (1983): 81–86.

23. Ibid., 86.

24. Ibid., 81, 86.

25. Amar Annus, *The God Ninurta in the Mythology and Royal Ideology of Mesopotamia*, SAAS XIV (Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2002), 40.

unlimited. Since his rule was identified with that of the city-cum-empire of Ashur and of its king (the representative of Assur), there was no land over which the empire should not be sovereign. The practical implementation of this ideology required the continuous expansion of the empire, ideally until it became universal. The universal aspirations of the empire are thus the direct result of the link between the god Assur and his representative (the king).[26]

Assur is almost never mentioned in isolation from his human representative, the Assyrian king, and the link between them is critical to the ideology.[27] The king embodies the will of Assur, and acts as his representative (Sum: EN_2.SI; Akk. *iššakku*) and as his priest (Sum: SANGA; Akk: *šangû*).[28] This creates an intentional analogy between the position of the king, as head of the empire, and Assur, as head of the pantheon. The empire is described as the *tamšilu* (counterpart) of the "kingdom of heaven," or divine realm, ruled by Assur.[29]

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26. The terminology used to indicate the universal reach of the king is discussed by Paul Garelli, "L'état et la légitimité royale sous l'empire assyrien," in *Power and Propaganda: A Symposium on Ancient Empires,* ed. Mogens Trolle Larsen (Copenhagen: Akademisk Forlag, 1979)*,* 319–27. Garelli sees the universal reach of the king as the result of obedience to the dictates of the god Assur: "Le roi d'Assyrie doit étendre sa domination jusqu'aux confines du monde, s'il veut obéir à l'ordre de son dieu" (323). For more on the ideological imperative compelling each Assyrian king to extend the boundaries of the empire, see Hayim Tadmor, "World Dominion: The Expanding Horizon of the Assyrian Empire," in *Landscapes, Territories, Frontiers and Horizons in the Ancient Near East: Papers Presented to the 44th Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale, Venezia 7-11 July 1997,* 3 vols; vol. 1, ed. Lucio Milano Milano (Padua: Sargon, 1999), 55–62.

27. The Neo-Assyrian adaptation of the *Enuma Elish* epic, in which Assur is substituted for Marduk, does indeed mention the god in isolation from the king, but this does not reflect an original conception of Assur.

28. The status of the king as vice-regent is addressed by Machinist, "Assyrians on Assyria in the First Millennium," 84. Throughout the ancient Near East, gods are described as approving of kings and kings act to glorify gods through conquests. But the extent to which the king's will, power, and rule are identified as identical to the will, power, and rule of Assur is unique to the Neo-Assyrian empire. The god is never said to have a will different than or distinct from that of the king; the king is not said (in any text of which I am aware) to propitiate Assur. The lack of distinction between the will of the king and that of Assur is also seen in the divinatory literature. Starr has noted that the king's questions seeking information about the success or failure of projected military expeditions are not addressed to Assur, despite the obvious closeness between this god and the king. Instead, the questions are addressed to Shamash: Ivan Starr, *Queries to the Sun-God,* SAA 4 (Helsinki: Helsinki University, 1990), xvi.

29. Simo Parpola, *Assyrian Prophecies*, SAA 9 (Helsinki: Helsinki University, 1997), xxi, lxxxii n. 25.

This paralleling of the king's rule with that of Assur obviously derived from a need to justify the empire's rule. But having been created, this ideological parallel then itself generated an ideological impetus to expand the empire, for if Assur rules all of the divine realm, then the king ought to rule all of the lower realm. This ideological impetus is expressed in the coronation ritual, which from the Middle Assyrian period (late in the second millennium) and through the Neo-Assyrian period contained the injunction to expand the land of Assur.[30] The king is judged against this command: a good king will expand Assyria's borders, and would be able to claim the epithet *šar kibrāt erbetti*, king of the four directions.[31] This command had a practical element: imperial expansion was critical for the Assyrian economy, and so an expansionist king would uphold the prosperity of Assyria.[32] But the ideological element in this command also motivated kings, perhaps none more than Tiglath-pileser III.[33] He was the first king in nearly 100 years (since Shalmaneser III) to claim the title *šar kibrāt erbetti*.[34]

Although the king of Assyria is nowhere seen as a god, his power and special abilities are consistently seen as deriving from those of his master, Assur, the head of the pantheon. This identification between king and god leads to what Hayim Tadmor called "the heroic principle of royal omnipotence."[35] In inscriptions, in art, and in ritual, the king is consistently portrayed as all-powerful and therefore invincible. His invincibility, and the recognition of this invincibility, are seen in the inscriptions as resulting from the link between god and king described above. The following passage from the annals of Shalmaneser III is one of many illustrative examples. In it, foreigners overwhelmed by Assyria's military might are seen as overwhelmed by the god's power and reacting as though no distinction exists between the king's power and that of the god:

> I approached the city Suru, which belongs to Bit Halupe. Fear of the insuperable force of Assur, my lord, overwhelmed them (*pulḫi melamme ša*

30. Alasdair Livingstone, "New Dimensions in the Study of Assyrian Religion," in *Assyria 1995: Proceedings of the Tenth Anniversary Symposium of the Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project*, ed. Simo Parpola and R. M. Whiting (Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 1997), 165–77, here 166; Fales, "The Case of Assyria," 8–9.

31. For kings who held this epithet, see M.-J. Seux, "Les titres royaux *šar kiššati et šar kibrāt arba'i*," *RA* 59 (1965): 1-18, here 11-18.

32. Siddall, *The Reign of Adad-nirari III*, 195.

33. Tadmor, "World Dominion."

34. Barbara Cifola, *Analysis of Variants in the Assyrian Royal Titulary from Origins to Tiglath-pileser III* (Naples: Instituto Universitario Orientale, 1995), 138.

35. Tadmor, "Propaganda, Literature, Historiography," 326.

> *Assur bēliya išḫupšunu*). The nobles (and) elders of the city came out to me to save their lives. They submitted to me (lit., they seized my feet), and said: As it pleases you, kill! As it pleases you, spare! As it pleases you, do what you will![36]

For our purposes, the following capsule summary of Assyrian royal ideology is relevant: the dominion of the god, the power of the king, and the reach of empire had no bounds.

Above, I have highlighted only some of the key elements of Assyrian imperial ideology that remain consistent through the period under consideration. Each king, however, chose specific emphases in royal portrayals, in accordance with his own personal agenda and the larger political circumstances. These emphases appear in both artistic and literary material produced during the reign of those kings and are discussed extensively in the relevant literature.[37] I discuss these changes in the different chapters of this book, with reference to Tiglath-pileser III (744–727) and the kings who followed him, Sargon II (720–705) and Sennacherib (704–681).

4. Conveying Assyrian Imperial Ideology

Conveying this ideology successfully both to conquerors and conquered was a chief pre-occupation of the empire. The Assyrian sphere of influence was far too geographically vast for military force to ensure the loyalty of all regions. Both officials and those they dominated needed to be convinced to support the empire, and repeated indoctrination with imperial ideology helped accomplish this.[38] And while both Assyrian officials and those they

36. RIMA 2, A.0.101.1, 199 i 79–81.

37. See the discussion in Siddall, *The Reign of Adad-nīrārī III*, 167–87, on the kings preceding Adad-nirari III; G. W. Vera Chamaza's important study of imperial ideology under the Sargonids, *Die Omnipotenz Aššurs: Entwicklungen in der Aššur-Theologie unter den Sargoniden Sargon II., Sanherib und Asarhaddon* (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2002); Hayim Tadmor, "Sennacherib, King of Justice," in *Sefer Moshe: The Moshe Weinfeld Jubilee Volume* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2004), 385–90, which is amplified by the several articles that comprise the "Historiography and Royal Ideology Section" (1-102) of the posthumous collection of his essays *"With My Many Chariots I have Gone up the Heights of Mountains": Historical and Literary Studies on Ancient Mesopotamia and Israel*, ed. Mordechai Cogan (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 2011). These focus on the changes reflected in the literary materials; some changes reflected in the artistic materials are discussed in chapter 2.

38. See the very detailed discussion of Holloway on the methods of accomplishing this in *Aššur is King!*, 160–216.

conquered needed to be informed of Assyrian ideology, we are chiefly concerned here with how this ideology was conveyed to the conquered.

Above, I cited Berlejung's view that Assyria did not demand "acculturation" of the vassal kingdoms in the west, but only that they "obey and pay." But the obedience of these kingdoms, and indeed of all those subject to the Assyrian king, was encouraged by the creation of a "community of knowledge" that encompassed the elites of the conquered kingdoms, as well as Assyrian officials.[39]

In an earlier study, I detailed the many and multifaceted ways in which the elites of conquered kingdoms were exposed to Assyrian ideology. These included audiences (in Aramaic) with Assyrian officials on the frequent occasions when officials from conquered states were required to visit Assyrian palaces, exposure to palace art on these visits, exposure to Assyrian monuments erected at road junctions, inscribed stele in the conquered territory, and communications (also in Aramaic) with Assyrian officials in the conquered territory.[40] Subsequently, Morrow noted that the audiences with Assyrian officials in the Assyrian palaces were undoubtedly the most important of these ways.[41]

The combination of Assyrian administrative records (many of which have been published in the State Archives of Assyria series) and Assyrian royal inscriptions teaches us a great deal about the transmission of royal ideology. From the administrative records, we learn of the frequent travel

39. I take the phrase from Julie Sanders, *Adaptation and Appropriation: The New Critical Idiom* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006), discussed in Carly L. Crouch, *Israel and the Assyrians: Deuteronomy, the Succession Treaty of Esarhaddon, and the Nature of Subversion*, SBL ANEM 8 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2014), 43. For a discussion of the inclusion of both officials of Assyria and those of dominated states in this community, see Machinist, "Assyrians on Assyria in the First Millennium."

40. Aster, "Transmission of Neo-Assyrian Claims of Empire to Judah in the Late Eighth Century BCE," with extensive references to the administrative texts and royal inscriptions. For the communication with Assyrian officials in Aramaic and especially for the communication of Assyrian inscribed stele to the public, see Barbara Nevling Porter, "Language, Audience, and Impact in Imperial Assyria," in *Language and Culture in the Near East: Diglossia, Bilingualism, Registers*, Israel Oriental Studies 15, ed. Shlomo Izre'el and Rina Drory (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 51–72, here 61, who discusses public reading as a mechanism for conveying the content of the cuneiform texts to an audience who could not read the signs.

41. William Morrow, "Tribute from Judah and the Transmission of Assyrian Propaganda," in *"My Spirit at Rest in the North Country" (Zechariah 6.8): Collected Communications to the XXth IOSOT Congress, Helsinki 2010*, ed. Hermann Michael Niemann and Matthias Augustin (Frankfurt, 2011), 183–92.

of ambassadors from the vassal states to the Assyrian palaces.[42] As I discuss in chapter 2, this travel was not designed solely to present tribute, but to provide the Assyrians with an opportunity to indoctrinate the ambassadors, who formed part of the local elites, in the ideology which justified Assyrian rule. The ambassadors returned to their kingdoms suffused with this ideology, and were responsible for transmitting it to other members of the elite.

But these visits to the palace were not the only forum for the transmission of Assyrian ideology. As Bagg has noted, Assyrian officials were present at many sites throughout the land of Israel beginning not later than the conquests of Sargon II.[43] From the cuneiform contracts found near Tel Hadid and at Gezer, each of which is about 40 km from Jerusalem, we learn of the presence of Assyrian officials at or near these sites in the first half of the seventh-century.[44] The evidence does not suggest that these Assyrian officials restricted themselves to tax collection. As representatives of the empire, they were responsible for encouraging states in the region to be loyal to Assyria, regardless of whether these had already submitted. Tiglath-pileser III expanded Assyrian control to Syro-Palestine, maintaining regular contact with the ruling elites in these states. Thus, Qurdi-Aššur-Lamur, the well-known Assyrian governor of Ṣimirra (in Phoenicia) in the reign of Tiglath-pileser III, records how a representative of the king of Moab came to him to adjudicate a dispute with the Qedarites.[45]

A further technique for transmission of Assyrian ideology may have been the extensive and detailed loyalty oaths. Long known from the evidence of Esarhaddon's famous succession treaty (SAA 2:28–58, no. 6), the use of these texts in the west is now known from the excavations at Tell Ta'yinat, ancient

42. Most famous of these is SAA 1:92–93, no. 110, dealing with the travel of the emissaries of Egypt, Gaza, Judah, Moab, and Ammon to Assyria, sometime in the reign of Sargon II. SAA 19:177-178, no. 178 describes the travel of representatives of Gaza, and is dated, based on the names of officials in the text, to the reign of Tiglath-pileser III.

43. In "Palestine under Assyrian Rule." Among these are Megiddo and Samaria, each of which was the residence of an Assyrian governor, and other sites on the coast.

44. See my discussion in Shawn Zelig Aster, "An Assyrian bīt mardīte Near Tel Hadid?" *JNES* 74.2 (2015): 281–88, where I also list some of the evidence for Assyrian officials at other sites; and the discussion by Aster and Avraham Faust, "Administrative Texts, Royal Inscriptions and Neo-Assyrian Administrative in the Southern Levant: The View from the Aphek-Gezer Region," *Or* 84.3 (2015): 293–308. The possibility that Assyrian officials were present even closer to Jerusalem, at Ramat Rahel (less than 7 km from the Old City) was broached by Ronny Reich, "On the Assyrian Presence at Ramat Rahel," *Tel Aviv* 30 (2003): 124–29 and is under extensive debate by archaeologists.

45. SAA 19:35-36, no. 29. He apparently lacked the authority to adjudicate the dispute, and sends the message and messenger on to the Assyrian palace in Calah.

Calneh.[46] These texts emphasized loyalty to the Assyrian king, and were ceremonially administered to the local elite. Such texts may have been used already in the period of Tiglath-pileser III in the southern Levant; if so, this is further evidence for the transmission of ideology directly to the elites in the southern Levant.[47]

But besides the textual evidence, we also have extensive artistic evidence from the Assyrian palaces. In addition to attesting to contacts between Assyrian officials and members of elites from the different vassal states in these palaces, their art shows that effective transmission of Assyrian ideology was an important consideration in their design. This is discussed in chapter 2. Bringing these local elites into the "community of knowledge" of Assyrian ideology was key to ensuring that vassal states would remain loyal to Assyria. The key method of exposing vassal elites to this ideology was the ceremonial reception of emissaries from these states in the Assyrian palaces.

But before such exposure was relevant, previously-independent states had to be induced to become tributary to Assyria, and thereby implement the basic division into conquered and conquerors, a division which lies at the foundation of every empire. The brute threat of Assyrian military power, rather than the subtleties of Assyrian ideology, was key in transforming states into vassals. Only after military power had transformed states into vassals could the transmission of ideology be effective.[48]

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46. See note 8 above. At Ta'yinat, such oaths were used in relation to provinces, while in the Esarhaddon succession treaty, they were imposed on vassals.

47. One indication of this, SAA 19:35, no. 28, dates from the reign of Tiglath-pileser III, and appears to mention a loyalty oath administered by the king of Assyria to several towns in the region of Ashdod: Lidu (possibly Lod) and Qadarua (possibly Tel Qatra, ancient [and modern] Gedera). The restoration "Ashdod" is not certain since the text is broken, but seems probable. See discussion in Mikko Luukko, *The Correspondence of Tiglath-pileser III and Sargon II From Calah/Nimrud*, SAA 19 (Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2012), 35 and bibliography there.

48. This principle, that military power generally precedes the transmission of ideology, is hardly unique to Assyria. As Carr noted in his study of the modern period, political and military power ensure a more successful transmission of ideology in the international sphere; those who possess military power can more effectively control public opinion. "The military power of Napoleon was notoriously the most potent factor in the propagation throughout Europe of the ideas of 1789. The political influence of the idea of free trade dated from its adoption by Great Britain as the basis of British policy. The revolutionaries of 1848 failed everywhere to achieve political power, and the ideas of 1848 remained barren .... The Third or Communist International enjoyed little influence until the power of the Russian state was placed behind it." (Edward Hallett Carr, *The Twenty Years Crisis 1919-1939* [New York: Harper and Row, 1964], 138–39).

We do not know of any direct contact between Judah and Assyria prior to the reign of Tiglath-pileser III. While Judah may have learned about Assyrian ideology from its sister-kingdom, Israel, who fought Assyria in the ninth century and submitted to Assyria at the turn of the eighth, it is highly likely that Judah's first direct exposure to Assyrian ideology occurred in the reign of Tiglath-pileser III, when Assyrian power was at its height. The political and military reality of Assyrian power would tend to lend credence and force to the ideological claims conveyed by Assyria to its vassals. Because these were the first direct contacts, Judah's leadership may initially have failed to fully recognize that Assyria was a power subject to the ordinary cycles of victory and defeat that characterize all military forces.[49] These cycles characterized Assyrian political fortunes before 744 and again after the death of Tiglath-pileser III in 727. This lack of familiarity with Assyria may have contributed to the "shock and awe" Judah seems to have experienced when she encountered Assyria in the initial years of the reign of Tiglath-pileser III. In these years, there was no sign that Assyria would ebb, or that it would, like earlier conquerors such as Shishak, grab spoils and return to its land. The reality of Assyrian power, expressed in its meteoric rise in the West in these years, seemed to provide the empirical proof for Assyria's ideological claims.

Judah was thus first exposed to a clearly defined imperial ideology, expressed through effective communication strategies, at the precise moment when military realities seemed to support this ideology. The encounter between Judah's elite and Assyrian imperial ideology created significant intellectual ferment.

Although Judah had encountered political domination before, backed by different royal ideologies, Assyria's imperial ideology had new aspects, and these challenged Judah intellectually in a way that the ideologies of previous conquerors had not. Earlier conquerors of the southern Levant such as the Egyptians and Arameans have left us traces of their royal ideologies in their royal inscriptions. Each of these emphasize the legitimacy of the king, the aid he achieved from the gods, and his right to rule the particular land in question. But none of these claimed sovereignty of all known territory,[50] and combined this with what appeared to be, around the years 740–734, an unre-

49. For this topic, see further in my essay "Israelite Embassies to Assyria in the First Half of the Eighth Century," *Biblica* 97 (2016): 175–98.

50. Certainly Egyptian royal ideology had universal aspects, but also contained a clear and sober recognition of the rights of other kings to their lands. This is expressed in the parity treaty of Pharaoh Ramses II and Hittite King Hattušili III, and is reflected in such texts as El-Amarna letter 104, in which a vassal king (Rib-Addi of Byblos) implicitly recognizes the rights of other members of the "great powers club" to dominate vassals.

lenting conquest of such territory. The universal reach and invincible mastery the Assyrians claimed stood in stark contrast to Israel's "Yahweh-alone" belief. In chapter 7 of this book, I show why I consider this belief to have emerged significantly before the reactions to Assyrian imperialism, which we find in many of the passages considered.[51] The idea that Assyria's god was supreme and held universal dominion was certainly incompatible with belief in "Yahweh-alone," regardless of whether one characterizes this belief as incipient monotheism or developed henotheism. Levine describes this strand of Israelite belief in this period as holding that it was YHWH "who had granted his people sovereignty in Canaan and victory over neighboring foes," and that Israelites were obligated to worship Him alone.[52]

Responses to the challenges posed by Assyrian theology are preserved for us in parts of Isa 1–39, interwoven with more practical discussions about the best political and military response to Assyria.[53] As Levine has noted, by the end of the eighth century "The immediacy and inescapable force of the Assyrian threat demanded a God-idea broad enough to measure up to empire. First Isaiah expounded just such a concept for the first time in biblical literature."[54] As we shall see, passages in Isa 1–39 accord such attributes as invincibility and universal dominion to YHWH, while directly referencing Assyrian motifs that accord these to Assur and his king.

5. The Origins of Passages from Isa 1–39 in the Assyrian Period: Thematic vs. Linguistic Approaches

5.1. Thematic Approaches

That the book of Isaiah addresses the Assyrian threat is hardly a new concept; it is obvious to any ancient or modern reader of passages such as 10:5–15 or chapters 36 and 37. But since the beginning of modern scholarship, scholars

51. Pace Levine, whose view I discuss below.

52. Baruch A. Levine, "Assyrian Ideology and Israelite Monotheism," *Iraq* 67 (2005): 411–27, here 415. While Levine's formulation of this belief ought in my view to be expanded, the sparse formulation is useful for our discussion.

53. The difficulty of worshipping a national god when a universal god both claimed and demonstrated sovereignty may have posed significant intellectual challenges for monolatrous nations other than Israel and Judah, but we know little or nothing about these.

54. Levine, "Assyrian Ideology and Israelite Monotheism," 414. While I doubt whether this is indeed the first time such a concept was expressed in biblical literature, this does appear to be the first time that biblical literature engages in a direct polemic with Assyrian claims of empire.

have questioned the attribution of passages in Isa 1–39 to an author of the late eighth century BCE. It is not my goal to provide anything approaching an overview of modern scholarship on the dating of Isa 1–39; the topic is amply covered elsewhere.[55] I seek here to mention only a few central works that illustrate the scholarly trends with which this book interacts in the subsequent chapters. At the turn of the nineteenth century, Duhm argued clearly that the book of Isaiah grew through a slow process of collection, in which many "collectors" (Sammler) participated. He acknowledges the existence of a "first kernel" of the book created by Isaiah of Jerusalem, containing the "teaching and wisdom" that the author commends to the attention of the youths mentioned in 8:18. But to this small book, much non-Isaianic material was added, in a process that was still ongoing in the post-exilic period. Duhm divides chapters 1-35 into three "collections," corresponding to the points in time in which they were collected: 1–12, 13–23, and 24–35, and argues that only the first "collection" contains material to be ascribed to "Isaiah of Jerusalem." Nevertheless, even this collection contains much material from as late as the sixth century, and only in the unit 6:1–9:6 does he find part of that kernel composed by Isaiah.[56] Marti then accepted the general principle of a protracted and complex redactional process. He also attempted to define the eighth-century core more precisely. He argued that short passages can be assigned to this core. For example, in considering chapter 8, he assigned verses 1–4, 5–8a, 11–15, and 16–18 as belonging to this core, but excluded the intervening material.[57]

A more recent trend limiting the extent of the eighth-century core of the book emerges from Barth's *Assur-Redaktion*. This thesis offers a very

55. A useful summary can be found in Hugh Godfrey Maturin Williamson, *The Book Called Isaiah: Deutero-Isaiah's Role in Composition and Redaction* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), 1–18, and a more recent one in Matthijs J. De Jong, *Isaiah among the Ancient Near Eastern Prophets: A Comparative Study of the Isaiah Tradition and the Neo-Assyrian Prophecies* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 5–38. See also Ulrich F. Berges, *The Book of Isaiah: Its Composition and Final Form* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2012), 1–37; and for a more detailed survey of late twentieth century continental scholarship, Uwe Becker, *Jesaja: Von der Botschaft zum Buch* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1997), 7–20.

56. Bernhard Duhm, *Das Buch Jesaja übersetzt und erklärt*, Göttinger Handkommentar zum Alten Testament, 4th ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1922), 7–12 (first published in 1892).

57. Karl Marti, *Das Buch Jesaja*, Kurzer Handkommentar zum Alten Testament (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1900); see especially the chart on page 18 of the introduction, a useful schema of his view of the eighth-century core. Marti assigned somewhat later dates than Duhm to parts of chapters 1-35, placing much of the material in the post-exilic period. The differences between Marti and Duhm, while significant, are not relevant for our discussion.

different explanation for the divergent approaches taken to Assyria in Isa 1–39 than what I propose in this book. As Barth notes, in Isa 7:17, God is said to send Assyria to punish Israel, while in 10:5–15 and 10:16–19, the prophet predicts a divine judgment on Assyria. Barth argued that late in the seventh century, during the reign of Josiah, when Assyrian power was at its lowest ebb, passages that reflect the impending overthrow of Assyria by God were added, and others re-edited to include predictions of Assyria's demise.[58] In the same year that Barth published his influential work (1977), Vermeylen published *Du prophète Isaïe à l'apocalyptique*, in which he analyzed each passage in Isa 1–35 and assigned the redaction of many of these passages to the Persian period.[59] Barth's thesis was developed further by Clements, who used the "Josianic redaction" of passages in Isaiah as a touchstone in understanding the development of the Zion tradition.[60] Barth's thesis was also influential in Sweeney's important study. Sweeney argued that much of Isa 5–23*, 27–32, and 36–37 were composed in the period of Josiah, written to support his program of national and religious reform, and only "various texts found throughout chs. 1-32*" stem from the eighth-century prophet.[61] In all of these works, the separation of material assigned to the eighth-century core of the book from those assigned to later redactions depends on stylistic and literary analyses internal to the biblical text, and on dating the ideas expressed in these passages. Following the publication of Barth's study, the second edition of Kaiser's commentary argued that only material in chapter 1 and in chapters 28–31 can be considered to pre-date

58. Hermann Barth, *Die Jesaja-Worte in der Josiazeit*, WMANT 48 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1977). I will return to consider Barth's approach to this problem below.

59. Jacques Vermeylen, *Du prophète Isaïe à l'apocalyptique: Isaïe 1-35, miroir d'un demi-millénaire d'expérience religieuse en Israël* (Paris: Gabalda, 1977).

60. Ronald Ernest Clements, *Isaiah and the Deliverance of Jerusalem: A Study of the Interpretation of Prophecy in the Old Testament,* JSOTSup 13 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1980); *Isaiah 1–39*, The New Century Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans; London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1980).

61. Marvin Alan Sweeney, *Isaiah 1–39, With an Introduction to Prophetic Literature.* Forms of Old Testament Literature, 16 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 57. Sweeney follows Barth in arguing that oracles concerning the demise of Assyria date to the period of Josiah. Sweeney identifies a significant number of verses as written by the eighth century prophet, but these identifications are based on form and content, rather than comparisons to the Assyrian material. These include: 1:21–26, 27–31; 5:1–24; 6:1–11; 7:2–17*; 7:20; 8:1–15; 8:16–9:6; 15:1b–16:12 and 29:15-24, which are said to date to the period of the Syro-Ephraimite War; 5:25–30; 9:7–10:4; 10:5–34; 14:24–27; 14:17–18; 19:1–17; and 29:1–14, which are said to date to the years 724–720; and 1:2–9, 1:10–18; 3:1–9; 3:12–15; 3:16–4:1; 14:4b–21; 22: 1b–14; 22:15–25; 23: 1b–14; chapter 28; 30:1–18; 31; and 32:9–14, which are said to date to the period of Hezekiah's revolt.

the exilic period. He argued that 6:1–8:18 was heavily influenced by Deuteronomic theology, and that this material, which Duhm had seen as the earliest in Isaiah, was actually intended to explain the Babylonian exile.[62]

In separating redactional strata in Isa 1–39, Duhm, Marti, Barth, Vermeylen, and Kaiser all assign dates to passages that lack clear and uncontested chronological anchors. With the exception of certain passages that contain such anchors (such as 11:12, which describes the return of the exiles and therefore fits best, at first glance, in a post-exilic context), general ideological and stylistic criteria are used to separate redactional strata. Certain ideas are said to be more prevalent at certain periods, and prose passages are said to postdate pithy poetic passages. Employing such general criteria, without a clear chronological anchor for specific phrases or ideas, has generated, as appears above, a wide variety of views. The overall conclusion that the book of Isaiah as we now have it has been edited in several periods is clear to any reader, ancient or modern.[63] But determining the extent of redactional activity, and assigning particular verses to specific redactional strata based only on correlations to ideas allegedly prevalent at certain periods, or to a hypothetical stylistic chronology, does not inspire confidence.

One example will suffice to illustrate my skepticism of assigning particular ideas to particular periods and thereby dating redactional strata. Vermeylen sees in Isa 2:12–17 examples of the Deuteronomic school of thought and therefore dates these verses accordingly. Kaiser sees these ideas as influenced by the onslaught that resulted in the Babylonian exile.[64] But the ideas these verses express are not inextricably tied to the late sixth century. On the contrary, the motifs and language of this passage are clearly

62. Otto Kaiser, *Isaiah 1–12: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox, 1983); trans. from the fifth edition of his German commentary, *Der Prophet Jesaja: Kapital 1-12* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1981) in the Das Alte Testament Deutsch series. The first edition of Kaiser's work on Isa 1-12 appeared in German in the same series in 1960, with a second edition in 1963. The edition of 1963 was translated in 1972 (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972). The difference between the earlier versions of Kaiser's commentary and the 1981 version is stark, with the later version adopting the very late dating described above. A critique of this method will appear below.

63. This, too, was obvious to ancient readers of the book, as is clear from the rabbinic statement in *b. B. Bat*. 15a that the book of Isaiah was written by חזקיה וסיעתו — perhaps best translated as "his supporting group." Rashi renders this "the members of his generation who continued after him."

64. Vermeylen, *Du prophète Isaïe à l'apocalyptique*, 156–57. Kaiser, in his revised edition, also argues for a late dating of this material, seeing it as composed around the time of the exile (Kaiser, 1983 English Translation, 4). Interestingly, Marti assigned it to the late eighth century (Marti, *Das Buch Jesaja,* 20).

influenced by the language used in Assyrian imperial propaganda, and this militates strongly in favour of this passage dating from the Assyrian period.[65] From a methodological point of view, it is important to recognize the difficulty of dating based on ideological considerations. While certain ideas may be more prevalent at certain periods of time, it is impossible to limit ideas that recur in history to specific tranches of time.

For these reasons, I concur with Roberts' assessment: "The confidence with which many modern scholars .... reconstruct hypothetical redactors living at particular periods, who make particular editorial changes in the service of some equally hypothetically reconstructed theological interest, strikes me as extreme hubris."[66]

5.2. Approaches Based on the Comparative Method

An alternative and preferable approach to the dating of passages in Isa 1–39 is based on comparative data with clear chronological anchors. Such an approach emerges from Machinist's 1983 essay that appeared shortly after the influential works noted above. Although intended to address the question "What did the Neo-Assyrian empire look like to others, especially its contemporaries?" Peter Machinist's essay entitled "Assyria and Its Image in the First Isaiah" provides a more solid basis for dating passages from Isaiah. His linguistic and literary approach differs from the thematic one in significant respects. Rather than arguing about the ideational component of the passage, and attempting to correlate those ideas with the *Zeitgeist* of a particular time, Machinist focused on comparisons between the language of passages in Isa 1–39 and the language of the Assyrian royal inscriptions. He showed that the Isaiah passages could not have been written without their author knowing the language of the Assyrian inscriptions.

His approach is grounded in the comparative method in Biblical Studies, an area of research in which scholars have developed tests for evaluating the extent to which a particular literary work can be considered dependent on a second literary work.[67] To demonstrate literary dependence, the motifs that appear in both works must have unusual elements that are unlikely

65. For the date of this passage, as established by comparative linguistic study, see my "The Image of Assyria in Isaiah 2:5–22: The Campaign Motif Reversed," *JAOS* 127 (2007): 249–78.

66. Jimmy Jack McBee Roberts, *First Isaiah* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015), 3.

67. The key discussions include Jeffrey H. Tigay, "On Evaluating Claims of Literary Borrowing," in *The Tablet and the Scroll: Near Eastern Studies in Honor of William W. Hallo*, ed. William W. Hallo, Mark E. Cohen, Daniel C. Snell, and David B. Weisberg (Bethesda: CDL, 1993), 250–55; Meir Malul, *The Comparative Method in Ancient Near Eastern and Biblical Legal Studies* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener; Kevelaer: Butzon & Bercker, 1990).

to have been independently generated in both works. Language or motifs that are expected and fit well in one literary work (the borrowed work), but which betray linguistic irregularities or other unusual features in the second (or borrowing) work, cannot reasonably be considered independent of the first when a known channel of communication between the borrowed and borrowing work exists. Establishing literary borrowing has obvious implications for dating the borrowed text, since it was necessarily composed in a time and place when the borrowed motifs were known, and this topic is discussed in detail below.

Some further discussion of the method used in establishing literary dependence is necessary as a methodological introduction to the present book. The clearest cases of literary dependence appear when the borrowing has left traces of the borrowed motifs in the language of the borrowing work. Tigay discusses "blind motifs," motifs that lack meaning in the text into which they are borrowed, and can only be understood by reference to the original context, from which they derive. Some passages in Isa 1–39 do indeed contain such "blind motifs" (such as 37:24–25, 19:19, and others discussed further on).[68] Other passages do not contain blind motifs, but contain linguistic anomalies in Hebrew (such as those found in 2:10, 2:19, 2:21) that are best explained by reference to the language of the Assyrian texts.[69] Linguistic anomalies are commonly used in many areas of comparative Biblical Studies as a way of demonstrating dependence of a biblical text on extra-biblical usages.[70]

Other passages lack linguistic anomalies, or "blind motifs," but instead contain motifs, often as part of similes or metaphors, that are unparalleled elsewhere in the biblical corpus. These passages need to be examined more closely to determine whether there are other reasonable explanations for the unusual motif, and its use in a particular context, and whether the motif might derive from reasons other than borrowing. The fundamental question to ask in any discussion of literary borrowing remains: "Is it probable that the second work was independently-generated, without reference to

68. See my articles "What Sennacherib Said and What the Prophet Heard: On the Use of Assyrian Sources in the Prophetic Narrative of the Campaign of 701 BCE" [Hebrew], *Shnaton* 19 (2009): 105–24 and "Isaiah 19: The 'Burden of Egypt' and Neo-Assyrian Imperial Policy," *JAOS* 135.3 (2015): 453–70.

69. For Isa 2:5–22, see my "The Image of Assyria in Isaiah 2:5–22."

70. A few classic examples include Shalom M. Paul, "Deutero-Isaiah and Cuneiform Royal Inscriptions," *JAOS* 88.1 (1968): 180–86; Hayim Tadmor and Mordechai Cogan, "Ahaz and Tiglath-pileser in the Book of Kings: Historiographic Considerations," *Biblica* 60.4 (1979): 491–508; Shalom E. Holtz, "The Case for Adversarial Yaḥad," *VT* 59 (2009): 211–21.

the first?" The question is not unlike those considered by modern forensic lawyers dealing with intellectual property.[71]

To return to Machinist's discussion: the Isaiah passages he cites contain unique linguistic features that cannot easily be explained without reference to the Assyrian material. As a result, scholars of the comparative method have accepted that these demonstrate the literary dependence of the relevant passages on language we know from the Assyrian royal inscriptions.

This dependence does not establish the authorship of these passages, but does show that they date from the Assyrian period. Machinist notes that his purpose is not to ascribe the passages in question to the First Isaiah, and he raises the possibility "that some of the passages discussed may have come from later writers in the prophet's tradition."[72] But in reference to several of the passages that present the most striking similarities with the language of Assyrian motifs, he notes that "In none of these passages has a serious case been made for a date after the Assyrian period." These are 37:24 (the motif of the cutting down of cedars in the mountains); 1:7–8 (the burning and consumption of cities by fire); 10:13 (the removing of a kingdom's boundaries); 37:26b (crashing cities into ruins); and 8:7–8 (the flood and the כבוד). In these cases, "We are evidently dealing with the effects of Assyrian propaganda." In point of fact, various authors have argued for later dates for some of these passages,[73] but Machinist's demonstration that the motifs they contain are dependent on the Assyrian material is decisive. These passages must have been written in a period when Assyrian propaganda was known.

But Machinist goes beyond this, noting that in several passages the author of Isaiah sought to deflect and rework the Assyrian propaganda he encountered (he refers to 37:24, 14:8, and 10:5–19). In his attempt to defend what Machinist calls "the Israelite covenant tradition," the author of these passages inverts motifs found in Assyrian royal inscriptions. These motifs highlight the Assyrian kings' exploits as evidence of their invincibility; the author of the biblical passages inverts these to highlight the opposition between the Assyrian kings and God.

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71. See, for example, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development's document on "Detecting Bid Rigging in Public Procurement." Accessed April 18, 2016. http://www.oecd.org/competition/cartels/42594486.pdf. On page 10, criterion 7 discusses similarities in bid documents that attest to the documents not having been composed independently of each other.

72. "Assyria and Its Image in the First Isaiah," 729.

73. See, for example, Vermeylen, *Du prophète Isaïe à l'apocalyptique*, 1:53 in reference to Isa 1:8, and literature cited there, and more hesitantly at 1:256–57 in relation to 10:13.

Many examples of this tendency to rework and subvert such motifs, in order to argue against the points they were designed to prove in their original Assyrian context, will be discussed throughout this book. Here, only one example will be cited, from Machinist's article. The passage appears in Isa 10:13, where the prophet cites the personification of Assyria (clearly the king) as declaring

בכח ידי עשיתי
ובחכמתי כי נבונתי

By the strength of my hand I have done it
And by my wisdom, for I have understanding.

The trust in the strength of one's own hand is a motif frequently attested in the Assyrian royal inscriptions, and describes the behavior of the enemies of Assyria. The Assyrian king, in contrast, is said to act "with the help of Assur," and speaks in the first person throughout the inscriptions. Machinist notes that the verse above preserves the first person diction, but deftly reversed the descriptions so that the Assyrian's first person proclamation, unqualified as it is by any reference to a god, appears as hubris of the highest order, and specifically constitutes rejection of Yahweh. In short, 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."[74]

If the author of these passages reworks and subverts motifs found in Assyrian royal inscriptions, it follows that the author was aware not only of the language of these inscriptions, but also of the ideology that they were designed to express. Furthermore, he was, as Machinist notes, attempting to defend what he saw as the inherent threat posed to "the Israelite covenant tradition" by Assyria. If these passages respond to a perceived threat coming from Assyria, it follows that they were written in a period where Assyria was actively engaged in attempting to convey its ideology to Judah. This makes it impossible to claim that the passages which contain such subversion of defined motifs were written in later periods, when the language known to us from the Assyrian royal inscriptions had somehow entered the Biblical Hebrew lexicon.[75]

74. Machinist, "Assyria and its Image," 734.

75. This claim frequently arises in discussions of the Assyrian motifs in prophetic passages with scholars who seek to defend later dates for the composition of these passages.

Machinist was hardly the first to recognize the influence of motifs we know from Assyrian texts on Isaiah; the point was noted by Gray early in the twentieth century.[76] Throughout the twentieth century, as the Neo-Assyrian inscriptions were published, other scholars noted important points of correspondence between the language of the inscriptions and that of Isaiah.[77] Machinist's article broke new ground in two ways: first, by noting that such influence was not localized, but that it appears in many passages in different parts of Isa 1–39, and second, by showing how the use of Assyrian-influenced language in these passages is part and parcel of an ideological polemic undermining Assyrian ideology. This awareness of the subversion of Assyrian language in Isa 1–39, as part of a dialogue of ideas, has formed the basis of several subsequent discussions of reversal and usurpation of Neo-Assyrian motifs in these chapters.[78]

As Machinist argued, if the author of these passages intentionally reworked the Assyrian motifs, he intended his audience to understand them. The audience of these passages was a group of Jerusalemites Machinist calls the *literati*, who formed part of the political elite of Judah and represented Judah in communication with the Assyrian officials.

5.3. Using the Comparative Method to Date Passages in Isaiah 1–39

Demonstrating that the passages in question were written as part of an active dialogue with Assyrian ideology is important in establishing their date. As discussed above, propagation of ideology was an inseparable part of the process of asserting Assyrian domination over conquered territory and vassal states. As a result of that propagation, elites in Judah and other dominated kingdoms became familiar with the motifs used to express Assyrian imperial ideology. We can therefore identify a period of roughly a hundred years, following the completion of the campaign against Arpad

76. George B. Gray, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Isaiah I-XXXIX* (New York: Scribner, 1912), 55; see Morrow, "Tribute from Judah," 183.

77. R.A. Carlson, "The Anti-Assyrian Character of the Oracle in Is IX 1-6," *VT* 24 (1974): 130–35 (Isa 9:6 and Assyrian royal epithets); Chaim Cohen, "Neo-Assyrian Elements in the First Speech of the Biblical Rab-Shaqe," *IOS* 9 (1979): 32–48 (Neo-Assyrian elements in Rab-Shakeh's speech in Isa 36:4–10).

78. These include my studies noted above, Aster, "The Image of Assyria in Isaiah 2:5–22"; "What Sennacherib Said and What the Prophet Heard"; "Isaiah 19: The Burden of Egypt"; Michael Chan, "Rhetorical Reversal and Usurpation: Isaiah 10:5-34 and the Use of Neo-Assyrian Royal Idiom in the Construction of an Anti-Assyrian Theology," *JBL* 128 (2009): 717–33 (Isa 10:5–34); William R. Gallagher, *Sennacherib's Campaign to Judah: New Studies* (Leiden: Brill, 1999) 187-208 (referring to Isa 36:15–20); Nathan Mastnjak, "Judah's Covenant with Assyria in Isaiah 28," *VT* 64.3 (2014): 465–83.

of Tiglath-pileser III in 740, as the period in which Judah was dominated by Assyria and therefore the period in which these passages were composed. The precise end of the Assyrian domination of the southern Levant is widely discussed in scholarship, but the period after 640 was a period of decline for Assyria's world empire. In this period (corresponding roughly to the second half of the reign of Ashurbanipal, who reigned 669–c. 631), the empire was weakened by revolts and over-extension, and gradually lost its grip on the region. Kahn has cited evidence suggesting that Psammetichus I of Egypt besieged Ashdod in 636, indicating that Assyria was no longer in control of the region. It appears likely that the death of Ashurbanipal and the subsequent outbreak of the revolt in Babylon in 626 further weakened Assyria's hold on the region. By 616, the Egyptians had reached the Middle Euphrates. Assyrian control over the southern Levant must have collapsed completely several years before this to allow such a wide-ranging Egyptian advance. Thus, between 636 and 616, Assyrian control over the region went from highly tenuous to non-existent.[79] This very severely constrains the possible time-span for any "Josianic" redaction of passages in Isa 1–39 that were part of this active dialogue with Assyrian ideology, to the first few years of Josiah's reign, which began in 640.[80]

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79. The date of the decline of Assyrian dominion in the Land of Israel is subject to debate and the decline was certainly a gradual process. Eph'al and Malamat have argued for a decline beginning already in the middle of the seventh century, due to the wars and revolts Assyria faced. Israel Eph'al, "Assyrian Dominion in Palestine," in *Political History,* vol. 4.1 of *The Age of the Monarchies,* ed. Abraham Malamat and Israel Eph'al (Jerusalem: Masada, 1979), 276–89, here 281-82; Abraham Malamat, "Josiah's Bid for Armageddon," *JANES* 5 (1973): 267–78, here 270–71. In contrast, Na'aman argued that "No one managed to oust Assyria from Syria and Palestine before Ashurbanipal's death in 631 BCE and the outbreak of the revolt in Babylonia in 626 BCE." (Nadav Na'aman, "The Kingdom of Judah under Josiah," *Tel Aviv* 18 [1991]: 3–71, here 38.) The textual evidence for a gradual decline during the reign of Ashurbanipal cited by Eph'al is certainly convincing, and is particularly relevant for our discussion, which relates to the ability of Assyria to convey its ideology verbally and orally. Furthermore, the weakness of Assyrian rule in Judah by the time of the loss of Egypt (652) is also noted by Hermann Spieckermann, *Juda unter Assur in der Sargonidenzeit* (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1982), 375–76. It must nevertheless be acknowledged that as late as 644, Ashurbanipal mounted a campaign against Tyre and Acre. Partly for this reason, I have here adopted the more cautious approach advanced by Dan'el Kahn, which uses the chronological indicators noted to anchor the decline ("Why did Necho II Kill Josiah?" in *There and Back Again – The Crossroads II: Proceedings of an International Conference Held in Prague September 15-18, 2014*, ed. Jana Mynářová, Pavel Onderka, and Peter Pavúk [Prague: Charles University, 2015], 511–28.) The reference to 636 appears at p. 511, with literature cited there.

80. In attempting to justify such a redaction in the reign of Josiah, Ronald E.

It is hardly possible to argue for any active dialogue with an Assyria broadcasting its ideology during most of Josiah's reign. While administrators initially appointed by Assyria may have remained in some parts of the southern Levant throughout Assurbanipal's reign, Assyria's ability to broadcast ideology was curtailed, if not eliminated, by the difficulties of communication between the Levant and the Assyrian center after these revolts took hold.[81] Furthermore, as Assyrian power became more and more limited to the Assyrian heartland and adjoining regions, justifying Assyrian power in the southern Levant would have become inherently absurd. In other words, when Assyria lost its hold on the southern Levant, Assyrian imperial ideology lost its political and ideological relevance. Babylonia replaced Assyria as imperial master of the southern Levant at the end of the seventh century.

The transition from Assyrian rule to Babylonian was characterized in some regions by administrative continuity.[82] But despite this, the royal ideology of the latter empire differed from that of the Assyrians.[83] While all empires declare the greatness of their kings, the motifs used to express this greatness articulate the ideological justification for that particular empire. Even a cursory examination will detect important and significant differences between Neo-Assyrian royal ideology and that of the Neo-Babylonians. The

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Clements, *The New Century Bible Commentary Isaiah 1-39* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 6, claimed that Assyria's fall as a world power took place only when Nineveh fell in 612 BCE. Our current knowledge of late seventh-century power dynamics makes this claim impossible.

81. Eph'al, cited above, notes that one of the cuneiform administrative documents found at Gezer was written in the month Simanu (two months after the start of the year in Nisanu) without knowledge of the eponym that had been established in Assyria for that year, 641. This strongly implies a breakdown in communication between the Assyrian heartland and the Assyrian administrative centers in the southern Levant.

82. Stephanie Dalley, "The Transition from Neo-Assyrians to Neo-Babylonians: Break or Continuity?" *Eretz-Israel* 27 (2003): 25*–28*, noted that some areas of the empire underwent a fairly seamless transition from Assyrian to Babylonian rule. The transition in the southern Levant was certainly not seamless, and involved Egyptian intervention. Nevertheless, Assyrian administrators (many of whose Babylonian names may attest to Babylonian origins) who remained in the southern Levant during this period may well have begun working for the Babylonians, as was suggested by Wayne Horowitz (oral communication).

83. In Muhamad A. Dandamayev's discussion of "Assyrian Traditions during Achaemenid Times," in *Assyria 1995: Proceedings of the Tenth Anniversary Symposium of the Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project,* ed. Simo Parpola and Robert McCray Whiting (Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 1997), 41-48, he notes many examples of administrative continuity, and a single artistic motif (the god in the winged sun-disk) that continues from the Assyrian through the Babylonian period to the Achaemenid.

motifs and language, indeed the very arguments for legitimacy, which we find in the inscriptions of the Babylonian kings who succeeded Assyria as imperial lords of the southern Levant, differ substantially from those of the Assyrians, and it would be false to equate these in order to claim that the passages bearing Assyrian influence could post-date the Assyrian period. To oversimplify, Assyrian ideology focused on breadth, emphasizing the command of Assur to expand (*urappiš*; literally, "broaden") the borders of the kingdom, while Babylonian ideology, from the earliest periods, focused on height, considering the king a pious temple-builder and temple-restorer. It is not possible to argue that later empires preserve Assyrian ideological traditions, with obvious implications for the dating of the relevant passages in Isa 1–39.

6. Contemporary Scholarship, Redaction, and the "Eighth-Century Core" of Isaiah 1–39

Despite the convincing nature of the comparative arguments for the dating of these passages, one would be hard-pressed to claim that the work of the comparative scholars cited above has shifted scholarly attitudes in regard to Isa 1–39 as a whole. One reason for this may be scholars' reluctance to engage linguistic arguments due to the apparently-technical nature of these arguments. In Williamson's recent discussion, he proposes several methods of identifying "pre-exilic Isaiah," none of which engage the comparative linguistic evidence from the Assyrian texts. The first method engages historical parallels but not linguistic ones: he notes passages such as Isa 20:1 (which mentions Sargon's attack on Ashdod) and Isa 22:10 (which mentions the destruction of houses to build a wall around Jerusalem), and sees in them "solid pre-exilic historical memory."[84] He then adduces passages which contain ideas that became anathema in the post-exilic period, such as the inclusion of magical experts in the list of societal leaders in Isa 3:2–3, and the excoriation of those who rely on ritual in 1:11–15. The third method he notes, one to which he has devoted particular attention, is the identification of citations from earlier material (such as Isa 11:6–9) in post-exilic Isaiah material (here Isa 65:25). These are important methods, but the comparative analysis of specific linguistic and literary motifs, found only in Isa 1–39 and in Assyrian claims of empire, offers a method of identifying Assyrian-period material that need not be restricted by Williamson's general caution: "In the case of texts that are more than

84. Hugh Godfrey Maturin Williamson, "In Search of Pre-Exilic Isaiah," in *In Search of Pre-Exilic Israel: Proceedings of the Oxford Old Testament Seminar,* ed. John Day (London: T&T Clark, 2005), 181–206, here 185.

2000 years old, nothing can be proved."[85] The comparative studies noted above indeed prove that it is impossible for many passages in Isa 1–39 to have been composed without reference to Assyrian material.

This comparative argument is fundamentally a linguistic one, often depending on a close comparison of technical points in Biblical Hebrew with Assyrian passages and phrases. It is interesting that, overwhelmingly, scholars who argue that this material was composed after the Assyrian period do not reply directly to the comparative linguistic points. This may be due to some of these scholars' lack of facility and/or interest in the relevant ancient Near Eastern languages, principally Akkadian.

But this lack of attention is also clearly related to the prevalent scholarly trend to see prophetic literature as compilations dating from the Persian period or later.[86] There exists an incorrect perception, which I address below, that the individual motifs Machinist identified represent small discrete elements, "snippets" of verses that are embedded in a larger complex of verses, with the larger complex having been composed later. This perception seems to result from the influence of redactional analysis of the sort that Kaiser applied to Isaiah, in which only small passages of an eighth-century core are to be identified. This approach, which sees prophetic units as

85. Ibid., 182.

86. One recent attempt to muster historical arguments in favor of this trend appears in James M. Bos, *Reconsidering the Date and Provenance of the Book of Hosea: The Case for Persian-Period Yehud* (London: T&T Clark, 2013), 7–39. Among the arguments he cites are doubts as to whether there existed a scribal culture sufficiently sophisticated to record complex literary works, which consisted of scribes who were not supported by the monarchy in eighth-century Israel. Although we lack epigraphic evidence for eighth-century literary activity in Judah, we note that scribes in tenth-century Judah produced a "wisdom instruction" text: see Reinhard Achenbach, "The Protection of Personae Miserae in Ancient Israelite Law and Wisdom and in the Ostracon from Khirbet Qeiyafa," *Semitica* 54 (2012): 93–125, here 124. Furthermore, the long and complex literary text from Deir Alla in northern Transjordan dates from approximately 800 BCE. (The archaeological stratum in which the Deir Alla text was located was dated to between 880 and 770 with the highest probability clustering around 800. Moawiyah M. Ibrahim and Gerrit van der Kooij, "The Archaeology of Deir 'Alla Phase IX," in *The Balaam Text from Deir Alla Re-Evaluated,* ed. J. Hoftijzer and Gerrit van der Kooij [Leiden: Brill, 1991] 16–29, here 27–28.) Once scribal culture existed in Judah, it is difficult to see how it could be restricted to circles supported by the monarchy. For more on scribal culture in Judah in the eighth century, see Chris A. Rollston, *Writing and Literacy in the World of Ancient Israel: Epigraphic Evidence from the Iron Age* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2010). He shows that the contention that no scribal culture existed in Judah in the ninth and eighth centuries "is in direct conflict with the epigraphic evidence," and that the Israelites were certainly capable of writing "literature" in this period (134).

developing from very short declarations with a poetic quality, consisting of several words, is common in continental studies of biblical prophecy.[87] In a recent study referencing Isa 6, De Jong argues that scribal activity, including revisions and re-writing, have basically obliterated any traces of eighth-century prophetic formulations.[88] In my view, his study relies too heavily on comparisons to the types of royal prophecies we know from Mesopotamia and Syria, and does not take into account the chronological anchors we find in many passages in Isa 1–39. These anchors, which tie the passages firmly to the late eighth and early seventh centuries, are provided by references to Assyrian motifs.

In my studies of Isa 2:5–22, Isa 19, and Isa 36–37, I have argued that the elements bearing Assyrian influence are not simple discrete motifs but larger literary units. These units deploy these motifs in constructing rhetorical arguments to oppose imperial rhetoric. It follows, therefore, that we cannot limit the Assyrian influence to very brief units of a verse or perhaps two verses. As noted above, my goal in this book is to identify passages that contain motifs or language influenced by Assyrian imperial ideology, and consider both the language that betrays this influence, and the ideological reactions they present to this ideology.

The passages I consider are those where not only the individual motifs, but also the larger rhetorical argument, betray knowledge of Assyrian imperial ideology. The literary units that express this argument, therefore, can be assigned to the period of ideological conflict with Assyrian imperialism, and that dating cannot be limited to single verses or verse couplets. This does not exclude the possibility of later intrusions into these units, in the course of their redaction and inclusion in the larger work. That much of Isa 1–39 may be a "rolling" composition and edition, with successive editors adding to a core, has long been accepted. But the present study shows that, in many cases, enough of the passage to clearly express its argument must have been written in a period when polemicizing against Assyrian imperial ideology was relevant. Furthermore, later editors of the passage were sufficiently conservative to avoid obscuring that message.

87. One example of this approach is that taken by Hans Walter Wolff in his commentary in Hosea, where he identifies "kerygmatic units," which the prophet is said to have declared to his audience: Hans Walter Wolff, *Hosea*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1974) translated from his German commentary in the Biblischer Kommentar Altes Testament series (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1961).

88. Matthijs J. De Jong, "Biblical Prophecy—A Scribal Enterprise. The Old Testament Prophecy of Unconditional Judgement considered as a Literary Phenomenon," *VT* 61.1 (2011): 39–70.

The idea that the "eighth century core of the book" consists of larger units is supported even by scholars for whom the Assyrian influence is not the primary field of interest.[89] Sweeney assigns 14:24–27 and large parts of chapters 28–32 to this core, and this approach is supported to a lesser extent by Barthel, who considers that substantial parts of Isa 6–8 and 28–31 can be assigned to it.[90]

However, at least as equally prominent are the more recent works of scholars who view only certain parts of brief passages as belonging to this core. Becker, for example, considers the eighth-century material to consist only of parts of certain verses in 6:1–8 and 8:1–4.[91] Berges also limits the eighth century material as well, citing 6:1–8, 7:1–9, 8:1–4, and 8:11–18 as related to the period of the "Assyrian threat to Zion."[92] He acknowledges that other parts of Isa 1–32 are pre-exilic, but argues that a very complex process of redaction has produced the present book, whose addressees are in the late Persian period.[93] There is little discussion in his work of the method by which the eighth-century core is to be identified.

Williamson's 1994 study focuses specifically on Deutero-Isaiah's interaction with specific passages in Isa 1–39, and shows how formulations in parts of Isa 1–39 influence other parts of the book. He shows that Deutero-Isaiah "regarded his own work as an integral continuation to the work of Isaiah."[94] In discussing the "literary deposit of Isaiah of Jerusalem," Williamson follows the view that "A major first collection of material was undertaken before the fall of Jerusalem," and speaks of material that "can be ascribed to the eighth-century Isaiah."[95] In identifying this material, he considers primarily passages whose formulations influence the later contributors to the book of Isaiah. But as noted above, Williamson does not engage comparisons with the specific language or motifs of the Assyrian material.

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89. I use a shorthand term that has taken hold in the scholarly literature, which is not meant to exclude the early seventh century from its ambit.

90. Sweeney, Isaiah 1–39; Jörg Barthel, *Prophetenwort und Geschichte: Des Jesajaüberlieferung in Jes 6–8 und 28–31* (Tübingen: Mohr Sieback, 1997).

91. Becker, *Jesaja*, 281–87; "Das Problem des historischen Jesaja," in *Prophetie in Israel: Beiträge des Symposiums 'Das Alte Testament und die Kultur der Moderne' anlässich des 100. Geburtstags Gerhard von Rads* (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2003), 117–24. Becker's central thesis is that the historical Isaiah issued prophecies of salvation, while later editors are responsible for additions to this "positive" material.

92. Berges, *The Book of Isaiah*, 79.

93. Ibid., 16.

94. Williamson, *The Book Called Isaiah,* 113. His later study, discussed below in note 110, focusses on identifying passages to which a later date ought to be assigned.

95. Ibid., 27, 56.

Some scholarly attention has indeed been dedicated to the Assyrian context of Isaiah. Hays' detailed study provides an important overview of Judah's relationship with Assyria and the mechanisms of Assyrian ideological influence on Judah.[96] His interpretation of many passages in Isa 1–39 compares them carefully with their historical context in the Iron II, using both Mesopotamian and Egyptian textual material.[97] While many of the passages he considers and those I consider do not overlap, in the case of Isa 19 (in chapter 4 of this work) and Isa 14:4–23 (in chapter 6), I discuss his findings. Blenkinsopp recognizes the historical import of the Assyrian period in a detailed introduction to his commentary, and correlates the composition of a number of passages to the events of this period.[98] Also of note is a volume on *Isaiah and the Imperial Context: The Book of Isaiah in the Times of Empire* contains some interesting discussions of themes in Isa 1–39 that relate to Assyrian imperialism.[99]

The studies of Arie van der Kooij and his students, principally Matthijs De Jong's recent volume, are also important contributions. I engage De Jong's study repeatedly in the following chapters.[100] This study identifies significant sections of Isa 6–8, 9:1–6, and 10:5–11:5, and parts of chapters 14, 17, 19:1–4, and 18–22 as part of an "Isaiah tradition in the Assyrian period." Sayings and oracles were delivered during the periods of conflict with Assyria, viz. 734–732, 720, 713-711, 705–701, and these messages bear the consistent message against resistance to Assyria. He follows the path laid down by Barth in assigning passages that describe Assyria's downfall (albeit cautiously) to the late seventh century.

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96. Christopher B. Hays, *A Covenant with Death: Death in the Iron Age II and Its Rhetorical Uses in Proto-Isaiah* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 1–34.

97. Ibid., 202–346.

98. While he recognizes the historical correlations of many passages in Isa 1–12 and other passages such as 14:28–32 and 19:1–15, he does not always see these historical correlations as decisive evidence for the composition of the passage. He recognizes the elusive nature of these correlations, since, as he notes, correlations to later events have been suggested. (Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1–39*, Anchor Bible 19 [New York: Doubleday, 2000].) For this reason, I view the correlation based on unique literary motifs as particularly important.

99. Andrew T. Abernathy, Mark G. Brett, Tim Bulkeley, and Tim Meadowcroft, eds., *Isaiah and Imperial Context: The Book of Isaiah in the Times of Empire* (Eugene: Pickwick, 2013).

100. *Isaiah among the Ancient Near Eastern Prophets*. After interpreting several Isaiah passages, De Jong then compares the Isaiah material to many of the Assyrian prophecies. This comparison is an interesting endeavour, but one which differs from the focus of the present work.

De Jong's discussion includes a comparison of Isaiah to many of the Assyrian prophecies. This type of comparison was also taken up by Stökl, who noted the inherent class-based tension between the audiences of Biblical and Neo-Assyrian prophecies, a point to which I revert in chapter 3 of this book. He notes: the "Neo-Assyrian prophetic texts were found in royal archives, while the Bible includes texts which are anything but royal in their origin."[101] Biblical prophecy does not always represent a reaction of social strata close to the elite, and in this lies much of its importance for our present discussion of reactions to Assyrian Royal Ideology.

7. Periodization and Its Pitfalls: An Alternative to Barth's Approach

Barth's advocacy of an *Assur-redaktion* addresses a serious problem in Isa 1–39, and the continued scholarly engagement with his thesis attests this. Any attempt to place passages from Isa 1–39 in their Assyrian period context encounters the difficulty of clashing approaches to Assyria expressed in different passages, sometimes within the same chapters. Thus, 8:1–4, the *Le-maher-shalal-hash-baz* oracle, describes an imminent Assyrian victory against Aram and Israel, while 8:9–10 seems to describe Assyria's imminent downfall, as nations gird themselves (for war?). De Jong assigns the former passages to the eighth-century core, and the latter to an "Assyria Redaction" late in the seventh century.[102] Similarly, 31:1–3 castigates those in Judah who seek to ally themselves with Egypt against Assyria, and opposes rebellion against Assyria; while 31:4 describes God descending and fighting on Mount Zion, and 31:8 apparently describes God's battle against Assyria. Both De Jong and Kreuch therefore assign 31:1–3 to an eighth century prophet who opposes rebellion against Assyria, while the latter part of the chapter is assigned to a later revisor (whom De Jong sees as part of the "Assyria Redaction").[103] Other passages that relate to Assyrian destruction and Judah's restoration, such as 9:1–6, 10:16–19, and 10:27, are also assigned to this "late seventh century revision."[104]

A similar problem is posed by chapters 36–37, which seem to give a positive assessment of Hezekiah's 705–701 revolt against Assyria. This

101. Jonathan Stökl, *Prophecy in the Ancient Near East: A Philological and Sociological Comparison*, Culture and History of the Ancient Near East (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 219.

102. Ibid., 67–73.

103. Ibid., 83, 94–97, 118–23; Jan Kreuch, *Unheil und Heil bei Jesaja: Studien zur Enstehung des Assur-Zyklus Jesaja 28–31*, Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament 130 (Neukirchen: Neukirchener Theologie, 2011), 71–76.

104. De Jong, *Isaiah among the Ancient Near Eastern Prophets*, 161–62.

assessment stands in contrast with the view of allegedly earlier material in Isaiah, which opposes such rebellion against Assyria. Because of this positive assessment, because the narrative seems to describe an Assyrian defeat, and because many scholars consider that the narrative originates in its parallel version in 2 Kgs 18:17–19:37, this material is often assigned to the late seventh century.[105]

The problem with this view is that some of the passages assigned to the late seventh century contain motifs that clearly react against Assyrian imperial ideology, and are therefore difficult to assign to a period when this ideology lost its relevance, and when there was no longer any need to engage with it intellectually. Furthermore, this approach derives from the view that Assyria's decline would have been inconceivable to Judahites of the late eighth and early seventh century, at least until the revolts in the reign of Ashurbanipal.

But a serious examination of how Assyria was viewed in the Levant during this period shows quite the opposite. Without in any way minimizing the incomparably greater power that Assyria harnessed, when compared to previous empires, Assyria was indeed subject to the vicissitudes of power that characterize all empires. The states of the Levant were quite aware of these vicissitudes. This can be gauged from the willingness of these states to discuss refusal to continue to submit to Assyrian domination, a willingness grounded in expectations of success. Already in the reign of Tiglath-pileser III, an anti-Assyrian king (Tefnakht) ruled in the Egyptian delta and defied Assyria; despite the boasts of Tiglath-pileser to have conquered "until Egypt," the Assyrian king could do no more than embargo trade with him.[106] The southern Levantine states were certainly aware of the limits on Assyrian power, and the request by Hoshea of Israel to receive Egyptian aid (probably from Tefnakht) in revolting against Assyria is one example of this.[107] From 722 to 712, revolts against Assyrian power in the southern Levant were almost continuous. These revolts began when Assyrian weakness was detected at the close of the reign of Shalmaneser V (successor of Tiglath-pileser III), with Gaza, Samaria, and Damascus joining a revolt, and

105. See, for example, 277–81 and note the earlier date assigned by Roberts, *First Isaiah,* 443, who notes the "widespread tendency to date these chapters far too late."

106. On Tefnakht, see Dan'el Kahn, "The Inscription of Sargon II at Tang-i Var and the Chronology of Dynasty 25," *Or* 70 (2001): 1-18. On the boasts of Tiglath-pileser III, see Hayim Tadmor and Shigeo Yamada, *The Royal Inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III (744-727) and Shalmaneser V (726-722) Kings of Assyria*, Royal Inscriptions of the Neo-Assyrian Period 1 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011), 118, Tiglath-pileser III 47 line 4, and other sources cited in chapter 3 note 86.

107. On this request, see Kahn, "The Inscription of Sargon II," 13–14.

continued with rebellious activities causing Sargon II to campaign again in the southern Levant in 716. Not only Assyrian weakness provoked such revolts, but also Assyrian pre-occupation in other regions: around the time that Sargon II undertook his great eighth campaign against Urartu in 714, the king of Ashdod, Azuri, "sent hostility against the land of Assyria to the kings surrounding him."[108] Assyria's removal of Azuri did not quench the revolt, which continued to expand to include other southern Levantine states who together with Ashdod requested aid from Egypt. Only in the 712 campaign did Sargon II become the uncontested master of the southern Levant, and that for only seven years until his death, when a new revolt erupted.

The last third of the eighth century, then, was a period of significant military and political turmoil, and it is unreasonable to think that serious political observers of the period would not have changed their political advice to their states as circumstances changed. We ought not to hold the observer from this period, whose views are recorded in the passages bearing Assyrian influence in Isa 1–39, to this unreasonable standard. The politics of the region in this period are known to us (although perhaps not quite as well as they were known to him). Therefore, we ought to consider the possibility that the different views of Assyria in these passages reflect not the permanent eclipse of Assyrian power in the late seventh century, but the changes in Assyrian power during the period between the rise of Tiglath-pileser III and the mid-seventh century. During this period, Assyria intermittently but repeatedly broadcast the motifs referenced in the passages we will discuss.

As noted above, there were important developments in Assyrian imperial ideology during the reigns of Tiglath-pileser III, Sargon II, and Sennacherib. Each of them emphasized different aspects of royal portrayal, and Sennacherib in particular understood the obligation to expand the empire differently than did his predecessors. While many of the specific literary motifs continued unchanged, others were in use only during the reigns of certain kings. Certain motifs and ideological elements fell into desuetude. The motifs to which Isaiah responds, therefore, changed, just as the political circumstances changed.

Both the political circumstances and these changes in motifs provide us with valuable clues that we can use in evaluating the circumstances in which the passages under consideration were composed. Using both these considerations, we can evaluate the years to which a passage refers. This evaluation must be done with caution: we can assign passages that react to Assyrian ideology to the period of roughly 740–640 BCE with a fair degree of certainty, but frequently we cannot with the same degree of certainty assign

108. Andreas Fuchs, *Die Inschriften Sargons II aus Khorsabad* (Göttingen: Cuvillier, 1994), 219; *Prunkinschrift* lines 91-92 (my translation).

them to a specific sub-period or range of years. Beyond obvious *termini a quo* (for example, chapters 36–37 cannot predate 701 BCE), these datings are probable (in some cases highly probable), rather than certain.

Nevertheless, we do not consider probability insignificant. In evaluating each passage, a probable range of dates for its composition is suggested, and the passages are organized in the book according to these probable dates. As noted, these probable dates were developed on the basis of the Assyrian motifs and historical circumstances referenced in the passages, and an interesting ideological development seems to emerge from this arrangement of these passages, in terms of their attitude towards Assyrian power.

The suggested dating of the passages provides an alternative to the approach suggested by Barth, and followed by Clements, De Jong, and others.[109] It recognizes a development in Isaiah's attitude towards Assyria, while dating the passages that clearly react against Assyrian ideology to the period when this ideology was relevant. It also allows us to describe in outline a possible intellectual biography of Isaiah, who maintains a commitment to the supreme and transcendent nature of God, while expressing that theology in a manner consistent with the political realities of the moment. Put differently, this approach allows us to write an intellectual history of Israel's reactions to the political history we know from the Assyrian texts and from archaeology.

8. The Inscriptional Bible and the "God Idea Broad Enough to Stand up to Empire"

The approach proposed here essentially treats the Hebrew Bible as a "putative" Near Eastern text. By comparing the Masoretic text we possess, the product of thousands of years of development and transmission, to the Assyrian texts and material culture, we can determine which passages of the Hebrew Bible respond to and dialogue with the Assyrian material. These passages will then indeed be considered Near Eastern texts. It is based on a clear methodology for determining dependence of one text on another.

109. Doubts about the theory of Josianic redaction were raised briefly by Jacob Stromberg, *An Introduction to the Study of Isaiah* (London: T&T Clark, 2011), 24. I concur with these doubts and develop an alternative view. In his recently published "The Theory of a Josianic Edition of the First Part of the Book of Isaiah: A Critical Examination," in *Studies in Isaiah: History, Theology, and Reception*, ed. Tommy Wasserman, Greger Andersson, and David Willgren, LHBOTS 654 (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017), 3–21, H. G. M. Williamson critiques Barth's paradigm and argues instead that many of the passages under discussion were composed in the post-exilic period. In my view, the clear references to Assyrian motifs make such a position very difficult.

This compelling methodology and its use for dating of passages allow us to take a position on several questions of intellectual history that emerge from Isa 1–39. One of the most debated intellectual-historical questions related to Isa 1–39 is the development of the "Zion theology," which holds Jerusalem to be unconquerable, since it represents God's throne.[110] In chapters 4 and 5 of this work, I discuss the development of this theology, based on the chronology determined by this comparative approach. Because this comparative approach has not been taken into account by many of the scholars who have discussed the development of this theology, their work is of limited relevance to this study.

Similarly, my work interacts with scholarship on the development of Israelite monotheism only to a limited extent.[111] I date the passages based on comparing the motifs they contain to the Assyrian material, and based on this, determine the date of the ideas they contain. As I discuss throughout this work, many of the passages that react to Assyrian imperial ideology and focus on the question of God's relationship with Assyria show a consistent underlying theology. Their view of God as a universal ruler, as wholly other from human beings, and as omnipotent and invincible, remains consistent throughout these passages. The author of these passages locates YHWH's power as transcending human and earthly power, thus allowing him to separate between the power of God and the relative political and military weakness of God's people. Unlike the power of Assur, the power of God is not expressed by the physical military power. The reign of Assur has a *tamšilu*, or earthly counterpart, in the earthly empire. The reign of YHWH has no such counterpart. This distinction allows Isaiah to develop a second critical idea, that YHWH is a universal ruler. The universality of YHWH, that is, his supremacy over all the world, is often expressed in motifs and expressions influenced by Assyrian theology, and in this way, Isaiah's "God idea" is equal to that of the empire. But the element of transcendence is what distinguishes YHWH from Assur, and allows him to be perceived as supreme, regardless of earthly power struggles. Isaiah takes care to avoid propounding an idea of God as "man writ large." The idea of God's transcendence also makes the

110. Critical studies include Ben Ollenberger, *Zion, the City of the Great King: A Theological Symbol of the Jerusalem Cult*, JSOTSup 41 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1987); Jimmy Jack McBee Roberts, "The Davidic Origin of the Zion Tradition," *JBL* 92.3 (1973): 329–44; and Jimmy Jack McBee Roberts, "Solomon's Jerusalem and the Zion Tradition," in *Jerusalem in Bible and Archaeology: The First Temple Period,* ed. Andrew G. Vaughn and Ann F. Killlebrew (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 163–70; and the studies in Bernard F. Batto and Kathryn L. Roberts, eds., *David and Zion: Biblical Studies in Honor of J. J. M. Roberts* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2004).

111. One major comprehensive study is Mark S. Smith, *The Early History of God: Yahweh and the Other Deities in Ancient Israel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002).

discussion of monotheism vs. henotheism somewhat redundant. For only if YHWH exists as supreme over time and space and wholly without parallel in the earthly sphere, are any other powers not his equals. Whether such powers are called "gods" or "celestial beings" no longer matters, for they exist in the realm of constrained power, whereas YHWH is unconstrained and supreme.

It is clear that the intellectual dissonance between on the one hand, Assyrian rule and its ideological justification, and on the other, Israelite ideas of a powerful and land-giving God, YHWH, to whom Israelites were bound in covenant, produced the need for a clear exposition of this theology.[112] This exposition highlights the unbridgeable gap between human sovereigns and God who truly transcends time and space, and completely ignores the purported existence of other gods.

It is significant that although the passages discussed clearly betray knowledge of Assyrian portrayals of the god Assur, this god is nowhere mentioned in Isa 1–39. In the chapters that portray Assyria as God's enemy, the enemy is personified in the character of an unnamed human Assyrian (as in 10:5–15) or in the character of the king of Assyria (as in 37:24–25). There is no need for God to battle gods; that battle, it seems, has already been won, and the intellectual battle is one of "the God-idea" against imperial ideology, as represented by the physical forces of empire. Outlining that intellectual battle is one goal of this book.

112. See Levine ("Assyrian Ideology and Israelite Monotheism," 414), who notes that First Isaiah "expounded" this concept for the first time in biblical literature. But the need for this exposition, as both Levine and Machinist note, derives from a sense that Assyrian imperial ideology was somehow irreconcilable with religious ideas previously existing among the Israelites.

2

Isaiah 6: A Demand for "Cognitive Re-Processing" of Visual Propaganda

1. Historical Introduction

We begin with a more detailed historical introduction to the earliest period of Judah's direct contacts with Assyria. These contacts began shortly after Tiglath-pileser III's accession in 744, which initiated a period of overwhelming Assyrian military power.

Tiglath-pileser defeated and completely subdued Arpad between 743 and 740.[1] Arpad in northern Syria had previously been the strongest kingdom in the Aramaean sphere, and its reduction to an Assyrian province sent a strong message of Assyrian power throughout the regions of the Levant to its south. By 738, the kingdoms of Unqi (Pattina) and Hadrach (Akk. Hatarikka), which bordered Arpad to the west and south, respectively, were brought within the borders of the Assyrian empire. The continued advance of Assyrian annexation southward caused several kings of the southern Levant, including those of Israel, Tyre, Damascus, and probably Hamath, to bring tribute and become vassals or "client kingdoms" of Assyria by 738.[2]

1. For these victories, see Dan'el Kahn, "The Kingdom of Arpad (Bit Agusi) and 'All Aram': International Relations in Northern Syria in the Ninth and Eighth Centuries BCE," *ANES* 44 (2007): 66–89, here 83–85.

2. For the sequence and dates of the different tributaries, see Tadmor, *The*

By 734, Ahaz of Judah, along with the kings of Ashkelon and Gaza on the coast and of Ammon, Moab, and Edom in Transjordan, had remitted tribute to Assyria and were considered vassals by the Assyrians.[3] Perhaps unavoidable from a military and political point of view, Ahaz's submission intensified Judah's direct exposure to Assyrian imperial ideology. Thus, Judah's encounter with Assyrian military power led both to Assyrian economic exploitation of Judah and, more importantly for our purposes, to Assyrian attempts to influence the opinions of Judah's elite.

The function of vassal states in the Assyrian imperial system was to provide substantial resources to the imperial center, in the form of annual tribute. This involved a heavy drain on the resources of the kingdoms. While the threat of Assyrian military action could, to a certain extent, enforce the payment of annual tribute, there were limits to the efficacy of this threat. Vassal states in the Assyrian west were aware that in years in which the empire campaigned in border areas in the far north and east, no campaign in the west would eventuate. Furthermore, it was clearly in Assyria's interest to avoid costly military campaigns and to find other means of encouraging vassals to make their annual payments.

Assyria therefore developed a sophisticated system of annual palace visits as part of its effort to convince vassals to pay tribute to Assyria. This system involved coopting local elites. These elites, who were connected to the royal court in each of the vassal states, would necessarily be involved in the collection of resources in each state. By coopting these elites, Assyria ensured a smooth and efficient delivery of tribute. Kingdoms that had submitted to Assyria were required to bring or send high-ranking representatives bearing their annual tribute to the Assyrian palaces.[4]

The bringing of the tribute to the Assyrian palace was hardly an efficient method of conveying wealth to Assyria; if that were the goal of this requirement, the tribute could have been remitted to one of the Assyrian governors in the Assyrian province closest to the submissive kingdom. Rather, the palace visits were an opportunity to further Assyria's cooption of local elites. These visits exposed the representatives of submissive kingdoms to an integrated presentation of Assyrian imperial ideology, which involved

Inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III, 265–68. The precise dates of the different submissions are discussed in chapter 3 of this book; here, it suffices to note that all or nearly all of the kingdoms between Arpad and Judah submitted to Assyria by 738.

3. Ibid., *277*.

4. Karen Radner, "Abgaben an den König von Assyrien aus dem In-und Ausland," in *Geschenke und Steuern, Zölle und Tribute: Antike Abgabenformen in Anspruch und Wirklichkeit, ed. Hilmar Kinklott, Sabine Kubisch*, and Renate Müller-Wollermann (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 213–30.

exposure to palace art and audiences with Assyrian officials.[5] The Assyrian texts describe the purpose of the visit as *ana šulmu*. Literally translated "to greet," this expression refers to the reception of the visiting ambassadors by the king and his high officials.

Assyrian palaces were designed with this function in mind, and were used for this purpose. We see this from an integrated examination of the architecture and art of the palaces, with texts describing them. A building account related to the building of the palace of Assurnasirpal II (883–859 BCE) at Calah (a palace that will be discussed in detail below and which remained in use for nearly all of the reign of Tiglath-pileser III and into the reign of Sargon II) explicitly states the goal of this palace: "for the gaze of rulers and princes forever."[6] The "banquet stele" describes the thousands of foreign dignitaries who attended the dedication of the palace.[7] Russell argues that these dignitaries were shown key areas of the palace, whose reliefs were designed specifically for the consumption of such dignitaries:

> In view of the nature of the celebration ... which would appear to have been to show off the new building, it seems reasonable to suppose that many, if not all, of the guests saw at least the most public areas, namely the outer court (D/E) and the throne room (B). These, as it happens, are the very areas decorated with those subjects (namely, tribute processions and campaign narratives) that would most successfully impress a wide range of viewers.[8]

The decorations in the outer court of Assurnasirpal's palace referred to by Russell contained "procession reliefs," scenes of tributaries arriving at the palace, humbling themselves, and showing their submission to the king.[9] Similar reliefs, showing the procession of emissaries from western Asia, led by an Assyrian attendant, were installed in a long corridor (room 10) in the inner courtyard at Sargon's palace at Khorsabad.[10] This led Postgate to

5. For the audiences in the Assyrian palaces, see J. Nicholas Postgate, *Taxation and Conscription in the Assyrian Empire* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1974), 3:122–26, and the discussion in my article "Transmission of Neo-Assyrian Claims," 15–20.

6. RIMA 2:302, A.0.101.35, 8–10.

7. RIMA 2:293, A.0.101.30, 143–154.

8. John Malcolm Russell, *Sennacherib's "Palace Without Rival" at Nineveh* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 224.

9. Barbara Nevling Porter, "Intimidation and Friendly Persuasion: Re-Evaluating the Propaganda of Ashurnasirpal II," *Eretz-Israel* 27 (2003): *180–91.

10. Pauline Albenda, *The Palace of Sargon, King of Assyria: Monumental Wall Reliefs at Dur-Sharrukin, from Original Drawings Made at the Time of their Discovery in 1843-1844 by Botta and Flandin*, Synthèse Series 22 (Paris: Recherche sur les civilisations, 1986), 3, 44–48.

conclude that the ceremony of presenting the tribute is "surely the purpose" for which this courtyard was designed.[11] Winter has noted that the effect of the palace of Sennacherib on foreign dignitaries was a crucial part of its function, and this is true of many Assyrian palaces.[12]

To many of the reliefs in the palaces were appended cuneiform epigraphs, short enough to be memorized by palace staff who were not scribes, who apparently guided foreign dignitaries around the palace.[13] Nevling Porter viewed the presence of such "guiding" officials as a certainty,[14] and indeed, it would be absurd to imagine that foreign dignitaries were left to wander on their own around the palace. Significantly, the reliefs noted above from the palace of Sargon II at Khorsabad show an Assyrian official leading the ambassadors.[15] Nevling Porter suggests that these officials may have been among the interpreters referred to in the Wine Lists, but it seems more likely that Assyrian and Judean officials would have shared a common language. Communication would have taken place in Aramaic, a language with which both Assyrian and Judean court officials were familiar.[16] This effectively eliminates the language barrier that Crouch discussed in relation to the reception in Judah of Assyrian treaties written in Akkadian.[17]

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11. Postgate, *Taxation and Conscription*, 126.

12. Irene J. Winter, "'Seat of Kingship'/'A Wonder to Behold': The Palace as Construct in the Ancient Near East," *ArsOr* 23 (1993): 27–55, here 37.

13. Russell, *Sennacherib's "Palace Without Rival" at Nineveh*, 240.

14. Nevling Porter, "Intimidation and Friendly Persuasion," 185*.

15. Albenda, *The Palace of Sargon*, 44–48.

16. That Assyrian officials functioned in Aramaic is clear from SAA 17:5, no. 2, which rebukes an official who asks to write in Aramaic, and from Hayim Tadmor, "On the role of Aramaic in the Assyrian Empire," in *Near Eastern Studies Dedicated to H.I.H. Prince Takahito Mikasa on the Occasion of His Seventy-Fifth Birthday,* ed. M. Mori, H. Ogawa, and M. Yoshikawa (Wiesbaden: Harrasowitz, 1991), 419–35. On scribes proficient in Akkadian and Aramaic, as well as other languages, see the discussion in Nevling Porter, "Language, Audience, and Impact in Imperial Assyria," 61. That Judean officials functioned in Aramaic is obvious from Judah's participation in diplomatic contacts with other nations of the Levant, such as that mentioned in Sargon's inscriptions related to the Ashdod rebellion (published in Fuchs, *Die Inschriften Sargons II aus Khorsabad,* 219; *Prunkinschrift* lines 91–92). It is also clear from Isa 36:11/2 Kgs 18:26.

17. Crouch, *Israel and the Assyrians*, 151–59, especially 156. The doubt she expresses at 158 regarding the Aramaic literacy skills of populations subject to Assyria seems irrelevant to the southern Levant, where we find the Ekron inscription in a language cognate to Aramaic from the seventh century. Aramaic was used in the southern Levant before the period of Tiglath-pileser, as we see from the Aramaic inscriptions on the Samaria ivories, and surely knowledge of Aramaic did not disappear in the Assyrian period. (On the Samaria ivories, see Irene Winter, "Is there a South Syrian Style of Ivory Carving in the Early First Millennium BCE?" in *On Art in the Ancient Near*

Whatever barriers may have existed in regard to such treaties, there were no language barriers in the way of Judean ambassadors absorbing imperial ideology from Assyrian palace officials.

The Judean ambassadors' arrival in Assyria was part of a much larger event. As is implied by the "procession reliefs," and clearly stated in the administrative texts, the emissaries from the different vassal states did not travel separately. The ritual of receiving the tribute-bearing emissaries was an important part of the Neo-Assyrian imperial framework. The emissaries assembled in the capital from various corners of the ancient Near East in annual processions in the spring months, and emissaries from several kingdoms travelled to the capital together.[18] This increased the empire's prestige, and conveyed to the emissaries the sense that it was truly a universal empire. In Assyrian imperial ideology, the bringing of tribute was understood as an act of submission to Assyrian sovereignty, and failure to bring tribute was understood as an act of rebellion.[19]

The ambassadors were treated as honored guests and were given personal incentives to ensure that they would convince their kingdoms to remain loyal to Assyria, and that they would bring their kingdom's tribute the next year. These lavish gifts were a key part of the experience of the ambassadors, and understanding the "incentivization" of the ambassadors is important for our purposes. Postgate has detailed these incentives based on the administrative texts:

> They were fed at the state's expense. They were also given presents of clothing and of shoes for their journeys. The practice of rewarding the loyal—or bribing the potentially loyal—by presenting them with rich garments and other gifts is not restricted to ambassadors ... Not only the ambassadors themselves were presented with gold or silver rings, but

East of the First Millennium BCE [Leiden: Brill, 2010], 1:316.) For further discussion of this point, see my "Treaty and Prophecy: A Survey of Biblical Reactions to Neo-Assyrian Political Thought," in *Assyrian Domination of the Southern Levant*, ed. Avraham Faust and Shawn Zelig Aster (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, forthcoming).

18. The arrival of tributaries together is based both on the reliefs from room D noted above and on administrative texts such as SAA 1:92–93, no. 110. See further in Israel Eph'al, "The Significance of Assyrian Imperial Rule According to Administrative Texts Relating to Ebir Nari," in *Israel and its Land: Inscriptions and History*, ed. Zipora Talshir [Hebrew] (Beersheba: Ben-Gurion University Press, 2010), 31–69, here 58–59.

19. One example attesting to this is the mention in Sargon's annals that Judah "brought tribute and gifts" to Assyria until Yamani (Yadani) of Ashdod incited them to cease doing so. The text (K 1668) is published by Andreas Fuchs, *Die Annalen des Jahres 711 v. Chr*, SAAS 7 (Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1998), 46, lines 25–28. Another example is 2 Kgs 17:4.

> even "their servants who were with them" or "who brought the tribute" received smaller rings of the same kind. Quite apart from the usual traditions of hospitality, such gifts would have been a real incentive to the poorer states to be punctual with their tribute, and must have encouraged those who actually made the journey to undertake it again. And of this the Assyrians were well aware.[20]

When they returned to their kingdoms, these ambassadors therefore had a personal interest in ensuring that their kingdoms remained loyal to Assyria. Besides the personal interest, their reception in the palace ensured that they clearly understood the arguments used by the Assyrian Empire to legitimate its rule. Put differently, their reception in the palace exposed them to Assyrian imperial ideology. This was accomplished visually by exposure to the palace art program, and orally by contact with palace officials whose role it was to guide them around the palace. Both means were used during the audience with the king in the throne room, which was the culmination of the visit.

Besides the "procession reliefs," other parts of the art program in the Assyrian palaces designed for the edification of the emissaries highlighted the super-human nature of the king, his universal rule, his prowess, and his victory in battles. Based on the placement of the reliefs in Assurnasirpal's palace (especially in suites D/E, which Russell noted in the passage cited above), Nevling Porter discussed the progress of a group of ambassadors through the palace.[21] I discuss their progress in detail further on in this chapter, but for the present, it suffices to note that the reliefs they viewed would have conveyed to them the main elements of Assyrian imperial ideology. Although our knowledge of these is amplified by our exposure to a plethora of texts, the ambassadors processing through this palace would certainly have grasped two basic claims of Assyrian imperial ideology:

1. The "heroic principle of royal omnipotence";
2. The universal reach of the Assyrian Empire.

The "heroic principle of royal omnipotence," a patent fiction, holds that the king himself is an invincible hero, who personally defeats and massacres the enemy, and who can personally traverse the most difficult terrain in military campaigns.[22] Similarly, the principle of the universal reach of the Assyrian

20. Postgate, *Taxation and Conscription*, 127–28.

21. Nevling Porter, "Intimidation and Friendly Persuasion."

22. See further, Hayim Tadmor, "Propaganda, Literature, History: Cracking the Code of the Assyrian Royal Inscriptions," in *Assyria 1995: Proceedings of the Tenth Anniversary Symposium of the Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project*, ed. Simo Parpola and

Empire was not so much a description of a reality as it was a guiding belief that it was both legitimate and mandatory for Assyria to dominate every land or territory. The universal reach of the empire expressed the universal reach of the god Ashur.[23] Tribute-bearers were shown both that universal domination was a driving force in Assyrian ideology, and that the empire possessed the means to effect such domination.

In other words, if the Assyrian artists and palace personnel did their job well, Judah's tribute-bearers would return to Jerusalem as loyal proponents of royal invincibility and Assyrian omnipotence. This phenomenon, of "turning" local officials into tradents of imperial ideology, is a well-known one in the comparative study of empires. The "co-option of local elites" offers empires, especially in their initial stages, the opportunity to exploit existing revenue-collection systems and hierarchies, without the need to engage in the laborious process of developing anew such systems in client states.[24]

The evidence from the palace art and architecture, as well as the references to these visits in texts, clearly indicates that Assyria aimed to use the palace visits as a setting for transmitting ideology, primarily by means of art. There is every reason to believe that Assyria succeeded in this goal.

Thus, by 734, representatives of Judah, who were part of the ruling elite, were intensively exposed to Assyrian imperial ideology, and to the art and language used in Assyria to express it.

This historical background serves as the point of departure for a detailed discussion of Isa 6, whose throne-room vision is a consummate piece of literary artistry. It conveys the transcendent nature of YHWH in a narrative drama with an unusual visual backdrop. God is portrayed as a king who transcends human time and space, and who differs qualitatively in His power from human kings. The literary character of the chapter is discussed first, and is followed by a detailed discussion of the parallels between the visual background of this chapter, and the throne room of Assurnasirpal II at Calah.

Robert M. Whiting (Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 1997), 325–38, especially 326–27. It is important to note that the palace art of Tiglath-pileser III illustrates the invincibility of the king and his army with even greater emphasis than the palace art of Assurnasirpal II. The king and his officers are portrayed as giants or demigods, one and a half times the size of ordinary mortals: Richard David Barnett, *Assyrian Palace Reliefs in the British Museum* (London: British Museum, 1970), 21.

23. This point is discussed in detail in the introduction to this book, in section 3.

24. Carla M. Sinopoli, "The Archaeology of Empires," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 23 (1994): 159–80, here 164.

2. Why Begin With Isaiah 6?

The importance of divine transcendence to Isaiah's theology is one of three reasons for beginning this book with a discussion of Isa 6. The second reason to begin with Isa 6 is that the vision of the divine throne-room it contains is regarded by nearly all critics as part of the eighth-century core of the book. Even Becker, who in general is highly unwilling to assign material to the eighth century stratum, sees most of 6:1–8 as originating from the eighth-century prophet.[25] Based on the flow of ideas in Isa 6:1–9:16, these chapters (to which might be added material from chapters 9–12) form an "Isaiah memoir" (*Denkschrift*), and were long thought to represent a historic literary core of the book as a whole.[26] Many verses in Isa 7 and 8 refer clearly to the attack by Aram-Damascus and Israel on Judah, as well as the Assyrian context of this attack. Isa 6 shares with chapter 8 the style of a first-person narration, and in the past, parts of both chapters were definitively considered the product of the eighth-century prophet.[27] But the idea that the "Isaiah memoir" as a whole is a product of the eighth century has come under repeated criticism, and therefore will not serve here as a working hypothesis.[28]

Instead, I begin by demonstrating that the visual imagery in 6:1–8 depends on that of the Assyrian throne room, and explain how this imagery resolves exegetical difficulties in 6:9–12. I argue that nearly the whole chapter forms a single compositional unit, dating from the Assyrian period. Much has been said about whether the throne-room vision in this chapter forms the initial call of the prophet, or whether it is far too unusual a vision for this purpose.[29] I do not take a position on this question, since regardless of whether chapter 6 formed the earliest prophecy

25. De Jong, *Isaiah among the Ancient Near Eastern Prophets*, 11; Becker, *Jesaja, 298.*

26. On the history of twentieth-century scholarship of the *Denkschrift*, its scope and purpose, see Stuart A. Irvine, *Isaiah, Ahaz, and the Syro-Ephraimitic Crisis*, SBL Diss. Series 123 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 1990), 7–14.

27. See Hans Wildberger, *Isaiah 1-12, A Commentary,* trans. Thomas H. Trapp (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 255–56.

28. See discussion in De Jong, *Isaiah among the Ancient Near Eastern Prophets*, 17–19 and 81, and his dating of chapters 6–8 as a whole to the post-exilic period.

29. See among others, Mordecai M. Kaplan, "Isaiah 6:1-11," *JBL* 45 (1926): 251–59, and subsequently, Mayer I. Gruber, "Mordecai M. Kaplan and Abraham Joshua Heschel on Biblical Prophecy," *ZAW* 116.4 (2004): 602–9; Jacob Milgrom, "Did Isaiah Prophesy During the Reign of Uzziah?" *VT* 14 (1964): 164–82; for a review of more recent scholarship, see Craig A. Evans, *To See and Not to Perceive: Isaiah 6.9-10 in Early Jewish and Christian Interpretation*, JSOTSup 65 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989), 21–24.

of the eighth-century prophet it is a fitting starting point for an investigation of this prophet's theology.

The third reason for beginning with chapter 6 relates to the history of Assyrian palace art, and is discussed in some detail at the end of this chapter. The chapter draws on and subverts specific Assyrian artistic motifs in order to emphasize God as transcending human limitations of time and space. These specific motifs were in use during the reign of Tiglath-pileser III. This suggests a date relatively early in the prophet's career.

2.1. Literary Units in Isaiah 6

It is not seriously debated that Isa 6:1–8, which describe the appointment of the prophet using imagery unparalleled elsewhere in the biblical corpus, form a single literary unit. The relationship of these verses to 6:9–11, however, has been doubted. The latter verses are a very long-standing exegetical crux, for in them the prophet is commanded to prevent the people from understanding his message: "See indeed, but do not understand." Two reasons are cited for viewing 6:9–11 as originating separately from 6:1–8. One is the difference between the portrayal of the prophet in opposition to the people in 6:9–11, while 6:1–8 portray him as "dwelling as part of the people" (verse 5) and standing in opposition to God.[30] A second is that the visionary experience in 6:1–8 seems inconsistent with the prophet's description of ineffective communication in verses 9–11.[31] But these inconsistencies require explanation, and they are not solved merely by positing that verses 1–8 and verses 9–11 originate from different strata. As Wildberger asserts, regarding verses 9–11, "Isaiah certainly never spoke to the people in the way that Yahweh here speaks to Isaiah."[32] Verses 9–11 differ radically from typical prophetic pronouncements, and an original solution is proposed below to explain these differences.

This solution views nearly the whole chapter as a single literary unit, a position grounded in the continuity of the message that verses 1–12 display. Verses 1–8 rework a specific artistic setting in the Assyrian palace, and verses 9–12 reflect on the experience of the Judahite emissaries to the palace. Verse 13a also relates to the artistic setting, as I discuss below. When verses 1–8 are understood in the context of their Assyrian background,

30. De Jong, *Isaiah among the Ancient Near Eastern Prophets*, 79.

31. Ibid., 76. Both Berges (*The Book of Isaiah*, 95) and Kaiser (*Isaiah 1-12*) also support seeing verses 9–13 as secondary, post-exilic additions. Williamson's critique of Kaiser's position (*The Book Called Isaiah*, 30–36) is compelling, supporting the argument for the eighth-century origin of 6:1–11.

32. Wildberger, *Isaiah 1-12*, 271.

many of the discontinuities they exhibit with verses 9–12 are explained as intentional, and the exegetical difficulties in the latter verses disappear.

Hurowitz noted that the vision consists of three scenes. Different pairings of the three characters or character-groups (YHWH, the prophet, the seraphim) appear in each scene:

1. Verses 1–4, a description of YHWH in the divine throne room and the attendant seraphim. The prophet observes but does not act.
2. Verses 5–7, the interaction between the prophet, who claims to be "a man of impure lips," and a seraph who purifies him.
3. Verses 8–13, the dialogue between the prophet and YHWH.[33]

The three scenes form a single coherent act, since the characters in each scene appear in at least one other scene, and each scene describes the activities of two active characters or character groups, but no scene contains action by all three.

2.2. Biblical Parallels to the Imagery in Isaiah 6[34]

The imagery in verses 1–8 has no clear parallel in biblical literature. Nowhere else in the Bible are seraphim described as celestial beings, and only one other biblical text tradition contains such detailed descriptions of a vision of angelic beings, including the number of their wings: the vision of Ezekiel. This vision appears in Ezek 1, and several passages elsewhere in Ezekiel refer to it and develop some of the imagery further.[35] Ezekiel's vision is widely viewed as influenced by Mesopotamian artistic motifs, and these motifs are deployed in his vision to express the enduring power of YHWH and His mobility.[36] Whitely argued that the vision in Isa 6 was influenced by that in

33. Victor (Avigdor) Hurowitz, "Isaiah's Impure Lips and their Purification in Light of Akkadian Sources," *HUCA* (1989): 39–89.

34. The following discussion is a revised and updated version of my essay "Images of the Palace of Ashurnasirpal II at Calah in the Throne-Room Vision of Isaiah 6," in *Marbeh Hokma: Studies in the Bible and the Ancient Near East in Loving Memory of Victor Avigdor Hurowitz*, ed. Shamir Yona et al. (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2015), 13–42.

35. The detailed vision appears in chapter 1, and re-appears in chapters 3, 8–11, and in 43, as part of the vision of the *kabod*. The following verses correlate the visions in the later chapters to that in chapter 1: 3:23, 8:4, 10:15, 10:20, and 43:3 (referring to 9:1–6). The specific element of the ministering angels' wings appears in 3:13 and in 8:1–6.

36. On the Babylonian background of the imagery in these passages, see Othmar Keel, *JHWH-Visionen und Siegelkunst: Eine neue Deutung der Majestätschilde-rungen in Jes 6, Ez 1 und 10 und Sach 4* (Stuttgart: SBS, 1977); Christoph Uehlinger and Suzanne Müller Trufaut, "Ezekiel 1, Babylonian Cosmological Scholarship and Iconography: Attempts at Further Refinement," *TZ* 57 (2001): 140–71, and literature cited there. The חיות

Ezekiel,[37] but this argument is very difficult to sustain.[38] There are no elements in Isaiah's vision that can derive only from those of Ezekiel. The similarities Whitely notes (the angels covering their feet, the shaking of the house, the fire/smoke) have parallels in other biblical passages (Moses covers his face at Horeb in Ex 3:6, the people tremble at Sinai in Ex 19:16, and Sinai is covered in smoke in Ex 19:9 and 19:18). The key point of comparison between the visions is the detailed description of the angels. However, the angels in the two visions have different appearances and names, and those in Isaiah's vision are more active and vocal than those in Ezekiel's vision. As will be shown below, the visual elements in Isa 6 derive from a different set of Mesopotamian artistic depictions than those that form the background for Ezek 1.

A good starting point for investigating the imagery in Isa 6 is the element of the divine throne room, described in verses 1–2.

1) In the year of King Uzziah's death, I saw God sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and His hems filled the great house. (2) Seraphim stood above Him, each one had six wings: with two each would cover his face, and with two each would fly.

This throne room also has a single biblical parallel, the vision of Micaiah son of Imlah in 1 Kgs 22:19–23. This vision is the only other prophetic passage to portray God as seated on a throne with attendants, in which a prophet is present. Although the "divine council" is widely attested in biblical literature, only in these two prophetic passages do we find God sitting on a throne, surrounded by attendants and viewed by the prophet.[39]

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which support the רקיע on which the Divine throne rests (1:5–22; 10:8–22) and the radiance surrounding the image on the throne (1:27; 43:2) are among the iconographic elements based on Mesopotamian antecedents. On the חיות, see Uehlinger and Trufaut, "Ezekiel 1," 151–53, and on the radiance, see my "Ezekiel's Adaptation of Mesoptamian *Melammu*," *WO* 45 (2015): 10–21 and literature cited there.

37. Charles Francis Whitely, "The Call and Mission of Isaiah," *JNES* 18 (1959): 38–48, here 39.

38. Note the critique by Williamson, *The Book Called Isaiah*, 30–37.

39. The verses that attest to the divine council are collected by Max E. Polley, "Hebrew Prophecy within the Council of Yahweh, Examined in its Ancient Near Eastern Setting," in *Scripture in Context*, PTM 34, ed. Carl D. Evans, William W. Hallo, and John B. White (Pittsburgh: Pickwick, 1980), 141–56, here 141–46. Note that in none of these verses do members of the council actually advise YHWH. Such advising is found only in the vision of Micaiah, which highlights the unusual nature of this vision. Polley suggests that "It can be argued that a possible origin of the council of Yahweh in Hebrew thought is the political institution of kingship and council in Israel" (ibid., 147) This explanation fits with my understanding of Micaiah's vision and of Isaiah's: both descriptions of the heavenly council reflect earthly realities surrounding a human king.

Furthermore, the language of the two passages is similar, as Wildberger noted.[40] But a close examination of the larger context of Micaiah's vision shows that this vision does not reflect a larger theological tradition that imagines God in a throne-room, surrounded by attendants, but rather is closely related to the immediate context in which it was delivered. In 1 Kgs 22:15b and 22:17, Micaiah attempts to dissuade Ahab from military adventures, and Ahab is not dissuaded, partly due to the influence of the false prophets who encourage him. In the first attempt (15b), Micaiah uses thinly-veiled sarcasm, giving Ahab a positive oracle, one Ahab immediately perceives to be false. Ahab requests a true oracle, and the true oracle (verse 17) Micaiah delivers predicts the death of Ahab. Ahab then complains (verse 18) of Micaiah's negative predictions, and Micaiah then delivers a final response, which coats the truth of the oracle in verse 17 in a narration of Ahab's physical setting to make it more palatable. Ahab's physical setting was described in verse 10: "The king of Israel (Ahab) and Jehoshaphat king of Judah each sat on their throne, wearing robes, at the threshing floor at the entrance to the gate of Samaria, and all the prophets were prophesying before them." The prophecy of Micaiah recreates this setting, "I saw the Lord sitting on His throne, with all the host of heaven standing before Him on His right and on His left." (verse 19) This prophecy parallels the setting, with God on his throne paralleling the kings on their thrones, and his attendants paralleling the prophets who stood before Ahab and Jehoshaphat. In verses 20–22, the parallel between the host of heaven and the false prophets is developed:

> The Lord said: "who will entice Ahab, so that he will go and fall at Ramoth-Gilead?"
> This one said to do so in such a way, and the other said in a different way.
> A spirit came out and stood before the Lord and said "I will entice him."
> And the Lord said "With what?"
> And he said: "I will go out and be a false spirit in the mouths of all of his prophets."
> And He said: "You will entice and you will succeed. Go out and do thus."

In verse 23, the character of this false spirit is revealed: it is none other than a representation of the false prophets who stand before Ahab: "And now,

40. Wildberger, *Isaiah 1-12*, 252–3. He notes in particular the references to kingship, to the host, and to "one" and "another" in both narratives. At 258, Wildberger notes a further similarity, which in my view is the most important: Micaiah ben Imlah is asked to deceive Ahab, and Isa 6:9–11, as I discuss below, refers to a transparent attempt to deceive the people.

behold, the Lord has placed a false spirit in the mouths of all these prophets of yours...."

Since the false spirit who stands before God's throne in Micaiah's narrative is none other than that of the false prophets who stand before the enthroned kings, it follows that the image of the enthroned God is meant to parallel that of the enthroned kings. The image of the enthroned God cannot, therefore, be taken here as part of a prophetic tradition to portray God in a Divine throne-room.

Scholars have often seen the vision of Isa 6 as standing "midway" between that of Ezekiel and that of Micaiah.[41] Viewing Isa 6 as a sort of midway-point between the visions of Ezekiel and Micaiah belies the unique elements in this vision, and imagines the vision of Micaiah as part of a prophetic tradition of throne room visions. But no such tradition can be shown to exist.

Rather, the throne-room vision of Isa 6 shares with that of Micaiah general ideas of God as king and judge, and these fit within a very broad and well-known biblical tradition.[42] The Divine throne-room in the vision of Micaiah reflects an actual human throne-room (or more accurately, a throne-scene at the city gate). It is therefore reasonable to ask whether an actual throne room stands behind the vision of Isa 6.

The detailed descriptions of the seraphim and their wings, which we find in Isa 6, also do not fit into any identifiable biblical tradition. As in the case of the similarly unusual imagery in Ezekiel, which was discussed above, an extra-biblical parallel is the most reasonable source for this visual imagery. Such an extra-biblical parallel might explain not only the background for the imagery of the winged seraphim that appear in the first two scenes, but also the purifying function of the seraphim mentioned in the second scene, and their presence in proximity to the throne. To summarize, the following four elements in Isa 6 might well derive from extra-biblical parallels: a) the throne room; b) the seraphim with their multiple wings; c) the purifying function of the seraphim; d) their location at the throne.

A brief discussion of the term seraph, which is used nowhere else in the Hebrew Bible to refer to divine attendants, is necessary before proceeding. In Num 21:6–8, Deut 8:15 (which may reflect Num 21:6–8), and Isa 30:6, שרף refers to a snake inhabiting the desert, and is used to emphasize the difficulties of desert life.[43] In Isa 14:29, it refers to a snake, without reference to the desert, but rather as a symbol for the Assyrian king.

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41. Williamson, *The Book Called Isaiah*, 32, and references there. See also Vermeylen, *Du Prophète Isaïe à l'Apocalyptique,* 1:188; Berges, *The Book of Isaiah,* 80.

42. On the history of this tradition, see further in Marc Zvi Brettler, *God is King: Understanding an Israelite Metaphor* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989).

43. Shawn Zelig Aster, "The Bread of the Dungheap: Light on Num. 21:5 from the

Scholars have therefore sought sources for the imagery of a winged snake associated with a throne. In searching for images of a winged snake in the ancient world, Keel noted the Egyptian "uraeus" images of winged snakes.[44] Such uraei often appear in proximity to symbols of Pharaoh, and seem to be responsible for protecting him.[45] Images of winged snakes are known both from Egyptian glyptic art and from eighth-century Judahite seals that imitate the Egyptian ones.[46] Furthermore, Roberts has identified a figure of an erect winged serpent mounted on a pole embossed on a bronze bowl that formed part of the hoard of booty taken back to Assyria by Tiglath-pileser III from his campaigns to Syro-Palestine, showing that such imagery was known in the region at the time.[47]

These studies, which demonstrate that winged serpent imagery was known in eighth-century Judah, are helpful in understanding the background to the unusual imagery in Isa 6. But this imagery does not provide parallels to many elements of the throne room imagery. The uraei are not known to have any sort of purifying function, such as the seraph demonstrates in Isa 6:6. Furthermore, the uraei each have a single pair of wings, unlike the multiple wings of the seraphim. And in the eighth-century imagery, the uraei do not surmount the royal throne.[48]

Tell Fekheriye Inscription," *VT* 61 (2011): 341–58.

44. Othmar Keel, *Jahwe-Visionen und Siegelkunst*, Stuttgarter Bibelstudien 84/85 (Stuttgart: Katholisches Biblewerk, 1977), fig. 50. A similar argument is developed further in Karen Randolph Joines, "Winged Serpents in Isaiah's Inaugural Vision," *JBL* 86 (1967): 410–15; Jean de Savignac, "Les Seraphim," *VT* 22 (1972): 320–25; Jimmy Jack McBee Roberts, "The Visual Elements in Isaiah's Vision in Light of Judaean and Near Eastern Sources," in *From Bible to Babylon: Essays on Biblical History and Literature in Honour of Brian Peckham,* ed. Joyce Rilett Wood, John E. Harvey, and Mark Leuchter (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2006), 198–213.

45. Joines, "Winged Serpents in Isaiah's Inaugural Vision," 412; and Roberts, "The Visual Elements in Isaiah's Vision," 207.

46. They appear both in Egyptian seals found in the land of Israel (Joines, "Winged Serpents in Isaiah's Inaugural Vision," 412–13) and in Judean seals that imitate Egyptian styles (Roberts, "The Visual Elements in Isaiah's Vision," 205–7).

47. He hypothesizes that this figure might have been the Nehushtan mentioned in 2 Kgs 18:4, and suggests that Isaiah may have drawn on the presence of such an image in the Temple in formulating his vision. But it is more likely that the image of the erect winged serpent mounted on a pole was a Judean imitation of an Assyrian battle-standard. Such a battle standard, with a serpent mounted on it, appears in John Malcolm Russell, "Sennacherib's Palace without Rival Revisited," 302. Originally published in Sir Austen Henry Layard, *Nineveh and Its Remains* (New York: Putnam, 1849), 2:469.

48. Roberts ("The Visual Elements in Isaiah's Vision," 206) cited two images showing a single uraeus hovering above the symbol of the pharaoh, and noted that pairs

Parallels to each of the four elements noted above, and to two further visual elements mentioned in Isa 6:1–13, appear in reliefs found in the throne room of Assurnasirpal II of Assyria at Calah. (The two further elements are the "hem" of God mentioned in 6:1, and the tree mentioned in 6:13.) Because it was built in the ninth century, this throne room tends to be ignored in studies of the period of Isaiah. But this throne room was profoundly relevant to Judahites in the late eighth century, because it was in use during much of the reign of Tiglath-pileser III (reigned 744–727 BCE), at least until the last years of his reign.[49] The palace contained a carefully-developed art program, at whose center was the throne room itself.[50] Exposure to this art program was an integral part of the vassal ambassador's experience. It was in this throne room that the Judahite ambassadors who brought tribute to Tiglath-pileser III would have been received. While I begin below by examining the similarities between the art of the throne room and the imagery described in Isa 6, it is important to note that the argument for the dependence of Isa 6 on the ambassadors' experience in the Calah throne-room does not depend solely on these similarities in the visual material. It also relies on the larger similarities between the annual political ritual of the visit of the tribute-bearing ambassadors and the interactions among

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of winged cobras appear near armrests of the throne of Tutankhamun, and possibly in a Phoenician sanctuary. There is clearly an association between the uraeus image and royal images. But unless we posit that the Late Bronze imagery of Tutankhamun was known in Iron II Judah, the positioning of the winged serpent near a royal throne would be an unexplained innovation in Isa 6. More recently, Thomas Wagner, *Gottes Herrschaft: Eine Analyse der Denkschrift (Jes 6,1-9,6)*, VTSup 108 (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 118–22, has proposed that the vision be dated to the first half of the seventh century, based on the appearance of uraei in Judean iconography of this period. But this claim, too, does not provide a sufficient basis for arguing that the seraphim depend solely on the uraei, because the uraei do not explain the function of the seraphim as royal attendants and purifiers.

49. A brief discussion of the dates during which this palace was in use appears below, in section 6 of this chapter.

50. The ideology reflected in the art has been carefully described by Julian Reade, "Ideology and Propaganda in Assyrian Art," in *Power and Propaganda: A Symposium on Ancient Empires,* ed. Mogens T. Larsen (Copenhagen: Akademisk Forlag, 1979), 329–43; Irene Winter, "The Program of the Throne Room of Assurnasirpal II," in *Essays on Near Eastern Art and Archaeology in Honor of Charles Kyrle Wilkinson,* ed. Prudence Oliver Harper and Holly Pittman (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1983), 15–30; B. Parker Mallowan, "Magic and Ritual in the Northwest Palace Reliefs," in ibid., 31–39; John Malcolm Russell, "The Program of the Palace of Assurnasirpal II," *AJA* 102 (1998): 655–715; and Nevling Porter, "Intimidation and Friendly Persuasion." Nevling Porter also discusses the experience of the ambassadors in the courtyards and waiting areas leading up to their turn to enter the throne room.

Isaiah, the seraphim, and YHWH described in Isa 6. Isa 6 is a dramatic and imaginary enactment in the divine sphere, intended to parallel a real scene enacted in the human sphere. I begin with an exploration of the visual parallels because they lead us into the other parallels. I will then explore the role of the emissaries, and present a rhetorical analysis of the chapter that integrates this data.

Each of the six elements from Isa 6 noted above is paralleled in these reliefs. (These are the throne room, the "hems," the seraphim with their multiple wings, the purifying function of the seraphim, the location of the seraphim above the throne, and the tree.) I begin with the multi-winged seraphim, who are central both to Isaiah's vision and whose antecedents were central to the art of this Assyrian throne room.

3. The Throne Room of Assurnasirpal II at Calah

3.1. Multi-Winged Creatures with Animal Heads

The multi-winged magical creatures found both in reliefs and in sculptures throughout the palace of Assurnasirpal II at Calah are close parallels to the seraphim of Isa 6. They possess multiple wings and, as we shall see below, these creatures, like the seraphim, have a purifying function and are represented above the throne in the throne room.

Multi-winged magical creatures displaying different types of heads are found in many Neo-Assyrian palaces. In the palace of Assurnasirpal II some are portrayed with the heads of birds, others with human heads, and similar creatures in other Assyrian palaces have both fish heads and scorpion heads. Illustrations appear below.[51] Texts from Assur describe these figures both as "clad in the skin of a fish," or as "with bird faces clad in wings," and the choice of fish-heads for the creature, especially after the ninth century, seems related to the association of these magical creatures with the water god Ea/Enki, the master of magic.[52] Tiglath-pileser III boasts of plac-

51. Figure 2.1 (Metropolitan Museum 31.72.3; Mallowan, "Magic and Ritual," fig. 1) presents bird-headed genii with multiple wings, as does figure 2.2 (BM 98064; Reade, "Ideology and Propaganda," fig. 12). Note the purification buckets, which will be discussed below. Mallowan (ibid., 33) discusses the origins of griffin-headed figures.

52. Ibid.; Margaret Huxley, "The Gates and Guardians in Sennacherib's Addition to the Temple of Assur," *Iraq* 62 (2000): 109–37, here 122 n. 69. See further discussion of the links between *apkallū* (discussed below) and the sea in Helge S. Kvanvig, *Roots of Apocalyptic: The Mesopotamian Background to the Enoch Figure and the Son of Man*. Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament, vol. 61 (Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag, 1988), 207–9; and in Alan Lenzi, *Secrecy and the Gods: Secret Knowledge in Ancient Mesopotamia and Biblical Israel*, SAAS 19 (Helsinki: Neo-

ing statues of *binût apsî,* creatures of the deep, as guardians around the wall of his palace.[53] The type of head used on these creatures is less important than their winged nature and their function (which will be discussed below). The bird-head seems to be the traditional Assyrian choice, but other types of heads, borrowed from Babylonia and later from the western provinces, gradually become more common.[54]

Multi-winged creatures are also portrayed with scorpion heads. A limestone relief from Assurnasirpal's palace, reproduced as figure 2.3, portrays a figure identified as a "scorpion man." His wings and the implement he carries show that he has a function identical to those of the human-headed and bird-headed figures elsewhere in the palace.[55] A winged snake, with a similar function, is also known from the southwest palace of Esarhaddon at Nineveh, and is reproduced as figure 2.4.[56]

These creatures are usually represented in pairs. Many types of these creatures (but not all, as we see below) are placed in pairs flanking doorways in the palace of Assurnasirpal II, and also in the later palaces of Tiglath-pileser III and Sargon II.[57] Visually, this serves to draw attention to the doorways, but the declared intention of placing them is to serve as guards. They draw attention to the object between them. They also flank (and

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Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2008), 107–10, especially 109 n. 228.

53. Tadmor, *The Inscriptions of Tiglath Pileser III,* 175, summary inscription 7, line 31′, parallel to RINAP 1:124, Tiglath-pileser III 47, line rev. 31′.

54. The bird-headed figures are "traditional Assyrian types which subsequently become less frequent." "They are joined, and largely replaced, by others borrowed not only from Babylonia, the traditional home of wisdom and magic, but also from the western provinces, which contributed the sphinx" (Reade, "Ideology and Propaganda in Assyrian Art," 335).

55. He has calf musculature and wings identical to those of the bird-headed creatures in figure 2.1, and of the human-headed figure in the pivot relief; his left arm is in the identical position to carry the bucket as they do (although the portion of the relief containing the bucket itself has been eroded). Reproduced from Huxley, "The Gates and Guardians," fig. 7, originally appeared in Anthony Green, "A Note on the 'Scorpion-Man' and Pazuzu," *Iraq* 47 (1985): 75–82, here pl. viii.

56. It is preserved in a drawing by Layard, which contains three registers of figures (reproduced from Richard David Barnett and Margarete Falkner, *The Sculptures of Assur-Nasir-Apli II [883-859 B.C.], Tiglath Pileser III [745-727 B.C.], and Esarhaddon [681-669 B.C.] from the Central and South-west Palaces at Nimrud* [London: Trustees of the British Museum, 1962], 164, plate CXII). In the palace, it was located adjacent to a pair of winged bulls who guarded entrance b. The main figure on the top register looks quite like an erect snake with wings or arms, and he is clearly followed by a guarding genie bearing the bucket. (Note the musculature of the genie's calves, similar to those seen in figure 2.1 and in the pivot relief.)

57. Russell, "The Program of the Palace of Assurnasirpal II," 689–90.

Figure 2.1. Bird-headed Genie with Multiple Wings. Metropolitan Museum 31.72.3. Image copyright The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Image source: Art Resource, NY.

Figure 2.2. Bird-headed Genie with Multiple Wings. BM 98064. Copyright The Trustees of the British Museum. All Rights Reserved.

Figure 2.3. Scorpion Man, Limestone Relief from the Northwest Palace at Nimrud.
Reproduced from Huxley, "The Gates and Guardians in Sennacherib's Addition to the Temple of Assur." fig. 7.

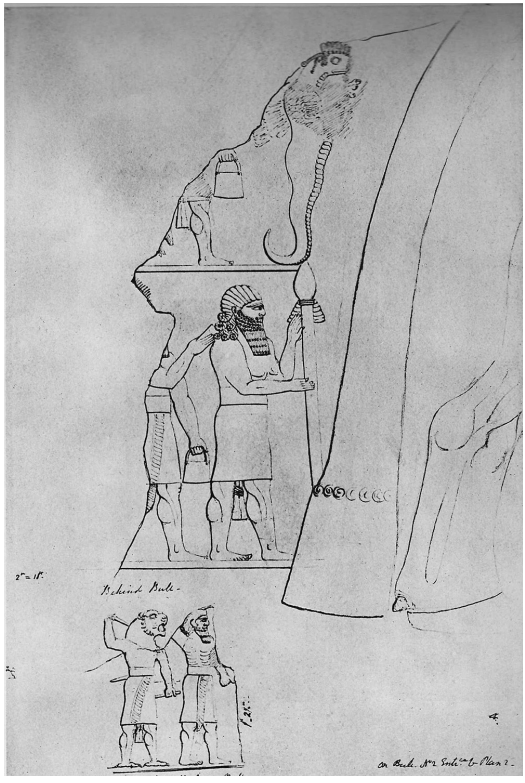

Figure 2.4. Winged Snake, from the Southwest Palace.
Reproduced from Barnett and Falkner, *The Sculptures of Assur-nasir-apli II (883-859 B.C.)*, 164, plate CXII.

Figure 2.5. Pivot Relief. BM 124531.

therefore call attention to) the sacred tree motif in some reliefs and to the throne in the throne room.

Their placement in the throne room is particularly relevant to the present discussion. They appear in a specific artistic composition, known as the "pivot relief," which is represented twice in the throne room. (An image of the pivot relief appears here as figure 2.5.[58]) One representation was opposite the entrance to the throne room, in the long southern wall. Anyone who entered the throne room could then turn to his left and view the very same relief once again, since it was reproduced, almost identically, on the upper portion of the eastern wall, above the throne itself.[59] Because of its repetition and strategic positioning, the relief "thus becomes the pivot point of the entire room, orienting the viewer immediately upon entrance, and reorienting him as he turns ninety degrees to face the king on his throne and the identical relief above."[60] The relief is

58. BM 124531, appears in Reade, "Ideology and Propaganda in Assyrian Art," fig. 15. Known as slab 13, it was "placed directly opposite a major doorway in the north wall of the room [which] ... was the major entrance to the throne room from Court D." (Winter, "The Program of the Throne Room of Assurnasirpal II," 17.)

59. Known as slab 23, it was located "immediately behind the throne base, at the eastern end of the room, the base on which the king himself would have been seated" (ibid.).

60. Ibid.

organized as a sort of mirror image, in which the two outer figures are repeated for emphasis both on the left and on the right, flanking the center of the image.

Thus, anyone entering the throne room would perceive the Assyrian king seated on his throne. Above him, on the pivot relief, were two magical creatures with four wings each. Each flanked another image of the king, wearing a fringed garment, who faced inwards towards a sacred tree, which represents the world and the cosmic order. Above the tree was portrayed the winged sun-disk representing the god Assur. The relief is designed to show how the king maintains the cosmic order, ensuring the position of Assur above the cosmic tree. The winged creatures flanking the king call attention to the king, and were considered to protect him. The king is thus portrayed as powerful both in relation to the divine sphere, where he maintains the rule of Assur, and as an individual, since he is protected from all harm by his magical guardians. These are the messages that the pivot relief conveys to any viewer who, upon encountering the king, might notice that he is only flesh-and-blood.

The viewer thus sees the king both on the throne on the ground, and in the images higher up on the wall, with multi-winged creatures suspended above the real king on the ground, and flanking the images of the king in the relief. The image of a seated king, who exists both in the throne room and in the space above the throne, with multi-winged creatures above him, forms an obvious parallel to the image of YHWH enthroned, flanked by six-winged seraphim, with the bottom of His raiment in the היכל and the remainder of His person presumably in the celestial sphere.[61]

3.2. The Function of the Multi-Winged Creatures

Besides their visual similarity, there is a second and perhaps more important similarity between the seraphim of Isaiah's vision and the multi-winged creatures in the pivot relief. This similarity relates to the similar function served by both sets of creatures. (Although many types of multi-winged creatures appear in palace reliefs, we are concerned here with a specific subset of these creatures, of the sort represented in the pivot relief and in figures 2.1 and 2.2. A similar creature appears behind

61. The word היכל, widely used in the Hebrew Bible for the Temple, derives from the Akkadian word for palace, *ekallu,* and the two words sound very similar. For further discussion of the use of this term to designate "palace" in periods of Israelite contact with Assyria, see Shawn Zelig Aster, "The Function of the City of Jezreel and the Symbolism of Jezreel in Hosea 1-2," *JNES* 71 (2012): 31–46, here 39.

the erect snake in figure 2.4.) Each of the multi-winged creatures in the pivot relief carries a bucket.

It is important to note that the creatures in figures 2.1, 2.2, and 2.5 also carry a second implement, shaped like an oval. (The creature in the middle register in figure 2.4 also carries a second implement of a more rectangular shape.) The bucket and the oval implement allow decisive identification of the winged creatures as *apkallū*. This identification emerges from the ritual texts published by Wiggermann. Mallowan, Russell, and Nevling Porter have all accepted this identification.[62]

Some brief discussion of the identity of the *apkallū* is necessary before proceeding. Appearing throughout the millennia of the Mesopotamian cuneiform tradition, these are antediluvian mythic figures who transmitted divine wisdom to human scholars.[63] This communication ensured the correct implementation of divine plans by kings, and also allowed scholars to perform the proper apotropaic and purification rituals.[64] Below, I focus on Wiggermann's identification of *apkallū* in the palace reliefs, where they have an apotropaic or lustrative function.

> The texts ... list an "*apkallu*" (sage), described as a "guardian" with the face and wings of a bird, holding in its right hand a *mullilu*, or "purifier," and in

62. The relevant apotropaic texts were published by F. A. M. Wiggermann, *Mesopotamian Protective Spirits: The Ritual Texts*, Cuneiform Monographs 1 (Groningen: Styx, 1992); see the summary discussion on pages 65–79. Most of the texts Wiggermann discusses "give directions for making clay and wooden figurines to be buried in strategic spots underneath the doors of the house to exorcise it or protect it from evil" (Mallowan, "Magic and Ritual," 32). But some refer to similar figures "drawn in the corners," or "drawn in the gate." On this basis, Russell concludes that each of these figures "could exercise its apotropaic function whether it was executed in two dimensions or in three," and that the texts in Wiggermann's collection can be used to identify the genii in the palaces. Russell notes that his views, which he published in "The Program of the Palace of Assurnasirpal II" (especially 674–82), were "inspired by the excellent work of Mary M. Fulghum" (unpublished seminar paper, cited by Russell, "The Program of the Palace of Assurnasirpal II," 674 n. 102). Mallowan ("Magic and Ritual") published similar conclusions several years earlier, and Nevling Porter accepted these views in "Intimidation and Friendly Persuasion," 191 n. 36.

63. See the brief discussion by Jonas Chaim Greenfield, "Apkallu," in *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, ed. Karen van der Toorn, Bob Becking, and Pieter Willem van er Horst, 2nd rev. ed. (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 72–74.

64. See extensive discussion of the links between the *apkallū* and the *ummânū* (scholars or experts) in Lenzi, *Secrecy and the Gods*, 67–122, especially 110 (on the implementation of divine plans), and 77 (on the different tasks of the *ummânū*-scholars, including apotropaic and purification rituals).

> its left a *banduddu*, or "bucket." This must be the bird-headed guardian figure of the doorways of Assurnasirpal's palace, which always holds a bucket in his left hand and a pinecone-shaped object, evidently the purifier, in his right. Wiggermann has plausibly identified the action depicted here as sprinkling – the purifier is dipped in the bucket, which contains holy water, and then held aloft and flipped forward with a sharp snap of the arm and wrist, throwing a shower of droplets outward onto whatever is to be purified.[65]

This purifying function of the *apkallū* is directly connected to their protective function; it is by purifying the gateways and the king that they protect the king and his residence from spirits of evil, who are considered impure. This is evident from the name of the implement they carry: *mullilu* ("purifier"). The forces of evil are associated in some undefined way with impurity, and by means of the *mullilu*, the *apkallū* are able to ward off these forces. At the doors, they block evil from entering, and in the pivot relief they raise their arms to the king to purify him.[66]

Their lustrative function thus parallels the function of the lone seraph in Isa 6:5–7, who is responsible, in an entirely unexpected way, for purifying the prophet by touching an object to his mouth. It is important to note that the practice of purifying an individual by touching an object from the altar to his mouth is completely without parallel in the Hebrew Bible.[67]

The parallel between the actions of the *apkallū* and those of the seraphim in Isa 6:1–8 are significant and comprehensive. The multi-winged nature of these creatures, their position above the throne, and their lustrative function all parallel the seraphim. It is also important to note that these aspects of the seraphim are precisely the ones that lack any parallel in the Hebrew Bible, or in the other ancient Near Eastern antecedents suggested for them. While I do not deny the contribution of the uraei to the complex and hybrid imagery in this vision, the discussion below will call attention to the *apkallū*'s contribution.

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65. Russell, "The Program of the Palace of Assurnasirpal II," 674.

66. The *apkallū* with their buckets and purifiers were only some of the many types of apotropaic figures placed at the gates of the palace and at doors within the palace; Russell notes several varieties of doorway figures in Assurnasirpal's palace. At some of the passages in the palace, other anthropomorphic figures make a gesture of greeting or blessing with one upraised hand (*karābu*) and hold either a mace or a branch in the other. Other figures hold a goat or deer in one hand and a palmette in the other (Russell, "The Program of the Palace of Assurnasirpal II," 675). Both the goat and the palm frond have apotropaic functions in Assyrian texts. (Mallowan, "Magic and Ritual," 38).

67. On the unusual nature of this action, the history of scholarship, and the search for parallels, see Hurowitz, "Isaiah's Impure Lips."

Other details of Isaiah's throne room vision, which are paralleled in this relief, include the "hem" attributed to God in 6:1 (paralleling the fringed garment of the Assyrian king) and the tree signifying Judah's continuity in 6:13. The tree in the relief is a symbol of world order, and both hem and tree are discussed below.

I now discuss the way in which knowledge of the *apkallū* would have reached the author of Isa 6. As discussed above, Judahite ambassadors visited Assyrian palaces perhaps as early as 738 BCE, but certainly by 734 BCE, to bring annual tribute and express vassal status.

4. The Judahite Ambassadors to Calah

Like other Assyrian palaces, the structure of the palace of Assurnasirpal II at Calah, and even more so the nature of the art program it contained, were designed specifically to convey Assyrian ideology to visiting dignitaries from abroad. This specific palace was designed to exhibit the identity of the resurgent Assyrian Empire, which under Assurnasirpal II had begun a period of renewed expansion.[68] Nevling Porter's discussion, noted above, follows the journey of a group of foreign tributaries as they process on their scripted visit through the palace.[69] This description is based on the many studies of the palace and the placement of its reliefs, which show a logical process through the palace by visiting dignitaries. After entering the palace's gates, they were ushered into a waiting area (Area D) in which was prominently displayed a relief of submissive tributaries, crouching in deference and bearing tribute to a prominent figure of a king armed with a bow.[70] The relief was designed to show them the proper "world order" of which they were part. Guarding the entrance to the waiting area was a winged *apkallū* carrying a *mullilu*, along with other magical creatures. As noted above, they were certainly accompanied by palace officials, who explained to them the contents of the reliefs and accompanying cuneiform inscriptions they viewed. Upon entering the throne room, the tributaries would have been exposed to a more violent version of the king's accomplishments. The reliefs near its entrance showed the conquest of two cities by massed armies led by a massive Assyrian king

68. See the discussion of Brian Brown, "Kingship and Ancestral Cult in the Northwest Palace at Nimrud," *JANER* 10 (2010): 1–53, especially 1–2.

69. Nevling Porter, "Intimidation and Friendly Persuasion," 184–89.

70. Several of the reliefs in the ante-rooms outside the throne room conveyed the universal nature of the empire by portraying tribute-bearers from obviously-exotic destinations bringing monkeys as tribute. See slabs D-7 and D-8, published in Nevling Porter, "Intimidation and Friendly Persuasion," 185.

armed with a bow, and piles of beheaded enemy bodies. The tributaries were then exposed to the less violent pivot relief (which Nevling Porter interprets as indicating the king's role in creating abundance). Among the final reliefs they saw before leaving the throne room was one portraying the king as a powerful hunter, and an inscription describing him as a collector of animals. The experience balanced insistent persuasion with the very clear threat of consequences if the tributaries' states disobeyed Assyria. As discussed above, by 734, these ambassadors became vectors for the transmission of Assyrian ideology to Judah. Although we may think of these ambassadors as serving the kingdom of Judah, they were coopted by the Assyrian empire to serve as tradents of this ideology.

Parenthetically, we should note that many Assyrian seals contain scenes similar to the pivot relief, and these would likely have increased Judahites' familiarity with this type of scene. As Aruz noted, seals were "markers of cultural identity," and because of their importance in the trade process, they travelled with their owners. They were distributed widely in a variety of contexts, and testify not only to the movements of peoples but to the transfer of ideas.[71] Scenes similar to the pivot relief were common in glyptic art of the eighth and seventh centuries. These scenes depict in their center the stylized tree below the god in the winged disk, flanked by different figures. In one example, a worshipper appears on one side of the tree and on the other a bull-man.[72] In another, two fish-men carrying buckets flank the tree, above which is the god in the winged disk.[73] Others portray two multi-winged *apkallū* figures carrying buckets flanking the sacred tree.[74] Porada discussed the tendency, in Neo-Assyrian seals, to portray "genii" flanking the sacred tree, and also noted the

71. Joan Aruz, "Seals and Interconnections," in *Edith Porada zum 100 Geburtstag*, Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis 268, ed. Erika Bleibtreu and Hans-Ulrich Steymans (Fribourg: Academic Press, 2014), 255–68, here 255.

72. A clay bulla from the seventh century (BM 84619) appears as number 245 in Terence C. Mitchell and Anne Searight, eds., *Catalogue of the Western Asiatic Seals in The British Museum*, Vol. 3 (Leiden: Brill 2008), 109. Other similar examples are referred to there.

73. Pierpont Morgan Library seal 773, available at http://corsair.themorgan.org/cgi-bin/Pwebrecon.cgi?BBID=84395, and on the cover of Lenzi, *Secrecy and the Gods,* and in Edith Porada and Briggs Buchanan, eds., *Corpus of Ancient Near Eastern Seals in North American Collections,* edited for the Committee of Ancient Near Eastern Seals (New York: Pantheon, 1948), 1: pl. CXVII, and discussed there in 2:93–94.

74. Pierpont Morgan Library seals 770 and 771E (the latter depicts both the tree and god in the winged disk), in Porada and Buchanan, *Corpus,* vol. 1, pl. CXVII. Other images of figures flanking the sacred tree above which is the god in the winged disk appear there in pl. XCIII—XCIV, seals 640E–649.

similarities between these seals and the reliefs in the palace of Assurnasirpal II.[75]

We do not know exactly how seals and reports of the pivot relief (and similar scenes from the palaces) interacted when received in Judah of the Assyrian period. It is reasonable to posit that the more portable glyptic art served to more widely disseminate the general layout of the scene described, and reports from emissaries who viewed the palace reliefs informed a more limited group of Judahites of the use of this scene in royal propaganda. Thus, the two media strengthened each other, with one serving to disseminate the scene more widely and the other conveying the elements specific to the pivot relief.

5. Rhetorical Analysis of Isaiah 6:1–13

The experience of the emissaries in the Assyrian palace, and especially in the throne room, form the background for the throne-room vision of Isa 6. This vision was designed to address the cooption of these emissaries and their role in transmitting Neo-Assyrian ideology to Judah, and this design is elaborated in the following paragraphs. In its first two scenes (verses 1–4 and 5–7), Isa 6 focuses on the theological implications of their experience in the Assyrian palaces, and questions the logical implications that emissaries were encouraged by the Assyrians to derive from the Assyrian art program. It reframes and subverts the message of this art program, principally the pivot relief, to argue that it illustrates the mortality and the weakness of the Assyrian king, rather than his heroic nature. It ridicules the claim of invincibility propounded by a king who is clearly not self-sufficient, since he requires magical assistants to save him from impurity. In the last scene (verses 8–13), the question of the political loyalties of the emissaries is engaged, thus directly undermining the imperial strategy of cooption.

I now examine each of the scenes and consider the goals of each. In the first scene, the figure of God on the throne is designed to contrast with that of the Assyrian king, while the seraphim are designed as satirical portrayals of the *apkallū*. The seraphim play a central role in subverting the message that Assyria expected the throne room visit to convey. It is hardly surprising that in trying to undermine the message of the emissaries' experience in the Assyrian palace, the prophet chooses to emphasize a satire of the multi-winged magical creatures found throughout the palace. Unlike the general concepts of royal invincibility and universal dominion,

75. Edith Porada, "Suggestions for the Classification of Neo-Babylonian Seals," *Or* 16 (1947): 145–65, here 161. The discussion of the genii appears at 161 n. 5.

with which the emissaries were at least somewhat familiar before their visit, the very large multi-winged figures were a new phenomenon encountered on this visit. Since they were placed throughout the palace, repeatedly viewing them would have left a profound sensory impression. It is precisely this sensory impression that the prophecy aims to address.

It is also interesting to reflect on how, after their return to the Land of Israel, the emissaries would have described the fantastical creatures depicted in the palaces. We can compare their experiences with those of more recent travellers who encountered Assyrian palace art for the first time. In describing the figure of the erect snake, which appears here as figure 2.4, Austen Henry Layard described seeing "a dragon with the head of an eagle and the claws of a bird."[76] His choice of the word "dragon," rather than "uraeus" or "king cobra" (the natural animal it most nearly resembles), reflects the prominence of this word in the British imagination, the product of centuries of English mythology.[77] Similarly, it is most reasonable to assume that the returning ambassadors would have described these magical creatures by referring to the winged animals with which they were most familiar. These would be the winged uraei, which they knew from Egyptian glyptic art and Judean glyptic art, and to which Keel, Roberts, and Joines have called attention. The term שרף may have been applied to the winged uraei because the snake known as שרף in Biblical Hebrew was a somewhat exotic animal, living in the Sinai desert (Num 21:6–8, Deut 8:15), rather than in inhabited areas. The term may also have been connected to the uraei because of its similarity to Middle Egyptian *sfr*, referring to a winged wild animal.[78] In either case, the term was then transferred to the unheard-of magical animals about which the emissaries reported.

5.1. The First Scene (Isa 6:1–4): The Seraphim and YHWH

> In the year of King Uzziah's death, I saw God sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and His hems filled the great house. (2) Seraphim stood above Him, each one had six wings: with two each would cover his face, and with two each would cover his legs and with two each would fly. (3) And one

76. Layard, *Nineveh and Its Remains*, 348–49. The description that Layard provides leaves no doubt that he is referring to the figure from the southwest palace reproduced here as figure 2.4.

77. Note the prominence of the stories of St. George slaying the dragon, and the appearance of the dragon on the Welsh flag and on countless other heraldic devices.

78. Manfred Görg, "Die Funktion der Serafen bei Jesaja," *BN* 5 (1978): 28–39, here 29. See 29–32 for an explanation of the consonantal metathesis and the specific connection of the term to snake.

> called to the other, and said "Holy, holy, holy is YHWH of Hosts, His presence fills the earth." (4) The posts of the doors shook from the sound of the one who called, and the house would fill with smoke.

In this first scene, the seraphim attend YHWH but do not assist Him or protect Him in any way. According to verse 2, they recoil at His presence, covering their faces (to prevent themselves from seeing Him) and their legs (to cover their nakedness). The description of YHWH as having שולים (hems on clothing, as in Ex 28:34) is unique here in the Biblical corpus, and seems to reflect the decorated fringes on the clothing worn by the Assyrian king in the relief. These decorated fringes are marks of high status and are known from clothing displayed in other palace art.[79]

The inability of the seraphim to protect or assist YHWH thus contrasts sharply with the behavior of the *apkallū* in the palace, whose primary task is precisely to protect the king. The contrast is intentional, and is designed to encourage the emissaries to engage in a sort of cognitive reprocessing of their experience, and to question whether the art program to which they were exposed effectively argues for the invincibility of the king and omnipotence of his empire. The authors of the art program would have viewers believe that the king's ability to command the protection of magical creatures as well as human ones demonstrates his power. Isaiah encourages the viewers to question this proposition: by protecting the king, the *apkallū* demonstrate his frailty and need for protection. By comparing seraphim who cannot help YHWH to the *apkallū* who protect the king, Isaiah highlights the king's vulnerability. He encourages viewers to recognize how the inability of the seraphim to assist YHWH attests His status above the human sphere: He is self-sufficient and invulnerable.

Furthermore, the interaction of the seraphim with YHWH shows that they recognize His transcendent nature. Not only does He not stand in need of their protection, but they are unable to approach Him, and recognize that He belongs to a superior sphere. They hide from His presence, covering both their nakedness and their faces, with the latter action paralleling that of Moses at the burning bush (Ex 3:6) and of many other encounters with God in the Hebrew Bible (for example, Lev 8:24 and 1 Kgs 18:39).

The declaration of the seraphim in verse 3 reflects this recognition and develops it further. The term קדוש in the Hebrew Bible refers to something from which one must separate (as in Lev 22:2), and it is in this sense that the seraphim declare YHWH to be holy in verse 3. The

79. See Brown, "Kingship and Ancestral Cult," 10–11, 27.

second part of this declaration emphasizes His universal presence. This universal aspect has not been previously engaged in this vision; on the contrary, in emphasizing God's transcendent nature, the vision seems to restrict itself to the heavenly sphere. However, the statement that God's Presence is universal fits into the Assyrian background of the vision, when one considers how the universal rule of Assur and the Assyrian king is repeatedly emphasized. The first part of the statement ("holy, holy, holy") shows how different YHWH is from the Assyrian rulers; the last part of the statement ("His Presence fills the earth") claims for Him the universal role that the Assyrian rulers arrogate. The designation of God as *ṣeḇāʿôṯ* (literally, "armies") also fits well in the Assyrian context, and particularly that of the throne-room art program.

The goal of verses 1–4 is to give voice to the silent attendants beside the throne. The seraphim are designed to encourage the emissaries to reflect on their viewing of the *apkallū*, and the seraphim act and speak to emphasize both the transcendence of YHWH and His role as universal master, commander of armies. By causing the emissaries to compare the relationship of the seraphim to YHWH with that of the *apkallū* to the Assyrian king, they highlight the humanity and vulnerability of the Assyrian king, and thus undermine the notion of his royal omnipotence. By declaring YHWH to be the universal ruler, they undermine the Assyrian claims of universal dominion.

5.2. The Second Scene (Isa 6:5–7): The Seraph and the Prophet

> (5) I said, "Woe is me for I am destroyed,"[80] for I am a man of impure lips, and I dwell among a people of impure lips, and yet I have seen YHWH of Hosts. (6) One of the seraphim flew to me, with a coal[81] in his hand, which he took from the altar by means of tongs. (7) He touched my mouth, and said "Behold, once this has touched your lips, your iniquity will be removed and your sin will be forgiven."

In the second scene, the prophet addresses the apparent inconsistency between the refusal of the seraphim to view YHWH and his own bold statement in verse 1: "I saw the Lord." Because of this act of lèse-majesté,

80. The verb נדמיתי is difficult, but has parallels in Hos 10:15 and Zeph 1:11. Both the parallels and the context support the meaning "destroyed." Hurowitz ("Isaiah's Impure Lips," 43) suggests "I am destined for perdition" as a possible translation.

81. Hebrew רצפה is here translated based on context.

he indicts himself. The distance between man and God remains the central motif in this scene.

Three interpretive questions relate to the formulation used in verse 5:

1. Why does the prophet phrase his self-indictment by referring to his impurity?
2. Why does he refer specifically to impurity of the lips?
3. Why does he mention that the rest of the people also have impure lips?

The mention of impurity in this scene spurs the seraphim to action. By portraying the seraphim as having a lustrative function, the vision further highlights their similarity to the *apkallū*. But after comparing the two creatures' actions, Isaiah intentionally contrasts them. The vulnerable Assyrian king is in need of purifying attendants because he is human. But transcendent YHWH is completely removed from such impurity, and His attendants purify human beings. While both *apkallū* and seraphim flank the throne, only the former purify the occupant of the throne. Thus, the act of lustration by the seraphim emphasizes the difference between the occupant of the throne attended by the *apkallū* and the Occupant attended by the seraphim. The distance between human and Divine king is thus further emphasized.

The impurity of the human prophet only becomes relevant when he views the antithesis of impurity: YHWH, as is clear in verse 5. Impurity serves to make explicit the distance between man and God, which was implicit in the first scene. The second scene thus complements the first.

The concept of purity and impurity used in this scene contrasts with its use elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible. Here, impurity is destructive: the prophet declares that he is "destroyed" (נדמיתי), because he allowed himself to view the Divine king, despite his impure lips, and his status as part of an impure people. The notion that impurity endangers physical existence is found in Mesopotamia: it underlies the use of the term *mullilu* (purifier) to an object, which according to the texts Wiggermann cites, is used to ward off destructive forces. The nexus between impurity and destruction found in Isa 6:5, unparalleled in the biblical corpus, seems to be derived from the Assyrian notion.

After the seraph has touched the prophet (verse 6), the problem of the prophet's impure lips seems to be resolved: he is not destroyed, and the seraph declares that any sin the prophet committed will be removed (verse 7). The particular object with which the seraph touches the prophet is interesting: the context of verse 6 seems to require understanding רִצְפָּה as a coal, since it is taken from the altar. The altar is one of the only elements in this passage localizing the vision in a temple (since היכל can refer to temple or palace). The altar and coal

imagery seems intended to connect between the Assyrian palace, with its multi-winged creatures, and the Temple of YHWH, with its altar. The use of the coal as a purifying tool, instead of the water used by the *apkallū* in the Assyrian reliefs, does not detract from the other similarities noted. It seems to be part of a deliberate attempt to transfer the scene from the Assyrian palace to a Temple-like setting, in which an altar is present.

The localization of the impurity in the lips, a concept unparalleled in the Hebrew Bible, derives from Assyrian and Babylonian sources, as Hurowitz demonstrated. As Hurowitz noted, it is not possible to link this phrase to the Egyptian ritual of "opening of the mouth." Impurity does not stand at the centre of the Egyptian ritual, whereas in Isa 6:7 the action of the seraph is said specifically to remove impurity, which is here connected to sin.[82] As Hurowitz noted, in the Assyrian and Babylonian sources, speaking with a pure mouth (*pû ellu*) tended to be a divine characteristic. Ritual performers who wished to achieve purity of mouth had to undergo preparatory rites, the goal of which was not to prepare them for speech, but to grant quasi-divine status to the possessor of such a mouth. "The pure mouth enables the person or object to enter the divine realm, or to stand before God."[83] This connection between purity of mouth and ability to stand before God is clearly in evidence in Isa 6:5. Thus, the impurity of the mouth also highlights the difference between humans and God. Verse 6 thus adopts the Mesopotamian symbolic significance of "a man of impure lips," while verse 7 uses the lustrative or apotropaic function of the *apkallū* found in palace art. The vision draws on different Mesopotamian concepts in conveying to the emissaries the distance between man and God.

82. Hurowitz, "Isaiah's Impure Lips," 46. For further discussion of the purity of the lips, see Ann Macy Roth, "Fingers, Stars, and the 'Opening of the Mouth': The Nature and Function of the *nṯrwj*-Blades," *JEA* 79 (1993): 57–79, here 63, who describes this Egyptian ritual, attested in the New Kingdom, in which instruments were intended to be used to "open the mouth" of a corpse. Roth discusses similarities between this action, and the need to remove mucus from the mouth of a newborn, usually by means of inserting a small finger, thus allowing the newborn to suckle. The "opening of the mouth" ritual in Egypt was designed to allow the dead to "eat the real and symbolic food that Egyptian mortuary customs went to such great lengths to provide" (Ann Macy Roth, "The psš-kf and the 'Opening of the Mouth' Ceremony: A Ritual of Birth and Rebirth," *JEA* 78 [1992]: 113–47, here 146.) This ritual is therefore concerned primarily with ensuring proper care of the dead, and lacks any clear thematic link to the performance in Isa 6:5–7.

83. Hurowitz, "Isaiah's Impure Lips," 54.

5.3. The Third Scene (Isaiah 6:8–13): YHWH and the Prophet

> (8) I heard the voice of God saying "Whom shall I send and who will go for Us?" And I said "Here I am, send me." (9) And He said, "Go and say to this people: Hear indeed but do not understand, see indeed but do not know. (10) Fatten the heart of this people, and make heavy their ears and plaster over their eyes, lest they see with their eyes and hear with their ears and their heart will understand, and they will return and be healed." (11) And I said "Until when, God?" And He said "Until cities are desolate with no inhabitants and houses without people, and the land will be a desolate waste." (12) And the Lord will distance humans, and the abandoned places will be many in the midst of the land. (13) And if there remains in the land a tenth, it will return and be burnt, like the terebinth and the oak when they drop their leaves, the trunk remains. The holy seed is its trunk.

Verses 9–10 in this third scene present one of the most famous and oldest interpretive cruces in the Hebrew Bible: How can a prophet be directed to deliver a message that is meant not to be understood? The interpretation I propose below solves this crux.

In this third and final scene of the vision, the seraphim are absent. The previous scenes use the seraphim as a means of evoking the palace art. The vision that Isaiah describes in these scenes contrasts with palace art in order to emphasize the distance between God and man, and thereby challenges the elements of Assyrian royal ideology that stand in opposition to universal monotheism and God's transcendent nature. In this third scene, the prophet shifts the focus of his vision to the interaction between the throne's Occupant and those viewing the scene in the throne room. He thus causes the emissaries to reflect on their own interaction with the Assyrian king and his court.

In verses 1–7, the prophet functioned as a silent viewer of the scene; in verse 8, he shifts to volunteer as an active participant. The transition from viewer to active propagator of a message mirrors the transition that the ambassadors underwent. Just as the tribute-bearers began by viewing the art program and imbibing the messages of the palace, and were then transformed into active proponents of imperial ideology, so too is the prophet here transitioning into the bearer of the message dictated by the Occupant of the throne.[84]

84. His volunteering to convey the message may be contrasted to the mercenary willingness of the tribute-bearers to transform themselves into propagators: their willingness was purchased by the gifts they received, but the prophet volunteers without remuneration or coercion.

The prophet thus becomes a sort of satirical representation of the tribute-bearers, just as the seraphim parallel the *apkallū*, and YHWH parallels the human king in the Assyrian throne room. The overall goal of the scene is to encourage the emissaries, and the elite of Judah to whom they direct their message, to engage in cognitive reprocessing, and to question and undermine the doctrines of royal omnipotence and Assyrian power to which they have been exposed, both in the art program and in their verbal interactions with Assyrian officials. In verses 1–7, Isaiah argued that the doctrines are false; he presented in words an alternative visual experience that argues for Divine omnipotence and transcendence. After allowing the ambassadors to consider this critique, he presents the dialogue between YHWH (representing the Assyrian king) and the prophet (representing the emissaries) as a highly transparent attempt to propagate falsehood to Judah.

Above, I discussed the reasons many consider this section of the chapter (focusing on verses 9–11) to originate separately from the vision in verses 1–8. The separation is based on the contrast between the portrayal of the prophet as "part of the people" in verse 5 and his portrayal in opposition to the people in verses 8–11. But the proposed interpretation eliminates the rationale for this separation, since the contrast in the prophet's role is intentional. It is designed to provoke the emissaries to ask whether they represent the Judahites or the Assyrians.

The prophet's volunteering for the undefined mission in verse 8 expresses this question of whom the emissaries represent. He volunteers to represent the Occupant of the throne (מי ילך לנו), reflecting the emissaries' volunteering to "go out for" and represent the Assyrian king in propagating Assyrian ideology to Judah. Verses 9–10 then describe the satirized Assyrian king's charge to his newfound emissaries: Go forth, but do not let the ones to whom you speak understand what you have actually seen. The Assyrian strategy of cooption demanded that emissaries tell their compatriots about their experience in the Assyrian palace in a manner that would reinforce Assyrian royal ideology. But verses 1–7 show that this version of their experience presents false data. To tell what they have seen in a manner that corresponds to Assyrian royal ideology is false, and is based simply on "seeing without understanding," or in other words, seeing visual images without adequately reflecting on the true meaning that lies behind those images. The message that Isaiah presents in verses 1–7 encourages reflection on the experience in the Assyrian palace so as to achieve a true understanding of this experience.

It is that true understanding that the Assyrians seek to avoid. Thus, "hear indeed, but do not understand, see indeed but do not know."

The formulation is designed to mock the mission that the Assyrians entrust to the emissaries: a mission that demands they fail to adequately understand what they have seen. Furthermore, the emissaries are also expected to propagate their palace experiences in such a way as to avoid the Judahites' understanding the false nature of Assyrian imperial ideology: "Make the heart of this people fat, and their ears heavy, and their eyes plastered over, lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and their heart will understand." For if they were to reflect on the scenes they saw, and appreciate the emptiness of Assyrian claims of omnipotence and invincibility, they would recognize YHWH as the true possessor of these traits. They would then "return and be pardoned" (10b).

The phrase ושב ורפא לו ("return and be pardoned") requires clarification. "Return" (שב) is used in Isa 10:21 to mean "return to YHWH," and the context (10:20–21) clearly contrasts "return" with previous "reliance on the one who smites them" — that is, Assyria. "Return," in that verse, indicates re-establishing a relationship of reliance on YHWH after a period of reliance on Assyria. In this use of "return," Isaiah follows a pattern of usage in Hosea, found most notably in 14:2–5, in which Hosea adjures Israel to return to YHWH, because "Assyria cannot save us" in Hos 14:4.[85] In both Isa 6:10b and Hos 14:5, the return to YHWH is followed by His performing the action of רפא. In both verses, God's רפא does not respond to a physical illness. In both verses, רפא refers to a Divine action performed after Israel transfers its loyalty back to God after a period of regarding Assyria as its sovereign. רפא in both verses does not mean "healing," but rather "pardon," paralleling the Akkadian *bulluṭu*, which refers to the sovereign's privilege to remit the punishment of a subject who recognized another suzerain, but then repudiates that act of disloyalty and returns to the sovereign.[86] Hos 14:2–4 refer to Israel transferring its loyalty from Assyria to God, and it is precisely this type of transfer (in Isa 6:10b called ושב, referring to Judah's "return") that Assyria seeks to avoid. In the prophet's mind, it is as if the Assyrian officials have designed the visit of the emissaries to avoid such a transfer.

85. The phrase ורפא לו, which is used in Hosea to contrast loyalty to Assyria with loyalty to YHWH, reworks the Akkadian verb *bulluṭu*, or pardon, which shares a root with the Akkadian verb "to heal." On this verb, see my and Abraham Jacob Berkowitz's study, "Akkadian Bulluṭu and Hebrew רפא: Pardon and Loyalty in Hosea and in Neo-Assyrian Political Texts" (forthcoming).

86. See "Akkadian Bulluṭu and Hebrew רפא" for references.

In Isaiah's view, return to and reliance on YHWH are incompatible with acknowledging the fundamental claims of Assyrian power, including the principle of royal omnipotence. In the parody of the Assyrians in verses 9–10, the prophet portrays them as attempting to prevent Israel from returning to rely on YHWH. Rather than functioning as an attempt to convince tribute-bearers of Assyrian claims of power, Isaiah argues that the palace art program actually aims to prevent Israelites from recognizing the omnipotence and invincibility of YHWH (which are the direct result of His transcendence) and from relying on Him. Of course, it is highly unlikely that the Assyrian Empire had the least interest in Israelite religion or in the theology of YHWH.[87] But Isaiah's re-interpretation of Assyrian intentions does not need to match the historical reality. As in Isa 37:24–25, the prophet sees Assyrian imperial propaganda as a direct attack on the sovereignty of YHWH, regardless of whether the Assyrians intended it as such.[88]

In 6:11–13, the prophet for the first time broaches the political dangers inherent in accepting the vassalage that is the logical consequence of Assyrian imperial ideology. It shows an understanding of political realities on which chapters 7–8 expatiate: accepting Assyrian protection will cause Judah to be drawn into the whirlpool of vassal obligations, which will ruin Judah; Judah will be faced with the choice of rebelling or paying, and the inevitable rebellions will cause conquest and the attendant desolation and exile. The prophet in verse 11 asks "Until when?" perhaps representing in this question the doubts that begin to assail the emissaries when confronted with the dishonorable nature of their mission to their compatriots. The answer he is given, until desolation takes hold of the land, accords with the message given in verse 12, which also describes exile.

Wildberger, Sweeney, and Blenkinsopp all see verses 12–13 as added at a later stage than verses 9–11, partly because of the description of exile in verse 12.[89] But as Williamson argued, it is difficult to accept the

87. Cogan has shown that Assyrian attempts to impose cultic worship of Assyrian gods on conquered kingdoms were rare, and that no such attempts are attested in the case of Judah: Mordechai Cogan, *Imperialism and Religion: Assyria, Judah, and Israel in the Eighth and Seventh Centuries BCE* (Missoula, MT: Society of Biblical Literature, 1974). In "Judah under Assyrian Imperialism: A Reexamination of *Imperialism and Religion*," *JBL* 112 (1993), 403–14, he reviews the evidence and convincingly defends this thesis.

88. On these verses, see further in chapter 5 below, and Aster, "What Sennacherib Said and What the Prophet Heard."

89. Wildberger, *Isaiah 1-12*, 258, notes that the description of exiling humans in verse 12 represents a further development of the empty land motif in verse 11, and sees verse 12, and the two parts of verse 13 as having been added gradually to the text.

view that verse 12 was added to verses 9–11, based on the introduction of "exile into a context which is speaking rather of the desolation of the land."[90] Assyrian campaigns conducted in response to perceived rebellions (such as those to Gaza and other areas in Philistia in 734, to the Galilee in 733–732, and to Gezer sometime in this period) involved conquest, destroying cities, and exiling part of the population, besides the consumption of vital foodstores by foraging soldiers and pillage.[91] Unlike the later campaigns of Sargon II, the campaign to the Galilee in 733–732 involved (as far as we know) only unidirectional deportations, which would produce desolation, rather than an exchange of populations. Isaiah warns that only demographic disaster can result from accepting Assyrian imperial ideology and from becoming tributary to Assyria. Judah is much better off remaining outside the ambit of the Assyrian imperial system for as long as possible.

Verse 12 adds an important theological detail to verse 11: God is said to be the author of Judah's possible exile. This statement fits with the portrayal of God as parallel to the Assyrian king in this chapter, but even more so, it fits with the prophet's theological view that God is the ultimate author of any action taken by Assyria. The idea that God controls Assyria and uses it as His tool is developed further in Isa 7 and 8, which I address in the next chapter.

The chapter concludes with a note of partial hope: Judah will not be destroyed completely. A tenth part will remain, and this tenth part is compared to the trunk of a tree, perhaps evoking the cosmic tree in the pivot relief with which the chapter began. Williamson argues that the final phrase, זרע קדש מצבתה, is a post-exilic addition to the passage.[92] This may be so, but in no way detracts from the coherence of the rest of the chapter as a literary unit. Furthermore, given the parallels between the seraphim and the *apkallū* (including both multiple wings and lustra-

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But at p. 274, he states regarding verse 12 "This message comes most likely from the time after 721." Sweeney, *Isaiah 1-39*, 138, sees these verses as related to the events of 701. Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1-39*, 266, notes that it is "generally recognized" that the description of deportation in verse 13 post-dates 586.

90. Williamson, *The Book Called Isaiah*, 35, who doubts that verse 12 was added secondarily.

91. It is unnecessary to posit that these verses "represent a relecture in the light of the fall of Jerusalem and the exile of many of the people of Judah." (ibid., 37) Partial exiles of Judah's population, especially in the Shephelah region, took place through much of the Assyrian period, and the exiles of Israel's population were certainly known to Judahites at this time.

92. Hugh Godfrey Maturin Williamson, *Ezra and Nehemiah* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1987), 131–32; *The Book Called Isaiah*, 37.

tive function and implements), and between the unique image of YHWH wearing a hemmed garment seated on a throne and that of the Assyrian king in the pivot relief, it appears that the tree imagery in this verse is designed to parallel the cosmic tree in the pivot relief. The tree at the center of the relief expresses the king's role in achieving the desired abundance for the land.[93] The tree in Isa 6:13, in contrast, expresses God's role in ensuring the continuity of Israel's presence in the land, despite the exile that Assyria will impose on Israel at God's behest. The contrasting symbolism of the trees seems intentional.

Verse 13 thus forms an unexpected answer to Isaiah's question in verse 11a. The prophet asks for a time limit on Israel's refusal to recognize the false nature of Assyrian claims. God does not set such a time limit. He affirms that Israel will suffer exile as a result of its refusal to repudiate Assyrian claims of power, and its refusal to rely on YHWH. Rather than a time limit, YHWH replies by limiting the extent of the destruction: the trunk will remain.

6. The "Educational Theology" of the "Throne Room Vision"

Isa 6 focuses (in verses 1–10) on a theological response to Assyrian imperial ideology. This response argues against Assyrian imperial ideology by asserting that YHWH is the true invincible king, and sole universal ruler. The prophet buttresses these claims by pointing to God's transcendent nature. He is unfettered by human limitations, unlike the Assyrian king.

The prophecy addresses the experience of the Judahite ambassadors to Assyria, and it is plausible that it was specifically directed at this group. In his discussion of Isa 10:5–15, Machinist argues that that text was directed at the Judahite ruling elite. This ruling elite (like ruling elites everywhere, when confronted with empire) were divided in their attitudes towards Assyria; some favoured resistance, while others took a pro-Assyrian attitude, and sought to extract personal benefits from their support for subjugation to empire. Machinist argues that Isa 10:5–15 is directed against the latter group:

> Putting the focus on the local Judahite elites and the pro-/anti-Assyrian tension among them fits well with and explains the effort in our text

93. Irene J. Winter, "Ornament and the 'Rhetoric of Abundance' in Assyria," *Eretz Israel* 29 (2008): 252–64, here 253, and Barbara Nevling Porter, "Sacred Trees, Date Palms, and the Royal Persona of Ashurnasirpal II," *JNES* 52 (1993): 129–39. For other views on the meaning of the tree, see Brown, "Kingship and Ancestral Cult," 23–24.

> deliberately to reverse and so to undermine the ideological power of the Assyrian inscriptional tradition, since it would have been these elites who had primary access, in some way, to that Assyrian tradition and who needed persuasion that Assyrian power was not all-encompassing.[94]

I would argue that in Isa 6, the prophet has a similar agenda: to undermine the ideological power of Assyrian imperialism, as presented through visual art. He addresses the Judahite ambassadors, whose experiences with this art have encouraged them to become pro-Assyrian. He describes a vision which serves as a counter-point to the experiences for these ambassadors in the Assyrian palace. By means of this vision, he argues explicitly for the omnipotence of YHWH and implicitly against Assyrian claims of royal omnipotence.

Isaiah therefore focuses in these verses on deconstructing the underlying groundwork of Assyrian imperial ideology. He places the political challenges created by Assyrian dominion in secondary position, addressing them only as corollary to the theological question of who is the true universal ruler.

No opposition between God and Assyria is portrayed, because God operates in an entirely different plane than Assyria and no rivalry seems possible. Assyria impudently claims divine characteristics such as universal rule, but only those who refuse to understand what they are seeing are fooled by these claims. The prophet's role, then, is to educate. His goal is to encourage the emissaries and other members of Judah's elite, who are being coopted by Assyria, to reflect more thoughtfully on their experience so as to recognize Divine supremacy.

I would cautiously view Isa 6 as belonging to the earliest period of the prophecies of Isaiah of Jerusalem, in the reign of Tiglath-pileser III, for two reasons. Firstly, this prophecy is perhaps the only one to develop a detailed literary response to motifs expressed in visual art. Visual art is a medium that can more easily be assimilated than verbal argument, and the vision responds to the visual impressions that Judahite emissaries to Assyria received from their palace visits. These impressions involve a sense of wonder and sensory overload, which the prophet asks them to rework and reprocess in his vision of an alternative throne room. The wonder and sensory overload fit best as the experiences of those

94. Peter Machinist, "Ah Assyria .... (Isaiah 10:5ff) Isaiah's Assyrian Polemic Revisited," in *Not Only History: Proceedings of the Conference Held in Honor of Mario Liverani, Sapienza, Universita di Roma, Dipartimento di Scienze dell'Antichità, 20–21 April 2009*, ed. Gilda Bartoloni and Maria Giovanna Biga in collaboration with Armando Bramanti (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2016), 183–218, here 203.

encountering Assyrian palace art for the first time. For that reason, the prophecy makes most sense as reflecting an early stage in Judah's relationship with Assyria, before the repeated annual palace visits made emissaries blasé about the wondrous images of palace art.

Secondly, the palace that best fits with the images in Isaiah's vision is that of Assurnasirpal II, with its pivot relief. It is entirely possible that other Assyrian palaces had similar reliefs and that the vision in question refers to these rather than to the relief we know. But due to the vagaries of history and preservation, we lack adequate information about the placement of reliefs in the palace that Tiglath-pileser III built, and no similar reliefs have been uncovered in other palaces.[95] While maintaining a certain skepticism due to our lack of knowledge of other palaces, it seems more probable to date Isa 6 to the period when the palace of Assurnasirpal II was in use. We know that the palace was in use until close to the end of the reign of Tiglath-pileser III.[96] We also know that Sargon II restored Assurnasirpal's palace and lived in it in the first five years of his reign, until the completion of his palace at Dur Sharrukin (Khorsabad).[97] Because of the sense of wonder conveyed (discussed above), the dating to the reign of Tiglath-pileser III seems somewhat more probable.

If this dating of the prophecy is correct, an interesting pattern emerges. In the educational-theological agenda of Isa 6, no clash between God and Assyria is possible. This is similar to the prophet's responses to Assyria in chapters 7 and 8. In these chapters too, there is no clash between God and Assyria. God is the ultimate sovereign, and it is He who sends Assyria. This sovereign–vassal (!) relationship fits with the theological message of 6:1–10. It also fits with the clear statement in 6:12 that

95. Many of the reliefs from the palace of Tiglath-pileser III were dismantled by Esarhaddon and re-used in his southwest palace, and others have been lost. Julian E. Reade, "The Palace of Tiglath-Pileser III," *Iraq* 30 (1968): 69-73, here 71; Tadmor, *Inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III, 10*–11.

96. A discussion of the arrangement of the slabs in the palace of Tiglath-Pleser III appears in Tadmor, *Inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III, as Supplementary Study B (238*–58). It should be noted that all of the slabs presented contain war imagery; "friendly persuasion" seems absent. As Tadmor notes at p. 258, the inscriptions in this palace extend to 729 BCE, and it appears that the unfinished palace was abandoned upon the death of Tiglath-pileser III in 727 BCE. It is not certain if the palace of Tiglath-pileser III was in use in the last years of his reign, nor do we know whether the palace of Assurnasirpal II ceased to be used at that time. Similarly, we do not know if the palace of Assurnasirpal II was in use in the brief reign of Shalmaneser V, although this appears likely.

97. Russsell, *Sennacherib's "Palace without Rival,"* 177.

it is God who performs the actions that appear to be those of Assyria, viz. exile and desolation.

The theological argument in verses 1–10 is linked in verses 11–13 to a political argument: the Israelites' impending exile derives not from their disloyalty to Assyria but from their refusal to acknowledge YHWH as omnipotent and to rely on Him. The view that Israel can only lose through loyalty to Assyria is exposed in greater detail in Isa 7 and in parts of Isa 8, which clearly relate to the period of the Syro-Ephraimite crisis in 738–733. Isaiah counsels Judah to remain aloof, to refuse to join either the Syro-Ephraimite alliance or those countries loyal to Assyria (7:3–9).

3

Assyria as Theological Catalyst: Prophecies Related to the Syro-Ephraimite Crisis and the Campaign of Tiglath-pileser III to Philistia

This chapter addresses two Isaiah passages that may relate to the period of Tiglath-pileser III and presents the evidence linking them to the Assyrian period. These are Isa 7:1–8:18, which relate to the Syro-Ephraimite crisis, and Isa 19, the "burden of Egypt." Throughout these passages, Assyria is presented as a force sent by YHWH. In Isa 7–8, Assyria's invasions of the Land of Israel are presented as directed by God, and in Isa 19, Assyria's military threat to Egypt is presented as provoking an outburst of monotheism in Egypt.

Like Isa 6, Isa 7 and 8 form part of the "Isaiah memoir," and I therefore discuss them before moving on to Isa 19. Many scholars have considered Isa 6:1–8:18 to be a single literary unit, nearly all of which date to the Assyrian period.[1] In the following, I explore the political advice and the use of Assyrian motifs in passages from chapters 7 and 8. I end by concluding that several

1. This is hardly a new view; for a review of some of the earlier scholars who defined this unit and date, see the summary in Kirsten Nielsen, *There is Hope for a Tree: The Tree as Metaphor in Isaiah,* JSOTSup 65 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989), 144–46; Roberts, *First Isaiah*, 88, also attributes this material to this date. For a discussion of this unit as a circular composition, see Kirstein Nielsen, "Is 6:1-8:18* as Dramatic Writing," *Studia Theologica* 40 (1986): 1–16.

of these passages likely date to the time of Tiglath-pileser III, and therefore relate to the very earliest period of Judah's encounter with Assyria.

Like Isa 6, Isa 7:1–8:18 critique Judah's elite for acquiescing in Assyria's domination of Judah, an acquiescence that resulted in material benefits for the elite. This critique is, however, expressed differently in the two units. As discussed in the previous chapter, Isa 6 implicitly critiques Judah's emissaries for allowing Assyria to co-opt their support and for using Assyrian power to bolster their own wealth and influence. Isa 7:1–8:18 critique other officials and leaders. Some verses, such as 7:18–20, critique the royal court for its role in promoting Judah's vassalage to Assyria, while 8:5–8 attack "this people" for overly emphasizing the Syro-Ephraimite threat. The unit correlates Judah's vassalage to Ahaz's failed management of the Syro-Ephraimite crisis, seeing the former as resulting from the latter.

While many scholars have attempted to highlight ideological differences between different types of "positive" and "negative" elements in 7:1–8:18, and date them to different periods, a historical reading of this material shows that it forms a coherent message, and fits well in the period noted.[2] As I show in the following discussion, the different elements in Isa 7:1–8:18 are directed at different groups within the Judean elite and together form a coherent critique of Judah's elite for placing its own short-term interests against the long-term interests of the polity as a whole.

Several passages in this unit (7:20, 8:5–8, and 8:11–13, and possibly also 7:18–19) respond to Assyrian claims of empire. As is shown in detail further on in this chapter, these passages undermine Assyrian claims of universal dominion. The goal of the first part of this chapter is to understand the message of 7:1–16 in its historical context, and then explore the responses to Assyrian claims of empire. This requires first surveying the political events related to the Syro-Ephraimite crisis and Judah's submission to Assyria.

1. Historical Background of the Syro-Ephraimite Crisis

The events of Assyria's first encounter with Judah are enmeshed with the story of an attack on Judah by the combined forces of Aram-Damascus and Israel, narrated in both Isa 7 and 2 Kgs 16:5–9. While scholars generally read these sources in tandem, leading to the conclusion that Isaiah opposed Judah's submission to Assyria, this tendency has been critiqued by Irvine.[3]

2. For such views, see De Jong, *Isaiah Among the Ancient Near Eastern Prophets*, 57, and Kaiser, *Isaiah 1-12* (1983), 134–89. There are almost certainly some later intrusions, probably including Isa 7:8b, which I do not discuss below.

3. Irvine, *Isaiah, Ahaz, and the Syro-Ephraimitic Crisis,* 16–17, notes that "If one reads the speeches of Isaiah in isolation (from 2 Kings 16:5-9), one would never guess that

To respond to this criticism, I begin the historical reconstruction of the relevant period (roughly 740–734) by relying on the Assyrian texts. These reveal very different responses on the part of Judah and Israel towards the Assyrian advance into the Levant in the early years of Tiglath-pileser III. The key texts for this purpose are the datable lists of kings who paid tribute to Tiglath-pileser III.[4]

It is very clear that Judah and Israel each responded differently to the Assyrian advance. Israel, like Aram, became a tributary once it recognized that Arpad, once the hegemonic power in North Syria, had been beaten by Assyria.[5] Judah, in contrast, refrained from paying tribute until sometime between 738 and 734.[6] In the following paragraphs, I review the responses of each kingdom, starting with Israel.

Menahem of Samaria and Rezin of Aram-Damascus each submitted to Assyria in 740 or 739, after Assyria subdued Arpad.[7] But both kingdoms began to build an anti-Assyrian alliance sometime between 737 and 734.[8] In these years, the pro-Assyrian policy that both kingdoms had adopted only a few years earlier seemed less wise. In the years 737–735, Tiglath-pileser III was

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the point of contention between him and Ahaz was the latter's thought of appealing to Assyria." But few of Isaiah's prophecies provide detailed historical background, and so the absence of such explicit mention in this or other prophecies ought not to prevent the scholar from adducing the relevant background, provided that a clear case can be made for the passage's originating in the relevant historical period.

4. The two earliest lists are in the Iran stele, and in a separate list of the south-east Anatolian and Syrian kings in the annals. The former appears in Tadmor, *The Inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III*, 106–9 as stele IIIA (= RINAP 1:86–87, Tiglath-pileser III 35, col. iii, lines 1–36), the latter at 68–71, annals 13* and 14* (= RINAP 1:45–49, Tiglath-pileser III 14 and 15). The former list is understood to reflect the reality of 740–739 BCE, and the latter that of 738 BCE. For the dating of these texts, see Tadmor, *The Inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III*, 266–68, Supplementary Study D; Mordechai Cogan, *The Raging Torrent: Historical Inscriptions from Assyria and Babylonia Relating to Ancient Israel* (Jerusalem: Carta, 2008), 51–56.

5. For the Assyrian campaigns against Arpad, see Kahn, "The Kingdom of Arpad (Bit Agusi)," 83–85.

6. This is based on a later list, found in a summary inscription inscribed on a large clay tablet in 729 BCE, which "reflects the extent of Assyrian domination in 734." (Cogan, *The Raging Torrent*, 56) For the text, see ibid., 56–58; Tadmor, *The Inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III*, 170–71, Summary Inscription 7, rev. 7′–15′ (parallel to RINAP 1:122–23, Tiglath-pileser III 47). In it, no king of Israel or of Aram is mentioned, indicating that these kingdoms had rebelled against Assyria by 734. However, "Jehoahaz of Judah" (clearly the biblical Ahaz) did remit tribute, as did the kings of Ammon, Moab, and Edom, along with Hanunu of Gaza and Mittinti of Ashkelon.

7. They are mentioned among the tributaries in the lists noted above, in n. 4.

8. See above, n. 6.

occupied in campaigns in the north and east of the empire, and appeared to have moved away from interest in the Levant. Close to the end of this period, Pekah seized power in Israel from Menahem; he either moved Israel to an anti-Assyrian position or (less probably) continued a shift begun under Menahem from supporting Assyria to resisting it.[9] If Pekah indeed seized power from an Assyrian vassal (Menahem) and refused to pay an initial tribute payment, he became a rebel, from the Assyrian viewpoint. Israel was not alone in moving to an anti-Assyrian policy during this period. Aram-Damascus and Tyre, both of which appeared in the earlier tribute lists (in which Israel also appeared), are also absent from the 734 list of tributaries. Furthermore, Hiram of Tyre (mentioned in the 738 list of tributaries) "plotted together with Rezin," in the years before 733.[10] Clearly, the near-simultaneous cessation of tribute from Tyre, Israel, and Damascus was not coincidental, but the result of coordinated planning. Hiram of Tyre and Rezin of Damascus together planned an anti-Assyrian coalition, of which Pekah of Israel was also part. This anti-Assyrian coalition had an inherent political logic: by grouping together a large number of small states, these states thought that they could resist Assyria together.

The result of this coalition was that Israel was included as a target, alongside Aram, in the Assyrian campaigns of 733–732, and extensive regions in the north and east of the kingdom were devastated and became Assyrian provinces.[11] As Tiglath-pileser III states, "The city of Samaria alone I spared," and this refers to the maintenance of truncated Israel as a vassal state in the region surrounding the city of Samaria. Pekah was killed during this Assyrian campaign.[12]

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9. It is difficult to date his seizure of power precisely and it may not have occurred suddenly. The "twenty years" 2 Kgs 15:27 attributes to Pekah clearly include some period in which Pekah had some degree of control, probably in northern Transjordan, while other kings ruled in Samaria: see Mordechai Cogan and Hayim Tadmor, *II Kings: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary,* AB (Garden City: Doubleday, 1988), 174 and bibliography cited therein. The same verse attributes the beginning of Pekah's rule to the fifty-second year of Azariah of Judah, which is the year 734 in Tadmor and Cogan's chronology. Clearly, by 734, Israel had adopted an anti-Assyrian position, judging from the absence of any Israelite king in the tributary list of that year.

10. Tadmor, *The Inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III,* 186, Summary Inscription 9, line rev. 5 (parallel to RINAP 1:131, Tiglath-pileser III 49).

11. For the multiple Assyrian campaigns to the territory of the kingdom of Israel, see Tadmor, *The Inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III,* 281.

12. Pekah's death is attributed to Hoshea, the last king of Israel, in 2 Kgs 15:25. Although two of Tiglath-pileser III's summary inscriptions refer to his demise, the part of the verb indicates the person responsible is missing in both: see Tadmor, *The Inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III*, 140, Summary Inscription 4, line 17′ (RINAP 1:106,

We know relatively little about Judah's role in these events in the critical period after 738 and before 734, a period about which we lack Assyrian texts related to the region. The attack by Israel and Aram-Damascus on Judah is not mentioned in any extra-biblical text, and is recorded only in Isa 7:1–2 and in 2 Kgs 16:5–9. But these passages fit well into the Assyrian texts, and there is no reason to doubt that Israel and Aram-Damascus did indeed attack Judah. Oded has suggested that the background for this attack included disputes over territorial expansion,[13] but there is good reason to see the anti-Assyrian position of Israel and Damascus as part of the reason for this attack. Israel and Aram-Damascus would logically seek to include Judah in their anti-Assyrian coalition, in order to include as many members as possible. Initially, they would attempt to bring Judah into the coalition by means of diplomacy. After diplomacy failed to bring Judah into the alliance, such an attack might have taken place. The goal of attacking Jerusalem, as presented in Isa 7:6, would not be to convince the king of Judah to join the coalition, but to remove him, replacing him with an anti-Assyrian Judahite leader more in tune with the coalition's goals. This goal fits with parallel actions taken by other states in the region in similar circumstances during the Assyrian period.[14] The threat from the anti-Assyrian coalition was not to Judah as a whole, but to Ahaz specifically, a point that is of great importance in understanding our passage.

There is no reason to doubt the report in 2 Kgs 16:7–8 that Ahaz appealed for aid to Tiglath-pileser III, but it would be stretching a point to argue that Ahaz's payment of tribute was a decisive factor in the Assyrian decision to undertake a campaign against Israel. Geo-strategic considerations, including deterring future rebels, clearly have figured far more prominently in Assyria's calculations than Judah's tribute.

Tiglath-pileser III 42), and 202, Summary Inscription 13, line 18′ (parallel to RINAP 1:112, Tiglath-pileser III 44). The former also indicates that he was replaced by Hoshea, and the passage about sparing the city of Samaria appears in the latter.

13. Bustenay Oded, "The Historical Background of the Syro-Ephraimite War Reconsidered," *CBQ* 34 (1972): 153–65.

14. A similar step was undertaken by Hezekiah during the 705–701 revolt against Assyria, when he held Padi, king of Ekron, prisoner in Jerusalem. Padi was pro-Assyrian, and was removed from the kingship by Hezekiah and/or anti-Assyrian elements in Ekron. By keeping him prisoner in Jerusalem, Hezekiah was able to empower "the officials, the nobles, and the people of Ekron" who, like Hezekiah, were in favor of a revolt against Assyria. The citation is from Sennacherib's well-known Rassam cylinder, RINAP 3/1:64, Sennacherib 4, 42–43. We cannot know whether the anti-Assyrian elements in Ekron removed Padi, whether Hezekiah did so, or whether cooperation between Hezekiah and the local anti-Assyrian elements resulted in his removal. The last possibility seems most likely.

In 734 BCE, Assyria began its campaigns to the southern Levant with a campaign that sought to separate Philistia from Egypt.[15] As a result of this campaign, many kingdoms of the southern Levant paid tribute to Assyria, and these included Judah, Edom, Moab, Ammon, Gaza, and Ashkelon. (It is difficult to know if Ahaz paid tribute before 734 or if 734 was his first tribute.[16]) Based on this reconstruction, we now move to examine Ahaz's actions.

It was clearly against Ahaz and Judah's best interests to join the anti-Assyrian coalition. But was paying tribute to Assyria advisable? Payment secured Ahaz's place on the throne, but appears opposed to the long-term interest of Judah. By 734–733, it was clear that the kingdoms that paid tribute to Assyria and then ceased to do so (such as Israel and Aram-Damascus) would suffer crushing defeats, destruction, and exile when Assyria finished its military activities in other regions and arrived to settle accounts. In contrast, kingdoms that had previously not paid tribute were not treated as harshly when Assyria arrived in the region. This long-range view lies at the basis of much of the critique of Ahaz's actions found in Isa 7:1–8:18.

This distinction between rebels and kingdoms that had not previously submitted may be demonstrated by the story of Hanunu king of Gaza, who was never tributary to Assyria before 734. Upon the arrival of Tiglath-pileser III, he escaped to Egypt, presumably to seek Egyptian aid. After he apparently failed to do so, the Assyrians permitted him to return to Gaza and to rule there as a vassal.[17] The story of Hanunu also demonstrates that the primary local beneficiary of the tribute was the king, whose position was assured by the tribute. The amounts demanded in tribute were very heavy. The tribute imposed a financial burden, which created a built-in incentive for the kingdom to cease paying tribute. When Israel and Aram accepted this incentive, they suffered heavily. How long would Judah be able to resist a similar incentive, once it began paying? Advising Judah to refrain from paying tribute to Assyria for as long as possible may have been astute, rather than naïve, political advice, as some have implied.[18]

We cannot know whether a neutral position, joining neither the anti-Assyrian coalition nor submitting to Assyria, was open to Judah in 734. We note the absence of two of Judah's neighbours, Ashdod and Ekron, from the 734

15. For discussion of the reasons for this campaign, see Peter Dubovský, "Tiglath-pileser III's Campaigns in 734-732 BC: Historical Background of Isa 7; 2 Kgs 15-16 and 2 Chr 27-28," *Bib* (2006): 153–70; and below in the discussion of Isa 19.

16. Tadmor, *The Inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III,* 277.

17. While the treatment of Hanunu may also be related to the special role of Gaza in trade, this policy of accepting the submission and tribute of those who had not previously submitted is found throughout the Assyrian royal inscriptions.

18. See the scholars cited by Irvine, *Isaiah, Ahaz, and the Syro-Ephraimitic Crisis,* 8.

tribute list. (The list is fragmentary and it is difficult to reach any definitive conclusions from their absence.[19]) Judah differed from all of the states mentioned in the tribute list in that no major international trade routes passed through her territory, and her distance from the international trading system would have made control of Judah less attractive to Assyria than control of some other kingdoms, including those in Transjordan, through which the Arabian trade routes passed. These points suggest, but do not prove, that Judah might have remained neutral.

Clearly, though, what was in Ahaz's immediate best interest was not necessarily in the long-term best interest of Judah's population. For Ahaz, tribute to Assyria offered protection from the threat of removal and replacement by the members of the anti-Assyrian coalition. But this same tribute created a serious and severe long-term threat to Judah. Ahaz's vassalage also changed the nature of the relationship between Judah and its king. The king was no longer responsible to the population. He became an appointee of a foreign power, responsible for extracting wealth from the population and transmitting it to Assyria. From the point of view of the population, a vassal king was essentially an Assyrian tax-farmer.

2. Political Advice in Isaiah 7:1-16

The message the prophet delivers to Ahaz in Isa 7:1–16 relates specifically to the historical background presented above. While this passage does not contain motifs I can identify as Assyrian, it demonstrates knowledge of the eighth-century political realities, and does not fit well as a text composed at the end

19. The list is cited in footnote 6, above. These kingdoms were closer than Judah to the coastal region, where much of Assyrian activity was concentrated. If they indeed refrained from bringing tribute, it would appear that Assyria was willing to accept states in the southern Levant that were not tributary to Assyria, as long as they refrained from hostile political activity. SAA 19:10–11, no. 8 makes it clear, however, that at some point in the reign of Tiglath-pileser III, Ashdod sent tribute-bearing ambassadors to Tiglath-pileser III: see Luukko, *The Correspondence of Tiglath-pileser III and Sargon II*, 10. The letter is written by the king's son Ululaia, later Shalmaneser V. Ashdod's vassal status may also be attested in SAA 19:35, no. 28 (where the city name is broken). The vassal status of Ekron is attested by SAA 19:177, no. 178, which speaks of two emissaries from Ekron and possibly of messengers from Gaza, but we do not know whether this letter dates from the reign of Tiglath-pileser III. The name of the sender of the letter is broken and contains only the broken LUGAL sign; if this was sent by Šarru-duri, governor of Calah, then it would date from the period of Tiglath-pileser III. By the reign of Sargon II, Ashdod and Ekron were certainly tributary, as we see from SAA 1:92–93, no. 110. But this does not necessarily teach us about the reality in 734.

of the seventh century or later, as De Jong and Kaiser have argued.[20] Examining the passage in light of its historical background (and not only in light of the narrative in 2 Kings) shows this. Furthermore, the political views expressed in 7:1–16 are key to understanding subsequent passages (7:18–20, 8:5–8, 8:11–13), which do indeed deploy motifs known from Assyrian royal inscriptions.

Isaiah 7:1–16 consist of two oracles delivered to Ahaz, one in 7:1–9 and one in 7:10–16 (which may extend to verse 17 as well). Although the former contains the encouraging phrase "Fear not" (7:4), and the latter contains a critique of the king, there is no reason to see these passages as opposed to each other.[21] The binary view of these passages as supportive or opposed to the Davidic dynasty has led scholars to see them as contradictory. This has led to the redactional conclusion that this passage contains oracles supporting the House of David that were then reworked at a later period into a critique of Ahaz.[22] Below, I interpret the passage based on the political situation and show how the two oracles are complementary.

Verses 1–9 clearly relate primarily to the Syro-Ephraimite conflict, but appear to recognize the larger context of this attack, and the question of an alternative alliance with Assyria. As noted above, Isa 7:5 states that the goal of the Syro-Ephraimite attack on Judah was to replace Ahaz. The threat presented by this attack was to the person of the king, not the kingdom. The prophet offers very specific advice in 7:4, alongside the general "Fear not" formulation: השמר והשקט, best translated as "refrain from activity, and keep calm."[23] Scholars have discussed the "fear not" formulation extensively, and have noted parallel formulations found in many oracles directed at kings in the ancient Near East.[24] However, these oracles differ from the formu-

20. De Jong, *Isaiah Among the Ancient Near Eastern Prophets*, 63; and Kaiser, *Isaiah 1-12: A Commentary*, 138. Both see the passage as composed close to the period of the exile.

21. The formulation "Fear not!" frequently appears in encouraging oracles delivered to the king prior to war in the ancient Near East, and is found in this context in the Zakkur inscription and in Assyrian prophecies. For a full discussion, see below.

22. Kaiser sees the admonitions of 7:4 as "rooted in the Deuteronomic-Deuteronomistic preaching of war." But the phrase "Fear not" already appears in oracles to kings in the ancient Near East in the eighth century, as noted above. The imperative השקט (be calm) may well be, as Kaiser argues, related to the similar phrase in Isa 30:15. But 30:15 is not, as Kaiser argues there, "at best a late pre-exilic reflection." It rather reflects and reworks an Assyrian formulation: see Kevin J. Cathcart, "Isaiah 30:15 בשובה ונחת and Akkadian *šubat neḫti/ šubtu neḫtu*, Quiet Abode," in *Let Us Go Up to Zion: Essays in Honour of H. G. M. Williamson on the Occasion of His Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, VTSup 153, ed. Ian Provan and Mark J. Boda (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 45–56.

23. See Wagner, *Gottes Herrschaft,* 127–44.

24. The imperative השמר throughout biblical Hebrew, often in conjunction with פן,

lation in Isa 7:4–9 in an important way. Many of these oracles, such as that delivered to Zakkur of Hamath, encourage the king to go to war against his enemies. Others, including some delivered to Esarhaddon of Assyria, promise that the divinity will "deliver up the enemy of the king of Assyria for slaughter."[25] These oracles promise either success in (an apparently offensive) war, as in the case of Zakkur, or defense from enemies, as in several of the oracles to Esarhaddon. But none of these extra-biblical oracles seek to dissuade the king from activity, as Isa 7:4 does.[26] The oracle in Isa 7:4 is unique in combining formulations: "Fear not, refrain from activity and keep calm." It diverges from the standard type of "Fear not" oracle in order to relate not only to the threat posed by the Syro-Ephraimite attack, but also to the wider political situation, in which the alliance with Assyria loomed large. The most obvious way for Ahaz to protect himself against the Syro-Ephraimite alliance was to become a vassal of Assyria, and it is against such a move that the warning "refrain from activity and keep calm" is directed. Each of the two imperatives in 7:4 relates to one of the political options at hand. "Fear not" is directed against the Syro-Ephraimite threat, and "refrain from activity and keep calm" against joining any alliance.

The subsequent parts of the oracle, Isa 7:8a, 9a, each seek to reduce the level of fear that Ahaz feels from his Syro-Ephraimite opponents. They do this by reducing each of the opposing states to its capital, and its capital to its leader, thus implying that the state is only as strong as its leader, who can be swept away in an internal revolt.

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refers to refraining from a given activity (cf. Gen 31:24; Ex 10:28; Deut 4:9, 8:11, 15:9; 2 Kgs 6:9). See the discussion in Irvine, *Isaiah, Ahaz, and the Syro-Ephraimite Crisis,* 150 n. 61.

25. The oracle to Zakkur is recorded in the Zakkur inscription, discovered at Afis near Hamath, published in Herbert Donner and Wolfgang Röllig, *Kanaanäische und aramäische Inschriften,* 5th ed. (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2002), 1:47–48, inscription 202. The oracles to Esarhaddon are published in SAA 9: 5, collection 1, col i, lines 30–31.

26. Several of the oracles to Esarhaddon mention that the goddess Ishtar will keep the king safe and mention his role in the succession. A completion to column i in the collection cited above results in the following: "[I will] keep you safe and [make] you [great in] your Palace of Succession" (p. 5, col i, line 33′). A similar completion occurs in collection 2 (p. 15, col ii, line 2): "As for [you, stay] in your palace; I will [reconcile] Assyria with you. I will protect [you] by day and by dawn and [consolidate] your crown." In these cases, the mention of staying in the palace does not indicate that the king ought to refrain from military activity, but that he will not lose his right to the crown. In these passages, and in many others in the Assyrian royal inscriptions, the "palace of succession" is a metaphor for the position of heir to the throne. In political parlance, this "palace" parallels the position of the Prince of Wales and Duke of Rothesay in the United Kingdom, a position traditionally accorded to the heir to the throne.

(8) כי ראש ארם דמשק וראש דמשק רצין

For the head of Aram is Damascus, and the head of Damascus is Rezin ...[27]

(9) וראש אפרים שמרון וראש שמרון בן-רמליהו

And the head of Ephraim is Samaria, and the head of Samaria is the son of Remaliah ...

This reduction corresponds to the substantive threat of "regime change," which the Syro-Ephraimite attack poses to Ahaz. Just as Ahaz fears that he can be replaced by another as king of Judah, so too can the opposing kings be dethroned and replaced (as happened most recently in the kingdom of Israel). Isa 7:8a reminds Ahaz that the great Aram whom he fears is only Damascus, a part of the historic grouping of Aram,[28] and that all he fears is a single leader. This implies that the leader can be replaced, and a similar charge is made in relation to Ephraim in Isa 7:9a. The oracle has been labelled as "pro-Davidic" by many scholars,[29] but its rhetorical thrust is not to promise Divine support for the Davidic monarchy, but to reassure Ahaz that there is reason neither to fear the attack nor to seek alliances in the current political constellation.

Isa 7:10–16, however, relates not to the threat from the Syro-Ephraimite coalition, but only to the threat posed to Judah by Assyria. The tone of 7:11–13, in which the prophet seems to sneer at the king, suggests that the king has disregarded the prophet's advice. Although Irvine is correct in noting that the speeches provide no explicit evidence that Isaiah has rejected Ahaz, the tone of 7:11–7:13 is clearly mocking, and differs markedly from the robust and encouraging tone used in 7:4.[30] The simplest explanation of the change in tone is that between the oracle of 7:1–9 and that of 7:10–16, Ahaz has taken a decision and submitted to Assyria. It is important to note that the text does not present 7:10–16 as a continuation of the same "event" at the end of the upper pool channel narrated in 7:3–6. 7:10–16 narrate a separate event, as indicated by the opening verb ויוסף.[31] Although the narrative is

27. The remainder of verse 8, which I do not treat here, is widely considered a later gloss.

28. The term "Aram" was used in this period to refer to territory as far north as Arpad; see the Sefire stele lines I A 5–6.

29. See the scholars cited by Irvine, *Isaiah, Ahaz, and the Syro-Ephraimitic Crisis*, 9, 148–59, and especially von Rad and Wolff's discussion of holy war in this context.

30. Irvine, *Isaiah, Ahaz, and the Syro-Ephraimitic Crisis,* 15.

31. Although the verb sometimes indicates repetition of a previous action, it does not indicate a continuity of narrative time. We see this from Num 22:15; 2 Sam 24:1; et al.

continuous from 7:9 to 7:10, the event is not, and it appears that in the time gap between the first and second oracle, the submission to Assyria takes place. The prophet's mocking tone in 7:13 is based on opposition to this step, and on recognition that Ahaz took this step with disregard for the counsel in 7:4. By 733, as discussed above, it was clear that accepting Assyrian vassalage might benefit the king in the short-term, but would not be in the long-term interest of the population.

3. The Sign in Isaiah 7:14–16

The "sign" presented in 7:14–16 and explicated further in 7:21–25 addresses the consequences of accepting Assyrian vassal status. Like the oracle in 6:11–12, this sign argues that exile is the unavoidable long-term consequence of vassal status.

Identifying the sign in this oracle is critical to understanding its message. Perhaps because the sign was interpreted typologically by early Christianity, some modern commentators still focus on the birth of the child as the substance of the sign, and others see the name given to the child as the sign's distinguishing feature.[32] Put differently, they see 7:14 as the essence of the sign and 7:15 as a later addition. But a sign must refer to some unusual and unexpected element. And if one accepts that 7:14 does not refer to virgin birth, then the substantive and unusual element of the sign is not the child's birth (or even his name), but his diet. As I discuss below, the diet described in 7:15–16 is highly unusual. This diet cannot be seen as a later addition, for it is the essence of the sign. (The expansion of 7:15–16 in 7:21–25 also seems original to the passage, as I discuss below).

(15) חמאה ודבש יאכל לדעתו מאוס ברע ובחור בטוב
(16) כי בטרם ידע הנער מאס ברע ובחר בטוב
תֵּעָזֵב האדמה אשר אתה קץ מפני שני מלכיה

32. Irvine, *Isaiah, Ahaz, and the Syro-Ephraimitic Crisis,* 170, who sees the child as representing an heir to the Davidic dynasty; Andrew H. Bartelt, *The Book Around Immanuel: Style and Structure in Isaiah 2-12,* Biblical and Judaic Studies 4 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1996), 115, who focuses on the name Immanuel. Wildberger (*Isaiah 1-12*), 314, also sees verse 15 as the addition of a redactor. See also the complex redactional scheme proposed by Kaiser, *Isaiah 1-12*, 153–60, who sees most of verses 15 and 16 as secondary glosses. He sees the essence of the sign as the announcement of the birth of a son to a specific woman, but this is not supported by the text, which does not identify the עלמה.

(15) Curds and honey he will eat, for his knowing to reject evil and chose good.

(16) For before the child will know to reject evil and choose good,[33]
the land with whose two kings you are disgusted[34] will be abandoned.

The meaning of the oracle is made clear by verse 16, which is an original part of the oracle. It is simply not correct to argue that curds and honey are the "normal soft diet of infants."[35] We have no evidence to suggest that either honey or curds were part of the normal diet of anyone in ancient Israel. On the contrary, the ability to eat bee honey would depend on the chance finding of a bee hive, and the production of both honey from excess dates and curds from excess dairy products would depend on the existence of a substantial excess that could not be consumed before it would spoil.[36] Normal diets in ancient Israel consisted primarily of grain products, with the addition of olives (primarily in the form of oil) and the standard fruits, especially figs and in some regions also pomegranates, grapes, and dates. Nor are honey and curds "nomadic fare."[37] The true meaning of the child consuming curds and honey is made clear in 7:16: the abandonment of the land (caused by exiling part of the population) results in an excess of curds and honey. Land formerly used for growing crops became grazing land, resulting in an excess of milk products, and the absence of cultivation and disturbance from humans attract bees who build hives.[38]

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33. The verse probably refers to the child reaching the age of moral judgment, perhaps at the age of six or seven years. This sense of טוב and רע is clear in Isa 5:20 and Amos 5:14. It seems less likely that it refers to a younger age when the child will begin "to express its likes and dislikes, especially regarding various foods" (Irvine, *Isaiah, Ahaz, and the Syro-Ephraimitic Crisis,* 171). See also Victor Avigdor Hurowitz, "The Mesopotamian God Image, from Womb to Tomb," *JAOS* 123.1 (2003): 147–57, here 152 n. 18, who understands these verses as referring to the child's taste.

34. This translation is consistent with the use of the phrase קץ מפני in Gen 27:46 and Num 22:4.

35. Irvine, *Isaiah, Ahaz, and the Syro-Ephraimitic Crisis,* 171.

36. Although large scale bee-keeping is attested in recent archeological finds from Tel Rehov in Iron II, it seems to be restricted to the elite: see Amichai Mazar and Nava Panitz-Cohen, "It is the Land of Honey: Beekeeping at Tel Rehov," *NEA* 70.4 (2007): 202. Different forms of preserving excess milk are attested, as in חרצי החלב in 1 Sam 17:18, but curds were something of a delicacy, as in this verse and in Gen 18:8 and Judg 5:25.

37. Irvine, *Isaiah, Ahaz, and the Syro-Ephraimitic Crisis*, 166 n. 20 and bibliography cited therein.

38. It is relevant to note that this may not be solely a theoretical idea. The transition of crop land into grazing land may well be attested in the Assyrian administrative records, which record how land near Megiddo was used for grazing wool-bearing

This meaning of the sign of curds and honey is elaborated further by 7:21–25, which cannot be separated from the meaning of the sign in 7:15–16. Although most commentators see all or part of these verses as later additions to the text, 7:21–25 explain the only possible meaning of the "curds and honey" statement that fits with the reality of ancient agricultural life, and these verses seem to stem from the same source as 7:15–16.[39] Despite the pleasant taste of honey, the sign in 7:15–16 is not a positive one. Even a brief consideration of the meaning of a child eating curds and honey "in a short time" will show that this phrase refers to exile and abandonment of the land. The land that is to be abandoned is that of "the kings with whom Ahaz has become disgusted"—that is, Rezin and Pekah.

The exile of those who previously threatened him might appear to be a positive development for Ahaz. But the historical survey above shows that the destruction, exile, and conquest of the territories of Israel and Damascus carry a warning for Judah. Those lands were devastated because their kings had become vassals to Tiglath-pileser III and had subsequently repudiated their vassal status. Enticed by Assyria's temporary absence from the southern Levant in the years 737–735, they had repudiated their vassal status and ceased remitting the difficult and heavy annual tribute to Assyria. Judah, an Assyrian vassal, would certainly experience similar difficulties, and would therefore cease making tribute payments. When it did so, the fate of Israel and Aram would be its fate. The destruction and exile of Aram and especially of northern Israel serve here as a warning to Judah.

Interestingly, the sign and its meaning, as mentioned in 7:16, share a rhetorical characteristic. At first glance, the sign (the eating of curds and honey) and meaning (the exile of Aram-Damascus and Israel) appear to be

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sheep after 732, when much of the population was deported and the region became an Assyrian province. SAA 7:125, no. 116 records wool payments from this region, which had previously been the most productive agricultural land in the kingdom of Israel. See further Baruch Halpern, "Centre and Sentry: Megiddo's Role in Transit, Administration and Trade," in *Megiddo III: Seasons 1992-96,* ed. Israel Finkelstein, David Ussishkin, and Baruch Halpern (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 2000), 535–77, here 564.

39. For the tendency to see all or parts of these verses as late, see Irvine, *Isaiah, Ahaz, and the Syro-Ephraimitic Crisis*, 171, who assigns verses 21–22 to a late editor; Wildberger, *Isaiah 1-12*, 326–27, who regards verses 23–25 as too stylistically cumbersome to originate from Isaiah, and argues that 23–24a stem from a redactor while 24b and 25 are the work of a later glossator; Vermeylen, *Du prophète Isaïe à l'apocalyptique,* 222 regards verses 23–25 as late and verses 21–22 as still later. While it is entirely possible that some parts of these verses are later glosses, the verses as a whole explain the only possible meaning of the sign, and I see no compelling reason to date them to a later writer. These verses do not contain a *relecture* of verses 15–16, as Vermeylen argues, but represent the only logical meaning of the sign.

positive developments. Honey tastes good, curds are desirable food, and the exile of those who threatened Judah might be positive for Judah. But several moments of pondering both the sign and its meaning show that both are actually threatening to Judah. The sign indicates that a child in Judah will eat the fare of an exiled land, and the meaning of the sign is a threat to Judah that its fate may not differ from that of Israel and Aram-Damascus.

4. The Warning in Isaiah 7:17

The last three words of 7:17, often considered a later addition to the text, make the threat of an Assyrian invasion of Judah explicit.[40] My reasons for considering these words of 7:17 as original relate to my analysis of 7:18–20 and are discussed further below. But in order to follow the order of the text, I briefly explain 7:17 first.

> יביא י' עליך ועל עמך ועל בית אביך ימים אשר לא באו למיום סור אפרים מעל יהודה
> את מלך אשור

> God will bring upon you and upon your troops[41] and upon your father's house days which have not come since Ephraim departed from upon Judah. He will bring[42] the king of Assyria.

Like the sign and the meaning mentioned in previous verses, 7:17 begins with an apparently positive message: Ahaz and those loyal to the Davidic house will experience days unlike any in the time of the divided monarchy. The prediction appears positive for Ahaz and the House of David, since it seems to predict a reversal of the division in the monarchy.[43] But the prediction is ambiguous, and the nature of the "days" is not defined. The last three words then make explicit the comparison between Judah and Israel, which is implicit in the previous verses: like Israel, Judah will be invaded

40. Most commentators consider the last three words as a later addition: see Irvine, *Isaiah, Ahaz, and the Syro-Ephraimitic Crisis*, 15, 167; Vermeylen, *Du Prophète Isaïe à l'Apocalyptique*, 201 n. 2; Wildberger, *Isaiah 1-12*, 315.

41. This translation follows the use of עם in 7:2 to refer to those closest to Ahaz. עם refers to troops loyal to a king in 2 Sam 12:31b, 16:14, 17:3, and throughout the Absalom narrative.

42. The Hebrew does not contain the words "He will bring" but does contain the direct object marker, clearly showing that what He will bring is the king of Assyria. It is difficult to render this clearly in English without repeating the subject and verb.

43. The formulation בא על usually precedes a threat, as in Gen 20:9; Deut 28:19, 30:1; 2 Chron 20:12; and this implies a negative aspect to the prediction.

by Assyria, and will share the inevitable fate of any Assyrian vassal who fails to provide the very high tribute exacted. The first part of the verse emphasizes the benefits to Ahaz and the House of David specifically, while the negative impact of the verse including its last three words will be felt by Judah as a whole. This contrast echoes that in 7:4–7 and 7:16, which imply a gap between political results that are beneficial for Ahaz personally and those that harm Judah as a whole in the long-term.

The eventual Assyrian invasion promised in these last three verses is a natural and inevitable result of Ahaz's entry into Assyrian vassalage. But it is also understood here as a specific divinely-sent punishment, directed at Ahaz for becoming an Assyrian vassal. This is one manifestation of a widespread tendency in Isa 1–39 to portray or interpret events that seem part of the natural political order as though they were divinely-ordained.[44]

5. Reworking Assyrian Motifs and Ideology in Isaiah 7:18-20

The threat of an Assyrian invasion of Judah, made explicit in 7:17b, is also made clear in the oracles of 7:18–19, 20. It is often claimed that these are late.[45] The reasons cited for this assessment include the formula "On that day," which are understood as editorial introductions to secondary material, and the shift to third-person language in these verses, from the second person language in the preceding ones.[46] It is quite clear that these verses do begin a new literary unit and that 7:18 indicates a break in narrative continuity. But this does not indicate a post-Assyrian date for these verses. As I show below, 7:20 reworks an Assyrian motif and argues against Assyrian imperial ideology, and the motif in 7:18–19 may also do this. This precludes these verses' composition post-dating the Assyrian period. While we cannot prove that they relate precisely to the period of Tiglath-pileser's 733–732 campaign, this remains a strong possibility, as discussed below. If these verses in fact belong to the eighth-century core of the book, then there is little reason to view 7:17b, with its explicit threat of an Assyrian invasion, as late.

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44. For more on the concept of "dual causality," in which an event is seen in biblical narrative as having natural and divine causes simultaneously, see Yairah Amit, "The Dual Causality Principle and its Effects on Biblical Literature," *VT* 37 (1987): 385–400. For the application of this principle to prophetic narratives, see chapter 6.

45. Vermeylen, *Du Prophète Isaïe à l'Apocalyptique*, 222; Kaiser (*Isaiah 1-12*, 173) argues that while this section may rely on earlier material, it revises it so as to fit into the period preceding 586 BCE. De Jong (*Isaiah Among the Ancient Near Eastern Prophets,* 80) also assigns to this section (with the exception of verse 20) a later date.

46. Sweeney, *Isaiah 1-39*, 154; Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1-39*, 235.

Let us move now to an exploration of the Assyrian motifs in 7:18-19 and 7:20. Although the motif in 7:20 is more certain, I follow the order of the text and discuss 7:18-19 first.

(18) והיה ביום ההוא ישרק י' לזבוב אשר בקצה יארי מצרים
ולדבורה אשר בארץ אשור

(19) ובאו ונחו כלם בנחלי הַבְּתוֹת ובנקיקי הסלעים ובכל הנעצוצים ובכל הנהללים

(18) On that day, God will hiss to the fly that is at the edge of the channels of Egypt

And to the bee that is in the land of Assyria

(19) And they will come and all camp in the abandoned valleys[47] and in the clefts of the rocks and all the thorn bushes and in all the watering places.[48]

The motif in these verses is extremely strange and raises several questions. Among these are the use of the bee and the fly as symbols for Assyria and Egypt. The use of the fly as a symbol for Egypt is suggested by its river channels,[49] but there is no clearly apparent reason for bees to be used as a symbol of Assyria. In trying to find such a reason, Roberts has noted the cultivation of bees in the mountains to the north and northeast of Assyria.[50] But we now know from the Rehov excavations that the bees cultivated in the Land of Israel in the ninth century (for their honey and/or wax) were brought from Anatolia, the bees native to Syria and the Land of Israel being too aggressive for bee-culture. Bees had to be brought on a regular basis from Anatolia to ensure viable hives.[51] The Anatolian origin of the bees makes it difficult to understand them as symbolizing Assyria.

Even more difficult than the mention of the bees is the root used to attract the bees, שר״ק, usually translated "whistle." Wildberger cites sources

47. Understanding בתות from בתה, as in Isa 5:6, following Samuel David Luzzato, *Commentary to the Book of Isaiah* (Tel-Aviv: Dvir, 1970), 80 (Hebrew translation of the Italian publication in Padua 1855–1897).

48. The meaning of נהלל is uncertain, but context suggests taking it from the root נה"ל, which refers to leading of grazing animals in Isa 40:11; and in a metaphor based on leading cattle in Isa 49:10 and in 2 Chron 32:22.

49. Roberts, *First Isaiah*, 126. In his earlier work (ET 1972, 108), Kaiser proposes that the addition of Egypt here is secondary.

50. Roberts, *First Isaiah*, 126.

51. Guy Bloch, Tiago M. Francoy, Ido Wachtel, Nava Panitz-Cohen, Stefan Fuchs, and Amihai Mazar, "Industrial Apiculture in the Jordan Valley during Biblical Times with Anatolian Honeybees," *PNAS* 107 (2010): 11240–44.

from classical literature describing how bees are attracted by striking metal against metal,[52] but this clanging metallic noise is not that suggested by שר״ק. In the Hebrew Bible, שר״ק refers to a non-verbal noise made with the mouth. It is used in two main senses. In Isa 5:26 and in Zech 10:8, it refers to a noise made to call together a group of people, on the basis of which Bible translators use the meaning "whistle." But in a larger number of verses, it is used, often together with שמ״ם (astonish), to express wonder at a surprising and depressing sight. It is used in this way in 1 Kgs 9:8, Jer 19:8, 49:17, 50:13, Lam 2:15–16, Ezek 27:35–36, and Zeph 2:15. In these verses, the translation "whistle" seems less appropriate, and the verb refers to the noise of sudden sharp exhaling made by a person who beholds a shocking sight. (In colloquial language, this is often represented as "pshhhh!") The root שר״ק can refer to a variety of non-verbal noises made with the mouth, and it is difficult to pin down a single translation in English.

None of this, however, helps explain how or why such a noise would be used or effective in attracting bees or flies. I know of no biblical or extra-biblical parallels describing such a noise as a means of calling such insects. This appears to be a "blind motif," a motif that makes little sense in the current context. Therefore, it might derive from a different context, into which it fits more logically. A second unusual feature in the verse, which also calls for explanation, is the description of the bee settling in "the abandoned valleys" and (probably) in pastures (נהלולים). These two features, the bee and the "abandoned valleys," are found together in a motif that recurs in several Neo-Assyrian royal inscriptions. These suggest a possible context from which the concatenation of motifs in 7:18–19 derives.

To understand this context, it is first necessary to note that the Akkadian verb *ḫbb* describes non-verbal voices such as both chirping and buzzing. Since it describes a non-verbal voice, it is similar in meaning to the Hebrew root שר״ק. It is used in reference to the noise that both birds and flies make,[53] and is rendered into English as "buzz" in many contexts.[54] This Akkadian verb is also the source of one Akkadian noun for bee, *ḫabubītu*—which literally means "buzzer." Imagery containing this root also has other similarities to the imagery in this verse.

52. Wildberger, *Isaiah 1-12,* 322–23.

53. See the literary text concerning Ishtar VAT 9728 republished in Irene E. Riegner, *The Vanishing Hebrew Harlot: The Adventures of the Hebrew Stem znh*, Studies in Biblical Literature 73 (New York: Peter Lang, 2009) 35, line 51, for references to birds; for flies, see tablet K3200: Reginald Campbell Thompson, *The Epic of Gilgamesh* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1930), 91, pl. 59 line 12. Not regarding this as part of the epic, George did not include it in his edition.

54. CAD R 319.

The verb from which *ḫabubītu* derives is used in Assyrian imagery to describe an action that the king makes in abandoned valleys and pastures, locations that parallel the locations of the bees and flies in Isa 7:19. This action appears in the inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III and Sennacherib.

Tiglath-pileser III claims that he caused the Patti-Enlil canal, which was previously abandoned and filled up with dirt, to "buzz" with water when he repaired the canal.

> *Patti-* [*Enlil*] *ultu ūmē rūqūti nadâtma aḫrēma ina qerbiša ušaḫbiba mê nuḫše*
>
> I dug out the Patti-Enlil canal which had been abandoned since far-away days, and made an abundance of water gurgle through it.[55]

The digging of canals was considered an important royal activity in Assyria, and was particularly emphasized in Sennacherib's inscriptions.[56] The following lines appear in a titulary of Sennacherib:

> *mušaḫrû nārāti pētû miṭrāti*
> *mušaḫbib pattāti*
> *šākin nuḫšu u ṭuḫdu ina ugārī māt aššur rapšūti*
> *mukīn mê šīqāti ina qarbāti māt aššur*[57]
>
> The one who digs canals and opens streams
> the one who makes watercourses gush,
> the one who establishes abundance and plenty in the wide plains of Assyria,
> the one who provides irrigation water in the meadows of Assyria

The subsequent lines describe how in previous generations these canals were not used. These passages do not refer to bees. However, in them the Assyrian king uses the verb that gives the animal "bee" its name to describe his canal-building activity. More specifically, he describes how he caused water to "buzz" (or "gurgle" or "bubble," all of which refer to non-verbal noises) into abandoned watercourses. They provide an interesting contrast to Isa 7:18–19, in which God summons the king of Assyria by making a non-verbal noise.

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55. In Tadmor, *The Inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III, 42,* annal 9, lines 4–5, corresponding to RINAP 1:27, Tiglath-pileser III 5. The translation follows the latter reference, and in the former "bubble through it" appears. The difference illustrates the difficulty of translating this verb.

56. RINAP 3/1:144, Sennacherib 17, col. viii, line 30, and RINAP 3/1:159, Sennacherib 18, col. viii, line 5′.

57. RINAP 3/2: 247, Sennacherib 168, lines 11–14.

There are several elements similar to both Isa 7:18–19 and the inscriptions cited above: the non-verbal noise, which is unexplained in the biblical text; the call to fill abandoned valleys and pasture-land with something that makes such a buzzing noise; and the reference to the bee, which appears explicitly in 7:19 and which takes one of its Akkadian names from the verb used for the sound of water in the canals. These parallels suggest that the Assyrian motif might possibly be the source of the imagery in our verse. If this is so, then we find an interesting example of subversion, centering on the idea of "buzzing." The king, who vaunts himself on causing the buzzing in abandoned watercourses and valleys, is subjected in Isa 7:18–19 to God, who makes a buzzing noise. Almost involuntarily (like a bee), the king responds to the noise God makes, and follows this noise into the same abandoned valleys and pasture-places in which he in his inscriptions causes water to gurgle. The noise the king causes becomes the noise to which he responds.

This is an interesting and complex suggestion, which would explain the difficult reference to שר״ק as a means of calling animals in Isa 7:18–19. As Albright noted, when we compare two similar motifs and consider whether they share a common origin, complex motifs are less likely to have been independently generated than simpler ones. Simple motifs are more ubiquitous and therefore the presence of two such similar motifs is less likely to attest to a common origin than two more complex similar motifs. The complex motifs are more likely to share a common origin because they are less likely to have been independently derived.[58] This note has obvious implications for comparing Isa 7:18–19 to the Assyrian passages noted above. The suggestion that the motif in Isa 7:18–19 derives from the Assyrian royal inscriptions describing canal building explains two of the unusual features in the verse: the nature of the call and the locations in which the bee and fly settle. However, because this suggestion is novel and untested, and because of the absence of any explicit reference to bees in the Assyrian texts, I hesitate to make a firm statement in this regard.

This view of the king as subjected to God, and as responding to God's call, is obvious in the verse, and exists without reference to the Assyrian motif. But the comparison to the Assyrian motif adds rhetorical emphasis to this view.

Isaiah 7:18–19 does not only mention Assyria but also Egypt. Several scholars take the words אֲשֶׁר בִּקְצֵה יְאֹרֵי מִצְרָיִם as referring to "the source of the rivers of Egypt," and see it as a likely reference to Ethiopia.[59] But the word קצה refers to either "end" of an object (as in Ex 26:28), and here can refer

58. William Foxwell Albright, *From the Stone Age to Christianity* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1957), 67.

59. Wildberger, *Isaiah 1-12,* 323; Irvine, *Isaiah, Ahaz, and the Syro-Ephraimitic Crisis,* 172–73.

equally well to the Nile Delta as to its Ethiopian source.[60] In understanding the passage, it is helpful to note that the Divine call goes out equally to "the fly" and to "the bee" and that both act in concert.[61] This would suggest that the verse refers to a period when Assyria (the bee) and elements in the delta or in Ethiopia (the fly) could be expected to act in concert in dominating the land of Israel.[62] Such a political constellation emerged in the period of the Syro-Ephraimite crisis, more precisely in 734. In this period, Piankhy, a Nubian king who ruled parts of Egypt, was engaged in a struggle with Tefnakht, a resolutely anti-Assyrian leader in the Egyptian delta.

I present here a short political background, relevant both to this verse and to Isa 19, which will be discussed later in this chapter. In 734, Tiglath-pileser III launched his first campaign to the southern Levant, elements of which were directly connected to Piankhy's struggle, as we shall see below. Rather than attacking the rebels in Israel, Aram-Damascus, or Tyre, Tiglath-pileser III first attacked Philistia, and campaigned at Gaza. Gaza was the pivot-point linking Philistia to Egypt, and an important port. As Tadmor noted, this campaign was directed at dominating the Mediterranean seaports.[63] But while there were Assyrian land-based traders representing imperial interests (known as *tamkāru*) present in the region, Assyria did not dominate the trade by sending its personnel on boats; its domination of trade was expressed primarily in exercising a certain degree of political control over the ports themselves. Many actions mentioned in Tiglath-pileser's inscriptions as undertaken by Assyria in Philistia in 734 express this desire for political control, and one of them is the famous statement that Assyria turned Gaza into a *bīt kāri* (lit.: "port house").[64] Such an "emporium" (Tadmor's translation) allowed Assyria to determine which elements in Egypt could profit from the lucrative trading possibilities at Gaza. The founding of this "emporium," at which Assyria controlled the land-based trade, "enabl[ed] Piankhy to defeat Tefnakht, subdue the Eastern Delta, and

60. See Kaiser in one of the earlier editions of *Isaiah 1-12* (ET 1972, 108).

61. This point is underlined by the view of some scholars that the words "that is in the land of Egypt" are a later addition. For this view, and relevant references, see Irvine, *Isaiah, Ahaz, and the Syro-Ephraimitic Crisis,* 173 n. 139.

62. This makes it difficult to sustain the view of Vermeylen (*Du Prophète Isaïe à l'Apocalyptique*, 222) that the passage refers to the events of 701, when Egypt and Assyria were opposed. In that event, Egypt entered the country only to block Assyria, not to dominate the southern Levant. It is therefore difficult to understand the reference to the fly of Egypt camping throughout the country as referring to Egypt's actions in 701.

63. Hayim Tadmor, "Philistia under Assyrian Rule," *BA* 29.3 (1966): 86–102, here 88.

64. Tadmor, *The Inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III,* 188–89 (Summary Inscription 9, line 16), 222–30 (excursus). Parallel to RINAP 1, Tiglath-pileser III 49, line rev. 16.

initiate trade contacts with Assyria."[65] Assyria's "emporium" strengthened Piankhy by ensuring that he, rather than anti-Assyrian Tefnakht, profited from the trade that flowed through Gaza. Piankhy prospered as a result, and had the resources to defeat Tefnakht. Piankhy's stele describes the lucrative trade that Piankhy enjoyed with ports throughout the Levant, trade Kahn dates to the years 734–733.[66]

Thus, in the period directly after the Syro-Ephraimite crisis, Assyria and a ruler from Egypt descended on and dominated the southern Levant. Although they acted in concert politically, each expressed control in different ways. Assyria subdued kingdoms and extracted tribute, while Piankhy from Egypt profited from exclusive trading privileges in seaports. Both of these actions circumscribed the control over their own resources that the kingdoms of the southern Levant had previously enjoyed. This interference of outsiders in local economic control of the land seems to be expressed by the metaphor of insects representing these kingdoms camping throughout the land, irritating its inhabitants. The metaphor is particularly apt because in the 734 campaign, neither Egyptians nor Assyrians are clearly known to have destroyed any towns proximate to Judah.[67] Assyria and Egypt both dominated and irked, but did not destroy. The metaphors of flies and bees, which respectively draw blood and sting, express these kingdoms' practice of resource extraction. It therefore appears reasonable to understand Isa 7:18–19 as referring to the period of 734, the period surrounding the Syro-Ephraimite crisis.[68]

These verses express Isaiah's view that God is responsible for bringing Assyrian dominion into the Land of Israel (a dominion expressed here in concert with Egypt). This understanding of the verses holds even if one rejects the specific historic context suggested here.

The subsequent verse, 7:20, expresses this view using a different metaphor, one which is very clearly grounded in the motifs of Assyrian imperial texts and art.

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65. Kahn, "The inscription of Sargon II at Tang-i Var," 17.

66. Piankhy's domination of the Delta did not last long (the years 734–733 here are an approximation). Shortly after his campaign against Tefnakht, he returned to Nubia, and Tefnakht asserted some degree of control over the Delta (ibid., 16–18).

67. We do not know when the conquest of Gezer took place; it may well have formed part of the 733–732 campaigns against Israel and Aram-Damascus.

68. Militating against this date is the statement that the bee and fly will camp "in all the thornbushes and in all the watering places," perhaps implying that Egypt and Assyria were present throughout the land; this was certainly not the case in 734. The presence of Egyptian and Assyrian forces is of course attested in 701 (the events to which Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1-39*, 236, connects these verses), but the imagery of the bee and fly, which bite but cannot kill, fit badly with the very destructive results of that campaign.

(20) ביום ההוא יגלח ה' בתער השכירה בעברי נהר במלך אשור את הראש ושער הרגלים וגם את הזקן תספה

(20) On that day, God will shave the head and the hair of the legs,[69] by means of the hired razor[70] in the Levant, by means of the King of Assyria, and the beard too.
She will be destroyed.[71]

This verse expresses God's use of Assyria. Irvine has noted the difficulty in interpreting the harsh imagery of this verse, questioning the meaning of the "shaving" imagery it contains. "What precisely Isaiah had in mind here is not clear."[72] He suggests that the shaving imagery may be grounded in "an ancient practice of humiliating slaves and prisoners of war by shaving off their hair (see 2 Sam 10:1–15)." While the direction of Irvine's proposal is correct, a more precise explanation is called for.

The imagery does not simply describe shaving beards as an act of humiliation (as in the Ammonite incident cited from 2 Sam 10). Rather, it describes shaving as an act of emasculation, in which not only the beard but the "hair of the legs" is also shaved. The "hired razor" is here identified as the king of Assyria, while the location of the shaving/emasculation is the region known in the Assyrian texts as "Ebir Nari" (lit.: "across the river").[73] Thus, Isa 7:20 refers to the Assyrian king shaving and emasculating unnamed individuals in the Levant.

Recent studies of motifs used in Assyrian imperial propaganda have highlighted the role of gender in metaphors of power. Power is associated with masculine physical characteristics. To express his power, the king

69. The phrase ושער הרגלים is often translated as "pubic hair," but I have opted for a more literal translation. Whether the phrase refers to pubic hair or hair of the legs does not materially change the argument presented.

70. Treating בְּתַעַר הַשְּׂכִירָה as an attributive genitive, with the second word having the meaning of an adjective.

71. תִּסְפֶּה is an intransitive verb (as in Jer 12:4) whose subject is either the beard (which is feminine in Isa 15:2) or the feminized person whose hair has been shaved. Roberts renders "it will remove the beard as well" (*First Isaiah*, 125), but it is difficult to understand the subject of תִּסְפֶּה in this rendering.

72. Irvine, *Isaiah, Ahaz, and the Syro-Ephraimitic Crisis,* 174.

73. While this term refers to a Babylonian province in later periods, it is found in eighth-century Assyrian texts in reference to Syria and Palestine. In RINAP 4:23, Esarhaddon 1, col. v, line 54, the term *ebir nāri* seems to be identical to the Land of Hatti. Similarly in SAA 4:94, no. 81, lines 9–10, where, although the text is broken, it seems that Esarhaddon uses the term to refer to the region around Ashkelon. The term also appears in SAA 1:160, no. 204, rev. 10, from the period of Sargon II, and seems also to refer to the region beyond the Euphrates—namely, Syro-Palestine.

represents himself as "the dominant male" both in literary texts and in art. Literarily, this is expressed by characteristics such as *zikrūtu* (masculinity) and *meṭlūtu* (prowess), as well as epithets such as *zikaru qardu* (heroic male) and *zikaru dannu* (strong male).[74] Absence of power, on the other hand, was seen as a feminine characteristic. This is seen partly from the complete absence of women from expressions of the Assyrian ideology of power.[75] But it is also seen in the treaties that contain threats to "feminize" the enemy and his soldiers if they should break the oath, and in literary texts that compare formerly-powerful enemies to women.[76] The Assyrian king, possessor of power, is masculine; the enemy, whom the texts seek to portray as weak, may become feminine.

Furthermore, this masculine/feminine distinction is also expressed in political performance, with specific reference to the beard. An administrative letter describes the abuse of a foreign emissary's beard: the Assyrian king orders officials to force kings of rebel states to wipe the officials' sandals with their beards.[77] This seems to express the humiliation of the

74. See the references in Mattias Karlsson, *Relations of Power in Early Neo-Assyrian State Ideology* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2016), 234, 461.

75. "Assyrian royal ideology could not accommodate the presence of an authoritative female figure." (Siddall, *The Reign of Adad-nirari III*, 100)

76. The clearest demonstration of this appears in the treaty between Ashur-nerari V (the Assyrian king who preceded Tiglath-pileser III) and Mati'ilu of Arpad, in which the latter is threatened that if he violates the treaty, "may Mati'ilu become a prostitute, his soldiers women" (SAA 2:12, no. 2, col. v, line 9), and in the "vassal treaty" of Esarhaddon, where we find a similar treaty curse "May (the gods) make you like a woman before your enemy." (SAA 2:56. no. 6, paragraph 91, line 617) For more metaphoric examples of "feminizing enemies," see Cynthia R. Chapman, *The Gendered Language of Warfare in the Israelite-Assyrian Encounter,* Harvard Semitic Monographs 62 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2004), 33–59. She discusses how failure of enemies to protect and provide for their families, themes which recur in Assyrian literature, are also examples of feminization. See also the direct example in the letter to the gods about the eighth campaign of Sargon II, discussed in chapter 5, which compares the behavior of Rusâ of Urartu in fleeing from Sargon to that of a woman in labor: See Walter Mayer, *Assyrien und Urartu I. Der Achte Feldzug Sargons II im Jahr 714 v. Chr*, AOAT 395/1 (Münster: Ugarit, 2013), 110, line 151. Urartu was at one point the most powerful rival of Assyria, and its kings could at certain points claim to be the near equals of Assyria. The feminizing language serves to counter these claims of power. For the comparison of Sargon and the king of Urartu, see further Marc Van De Mieroop, "A Study in Contrast: Sargon of Assyria and Rusa of Urartu," in *Opening the Tablet Box: Near Eastern Studies in Honor of Benjamin R. Foster,* ed. Sarah Melville and Alice Slotsky (Leiden: Brill, 2010),417–34.

77. "As to what you wrote: 'A messenger of Urpala'a came to me for an audience with the Phrygian messenger' – let him come, and let [Aš]šur, Šamaš, Bel and Nabû command

foreign potentate by depriving his beard, which indicates his power, of its symbolism.

In art, too, masculine physical characteristics are used to express power. One such characteristic is the powerful musculature, while another is the "well-formed, abundant beards" that characterize Assyrian kings.[78] Not only did the beard itself indicate masculinity and military power, but its length and fullness conveyed the degree of power possessed.[79] We also find abuse of beards in artistic material. A relief of Sennacherib portrays the left hand of an Assyrian soldier holding the beard of a captive while the soldier grasps a dagger in his right hand, and Karlsson convincingly argues that "the images of Assyrian soldiers grasping the hair of their opponents and holding a dagger to their throats do not represent the cutting of throats but rather the cutting of beards."[80]

Isaiah 7:20 references this motif in describing how God will shave an unidentified individual in the Levant by means of the king of Assyria. The unidentified individual might be any of the kings of the region, but given that the oracle appears to be directed at Judah, it would seem that Judah's king is intended. The motif is taken from Assyrian art, text, and performance, and references the practice of an opponent or disloyal vassal having his beard abused, and the tendency to feminize disloyal vassals. Isaiah has changed the motif so as to include the shaving of hair in different parts of the body, and to highlight that in control of the instrument of shaving is not the king of Assyria, but rather God. The king of Assyria (like in 10:5, but also like 10:18–19 and 10:17b) is only the instrument through which God operates.

Power imagery is an important part of the rhetoric in this verse, which aims to critique the king of Judah. Assyrian vassals were powerful not because of popular support, but because their submission to Assyria created Assyrian support for their rule. This support prevented their removal from office. The king of Judah was such a vassal. To express this power in Assyrian "language," he has beard and leg hair, both masculine characteristics, a

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that all these kings should wipe your sandals with their beards." This text appears in the printed edition of SAA 1:4-7 as text no. 1, but in the online edition as SAA 19, no. 152.

78. Irene J. Winter, "Art in Empire: The Royal Image and the Visual Dimensions of Assyrian Ideology," in *Assyria 1995,* ed. Simo Parpola and Robert McCray Whiting (Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 1997), 359–81, here 370–71.

79. Ibid., 370–71; Karlsson, *Relations of Power,* 236.

80. For Sennacherib's relief, see Richard David Barnett, Erika Bleibtreu, and Geoffrey Turner, *Sculptures from the Southwest Palace of Sennacherib at Nineveh* (London: British Museum, 1998), 388, pl. 174–175. An examination of the relief shows that Karlsson's suggestion (*Relations of Power,* 236) is the most plausible interpretation of the image. It is specifically the beard of the captive that is grasped, not the throat.

clear Assyrian symbol of power. But this reliance on Assyria is dangerous: just as a vassal acquired his power from Assyria, so too can Assyria remove his power. Assyria can shave his beard, signifying that Assyria can easily (and suddenly) remove his power if Assyria considers him a disloyal vassal. By making Assyria into the source of their power, the vassals have effectively disempowered themselves.

Assyria's king is here called "the hired razor" not because Judah's tribute actually motivated Assyria to conquer the Levant, but as part of a sarcastic expression about Judah's submission.[81]

Like 7:17b and 18–19, the emphasis in 7:20 is on God as the power behind Assyria. The political and theological lessons in these verses convey to the leadership of Judah that the recognition of Assyria as Judah's master is both theologically incorrect and politically imprudent. Politically, becoming tributary to Assyria places the kingdom's fate in the rapacious hands of the Assyrians, who will not hesitate to demand tribute so high that Judah (like Israel and Aram-Damascus) will be enticed to rebel. And theologically, vassalage to Assyria, and acceptance of Assyrian political claims, incorrectly sees Assyria, rather than God, as the source of power. The verses noted show how these theological and political lessons are inextricably intertwined.

Significantly, the focus in 7:17–20 is on the king of Judah and his court, rather than on Judah as a whole. 7:17 refers to bringing the king of Assyria "upon you … and your father's house"; the metaphor in 7:18–19 seems to refer to resource extraction, for which the vassal king was responsible; and 7:20 specifically engages imagery relevant to vassal and suzerain kings. Taken together, these verses express the lack of wisdom inherent in Ahaz's decision to become an Assyrian vassal.

In summarizing the grounds for dating these verses to this period, 7:20 clearly draws on Assyrian motifs, fitting best within the larger political and theological message of Isa 7–8. For this reason, I see it as related to the period following the Syro-Ephraimite crisis. 7:18–19 seem to rely on a specific motif and formulation found in Assyrian texts, and the specific political

81. The focus is not on Assyria's actual motivations, but on those of Judah's king. Fearing the Syro-Ephraimite coalition, Ahaz sought out Assyrian vassalage as a way of ensuring his continued reign. Isaiah is highly critical of this action, and designating Tiglath-pileser III "the hired razor" mocks Ahaz's presumption in seeing the tribute payments to Assyria as a solution to Judah's difficulties. This mockery is not necessarily based on the language of 2 Kgs 15, which terms Ahaz's payment a "bribe." Isaiah is independently critical of the immorality of Ahaz's paying Assyria and thereby causing harm to Israel. This can be seen from 8:23, which compares the campaign that followed Ahaz's payment with that which followed Asa's payment tribute to the Arameans (as recounted in 1 Kgs 15:18–20). The comparison is discussed in Hanan Eshel, "Isaiah VIII 23: An Historical-Geographical Analogy," *VT* (1990): 104–9.

constellation described in these verses best fits the period 734–733. Because 7:18–20 emphasize God's role in summoning Assyria to threaten Judah, I take 7:17b, with its mention of God summoning the Assyrian king, as an original part of 7:17. If 7:17 in its present form is the original form of the verse, and if 7:18–20 date to the Assyrian period, there is no good reason to see 7:1–16 as post-dating this period.

6. Reworking Assyrian Motifs in 8:5–8 and 8:11–13

The connection between the Syro-Ephraimite threat and the threat of an impending Assyrian invasion, which lie in the background of Isa 7, are explicit in 8:5–8. This passage has long been regarded as part of the eighth-century core, expressing Isaiah's response to Ahaz's appeal to Assyria.[82] Recently, however, this view has been challenged by De Jong, who considers it a "literary extension" of 8:1–4 "from the hand of the editor/composer," and others, who also deny that it belongs to the eighth-century core of the book.[83]

As Machinist notes, however, 8:5–8 contains a clear example of an Assyrian imperial motif—namely, the flood. Other Assyrian motifs are also present in these verses, and we will discuss them below.

(5) ויסף י' דבר אלי עוד לאמר. (6) יען כי מאס העם הזה את מי השלח ההלכים לאט,
ומשוש את רצין ובן רמליהו. (7) ולכן הנה ה' מעלה עליהם את מי הנהר העצומים והרבים
את מלך אשור ואת כל כבודו, ועלה על כל אפיקיו, והלך על כל גדותיו. (8) וחלף ביהודה
שטף ועבר עד צואר יגיע, והיה מטות כנפיו מלא רחב ארצך עמנו אל.

(5) The Lord once again spoke to me, saying: (6) Because this people has rejected the waters of Shiloah that go slowly, and rejoiced with Rezin and the son of Remaliah (7) Therefore, behold, God is bringing upon them the waters of the River, mighty and many, (namely) the king of Assyria and all his importance. It will go up over all its channels and go upon all his banks. (8) It shall run through Judah, flooding and passing, reaching until the neck. And his outstretched wings will fill the breadth of your land, Immanuel.

The image of the king as a flood is well-attested in the Assyrian royal inscriptions.[84] Although the image also appears in Neo-Babylonian

82. See Irvine, *Isaiah, Ahaz, and the Syro-Ephraimitic Crisis*, 185 n. 19, for a list of scholars who hold this view.

83. De Jong, *Isaiah Among the Ancient Near Eastern Prophets*, 69. Becker and Berges both express doubts regarding the eighth-century date of this passage: Becker, *Jesaja: Von der Botschaft zum Buch*, 104–9, 281–87; Berges, *The Book of Isaiah*, 73–80.

84. See the citations in Machinist, "Assyria and Its Image," 726–27; Karlsson,

inscriptions,[85] there are other elements of the imagery in these verses that strongly suggest they draw specifically on Neo-Assyrian imagery, as Machinist noted. The image appears throughout the inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III and many other kings as a metaphor for the destructive power of the king's campaigns, and to describe the many lands he wrecked as he passed through them. The imagery used to describe the flooding river here is that of overwhelming its banks, as seen in the phrase ועלה על כל אפיקיו in verse 7. The imagery is similar to that found in the following passage in the royal titulary of Tiglath-pileser III:

> *abūbiš ispunuma zīqīqiš imnû*
>
> He [Tiglath-pileser III] swept over them like the flood, he considered them like ghosts.[86]

The titulary describes specifically how Tiglath-pileser III marched from the Persian Gulf up to the Mediterranean, as far as Egypt. In other words, it specifically references his western campaigns (as well as those in other regions). Furthermore, *sapānu,* the verb generally used in reference to flood imagery in the royal inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III and Sennacherib, has the sense of "flattened" and is similar to the motif of the overwhelming river that sweeps away mounds that lie on its banks when it overflows those banks. The river described in Isa 8:7 passes through Judah, washing away much that lies in its path (שטף ועבר).

However, Isaiah's flooding river differs from that of Tiglath-pileser III in one important respect. The flood described in Tiglath-pileser's inscriptions turns inhabitants into *zaqīqu*—often translated "phantoms."[87] Put

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Relations of Power, 486–87.

85. As in the Babylonian stele of Nabonidus: see Hanspeter Schaudig, *Die Inschriften Nabonid von Babylon und Kyros' des Grossen*, AOAT 256 (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2001), 516, col. III, lines 10′ and 31′.

86. The titulary, which resembles Shalmaneser III's, is attested in the opening lines of Summary Inscriptions 7, 11, and 12 in Tadmor, *The Inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III* (= RINAP 1:116–17, RINAP 1:135, RINAP 1:138, Tiglath-pileser III Inscriptions 47, 51, 52, respectively). The turning of enemies into *zaqīqu* is attested earlier, in the inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser I, and these are discussed by Ulrike Steinert, *Aspekte der Menschseins im Alten Mesopotamen: Eine Studie zu Person und Identitat im 2. Und 1. Jt. v. Chr.*, Cuneiform Monographs 44 (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 350–51.

87. On the precise meaning of *zaqīqu*, which usually refers to the spirits of the dead, see Steinert, *Aspkete des Menschseins*, 350–56. The term can mean "spirit of the dead," but also "ghost in a dream." On its particular use in royal inscriptions, especially those of Tiglath-pileser I and Tiglath-pileser III, note Steinert's comment (at p. 351):

simply, the flood described in the titulary of Tiglath-pileser III kills. In contrast, the flood Isaiah describes reaches the neck and no more. It does not drown the people of Judah, whose land it sweeps. The threat here is similar to that expressed in 6:10–13, in that the land will be overwhelmed by an Assyrian invasion (represented here by the deluge), but this invasion will not utterly destroy Judah. Judah is here (8:8) compared to a man pulled into a current, whose neck remains above water, just like the limited destruction described in 6:13, where the trunk of the tree remains intact. In both passages, some portion of Judah remains undestroyed. Here, that sense of survival is expressed by the words עד צואר יגיע. These words may perhaps be an intentional contrast with the expression of the flood in the titulary of Tiglath-pileser III, where it turns people into ghosts.

Machinist also suggested that the phrase ואת כל כבודו in 8:7 refers to the image of the *melammu*, an Assyrian concept referring to an insuperable force.[88] Throughout the royal inscriptions, the *melammu* of the king or of the god Assur is expressed in conquests, and the verb *saḫāpu*, "to cover, to overwhelm," is the action performed by the *melammu*. Machinist noted the parallel between this verb and the flooding imagery in Isa 8:7. Williamson has also noted that the noun כבוד is used elsewhere in Isaiah (16:14, 21:16) to refer to armed forces, and so the translation "and all his host" might be preferred for ואת כל כבודו.[89] It is possible that this phrase refers to the Akkadian *melammu*; it certainly refers to the Assyrian army.

A further and more defined point of contact with Assyrian imagery (and also with Babylonian imagery) is the final words of verse 8: והיה מטות כנפיו מלא רחב ארצך, "His outstretched wings will fill the breadth of your land." As Wagner noted, this expression seems to describe the artistic motif of the god in the sun-disk with wings outstretched, which is so prominent in Assyrian palace art, and which appeared in the pivot relief (see figure 2.5 in chapter 2).[90] But although this image appeared in later Mesopotamian royal art, it is specifically in the Assyrian artistic symbolism that we find this image signifying the universal dominion of the god Assur.[91] In later

"Der König preist seine Grausamkeit und Gnadenlosigkeit, mit der er seine Gegner auslöscht, 'in Luft auflöst'."

88. Machinist, "Assyria and its Image," 727. For *melammu* in Assyrian inscriptions, see Shawn Zelig Aster, *The Unbeatable Light: Melammu and its Biblical Parallels*, AOAT 384 (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2012), 45–106.

89. Hugh Godfrey Maturin Williamson, "A New Divine Title in Isaiah 10:17," in *Open-Mindedness in the Bible and Beyond: A Volume of Studies in Honour of Bob Becking,* ed. Marjo C. A. Korpel and Lester L. Grabbe (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2015), 315–59.

90. Wagner, *Gottes Herrschaft,* 173.

91. For the appearance of similar "god in the sun-disk" images in Babylonian art, see Bradley L. Crowell, "Nabonidus, as-Sila' and the Beginning of the End of Edom,"

periods, it symbolizes the solar deities. But in the Assyrian period, we find this image standing above the "cosmic tree," or "tree of abundance," as in the pivot relief, showing the universal rule of Assur. That image, expressing universal Assyrian dominion, is conceptually similar to the idea expressed in the titulary of Tiglath-pileser III[92] that vaunts Assyrian conquest of the known world, part of which was the threat of an Assyrian conquest of Judah, mentioned in Isa 8:5–8. Furthermore, as Hartenstein has noted, the motif of "outstretched wings" appears in Esarhaddon's inscriptions, where Esarhaddon compares himself to a flying eagle, spreading his wings to drive back his enemies.[93] As Hartenstein notes further, in another passage Esarhaddon combines his self-portrayal as an eagle with self-portrayal as a deluge, similar to the concatenation of images we find in 8:8:

> *kīma erî nadri petâ agappāya meḫret ummāniya abūbāniš allak*
>
> Like a furious eagle, my wings were spread before [my army] (and) I was marching like the flood.[94]

Interestingly, both the outstretched-wing imagery and flood imagery are used to express the "rage" of the Assyrian king and the ferocity of his campaign.[95]

BASOR 348 (2007): 75–88, here 81. It is also important to note that the tradition of depicting the god who assists the king in a winged sun-disk continued into later periods in Mesopotamia. Images of King Shapur II in the fourth century CE depict him as wearing a winged sun-disk on his head, and these images are very similar to those found in the Neo-Assyrian reliefs portrayed above. In the Shapur reliefs, the winged sun-disk was understood to symbolize Ahura-Mazda: see Abolala Soudavar, *The Aura of Kings: Legitimacy and Divine Sanction in Iranian Kingship*, Bibliotheca Iranica 10 (Cosa Mesa: Mazda, 2003), 15–23.

92. Part of this titulary was cited at note 87 above.

93. RINAP 4:13, Esarhaddon 1, col. i, line 67, and restored in RINAP 4:47, Esarhaddon 6, col. i′, line 14′. See A. Hartenstein, "JHWH und der 'Schrekenglanz' Assurs (Jesaja 8, 6-8): Traditions und religions geschichtliche Beobachtungen zur 'Denkschrift' Jesaja 6-8*," in *Schriftprophetie,* ed. Friedhelm Hartenstein, Jutta Krispenz, and Aaron Schart (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 2004), 83–102, here 91.

94. RINAP 4:53–54, Esarhaddon 8, col. ii′, lines 10′-11′; Hartenstein, "JWHW und der 'Schrekenglanz' Assurs," 91.

95. The outstretched wing imagery is so used in the passage noted above from Esarhaddon, and the flood imagery in RINAP 3/1:34, Sennacherib 1, 25 and in the inscription of Sargon II published by G. W. Vera Chamaza, "Sargon II's Ascent to the Throne: The Political Situation," *SAAB* 6 (1992): 21–33, here 22 line 6.

In addressing the chronological point raised by Hartenstein, it is relevant to note that the concatenation of eagle and flood imagery is not unique to Esarhaddon. Similar imagery is found earlier, in the inscriptions of Assurnasirpal II, in describing his campaign against the city of Tušḫa, high in the mountains and protected by a river:

> GIM ^{d}IŠKUR *šá* GÌR.BAL UGU-*šú-nu áš-gu-um*
> *nab-lu* UGU-*šú-nu ú-šá-za-nin*
>
> *ina šip-ṣi u da-nan-ni mun-daḫ-*ṣi-a GIM *an-ze-e*. MUŠEN UGU-*šú-nu i-še-'u*
>
> Like Adad of the flood, I thundered upon them.
> Fire/lightning upon them I rained down.
>
> With strong power, they [that is, my troops] flew against them like Anzu the bird.[96]

Artistic depictions of the god in the sun-disk with outstretched wings, and a certain type of flood imagery, both appear in the palace of Assurnasirpal II.[97] The parallel to the inscription of Esarhaddon is certainly closer, and this passage (or the final words of 8:8) may react to it in a post-701 reflection on the causes of the Assyrian invasions. However, we cannot exclude that the passage as a whole dates from the period surrounding 734.

Isa 8:6 portrays the flood, representing the Assyrian possibility that the conquest of Judah is a divine punishment, a punishment resulting from the people's rejection of the waters of Shiloah, and their rejoicing with Pekah and Rezin. The imagery contrasts rejecting "slow waters" and receiving as punishment the fast-moving flood of Assyria. The Shiloah waters here

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96. RIMA 2 A.0.101.1, 210, ii 106–107 //A.0.101.17, 250 iv 71-74. Grayson translates: "I thundered against them like Adad-of-the-devastation and rained down flames upon them. With might and main they [that is, my troops] flew against them like the Storm Bird." I have left the text without normalization in order to discuss the title of Adad, in which the Sumerogram GÌR.BAL corresponds to the Akkadian *riḫṣu,* which Labat (444) renders "inundation." The term can clearly refer to a wide variety of destructions (not only by flood), but when used in a genitive phrase modifying Adad, the action Adad does is nearly always expressed by a verb related to rain. Therefore, *riḫṣu* in these cases refers to destruction by flood. Thus, Karlsson (*Relations of Power*, 448) translates this as "Adad the flooder." Assurnasirpal II frequently compares himself to Adad-šarāḫiṣi (ibid., 486).

97. In several reliefs, the symbol of the god in the winged sun-disk proceeds in the air above Assurnasirpal, while other reliefs show Assurnasirpal on a boat crossing a river, showing his power over the flooded river. See Karlsson, *Relations of Power*, 369, for examples of these motifs, which are only a few of the many containing the symbol of the god in the sun-disk and the Assyrians crossing flooded rivers.

seem to have particular symbolism, which requires attention. Long before Hezekiah's large-scale excavation of a water tunnel, extensive excavations had been undertaken to bring the waters of the Gihon spring closer to (or inside) the city walls of Jerusalem.[98] The name שילוח would apply to these water projects, which "released" (שלח in the D-stem) water into a new pool or channel; the precise identity of this pool or channel is not relevant to our present discussion. What is important to us is that the Shiloah waters were designed to provide the city with the ability to withstand a siege by ensuring a supply of water accessible to the defenders of the city but beyond the reach of the attackers. Thus, rejection of the Shiloah refers to rejecting the defensibility of Jerusalem, and viewing the city as vulnerable. Therefore, those who reject the Shiloah waters are described as excited by the Syro-Ephraimite alliance: משוש את רצין ובן רמליהו.[99] Those who rejected the defensibility of Jerusalem were excited by the prospect of a Syro-Ephraimite victory over Ahaz, because they viewed this as the "least bad" option of saving the city (or because they genuinely supported Judah joining the anti-Assyrian coalition). In either case, the popular concern about the city's surrender led to their viewing a Syro-Ephraimite victory as likely and desirable. This popular support for his opponents led Ahaz to become tributary to Assyria, a step that Isaiah views as bringing a future Assyrian invasion. As Wagner notes, "Juda wird, sollte sich die politischen Bestrebungen der der aramäisch-israelitischen Koalition nahestenden Kreise durchsetzen, unter einer solchen Okkupation der Assyrer leiden müssen."[100]

98. The precise nature of the different components of the water system, and their dates, has been the subject of intense discussion, generated by the ongoing archaeological explorations, but it is clear that much of the system precedes Hezekiah. An introductory article is Yigal Shiloh, "The Rediscovery of the Ancient Water System Known as 'Warren's Shaft'," in *Ancient Jerusalem Revealed,* ed. Hillel Geva (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 2000), 46–54; see also in the same volume the more detailed discussion of Ronny Reich and Eli Shukron, "The Excavations at the Gihon Spring and Warren's Shaft System in the City of David," 327–39. See also their articles: "Channel II in the City of David, Jerusalem: Some of its Technical Features and Their Chronology," in *Cura Aquarum in Israel*, ed. Christoph Ohlig, Yehuda Peleg, and Tsvika Tsuk (Siegburg: Deutschen Wasserhistorischen Gesellschaft, 2002), 1–6, which explains the course of the pre-Hezekiah "Channel II" water system; "The System of Rock Cut Tunnels near Gihon in Jerusalem Reconsidered," *RevBib* 107 (2000): 5–17; "The History of the Gihon Spring in Jerusalem," *Levant* 36 (2004): 211–23. Note that the discussion of channel II in the 2002 article reflects a later stage in the excavation than that in the 2004 article.

99. The noun משוש refers to excitement, most often characterized by rejoicing. It can also refer to excitement about destruction (cf. Deut 28:63). However, it does not refer to fear or to terror in that or any other verse.

100. "If those close to the Aramaic-Israelite coalition succeed, Judah will instead

This passage differs from those in Isa 7 in that it critiques העם הזה rather than Ahaz specifically. The phrase may refer to the troops, as in 7:2 above, or it may refer to the people generally. The people (or the troops) are castigated for their failure to rely on the technical difficulty of conquering Jerusalem, and their preference to ensure their safety by surrendering to the Syro-Ephraimite invasion, a threat Isaiah saw as "unthreatening." This passage fits with the political views expressed in Isa 7, but analyzes the situation by answering the question "How are wider circles beyond Judah's royal court guilty?" A critique directed at the people also appears in Isa 8:11–18, and it would seem in general that passages directed at the people are gathered together in what we now call Isa 8, while those directed at the king appear in Isa 7.

Isa 8:11-13 clearly date to the Assyrian period.[101] Like 8:5–8, these verses call attention to the misdeeds of the people, but focus specifically on political instruction designed to separate the prophet and his disciples from the popular view. Read in accordance with the political lexicon of the Assyrian period, they form a clear political "road map."

(11) כי כה אמר י' אלי כחזקת היד ויסרני מלכת בדרך העם הזה לאמר.

(12) לא תאמרון קשר לכל אשר יאמר העם הזה קשר ואת מוראו לא תיראו ולא תעריצו.

(13) את י' צ'באות אתו תקדישו והוא מוראכם והוא מערצכם.

(11) For thus says the Lord to me, with strength of hand,[102] preventing me through punishment from walking in the way of this people, and saying:

(12) Do not call "treason" everything this people calls "treason," and do not fear the people's מורא or consider it worthy of terror.

(13) The Lord of Hosts, Him you should consider holy; He is your מורא and the one who inspires terror.

suffer Assyrian occupation." (Wagner, *Gottes Herrschaft*, 174)

101. *Contra* De Jong, *Isaiah Among the Ancient Near Eastern Prophets* and the bibliography cited therein.

102. The variants בחזקת and כחזקת are both well-attested for the Hebrew text. The phrase does not necessarily introduce a visionary experience (as De Jong, *Isaiah Among the Ancient Near Eastern Prophets*, 70 n. 77 and Vermeylen, *Du prophète Isaïe*, 1:226 argue), but rather refers to the strength with which God punishes the prophet. The verb here translated "punish" (יסר) refers most often to physically beating a person as punishment, deterring them from "walking in the wrong path" (cf. Deut 21:18; 1 Kgs 12:11–14). This is an action for which "strength of hand" is appropriate.

This short passage is sometimes considered to be a caution against fearing the Syro-Ephraimite armies or "all and everything that is surmised to be treason" by the people.[103] Clear philological reasons exist, however, for understanding the warning as directed against reverence of Assyria. The participle מעריץ refers to an oppressor of the weak in Ps 10:18, and in Isa 13:11 it refers to a conqueror against whom God battles. A מעריץ is powerful enough to oppress others and to presume to be master of the land. This noun suggests a reference to Assyria, while the noun מורא is clearly a reference to Assyria, and will be shown on linguistic grounds to derive from Akkadian *puluḫtu.*

The second half of verse 12 cannot mean "do not fear their fear or consider it worthy of terror" because the context requires that the passage refer to the source of the people's terror, not to the feeling of fear itself. Yet the word מורא in the Hebrew Bible usually designates the feeling of terror rather than the source of terror (as in Gen 9:2 and Deut 11:25). Only if the Hebrew is intended to translate the Akkadian *puluḫtu* can it designate the source of the fear. (The Akkadian *puluḫtu* literally means fear.[104]) This Akkadian term is used as a way of referring to the *melammu*, the insuperable power that accompanies the Assyrian king in his conquests and represents him when he is absent.[105] The second half of 8:12, then, warns the prophet against imitating the people's behavior in fearing the Assyrian king's *puluḫtu.* It is a warning against sharing their reverence for Assyrian invincibility, and against accepting the view propagated by the Assyrian empire of royal omnipotence and universal rule. By evoking *puluḫtu,* and thereby the Assyrian doctrine of royal omnipotence, 8:12–13 contrast this view with attributing these characteristics to YHWH. It is God who is here said to possess insuperable force that inspires terror, and the prophet and his disciples are called to recognize this.

As discussed above, the political views expressed in Isa 7 and Isa 8:5–8 are complementary, and this is true of 8:11–13 as well. A common theological viewpoint is shared by all of these passages. The passages in both Isa 7 and Isa 8:5–8 emphasize the role of God as the bringer of the king of Assyria, as can be seen in the verbs used in 7:17, 18, and 20, and 8:7. 8:11–13 argue a corollary point, that the king God brought is not to be equated in power to God. But although it is God who brings the Assyrian enemy upon Jerusalem, the king (in Isa 7) and the people (in 8:5–8, 11–13) are not absolved of responsibility for the impending Assyrian invasion. Implementing the principle we know as "dual causality," the prophet sees the people's fears as leading the king to take unwise political decisions, and these lead naturally to the impending Assyrian invasion.

103. Brevard S. Childs, *Isaiah*, OTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 74.

104. On יראה used to translate *puluḫtu,* see Nahum M. Waldman, "A Note on Ezekiel 1:18," *JBL* 103.4 (1984): 614–18.

105. Aster, *The Unbeatable Light,* 81–92.

Simultaneously, this impending invasion is also a Divine punishment for these fears and decisions.

These faulty political decisions were motivated by an undue fear of the Syro-Ephraimite threat, on the part of both the people and Ahaz, and by an undue reverence on the part of the people for Assyria. These decisions, leading to Ahaz's decision to submit to Assyria in order to save himself, were viewed by the prophet not only acts of political misjudgment. They are also acts of disloyalty to God, whose prophet counsels that both king and people see the Syro-Ephraimite threat as less potent and less dangerous, and warns them against revering Assyria. By refusing to believe this counsel, both king and people display a lack of faith in the prophet and in God who sent him.

God's word minimizing the Syro-Ephraimite threat is not divorced from political and military realities. In support of the counsel undermining this threat, the prophet argues for the weakness of the royal institution in both Aram-Damascus and Israel in 7:7–8. In 8:5–8, he supports this counsel by referring to the "waters of Shiloah." This seems to be a reference, as discussed above, to the defensive advantages conferred by the Jerusalem water system. This foreshadows a theme that is developed in subsequent chapters, in discussing passages such as Isa 14:28–32, 31:1–5, and 10:5-27: God protects Jerusalem not only by means of miracles but by means of geographic and political realities which seem natural. This idea forms the basis for much of the political counsel Isaiah gives throughout the passages discussed in this book, especially those related to Jerusalem.

We move now to consider Isa 19, in which the idea of dual causality is very much in evidence. Large parts of Isa 19 belong to a period close to that of Isa 7–8, and are a reflection and explanation of the theological meaning of the Assyrian invasion of Philistia in 734. This invasion was a show of force directed partly against political forces in Egypt that sought to encourage anti-Assyrian elements in the Levant. After considering Isa 19, I shall return in chapter 4 to consider Isa 14:28–32, which resumes the idea of Jerusalem's impregnability discussed above.

7. Isaiah 19:1-14[106]

Entitled משא מצרים ("the burden of Egypt") by an editor, Isa 19 has been placed into the series of passages (Isa 13–23) that appear to address other nations. Many of its sub-units deal specifically with Assyria's interactions with Egypt, and react to the motifs and ideas of Assyrian imperial ideology.

106. This is a revised version of my earlier discussion: see Aster, "Isaiah 19: The 'Burden of Egypt'."

Several of these display a unique universal theology. As I will demonstrate below, this theology reacts to Assyrian imperial ideology.

On stylistic grounds, Isa 19 is usually divided into two sections: a core consisting of verses 1–15, and a series of five oracles in verses 16–25, which begin with the phrase ביום ההוא, "on that day." Many scholars date verses 1–15 to the late seventh century due to a perceived Deuteronomic idol polemic in verses 1 and 3.[107] This has been challenged by Hays, who noted Akkadian influence on the language of these verses.[108] The second section of the chapter, verses 16–25, are often seen as literarily dependent on the core, and these verses are generally dated on the basis of the specific events to which they refer. Much of the discussion below will focus on 19:19–25, comprising the third, fourth, and fifth oracles of the series.

Before moving to verses 19–25, I briefly deal with Assyrian motifs in the first part of the passage, verses 1–4.[109] These verses contain at least two references to Assyrian motifs. The first appears in the opening phrase of the oracle:

> הנה י' רכב על עב קל ובא מצרים ונעו אלילי מצרים מפניו ולבב מצרים ימס בקרבו.
>
> Behold, the Lord rides on a light cloud, and will come to Egypt, and the idols of Egypt will tremble from before him, and the heart of Egypt will melt in its midst.

The עב קל imagery is often seen as derived from that of the Ugaritic storm god Baal, "the rider on the clouds," which has parallels in Ps 68:5 (where God is described as רכב בערבות, usually translated "rider on the clouds") and in Ps 18:11/2 Sam 22:11, which describe God as riding on כנפי רוח (lit.: "wings of the wind"). This imagery, and its Ugaritic antecedents, is directly connected to the idea of a storm god. Biblical passages such as Judg 5:4–5, Ps 68:9, and Hab 3:3-15 all express the idea of a theophany connected to a violent

107. Marti, *Das Buch Jesaja*, 155; Vermeylen, *Du Prophète Isaïe à l'Apocalyptique*, 321. More recently, this has been advanced by Bernd Schipper, "'The City by the Sea will be a Drying Place:' Isaiah 19:1-25 in Light of Prophetic Texts from Ptolemaic Egypt," in *Monotheism in Late Prophetic and Early Apocalyptic Literature*, ed. Nathan MacDonald and Ken Brown (Tübingen: Mohr Sieback, 2014), 25–46.

108. Christopher B. Hays, "Damming Egypt/Damning Egypt: The Paronomasia of *skr* and the Unit of Isa 19:1-15," *ZAW* 120 (2008): 612–17.

109. Roberts, *First Isaiah,* 259 notes that these verses stand on their own with an opening and conclusion; Hays argued that the theophany report in verses 1b–4 would be incomplete without the language of natural disaster in verses 5–10 (ibid., 615). Nevertheless, as Hays notes, it is clear that the formulation "the speech of the Master YHWH of Hosts" in verse 4b indicates the end of a defined sub-unit.

thunderstorm.[110] But it should be noted that the imagery of "God on a cloud" in Isa 19:1-4 differs from the storm god imagery: no storm is mentioned in Isa 19. We find no mention of water, hail, or fire, or of mountains flattening, as in the biblical passages noted. Furthermore, the description of the cloud as עב קל, a cloud that is light and swift, is also incompatible with a rain cloud, which is heavy and waterlogged.[111] This suggests that the imagery here is not derived from the storm-god tradition.

The fact that the subsequent verses describe how the Egyptians fight against each other and become disheartened as a direct result of God's actions is significant in understanding the source of the imagery. The imagery of a god who rides on a swift cloud and confronts the enemy is well-known in Assyrian art, which portrays the god Assur as suspended in the air on a winged disk, flying above and moving with the Assyrian army. The Assyrian army is consistently described in literary texts as moving swiftly, a description that seems grounded in historical reality.

Examples of this image appear in reliefs from the palace of Assurnasirpal II at Calah. Several of the reliefs show the god drawing a bow at the same time as the king draws his bow, aiming at the same enemies. The image clearly intends to show that the god Assur adds his own powers and strength to those of the king, and that he assists him in throwing his enemies into disarray.[112] Reade describes the motif as follows:

> Early ninth-century kings are accompanied by a god in mid-air; divine insignia go with the army; the gods of defeated nations acquiesce. It was the king's duty to protect his realm, the realm of the god Ashur, from the powers of chaos which the enemy represented.[113]

The Assyrian inscriptions are replete with descriptions of how enemies become terrified at the approach of the Assyrian army, throwing them into disarray and causing them to cease fighting, and this is often expressed

110. Roberts, *First Isaiah,* 255.

111. Cf. עב קל with, קל ברגליו, "light on his feet" or "swift-footed," in 2 Sam 2:18.

112. Among the reliefs are those bearing BM numbers 124540, 124551, and 124555, which are reproduced in George E. Mendenhall, *The Tenth Generation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), 150–51. A reproduction of the second of these also appears in Karlssen, *Relations of Power,* 369. An earlier colored tile from the city of Ashur illustrates a similar theme, and is reproduced in Walter Andrae, *Colored Ceramics from Ashur* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1925), 27, pl. 8. The tile bears BM number 115706.

113. Reade, "Ideology and Propaganda in Assyrian Art," 332.

as terror of the god Assur.[114] This terror is similar to the reaction of the Egyptians in Isa 19:2–3 at the advance of YHWH. Isa 19:1 subverts the image of the god Assur riding on a cloud ahead of his army to describe YHWH doing the same act, causing the same results. It is God who leads the army into Egypt, with the result of confounding the Egyptians. God then delivers Egypt into the hands of a different master:

> וסכרתי את מצרים ביד אדנים קשה ומלך עז ימשל בם
>
> I will dam up Egypt by the hand of a harsh overlord (or, I will hand Egypt over into the hand of a harsh master), and an angry king will rule over them.[115]

The expression מלך עז has been identified with a variety of rulers by scholars.[116] But this expression is nearly unique in the Hebrew Bible, with the epithet עז applied to a king only here and in Dan 8:23.[117] The parallel in the verse makes it clear that the king to whose hand God delivers Egypt is not only "strong" but also "harsh," and this suggests that the word עז here might best be translated as "angry," or "fierce" as in Isa 42:25, Ps 90:11, Prov 21:14, and Eccl 8:1.[118] Throughout the royal inscriptions, Assyrian kings boast of their mercilessness, and the description of the king here as harsh and fierce seems to parallel the Akkadian phrase *lā pādû*, "merciless," an important part of titulary of both Assurnasirpal II and Esarhaddon.[119] All Neo-Assyrian kings use the word *ezzu,* a philological cognate of עז, to refer

114. See the examples in the following passages of Tiglath-pileser III: Tadmor, *The Inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III*, 74–75, Annal 16, line 11 (parallel to RINAP 1:53, Tiglath-pileser III 17); Mila Mergi Rock Relief, line 38 (RINAP 1:92, Tiglath-pileser III 37).

115. The double translation reflects the double meaning pointed out by Hays, "Damming Egypt," 616.

116. Csaba Balogh, *The Stele of YHWH in Egypt: The Prophecies of Isaiah 18-20 concerning Egypt and Kush* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 294, lists Piye, Shabaka, Sargon II, Sennacherib, and later rulers.

117. Although God is said to give עוז to His king (1 Sam 2:10) and nation (Ps 29:11), the corresponding adjective is rarely employed in relation to kings.

118. For the first three verses cited, see Yitzhak Avishur, "Biblical Words and Phrases in Light of their Akkadian Parallels" (Hebrew). *Shnaton* 2 (1977): 13–16. For Eccl 8:1, see Harold Louis Ginsberg, *Studies in Koheleth*, Texts and Studies of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America 17 (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1951), ad loc.

119. For Assurnasirpal II, see Karlsson, *Relations of Power,* 450, and the bibliography cited there. For Esarhaddon, see RINAP 4:184, Esarhaddon 98, line 20.

to their weapons, and both Tiglath-pileser III and Sargon II use it to refer to themselves.

Tiglath-pileser III states that his attack on Calneh (Kinalia) in Unqi was conducted *ina uzzi libbiya,* "in the fury of my heart," and narrates himself in the attack on Ulluba as marching into the mountain passes *ezziš šamriš*, "furiously and ferociously."[120] Sargon describes his actions in his famous eighth campaign in similar terms:

> *ki šitālḫi ezzi ... amqutma*
> I fell on him like a furious arrow ...[121]

These references seem to be the best explanation for the unusual phrase מלך עז, which borrows Assyrian terminology to refer to the Assyrian king. The short passage 19:1–4 describes God as assisting the Assyrian army to conquer Egypt, replacing the god Assur who occupies this position in Assyria, and then handing Egypt over to the Assyrian kings. It clearly shares with Isa 7:17–20 and 8:5–8 the idea of God directing Assyria's actions. Isa 19:1 subverts the Assyrian motif of the god Assur leading the Assyrian armies, suspended in the sky above them. This act of subversion has similarities to Isa 2:5–22, which subverts Assyrian military campaign rhetoric to describe a Divine campaign, in that YHWH replaces Assur in both passages as the leader of the campaign. (I return to this point in my discussion in chapter 7.) However, unlike in Isa 2:5–22, YHWH is not described in Isa 19:1–4 as exercising authority in the lands He conquered. Instead, He hands it over to Egypt, thus showing a similarity to the theological position in Isa 7 and 8:5–8, in which God directs Assyrian military activity.

It is difficult to place 19:1–4 in a particular historical context.[122] Assyria attempted to control Egypt in the reigns of Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal. As I discuss below, Assyrian rhetoric also described the 734 campaign of Tiglath-pileser III to the eastern borders of Sinai as a threat to Egypt,

120. Tadmor, *The Inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III King of Assyria*, 56, annal 25, line 4′ (regarding Unqi), and 115, the Mila Mergi Rock Relief, line 25. Respectively, these parallel RINAP 1:39, Tiglath-pileser III 12, and RINAP 1:91 Tiglath-pileser III 37.

121. Mayer, *Assyrien und Urartu, der Achte Feldzug Sargons II im Jahr 714 v. Chr*, 1:110, line 133.

122. Hays notes that the reference to צען in verse 11 suggests that this verse refers to the period before 715 BCE, during which this was Egypt's capital ("Damming Egypt," 615 n. 13). As noted above, he argues convincingly that Isa 19:1–15 form a complete unit. Since the passage refers to an attack on Egypt, it seems to refer to that of Tiglath-pileser III.

and the passage may belong to that period. But it is clear that this passage belongs to the Assyrian period, and refers to Assyrian imagery.

Let us now discuss Isa 19:19–26, where the political event and the underlying theology are more explicit.

8. Egypt, Israel, and Assyria in Isaiah 19:19–25

This passage contains some of the most universal language in Isaiah, describing how Assyria and Egypt join Israel in worshipping YHWH.[123]

(19) ביום ההוא יהיה מזבח לי' בתוך ארץ מצרים ומצבה אצל גבולה לי'. (20) והיה לאות ולעד לי' צ'באות בארץ מצרים, כי יצעקו אל י' מפני לחצים וישלח להם מושיע ורב והצילם. (21) ונודע י' למצרים וידעו מצרים את י' ביום ההוא ועבדו זבח ומנחה ונדרו נדר לי' ושלמו. (22) ונגף י' את מצרים נגף ורפוא ושבו עד י' ונעתר להם ורפאם.

(23) ביום ההוא תהיה מסלה ממצרים אשורה ובא אשור במצרים ומצרים באשור ועבדו מצרים את אשור.

(24) ביום ההוא יהיה ישראל שלישיה למצרים ולאשור ברכה בקרב הארץ. (25) אשר ברכו י' צ'באות לאמר ברוך עמי מצרים ומעשה ידי אשור ונחלתי ישראל.

(19) On that day, there will be an altar to the Lord inside the land of Egypt, and a monument near its border to the Lord. (20) It shall be a sign and a witness to the Lord of Hosts in the Land of Egypt, when they will call out to the Lord because of their oppressors, and He will send them a deliverer and a leader, and he will remove them. (21) Then, the Lord shall become known to Egypt, and Egypt shall know the Lord on that day, and they shall perform an offering and a gift-offering, and they shall vow a vow to the Lord and fulfill it. (22) And the Lord shall smite Egypt, smiting and pardoning, and they will return unto the Lord, and He will respond to their plea and pardon them.
(23) On that day, there shall be a high-road from Egypt towards Assyria and Assyria shall come into Egypt and Egypt into Assyria, and Egypt shall serve Assyria.

(24) On that day, Israel shall be a triad with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the land. (25) Which the Lord of Hosts blessed, saying: Blessed is My people Egypt, and the work of My hands Assyria, and My inheritance Israel.

The passage begins with the establishment of two structures marking Egypt as belonging to YHWH: the altar and the monument, both of which I discuss

123. For the theological import of the passage, see Berges, *The Book of Isaiah,* 151–53.

in detail below. A group in Egypt (presumably Egyptians) is said in verse 20 to call out to God, recognizing His sovereignty in verse 21. God both punishes and pardons Egypt in verse 22, showing His mastery over this land. God's mastery over Egypt is connected in verses 23–25 to Assyria's dominion over Egypt, and to the road linking the two lands, and passing through Israel. The result of Assyria's mastery of Egypt is described in verses 24–25: like Israel, both Egypt and Assyria become worshippers of God.

The passage clearly sees the Assyrian influence in conquering Egypt as driving Egypt towards joining Israel and Assyria as a "YHWH-nation" in verses 23–25. But in verse 21, Egypt is described as going beyond this, not only worshipping God, but acknowledging God as sole sovereign. (Such acknowledgement is the meaning of the biblical phrase "to know God," as in Ex 5:2, 8:7, 8:18, 9:16, and 9:29.) This acknowledgement results from the initial establishment of the structures dedicated to God in verse 19, which are referred to as "a sign and a witness" in verse 20, and lead to Egypt turning to God in verse 20. After Egypt turns to God in verse 20, Egypt acknowledges God in verse 21. I therefore begin by investigating the historical background to the establishment of these two structures.

In investigating verse 19, most scholars have focused on the many known altars to YHWH established in Egypt, and tried to connect the composition of the verse to those events.[124] Such altars were established in various periods, generally by Judeans who were exiled or moved to Egypt. But the altar in verse 19 is not a unique or unexpected part of the religious change described in verses 19–22. Sacrifice and altar-construction are an integral part of biblical narratives of gentiles who become worshippers of YHWH (as can be seen from Jon 1:16 and 2 Kgs 5:17–18). Since the altar is not out of place in verses discussing a process of conversion, and is an expected part of that process, it seems unnecessary to interpret the altar as a reference to a specific historical reality.

The more unique motif in Isa 19:19 is not the construction of an altar within (בתוך) the land of Egypt, but the monument established "near its border" (אצל גבולה).[125] The phrase "near its border" refers to the border between Egypt and the Land of Israel, which is called גבול מצרים elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible (1 Kgs 5:1 and in the parallel in 2 Chron 9:26).[126] There

124. For a summary of these views, see Aster, "Isaiah 19: The Burden of Egypt," 454–55.

125. It is important to emphasize the border location of this stele. Balogh, *The Stele of YHWH*, 298, argued that this verse reflects the establishment of a stele by Esarhaddon at an unknown location *within* Egypt. But this ignores the emphasis in the verse on the border location of the stele.

126. It is unlikely that it refers to the southern border of Egypt, which is called גבול

are no literary parallels to a monument at such a location within the biblical corpus, and to the best of my knowledge, there is only a single clearly-attested case of establishing such a monument.[127]

Marti recognized the unusual nature of a monument in such a wilderness location, and found it difficult to identify parallels precisely because they are so rare.[128] The unusual nature of this motif suggests that it is based on a historical occurrence. But border monuments in unsettled terrain were not very common in the pre-modern period. Wazana notes that border markers were most frequently used in the ancient Near East to indicate borders between adjoining vassal states or private householders' lands.[129] An empire would typically extend to the utmost limit of settled territory, and since the empire ended where settled territory ended, there was no functional need to delineate the empire's border by means of a monument. On the contrary, "Like central cities and temples, the Empire's frontier was in no need of physical demarcation: the setting up of monuments at the edges

כוש in Ezek 29:10. When גבול is used to refer to a border between lands (as opposed to its use to refer to a land *in toto*, as in Ex 10:19), the geographic name that follows גבול refers to the side of the border that is farthest from the speaker. Josh 17:8 illustrates this by referring to the Ephraimite-Manassite border as "the border of Manasseh for the sons of Ephraim." Similarly, the Egypt-Kush border is called "the border of Kush," and the border between Egypt and the Israelites is called "the border of Egypt."

127. In searching for an inner-biblical parallel to the motif of the monument, Kissane cited Gen 31:45, arguing that just as the monument of Gilead marks the border between Aram and Israel, that of Isa 19:19 marks "the extent of Jahweh's land": Edward J. Kissane, *The Book of Isaiah: Translated from a Critically Revised Hebrew Text with Commentary* (Dublin: Browne and Nolan, 1941), 1:220. But this functional interpretation of the monument requires that we re-interpret the phrase as referring not to the border between Egypt and Canaan, but to one of the borders between Egypt and its neighbors to the south and west. This re-interpretation flies in the face of the linguistic tendency noted above. It is required by the context of the passage that describes the transformation of Egypt into speakers of a Canaanite language (verse 18) and worshipers of YHWH like Israel (verses 19–23), thus making Egypt "like Canaan of old, Jahweh's land." A monument on the border *between* Egypt and Canaan would not mark "the extent of Jahweh's land." The single attested incident of a border marker on the border between Egypt and Israel occurs in the annals of Tiglath-pileser III, in the description of his campaign of 734 BCE. It is described in detail below.

128. Cf. Marti: "die Maṣṣebā ... nicht näher bestimmbar ist" (*Das Buch Jesaja*, 157).

129. In her interesting study, *All the Boundaries of the Land: The Promised Land in Biblical Thought in Light of the Ancient Near East*, trans. Liat Qeren (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2013), Nili Wazana shows that stone border demarcations in the ancient Near East were generally used in cases where borders between sovereigns were located in settled areas: see especially 43–44 n. 111.

of the world was intended to serve ideological and political-propagandist rather than administrative-governmental purposes."[130]

Monuments on borders in unsettled territory were used to advertise the extent of a suzerain's conquests.[131] A monument on the border cannot possibly be a cultic object,[132] but rather is one that broadcasts the sovereignty of a suzerain over territory. The oracle in verses 19–22 fits well with a monument designed to broadcast sovereignty. This oracle links two motifs: a foreign "oppressor" who threatens Egypt, and a monument expressing sovereignty "on the border of Egypt." These two motifs appear together in the historical record only at a single point: in the 734 BCE campaign of Tiglath-pileser III, who established the only known monument "on the border of Egypt."

> *ṣalam šarrūtiya ina āl naḫal Muṣur nāru [ša...ulziz]*
>
> My royal stele [I set up] in the City of the Brook of Egypt, a river-[bed ...][133]

The "Brook of Egypt" is consistently used in both the Bible and Assyrian texts as the topographical feature designating the political boundary

130. Ibid., 45. The point that borders in antiquity usually ran through unsettled territory is discussed by Roy E. H. Mellor, *Nation, State and Territory: A Political Geography* (London: Routledge, 1989), 74.

131. Thus, Shalmaneser III established monuments in the Land of Nairi, in the mountains near the source of the Tigris, and in Mount Baali-raasi, somewhere on the Levantine coast in the area of Tyre, each of which marked the limits of his conquests (RIMA 3:39, A.0.102.6, col. iii, lines 34-38, in the fifteenth year, describing events in Nairi, also described in subsequent inscriptions). For the statue on the coast, see RIMA 3:48, A.0.102.8, lines 20′–25″and subsequently in RIMA 3:54, A.0.102.10, col. iv, lines 7-19. Centuries earlier, Thutmes III described how he established monuments to mark his borders to the north, in the swamps on the Euphrates, and to the south, in the Nubian Desert (Wazana, *All the Boundaries of the Land,* 46–47).

132. *Contra* Wildberger, *Isaiah 1-12*, 274, who connects this to the מצבות in Deut 12.

133. Tadmor, *The Inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III*, 179, Summary Inscription 8, line 18′ (parallel to RINAP 1:127, Tiglath-pileser III 48). The precise geographic location of the "city of the Brook of Egypt" and the question of whether the Sumerogram URU should be translated or taken as a determinative lie beyond the scope of our discussion here. See further Nadav Na'aman, "The Brook of Egypt and Assyrian Policy on the Border of Egypt," *Tel Aviv* 6 (1979): 68–90; Anson F. Rainey, "Toponymic Problems, continued," *Tel Aviv* 9 (1982): 130–35; Paul K. Hooker, "The Location of the Brook of Egypt," in *History and Interpretation: Essays in Honor of John F. Hayes*, ed. M. Patrick Graham, William P. Brown, and Jeffrey K. Kuan (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 203–10.

between Egypt and Israel/Judah, although its northern bank was inhabited and controlled by Philistines for much of the relevant period.[134]

As discussed above in explaining Isa 7:18–19, the 734 campaign of Tiglath-pileser III was designed to separate the Levant from Egypt, weaken anti-Assyrian forces in Egypt, and strengthen pro-Assyrian forces in Egypt. Although designated in the eponym chronicle "to Philistia," the political and economic effect of the campaign was without doubt felt in Egypt. Furthermore, Tiglath-pileser III vaunts himself as subduing territory "below Egypt" in this campaign. In his titulary, he mentions Egypt, claiming that he ruled "up to the Western Sea as far as Egypt."[135] It is entirely clear that Tiglath-pileser III neither invaded Egypt nor controlled it. But the Assyrian rhetoric surrounding the 734 campaign naturally sought to obscure this fact, and portrayed Egypt (rather than the border region at the northeastern tip of the Sinai Peninsula) as the goal of the campaign.

The establishment of this stele on the border with Egypt was part of a series of Assyrian actions designed to show Assyrian control of the Gaza region, which formed the key link between Egypt and the Levant. The Assyrians could not destroy Gaza, which was a valuable trading center. But political expediency demanded a clear gesture to convey to Hanunu, king of Gaza, that Assyria was sovereign. Before the 734 campaign, Hanunu was not tributary to Assyria, and upon the Assyrian arrival, he fled to Egypt, but was then allowed to return.

To indicate Assyrian control of Gaza, in addition to the royal stele in the river-bed on the border with Egypt, a royal image of gold was established in the palace of the king of Gaza. This image is attested in two summary inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III. In these, Tiglath-pileser III states that he considered this royal image of gold "among the gods of the land" (that is, Gaza), and both Tadmor and Yamada suggested restoring the text so that it tells of Tiglath-pileser III ordaining permanent offerings to this statue.[136] Regardless of whether one accepts this restoration, the

134. Hooker, "The Location of the Brook of Egypt," 210. Biblical references to "the brook of Egypt" as the border of the Land of Israel appear in Josh 15:14 and 1 Kgs 8:65 (parallel to 2 Chron 7:8). Hooker cites the Assyrian references.

135. *ša šapal* ^{KUR}*muṣri*: see Tadmor, *The Inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III*, 178–79, Summary Inscription 8, line 22′, parallel to RINAP 1:128, Tiglath-pileser III 48. Israel Eph'al, *The Ancient Arabs: Nomads on the Borders of the Fertile Crescent, Ninth–Fifth Centuries BC Jerusalem* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1982), 91, translates as "south of (lit.: below) Egypt." This translation is logical: in the inscription, Idbi'ilu is said to occupy territory "facing" Egypt in the north-eastern part of Sinai, while the Me'unites, who are said to be "below Egypt," occupied territory farther south. For examples of the titulary of Tiglath-pileser III, which contain this phrase, see the three references in note 87, above.

136. Tadmor, *The Inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III*, 140–41, Summary Inscription 4,

statue was given a quasi-divine status (as is clear from it being considered among the gods of the land) and it served as a reminder of Assyrian control over Gaza, the gateway to Egypt.[137]

Based on this historical background, it would seem that Isa 19:19–22 re-envision the history of the 734 campaign. They describe how in a future conquest of Egypt, which is modeled on that of the 734 campaign on the border of Egypt, a monument to God will be established in the precise location where Tiglath-pileser III established his monument. Furthermore, an altar to God will be established inside Egypt, evoking the "reminder" Tiglath-pileser III placed in the Gaza palace.

In this re-envisioned campaign, the people of Egypt will see visual reminders of God's sovereignty, just as the people of Egypt's border saw visual reminders of Assyrian sovereignty in 734. The re-envisioned campaign does not narrate the events of 734; rather, it draws on these historical events while re-interpreting their significance. It describes them as part of a larger process leading to worship of YHWH in Egypt, and it also draws heavily on the Exodus narrative in Ex 3–14.

Balogh has argued that the passage reacts to the period of the actual Assyrian invasion of Egypt in the seventh century.[138] We cannot exclude this possibility. But it is important to note that nowhere in Isa 19 is an actual invasion of Egypt described.[139] Instead, the emphasis is on panic in Egypt, in apparent reaction to an Assyrian threat. As part of this panic, 19:19–20 describe changes in the religious practice of Egypt. It appears most reasonable to see these changes as a "re-envisioned" version of the changes that were imposed by Assyria in Gaza in 734. While it is clear to us that Gaza and the surrounding region are not Egypt, it is important to

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lines 10′–12′ clearly states that Tiglath-pileser III considered this statue among the gods of their land. As Tadmor there notes, a passage indicating the imposition of permanent offerings in this context can be restored. (This inscription is paralleled by RINAP 1:106, Tiglath-pileser III 42). Tadmor, *The Inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III*, 178–79, Summary Inscription 8, lines 17′–18′ (parallel to RINAP 1:127, Tiglath-pileser III 48) also refers to the establishment of this gold image. The passage stating that Tiglath-pileser III regarded it among the gods of the land is restored by both Tadmor and Yamada. The passage about offerings is suggested by Yamada in RINAP 1:106 as a possible completion to this text.

137. On the political function of this statue, see further in Holloway, *Assur is King!*, 190–93.

138. Balogh, *The Stele of YHWH*, 208, argues that the passage relates to the period between Esarhaddon's invasion in 671 and the early years of Assurbanipal.

139. On 19:4, in which Egypt is "dammed" and given over into the hands of a king, apparently that of Assyria, see discussion above. But here too, no actual invasion is described, only the transfer of control.

remember that Assyrian propaganda regarding the 734 campaign used the toponym "Egypt" freely in regard to the region around the "Brook of Egypt," as discussed above. Isaiah's reactions are to these propagandistic claims, and not to factual toponymy. Therefore, it appears most reasonable to understand Isa 19:19–22 as a re-envisioning of the 734 campaign.

Isa 19:19–22 are a single compositional unit, whose verses depend on each other. Verse 20, which designates either (or both) of the structures mentioned in verse 19 (the altar and the monument) as "a sign and a witness," clearly depends on verse 19. Verse 21 refers both to acceptance of the sovereignty of YHWH, which is expressed by the monument, and to worship of YHWH, which is expressed by the altar. Verse 20b, which describes Egypt's cries to God "because of oppressors" also describes the historical events of the 734 campaign, and verse 22 is clearly related to verse 20b.

In verses 20b and 22, the prophet re-envisions the events of this campaign as leading not to an Egyptian recognition of the Assyrian king and god as sovereign, but to recognition of YHWH as the sole universal sovereign. Egypt learns the concept of a universal sovereign from political events, and then applies that lesson in the more rarified theological sphere. The Assyrian king, who smote Egypt in the prophet's historical imagination, is replaced by YHWH, who smites Egypt. As a result of these blows, Egypt expresses their newfound recognition of YHWH by the standard means non-Israelites use to express recognition of YHWH, namely the sacrificial altar, and also by an innovative subversion of the monument at the Brook of Egypt, the symbol of Assyrian sovereignty, which they transform into a monument to YHWH. Recognizing YHWH as sovereign, the Egyptians call out to YHWH, who saves them from their oppressor by sending a "savior and chieftain" (מושיע ורב) in verse 20b. This figure is not necessarily a reference to a specific eighth-century political leader, but it clearly draws on the narrative of Israel's own Exodus from Egypt.

The dependence of Isa 19:19–25 on formulations we know from Ex 3–14 has long been recognized. Over 30 years ago, Fishbane wrote:

> Through a manifest and deliberate reworking, Israel's paramount national memory of salvation has been extended to its most ancient enemy. Such a metamorphosis requires that the literary tradition of Exod 3-11 had already become sufficiently authoritative so as to provide the foil for this audacious, theological counterpoint.[140]

140. Michael Fishbane, "Revelation and Tradition: Aspects of Inner-Biblical

And he later wrote:

> This transformation is brought about by a deliberate and extended play on the language of the exodus cycle, particularly such segments of the Pentateuchal account as are found in Exod 3:7-9 and 8:16-24.[141]

Below, I discuss the specific formulations we know from these Exodus chapters that are reformulated in the Isaiah verses. I note that the language is not only similar, but is also unique. Four specific phrases used in Isa 19:19–22 appear with reference to Egypt only in these verses and in Exodus. Furthermore, two of these phrases are relatively rare in biblical Hebrew. It is exceptionally unlikely that these four specific phrases would be used in each of these passages without reference to the other passages.

It is even more unlikely that the very short Isaiah passage forms the basis for a later expansion in Ex 3–14. Tropes such as the sending of a divine deliverer to Egypt, and formulations such as Egypt's "knowing" YHWH, and the divine "smiting and healing" of Egypt all seem inexplicable in Isa 19:19–22, unless these are interpreted as adaptations of tropes and formulations from the Exodus cycle. Additionally, the narrative of Israel's oppression and Exodus in Egypt is so widespread in biblical literature that it seems much more reasonable for Isaiah's narrative to draw on the better-known narrative. The degree of similarity can best be explained by the dependence of the Isaiah verses on the literary tradition we know from the Exodus chapters.[142]

Thus, there are two main influences on the formulation of Isa 19:20b–22. These verses (along with 19:19–20a) draw on the events of the 734 campaign, as they are portrayed in Assyrian royal inscriptions. These events include the

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Exegesis," *JBL* 99 (1980): 343–61, here 354. As I discuss below, there are also references to Ex 14 in Isa 19:20b–22.

141. Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985), 367.

142. I use "literary tradition" to refer to an intermediate stage in the composition of a narrative: one in which the characterization and rhetorical emphases are expressed in particular formulations, but in which the final presentation of the narrative may remain fluid. In large measure, it corresponds to the stage of "statement" in Chatman's narrative grammar. The "statement" is part of the "expression plane," a later stage than the "content plane" (in which the story comes into existence), but it is defined as "the basic component of the form of the expression, independent of and more abstract than any particular manifestation ..." (Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* [Ithaca: Cornell, 1978], 146). I prefer to draw on the structural analyses of narratologists than on those of form critics, the former being more universalizable.

threat to Egypt, the establishment of the border stele, and perhaps also the theological dimension created by the placement of a royal image among the local gods in Gaza. But they also draw on the literary tradition we know from Ex 3–14. Recognition of these two influences is important in the exegesis of Isa 19:19–25, but it also has implications for dating the redaction and canonization of Ex 3–14, or at least of certain passages in that group. It is unlikely that knowledge of the events of the 734 campaign, and of the ways it was portrayed in Assyrian royal inscriptions, would have been preserved long after the eighth century. Isa 19:19–22 are a compositional unit, which draws simultaneously on both of these influences. Therefore, we can determine that by the early seventh century at the very latest, not only the events of the Exodus, but also the literary descriptions detailed below, which we know from Ex 3–14, were known in Jerusalem.[143] Four specific formulations can be noted:

8.1. Calling out to God due to Oppression

Verse 20b describes the Egyptians as כי יצעקו אל יי. Although this is not a rare formulation, it is used in describing Israel's actions in Egypt in Ex 3:7

143. Arguing that an author of the late eighth or early seventh century drew on formulations known to us from Ex 3:7–12, 7:25, 9:4, 14, 14:4, 18, and 25 has obvious implications for the redactional history of the Exodus narrative. Even if the narrative had not yet reached the stage of a fully-canonical redacted text (Chatman's "a particular manifestation") by this point, the author of Isa 19:19–22 had knowledge not only of the story, but also of some of the formulations used to tell it. Biblical scholarship generally considers the primary components of the exodus cycle to be a JE source and a P source, which are synthesized together. (A clear formulation of this thesis appears in Moshe Greenberg, "The Redaction of the Plagues Narrative in Exodus," in *Near Eastern Studies in Honor of William Foxwell Albright,* ed. Hans Goedike [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1971], 243–52. This thesis guides the work of Thomas B. Dozeman, *Commentary on Exodus* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009], who refers to the sources as P and Non-P.) The formulations with which the author of Isa 19:19-22 is familiar appear in both sources.

More specifically, Ex 3:9–12 is attributed to (J)E: see Dozeman, *Commentary on Exodus*, 98. Propp in contrast argues that in Ex 3–4, it is nearly impossible to separate J from E: William Henry C. Propp, *Exodus 1-18: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary,* Anchor Bible 2a (New York: Doubleday, 1998), 194. The root נגף appears in Ex 7:27 and 9:14, both attributed to E (Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 286–89), and 9:4, which contains עתר, is attributed to the same source. But the emphasis on Egypt "knowing" God is generally seen as a hallmark of P (as is clear from Dozeman's discussion [*Commentary on Exodus*, 317] of the dependence of Ex 14:18 on Ex 7:1-5). Ex 14:4 and 18 are thus attributed to P (Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 461–62, 481; Dozeman, *Commentary on Exodus*, 309–10, 317).

and 14:10b.[144] The full phrase in Isa 19:20b is כי יצעקו אל י' מפני לחצים, and an almost identical formulation appears in Ex 3:9:

> ועתה הנה צעקת בני ישראל באה אלי וגם ראיתי את הלחץ אשר מצרים לחצים אתם
>
> Behold, the cries of the Israelites have come unto me, and moreover I have seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them.

The specific collocation of לחץ and צעק appears only in Isa 19:20b, Ex 3:9, and Judg 4:3, only the first two alluding to Egypt.[145]

Furthermore, Ex 3:12 mentions the "sign" (אות) with which Moses is to demonstrate his mission. This phrase appears in Isa 19:20: והיה לאות ולעד לי' in describing the impact of the altar and monument.[146] In view of the use of material from Ex 3:9 in the same verse, it seems most reasonable to see the use of לאות here as drawn from Ex 3:12.

Isa 19:20 thus includes three specific lexemes that appear in Ex 3:9–12 (צעק, לחץ, אות) and which do not appear together elsewhere. Furthermore, Isa 19:20 conceptually parallels Ex 3:9–12 in that it describes the experience of calling out to YHWH as a result of oppression, and YHWH sending a deliverer as a result. It seems most reasonable to see Isa 19:20 as drawing on the language of Ex 3:9–12.

144. It is used in the wilderness-wandering narratives, in describing Israel. Most of these passages are attributed to JE, as appears from the detailed list in Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 478.

145. The concatenation of these phrases in Judg 4:3 does not appear to be incidental, but is also a reference to the Exodus narrative. Several references to Ex 14 appear in Judg 4, including the focus on the threat posed by the chariots, and the attendant hopelessness of Israel's situation in the initial part of the narrative. Like Moses in Ex 14:15, Barak in Judg 4:8 needs to be prodded into activity.

146. Of the two phrases designating the altar and monument, one is expected and one is unusual. The phrase לעד, "for a witness," is used in describing the monument of Jacob and Laban in Gen 32:52, and in describing the altar of the tribes of Reuben and Gad in Josh 22:27. But the phrase לאות, "for a sign," is not used elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible in reference to an altar or monument. It is usually used in reference to a miraculous sign, and seems entirely out of place in Isa 19:20. Its use here is best explained as drawn from the Exodus narratives, which contain many such references (Ex 4:8–30, 10:1–2). While it is possible that the single word לאות is a later insertion, the logic of the insertion is the presence of language drawn from Ex 3:9 later in the verse.

8.2. The Deliverer

Verse 20b speaks of the sending of a divine emissary, who is designated מושיע ורב, "a deliverer and leader," to rescue Egypt. Conceptually, the verse seems to draw on the Israelite experience in Egypt. It may draw on Ex 14:30, ויושע י' את ישראל ביום ההוא מיד מצרים "YHWH delivered Israel on that day from Egypt's power."[147] Ex 14:30 is the only use of the root ישׁ"ע to describe God's acts to Israel in Exodus, and Isa 19:20 seems to draw on this portrayal. Below, I note other phrases in Isa 19:19–22 that seem to draw on Ex 14.

8.3. Knowing God

In Isa 19:21, YHWH is said to become known to Egypt, following which Egypt will "know YHWH" (ונודע י' למצרים, וידעו מצרים את י'). As noted above, this clearly refers to Egypt accepting the Sovereignty of YHWH. Similar formulations are rife in the Exodus narrative, appearing as the center of the conflict between YHWH and Pharaoh in 5:2, 8:7, 18, and 9:14, 29. All of these phrases narrate how Pharaoh is expected to "know YHWH" but refuses to do so. Only in Ex 14, at the Red Sea, is Egypt (not Pharaoh) specifically said to achieve knowledge of YHWH. This knowledge is predicted in 14:4, 18 and finally achieved in 14:25.

Besides its mention of Israel "calling out to the Lord" (ויצעקו בני ישראל אל י') in verse 10 (paralleling Isa 19:20), and its mention of YHWH "delivering" Israel in verse 30 (also a parallel to Isa 19:20), Ex 14 thus includes the only explicit mentions of Egypt knowing YHWH. Besides grouping together three phrases that appear in Isa 19:20b–21, Ex 14 also serves a conceptual background for the conversion of Egypt: Egypt is smitten in the plagues, but it is only when Israel is finally delivered, at the Red Sea, that Egypt achieves knowledge of YHWH. In Isa 19:20b–21, Egypt is both delivered and smitten, but it is specifically the process of deliverance that seems to predicate Egypt's achieving knowledge of YHWH. It is difficult to understand how Isa 19:20b–21 could have been composed without reference to Ex 14.

8.4. Smiting and Entreating

In Isa 19:22, YHWH is said to "smite Egypt, smiting and healing." The root "smiting" (נג"ף) appears in the plagues narratives in Ex 7:27 and 9:14. In Isa

147. Although the term "deliverer" (מושיע) is frequently used in Judges to refer to the chieftains sent to rescue Israel (as in 3:9, 3:15, and 6:14), these narratives seem to draw on the Exodus narrative. Like Isa 19:20b, these narratives use the term "deliverer" to refer to other leaders who are similar in some ways to Moses, without using this term to refer to Moses himself.

19:22, as in the Exodus narrative, it is the repeated smiting of Egypt that causes Egypt to turn to YHWH. The same verse in Isaiah contains another rare root used in the exodus narrative. The root עת"ר, which can mean "to entreat" (in the causative stem) or "to respond" (in the N-stem), is used in Ex 9:4 in Pharaoh's request that Moses entreat YHWH to stop the plague and in Isa 19:22 to describe YHWH's response to Egypt's pleas. The return of Egypt to YHWH described in Isa 19:22 seems to be the direct result of a re-enactment of the plagues of Egypt, and the Assyrian attack seems to be re-envisioned as a re-enactment of those plagues.

Thus, the re-envisioned description draws not only on the Egyptians' experiences with Tiglath-pileser, but also on their long-ago experiences with YHWH at the time of the Exodus. In drawing on the Exodus, the prophet casts the Egyptians in a dual role: on the one hand, like the Egyptians of the Exodus, they suffer the "smiting" of YHWH (verse 22); on the other, like the Israelites of the Exodus, they are delivered by a "savior" (verse 20). The ultimate achievement of this process is that YHWH responds to the plea of the Egyptians and "heals" them. The "healing" here is an act of remission of punishment: as a direct result of Egypt's accepting the sovereignty of YHWH, He agrees to cease the punishment. This recalls the Assyrian usage of *bulluṭu*, literally "to heal," but practically "to pardon" in remitting the punishment of a vassal who rebelled but then accepted the Assyrian king as sovereign. This phrase appears in several Neo-Assyrian royal inscriptions.[148] Of particular interest is its use in connection with the 734 campaign. In describing the submission of one of the rebellious states (probably Tyre), whose rebellion precipitated the campaign, a summary inscription of Tiglath-pileser III states: *ḫiṭišunu amḫuršunūtima, massunu ubal[liṭ]*—"I accepted their sin (that is, their plea for forgiveness for the rebellion) and forgave their country."[149] Like the Assyrian king, YHWH punishes until His sovereignty is recognized, then ceases punishment.

Verses 19–22, which draw on both the rhetoric of the Assyrian campaign and the Exodus narrative, exercise a direct and clear influence on verses 23–25, with their unparalleled theology. For ease of reference, verses 23–25 are reproduced here:

148. In Esarhaddon's Vassal Treaty: see SAA 2:192–93, no. 6, paragraph 17, and in the inscriptions of Assurnasirpal II (RIMA 2:199, A.0.101.1, col. i, lines 79–81). Simo Parpola and Kazuko Watanabe, *Neo-Assyrian Treaties and Loyalty Oaths*, SAA 2 (Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1988), 36.

149. Tadmor, *The Inscriptions of Tiglath-Pileser III*, 176; Summary Inscription 8, lines 13′–14′, parallel to RINAP 1:126, text 48. For this line as a reference to Tyre, see Tadmor, *The Inscriptions of Tiglath-Pileser III*, 182 and the discussion in in RINAP 1:125–26.

> (23) On that day, there shall be a high-road from Egypt towards Assyria and Assyria shall come into Egypt and Egypt into Assyria, and Egypt shall serve Assyria.
>
> (24) On that day, Israel shall be a triad with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the land. (25) Which the Lord of Hosts blessed, saying: Blessed is My people Egypt, and the work of My hands Assyria, and My inheritance Israel.

Verse 23 describes transport and communication between Egypt and Assyria, under Assyrian hegemony, reflecting the real events that resulted from Assyrian domination of Egypt's outgoing trade after 734. (The founding of the "emporium," the Assyrian attempts to strengthen Piankhy, and Piankhy's trade with the Levant were discussed above, in reference to 7:18–19.) But the re-envisioned interpretation of these events, in verses 24–25, draws on Egypt's newfound acceptance of YHWH as universal sovereign, which were discussed in verses 19–22, and on Assyria's portrayal of this campaign as an important step in achieving its vision of a universal empire, a portrayal expressed in the titulary of Tiglath-pileser III. Because Egypt now accepts YHWH as sovereign, it enjoys the blessing of YHWH and can occupy the status of "My nation." Furthermore, the status "My nation" derives from Egypt's playing the role of oppressed Israel in 19:20, a role that flows from its acceptance of YHWH. The status "My nation" is a contingent one, known to us from the relational formula in which Israel's status as YHWH's nation depends on YHWH being Israel's God (Ex 6:7, Hos 2:25), and it is one Egypt earned by accepting God.

While Egypt earns this status by accepting YHWH in the detailed "re-envisioning" in verses 19–22, and Israel's acceptance of this status is of long standing, Assyria's status as a member of the triad is somewhat more puzzling. It is important to note that Egypt and Israel are described in verse 23 in language that more directly reflects a special relationship with YHWH than that used to describe Assyria. "My nation" and "my inheritance"[150] clearly reflect a close relationship, but "the work of my hands" reflects Assyria's role in performing actions for which YHWH takes credit.

Several passages in Isa 6–8, which also relate to the early stages in Judah's encounter with Assyria, portray Assyria as an unwitting agent of YHWH. In 6:13, YHWH takes credit for deportations, which are clearly accomplished in practice by Assyria. In 7:17–19 and in 8:7, YHWH takes a direct role in instigating an Assyrian invasion of Israel. In 19:23, Assyria is described as "the work of YHWH's hands" because of its role in causing

150. Used to refer to the land (2 Sam 20:19, 21:3) and the people of Israel (Deut 32:9) in their relationship to YHWH.

the "conversion" of Egypt, in Isaiah's re-envisioned history. Assyria clearly understands the concept of a universal sovereign, and this allows Assyria to become an unwitting apostle, propagating the universal empire of YHWH, which we know as monotheism.

The prophet's re-envisioning of the campaign implies a transition from Egypt's recognition of the Assyrian empire as sole political sovereign to the recognition of YHWH in that role. In a specific and interesting manner, the approach of Isa 19:23–25 to the Assyrian campaign of 734 parallels a similar approach in the inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III. Although the campaign of 734 was clearly limited to southern Philistia and did not cross the Sinai desert, we have seen that Tiglath-pileser III portrays the campaign as creating his dominion over Egypt, a point he emphasizes in his titulary. There is a certain degree of "re-envisioning" of the 734 campaign in this portrayal, since the titulary implies a conquest of Egypt. Isa 19:23–25 continues this re-envisioning process one step further: Assyria not only dominates Egypt, but its domination of Egypt results in recognition of YHWH, rather than Assyria, as sole sovereign.

9. Conclusion

The prophecies discussed in this chapter can all be dated, based on their use of Assyrian imperial motifs, to the Assyrian period. They all relate to the events in the middle of the reign of Tiglath-pileser III, more specifically to the period surrounding the Syro-Ephraimite crisis and the subsequent Assyrian campaign of 734. Many of these passages seem to date from this period, although in some cases (such as 8:5–8), the passages may be later reflections on the events of this period.

Like Isa 6, the passages discussed in this chapter reference Assyrian imperial propaganda while undermining the ideology it was designed to promote. In particular, they attack the notion of the universal rule of the Assyrian king and his omnipotence, and attribute these characteristics to YHWH. This denial of the legitimacy of Assyrian imperial rule is connected to practical political advice in parts of Isa 7:1–8:18. Several passages in this unit highlight the divergence between the narrow interests of the elite and those of the wider population. They argue that for Judah's long-term political benefit, the elite should limit its involvement in the Assyrian imperial system to the minimum, and should try to avoid Judah becoming tributary to Assyria.

All of the passages discussed in this chapter portray Assyria as an agent of YHWH, conquering nations at His command. These passages show certain similarities in their response to Assyrian claims of empire to which they respond: while acknowledging that Assyria was a cruel conqueror, they describe an ultimate positive result to Assyria's actions, and in that sense Assyria can

be seen as a force for the good. Isa 19:19–25 describe how Assyrian rule ultimately will result in recognition of Divine sovereignty by the nations Assyria conquered. For Egypt, Assyrian sovereignty, which requires renunciation of any ambitions of Egypt to dominate the region, serves as a model for Divine sovereignty. Faced with overwhelming Assyrian force, Egypt is portrayed as recognizing Assyrian sovereignty in the inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III, and this recognition serves as a model for Egypt recognizing YHWH as sovereign in Isa 19.

But for Judah too, Assyria can serve as a positive catalyst, as described in 7:1–8:18. The invasions of 733–732 serve as a warning of the political dangers inherent in acknowledging Assyria as sovereign. These sought to return Judah to the recognition of Divine sovereignty, whose conflict with Assyrian sovereignty was detailed in Isa 6.

In both cases, the prophet is acutely aware of the suffering faced by those dominated by Assyria: he speaks of Assyria as settling in all of Judah's valleys and pastures in 7:18–19, as emasculating Judah's king in 7:20, and as the flood in 8:5–8, reaching "until Judah's neck." He speaks of Egypt being handed over to a harsh king in 19:4, and of Egypt serving Assyria in 19:23. But all of these actions have the potential to teach Judahites and Egyptians, respectively, about Divine sovereignty.

Most interestingly, all of these passages describe God as the motivating force behind Assyrian actions. God directs Assyria, and orders its movements. This divine power behind Assyria is directly connected to the potentially-salubrious theological developments that result from Assyrian domination.

This guardedly-positive view of Assyria changes markedly in prophecies related to the reign of Sargon II, the powerful king who emerged as ruler of Assyria several years after the death of Tiglath-pileser III in 727. The onset of his rule is described in the next chapter of this work. In the prophecies that can be dated to his reign, notably 31:1–5 (discussed in chapter 4) and 10:5–34* (discussed in chapter 5), we find an emphasis on Judah's need for divine protection. In 10:5–34*, the need for YHWH to challenge, fight, and defeat Assyria is discussed for the first time. These transitions show how the prophet responds to political changes, while maintaining the key elements of universal Divine sovereignty and omnipotence that characterize his theology.

4

How Jerusalem Differs from Philistia: Isaiah 14:28–32 and Isaiah 31 — Theological Interpretations of Geography and Political Lessons

The passages discussed in this chapter move beyond the period of Tiglath-pileser III into that of his successors: his son Shalmaneser V, who reigned briefly (and apparently ineffectively) from 727 to 722, and subsequently the usurper Sargon II, who reigned 722–705. In this chapter, we focus on 727–714, a particularly tumultuous part of these kings' reigns.

Both passages treated here (Isa 14:28–32 and Isa 31) share a similar political background: the tantalizing possibility of rebellion against Assyria both excited and scared the peoples of the southern Levant in these years. As I discuss in detail further on in this chapter, the relative Assyrian weakness in the years of Shalmaneser V demonstrated that Assyria was not an invincible giant, despite the many victories of Tiglath-pileser III. As a result, various polities attempted rebellions against Assyria during these years. Several of these rebellions were centered in Philistia, whose three maritime kingdoms (Gaza, Ashkelon, and Ashdod) seem to have been particularly keen on exploring the possibilities of rebellion in these years. Both passages compare and contrast the status of Philistia's kingdoms to that of Judah, and more specifically, to that of Jerusalem.

In each passage, the question of how Judah ought to react to Assyrian domination is explored. But this question is placed against the background of Assyria's domination of Philistia. Each passage relates to a specific and known political event that took place in (or very close to) the range of years

noted above, and it is most reasonable that each was composed in proximity to that event. It is possible that interpolations were added at a later date, but since the central message of each passage relates to the specific political event, and provides advice about how to respond to it, it is most reasonable to date the bulk of each passage to the years surrounding each event.

The datable nature of each passage has interesting implications for periodizing Isaiah's theology and chronicling its development. The second passage introduces, for the first time, the idea of God defending Judah against Assyria, and this forms an important change in the approach to Assyria found in these chapters.

In discussing the dangers of rebellion against Assyria, and those stemming from Assyrian retribution, each passage also discusses the question of divine protection of Jerusalem. Scholars frequently consider the promises of divine protection to Jerusalem to have developed as a result of the attempts of Sennacherib to conquer Jerusalem in 701.[1] But a close look at the passages discussed in this chapter, and at the dates of the events they discuss, shows that the idea of divine protection of Jerusalem preceded the events of 701 by about a quarter century. The idea of divine protection of Jerusalem did not result from an interpretation of the events of 701, but from the geographic and political realities explored in the passages discussed in this chapter.

It should also be noted that these passages use Jerusalem almost as a cypher for the kingdom of Judah. This may be partly due to Isaiah's words being addressed to the Jerusalem elite, resulting in increased focus on the city itself, and to the specific geographic position in the mountains, far from the coastal road. But it must also be recognized that by the last third of the eighth century (even before the destruction of the kingdom of Israel), Jerusalem was by far the largest city in Judah, many times larger than other cities in the kingdom. Jerusalem grew gradually from the ninth to the seventh centuries, expanding its territory and its population. By the period under discussion, Jerusalem was not simply "another town" in Judah; Jerusalem and its environs housed a substantial portion of Judah's population, and it would have been impossible to imagine Judah without Jerusalem.[2] Thus, the

1. Clements, who in his commentary on Isaiah develops Barth's ideas of a late-seventh century redaction of many passages, argues that the tradition of divine protection of Jerusalem "is more a consequence of the interpretation of what took place in 701 than its presupposition": Clements, Isaiah and the Deliverance of Jerusalem, 94, see also 90–108. For other studies of when and how this promise developed, see references to studies of "Zion theology" in chapter 1 n. 110.

2. Estimates for the population of Jerusalem at its seventh-century height cluster around 25,000 people, with substantial leeway in either direction. Although some scholars have argued that Jerusalem only grew as a result of Israelites fleeing Assyrian domination, archaeological research shows that much of this growth occurred earlier.

survival of Judah depended practically on the existence of Jerusalem, quite apart from any theological or spiritual significance of the city. We now turn to address the first of the two passages, Isa 14:28–32.

1. The Geographical Influence on Assyrian Policy

The short passage in Isa 14:28–32 has been grouped by one of Isaiah's editors together with the "oracles about the nations" unit (Isa 13–23), since it begins with an appeal to Philistia. But like several of the other passages in this unit, it does not refer solely to "the nations" (compare 17:3 and the passages from 19:19–25 discussed in chapter 3). Isa 14:28–32, in its present form, engages in a geographic and political comparison of the roles of Jerusalem and Philistia under Assyrian rule, and assures Jerusalem that it will not be attacked or besieged. This assurance results from the contrast between the geo-political situation in Philistia and that in Jerusalem, leading to Assyrian attacks on Philistia while Jerusalem avoided these.

The factors that made control of Philistia important for Assyria, which are explored below, all relate to its geographic location as the bridge between the Levant and Egypt, and its role in maritime trade. Isa 14:28–32 "assures" the inhabitants of Philistia that Assyria will continue to threaten them and demand to control this region. In contrast, Jerusalem's location away from international routes and its insignificance to trade made it of little interest to Assyria during much of this period, and this lack of interest protected its inhabitants.

To understand this contrast, a short historical-geographical survey of Assyria's interest in Philistia is needed. As seen from the priority which Tiglath-pileser III accorded to the attack on Philistia in 734 (an attack discussed in the previous chapter), control of Philistia was of the utmost importance to Assyria from the beginning of its advance into the southern Levant. This is often explained as resulting from the importance of controlling Philistia as a bulwark dividing the southern Levant from anti-Assyrian forces in Egypt, which could encourage rebellion in the southern Levant, and from the riches that could be gained from taxing Philistia's maritime trade.[3] But several factors ought to be considered in explaining why control of Philistia was important to Assyria.

See Avraham Faust, "The Settlement of Jerusalem's Western Hill and the City's Status in Iron Age II Revisited," *Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins* 121 (2005): 97–118; Nadav Na'aman, "When and How did Jerusalem Become a Great City? The Rise of Jerusalem as Judah's Premier City in the Eighth-Seventh Centuries B.C.E.," *BASOR* 347 (2007): 21–56, esp. 27.

3. On the prioritization of Philistia in the 734 campaign, see Dubovský, "Tiglath-pileser III's Campaigns in 734–732 BC."

One was the ideological factor, related to Philistia's role as the land-bridge to Egypt. The ability to claim dominion of Egypt was important ideologically for Assyrian kings, because it established their role as universal monarchs. The importance of claiming control of Egypt can be seen from the titulary of Tiglath-pileser III, discussed in the previous chapter.[4] But this claim required grounding in historical reality, and very severe challenges lay in the way of conquest of Egypt.[5] Instead, control of Philistia (especially its southern reaches) granted Assyrian kings the necessary half-measure of truth to propagate the claim of controlling Egypt. This is clear from the way the inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III term the territory of Siruatti the Me'unite, a tribal leader in north-central Sinai, as "below Egypt," thus terming the Rafah or El-Arish areas "Egypt."[6] Secondly, control over southern Philistia was also a way to materially influence events in Egypt, by determining which Egyptians would benefit from the lucrative trade with Philistine ports.[7] Furthermore, control of Philistia allowed Assyria to dominate land-based communication with Egypt, and prevent aid from anti-Assyrian elements in Egypt from reaching kingdoms in the southern Levant who sought to rebel against Assyrian control.[8] And last but certainly not least, political control of the Philistine ports allowed Assyria to impose customs duties on maritime trade.

4. "The king who marched about at the command of Ashur, Shamash, and Marduk, the great gods, from the bitter sea of Bit Yakini [that is, the Persian Gulf] up to Mount Bikni in the east [in the Zagros or Alborz mountain ranges in Iran], and up to the Western Sea as far as Egypt, the horizon to the zenith, he ruled and reigned over the countries." The titulary appears in several inscriptions; here cited from Tadmor, *The Inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III*, 158, Summary Inscription 7, lines 3–4, parallel to RINAP 1:118, Tiglath-pileser III 47.

5. For the importance of historical reality in imperial claims, see Machinist, "Assyrians on Assyria," 77–80.

6. See Tadmor, *Inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III*, 178–79, Summary Inscription 7, line 22′ (parallel to RINAP 1:127, Tiglath-pileser III Inscription 48) and his discussion in the notes there.

7. See the discussion of Isa 7:18–19 in chapter 3.

8. The appointment of the Idbi'ilu group of nomads as "gatekeepers facing Egypt" attests to this. The appointment of Idbi'ilu as gatekeeper is attested in Tadmor, *The Inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III*, 168, Summary Inscription 7, line 6′ (RINAP 1:122, Tiglath-pileser III 47, rev. 6′); Tadmor, ibid., 142, Summary Inscription 4, line 34′ (RINAP 1:107, Tiglath-pileser III 42); and in a fragmentary context, Tadmor, ibid., 202, Summary Inscription 13, line 16′ (RINAP 1:112, Tiglath-pileser III 44). For additional readings of these texts noting that some tribes were appointed to the position of *qēpu* in this region, see Nadav Na'aman, "Siruatti the Me'unite in a Second Inscription of Tiglath-pileser III," *NABU* 4 (1997): 139.

Philistine city-states did not accept the Assyrian control easily. The detailed and extensive program for demonstrating and enforcing Assyrian sovereignty in Gaza demonstrates that the people of Gaza, as well as their king, did not easily accept this.[9] This is also demonstrated by the rebellion of Mittinti, king of Ashkelon, who revolted against Tiglath-pileser III shortly after having sworn a loyalty oath in 734. Mittinti apparently expected that with the end of the Assyrian campaign of 734, Assyrian control of the area would end. In other words, Mittinti considered that once Tiglath-pileser III had left Philistia, the region would cease to remain under Assyrian control.

The annals of Tiglath-pileser record Mittinti's terror when he saw that Tiglath-pileser III had returned to the region and had defeated Rezin of Damascus. Subsequently, Mittinti ceased to rule (the circumstances are unclear) and Rukibtu replaced him.[10] This may indicate that Tiglath-pileser III undertook an additional campaign against Ashkelon in 732.[11] This post-734 rebellion of Ashkelon is likely connected to the re-emergence of the anti-Assyrian Egyptian King Tefnakht, who reigned in the delta in the years 733–726 (after he was briefly defeated by Piankhy in 734). Relying on Egyptian support, Ashkelon attempted to shake off Assyria's yoke, not realizing that Tiglath-pileser III was intent on controlling Philistia and would return to put down the rebellion. The insistence of Tiglath-pileser III on controlling Philistia is indicative of Assyria's attitude towards the region.

The last years of the reign of Tiglath-pileser III (730–728) were occupied with attempts to dominate Babylon; he died in 727, succeeded by his son Ululaya, who reigned as Shalmaneser V. While he was clearly active during his father's lifetime, serving as crown prince and a senior administrator, he is generally seen as a weak king.[12] He reigned only briefly, until Sargon II overthrew him in 722. We lack information as to the relations between Assyria and Philistia in the reign of Shalmaneser V.

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9. As discussed in the previous chapter, this program included the establishment of a gold statue in the palace in Gaza, as well as possible offerings to this statue. It also included the establishment of a stele of Tiglath-pileser III in "the city of the brook of Egypt," which was near Gaza, and the appointment of nomads to supervise land-based communications with Egypt, detailed above.

10. See Tadmor, *The Inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III*, 82–83, annal 18, lines 8′–12′; annal 24, lines 12′–16′ (which are fragmentary and complete each other). These parallel RINAP 1:63, Tiglath-pileser III 22 and RINAP 1:61, Tiglath-pileser III 21, respectively. For the dates of the events, see the end of Tadmor's Supplementary Study D, 268.

11. Line 12′ of the first text noted above states that Tiglath-pileser III "entered his city," and this seems to refer to Ashkelon. If so, it may well indicate a further short campaign of Tiglath-pileser III to Ashkelon towards the end of the 733–732 campaign.

12. For his activity in his father's reign, see SAA 19: 10–13, letters 8–11.

We do know, however, that rebellions against Assyria in Philistia reached new heights in the reign of Sargon II. As is discussed in detail further on in this chapter, Assyria campaigned in Philistia repeatedly between 720 and 714, due to repeated rebellions both in and around Gaza and in Ashdod. For now, it suffices to note that based on the Assyrian sources, Assyrian domination of Philistia was repeatedly opposed by the inhabitants of Philistia, from its imposition in 734 down through 712, and then again after the death of Sargon II in 705.

The superscription in Isa 14:28 dates the "burden" recorded in 14:28–32 to "the year of Ahaz's death," which seems to have occurred roughly at the same time as Tiglath-pileser III's. There is good reason to date Ahaz's death to approximately 727.[13]

2. Assyrian Motifs in Isaiah 14:28–32 and the Date of the Passage's Composition

The "burden" recorded in Isa 14:29–32 fits very well into the period of Tiglath-pileser's death. But it is important to emphasize that this dating is not based on the superscription "in the year of the death of king Ahaz" (Isa 14:28).

The superscription dates from the redactor of Isaiah, and cannot be taken as a definitive basis for dating the passage. Dating the passage based on a superscription from a different compositional stratum than the "burden" is problematic from a methodological point of view.[14] But more

13. This is deduced from 2 Kgs 17:1, which states that Hoshea the king of Israel acceded to the throne in the twelfth year of Ahaz, and from 2 Kgs 16:2, which states that Ahaz reigned sixteen years. We know that Hoshea succeeded to the throne towards the end of Tiglath-pileser III's 733–732 campaign. It follows that Ahaz died between 728 and 726. For the date 728/727, see Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings*, 195, 341. For a similar date of 726, see Gershon Galil, *The Chronology of the Kings of Israel and Judah* (Leiden: Brill, 1996). The differences between 728 and 726 are not material for our discussion, since both the lack of synchronism between the regnal and Julian/Gregorian calendars and the counting of the first regnal year make it difficult to achieve accuracy of more than a year or two in regnal dates. On questions of the counting of the first regnal year, see Edwin R. Thiele, *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*. 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983). In order to produce the date 701 for Sennacherib's attack, and keep this in the fourteenth year of Hezekiah (following 2 Kgs 18:13), Thiele dates the beginning of Hezekiah's reign (and the death of Ahaz) to the year 714. A different and simple solution to the problem of 2 Kgs 18:13 is proposed in chapter 6 of this book. The date 714 for the death of Ahaz seems to produce serious problems for understanding 2 Kgs 16:12. For a very different view, see Roberts, *First Isaiah*, 220–27.

14. De Jong, *Isaiah Among the Near Eastern Prophets*, 144–46, also notes the late

importantly, the "burden" itself provides sufficient guidance as to its date, and it is unnecessary to rely on the superscription.

As has long been recognized, the passage clearly references the death of a king who oppressed Philistia. The passage contains definable royal Assyrian motifs, and the close reading of the passage presented below argues that the "smiter of Philistia" is an Assyrian king, in contrast to Roberts's view.[15] These motifs also make it clear that this passage's composition dates to the Assyrian period, and that earlier views dating it to far later periods cannot be accepted.[16]

Identifying the "smiter" here as an Assyrian king narrows the range of possibilities to those Assyrian kings who launched the most extensive campaigns in Philistia: Tiglath-pileser III and Sargon II.[17] The discussion of the imagery will make clear why only an identification with Tiglath-pileser III is possible. Thus, the imagery justifies the date assigned by the author of the superscription. (This suggests that the author of the superscription lived not long after the date of composition of the passage and/or knew its historical background.) The "burden" reads:

(29) אל תשמחי פלשת כלך, כי נשבר שבט מכך
כי משרש נחש יצא צפע, ופריו שרף מעופף

(30) ורעו בכורי דלים, ואביונים לבטח ירבצו, והמתי ברעב שרשך, ושאריתך יהרג.

(31) הילילי שער זעקי עיר, נמוג פלשת כלך,
כי מצפון עשן בא, ואין בודד במועדיו.

(32) ומה יענה מלאכי גוי, כי י' יסד ציון, ובה יחסו עניי עמו.

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eighth-century background, but then describes this as belonging to a seventh-century revision of the Isaiah tradition. Among the reasons for positing such a revision is the superscription of the verse: "The phrase 'In the year King Ahaz died this oracle came' suggesting that the oracle deals with the death of Ahaz" (ibid., 146). The superscription ought not to influence the interpretation of the passage, and there is no reason to posit that the author of the superscription intended to re-interpret the passage.

15. Roberts (*First Isaiah*, 724–25) posits that Ahaz was the "smiter of Philistia," although the historical evidence supporting this is limited.

16. Duhm and Marti both see the passage as dating from the Hellenistic period (Marti, *Das Buch Jesaja*, 132, who summarizes Duhm's view as well). See further discussion of Duhm's view in De Jong, *Isaiah Among the Ancient Near Eastern Prophets*, 144. Note that Vermeylen, *Du prophète Isaïe à l'apocalyptique*, 297, dates it to the late eighth century.

17. This description "smiter of Philistia" does not fit Sennacherib well. We have no records of his destroying a city in Philistia. While he arrested and killed the anti-Assyrian leaders in Ekron, and deported the anti-Assyrian king of Ashkelon, he did not destroy any of these cities and restored native rulers to them. He also gave territories that had belonged to Judah to the kings of Ekron, Ashdod, and Gaza.

> (29) Do not rejoice, O Philistia, all of you, because the staff of your smiter has been broken
> For an adder will come forth from the root of a snake, and its fruit will be a flying seraph
>
> (30) And the firstborn of the poor will graze, and the needy will lie down securely, and I will kill your root by means of famine and your remaining descendants[18] he will kill.
>
> (31) Wail, O gate! Cry, O city! Philistia, all of you is melting.
> For from the north smoke comes, and there is no lonely one in his gathered-together ones
>
> (32) And what will the messengers of the nation declare?
> For the Lord has founded Zion and in it will find refuge the lowly/poor of my people.

The "burden" contains three references to Assyrian imperial motif: the staff, the snake, and the smoke.

The first of these, the staff, appears in the initial warning in verse 29. Although terms for "staff" (מטה/שבט) have a wide range of meaning in Biblical Hebrew (indicating a tribe, an elder, and a metaphor for something reliable),[19] they are used in Isa 1–39 in particular (as in Isa 10:5, 10:26, and 14:5) to denote an instrument used for or symbolizing territorial conquest. In Assyrian texts the staff is directly connected to territorial conquest. The Assyrian king holds a sceptre, which is the symbol of his position as king, and which he receives at his coronation.[20] But besides the regular sceptre, which the Assyrian king holds, and with which he is told to expand his territory, he is also said to hold a staff whose specific function is to defeat enemies. In a passage from a titulary of Sennacherib, which evokes his coronation,

18. The word שארית means "remnant," from שאר, to remain (cf. Isa 37:39 // 2 Kgs 19:39). It can also refer specifically to remaining descendants (perhaps due to the influence of שאר, "flesh") (cf. Jer 44:8; 2 Sam 14:7). The "root and fruit" imagery here evokes the idea of descendants and progeny: see below.

19. Examples of מטה referring to something reliable include "a staff of food" in Lev 26:26, but also "a staff of power/protection" in Jer 48 and Ps 110:2. Both usages derive from the use of the staff by honoured male persons as a type of status symbol (Gen 38:18). In all of these biblical attestations, staff refers to the activities connected with those of the family patriarch: providing food and protection. As a prominent and visible object held by the patriarch, the staff is used not only in reference to the food and protection he provides but also to the group of his descendants: the tribe.

20. The granting of this sceptre is part of the Assyrian coronation ceremony from the earliest periods to the Neo-Assyrian period: see Livingstone, "New Dimensions in the Study of Assyrian Religion," 166; Fales, "The Case of Assyria," 8–9).

he describes how he receives from Assur not only a *kakku*, or a ceremonial weapon, sceptre, or mace, which expresses the king's rule and whose formal function is to "widen the borders of Assyria," but also a "stick" (Akk. *ḫaṭṭu*; written ^{GIŠ} GIDRU) whose function is to fell enemies.[21] The specific role of the staff in smiting enemies seems to be evoked by the phrase "the staff of your smiter" in Isa 14:29a. The breaking of this staff in that verse indicates the king's death (as is clear from the second part of the verse) and this fits with the role of the staff as indicating the specific responsibility of the king to defeat enemies and conquer territory in Assyria.

The snake imagery in 14:29^{b} is also a reference to an Assyrian imperial symbol. Like the motif of the staff, the snake also expresses the conquering of territory by Assyria. As noted in chapter 2, snakes appeared on Assyrian battle standards. Based on a relief found in Sennacherib's palace in Nineveh, standards depicting impaled snakes were erected in Assyrian military camps.[22]

This relief is Slab 43 in Room V.[23] It shows a circular Assyrian fortified camp, labelled as the camp of Sennacherib, "in a wooded, mountainous landscape."[24] In the camp, sacrifices are prepared and incense is offered in front

21. See RINAP 3/2, Sennacherib 43, line 5; RINAP 3/1:221, Sennacherib 34, line 5. Such a "double staff" description also seems to be used by Tiglath-pileser III in the stele from Iran, which is broken in the relevant points. Tadmor, *The Inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III*, 94–96, lines A1-B8′ (= RINAP 1:81 Tiglath-pileser III 35 i 1–20). Note that the bestowal of sceptre and crown by Sin is mentioned in line A 8 (in Tadmor) or i 8 (in RINAP 1). This is parallel to the Mila Mergi rock relief, in Tadmor, 112–13, parallel to RINAP 1:91–92, Tiglath-pileser III 37). This sceptre (*ḫaṭṭu*) is mentioned (in the Mila Mergi relief, and completed in the Iran stele) together with the grant of sovereignty. In lines A31–35 of the Iran stele, the role of the king in expanding Assyria's boundaries is mentioned, and he is there instructed to "strike down the unsubmissive." The lines are broken, and include mention of the king's shepherding role and that of Assur in granting him something. It is possible that these lines included mention of the double stick, or at least of the stick used to strike down the unsubmissive. In line B8' the use of the weapon to defeat enemies is specifically mentioned. These two inscriptions (the Iran stele and the Mila Mergi rock relief) use similar epithets; they emphasize the universalistic aspects of Tiglath-pileser's control and date from the first part of his reign. For discussion of these inscriptions, see Cifola, *Analysis of Variants*, 138–39.

22. Russell, "Sennacherib's Palace without Rival Revisited," 302.

23. Room V is a "retiring room" behind the throne room. Its reliefs emphasize "military prowess, as one enemy after another feel before the onslaught of the Assyrian king and army." John Malcolm Russell, *The Final Sack of Nineveh: The Discovery, Documentation and Destruction of King Sennacherib's Throne Room at Nineveh*, Iraq (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 43.

24. The sequence in this room is identified by an epigraph as depicting the campaign against Aranziaš in the Zagros Mountains, during Sennacherib's second cam-

of a table-like altar. Behind the altar is a pair of standards on which were real snakes or carved snake-like dragons. The snakes, like the light chariot that stands behind them, seem part of the equipment of the camp.

Several reliefs from Sennacherib's period display camp scenes, in which the priests perform sacrificial and incense rituals in front of the incense burner and altar. The purpose of these rituals was to cleanse the king after or before the battle. It is important to note that the standards do not seem to be part of the ritual element (consisting of the priests, incense, sacrifices, and altar), since this element is found in several other reliefs without the standards.[25] Rather, the standards serve to mark the camp as "Assyrian space." "The gods' standards do not follow the royal chariot during the battle ... but they appear again next to the king during reviews, and inside the camp, which becomes Assyrian territory in enemy land."[26] Since these standards are used to mark conquered territory as belonging to Assyria, they are an appropriate way of representing Assyrian conquest, and are used to represent the king in Isa 14:29.[27]

Verse 29b, in evoking the image of the snake, the adder, and the seraph as representing, respectively, the root, the trunk, and the fruit of a tree, uses a device frequently found in biblical and ancient Near Eastern literature, in which succeeding generations are represented as parts of a tree. The root represents previous generations, the trunk represents the present, and the fruit represents the future.[28] Each of the types of serpents mentioned is more rare and more dangerous than the previous one: the first term, נחש, is mentioned frequently in the Hebrew Bible; the second, צפע (or צפעוני), is mentioned only in contexts involving danger (Prov 23:32 and Isa 11:8); and the last, שרף, is mentioned only in Num 21:8 (and Deut 8:15, which relates to Num 21:8) as a snake whose bite kills.[29] The image of the succeeding gener-

paign; ibid., 43 and 237.

25. M. G. Micale, and D. Nadali, "The Shape of Sennacherib's Camps: Strategic Functions and Ideological Space," *Iraq* 66 (2004): 163–75, here 164–67.

26. Ibid., 166.

27. In considering the use of language reminiscent of Assyrian visual images in discussing Philistia, it may be relevant to recall that in his very first campaign to Philistia, Tiglath-pileser III established in the palace of Gaza a divine image as a visual reminder of Assyrian conquest. While we do not know the form of that image, since we know that standards representing snakes were used elsewhere to mark conquered territory as Assyrian, this may have been the case in Gaza in 734, and Isaiah may here be referencing that event.

28. The image appears most clearly in the Eshmunazer inscription, KAI 14, line 11, in describing the eradication of a dynasty: the root refers to previous generations, and the fruit to future ones. Similarly in Mal 3:19, Job 18:16–17, and in many other verses.

29. In Deut 8:15, the שרף is connected to the עקרב, the scorpion, which represents

ations of progressively more vicious snakes in verse 29b therefore signifies the gradually more dangerous nature of the "smiters" of Philistia. Philistia ought not to rejoice at the death of its first smiter, because his succeeding generations will be more and more dangerous.

Taken as a whole, verse 29 clearly shows that Philistines had rejoiced at the death of their smiter, and the verse warns them that they have no reason to rejoice, because the dead ruler will have more powerful and dangerous future generations, who will be interested in dominating Philistia. Formulated in the language of modern political science, the prophet's message is that the Assyrian conquest of Philistia is caused by Philistia's situation in the international system, and not by the particular decisions of a specific individual Assyrian king.[30]

The terror that the people of Philistia ought to evince when faced with this dynasty of dangerous rulers is contrasted in verse 30 with the behaviour of the "poor" and "needy" who will "lie securely." The identity of these "poor and needy" is not made explicit in 30a, but they are contrasted with the Philistines, whose death and destruction is promised in 30b. The verse also uses imagery of "root" and "remaining descendants" to illustrate the danger to future generations of Philistia's inhabitants. This contrasts with the security and peace of the unnamed "poor" and "needy."

It is interesting that in verse 30b, the action of destroying Philistia is done both by God and by the "smiter" (or the snake, which represents the smiter).[31] This accords with the view seen in 7:17–20, according to which God is ultimately responsible for the actions of Assyria. Here, God and Assyria seem to act jointly to extirpate Assyria.

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the most dangerous animal of the three mentioned. Interestingly, the scorpion is a symbol for the Assyrian queen, and represents the continuity of generations, and the care of the mother for the survival of the heir (Karen Radner, "The Delegation of Power: Neo-Assyrian Bureau Seals," in *L'Archive des Fortifications de Persépolis: état des questions et perspectives de recherches: actes du colloque organisé au Collège de France par la "Chaire d'histoire et civilisation du monde achéménide et de l'empire d'Alexandre" et le "Réseau international d'études et de recherches achéménides" (GDR 2538 CNRS), 3-4 novembre 2006*, ed. Pierre Briant, Wouter Henkelman, and Matthew W. Stolper (Paris: de Boccard, 2008), 481–513, here 494–95). It is possible that שרף, נחש, and צפע in Isa 14:29 intend to allude to the scorpion symbol.

30. See the analysis of human and state-specific factors in explaining wars in Kenneth Neal Waltz, *Man, the State, and War: A Theoretical Analysis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959).

31. Although 1QIsa[a] replaces MT יהרג with אהרוג, "The more difficult reading of MT may be the more original. It better explains the confusion in the versions." (Roberts, *First Isaiah*, 220)

Resuming the message of destruction for Philistia, verse 31 warns Philistia that an unnamed conqueror is coming from the north, and that all of Philistia ought to wail and melt. The fact that the unnamed conqueror is coming from the north makes it very clear that the reference is not to Judah conquering Philistia, but to an army marching down the main coastal road leading towards Philistia, Sinai, and Egypt. The "melting" imagery indicates Philistia's refusal to fight, due to terror.[32] This imagery fits with the historical experience of Assyria. When Assyria advanced towards Philistia, some kings (such as Hanunu of Gaza in 734) escaped to Egypt, and others (like Mittinti of Ashkelon in 732) absconded in an unclear way. The description "There is no lonely one in his gathered-together ones" in verse 31b is similar to the description of Assyria in Isa 5:27. The comparison of Assyria's march to smoke parallels not only the actual experience of watching the Assyrian army's advance, but the literary descriptions in the inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III, which speak of a land which "saw the dust cloud from the march of my forces" and apparently submitted.[33] This description, of viewing a massive army that raises smoke or dust as it marches, and then submitting, fits with both the literary descriptions and the historical reality of the period of Tiglath-pileser III, in which the kingdoms of the southern Levant were shocked by the military might of Assyria.

3. Isaiah 14:28–32 and the Development of "Zion Theology"

Considering the historical evidence for Assyria's activities in Philistia, and the use of Assyrian royal imagery in these verses, these verses fit best as a description of Assyria. It is difficult to see them as a later representation of other empires, given the specific use of the staff, the snake, and the smoke in Assyrian imperial imagery.

Furthermore, the passage describes Assyria as unstoppable, and describes Philistia as trembling and melting when encountering Assyria. Such descriptions fit best with the perception of Assyria in the reign of Tiglath-pileser III. During this period, at least two kingdoms refused to pay tribute when Assyria was not actually campaigning in Philistia (Hanunu of Gaza before the 734 campaign and Mittinti of Ashkelon after it), but no king

32. The "melting" imagery in Josh 2:9 and Ex 15:15 carries a similar meaning.

33. The reference is to the land of Muqania (location unknown), which appears both in Tadmor, *The Inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III*, 76–77, annal 5, line 7 (RINAP 1:29, Tiglath-pileser III 6) and RINAP 1:54, Tiglath-pileser III 18, line 7. A similar description, in which viewing the dust cloud of the Assyrian army caused Merodach-Baladan to submit to Assyria, appears in the inscriptions of Sennacherib (RINAP 3/1:34 Inscription 1, line 26).

stood up and fought battles with Assyria. This contrasts with the situation in Sargon's reign, when battles against Assyria in Philistia took place both in 720 and in 712, and possibly at other points. The passage also argues against viewing Assyrian campaigns to Philistia as the product of a specific king's decision. Such an argument might have been required at the end of the reign of Tiglath-pileser III, when Philistia had yet to experience attempts of other kings to dominate it. It would hardly have been required at the close of the reign of Sargon II, for there was no reason to expect future kings to act differently than Tiglath-pileser III or Sargon II.

Another reason to view this passage as related to the death of Tiglath-pileser III is the clear expectation that upon the death of the king the succession will pass quickly to the next generation (verse 29b). Upon the death of Tiglath-pileser III, his son, who was a senior administrator and crown prince, quickly succeeded to the throne and was expected to do so. No such expectation would have been reasonable upon the death of Sargon II, who died on the battlefield and whose death provoked a revolt throughout the west.

The passage, therefore, is best understood as a warning to Philistia not to revolt in 727, as individual cities had done in previous years. It is relevant to note that no political entity called "Philistia" existed at this point; the four city-states were independent of each other. The emphasis on "all of it" in verse 29 and verse 32 seems designed to counsel against an attempt by the Philistine cities to join together in fighting Assyria in the hope of withstanding an Assyrian onslaught. Such attempts at creating anti-Assyrian coalitions in Philistia occurred repeatedly during the reign of Sargon, when Ashdod's kings twice sent emissaries seeking coalition partners for a revolt. (See discussion further in this chapter.) The coalition partners they sought included other kings of Philistia as well as the king of Judah. We have no clear evidence for such coalition building upon the death of Tiglath-pileser III, but we cannot exclude this possibility. It is relevant to note that until approximately 726, Tefnakht ruled in Egypt and would no doubt have encouraged anti-Assyrian coalitions in the southern Levant.

We turn now to the contrast evoked in verse 30 between the "poor" and "needy" and Philistia. De Jong argues that 30b, which describes the poor and needy group, "interrupts the coherence of verses 29–31."[34] Literarily, this is a difficult argument, because every contrast involves a certain degree of interruption, and the passage in its current form contrasts Philistia and Judah in verses 30–32.

Furthermore, it is most likely that the audience intended for Isa 14:28–32 was the political elite of late eighth-century Judah, who were expected to

34. De Jong, *Isaiah Among the Ancient Near Eastern Prophets*, 144.

learn something from the pronouncements of the prophet regarding Philistia. It is very difficult to conceive of how the people of Philistia themselves might have been the sole intended audience.

Thus, if we excise verse 30b (and verse 32, which clearly references Judah), we are left with an oracle that counsels the polities of Philistia to avoid rebelling against Assyria, and thereby provoking an Assyrian onslaught. The resulting passage, which focuses solely on Philistia, seems unlikely given the audience of the passage. The contrast between Philistia and Judah would then be implied, rather than stated. While I view verses 30b and 32 as part of the original passage, their excision still leaves us with a message for Judah.

Thoughts of revolt no doubt presented themselves in Philistia upon the death of Tiglath-pileser III; the death of a king was often an opportunity for organizing a revolt. The repeated campaigns of Sargon II to Philistia show that Philistia did not accept Assyrian domination easily, and it is extremely unlikely that Philistia's polities dutifully paid tribute throughout the weak reign of Shalmaneser V, only to revolt when Sargon took the throne. Clearly, the revolts against Assyrian dominion in Philistia began when Tiglath-pileser III died, and, if we are to consider the case of Ashkelon, even during the last years of his reign. The mention of "a nation's emissaries" in verse 32a evokes the possibility of political emissaries representing a different kingdom (presumably one of Philistia's city-states) visiting Judah to ask its views about the advisability of launching a revolt upon the death of Tiglath-pileser III.

In this passage, Isaiah sought to sensitize the court of Judah to the political status that Philistia occupied in the Assyrian system, and to the difference between Philistia's status and that of Judah. This difference has implications for the political action required of Judah. Although control of Philistia was important to Assyria, Judah of the late eighth century had little to offer the Assyrians. It did not border any world powers, no major roads crossed Judah, and its trade and economy were by far inferior both to those of Philistia's kingdoms and to those of the kingdom of Israel to the north. Little economic benefit or political impact could be obtained from Judah. Judah's distance from major international roads was also a relevant factor.[35]

35. All of the known activity of Tiglath-pileser III in the southern Levant was within 10 km of main international roads. In the Lower Galilee, the site he destroyed that is furthest from an international road seems to be Horbat Rosh Zayit, which is only 10 km (two hours march) from the main road leading from Akko to Transjordan, the Darb el-Harawneh. The points Tiglath-pileser reached in his conquest of lower Galilee appear in annals 18 and 24: see Tadmor, *The Inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III*, 82–83 and the geographic discussion there. For the Assyrian-period destruction level

This context makes the contrast between Philistia and Judah more easily understood. The "needy" and "poor" Judahites, who are of little interest to the Assyrians, dwell securely, in contrast to Philistia, which will be repeatedly invaded. This "warning" calls attention to the different positions that Judah and Philistia occupy from the point of view of the Assyrians.

This relative economic poverty—and lower political status—were precisely the elements that guaranteed Judah's survival, and made revolts or other active anti-Assyrian actions superfluous. Judah is counselled to avoid active involvement in Philistine-led revolts. Judging from Assyria's actions in the reign of Tiglath-pileser III, it appeared unlikely that Assyria would seek to dominate Judah the way it dominated Philistia. Therefore, it appeared that Judah could survive Assyrian control, and need not incur the risk of revolt. Because Judah's geographic position gave it a different status, it ought not to see itself as part of a conglomerate of neighbouring states whose interests were best served by acting in concert against the Assyrians. Judah was of relatively little interest to Assyria, and because of this, Judah ought not to revolt.

The different statuses of Judah and of Philistia are a critical point in Isaiah's political analysis, and form the background for his messages about Jerusalem that appear in Isa 31 and in Isa 10:5–27. Each of these passages, as we will see subsequently, references Assyria's interest in Philistia. We see, therefore, a development of certain aspects of the "Zion theology," which argues that Jerusalem cannot be conquered, at least a quarter century before the battles of 701 BCE. Zion theology does not develop only as a result of these battles, but as a result of the insignificance of Judah to Assyria throughout the last third of the eighth century.

Verse 32, which also appears to me to be original to this passage (*pace* De Jong), resumes the theme of the "poor/lowly" Judeans. Here, the Judeans are said to dwell in Zion, and Zion is said to have been established by God. This "establishment" by God alludes to the geographic emplacement of Jerusalem. Far from main trade routes, it is of little interest to Assyria (in contrast to the royal cities of Philistia) and it therefore serves as "a refuge" for Judeans. Jerusalem is "founded" by God, and this "founding," that is, its geographic emplacement and consequent political inconsequentiality and

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of Horbat Rosh Zayit, see Zvi Gal, Yardenna Alexandre, and Uri Baruch, *Ḥorbat Rosh Zayit: An Iron Age Storage Fort and Village*, vol. 8 (Jerusalem: Israel Antiquities Authority, 2000). This contrasts with activities of Sargon II who reached Samaria, which is 25 km from the main coastal road, and probably Shechem, which is in the centre of the Israelite hill-country.

relative economic poverty, makes the city into a refuge.[36] This geography, rather than any overt miracle, will save Judah.

We move now to consider a different passage that references Philistia, Isa 31. As we shall see, this passage specifically refers to the events in Ashdod and elsewhere in Philistia, up to the years 714–712 BCE. Some historical background on the turbulent and unstable period between the end of the reign of Tiglath-pileser III and the year 712 BCE is therefore required.

4. Historical Background: Egypt, Philistia, and Assyria from Tiglath-Pileser III to 720 BCE

As I noted above, the city-states of Philistia did not quietly accept Assyrian domination, and Ashkelon seems to have revolted after the 734 campaign of Tiglath-pileser III. No documentary sources tell of the relations of Philistia and Assyria during the reign of Shalmaneser V, who succeeded Tiglath-pileser III.[37] However, given the revolts during the reign of Sargon II, it seems most reasonable to posit that Philistia did not dutifully pay tribute during the reign of this weak king, as I noted above. From the year of his

36. It is possible that the reference to God "founding" Zion is intended to contrast with the repeated statements in the inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III detailing the cities he founded, which were located in areas of strategic interest to Assyria. See for example, the founding of Kar-ashur in southern Mesopotamia in Tadmor, *The Inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III*, 122–23, Summary Inscription 1, line 5 (parallel to RINAP 1:97, Tiglath-pileser III 39, lines 6–7) and other cities referenced in Tadmor, ibid., 76–77, annal 5, first line (parallel to RINAP 1:27, Tiglath-pileser III 5, line 1). Kar-ashur was established at a location of importance to the empire, in contrast to Jerusalem, which was "established" by God in a location of no significance to the empire.

37. At some point during his reign, Hoshea, the last king of Israel, appealed for Egyptian aid and Shalmaneser campaigned against him; this is the only information we have about his activity in the region. The Biblical notice appears in 2 Kgs 17:4–6, and mention of this king's "breaking" Samaria appears in the first lines of the Neo-Babylonian chronicle, published by Albert Kirk Grayson, *Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles* (Locust Valley: Augustin, 1975), 69–87. On the identity of the Egyptian ruler from whom Hoshea requested help, see the survey in Kahn, "The Inscription of Sargon II at Tang-i Var," 13–14. Extensive discussion of the fall of Samaria can be found in Hayim Tadmor, "The Campaigns of Sargon II of Assur: A Chronological-Historical Study," *JCS* 12 (1958): 22–40, 77–100, which lays the foundations for all subsequent reconstructions, and in Bob Becking, *The Fall of Samaria: An Historical and Archaeological Study*, Studies in the History of the Ancient Near East (Leiden: Brill, 1992). More recent studies include K. Lawson Younger, Jr., "The Fall of Samaria in Light of Recent Research," *CBQ* 61 (1999): 461–82 and Sung Jin Park, "A New Historical Reconstruction of the Fall of Samaria," *Bib* 93 (2012): 98–106.

death, 722, until 712 or 711, one or another of the Philistine city-states was engaged in rebellions against Assyria.

Around the time of the death of Shalmaneser V in 722, a chain of revolts against Assyria developed throughout the Levant, mostly in vassal states. In the north, these were led by Iaubidi (also known as Ilubidi), king of Hamath, to whom were allied non-royal elements in Arpad, Ṣimirra, Damascus, and Samaria opposed to Assyrian rule.[38] Each of these areas had previously been conquered by Tiglath-pileser III. Arpad, Ṣimirra, and Damascus became provinces under his rule. The revolt of these areas demonstrated that Tiglath-pileser's strategy of reducing these areas to provinces failed to permanently subdue them.

Sargon assumed the throne and in 720 set out on a campaign to put down these rebellions.[39] The main battles took place at Qarqar and in the land of Hamath, to which the Assyrian rebels against Sargon were later deported.[40] These battles were followed by a very quick march south by Sargon II in the course of which he re-captured Samaria, which had previously been conquered by Shalmaneser V. In the south, a rebellion also took place, but it is not clearly connected to that of Hamath. The fact that such a chain of revolts broke out in the Levant clearly shows that the people of the region did not consider Assyria invincible at this point.

This southern rebellion was led by Hanunu, king of Gaza, and appears to have been supported by Shabaka, who is thought to have succeeded Piankhy as ruler of Kush and exercised control in much of Lower Egypt.[41] Kahn

38. This revolt is well known. The most recently-discovered attestation is in the stele of Sargon II discovered at Tell Tayinat: see Jacob Lauinger and Stephen Batiuk, "A Stele of Sargon II at Tell Tayinat," *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie und vorderasiatische Archäologie* 105.1 (2015): 54–68, esp. 63–64.

39. Sargon II may well have been a son of Tiglath-pileser III, but seems nevertheless to have had a direct role in ending the reign of Shalmaneser V. See further Chamaza, "Sargon II's Ascent," and in Park, "A New Historical Reconstruction," 104. His reign is discussed in detail in Sarah C. Melville, *The Campaigns of Sargon II, King of Assyria, 721-705 B.C.* (Norman: University of Oklahoma, 2016), which unfortunately reached me too late for inclusion in the following discussion.

40. Lauinger and Batiuk, "A Stele of Sargon II," 64, referencing the Beirut and Cyprus stele.

41. For a general summary of the campaign, see Younger, "The Fall of Samaria in Recent Research." I follow here the view of Kahn, "The Inscription of Sargon II at Tang-i-var," 12, for the date of Shabaka's accession. According to the chronology proposed by Michael Bányai, "Ein Vorschlag zur Chronologie der 25. Dynastie in Ägypten," Journal of Egyptian History 6 (2013): 46–129, here 57, Shabaka only became king in 708 BCE, and was preceded briefly by Shebitku. Bányai proposed that the Kushite involvement in anti-Assyrian activity among the Philistine cities before

argued that Shabaka took a markedly anti-Assyrian position throughout his reign. The main battle against the forces of Hanunu of Gaza and the more significant Egyptian forces took place at Raphiah, a relatively unimportant city south of Gaza, one of the last regions inhabited by sedentary dwellers before entering the Sinai desert.

Sargon's inscriptions from Khorsabad describe the Raphiah battle as follows:

> He gave Re'u, his *turtenu* (second-in-command), to assist him. To do war against me, and battle with me, he went out. By the name of Assur my lord, I smashed and defeated him.
>
> Re'u, like a shepherd whose sheep was stolen, fled alone and went away. I seized Hanunu (king of Gaza) and brought him in fetters to Ashur, my city. I defeated, destroyed and burned by fire the city of Raphiah.[42]

The description of the flight of Re'u leaves no doubt that this is a play on the meaning of the name (which denotes "shepherd" in many Semitic languages), since the cuneiform represents the name with the logogram for "shepherd," and the line concerning Re'u translated above is ^{lú}*Rē'ê* (written as SIPA-*e*] *ki* ^{lú}*rē'î ša ṣēnašu ḫabta ēdānuššu ipparšidma ēli*). The ridicule of Re'u in this inscription is due to the trust the rebels placed in him. As the representative of a major power (Egypt), he was expected to vigorously oppose Assyria. The inscription satirizes this trust by describing Re'u as a helpless, robed shepherd, perhaps also engaging the image of the Assyrian king as a lion.[43] The particular ridicule of Re'u was clearly important to the Assyrian scribes: thirteen years after the battle of Raphiah, on a building inscription written in 707, his flight is again adduced:

> Hanunu, king of Gaza, together with Re'u, the *turtenu* [second-in-command] of Egypt, made battle and war against me at Raphiah. I smashed and defeated them. Re'u feared the noise of my weapons and fled, and his place was not seen.[44]

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this date was led by Piye, who preceded Shebitku (Michael Bányai, "Die Reihenfolge der kuschitischen Könige," Journal of Egyptian History 8 (2015): 115–80, here 124). Earlier views identifying the Egyptian king who led this activity are discussed in Kahn, "The Inscription of Sargon II," 11.

42. Cited in Fuchs, *Die Inschriften Sargons II*, 90, lines 53–57.

43. The shepherd is often robbed by the lion. The king in battle is compared to a lion throughout Sennacherib's inscriptions, and an example of this appears in Sennacherib's inscriptions describing his early battles against Babylon (RINAP 3/1:34, Sennacherib 1 line 25).

44. Cited in Fuchs, *Die Inschriften Sargons II*, 197–98, lines 25–26. The line describ-

The shepherd motif plays a role in the 707 inscription as in the earlier one: Re'u's name is written using the logogram for shepherd. Furthermore, the description of someone fleeing out of fear of noise is unusual in the Assyrian inscriptions.[45] It may be used to highlight the weakness of Re'u, who fled upon hearing the weapons—even before he saw them. We will return to this literary discussion below, but here it suffices to note that the victory over Re'u was celebrated by Assyria in the hope that it marked the end of any challenge from Egypt to Sargon's restoring the dominion over the Levant that Tiglath-pileser III enjoyed.

By publicizing Re'u's defeat, portraying him as a shepherd unable to protect his flock, and ridiculing his abandonment of the rebels in the Levant, Assyria hoped to dissuade Philistia and the other kingdoms of the southern Levant from rebelling against Assyria. Egyptian support was considered key to the success of these rebellions, and so emphasizing that Egypt was unreliable was one strategy Assyria used to deter rebellions in the region.

Dissuading further rebellions seems to have motivated more practical Assyrian actions as well. Sargon claims that he destroyed the city of Raphiah, which was a relatively unimportant city on the border of the desert, probably ruled by Gaza. The destruction seems to be intended as a message to the people of Gaza and to their king to avoid any further rebellions. Gaza was far too strategically important as a trading center for the Assyrians to contemplate destroying it to deter rebellion. Thus, the destruction of Raphiah served to influence the political behaviour of Gaza and deter any further rebellions. As far as we know, Judah did not participate in the rebellions leading to the campaign of 720, although Na'aman has argued that Sargon's claim to have "subdued" the land of Judah "which is far away" (that is, off the main roads) relates to this campaign.[46]

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ing Re'u's flight states: ^{lú}*Rē'ê* [written as SIPA-*e*] *rigim kakkēya ēdurma innabitma lā innamer ašaršu.*

45. For more typical formulations in Assyrian royal inscriptions describing flight from the "shine" or "fear" of the weapons, see Aster, *The Unbeatable Light*, 89–92, 106–12.

46. Nadav Na'aman, "The Historical Portion of Sargon II's Nimrud Inscription," *SAAB* 8 (1994): 17–20; see also Marvin Alan Sweeney, "Sargon's Threat Against Jerusalem in Isaiah 10, 27-32," *Bib* (1994): 457–70. The text reads *mušakniš Iauda ša ašaršu rūqu* "who subdued the land of Judah whose place is far away," and is generally thought to have been composed on the occasion of the dedication of the palace in 716. (The text appears in Hugo Winckler, *Die Keilschrifttexte Sargons* [Leipzig, 1889], I, 168, and is discussed by Tadmor, "The Campaigns of Sargon II of Assur," 38 n. 146, and Cogan, *Raging Torrent*, 100–3. The events are discussed by Eckhart Frahm, *Einleitung in die Sanherib-Inschriften* AfO Beiheft 26 [Vienna: Insitut für Orientalistik der Universität Wien, 1997], 232.) Both the specific formulation and larger context demonstrate that the goal of the inscription is to describe Sargon's control of the furthest borders of the known world.

5. Historical Background: Egypt, Philistia, and Assyria from 717 to 712/711 BCE

After this destruction of Raphiah, Sargon perhaps expected that he had effectively subdued Philistia in 720 and would be granted quiet on their western front, and turned his attention to the north, defeating Carchemish in 717. (Carchemish had paid tribute to Tiglath-pileser III, but like much of the rest of the west, had clearly rebelled in the interim and furthermore had not been subdued in the 720 campaign.)[47]

But contrary to any such expectation, the period between 720 and 712 was marked by an almost-uninterrupted series of revolts against Assyria in Philistia and the surrounding regions, which occasioned multiple Assyrian campaigns.

In 716, Sargon again campaigned to the border of Egypt.[48] There, he engaged in some way with the *nāsiku* (often translated "sheikh," cognate to Hebrew נסיך) of the city of Laban, who seems to have served as his overseer (*qēpu*) on the border.[49] More importantly, he received tribute from Shilkani, named as an Egyptian king, who was "overwhelmed by terror of the *melammu* (overwhelming force) of the god Assur."[50] A Khorsabad text records the

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It is possible that not all of the territories described in this inscription were necessarily defeated in a military engagement. The unusual description of Judah as "far away" relates to its location off the main roads, in contrast to Raphiah, which was certainly conquered by this time. In terms of distance, Raphiah was farther, but Judah's location away from main roads made it a more impressive destination, since reaching it was more difficult. This fits with the rhetorical focus of the inscription, which describes the expansion of Assyrian control.

47. Pisīri, king of Carchemish, had been tributary to Tiglath-pileser III. Although Sargon's campaign of 720 was directed against regions close to Carchemish, this campaign did not result in the re-subjugation of Carchemish, thus necessitating a further campaign in 717. For Carchemish's tribute to Tiglath-pileser III, see Tadmor, *The Inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III*, 68–71, Annals 13* and 14* (= RINAP 1:44–49, Tiglath-pileser III 14 and 15), reflecting the events of 738 BCE. For the 717 BCE campaign, see Fuchs, *Die Inschriften Sargons II*, 93, Annal lines 72–74. Both the tribute and the campaign are also mentioned in many other texts in these volumes.

48. The narrative of this campaign appears in Fuchs, *Die Annalen Des Jahres*, 28–29, labelled IIIe, Ass. 5–11. The subsequent passage refers to his fifth campaign according to the Calah count, which would place this in 716 BCE.

49. The text is fragmentary. For the location of Laban, see Eph'al, *The Ancient Arabs*, 104. For the function of the *qēpu*, see Peter Dubovský, "King's Direct Control: Neo-Assyrian *qēpu* Official," in *Organization, Representation, and Symbols of Power in the Ancient Near East*, ed. Gernot Wilhelm (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2012), 449–60.

50. The tribute consisted of twelve large horses, "of which there were none comparable in my land." Fuchs, *Die Annalen Des Jahres 711 v. Chr.*, 28–29, Ass. 8–11.

receipt of tribute from "Pir'u" (apparently Pharaoh) of Egypt in 715.[51] The same text records how Sargon settled four tribes of Arabia in the city of Samaria, who had previously never submitted to Assyria, apparently in the same period.[52] This text is generally understood as referring to the events of 715 BCE, in other words, one year later than the text naming Shilkani.[53] Both Pir'u and Shilkani are identified as Osorkon IV, an Egyptian king who ruled in Bubastis in the eastern delta.[54] It appears that in the years 716–715 Sargon undertook "pacification actions" in the southern Levant, focused on the Arab tribes, and on the Egyptian border. At this time, probably in reaction to the tribute received, and the rise of a pro-Assyrian ruler in the delta, Sargon "opened the (previously)-sealed *kāru* of Egypt," allowing Egyptians and Assyrians to trade.[55] This would represent an attempt to strengthen Osorkon IV in Egypt, just as the establishment of the *bīt kāri* by Tiglath-pileser III represented Assyrian attempts to strengthen Piankhy. Nevertheless, it does not appear that all political forces in Egypt were pro-Assyrian: a ruler from

51. Fuchs, *Die Inschriften Sargons II*, 110, Ann. line 123. Dan'el Kahn, cited in the discussion in Bányai, "Die Reihenfolge," 134, argues that the event attributed here to 715 may be identical with the event of 716, and only appear to be different events due to changes in dating by Sargon's scribes.

52. Ibid., 110, Annal lines 122–24. The dating of this campaign is discussed in Tadmor, "The Campaigns of Sargon II of Assyria," 78. The settling of these tribes was not successful, as far as we know. See Eph'al, *The Ancient Arabs*, 105–7, who interprets this as an attempt to shift commercial activity. Difficulties in sedentarizing nomadic Arab tribes are recorded in the administrative correspondence of Sargon II, in regard to regions in northern Syria, in SAA 1:139–141, no. 177, 178, and 179, each of which speaks of the Arabs as "coming and going" (that is, not sedentarized) and in SAA 1:136–137, no. 175. There is no reason to assume that such attempts were more successful in the southern Levant, and the text of the Khorsabad annal here clearly is connected to expressing dominion over the Arabs, rather than to successes in settling Samaria.

53. The dating here follows Fuchs, *Die Annalen Des Jahres*, 124–31 (discussion).

54. Ibid., 124–31. Fuchs discusses various possibilities, but reaches this conclusion. Kahn, "The Inscription of Sargon II," 9 n. 41, also discusses the possibilities.

55. Gadd prism, lines 42–46. Until the RINAP volume on Sargon becomes available, this text is only accessible in Cyril J. Gadd, "Inscribed Prisms of Sargon II from Nimrud," *Iraq* 16.2 (1954): 173–201, here 180. The dating to 716 or 715 is based on two factors. One is the mention there that Sargon "caused the *šalummatu* (radiance) of Assur to overcome the Arabians and Egyptians," which accords with what we know of the events of 716/715. The second is the mention in line 37 there of the re-settlement of Samaria. Since in the Khorsabad annals the resettlement of Samaria is connected to the settling of Arabs in the city, it seems that the re-opening of this previously sealed harbour took place after the subjugation of these Arabs.

Kush (probably either Piye or Shabaka) who was inveterately anti-Assyrian appears to have influenced events farther north.[56]

Certainly, northern Philistia was not pacified. A series of revolts in Ashdod, the northernmost of the maritime Philistine cities, seem to have begun as far back as 717 BCE, and ended in approximately 712. These involved three different kings, two of whom were anti-Assyrian and one pro-Assyrian. The passage of time involved in appointing and dethroning each strongly suggests that the events did not take place in the space of a few months. Our only fixed chronological point in the whole series of Ashdod episodes is the end point—712 or 711—when the culmination of these episodes is recorded in the Assyrian annals. The chronology I propose below fits the Ashdod kings and their revolts into the larger historical context in the region. While the precise dates are not critical to our discussion, there are good reasons to reconstruct this drama as having already begun in 716 or 715. I begin with the following passage from the Khorsabad display inscription:

> Azuri, king of Ashdod, whose heart planned not to bring tribute, therefore sent (messages containing) hostility against the land of Assyria to the kings surrounding him. Because of the crimes he committed towards the people of his land, I changed his rule. I established Ahimti his beloved brother, over them.[57]

While we do not know the date of Azuri's decision not to bring tribute, some Assyrian force clearly removed him and replaced him with Ahimti. If this was not a small force made up of local Assyrian traders or officials (this is possible, but seems less likely), then the removal of Azuri must have taken place during Sargon's actions in 716 or 715.[58] Azuri's rebellion would have coincided with Sargon's pre-occupation with Carchemish in 717. This means that the Assyrian campaign of 720 was followed almost immediately by a rebellion in Philistia. This pattern is similar to that seen after 734, when the revolt of Mittinti of Ashkelon followed the end of the 734 campaign.

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56. The identity of this ruler depends on the chronological debate discussed at n. 41 above.

57. This and the following passages are from Fuchs, *Die Inschriften Sargons II aus Khorsabad*, 219–21; Prunkinschrift, lines 90–109 (my translation).

58. It is very likely that "the year that Tartan came to Ashdod," mentioned in Isa 20:1, is 716/715, and not 712. The Egyptian focus of the passage would fit best with the battles against Egypt in that year. For Assyrian traders (who certainly resided in Philistia) serving in military roles, see Karen Radner, "Traders in the Neo-Assyrian Period," in *Trade and Finance in Ancient Mesopotamia*, ed. Jan Gerrit Dercksen (Leiden: Nederlands Instituut voor het Nabije Oosten, 1999), 101–26.

It is important to note that this rebellion was not limited to Ashdod, but included "the kings surrounding him." We do not know the identity of these kings, but Ashdod bordered Judah as well as Ashkelon and Ekron.

Ahimti reigned for only a short time in Ashdod; I would cautiously suggest 716/715 to 714. The anti-Assyrian elements in the population were clearly powerful, and took the first opportunity to remove him. In 714, Sargon was occupied with his famous eighth campaign to Urartu, in the far north. His absence from the southern Levant may have provided an opportunity for these anti-Assyrian elements in Ashdod to take action. They removed Ahimti. The Khorsabad display inscription gives a very brief summary of Ahimti's replacement:

> The people of Hatti, speakers of lies, hated his kingship. They elevated above them Yamani, who had no right to the throne, and like them, did not know how to fear sovereignty (that is, did not acknowledge Assyrian sovereignty).

A more detailed (although broken) description of this rebellion appears in the Nineveh annals:

> They appointed Yamani, a *ḫupšu* soldier, who was not a master of the throne, to the kingship over them, and seated him in the throne of his lordship ... To the kings of Philistia, Judah, Edom, and Moab, who live by the sea, who bear tribute and gifts of the god Ashur my lord, (they sent) words of lies and words of treachery, to make them hostile to me. To Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, who will not save, they sent payments seeking help, and asked repeatedly for auxiliaries.[59]

The removal of Ahimti and the appointment of Yamani began a full-scale revolt, in which Judah, other kingdoms in Philistia, and some of the Transjordanian kingdoms were active participants and not just passive recipients of messages. Support was expected from "Pharaoh" (here designating Shabaka, according to Kahn's chronology).

It is important to note that the sending of payments was not done only by the king of Ashdod, but by all the kings mentioned, including Judah.[60] The seriousness of the revolt can be judged from the scale of the Assyrian response.

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59. Fuchs, *Die Annalen Des Jahres 711 v. Chr.*, 44–46, lines 15–33.

60. The Akkadian verb from line 32, here translated "sent," is in the plural: *iššûma* (written *iš-šu-ú-ma*), and its subject is the kings of Philistia, Judah, Edom, and Moab. It

The Assyrian action was swift, as may be expected, and is generally dated to 712.[61] From the Khorsabad display inscription:

> Because of my angry heart, I did not gather the mass of my army nor did I summon my camp. With the heroes who do not leave my side, whether in hostile or in friendly territory,[62] I went to the city of Ashdod. That Yamani from afar heard the movement of my campaign. Into the territory of Egypt near the border of Meluḫḫa (Nubia) he fled, such that his place is not clear. I surrounded and conquered Ashdod, Gath, and Ashdod-yam. I considered as spoil his gods, wife, sons, daughters, property, goods, the wealth of his palace, and the people of his land. I reorganized these cities. I settled there people from the lands I had conquered in the East (lit.: from the lands of the rising of the sun). I placed over them my official as district governor. I counted them as people of Assyria. They bore my yoke.[63]

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is difficult to argue that this verb, which appears in line 32, refers back to the "people of Ashdod," who are the subject of the verb *iškunū*, which is completed in line 16. Lines 18–23 are badly broken and may contain verbs with other subjects. Furthermore, and more importantly, diplomatic messages are usually sent by kings, as was the case in the message sent by Azuri (and not by the people of Ashdod). It would thus be strange to interpret the sending of payments as done by the people of Ashdod, rather than by the kings mentioned. Lines 23–25, which are broken and discuss the famous "ditch" built by Yamani, contain both singular and plural referents. (In line 23, we find a singular possessive on the noun *limetišu*, "surrounding him" and in line 25, a possible plural, in the verb *ik-šud-du* [possibly *ikšudū*, "they reached"], referring to reaching groundwater.)

61. Fuchs, *Die Annalen Des Jahres 711 v. Chr.*, 126, argues for 711. The difference is not material to our discussion.

62. For *ašar salme*, see CAD S 104–105.

63. For the sake of completeness, I cite here the passage from the Khorsabad annals describing this incident. These were prepared near the end of Sargon's reign:

Azuri, king of Ashdod, plotted not to deliver tribute ... and sent ... to the kings of his neighborhood ... of Assyria. Because of the crimes he committed against the people of his land, I changed his rule. I appointed Ahimti, his beloved brother, to the kingship. The people of Hatti, speakers of lies, hated his kingship. They elevated above them Yadani, who had no right to the throne, and like them, did not know how to fear sovereignty. In my rage, with my personal chariot and horsemen—who do not leave my side whether in hostile or in friendly territory—I quickly marched to Ashdod, his royal city. I surrounded and conquered Ashdod, Gath, and Ash[dod-yam]. I counted as spoil the gods who dwell in their midst, with the people of his land, gold, silver, and the property of his palace. I settled there people from the lands I had conquered. I placed upon them my official as district governor. I counted them as people of Assyria. They bore my yoke. (Fuchs, *Die Inschriften Sargons II aus Khorsabad*, 132–35 [annals, lines 241–55; my translation].)

Sargon conquered and destroyed not only Ashdod, but also maritime Ashdod and Gath. Reaching Gath from Ashdod involved a march of only 25 km eastward from Ashdod along the very easy route of the Elah Valley. The Khorsabad text does not indicate that all of the cities conquered (Ashdod, Gath, and Ashdod-yam) belonged to Yamani; the context refers to "his gods" and to the "people of his land," but not to "his cities." The context highlights the leader of the revolt, but it appears from archaeological data that not all three of these were in the possession of Yamani. Gath appears to have been inhabited by a Judean population at this time, and it was almost certainly controlled by Judah prior to this Assyrian conquest.[64] It is probable that Azekah, only 7 km from Gath, was also conquered at this time.[65] The conquest of Gath (and probably that of Azekah) demonstrates that Assyrian retribution was meted out not only against Ashdod, but also against Judah. This retribution was due to Judah's role in the rebellion, as one of the kingdoms who sent tribute to Pharaoh.

To return to Yamani's rebellion, we note that alongside Ashdod, "the kings of Philistia, Judah, Edom, and Moab" participated. Although we know of the retribution directed against Judah, we lack knowledge of that taken against Edom and Moab. In regard to retribution against other Philistine kingdoms, we know that at some point in Sargon's reign he also conquered Ekron. This may have been in retribution for this city's role in the Yamani rebellion.[66]

64. Aren M. Maeir, "Philistia and the Judean Shephelah after Hazael and the 'Uzziah Earthquake': The Power Play between the Philistines, Judahites and Assyrians in the 8th Century BCE in Light of the Excavations at Tell es-Ṣāfi/Gath," in *Disaster and Relief Management: Katastrophen und ihre Bewältigung*, ed. Angelika Berlejung (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 241–62, here 247. The Gath mentioned in both Sargon inscriptions here is certainly Philistine Gath. The earlier suggestion to understand it as a reference to Gittaim lacks geographic logic, since the proposed location of Gittaim at Tel Hamid (near Ramle) is not connected by any direct route to Ashdod or Ashdod-yam. It was based on an archaeological premise which subsequent excavations proved incorrect. See further in Maier, "Philistia and the Judean Shephelah after Hazael," 250 n. 45.

65. The Azekah letter in lines 12–16 refers to a city like a mountain, high, with a moat dug around it. Based on the topography and geographic reality, this is certainly Gath. It is nearly certain, in my view, that the Azekah letter relates to this campaign, in which Sargon continued along the Elah valley and reached Azekah. The alternative, which is to see this letter as describing Sennacherib's 701 campaign, begs the question of why Gath and Azekah are described when other cities (such as Lachish) are not. For the text of the Azekah letter, and bibliography, see RINAP 3/2:351–352, Sennacherib 1015.

66. The record of Ekron's conquest survives only in the epigraph appended to reliefs depicting conquest scenes in the Khorsabad palace of Sargon II. It appears most reasonable to connect the conquest of Ekron with the 712/711 campaign and the punishment of one of the neighboring kings of Philistia, to whom Yamani sent emissaries

Sargon claims not only to have conquered and destroyed Ashdod and Gath but also to have created a new province out of them and settled deportees in them. The provincial status of Ashdod may not have lasted very long, and probably ended in the general "shaking off" of the Assyrian yoke, which took place in 705, when Sargon II's death on the battlefield signaled Assyrian weakness. As Sennacherib's inscriptions indicate, by 701 Ashdod had a king.

Let us now return to the reality in Judah before the revolt of Yamani, which seems to have taken place in 714. Judah may have been invited, but did not participate in the Azuri-led revolt, which I have suggested took place in 717. On the contrary, we know from an Assyrian administrative letter that Judah, together with other kingdoms, sent tribute-bearing emissaries to Assyria sometime between 716 and 713.[67] The list of other kingdoms consists of Gaza, Ammon, Moab, and Edom; of these Moab and Edom, along with Judah, were implicated in the revolt of Yamani. Perhaps this letter details efforts of kingdoms who were invited to participate in Azuri's revolt to assure Assyria of their loyalty.

But by the time of Yamani's revolt (714 or so), Judah was receptive to Yamani's messages of revolt, and participated fully. It is probable that the limited nature of the Assyrian campaigns in 716–715 encouraged Judah to believe that a full-scale attack would not eventuate; certainly the support expected from Egypt was a factor. It is relevant to note that unlike Azuri, Yamani was a sufficiently close ally of the Kushite king in Egypt to seek refuge with him when his rebellion failed, and this may indicate that he fully expected his support.[68] Thus, there are certain political similarities between the revolt led by Yamani in 714 and the rebellion led by Hanunu of Gaza in 720. Both sought to build a regional coalition in the southern Levant, supported by Egypt, to oppose Assyria. It appears that Judah had the option of participating in one of the rebellions in 720, and refused; had the option to

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in the revolt prior to 712. The reliefs also depict the conquest of the city of Gibbethon, slightly farther north in Philistia and located on one of the possible branches of the main north-south coastal road. These show that the city was defended by Nubian soldiers. If this account reflects actual events, it would mean that soldiers of Shabaka battled at Gibbethon. These may have been an advance party sent north to stop the Assyrians in the 720 campaign. This is the date Franklin assigns to the Gibbethon reliefs, in line with another relief in the same sequence which she identifies with Raphiah (Norma Franklin, "The Room V Reliefs at Dur-Sharrukin and Sargon II's Western Campaigns," *Tel Aviv* 21.2 [1994]: 255–75). It is less likely (but possible) that the Gibbethon campaign took place in 712 BCE. In this case, we would have to posit that Egyptian aid actually reached the rebels led by Yamani (or that the relief is inaccurate).

67 SAA 1:92–93, no. 110. For a discussion of the date, see Gershon Galil, *Israel and Assyria* [Hebrew] (Haifa: University of Haifa, 2001), 86–87.

68. For the identity of this Kushite king, see note 41 above.

participate in the rebellion led by Azuri (probably in 717) and refused; but finally decided to join the rebellion led by Yamani in approximately 714. This was a mistake.

6. Isaiah 31:1–5

Isa 31 refers to the history of this period and to both previous revolts, in trying to convince Judahites of the folly of joining Yamani's revolt. It alludes to the names of both Re'u and Azuri, and its background is connected to the differences between Judah and Philistia highlighted in Isa 14:28–32. Azuri is alluded to in verses 1–3, in which the root עזר recurs in unexpected lexemes. Re'u, the Egyptian army commander scorned in Assyrian royal inscriptions, is alluded to in verses 2–4. This scorn is the basis for the imagery in 31:4, and the repeated use of the noun רע in 31:2 is also a reference to this colorful character.[69] It is critical to recognize that this passage refers not only to the events of these years, but specifically to the way they were portrayed in Assyrian claims of empire, which we know from the Assyrian inscriptions. Isa 31 subverts the imagery these use to describe the status of these characters in order to undermine Assyrian royal ideology. It continues the theme seen in Isa 7–8 of disdaining participation in regional alliances, because these do not provide security for Judah. It highlights the role of God in providing protection for Judah, and recognizes that Judah may now need such protection from Assyria, previously portrayed as God's emissary. It continues the strategy seen in Isa 6 and in Isa 19:19–25 of seeing Assyrian supremacy as a model for divine supremacy, even while highlighting the difference between God and all human polities.

Isa 31:4–5 is often considered to be a later accretion to 31:1–3. Many authors note that the prophecies of woe and warning in 31:1–3 contrast with the salvific nature of what follows, and that the messenger formula of 31:4 typically begins an oracle.[70] Nevertheless, the continuity of the references

69. This suggestion was first made by Zvi Ilan, "The Name of Azuri King of Ashdod in the Bible" [Hebrew], *Beit Miqra* 16 (1971): 498–99. The following discussion develops my article "Isaiah 31 as a Response to Rebellions against Assyria in Philistia," *JBL* 136.2 (2017): 347–61.

70. Kreuch, *Unheil und Heil bei Jesaja*, 70–76. The division of verses 1–3 from verses 4–5 appears in many earlier commentaries, for example Otto Kaiser, *Isaiah 13-39: A Commentary*, trans. R. A. Wilson (London: SCM, 1974), 311–17, who contrasts the prophecy of woe with that of salvation. Other commentators—including Clements, *Isaiah 1-39*, 256–67—consider verse 4 a prophecy of woe, and group it with verses 1–4, dividing the unit at verse 5.

to specific characters contained in 31:1–5, which are detailed below, justify considering these verses as a single unit.[71]

6.1. Isaiah 31:1–3

(1) הוי הירדים מצרים לעזרה על סוסים ישענו, ויבטחו על רכב כי רב, ועל פרשים כי עצמו מאד, ולא שעו על קדוש ישראל, ואת י' לא דרשו. (2) וגם הוא חכם ויבא רע, ואת דבריו לא הסיר, וקם על בית מרעים, ועל עזרת פעלי און. (3) ומצרים אדם ולא אל, וסוסיהם בשר ולא רוח, וי' יטה ידו, וכשל עוזר ונפל עָזֻר, ויחדו כלם יכליון.

(1) Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help, they rely on horses, and they trust in chariots, for they are numerous, and on charioteers, for they are mighty, and they do not turn to the Holy One of Israel, and they do not seek out YHWH. (2) But He, too, is wise, and He brings רע , but He does not remove His word, and He will rise against the בית מרעים and the עזרה of doers of iniquity. (3) For Egypt is a man and not a God, and their horses are flesh and not spirit, and when YHWH stretches out His hand, the principal ally and the allied one will fail, and they will all vanish together.

Verse 1 presents a general critique of the Judahites' focus on horses and chariots, contrasting these with reliance on YHWH's power.[72] The final four words go further, however, criticizing the Judahites' lack of regard for His omniscience. This focus continues in verse 2, the first words of which refer to YHWH. The words ויבא רע are an intentional double-entendre: God can bring evil upon Judah and He is also the motivating force behind Re'u. Unlike the latter, however, whose unreliability became a byword in the Assyrian inscriptions, God does not remove His words: ואת דבריו לא הסיר. The last half of verse 2 is a declaration of the supremacy of YHWH's power over both of the key parties in the anti-Assyrian alliance formed before 712: YHWH will rise up against the house of the "Re'uites" or Egyptians—indicated by the words בית מרעים —and against Azuri and his supporters.[73] In an apparent

71. It is entirely possible that 31:4–5 were added to 31:1–3, but since the references to specific characters in 31:1–3 were understood and developed by the author of 31:4–5, little time could have elapsed between the proposed redactional strata.

72. The contrast between military investment and reliance on YHWH is expressed elsewhere in Isa (22:9–11—contrasting Hezekiah's defensive works in Jerusalem with focus on YHWH) and echoes the Deuteronomic concern with reliance on wealth and strength (Deut 8:12–14). It resembles that between reliance on alliances with Assyria and reliance on YHWH in Isa 10:20; Hos 5:13–6:1.

73. מרעים is usually interpreted as "evildoers," but can also mean "friends," as in Judg 14:11. It is used in the former sense in Isa 1:4 and apparently in the latter sense in 14:20. עזרת is usually interpreted as "allies," although it is used nowhere else in the

calque of Assyrian terms used to designate rebels, Azuri and his supporters are referred to as עזרת פעלי און.[74]

This emphasis on the qualitative difference between divine and human power continues in verse 3, which highlights the weakness of both Egypt and Ashdod. In the first half of the verse, the apparent advantage that the physical strength of political actors gives them over YHWH is undermined. It is precisely the palpable nature of Egypt's strength that leaves it vulnerable to the might of YHWH, which has no physical boundaries. This emphasis on God's non-human nature as proof of His power is similar to the contrast evoked in Isa 6 between God and the king of Assyria, focussing on the human nature of the latter. The last half of verse 3 refers to Ashdod in another double-entendre: Judahites are warned that with a swift wave of the hand of YHWH, both the principal ally (עוזר, referring to Azuri) and the allied (עזור, apparently referring to Judah) will vanish.

Each of the actions the prophet attributes to YHWH was accomplished historically by Assyria: Assyria defeated the Egyptians under Re'u in 720, deposing Azuri some years later. Just as Assyrian royal inscriptions vaunt the absolute supremacy of Assyria over all other polities, the prophet in verses 2 and 3 vaunts the qualitative difference between YHWH and the forces of Egypt and Ashdod. The nature of this qualitative difference emphasizes the similarity of all polities, including Ashdod, Egypt, and Assyria. They are all human, their horses being flesh rather than spirit, and always unreliable. The qualitative difference between all human polities and God explains the strange opening of verse 2, wherein YHWH is said to "bring evil/bring Re'u … ." This theme is developed in verse 3: God alone is ultimately capable. This explains why He is said to be the bringer of Re'u in verse 2: He is responsible for all political events.

6.2. Isaiah 31:4–5

(4) כי כה אמר י' אלי כאשר יהגה האריה והכפיר על טרפו, אשר יִקָּרֵא עליו מלא רעים,
מקולם לא יחת, ומהמונם לא יענה, כן ירד י' צ'באות, לצבא על הר ציון ועל גבעתה. (5)
כצפרים עפות כן יגן י' צ'באות על ירושלם, גנון והציל פסח והמליט.

Hebrew Bible to designate a group.

74. "Doers of iniquity" is a common way of referring to rebels in Neo-Assyrian royal inscriptions (cf. the reference to Merodach-baladan as *ēpiš lemnēti* in RINAP 3/1:34 Sennacherib 1, line 25). The description of Azuri and his allies as פעלי און echoes the Assyrian diction.

> (4) For thus said YHWH to me: just as the lion and the lion-cub roar on their prey, against which all the shepherds[75] were called,[76] but from their voice he does not fear and from their tumult[77] he does not lower himself, so will YHWH of Hosts descend to camp on Mount Zion and on its hill. (5) Like fluttering birds, so too will YHWH of Hosts defend Jerusalem: defending and saving, protecting and delivering.

Employing the simile of the roaring lion and shouting shepherds, verse 4 continues to draw on the Assyrian concept of the military supremacy of Assyria over Egypt and other polities, and to compare this supremacy to that of God over humans. This is done in order to highlight the qualitative difference between divine power and all human polities. It contains both an analogy (between the lion opposing the shepherds and YHWH descending on Jerusalem) and a metaphor (the lion and shepherds). The analogy can only be understood when the metaphor has been interpreted. The lion refers to the power of the Assyrian king, a common image in the royal inscriptions.[78] The shepherds symbolize the coalition of potentially anti-Assyrian forces whom the leaders of Gaza and Ashdod repeatedly try to summon, because Hanunu, Azuri, and Yamani were each too scared to face Assyria on their own. These shepherds oppose the lion with their voices alone, highlighting their lack of confidence and effectiveness. Their ineffective shouting and the lions' refusal to react evoke the Assyrian mocking of Re'u, described in the Assyrian building inscription as fleeing from the sound of Sargon's weapons. In the simile the prophet constructs by subverting Assyrian metaphors, the supreme lack of concern and nonchalance of the lion and its cub are emphasized by their reaction to מלא רועים. The characters in this simile evoke memories of the 720 encounter between Sargon and the Egyptian supporters of the rebels in Philistia, convincingly won by the Assyrians. The lions' lack of concern for the noise of the shepherds here refers to Assyria's indifference to the outmatched military forces of their opponents.

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75. Just as מלא כל הארץ כבודו in Isa 6:4 signifies "His Presence fills all the earth," so יִקָּרֵא עליו מלא רועים literally means "all the shepherds are called upon him."

76. The simplest translation of יִקָּרֵא is that the shepherds were summoned to oppose the lion stealing the sheep. This meaning of the verb in the N-stem appears in Esth 2:14. The image is also fairly simple: one shepherd witnessed the theft of his sheep by a lion but is too scared to confront it so summons others. This is a precise parallel to the actions of both Azuri and Yamani, who were reluctant to confront Assyria on his own and seek other partners before instigating a confrontation.

77. For המון meaning "tumult," see Jer 47:3; Ezek 26:13. The word denotes both "multitude" and "tumult," just like the Akkadian *ḫubūru*.

78. See note 43 above.

The prophet uses this image of a superior army (Assyria) facing a weaker one (Egypt and its various allies in Philistia) as an analogy for the way in which YHWH will come down to fight against those encircling Mount Zion.[79] His power is qualitatively superior to the forces attacking Mount Zion and He evinces the same nonchalance in the face of these forces as the Assyrians did in the face of the various rebellions of Hanunu, Azuri, and Yamani. The rhetorical tactic here is to acknowledge Assyrian supremacy while seeing it as providing a model for understanding divine supremacy.

Verse 5 continues to emphasize the divine protection of Jerusalem by subverting another Assyrian image of power. In Assyrian royal inscriptions, birds are consistently used as an image of the enemies of Assyria. They appear in two repeated motifs:

1. the fleeing enemy[80]
2. the defeated enemy, caged like a bird.[81]

Birds are thus used to evoke the qualitative difference between Assyria's power and that of its enemies. The prophet subverts a motif that originally stands for overwhelming Assyrian power, using it to describe how YHWH will defend Jerusalem: "Thus will YHWH defend Jerusalem: defending and saving, protecting and delivering." The image of the birds in verse 5 is a classic example of a blind motif: it is unclear how a fluttering bird serves to illustrate the protection of a city.[82] The use of birds in the Assyrian

79. Here, I understand צבא על as indicating divine protection of Zion. This approach, followed by John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 1-39* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 574, and Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1-39*, 427, differs from that of Roberts, *First Isaiah*, 404. Although Roberts notes that in Isa 29:7–8 and Zech 14:12 this phrase means "to fight against," such an interpretation would place Isa 31:4 in direct opposition to Isa 31:5.

80. Tadmor, *The Inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III*, 140, Summary Inscription 4, line 12′ (RINAP 1:106 Tiglath-pileser III 42); 178, Summary Inscription 8, line 17′ (RINAP 1:127, Tiglath-pileser III 48); 188, Summary Inscription 9, line r 13 (RINAP 1:132, Tiglath-pileser III 49)—all with specific reference to Hanunu of Gaza fleeing from Egypt, whence he was apparently ejected. See also RINAP 3/1:134, Sennacherib 17, col. iii, line 92; RINAP 3/1:177 Sennacherib 22, col. iii, line 65, and RINAP 3/1:184, Sennacherib 22, col. vi, line 29.

81. Tadmor, *Inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III*, 78, annal 23, line 11′ (RINAP 1:59, Tiglath-pileser III 20); RINAP 3/1:65, Sennacherib 4, line 52; RINAP 3/1:133, Sennacherib 17, col. iii, line 52, in reference to Hezekiah.

82. See the discussion of the blind motif in chapter 1. A blind motif is a motif that cannot easily be understood in its current context but makes sense in the original context from which it appears to be borrowed. Roberts, *First Isaiah*, 404, interprets this as "Like birds flying about their nest, Yahweh of Hosts will protect Jerusalem." Note that birds flying around the nest cannot effectively harm the attackers.

inscriptions, however, explains the usage in Isa 31:5. In their original context (the Assyrian inscriptions), birds highlight the qualitative difference between Assyria's power and that of its enemies. In the borrowed context (Isa 31:5), the author refers to the original meaning of the symbol, using it to illustrate the imbalance of power between YHWH and those who threaten Jerusalem.

Verses 4 and 5 thus both subvert images of Assyrian power in order to convey that, just as Assyria is a supreme military power, so YHWH's power is qualitatively superior to that of any human polity including Assyria.

7. The Theology of Isaiah 31:1–5 and Its Place in the Development of "Zion Theology"

In this passage, the theological response to Assyrian power develops that found in Isa 19:19–23, but differs from it. Like in Isa 19, God is here compared to Assyria. In 19:19–23, the Assyrian domination of the approaches to Egypt was re-envisioned as educating the Egyptians about YHWH's domination of the world, and the monument to Tiglath-pileser III established in this region was re-envisioned as a monument marking Egypt as loyal to YHWH. In Isa 31:1–5, Assyrian supremacy is also portrayed as a sort of *tamšilu*, or parallel model, of the supremacy of YHWH.

Interestingly, in 31:1–5, unlike 19:19–23, the emphasis is on the supremacy of Assyrian military power, rather than on Assyrian sovereignty over territory and political recognition of that sovereignty. This reflects the realities of the tumultuous period 720–712. In this period, Assyria's superior military force did not translate into uninterrupted and acknowledged sovereignty over the southern Levant. The power disparity between God and humans might be compared to that between Assyria and other human forces, but it was no longer possible to argue that Assyria's sovereignty over territory was a model for God's sovereignty over territory. Assyria's sovereignty could no longer serve as an educational force, which would familiarize the people of the Near East with the notion of a single political sovereignty and thereby gradually introduce belief in a single divine sovereign. (Such a portrayal of Assyrian sovereignty is implied in Isa 19:19–23, as discussed in the previous chapter.) In 720–712, Assyria's sovereignty in the southern Levant was repeatedly challenged, despite its military supremacy. Perhaps for this reason, these verses do not emphasize a comparison of God's sovereignty to that of Assyria. Instead, they contrast between God's supremacy and that of Assyria.

Isaiah continues to use Neo-Assyrian ideology as a basis for subversion, with a goal to argue for divine supremacy, but the precise elements of Neo-Assyrian ideology he uses changes in accordance with the circumstances.

This continuity in strategy, with flexibility in specific tactics, characterizes Isaiah's treatment of the Neo-Assyrian ideology throughout the passages discussed in this book.

An equally important element of these tactical changes is the introduction of divine protection of Zion from Assyria in Isa 31:4–5. Thus, in Isa 31:1–5, Assyria serves both as a model to which the superiority of God's power can be compared, and as a force powerful enough that God must defend Zion against Assyria.

This is not an inherent or logical contradiction: nowhere does the passage suggest that Assyria is actually comparable in power to YHWH. Like all analogies, the analogy between God and Assyria has limits and does not represent a perfect comparison. On the one hand, the passage represents Assyria as more powerful than any human force and demands that Judah and Philistia recognize the imprudence of rebelling against Assyria. On the other, it affirms that God has sent Assyria and that reliance on aid from Egypt is foolish, arguing that Judah must rely on divine power. Thus for the first time it suggests that this divine power will need to be deployed against Assyria to protect Judah.

This need for divine protection of Judah seems to reflect several changes in Assyrian policy from the reign of Tiglath-pileser III to the reign of Sargon II. As noted above, in the reign of Tiglath-pileser III, Assyria limited itself to control of the main roads in the southern Levant, and campaigns are not known to have extended more than 10 km from these roads. In contrast, the policy of Sargon II reflected the serious difficulties encountered in 720–712 in holding the southern Levant under Assyrian domination. A new policy of developing permanent Assyrian settlements along the main road was instituted (which will be discussed in detail in the subsequent chapter) and the Assyrian conquest of Gath in 712 or 711 (and probably of nearby Azekah in the same campaign) reflect the willingness to leave major roads to reach important settlements and destroy them. Even before 712, several events show that Assyria was no longer willing to restrict itself to control of main roads. Prime among these was the 720 conquest of Samaria, 25 km from the coastal road, and surrounded by fortresses.[83] Another event that demonstrated Assyrian attempts to control the hinterland were the repeated small-scale campaigns of Sargon II at the border with Egypt and his attempt to control a variety of nomadic and Arab groups there. These show that Sargon implemented a somewhat different model for controlling

83. For these fortresses, see Adam Zertal, "The Heart of the Monarchy: Pattern of Settlement and Historical Considerations of the Israelite Kingdom of Samaria," in *Studies in the Archaeology of the Iron Age in Israel and Jordan*, JSOTSup 331, ed. Amihai Mazar and Ginny Mathias (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 2001), 38–64, here 56–59.

the southern Levant compared to his predecessors. Tiglath-pileser III conducted a three-year campaign to the southern Levant, in which it appears that he campaigned in each sub-region only once (with Ashkelon as a possible exception). By the time of Sargon II, such a model was insufficient to achieve Assyrian control.

This new model of recurring campaigns, some of which would penetrate the areas distant from the main international roads, understandably elicited concern that Jerusalem would be targeted, and Isa 31:4–5 address this concern. Isaiah continues his insistence that Judah not battle Assyria or engage in revolts, which will surely provoke Assyrian retaliation. But he does recognize that circumstances may at some point require divine protection of Zion. God, not Judahite political activity, will protect Jerusalem.

It is important to note that unlike in Isa 10:5–21 or Isa 36–37, these verses do not describe God as battling against Assyria. The emphasis is on defending Zion, and not on decimating or defeating Assyria. The lion, here compared to God, simply ignores the shepherds, just as Assyria ignores its challengers. This is also illustrated by the simile of the fluttering birds: God protects Zion but there is no mention of His harming those who threaten Zion.

This passage can therefore illustrate the transition between the response to Assyria seen in Isa 19:19–23 and that illustrated in passages such as 10:5–27. The changes are significant: Assyria is seen as a model for supremacy, rather than sovereignty; God protects Zion against Assyria, unlike in previous chapters. But in these verses, there is no discussion of God battling Assyria.

Chapter 5 of this book discusses the historical reasons for introducing the concept of God as battling Assyria. But before turning to this important subject, let us address the remaining verses of Isa 31, both for the sake of completing the literary unit and because of the important ideas in these verses.

8. Isaiah 31:6–9

Isaiah 31:6–9 refer to several motifs we know from Assyrian royal inscriptions. Whoever joined these verses to Isa 31:1–5 understood the historical and theological polemic against Assyria in 31:1–5. It is entirely possible that they form a single compositional unit together with 31:1–5; it is possible that they were added at a later stage, when the nature of the polemic against Assyria was still understood.

Because I consider both options possible, I consider them in a separate sub-unit from Isa 31:1–5. It should be noted that these verses explicitly speak about God battling Assyria. If they do indeed form part of the same

compositional unit as Isa 31:1–5, then the transition I describe above is somewhat sharper, and includes a transition to a divine battle curbing Assyria.

8.1. Isaiah 31:6–7

> (6) שובו לאשר העמיקו סרה בני ישראל. (7) כי ביום ההוא ימאסון איש אלילי כספו ואלילי זהבו אשר עשו לכם ידיכם חטא.
>
> (6) Return to the one against whom you have deeply revolted, Israelites! (7) On that day, man will reject his silver idols and his golden idols that your hands made for you as a sin.

The contrast between YHWH and Assyria inherent in verses 4–5 is exposed and developed in verses 6–7. Verse 6 calls on Israel to return to YHWH, describing Him as "the one against whom you have deeply revolted."[84] This description is similar to that found in other passages in Isa 1–39. It is similar to 10:20–21, which attack Israel's lack of reliance on YHWH and contrast this to Israel's reliance on Assyrian power:

> (20) On that day, the remnant of Israel and those saved from among the house of Jacob will no longer continue to rely on its smiter but will rely faithfully on the Holy One of Israel. (21) A remnant will return—a remnant of Jacob—to the Powerful God.

In verse 20, Israel's reliance on "its smiter"—a reference to Assyria—is contrasted with its reliance on YHWH; in verse 21, a return to YHWH is predicted following His defeat of Assyria. Like 10:20–21, 31:6 calls on Israel to cease regarding Assyria as the inevitable suzerain, and demands that Israel regard YHWH as such.

Isa 31:7 contains a prediction about humans abandoning idols. At first glance, the shift in topic appears to indicate a move away from the Assyrian historical context. But the abandonment of idols is seen elsewhere in Isaiah as an inherent part of the conflict between reliance on YHWH and reliance on Assyria. The formulation in 31:7 is very similar to that found in Isa 2:20–21, which are part of a passage (2:5–22) describing a campaign of YHWH against human arrogance, modeled on Assyrian campaigns against enemies characterized as "proud" (*multarḫu*), and can be dated to the Assyrian period.[85] The prediction of humans abandoning idols in 2:20–21 is part

84. On this translation, see Kaiser, *Isaiah 13-39*, 315.

85. For this passage, see Aster, "The Image of Assyria in Isaiah 2:5-22," and here chapter 7.

of the recognition of YHWH as the universal sovereign, replacing Assyria. In both Isa 2:20–21 and 31:7, the prophet correlates the rejection of idols with the rejection of Assyrian doctrines of omnipotence and universal domination. The motivation for this correlation seems clear: both are false human creations, myths designed to inflate human power, and thereby minimize God's control. Just as the replacement of Assyria by YHWH in the campaign narrative in 2:5–22 attracts mention of the rejection of idols in 2:20–21, the message that YHWH, and not Assyria, is the ultimate power-broker in Judah and Philistia in 31:1–5 attracts mention of the rejection of idols in 31:7.

Verses 6 and 7, then, include motifs that appear elsewhere in Isaiah, in passages that clearly contain borrowings from Assyrian sources, and that therefore should be dated to the Assyrian period. They may be slightly later than 31:1-5. But whoever added verses 6–7 to 31:1–5 seems to have understood the political message underlying 31:1–5—namely, that YHWH, rather than Assyria, is responsible for political events and wields ultimate temporal power.

8.2. Isaiah 31:8–9

Vermeylen views Isa 31:8–9 as an "extension" of the idea of verse 5 because it continues the message of divine protection of Jerusalem by describing the defeat of Assyria.[86] Although these verses do indeed describe divine protection of Jerusalem, the message of Assyrian defeat, which is nowhere explicit in verses 4–5, is both new and explicit in verses 8–9. Both verses 4–5 and verses 8–9 borrow metaphors used to indicate the power of Assyria, and subvert them to describe the power of YHWH. Verses 4–5 use imagery taken from Assyrian literary sources (the imagery of the roaring lion and the fluttering birds) and re-interpret them to describe the supremacy of YHWH. Verses 8–9 use one metaphor known to us from Assyrian literary sources, and several that represent the actual experience of Assyrian power.

> (8) ונפל אשור בחרב לא איש, וחרב לא אדם תאכלנו, ונס לו מפני חרב, ובחוריו למס יהיו. (9) וסלעו ממגור יעבור, וחתו מנס שריו, נאם י' אשר אור לו בציון ותנור לו בירושלם.
>
> (8) Assyria will fall by the sword of no-person, and the sword of no-man will devour him, and he will flee from the sword, and his young men will become corvée labourers. (9) His rock will pass due to terror, his officers will tremble due to the banner, says YHWH who has a light in Zion and a kiln in Jerusalem.

86. Vermeylen, *Du prophète Isaïe à l'apocalyptique Isaïe 1-35*, 423.

Verse 8 describes Assyria in the guise of a typical opponent: defeated by the sword, his population becomes subject to forced labour. But Assyria here is explicitly defeated by God, whose non-human status was emphasized in 31:1–5.

The imagery in verse 9 is more specific, and begins with two unusual images: "His rock will pass due to terror, his officers will tremble due to the banner." The images of the rock and the banner as indicators of Assyrian power do not appear in Assyrian literary sources. However, both appear in the material record as important signifiers of Assyrian power. The use of stones as a means of signifying control over conquered territory was discussed in relation to Isa 19:19, and such monuments were also established at major road junctions that rulers of conquered territories would pass en route to Assyria.[87] Banners are a standard element of military campaigns. The rock and the banner signify Assyrian power, and are transformed in 9a into symbols of future Assyrian downfall.

The final stich of verse 9 seems to revert to the pattern found in verses 4–5, of appropriating an Assyrian literary *topos* and subverting it to describe the power of YHWH. In this final stich of the unit, YHWH is described as possessing a "light in Zion" and a "kiln" or "oven" in Jerusalem. This is a very unusual image of divine power, which has no parallels elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible.

While light is a universal symbol for divine and human power, there are no occurrences of the kiln or oven indicating such power. Noting that God has a "fire" in Zion is an unusual formulation. This formulation, like that in Isa 10:17–18, seems to subvert Assyrian depictions of radiance as a symbol for insuperable power. In discussing a formulation in Isa 10:17–18 that uses a similar noun and similar imagery (והיה אור ישראל לאש וקדושו, ללהבה "the light of Israel shall become a fire and its Holy one a flame"), Williamson notes "It is difficult to escape the notion that the author may have wanted to play on Assyrian notions of *melammu* ... here turned against the Assyrians in an ironical manner."[88] By the time of Sargon II, *melammu,* which indicates an invincible force enveloping a god, hero, or object, was frequently represented by and sometimes equated with radiance.[89] The subversion of *melammu* imagery will be discussed in greater detail in the last chapter of this book, in reference to Isa 2:5–22, but here it would appear that 31:9 also represents such subversion. Just as the stone, which represents

87. Daniele Morandi, "Stele e Statue Reali Assire: Localizzazione, Diffusione, e Implicazione Ideologiche," *Mesopotamia* 23 (1988): 103–18; Aster, "Transmission of Neo-Assyrian Claims of Empire."

88. Williamson, "A New Divine Title in Isaiah 10.17," 319.

89. Aster, *The Unbeatable Light*, 56–59.

Assyrian victory, is here mentioned in the context of Assyrian defeat, so is the fire appropriated by God in His battle against Assyria. And just as the *melammu* accompanies the Assyrian king in his battles, here the "kiln" of God is located in Zion, which He defends.

5

God's Plan to Curb Assyria – Isaiah 10:5–34

1. Introduction to the Clash of Titans

Isa 10:5–34 is one of the most dramatic passages in Isaiah concerning Assyria; its drama is created by what appears to be a clash of titans, in which God acts in opposition to Assyria.[1] Many of the units in this passage subvert specific Assyrian motifs in order to attack a central tenet of Assyrian royal ideology. They attack the belief that the Assyrian king, in his successful battles against the *nakrū* (enemies) who refuse to submit to Assyria, parallels the gods who hold at bay the forces of disorder. They attack the notion that Assyrian hegemony over the *nakrū* is a divinely-ordained lynchpin of world order. Isaiah subverts the motifs used to express this idea in Assyrian ritual and text, and re-casts the Assyrians as the *nakrū*, violating the divine order. In these verses, it is God who takes the role of legitimate and ultimate monarch, and who engages in the heroic behavior of establishing order by subduing Assyria.

This represents a departure from the depictions of God as motivating the Assyrians, or using them for his purposes, which we found in 6:12 and in 7:17–20. Furthermore, it differs from the idea that God will defend Judah and Jerusalem against potential Assyrian incursions, which we saw in 14:28–32 and in 31:4–5. In 10:5–19, and again in 10:24–34, God not only defends Judah

1. The question of whether 10:20–23 is original to this composition is discussed towards the end of the present chapter.

and Jerusalem, but actively punishes Assyria. This punishment is incurred by Assyria's arrogance in rivalling and disobeying God. The portrayal of a clash between two rivals who each claim primacy over the other seems to originate in this passage, but also figures prominently in the prophetic narrative of God's battle with Sennacherib in Isa 36–37 (reproduced in 2 Kgs 18:17–19:37). In that narrative, the rivalry that we first find in 10:5–34 lies behind the dramatic clash at Jerusalem between the two claimants to universal sovereignty.

This passage, therefore, represents a unique pivot point in Isaiah's approach to the God–Assyria relationship. The historical reality behind this pivot point has been explained in a unique manner by Barth, whose approach is followed in much recent scholarship. Part of this passage, 10:16–19, served as the entry-point for Barth's hypothesis of a later redaction of many "anti-Assyrian" passages in Isa 1–39. Barth's thesis developed from the position that speaking of an Assyrian downfall when Assyria was at the height of its power was simply not believable.[2] Therefore, passages that reflect a clash and conflict between God and Assyria reflect the intellectual and political atmosphere of the second half of the seventh century, in the period of Josiah.

As I argued in chapter 1, it is impossible to situate the composition of passages that actively polemicize against Assyrian ideology using motifs taken from this ideology, in a post-Assyrian reality. It is therefore quite difficult (although not necessarily completely impossible) to see these passages as dating from the period of Josiah, during whose reign Assyria moved from weakness to collapse.[3]

A much more convincing case can be made for dating passages that actively polemicize against Assyrian royal ideology, and which describe the impending downfall of Assyria, to the period beginning with the second half of the reign of Sargon II and ending in 701. As we will see below, there are compelling literary reasons to correlate 10:5–19 and 28–34 with that part of the reign of Sargon, but I begin first with a historical introduction, in order to situate the literary discussion of the polemic against Assyrian imperial ideology in this passage.

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2. The position was developed with specific reference to 10:16–19, which describe the fire consuming Assyria; below, I argue that this passage reflects knowledge of a ritual practiced in the Neo-Assyrian period. Barth, *Die Jesaja-Worte in der Josiazeit*, especially 32–34.

3. It is possible that some such passages date from the very first years of Josiah, but I find it difficult to understand the value of polemicizing against Assyria when Assyrian power was in a state of collapse and was in any case no longer effectively broadcast in Judah or the southern Levant.

2. After 712 BCE: Historical Background to Isaiah 10:5–19 and 10:24–27

As noted in the previous chapter, the period between the reign of Shalmaneser V[4] and the Ashdod campaign of 712 or 711 was characterized by an almost uninterrupted series of revolts followed by Assyrian campaigns. These took place throughout the Levant, and were particularly intense in the southern Levant, where nearly every year was marked by a revolt or a campaign.

Partly as a result of these revolts, Sargon instituted new policies for the control of conquered territory.[5] His policy involved the establishment of many more Assyrian provinces. Sargon seems to have considered that establishing vassal states had been useful in achieving the initial submission of these areas, but the rebellions showed that continued control of the territory by Assyria required new practices. Furthermore, the revolts showed that even provinces could rebel, and therefore required careful supervision. These changes took place gradually, and specific policies may have been more immediately apparent to the inhabitants of the region than the overall shift.[6] As regards the southern Levant, we can identify here four such policies, which I present below in summary and then review in their historical context. One such policy was an increased willingness to destroy cities whose kings had revolted, even in areas deemed strategically important. This will be detailed below in relation to Ashdod, and can be contrasted with the approach of Tiglath-pileser III to Ashkelon. Second was the depth of the penetration of Sargon's campaign into the hill country, which can be demonstrated in regard to Samaria. Samaria was located in the hill country, nearly 25 km from the main international road that ran parallel to the coast. There is no evidence that the campaigns of Tiglath-pileser III reached this

4. We know very little about the events of the reign of Shalmaneser V in this period, but the revolt of Samaria during his reign and the larger revolt that developed at the end of his reign strongly suggest that we ought to include at least the second part of his reign in this period. (His whole reign lasted only five years, 727–722.)

5. Bagg calls these "the second phase of Assyrian expansion." Ariel M. Bagg, *Die Assyrer und das Westland* (Leuven: Peeters, 2011), 233.

6. While Tiglath-pileser III established several provinces in the southern Levant, including Megiddo, his reign resulted in more vassal states than provinces in the southern Levant. Furthermore, several of the practices we tend to associate with provinces, such as bi-directional deportation, are not evidenced in the southern Levant during his reign, as I discuss below. The reign of Sargon II can therefore be seen as representing an overall shift in Assyrian policy. Mayer considers "re-education" to be a part of this shift, but I believe that the factors I note below were more significant, since such re-education took place in relation to vassal states as well. Mayer, *Assyrien und Urartu I*, 1:72.

far from the main road.[7] Third was the importation of new populations into the land of Israel, a process that apparently did not take place during the reigns of Sargon's predecessors. And fourth was a new approach to securing ongoing control of the international roads, which Sargon recognized were key to maintaining control of the land. Taken as a whole, these policies heralded irreversible changes not only in the political control of the Land of Israel but also in its demographic make-up. These irreversible changes were apparent to the political elite of Judah and certainly engendered grave concern about the future of their polity. The summary below illustrates how each of these changes developed.

Sargon's actions in relation to Ashdod in 712 or 711 show his determination to avoid subsequent revolts. He determined to destroy cities as punishment for rebellions. The inscriptions cited in the previous chapter state that Sargon II destroyed Ashdod, Ashdod-yam, and Gath, and turned the region into an Assyrian province. There is no reason to see this destruction as bluster, since destructions (especially that of Gath) are supported by the available archeological evidence.[8] There is also evidence of deportations to Ashdod in Sargon's reign; since populations were deported to provinces and not to vassal states, this shows that Ashdod became a province.[9] Earlier revolts (such as those of Hanunu of Gaza and Mittinti of Ashkelon against Tiglath-pileser III and even that of Hanunu of Gaza against Sargon II in 720) did not result in destruction of royal cities in Philistia, presumably because of the economic and strategic value of these cities.[10] Sargon's destruction

7. The contrast demonstrated here is between Sargon II, who pushed Assyrian control into the hill-country of Samaria, and Tiglath-pileser III, who did not. We cannot consider the actions of Shalmaneser V alongside those of these long-reigning kings; although Shalmaneser V also conquered Samaria, his control of the city did not last more than two or three years at most.

8. On Ashdod and Ashdod-yam (at which excavations and publications are ongoing), see Alexander Fantalkin, "Ashdod-Yam on the Israeli Mediterranean Coast: A First Season of Excavations," *Skyllis: Zeitschrift für Unterwasserarchäologie* 14.1 (2014): 45–57, and literature there. The evidence for a late eighth-century destruction at Gath is quite clear in Maier, "Philistia and the Judean Shephelah," 247–50.

9. See SAA 17:73, no. 82, which tells of deportations to Ashdod. (Although the footnote obliquely mentions deportations of Ashdodeans, both the translation and the placement of the document indicate that it speaks of deportations to Ashdod.) The fact that an Ashdodite king re-emerged after the death of Sargon II does not indicate that the establishment of a province in Ashdod was a mere literary flourish, but only that the provincial administration collapsed when the west revolted after the death of Sargon II.

10. See the discussion of Holloway, *Assur is King!*, 192–93, who notes the importance of the economic network Hanunu dominated. Economic importance of such

of Ashdod and Ashdod-yam in 712 or 711 therefore marked a new pattern of behaviour in regard to Philistia. The conquest was sufficiently important for Sargon to mark the occasion with the establishment of two stelae at Ashdod.[11]

For Judah too, this campaign marked a new pattern in Assyrian destruction. The destruction of Judean-occupied Gath in this campaign, and most probably of nearby Azekah as well, were the first time that Assyria had entered so deeply into the territory of Judah. The Gath-Azekah region is somewhat distant from the main coastal road.[12] (The two cities are only 7 km distant from each other; a stream bed links them, creating an easy route between them.) Azekah borders Judah's hill country, and Assyria's destruction of one or both of these cities created fears of deeper Assyrian penetration. This deeper penetration was similar to Sargon's conquest of Samaria in the hill country several years earlier.

No doubt these destructions gave pause to the inhabitants of Philistia and Judah and were a factor in the end of revolts in this region. When Sargon II turned his attention to campaigns against Babylonia in 710–709, no revolts in Philistia or Judah are known to have occurred. This differs from what happened in 717 (when Sargon II campaigned against Carchemish) or 714 (when Sargon II campaigned against Urartu). By 710, the appetite for revolt in Judah and Philistia ended.

But quite apart from the destruction and deeper penetration of Assyrian forces was the implementation of an Assyrian practice new to the inhabitants of this region – the practice of importing exiles from other regions. While we tend to think of bi-directional deportations as a common Assyrian practice, it is important to note that this practice was new to the inhabitants of the southern Levant in the reign of Sargon II. We have no reason to believe that Tiglath-pileser III, when he deported populations from northern Israel and Transjordan, imported new populations to the region.[13]

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maritime cities had to be balanced by Sargon II against the challenge to Assyrian imperial authority inherent in leaving such cities standing.

11. See most recently Wayne Horowitz and Takayoshi Oshima, *Cuneiform in Canaan* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 2006), 40–41 and literature cited there.

12. It is difficult to quantify this distance, since there are many possible trajectories for the main coastal road in the region around Ashdod, which is west of Gath. However, it is relevant to note that Gath is 25 km from Ashdod, and even if the main coastal road ran several kilometers east of Ashdod, the distance from the main road still took most of a day's march.

13. There is no mention of such importation of population in the inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III. Other Assyrian kings boast about such importations and so the absence of such a statement is significant. See Gal's view that late Iron II sites in the lower Galilee represent the presence of non-deported inhabitants of the region who

Sargon II recognized that the revolts of Arpad, Ṣimirra, Damascus, and Samaria showed failures of previous kings' strategies to deter these regions from future revolts. He therefore intensified the importation of non-native populations into the Levant. This practice began with deportations in northern Syria, when Assyrian rebels were deported to Hamath shortly after 720.[14] Later, Babylonians were deported to Samaria in or shortly after 710. One goal of these deportations was to change the nature of these rebellious regions and ensure their future loyalty to the empire.

We know about Assyrian deportations to Samaria from 2 Kgs 17:24. But it is not necessary to base a discussion of Sargon's actions on this Biblical notice. As Na'aman and Zadok have shown, epigraphic evidence points to such deportations immediately after Sargon's campaigns to Babylonia in 710–709 BCE. Immediately after these campaigns, Babylonians were deported to sites along the main coastal road, and to other sites close to the road.[15] Some of these deported Babylonians, along with Assyrian personnel, were settled so as to maintain roadside provisioning centers for Assyria along the main coastal road.[16] This was part of a larger change in the economic geography and demographic make-up of the Assyrian provinces in the southern Levant that began after 711 BCE. Previously, Sargon seems to have tried to settle Arabian tribes in the region; for reasons discussed in the previous chapter, these attempts did not greatly influence the demography of the region. But beginning in 710 BCE, new populations of deported Babylonians entered Samaria. These populations depended on the Assyrian empire, and served the empire by settling along the coastal road. This was a road on which the empire depended for passage of both troops and administrators, and the provisioning centers established by the deportees facilitiated this activity. It is significant that the Aphek-Gezer region in the western part of the Assyrian province of Samaria, through which the main coastal road passes, was the only region in the southern Levant to experience population

escaped deportations. Zvi Gal, "The Lower Galilee between Tiglath-pileser III and the Persian Period" [Hebrew], *Eretz-Israel* 29 (2009): 77–81.

14. Tiglath-pileser III imported populations into Ṣimirra in Annal 13, lines 5–8 (Tadmor, *Inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III*, 66, corresponding to RINAP 1:46, Tiglath-pileser III 14), and so Sargon's actions in north Syria are not an innovation, but rather an intensification of this practice. On Sargon's re-settlement of Assyrians in Hamath, see the Beirut stele, the Cyprus stele, and now the Tayinat stele, discussed by Lauinger and Batiuk, "A Stele of Sargon II at Tell Tayinat," 64. On his deportations to Damascus, see Fuchs, *Die Inschriften Sargons II*, 95, Annals lines 77–78.

15. See Nadav Na'aman and Ran Zadok, "Assyrian Deportations to the Province of Samerina in the Light of Two Cuneiform Tablets from Tel Hadid," *Tel Aviv* 2000.2 (2000): 159–88, especially 178–79.

16. Aster, "An Assyrian *bīt mardīte* Near Tel Hadid?"

growth under Assyrian rule.[17] Assyria did not simply decimate the population of the region; it completely re-shaped its economic base and ethnic composition.

3. Hezekiah's Brinksmanship and Changes in Local Attitudes to Assyria in the Reign of Sargon II

By 709 BCE, at the very latest, it was clear to inhabitants of the southern Levant that Assyrian control was actively, inexorably, and apparently permanently changing the demographic makeup of the region. Taken together, the trends illustrated above were even more significant than the sum of their parts. The sum of these trends meant that Assyria would penetrate farther away from the coastal road in its campaigns and enter further into Judah, and would annex Judah's cities to Assyrian provinces and deport new populations to them.[18] These regions would be permanently lost to Judah, and if this trend continued further enough inland, Judah would disappear. The "raging torrent" referred to in Isa 8:8 might reach beyond Judah's neck, and turn Judah into a ghost.

It is relevant to examine this realization within the political history of the preceding ten years. On the one hand, the years between the reign of Shalmaneser V and 712 taught the people of the southern Levant that Assyria was not invinicible or all-powerful, and that Assyrian claims to the contrary were not worth very much. Besides the many revolts against Assyria within the southern Levant, in which rebels perceived points of Assyrian weakness, Assyria endured a very close contest with Urartu in the campaign of 714. Urartu was Assyria's chief rival, and the only state in the region whose power was close to that of Assyria. The 714 campaign was won by Assyria, but Urartu's king was not captured. Despite the fact that Assyria emerged as the strongest power throughout the empire by the end of this period, this period nevertheless showed repeatedly that Assyria could demonstrate weakness. Any subsequent Assyrian demonstrations of strength would have to be viewed as part of the normal vicissitudes all polities experience. Assyria's power would sometimes wax and sometimes wane.

17. Shawn Zelig Aster and Avraham Faust, "Administrative Texts, Royal Inscriptions and Neo-Assyrian Administration in the Southern Levant: The View from the Aphek-Gezer Region," *Or* 84.3 (2015): 293–308, and literature cited there.

18. By 712/711, there was certainly empirical evidence for the confluence of these trends. Gath, which had become a Judean city before 712, was destroyed and annexed to the Assyrian province of Ashdod, according to Sargon's inscriptions cited in the previous chapter. Further inland, Azekah was in all likelihood destroyed in the same campaign, although we do not know whether it was annexed to the province of Ashdod.

The period beginning around 711 was a period of Assyrian strength in the southern Levant. This strength was demonstrated by the lack of revolts in the region during the six years beginning in 711, despite the fact that Sargon II was occupied elsewhere in the region.

Thus, two simultaneous realizations were experienced by the people of the southern Levant in this period, the second half of the reign of Sargon II. First, Assyria was subject to political vicissitudes, and though strong, it would eventually again experience weakness. And second, Assyria was changing the demographic make-up of the region, so that even if Assyria weakened to the point of collapse, it would leave permanent marks on the region's demography. The non-native inhabitants brought by Assyria would not leave when Assyria collapsed. The longer Assyria was able to control the region, the less influence the ethnic polities of the region would have when Assyria retreated. Assyria's importation of population created a long-term threat to the control of the region by those who saw themselves as its long-time inhabitants. This was a threat more difficult to overcome than the economic difficulties created by Assyrian demands for tribute.[19]

Out of these two realizations, a consciousness emerged that recognized that Assyria was experiencing a period of strength, but also that control of the southern Levant by the ethnic groups of the southern Levant would become more and more threatened the longer Assyria remained in control.

A policy of watchful waiting seemed Judah's only practical course. The need to remove Assyria was acute, because continued Assyrian control would eventually dispossess the inhabitants of the southern Levant of their region. But as seen from Judah's behaviour in the first half of Sargon's reign, it was critical to choose the right moment to revolt. Judah seemed deterred from participating in the revolt led by Azuri, but, perhaps encouraged by the limited Assyrian actions of 716 and 715, decided to participate in that led by Yamani (which I have dated to 714). This precipitous action resulted in a failed revolt and the destruction of a Judean city. Clearly, Judah would have to wait for further evidence of Assyrian weakness before shaking off Assyria's yoke.

This watchful waiting was called Hezekiah's policy of "brinksmanship" by Galil, and it accurately describes Judah's policy in these years.[20] On the one hand, many construction projects were undertaken in these years, including Jerusalem's broad wall and the improvement of the Shiloah water

19. Although these payments were onerous, recovery from economic burdens is usually possible. But it hardly seemed possible to remove the growing non-native population that was entering and becoming more economically-established along the coastal road.

20. Galil, *Israel and Assyria*, 77–79.

system. These projects, which were designed to help Jerusalem withstand a siege, could not have been completed in a single year, and there is no reason to see their construction as having begun only after 705.[21] On the other hand, Judah continued to remit tribute between Yamani's revolt and the death of Sargon II.

This political practice seems to fit with the attitude towards Assyria in Isa 10:5–15. This passage posits that the time has come for a Divine defeat of Assyria, but refrains from giving any encouragement or support to practical plans to revolt against Assyria. Verse 12 indicates that God will defeat and curb Assyria, not necessarily immediately, but at the time of His choosing. The prophecy emphasizes that it is God's responsibilty to curb Assyria, and not Judah's. This emphasis also gently discourages Judah's political leadership from immediate revolt.

As we see below, this passage only obliquely references the threat of Judah's loss of control over its part of the southern Levant. It subsumes this political threat under a theological rubric and sees it not as an ethnic or territorial threat but as a continuation and intensification of the ideological contest articulated in the passages discussed previously. In those, Assyrian claims of supremacy or sovereignty were re-formulated to argue for Divine sovereignty. But in 10:5–22, for the first time, Assyrian claims of supremacy and sovereignty are presented as attacks and threats against Divine sovereignty. Assyria's actions have brought into the open the contest between God and Assyria. A specific critique of Assyria's actions is presented in Isa 10:7–8, to which we will shortly turn.

4. Isaiah 10:9 as a Key to the Date of the Literary Unit

Isa 10:5–15 is widely recognized as a single literary unit; commentators are divided on the nature of the material in 10:15–27, and I discuss those verses after discussing 10:5–15.[22] We turn first to one of the key indicators of the date of 10:5–15, the list of cities in 10:9. As Roberts notes "If one could be

21. This correlates with the comment of Oded Lipschits, Omer Sergi, and Ido Koch, "Royal Judahite Jar Handles: Reconsidering the Chronology of the *lmlk* Stamp Impressions," *Tel Aviv* 37.1 (2010): 3–32, here 5 in regard to the distribution of the *lmlk*–stamped jars in the Judean Shephelah: "It is implausible that such an elaborate system could develop in the three or four years between the revolt of Hezekiah and the Assyrian campaign."

22. For a review of the most recent scholarship, see Roberts, *First Isaiah,* 164–76; and Csaba Balogh, "Inverted Fates and Inverted Texts: Rationales of Reinterpretation in the Compositional History of the Isaianic Prophecies, with Special Emphasis on Isaiah 10, 16–19 and Its Context," *ZAW* 128.1 (2016): 64–82.

certain of the precise events to which the prophet was referring, it would help immensely in dating the oracle."[23] The verse is part of the declaration of "Assyria" in the passage, and reads:

(9) הלא ככרכמיש כלנו, אם לא כארפד חמת, אם לא כדמשק שמרון.

Is not Calno like Carchemish, is not Hamath like Arpad, is not Samaria like Damascus?

The subsequent verses make clear the point of this three-fold comparison: Just as the speaker has overpowered Samaria and its idols, so too will he conquer Jerusalem and its idols. Verse 9 emphasizes the similarity between Samaria and other kingdoms, all of which are grouped together in verse 10 under the rubric "idolatrous kingdoms." Roberts notes that some of these kingdoms were conquered for the first time by Tiglath-pileser III, and others by Sargon II.[24]

But in this passage, as verse 10 and verse 14 imply, Assyria does not vaunt itself on the destruction or first conquest of these locations, but on dominating them and overpowering them. This suggests that the unifying characteristic of these verses is not their first conquest, but their having been overpowered with little opposition.

All of the cities mentioned in verse 9 were defeated and dominated by Sargon II in 720–717 BCE; nearly all were clearly rebels. Carchemish, as is well-known, was the principal target of the campaign of 717, and was previously a vassal kingdom of Tiglath-pileser III.[25] Of the other five, Arpad, Hamath, Damascus, and Samaria are known to have played leading roles in the revolt that preceded Sargon's 720 campaign and to have been subdued in this campaign. This leaves Calno as the "odd man out." A stele of Sargon II discovered in the region of Tell Tayinat (ancient Kullania, Biblical Calneh, here called Calno) gives us a better perspective on the unifying characteristics of these six cities.[26] The stele describes Sargon's subduing of Arpad,

23. Roberts, *First Isaiah,* 166.

24. Ibid.

25. Its tribute is recorded in several inscriptions, including the list of 738 in Annal 13 (Tadmor, *The Inscriptions of Tiglath-Pileser III*, 68–69 corresponding to RINAP 1:46, Tiglath-pileser III 14).

26. The stele in question was published by Jacob Lauinger, whose discussion explains the role of the different locations at which Sargon erected stelae, and the view of the historical events reflected in the establishment of these. Lauinger and Batiuk, "A Stele of Sargon II at Tell Tayinat."

Damascus, and Samaria (along with Ṣimirra), and was erected at Kullania.[27] Lauinger and Batiuk discuss the reasons that led Sargon II to establish this stele, and suggest that Kullania may have formerly been a center of the kingdom of Hamath, and Sargon's erection of a stele there expresses his full domination of the region of this former and powerful kingdom, which led the revolt subdued in 720. They also suggest the possibility that a local revolt took place at Kullania during his reign.[28] Another stele of Sargon (found at Beirut, probably originally erected at Hamath, and sadly now broken) mentions the lands of "Hatti" (the Levant) in its conclusion, along with "Bit Agusi" and "Unqi,"[29] and the context very strongly suggests these are lands Sargon II boasts of dominating. Bit Agusi is the historical name of Arpad, and Unqi that of Kullania/Calneh/Calno. Thus, Calno, like the other names mentioned in this verse, is not only the name of a city dominated by Sargon II in the years 720–717, but also of a city or region that he boasts of dominating in his inscriptions. We have no clear evidence of an Assyrian military battle against Kullania during the reign of Sargon II. But the erection of a stele at this site, and the mention of this former kingdom in another inscription erected at a regional center, shows that in Sargon's time it was important to express Assyrian domination of this city. The erection of a stele at Kullania points strongly to an Assyrian victory over someone challenging Assyrian authority over this city.[30]

It is therefore most reasonable to understand the six city names mentioned in Isa 10:9 as reflecting conquests of Sargon II in the Levant. The idea that the Levant as far south as Samaria is a single region is reflected in Sargon's inscriptions, which group together the revolts in Arpad, Hamath, Damascus, and Samaria, and in the reliefs at Khorsabad, which separate conquests in these regions from those in Philistia.[31] Furthermore, each of the cities mentioned in verse 9 was loyal to Assyria before the time of Sargon II. Carchemish and Hamath had been vassal states in the time of Tiglath-pileser III, and Arpad, Kullania, and Damascus had become provinces by his time. Samaria was also conquered prior to Sargon's reign. Thus, the verse refers to Sargon re-asserting control over cities or districts previously-loyal to Assyria that had rebelled.

27. Ibid., 63 and see the discussion of the completion at 65.

28. Ibid., 67.

29. Ibid.

30. The tendency to erect stelae as memorials of victory is discussed by Morandi, "Stele e statue reali assire."

31. The inscriptions mentioning Arpad, Damascus, and Hamath together appear in Fuchs, *Die Inschriften Sargons II aus Khorsabad,* 200–2 (lines 33–36). On the artistic evidence, see Franklin, "The Room V Reliefs at Dur-Sharrukin."

5. Isaiah 10:5–15 as a Literary Unit

5.1. Isaiah 10:5–7

As discussed above, the re-assertion of this control was accompanied by an overall shift in Assyrian policy in this region, and this change is addressed in Isaiah 10:5–8.

> (5) הוי אשור שבט אפי, ומטה הוא בידם זעמי. (6) בגוי חנף אשלחנו, ועל עם עברתי אצונו, לשלל שלל ולבז בז, ולשימו (ולשומו ק') מרמס כחמר חוצות. (7) והוא לא כן ידמה, ולבבו לא כן יחשב, כי להשמיד בלבבו, ולהכרית גוים לא מעט .(8) כי יאמר הלא שרי יחדו מלכים.
>
> (5) Woe! Assyria, the rod of my anger, and my wrath is a staff in their hands.[32] (6) Against a treacherous[33] nation I will release him,[34] and upon the nation of my anger I will command him, to take booty and to plunder plunder, and to make it into something trampled like the mud in the streets. (7) But he does not imagine this way, and his heart does not think this way. Rather, to destroy is in his heart and to put an end to nations, not a few. (8) For he says: Are not my officers, together, kings?

The passage articulates a contrast between God's command to Assyria, in verse 6, and Assyria's intentions in verses 7–8. In the formulation of God's command, Assyria is told to direct itself against certain nations, chosen by God for punishment. (The formulations "treacherous nation" and "nation of my anger" can refer to Judah and/or Israel.) Assyria is empowered to despoil these nations, an action reflected in Assyrian taking of tribute both after military campaigns and on an annual basis thereafter. (Note that such tribute was taken only from vassal states; resources were extracted from provinces in a different manner.[35]) Assyria is also empowered to lower the

32. See Chan, "Rhetorical reversal and usurpation," 720 n. 10, for a summary of the scholarship on this verse. I agree with his interpretation, but suggest that the word הוא need not be eliminated, since it serves to emphasize the contrast between Assyria's view of the staff and God's view. This contrast is discussed below.

33. Translation follows usage in Isa 24:5, where the land is said to respond to the people's treachery, and in Num 35:33.

34. Hebrew שלח in the D-stem does not mean "to keep sending" (Roberts, *First Isaiah,* 164), but rather to release from a certain space and allow to travel as in Gen 8:7–11, Num 5:2, and most famously Ex 5:1–2.

35. Provinces were taxed like all other Assyrian territory; one of the major types of taxation was the "grain tax," which was extracted by the governors of the provinces from grain growers directly. See further in Radner, "Abgaben an den König von Assyrien aus dem In-und Ausland."

status of these nations, and this lowering is depicted poetically as making them like mud in the streets. What Assyria is emphatically not empowered to do, however, is the role it arrogates to itself in verse 7. The two key verbs that characterize Assyrian intent in this verse are להשמיד and להכרית , both of which refer to total destruction.[36] Assyria is empowered to reduce nations to servile status and to arrogate their property but is not empowered to end their existence.

This is not a theoretical contrast, but one that reflects the historical shift in the southern Levant described above. In the days of Tiglath-pileser III, Assyrian domination included primarily reducing nations to vassal status and, to a more limited extent, turning areas into provinces, without bringing large numbers of new inhabitants to the region. This strategy, as noted above, did not prevent the outbreak of revolts in either provinces or vassal states in the years between the reign of Shalmaneser V and 712–711. But starting in the reign of Sargon II, Assyria undertook a more aggressive policy of changing the demographic composition and economic basis of the southern Levant, especially of the region that became the province of Samaria.[37] Below, I discuss how these changes resulted in the previous inhabitants becoming a less influential element in the province, both demographically and economically. Thus, ending the existence of "not a few" nations was a clear objective of Sargon's policy after subduing the revolts of the first half of his reign. The deportations to Hamath were one example of this policy, as were deportations to other regions conquered in Syria.[38] We have ample evidence for the implementation of this policy in Samaria, as detailed above. Sargon's policy seems to have worked; it is interesting that neither Hamath nor Samaria rebelled at the end of the reign of Sargon (as did many other vassal states in the Levant), nor did any of the other regions mentioned in 10:9.

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36. On להכרית, compare Lev 20:3–6; on להשמיד, compare Amos 9:8.

37. It is important to note that the province of Samaria included not only the hill country that had been the center of the former kingdom, but also the lowlands to the west of the kingdom, where the main coastal road passes. This is evident from an inscription of Esarhaddon (RINAP 4:87, Esarhaddon 34, line 12′), which considers Aphek, on the coastal road north of Tel Hadid, as part of the province of Samaria. The coastal road had to be included in some province because the governor of the province was responsible for the upkeep of the main roads used by Assyrian troops and administrators. This is clear from many Assyrian administrative texts, cited in my article "An Assyrian *bit mardīte* Near Tel Hadid?"

38. Examples include deportees settled in Marqasa, formerly capital of the kingdom of Gurgum in north Syria/southeastern Anatolia in SAA 1:199, no. 257, as well as mentions of deportees in SAA 1:200, no. 260. This last document is apparently from Syria since it mentions the Assyrian official Bel-iqbi.

The subsequent verse provides further context for this contrast. It cites "Assyria" as declaring his שרים to be מלכים. In Hebrew, the former term refers to officers and the latter to kings, while in Akkadian, the former term is cognate to *šarru*, "king," and the latter to *malku*, which refers to foreign rulers. As Machinist noted, this seems to be based on a conscious language play.[39] The verse reflects the Assyrian practice of replacing local vassal kings with Assyrian officers, in the process transforming them from vassal states to provinces. This practice was vaunted in the inscriptions of the Assyrian kings.[40] In the policy of Sargon II, this practice was implemented as part of a strategy of ensuring that regions would no longer rebel against him. This connection between defeating rebels and replacing local vassal kings with Assyrian officers appears in Sargon's inscriptions, where he consecutively boasts of subduing the rebels of the four corners and of replacing their kings with governors.[41]

This practice was implemented by Sargon II in regard to two of the cities mentioned in verse 10: Hamath and Carchemish had previously been vassal states and became provinces. Similarly, Samaria had had a king until not long before Sargon's accession, and then became a province.[42] Isa 10:6–7 thus describe the transition from the policy of Tiglath-pileser III in the Levant to that of Sargon II. In the days of Tiglath-pileser III, Assyrian domination reduced most of the states of the region (Israel, Judah, Ashkelon, Gaza, and Hamath) to vassalage and turned only troublesome states like Arpad and Damascus into provinces. As discussed above, we have no reason to believe that this king settled large numbers of deportees in areas formerly part of the kingdom of Israel. But this strategy did not prevent the outbreak of revolts in either provinces or vassal states after the death of Tiglath-pileser III. Sargon II therefore undertook a more aggressive policy of changing the demographic composition and economic basis of the southern Levant. After reducing Samaria to a province, deporting its inhabitants and importing others, new populations were settled astride the main international road in the western part of Samaria, and they were responsible for servicing the Assyrian troops and messengers travelling along this road.[43] The effect of this more aggressive policy was to destroy

39. Machinist, "Assyria and Its Image in the First Isaiah," 734–35.

40. For examples of Sargon's boasts of replacing kings by governors, see Fuchs, *Die Inschriften Sargons II,* 76, lines 12–13 and in the annals, 104, lines 97–98.

41. In the bronze tablet, Fuchs, *Die Inschriften Sargons II,* 46, lines 18–25.

42. While it is probable that Shalmaneser V formally made Samaria into a province, it is clear that the bulk of the administrative reorganization and deportations were done by Sargon II.

43. Aster, "An Assyrian *bīt mardīte* Near Tel Hadid?"

any possible national or local sentiment that could result in revolt. Many of the inhabitants of the province were no longer members of the ethnic groups that had long resided there. The economy of the region underwent drastic change, and only those regions astride the main international route prospered.[44] Efforts were made to ensure that the remaining inhabitants were economically dependent on the Assyrian empire. Thus, ending of the existence of "not a few" nations was a clear objective of Sargon's policy after subduing the revolts of the first half of his reign.

Verses 5–7 focus on this policy of ending the existence of "not a few nations." It does this in the context of the contrast noted above between God's command to Assyria, in verse 6, and Assyria's intentions in verses 7–8. God's command to Assyria is "to take booty and to plunder plunder, and to make it into something trampled like the mud in the streets," or in other words, to reduce the status of these states and extract their resources. In a very general way, this was the policy of Assyria under Tiglath-pileser III, and it is this policy that is portrayed here as "authorized by God," in keeping with the view seen in chapter 3 of this book. But verses 7–8 contrast this policy with the permanent elimination of states as national entities. This policy is portrayed as deriving from the Assyrian's heart, and as an Assyrian overstepping of Divine boundaries. It would be only a slight oversimplification to interpret this passage as indicating that the policies of Tiglath-pileser III received the sanction of YHWH, but those of Sargon II did not. Before examining the detailed discussion of Assyria's overstepping of boundaries in verses 8–14, a short discussion of the imagery in verse 5 is needed.

As Chan noted, verse 5 argues that "The Assyrian king fights as YHWH's agent, with YHWH's weapons, and for YHWH's purposes."[45] This verse subverts one of the central symbols used in Assyrian rhetoric to legitimate Assyrian conquest, the staff. As I discussed in the previous chapter (in reference to Isa 14:29), the staff is used both in the Assyrian coronation ceremony and in royal titularies.[46] It is said to be given by Assur to the king

44. Avraham Faust, "Settlement, Economy, and Demography under Assyrian Rule in the West: The Territories of the Former Kingdom of Israel as a Test Case," *JAOS* 135.4 (2015): 765–89.

45. Chan, "Rhetorical Reversal," 726.

46. Besides the inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III and Sennacherib cited in the previous chapter, one of Sargon's earliest inscriptions also refers to his being invested with the staff (Akk. *ḫaṭṭu*; written ^{GIŠ} GIDRU) by the god Assur (Chamaza, "Sargon II's Ascent to the Throne," 23, line 35). Other inscriptions of Sargon II refer to his being given a weapon (Akk. *kakke*, written ^{GIŠ} TUKUL) for the explicit purpose of felling enemies (Fuchs, *Die Inschriften Sargons II,* 32 [Zylinder line 7]; 62 [Stier lines 11–12]; 86 [Ann line 3]).

as an instrument to defeat other nations. In Isaiah's reversal of this imagery, the fact that the staff is conferred by YHWH limits Assyria's exercise of power. The staff is not given for the purpose of expanding Assyria's rule or eliminating enemies, but to deliver a measured punishment to nations YHWH deems worthy of punishment. By fulfilling the Assyrian injunction to expand the borders of Assyria, which Sargon II accomplished by subduing rebels, turning vassal states into provinces and thus adding their territory to the border of Assyria, Sargon II transgressed the limits God set upon him. These limits are set out in 10:6 and Assyria's transgressions are set out in 10:7.

5.2. Isaiah 10:8–11

Verses 8–11 and 13–14 detail Assyria's transgressions, not in the voice of the omniscient narrator, but in the first person voice of Assyrian boasts. As Machinist has noted, this voice is characteristic of the Assyrian royal inscriptions.[47] As scholars have noted, many motifs appearing in the boasts in verses 8–11 are known to us from these inscriptions.[48] And yet, there is an interesting focus on boasts current in the period of Sargon: this is seen not only in the list of conquests noted in verse 9, a list whose totality can only reflect the period of Sargon, but in other aspects of these verses as well. One of these is the motif found in verse 8, of appointment of governors in the place of kings. While known from inscriptions of other kings, this motif appears several times in Sargon's inscriptions with specific reference to the regions mentioned in verse 9.[49]

47. Machinist, "Ah Assyria .... (Isaiah 10:5ff)," 201.

48. See, for example, Wildberger, *Isaiah 1-12*, 420–22; on wisdom, border elimination, impudence, and bird imagery in 10:13–14, see Roberts, *First Isaiah*, 165–67. The literary similarities to Assyrian royal inscriptions are addressed in detail by Gallagher, *Sennacherib's Campaign to Judah*, 75–87; and most recently by Machinist, "Ah, Assyria," who pays close attention to the literary structure of the passage.

49. In Sargon's inscriptions, it appears in summaries of regions Sargon subdued, in Fuchs, *Die Inschriften Sargons II,* 63 (Stier lines 19–20, with specific reference to Carchemish and Syro-Palestine); 76 (Saales XIV, lines 12–13, with reference to the same region); 221 (Prunk. line 109, with reference to the same region); and 46 (Bronzetafel line 23 in regard to a different region, in Babylon), as well as 104 (Ann 97–98 in reference to a different region, in Elam), and 77 (Saales XIV line 26 in regard to both Babylon and Elam). This motif is also prominent in the inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III, where it tends to appear in regard to specific conquests, unlike in some of Sargon's inscriptions, where it sometimes appears in reference to a larger region.

Verses 10–11 describe an impending Assyrian attack on Jerusalem, which develops out of the Assyrian victories in the territories mentioned in verse 8:

> (10) כאשר מצאה ידי לממלכת האליל ופסיליהם מירושלם ומשמרון. (11) הלא כאשר עשיתי לשמרון ולאלילה, כן אעשה לירושלם ולעצביה.
>
> (10) Just as my hand found the idolatrous kingdoms, whose statues are more (numerous) than those of Jerusalem and Samaria ... (11) Is it not so that just as I have done to Samaria and her idols, so will I do to Jerusalem and her images?

Verse 10, which contains an unfinished comparison, focuses on the conquest of "idolatrous kingdoms," and specifically on dominating their idols. Counting the gods of a conquered city as spoils is well-known in Assyrian royal inscriptions.[50] But two specific comparisons may be noted. One is the reference to the idols of Samaria, which appears in Sargon's account of the city's conquest in the Nimrud prism: "the gods they trust, as spoil I counted."[51] And the second is the role that the plunder of the temple of Haldi, in the city of Muṣaṣir, occupies in Sargon's letter to the gods about his campaigns in Urartu, to which we return below.[52]

The comparison of Samaria to Jerusalem seems to be grounded in a geographic comparison: both capitals were in the hill-country, far from the main coastal road. Samaria had been conquered and it is reasonable that Jerusalemites feared that any revolt against Assyria might lead to their falling victim as well. Such a comparison would be most apt in the reign of Sargon. But the geographic comparison is blended with a theological one: the Assyrian in the verse implicitly compares the idols of Samaria to the God of Jerusalem, who responds in verse 12. The divine response in verse 12 is addressed below, after treating the Assyrian boasts in verses 13–14. Verses 13–14 have a special character, since they satirize a specific group of

50. Strategies for treating captured gods included either treating them as spoils or adopting them; see references in Machinist, "Ah Assyria," 192 n. 14.

51. Gadd, "Inscribed Prisms of Sargon II from Nimrud," 180, column iv, line 32. The motif of counting the gods of a conquered city as spoils is not necessarily uncommon, but the specific reference to Samaria here is highly interesting.

52. The plunder is described as part of an attack on Urzana of Muṣaṣir, apparently a small state between Assyria and Urartu. The attack is described in lines 309–370, and the plunder follows in lines 371–405. Line 347 records the removal of the statue of Haldi, god of Urartu, and the plunder includes the removal of various cult objects.

Assyrian boasts, all of which are found in a letter to the gods written on the occasion of the campaign of Sargon II to Urartu in 714 BCE.

6. Background to Isaiah 10:12–14: The Letter to the Gods Describing the Eighth Campaign of Sargon II

To understand this letter, some background to this campaign is required. Urartu had long been known as one of the strongest kingdoms of the region and had rivalled Assyria for hegemony in Anatolia and north Syria throughout the eighth century, including during the reign of Tiglath-pileser III.[53] Its defeat occupied an important place in Sargon's political calculations and ideological formulations. Urartu remained a major power but ceased to challenge Assyria in the Zagros.[54] Ideologically, defeat of such a powerful challenger formed a capstone of Sargon's campaign against those who threatened Assyrian domination. To mark this occasion, a letter to the gods was composed.[55] The letter served as the centerpiece of celebrations in the Assyrian centers upon the king's return from the battle, and appears to have been deposited as a votive offering in one of the temples.[56] It served as the model for composers of royal annals since it was considered an important statement of Assyrian royal ideology.[57] The letter closes with the statement that the king sends "the best orator" to Assur with the letter, and Oppenheim held that the letter was then read out publicly in Assyrian centers.[58]

53. Kahn, "The Kingdom of Arpad (Bit Agusi) and 'All Aram'"; Mayer, *Assyrien und Urarṭu*.

54. Louis D. Levine, "Sargon's Eighth Campaign," in *Mountains and Lowlands: Essays in the Archaeology of Greater Mesopotamia*, Bibliotheca Mesopotamica 7, ed. Louis D. Levine and T. Cuyler Young (Malibu: Undena, 1977), 135–53, here 148.

55. For the text itself, see Walter Mayer, "Sargons Feldzug gegen Urarṭu–714 v. Chr Text und Übersetzung," *MDOG* 115 (1983): 77–113; and now in Mayer's *Assyrien und Urarṭu,* I, 96–141, with indices following. An excellent English translation is available in Benjamin Read Foster, *Before the Muses: An Anthology of Akkadian Literature* (Bethesda, MD: CDL Press, 2005), 790–813. Unless otherwise indicated, the translations in this chapter are my own, but rely on those of Foster and of Mayer.

56. Victor Avigdor Hurowitz, "Shutting Up the Enemy – Literary Gleanings from Sargon's Eighth Campaign," in *Treasures on Camel's Humps: Historical and Literary Studies from the Ancient Near East Presented to Israel Eph 'al*, ed. Mordechai Cogan and Dan'el Kahn (Jerusalem: Hebrew University Magnes Press, 2008), 104–20, here 105–6; Mayer, *Assyrien und Urarṭu,* 1:6–7, discusses the ceremonial return of the conquering army.

57. Mayer, *Assyrien und Urarṭu* 1:7–8.

58. A. Leo Oppenheim, "The City of Assur in 714 B.C.," *JNES* 19 (1960): 133–47. This view was discussed by Hurowitz, "Shutting Up the Enemy," 105–6. That the text was publicly proclaimed seems clear; we cannot resolve the question of whether the Ak-

The anti-Assyrian polemic found in 10:5–15 closely parallels themes in this letter, and the closest parallels are found in verses 13–14, which mention certain Assyrian motifs found only in this letter, and satirize all of its major themes.

Six specific motifs in these verses relate to this letter:

> (13) כי אמר בכח ידי עשיתי ובחכמתי כי נבנותי, ואסיר גבולת עמים, ועתידתיהם (וע־ תודתיהם ק') שושתי, ואוריד כאביר יושבים. (14) ותמצא כקן ידי לחיל העמים, וכאסף ביצים עזבות כל הארץ אני אספתי, ולא היה נדד כנף ופצה פה ומצפצף.
>
> (13) For he has said "By the strength of my hand, I have acted, and in my wisdom, for clever am I, I will remove the borders of nations, and their prepared treasures I will despoil, and like a bull, I will bring down rulers.[59] (14) My hand has found the wealth of nations like a nest, and I have gathered the whole land up like one gathers abandoned eggs, and there was no one who flapped a wing or opened a mouth and chirped."

Five motifs are found in verse 13: a) strength, expressed through the hand (בְּכֹ֣חַ יָדִ֔י עָשִׂ֖יתִי); b) the wisdom of the Assyrian (וּבְחָכְמָתִ֣י כִּי נָבֹ֑נְתִּי); c) the removal of nations' boundaries (וְאָסִ֖יר גְּבוּלֹ֣ת עַמִּ֑ים); d) the plunder of treasure (ועתידתיהם [וַֽעֲתוּדֹתֵיהֶ֥ם] שׁוֹשֵּׁ֖תִי); and e) acting like a bull in "bringing down" rulers (וְאוֹרִ֥יד כַּאֲבִ֖יר יוֹשְׁבִֽים). The sixth motif, which is unique, and is found only in this verse (and seems absent in the rest of the Hebrew Bible) and in this letter (and absent in the rest of the Assyrian imperial corpus), is found in verse 14: the silence expressed by no bird flapping wings, connected to a nest.

6.1. Parallels to the Letter to the Gods in Isaiah 10:13

Although the motif found in verse 14 is the most compelling parallel, I follow the order of the verses and begin with those found in verse 13. Each of these motifs in verse 13 is well-attested in the Assyrian royal inscriptions, and this has led commentators to describe verses 13–14 as portraying "the typical claims of the Assyrian kings to enormous power, almost endless military success, and great wisdom,"[60] and to cite passages where individual motifs appear in different Assyrian inscriptions.[61] But there is good reason to believe that these are not simply "typical" motifs, pulled together from a wide variety of Assyrian inscriptions of different kings. The motifs

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kadian text was read out loud, or whether it was read out loud in Aramaic to enable a wider audience to grasp its meaning. It may have been read in both languages.

59. A more detailed discussion of the translations in verse 13b follows.

60. Roberts, *First Isaiah*, 167.

61. See note 48 above.

concatenate in a unique way in the letter to the gods of Sargon, where the first three motifs noted (strength, wisdom, defense of borders) form part of Sargon's self-presentation.

This self-presentation was discussed in detail by van de Mieroop, who noted contrasts to the presentation of Rusa, Sargon's opponent.[62] Sargon is portrayed as wise, respectful of boundaries, recognizing that these come from the gods, while Rusa is portrayed in opposite terms. This contrast between Rusa and Sargon is most explicit in lines 112–115 of the letter, which introduce Sargon's prayer to Assur:

> I, Sargon, the king of the four corners of the world, the shepherd of Assyria, who observes the oath (lit, the oil) of Enlil and Marduk, who heeds the ruling of Shamash, who is the seed of Assur, the city of wisdom and broad understanding, who reverently attends to the word of the great gods, who does not question their decreed plans,[63] correct king, who speaks good and rejects lies. Wicked and destructive words do not come from his mouth. Wisest among all kings.

These contrast with the presentation of Rusa, Sargon's opponent, in lines 92–94:

> Rusa, the Urartian, who does not observe the command of the gods Assur and Marduk, who does not respect the oath of the lord of lords, mountain man, the seed of a murderous line, who does not know practical intelligence, whose lips are voluble with nothingness and slander, who does not guard the solemn command of Shamash, the judge of the gods, and who year after year without ceasing again and again transgresses his (Shamash's) decreed plans.

Sargon is described as observing the oath of the gods, and Rusa is described in precisely opposite terms. Sargon is said to revere the word of the great gods and therefore respects the destiny they decree, while Rusa is described as transgressing these regularly. This focus on respecting divinely-decreed destiny reflects the practical justification for the campaign, found near the

62. Van de Mieroop, "A Study in Contrast: Sargon of Assyria and Rusa of Urartu," especially 419–20.

63. The Akkadian *uṣurtu* is translated "boundary" by van de Mieroop, "A Study in Contrast," 420, fitting with the verb *ētettiqu* (repeatedly transgressed) in line 113. However, the noun has a more general sense, referring to an ordinance or plan decreed by the gods as the destiny of a particular person or state. This is supported by the CAD entry U 295, which offers the translation "what was designed for him by the gods."

beginning of the letter, where lines 31–60 accuse Rusa of having crossed the border into the land of Ullusunu the Mannaean. Immediately after this accusation, Sargon declares in lines 60–61:

> With the overwhelming strength that Assur and Marduk bestowed upon me by making my weaponry superior to that of any other sovereign in the world, I declared to them to defeat the land of Urartu and to bring relief to the troubled peoples of the land of the Mannaeans.

This punitive justification for the campaign is also reflected in line 124, at the end of his prayer to Assur, where Sargon is said to declare "I lifted up my hand against him" in order to cause Rusa to "bear his iniquity."

Boundaries, which serve as the justification for the whole campaign, are also mentioned in lines 123–124: Sargon declares that before this campaign he had never crossed the borders of Rusa, but that Rusa had insolently acted otherwise. Sargon portrays himself as a defender of boundaries. These boundaries are described as having been set by Shamash and the other gods, and Sargon's willingness to defend these boundaries is thus portrayed in lines 92–94 as deriving from his commitment to observe divine commands. Rusa is portrayed in lines 112–114 as denigrating divine commands, as is evidenced by his crossing of the boundary.

The contrast between the rivals' willingness to observe divine commands and borders is portrayed as related to Sargon's wisdom and Rusa's lack thereof. In the same passages that contrast their observance of boundaries, Rusa is described as lacking *tašīmtu* (practical intelligence, l. 93), while Sargon is described as wisest among the kings. Rusa is insulted by being called a "mountain man," while Sargon is praised as hailing from Assur, a city of wisdom.[64]

The letter to the gods presents Sargon as the guardian of boundaries, a role he assumes in his wisdom; the gods give him the power to enforce boundaries. When Isa 10:13 references the claims Sargon makes against Rusa, it turns them against Assyria. The verse cites Sargon as boasting about his wisdom and strength, but instead of portraying him as using these to defend boundaries, it accuses him of removing boundaries of nations. Isa 10:13a effectively charges Sargon with the precise crime for which he set out to punish Rusa, thus justifying a punishment of Sargon by the true Guardian of boundaries (YHWH). This focus on Assyrian removal of boundaries

64. On "mountain man" as an insult, see Van de Mieroop, "A Study in Contrast," 423. The text here clearly refers to the city of Assur, not to the god Assur. The concept of Assur as a mountain accentuates the contrast.

reflects the experience of the southern Levant under the Assyrian domination, in which boundaries of formerly-independent kingdoms were re-drawn as they became Assyrian provinces. The author of Isa 10:13 references both the connections made in Sargon's letter between Sargon's wisdom and his obedience to the gods, both of which lead him to seek to defend borders, as well as the idea that strength was given to him by the gods to use for that purpose. But rather than guarding boundaries, the Assyrian has used his wisdom and power to remove nations' boundaries. Sargon is therefore in open revolt, by his own criteria, against "the gods," an accusation that directly connects the boasts of Isa 10:13 to the impending Divine punishment described in 10:12.

To parry the argument that Isa 10:13 reflects typical Assyrian boasts, it is important to note here that the claim ובחכמתי כי נבונתי in connection with conquest does not really reflect an Assyrian claim made outside Sargon's letter to the gods. In the corpus of Assyrian royal inscriptions, wisdom is not often connected to conquest. In the inscriptions of Sargon II, Sennacherib, and Esarhaddon, the king's wisdom is referred to either in a general way, or with specific reference to the king's technical ability to erect buildings.[65] In Sargon's inscriptions, it is also used with reference to his ability to govern, provide for, and control the land.[66] But the connection of wisdom to conquest and, more specifically, to the issue of borders, seems unique to Isa 10:13 and to Sargon's letter to the gods.

We move now to consider the second part of Isa 10:13, which contains two motifs, the plunder of treasure and the bringing down of strong inhabitants. The following Hebrew phrases require some brief discussion.

ועתידתיהם (וַאֲתוּדֹתֵיהֶם) שׁוֹשַׁתִּי

וְאוֹרִיד כַּאבִּיר יוֹשְׁבִים׃

65. For references to the king's wisdom in general, expressed by the epithet "wise prince" in the titulary, see the opening lines of the following Sennacherib inscriptions: RINAP 3/1:221, Sennacherib 34; RINAP 3/2:57, Sennacherib 43; RINAP 3/2:76, Sennacherib 46; RINAP 3/2:92, Sennacherib 49; RINAP 3/2:96, Sennacherib 50. For references to the king's wisdom expressed in building projects, see the references to Sennacherib's knowledge of copper-smelting mentioned in RINAP 3/2:62, Sennacherib 43, lines 73–79 and RINAP 3/2:86–87, Sennacherib 46, lines 141–143. For references to Esarhaddon's wisdom expressed by his knowledge of crafts, see RINAP 4:264, Esarhaddon 129, lines 20–24.

66. For Sargon's wisdom expressed in building projects, see Fuchs, *Die Inschriften Sargons II,* 54, lines 13–15 and 39, line 48 (in the cylinder inscription). For his wisdom as giving him the ability to provide for and control the land, see ten lines earlier in the same cylinder inscription, 37, line 38.

וַעֲתֻודֹתֵיהֶם שׁוֹשֵׁתִי is generally interpreted as referring to the plundering of treasures, based primarily on the meaning of the root שׁסה, to plunder. The feminine plural hapax legomenon עתודות is understood (by Ibn Ezra, R. Joseph Kaspi, and R. David Kimhi) as referring to prepared treasures, based on the use of the root in Prov 24:27 (where it seems to refer to preparing resources) and Job 15:28 (where the Hitpa'el form of the verb refers to future expectations).[67]

Another possible rendering of עתודות is "strong leaders." The biblical Hebrew term most similar to עתודות is עתודים, which appears in Isa 14:9 in parallel with מלכים, and seems to mean "powerful leaders." But the feminine form עתודות, which would mean "powerful female leaders," is unattested, and "plunder of treasures" seems preferable to "plunder of powerful female leaders."[68]

I have translated the second phrase, וְאוֹרִיד כַּאֲבִיר יוֹשְׁבִים, as "like a bull, I will bring down rulers." The verb "to bring down" does not usually express defeat in Biblical Hebrew, and refers to bringing down from high places. Many interpreters take the phrase כַּאֲבִיר יוֹשְׁבִים as equivalent to כביר יושבים, which means "the strongest rulers."[69] (Some Masoretic manuscripts list the shorter form as a *qere* for the longer form.[70]) But I have here followed the commentators who take כאביר as consisting of a comparative כ, followed by

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67. From Targum Jonathan on, some interpreters have rendered וַעֲתֻודֹתֵיהֶם as "their strong cities." While this achieves a more direct parallel to Sargon's letter, I find this rendering somewhat more difficult, for reasons I explain below. It too, is based on the need to interpret וַעֲתֻודֹתֵיהֶם as the direct object of the verb plunder, and is justified by reference to two contexts in which the noun עתודים refers to powerful beings. One is Isa 14:9, where the noun עתודים seems to be in parallel with מלכים, and seems to mean "powerful leaders"; the second is the frequent use of עתודים in the Hebrew Bible to refer to male sheep (as in Gen 31:10–12). The rendering "strong cities," it should be noted, is therefore achieved by melding together of different meanings of the similar noun עתודים and fitting these to the context.

68. Might this be a reference to the plunder of Rusa and his allies, based on the repeated depictions of Rusa as feminine in the letter, which Van de Mieroop, "A Study in Contrast," 421–22, has discussed?

69. So Rashi and R. Joseph Qara; cf R. Isaiah di Trani: "those who dwell in fortified cities." On an adjective in a construct phrase, see Wilhelm Genesius, *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar* 2nd English edition, revised by A. E. Cowley, ed. E. Kautzsch (Oxford: Clarendon, 1910), paragraph 133h, where he notes such phrases in Isa 14:30 (בכורי דלים) and Isa 19:11 (חכמי יעצי פרעה). On יושב meaning ruler, see the clear parallelism in Amos 1:5 between יושב and תומך שבט, and the discussion in Abraham Malamat, "Amos 1:5 in the light of the Til Barsip inscriptions," *BASOR* 129 (1953): 25–26. On the cantillation accents that allow this meaning, see Luzzatto, *Commentary to the Book of Isaiah*.

70. See references in Moshe H. Goshen-Gottstein, *The Book of Isaiah: The Hebrew University Bible* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1975).

the noun אביר.[71] This noun can mean "mighty one" (as in Job 34:20) but specifically refers to a bull in Ps 50:13.[72]

All of these motifs appear prominently in Sargon's letter to the gods. The plunder of treasure is emphasized particularly in what Fales identified as the second literary unit in the letter to the gods, lines 164–308.[73] In these lines, Sargon recounts his arrival at one fortress after another, emphasizing the strength of the fortresses, the sack of their riches (especially their food stores) and the enemy's flight and abandonment of the fortresses. Sargon's troops gorge themselves on the contents of the granaries on which Sargon's enemies relied to feed their own troops. Thus, at lines 165–166, "I hacked down their mighty fortifications like pottery, down to their foundations, and turned them into flat ground. I opened their innumerable granaries and fed my troops on grain rations beyond measure." Such statements of despoiling granaries are repeated in lines 187, 198, and 219, and descriptions of the uprooting and destruction of crops and fruit trees recur numerous times. These lines "convey the image of a highly advanced, well structured, strongly armed, in brief utterly civilized foreign culture," with abundant assets.[74] As Fales notes, the emphasis on abundance is designed to contrast with the enemy's abandonment of these forts and highlight Sargon's success in sacking them.

This emphasis on plunder in the second part of the letter parallels both the expression וַעֲתוּדֹתֵיהֶם שׁוֹשֵּׁתִי in 10:13b and the image of easily gathering "abandoned eggs" from all the land in 10:14. Furthermore, the bringing down of powerful rulers is the central theme of the whole letter to the gods.

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71. Roberts, *First Isaiah,* 167 renders וְאוֹרִיד כַּאבִּיר יוֹשְׁבִים as "like a bull I brought down rulers." A similar view is expressed by R. Moses ha-Kohen, cited in Ibn Ezra, and by Gallagher, *Sennacherib's Campaign in Judah*, 81–82. New International Version and many modern translations render this "like a mighty one." There may be intentional polysemy in the verse. R. David Kimhi, in commenting on the last phrase in the verse, raises the possibility that both the "bull" meaning and the meaning כביר, great, may be intentional, and "the mixture is to emphasize greatness."

72. On the different meanings of אביר, see Nahum Sarna, "The Divine Title אביר יעקב," in *Essays on the Occasion of the Seventieth Anniversary of the Dropsie University*, ed. Abraham I. Katsh and Leon Nemoy (Philadelphia: Dropsie University, 1979), 389–96. The term refers to mighty people, to bulls, and to powerful animals used in war as in Judg 5:22 and Jer 8:16.

73. Frederick Mario Fales, "Narrative and Ideological Variation," in *Ah Assyria … Studies in Assyrian History and Ancient Near Eastern Historiography Presented to Hayim Tadmor,* ed. Mordechai Cogan and Israel Eph'al (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1991), 150–63, here 142–46.

74. Ibid., 143–44.

The phrase ואוריד כאביר יושבים also has significant parallels in Sargon's letter. If I am right in translating "like a bull I will bring down rulers," then the meaning of the phrase is unclear: how is a bull useful in bringing people down? The simile cannot be re-interpreted to mean "I defeated rulers like a bull" because the verb "to bring down" does not usually express defeat in Biblical Hebrew. This may be a reference to the specific simile Sargon uses in his letter. Regarding the difficult terrain's mountainous regions, and the challenges of accessing their inhabitants, lines 255–257 read:

> I had my furious troops pass through the mountain's remotest recesses, like wild sheep ... I had the vast armies of Assur swarm over their cities like locusts and I let my swift, plundering troops enter their innermost chambers. The good, chattels, and treasures ... they brought me, I laid hands on their accumulated wealth.

Wild sheep (*bibbu*) are frequently used in Akkadian as a metaphor for mobility, since they travel easily. (For this reason, the term also refers to planets.) By acting like mountain sheep, the Assyrians were able to bring down the kingdom's wealth. While this comparison is found in Akkadian, the idea of a bull bringing down rulers is otherwise unknown in Biblical Hebrew, and it appears that Isa 10:14 subverts the animal imagery in this letter, substituting a bull for a sheep since the bull is a symbol of power in Biblical Hebrew. It therefore appears that the two phrases ועתודתיהם שושתי and ואוריד כאביר יושבים refer to motifs that appear together in Sargon's letter.

But even if the phrase ואוריד כאביר יושבים means "I will bring down great rulers," it parallels a very significant motif in Sargon's letter. אוריד necessarily implies bringing down from a higher place. Bringing down powerful rulers from higher places parallels the emphasis in the first part of the letter on the mountainous nature of the territory of Rusa, the "mountain man" (line 93), and the consequent difficulty of conquering it and forcing its rulers to submit to Assyria. In line 179, in regard to the mountain fortress of Ushqaia: "I mounted that fortress with the assault of my mighty arms, I plundered its vast goods and brought them into my encampment." Rusa clearly relied on the mountains as a means of protection against Sargon, and Sargon's strategy, detailed in lines 140–145, was to surprise the enemy by ascending the mountains. After describing how the enemy took difficult paths as a way of evading Sargon, he declares "I went after them with the fury of my mighty weapon, I choked the ascents and descents with the corpses of combatants. I followed him at arrow point ... to Zimur, the

mountain of jasper."[75] The mountainous nature of Urartu, as well as its status as a power to rival Assyria, seems reflected in the boast "I will bring down strong rulers."[76]

Thus, while the first part of 10:13 ("I will remove the borders of nations") satirizes and subverts a claim that appears in the letter to the gods, the second part of 10:13 ("Their prepared treasures I despoiled, and I will bring down strong rulers" or "like a bull, I will bring down rulers") cites such claims substantially as they appear in the letter. Isa 10:13 portrays Assyria both as claiming to be a boundary-violator, and hence deserving of punishment (like that which Sargon administered to Rusa), and as the powerful one who administers this punishment. There is an obvious tension here: Assyria can be either the punished or the punisher, but not both. Since Assyria must be punished (as it is guilty of the same sin of which Sargon accuses Rusa), the one to administer this punishment must be more powerful than Assyria. Verse 13 therefore justifies the verdict that God delivers against Assyria in 10:12.

Before discussing 10:12, we will investigate the most blatant and telling similarity between Isa 10:5–15 and Sargon's letter to the gods, which appears in 10:14.

6.2. "There Were No Flapping Wings" in Isaiah 10:14 and in the Letter to the Gods

This similarity relates to the motif of the silence expressed by no birds flapping wings.

> (14) ותמצא כקן ידי לחיל העמים, וכאסף ביצים עזבות כל הארץ אני אספתי, ולא היה נדד כנף ופצה פה ומצפצף.
>
> (14) My hand has found the wealth of nations like a nest, and I have gathered the whole land up like one gathers abandoned eggs, and there was no one who flapped a wing or opened a mouth and chirped

In its Biblical context, the motif refers to the ease with which the Assyrian is able to overpower his enemy. The motif, which describes the Assyrian

75. Foster's translation, in *Before the Muses*, 798–99, lines 143–144.

76. The bringing down of inhabitants may secondarily refer to a more general Assyrian practice known from an administrative letter (SAA 1:138, no. 176, lines 34–39, numbered as SAA 19, no. 173 in the online corpus), which demands that defeated populations in Syria come down and stop living on the tells (Akk. *tillāni*). The rationale for this command is presumably because the partly-undestroyed city walls allow them to barricade themselves on the mounds. Instead, the letter demands that they come down and serve as corvée laborers in building Assyrian forts in other locations.

as unopposed even by a bird flapping its wings or chirping, is unparalleled elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible. In its Assyrian context the motif is part of the description of the forbidding terrain of Urartu, with which the letter opens:

> It was in U'aush, a great mountain covered with clouds, the peak of which reaches the sky, which no living creature had traversed since time immemorial, nor any wayfarer seen its hidden fastnesses, nor even a bird of heaven in flight passed over, nor built a nest to teach its little ones to spread their wings, a peak sharp-tipped as a dagger point.[77]

Descriptions of mountains with dagger-like tips are found in other Assyrian royal inscriptions.[78] But the detailed description of how no bird passed over, nor built nests "to teach its little ones to spread their wings," is completely unparalleled in the Assyrian corpus.[79] It is true that bird imagery is frequently found in Assyrian royal inscriptions, to describe the defeated enemy either fleeing "birdlike" or caged like a bird.[80] In these, the bird's weakness consistently serves as a metaphor for the enemy. But the emphasis in this passage is not on their weakness. Rather, it focusses on how birds do not build nests in this mountain or teach their young to spread their wings. This is a much more direct and specific parallel to the metaphor in Isa 10:14, which focusses on the birds' lack of wing-flapping or chirping as the Assyrian gathers eggs from their nests.

The two passages both describe how no birds moved their wings, and both refer specifically to nests. These very specific similarities make it highly likely that the two passages are related. The motif fits well in Sargon's letter, since birds typically build nests in inaccessible places to avoid

77. Foster's translation, in *Before the Muses*, 796, lines 96–98.

78. It appears in line 5′ of the Azekah inscription, which has most recently been published in RINAP 3/2:351, Inscription 1015. The description fits (with some exaggeration) the topography of Tel Azekah, an unusually steep hill for the region.

79. The only vaguely similar formulation is the image of the father teaching his children to fly, which mentions wings. This image appears in several royal inscriptions: in the Ishtar Temple Inscription, where Assurbanipal describes how the god reared him instead of a father (Andreas Fuchs in Rykle Borger, *Beiträge zum Inschriftenwerk Assurbanipals* [Wiesbaden: Harrasowitz, 1996], 266 line 18); and in a royal grant of Aššur etelli ilāni, where this king also describes how Assur raised him in place of a father (John Nicholas Postgate, *Neo-Assyrian Royal Grants and Decrees*, Studia Pohl Series Maior 1 [Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1969], number 13 line 5).

80. Rusa himself is said to flee like a bird of the cave in line 149 of this letter. Other comparisons to fleeing and caged birds were discussed in chapter 4 of this book, in connection with Isa 31.

predators stealing their eggs, and this passage emphasizes that even the birds found this particular location too inaccessible for their nests. This fits into the larger topos of the uncivilized land, highlighted by Fales, and also may relate to the motif of the Anzû bird.[81] Its use in Isa 10:14 is somewhat unexpected, since it is unclear why flapping a wing would be an effective way for a bird to oppose the stealing of eggs from its nest; one would expect the bird to fly in the face of the thief and peck at him. The phrase וְלֹא הָיָה נִדֵּד כָּנָף is an example of a blind motif, which does not fit neatly where it is inserted, and can best be understood by reference to the context from which it derives.[82] It is most likely that Isa 10:14 borrows this unique motif from Sargon's letter.[83]

To this should be added the image of the nest, which appears in both texts. It appears that Isaiah was aware of the use made of the bird and nest motif in Sargon's letter to the gods (perhaps from oral transmission as a result of its public recitation) and removed the image from its original context to work it into his description of Assyrian boasts about Assyrian power.

We move now to consider one last shared motif, that of silence. This motif appears in some of the last lines of the letter (411–414) and in the final phrase of verse 14. Verse 14 ends with the phrase ולא היה נדד כנף ופצה פה ומצפצף, the first part of which is discussed above. In describing the ease with which the Assyrian gathered the wealth of nations like eggs from a nest, we are told that no bird opposed the Assyrian either by flapping a wing (discussed above) or by opening their mouth to chirp. The image of the birds describes how any opposition to Assyrian plunder is silenced.

In the letter to the gods, the campaign is described as having two overarching goals, as Hurowitz emphasized in his study. One is to prevent the enemy from crossing borders, a point addressed above. The other is silencing the enemy's mouth, by preventing his boast, thus making Sargon's

81. The bird is described in the myth of Lugalbanda and the Anzû bird as born from a nest in an inaccessible location, where not even cypresses grow; here Sargon is described as reaching places too remote even for the Anzû bird, thus demonstrating that he, like Ninurta, can accomplish more feats than Anzû. (Based on translation in the University of Oxford, *Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature* [Oxford, UK: University of Oxford, 2016], text 1.8.2.2, lines 20–131, http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/)

82. The key discussions include Tigay, "On Evaluating Claims of Literary Borrowing"; Malul, *The Comparative Method*.

83. Wildberger (*Isaiah 1-12*, 422) and others suggested parallels to bird motifs commonly-found in the Assyrian royal inscriptions. These motifs describe enemies as fleeing "birdlike," describe defeated enemies whose capitals Assyria failed to capture as "caged like a bird," and describe kings as flying against their enemies like Anzû. But these parallels are not nearly as specific as the one cited.

"truth" heard.[84] The letter emphasizes that this goal was achieved in line 158: "I imposed silence and lamentation on the enemy people."[85] Lines 411–414, which express Rusa's final defeat, also evoke the motif of silence and lamentation, both of which negate boasting. They describe Rusa as silenced by collapsing on the ground, throwing himself flat on his face, and then lines 413–414 describe both his silence and his mourning:

> His heart stood still, his liver burned within him, screams of grief dwelled in his lips. I caused mourning to echo in Urartu to its utmost extent and I caused perpetual mourning in the Na'iri lands.

Isa 10:13–14 close their description of the Assyrian's boasts with a declaration that no bird chirped or twittered; all was silence when Assyria conquered. This replicates the conclusion of Sargon's letter to the gods, which describes how Rusa was silenced, and how his boasts turned into lamentations. The silence is surprising; if the battle is over, one would expect that at least wildlife would resume their noisy nature, and the motif of silence in the letter to the gods seems to reflect literary intent.[86] This motif of silence in Isa 10:14 is expressed by bird imagery, perhaps as a way of ridiculing the boast: not only humans but birds too are silenced.[87]

The cumulative effect of these comparisons is striking and convincing. It is difficult to imagine that Isa 10:13–14 were composed without reference to Sargon's letter to the gods describing his eighth campaign. This reference may be indirect, since these motifs were present in the oral propaganda spread by Assyrian officials, but their concentration in Sargon's letter attests their currency in this period.

84. Hurowitz, "Shutting Up the Enemy," 115–18.

85. Akk *qūlu u dimmatu*. Hurowitz translates this as "quiet and stillness" (117) and Foster translates it as "consternation and lamentation." However, CAD D 303 prefers quiet for *qūlu*, and *dimmatu* clearly has the meaning lamentation or moaning.

86. Contrast this with the description of the remote cedar forest as filled with the "constant din" of birds, in Gilgamesh V, published in Farouk N. H. Al-Rawi and A. R. George, "Back to the Cedar Forest: The Beginning and End of Tablet V of the Standard Babylonian Epic of Gilgamesh," *JCS* 66 (2014): 69–90, here 76–77, lines 17–27.

87. Interestingly, birds are elsewhere (Mic 1:8) described as making mourning noises, probably because the high-pitched sounds they emit are similar to human crying. If this is intended in Isa 10:14, then the verse goes beyond the description in the letter to the gods, since they describe how even mourning noises are absent.

6.3. References to Sargon's Letter in Isaiah 10:12

As noted above, the rhetorical conclusion to be drawn from comparing the boasts in Isa 10:13–14 to their Assyrian source is that these verses level at Assyria the accusation that Sargon leveled at Rusa. As a result of Sargon's disrespect for boundaries, he himself must be punished, for he is guilty of precisely the sin of which he accused Rusa. This sin derives from Sargon's inflated sense of his own power, just as Sargon accused Rusa of such a sense. Sargon must obviously be punished by one stronger than he, and verse 12 sets out the punishment, which is then justified by verses 13–14.

(12) והיה כי יבצע ה' את כל מעשהו בהר ציון ובירושלם
אפקד על פרי גדל לבב מלך אשור ועל תפארת רום עיניו.

It shall be, when God will fulfil all his action in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem
I will punish the fruit of the arrogance of the King of Assyria, and the supremacy of his haughtiness.[88]

For several interrelated reasons, 10:10–12 are often considered a later intrusion into the unit of 10:5–15. One reason for this view is their mention of a defeat of Assyria, which sets them apart from the positive portrayal of Assyria as God's agent found elsewhere in Isaiah (for example, 7:18–20). A second reason is their locating Assyria's defeat at Jerusalem, which connects them to the Zion theology that is thought to develop in the aftermath of 701. A third reason is their emphasis on idols, which is thought to reflect late seventh century Deuteronomistic thought.[89] But Machinist's recent study argues that retaining these verses as part of 10:10–15 "yields a text that is dramatically and thematically coherent."[90] In parrying the first of the objections noted above, Machinist notes "The whole passage is permeated with the tension" resulting from YHWH having changed his mind about

88. Lit., "I will punish the fruit of the greatness of heart of the king of Assyria and the chiefness of the height of his eyes." Arrogance and haughtiness are represented by a large heart and high eyes in verses such as Prov 21:4 and Ps 101:5.

89. See Wildberger, Kaiser, and Vermeylen, all in Machinist, "'Ah, Assyria …' (Isaiah 10:5ff)," 190. Roberts sees these verses as having been inserted after the 701 campaign, as part of the development of the Zion theology portraying God as protecting Jerusalem.

90. Machinist, "'Ah, Assyria …' (Isaiah 10:5ff)," 193.

Assyria, and in parrying the third, he points to the Assyrian practice of removing conquered nations' idols.[91]

To the points raised by Machinist may be added an interesting thematic similarity between 10:12 and Sargon's letter to the gods. This suggests that like 10:13–14, Isa 10:12 is part of a composition that critiques Assyria, using the specific motifs and themes used to praise Sargon in his letter to the gods. Isa 10:12 clearly states that the reason for God's punishing Assyria is the king of Assyria's arrogance and haughtiness. Taken literally, verse 10 seems to present the punishment as being visited upon these characteristics, rather than upon the king himself. This parallels the declared goal of Sargon's campaign to Urartu, as portrayed in the letter. In line 9, the goals of the campaign are portrayed as "to muzzle the mouth of the proud and hobble the knees of the treacherous."[92] As noted above, the letter contrasts Sargon, the speaker of truth, and the enemy who boasts and lies. The overall goal of the letter is to highlight that "It is Sargon who is the truly glorious one, and not the vainglorious *muštarḫu* (proud one)."[93] The goals of Sargon's campaign are explicitly punitive: at the end of his plea in line 124, he declares "I lifted up my hand against him" in order to cause Rusa to "bear his iniquity." This parallels the punitive tone expressed in Isa 10:12. It is certainly true that "arrogance" and "pride" are used throughout the Assyrian royal inscriptions as characteristics of enemies.[94] But the motif of punishing an enemy for his pride, and of launching a campaign for that specific purpose, is found only in Sargon's letter to the gods. The parallel anti-pride goal of the Divine Campaign to rout Assyria in Jerusalem and of Sargon's campaign in Urartu suggests that, like verses 13–14, verse 12 depends on the motifs and themes of this specific text. It subverts the motif of pride by changing the Assyrian king from the punisher of the proud to the one punished for his pride. The Assyrian is here characterized as he characterizes his enemy, as the campaign against him is joined.

Like the motif of crossing borders in 10:14, the accusations of pride and arrogance that Sargon hurls at Rusa are hurled back at Sargon in 10:12. Significantly, these are two of the central accusations against Rusa in the letter to the gods. They figure prominently in the self-presentation of Sargon in

91. Ibid., 192.

92. This point is emphasized by Hurowitz, "Shutting Up the Enemy," 111 and by Fales, "Narrative and Ideological Variations," 135–36.

93. Hurowitz, "Shutting Up the Enemy," 117.

94. Frederick Mario Fales, "The Enemy in Assyrian Royal Inscriptions: The Moral Judgement," in *Mesopotamien und Seine Nachbarn*. Berliner Beiträge zum Vorderen Orient, ed. Hans-J. Nissen and J. Renger (Berlin: Reimber, 1987), 425–35, here 428–29.

contrast to Rusa discussed earlier, and are highlighted as central to the rhetoric by Fales, Hurowitz, and van de Mieroop.

The motif of pride and arrogance, expressed by crossing borders, relates directly to the imagery in 10:5–7, where the Assyrian is accused of failure to obey the limits on conquest imposed by God. In Sargon's letter, it is Rusa who fails to obey limits on conquest, and it is to cause him to "bear his iniquity" that Sargon says "I lifted up my hand against him" (line 124). But in Isa 10:5–7, the prophet hurls at Sargon the very same accusations Sargon levels against Rusa, viz., failure to obey a divinity's limits. Sargon describes himself as battling against "anyone who has trusted in his own strength alone, or anyone who has forgotten the greatness of Assur's divinity."[95]

The prophet in 10:12 deploys Nathan's tactic (You are the man!), and mimics Sargon's logic, turning it against him. If a king who transgresses divine limits must be punished, as Sargon claimed in his arguments against Rusa, then it is Sargon himself who must be punished for arrogance. He has forgotten Divine limits, and it is God Himself who here will carry out the punishment. A three-level ridicule emerges, in which atop Sargon's literary justification of his domination of Rusa is placed God's justification of his domination of Sargon. And interestingly, like in Sargon's campaign against Urartu, God's campaign will occur in a place that Sargon previously seems not to have reached: Jerusalem.

The Assyrian campaigns of Sargon's period showed that places previously considered inaccessible to Assyria were no longer so. Thus, Sargon vaunted his penetration into Urartu, conquered Samaria in the hill-country, and "subdued the land of Judah, which is far away."[96] Isa 10:5–15 argues that despite Assyria's success in penetrating inaccessible lands, there is One stronger than Assyria who will defeat Assyria at a city He previously promised to defend. In 31:5, God's promise to defend Jerusalem focuses on the rescue of the city itself; here, the emphasis is on the defeat of Assyria, and Jerusalem forms only the backdrop for that defeat. What necessitates the defeat, in 10:12, is not only the unfinished threat issued against Jerusalem in 10:10–11, but first and foremost the boastful nature of Assyria's claims.

95. Line 119; here I follow Foster's translation in *Before the Muses*, 797. Note that in Foster's translation, the lines are slightly re-numbered to allow for a more idiomatic English rendering.

96. From Sargon's Nimrud inscription, discussed in chapter 4; see discussion at note 46 there.

7. Isaiah 10:15 and Sargon's Letter

Having considered Isa 10:5–14, we now proceed to consider verse 15, which is generally considered as the concluding verse of this unit:

היתפאר הגרזן על החצב בו
אם יתגדל המשור על מניפו
כהניף שבט ואת מרימיו[97]
כהרים מטה לא עץ.

Does the ax declare itself chief over the one who hews with it?
Does the saw exalt itself over the one who raises it?
As though the rod raises the one who lifts it
As though a staff lifts one who is not wood.

As is widely recognized, this verse refers back to 10:5, with its image of the staff. But here, the wooden implements, including the staff, axe, and stick, are specifically used with reference to the pride and arrogance displayed in the previous verses. The prophet asks if the axe can take control of its controller. In light of the previous discussion, this use of the axe in the context of pride also seems to be taken from Sargon's letter. In line 126, he declares that Assur dispatched to his side "his furious weapons which, when they appear, crush the disobedient from east to west." It is by means of these weapons that Sargon achieves his mastery, and his use of these weapons is therefore challenged. Furthermore, in lines 120–1 of the letter, Sargon declares that he places his weapons at the disposal of rulers who guard the judgment of the gods and trust in the rules of Shamash and revere Assur. In the mockery of Sargon's claims that we find in Isa 10:15, Sargon's justification of his use of weapons is mocked.

These verses therefore contain an implicit but clear attack on the very basis of Assyrian imperialism. Sargon justifies his campaign against Urartu by adducing the support of the gods of Assyria, who set the boundaries of nations. Isa 10:5–15 clearly rejects this claim, without once mentioning these gods. Sargon's conquests, claims Isa 10:5–6, are justified by God's desire to punish a sinful nation, and have no connection to the boundaries set by the gods of Assyria. But as 10:7–11 show, Sargon's policies in the region show that he is disobedient to God, and 10:12 therefore describes how Sargon will be crushed. 10:13–14 resume Sargon's boasting, using language taken specifically from Sargon's imperial propaganda. 10:15 mocks this propaganda.

97. The *waw* on the word ואת is ignored by nearly all interpreters.

This understanding of 10:5–15 has obvious implications for our understanding of these verses as a compositional unit. It has been claimed that verses 11–12 are a later adaptation to deal with the threat to Jerusalem in 701 BCE.[98] But given the references to the themes and motifs of Sargon's letter to the gods from verse 5 to verse 15, it is exceedingly difficult to excise 10:12 from the unit, and to see it as a later addition. The unit assumes a divine judgment against Assyria; without 10:12, the accusations against Assyria lack an upshot or result. The claims that Assyria has violated its limits must be met, as Rusa's were, by a reaction and attack, and it is difficult to see how the unit can be construed without 10:12.

8. Historical Summary of Isaiah 10:5–15

These verses refer to one of Sargon's great campaigns, one which clearly established his domination not only in Urartu, but also throughout northern Syria. They do not mention this campaign, and instead refer to each of the other cities in the Syrian sphere dominated by Assyria between 720 and 717. This fits with a tendency seen elsewhere in Isaiah (as in 37:24–25): when satirizing Assyrian inscriptions, the prophet does not mention geographic locations far from the Land of Israel, because such mention would serve no rhetorical purpose.[99] The verses were composed after 714 BCE, but not so long after 714 that the pith of an attack on Sargon's ideology would be rendered irrelevant.[100]

They were written in a historical context in which Assyria's domination of the southern Levant became more and more alarming to the region's inhabitants, due to Assyrian policies of deportation and increased penetration of the hill-country described above. They were written with an awareness that Assyria was subject to the normal vicissitudes of power, as was clear from the ten years leading up to 714. That awareness was coupled with an acute sense that after 714, and even more so after 712, the moment was not productive for the kingdoms of the southern Levant to revolt. Despite their alarm, the kingdoms must wait for a new opportunity to present itself, and the responsibility for subduing Assyria therefore fell to God.

98. Roberts, *First Isaiah*, 166.

99. This tendency is discussed in the next chapter.

100. It is interesting that they do not mention Ashdod, but I am hesitant to conclude from this that they were composed before the 712 campaign, although I do not exclude this possibility.

9. Isaiah 10:16-19

Isa 10:16–19 are widely regarded as a discrete unit. They describe the downfall of Assyria in gory detail. Assyria is described as burned and devoured, and is compared to thorns and flesh that melts. The imagery focusses on comparisons to trees and to melting flesh, and has long attracted scholarly attention.

> (16) לכן ישלח האדון י' צ'באות במשמניו רזון, ותחת כבדו יקד יקד כיקוד אש. (17) והיה אור ישראל לאש, וקדושו ללהבה, ובערה ואכלה שיתו ושמירו ביום אחד. (18) וכבוד יערו וכרמלו, מנפש ועד בשר יכלה, והיה כמסס נסס. (19) ושאר עץ יערו מספר יהיו, ונער יכתבם.
>
> (16) Therefore, the Master, YHWH of Hosts, will release a thinning against his fat things, and in place of his substance, a burning will burn like the burning of fire. (17) And the Light of Israel will become fire and its Holy One flame, which will burn and devour his thorns and thistles in a single day. (18) And He will finish off the substance of his forest and his lushness, from breath to flesh, and it shall be like the melting of the swaying one. (19) And the few remaining trees of his forest will be (few) in number; a lad will be able to write them (meaning, to write a list of them).

Barth considered that descriptions of the burning of Assyria such as found in these verses could not have been written while Assyria was at the height of its power, and therefore dated this passage to late in the seventh century.[101] Williamson has argued that the passage is post-exilic because it relies on Isa 35:2.[102] He notes the use of the terms כרמל, כבוד and יער in both passages and argues that Isa 10:16–19 depend on Isa 35:2. Williamson also notes similarities between the language of Isa 10:16–19 and the mockery of the Assyrian in Isa 37:24–25 (parallel to 2 Kgs 19:23–24), a passage based on Assyrian propaganda that we will discuss in the next chapter. Williamson's suggestion that Isa 10:16–19 is post-exilic cannot be accepted; although 10:16–19 contains highly unusual imagery, this imagery is best explained as deriving from Assyrian motifs, rather than from Isa 35:2. On the contrary, it is most reasonable to posit that the use of יער and כרמל together in both Isa 10:16–19 and Isa 37:24–25, each of which reacts to a different Assyrian motif (as I discuss below), indicates that these passages share a single author, who used a similar vocabulary in each passage. Isa 35:2 then chose its vocabulary based on Isa 10:16–19.

101. Barth, *Die Jesaja-Worte in der Josiazeit*, 249.

102. Williamson, "A New Divine Title in Isaiah 10:17," 317.

Chan, in a detailed and important study of 10:5–34, devotes significant attention to verses 16–19. He argues that these verses usurp and reverse (or subvert) the Assyrian motif of chopping down the enemy's forests, felling his orchards and sometimes burning them as a means of demonstrating victory and/or as a means of exerting pressure on the enemy. Here, he argues, Isaiah portrays YHWH as doing to the Assyrians what the Assyrians did to their enemies.[103] By demonstrating the Assyrian motifs in this passage, Chan effectively counters the view of earlier scholars who saw this passage as originally intended to describe the Babylonian devastation of Judah.[104]

While I agree with Chan that we have here an Assyrian motif that is subverted and re-formulated so that YHWH rather than the king of Assyria performs the heroic acts of burning, I believe we can identify the motif behind this passage with greater precision.

It is important to note, as Williamson did, that the passage integrates two distinct motifs. One of these is related to fire. Verses 18–19 clearly refer to the burning of the forests, on which Chan focusses. Fire imagery is present in verse 16, and the burning of thorns also appears in verse 17b.

However, in verses 16 and 18, we find references to fat and to flesh, which are said in verse 18 to melt. Barth noted the similarity between the flesh-elimination motif in these two verses. The former verse declares that YHWH will release against Assyria רזון, a term connected to hunger in Ps 106:15 and to diminution of measurements in Mic 6:10. The thinning is released against Assyria's משמנים. As Chan notes, משמנים can refer to either people (as in Ps 78:31) or to fertile land (as in Gen 27:28, 27:39, Dan 11:24). But it never refers to forests, which are not fertile land, but rather, uncultivated land, which requires an extensive process of de-forestation before the land can be cultivated.[105] Therefore, it appears that the phrase יִשַׁלַּח... בְּמִשְׁמַנָּיו רָזֹון refers to a thinning or wasting-away of the fat of a person. The context here requires that it refer to a flesh-and-blood body. The phrase therefore refers to God sending a thinning against the fat of a personified Assyria.

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103. Chan, "Rhetorical Reversal and Usurpation," 726–29.

104. For a summary of these views, see Wildberger, *Isaiah: A Commentary*, 1:429.

105. See Magen Broshi, "Fire, Soil, and Water: The Settlements in the Hilly Regions of Palestine in the Early Iron Age," in *Bread, Wine, Walls and Scrolls* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 60–70, where he discusses the process of deforestation, and other related processes, required to transform forest land into productive farmland in the Land of Israel. Extensive deforestation was evidenced in the early Iron Age, during which the hill country became farmland. Note that משמנים seems to refer to flat lands with their alluvial soil suitable for grain growing (as in the related phrase in Gen 49:20, מאשר שמנה לחמו), and not to the hill-country where the forests historically flourish.

כבוד in verse 16b refers to the substance of personified Assyria, just as כבוד refers to the substance of a person in Gen 49:6 and in Ps 16:9.[106] The words תחת כבודו might mean that the fire is lit either under Assyria's כבוד or instead of said כבוד, but the melting imagery found in verse 18 strongly suggests that the fire is lit under Assyria's כבוד.

Both the משמנים and the כבוד mentioned in verse 16 refer to the substance or body of Assyria, a substance that is both thinned (in the first part of the verse) and has a fire lit under it (in the second part of the verse).

This combination of burning imagery with that describing thinning or wasting away of the flesh appears again in verse 18, and the repetition of this unusual combination suggests that in neither verse is the combined imagery incidental or the result of misinterpretation. Verse 18 contains a very unusual formulation: the כבוד of the forest of Assyria is destroyed מנפש ועד בשר, a merism whose second component clearly means "flesh." Both נפש and בשר are elements of the כבוד of the forest, and this makes it impossible for כבוד in verse 18 to mean honor or import or glory; it refers to "substance," following the parallels indicated above in verse 16b.

Verses 17–18 therefore refer to the destruction of the forest, which represents Assyria; it is an unusual forest, which has "substance" (כבוד) including flesh (בשר) and breath/throat (נפש). The forest is here compared to a human body. It is destroyed in stages: in verse 17, the underbrush is burned, and in verse 18a, the forest itself is eliminated.

Verse 18b describes the completion of the forest's elimination in an enigmatic three-word phrase: והיה כמסס נסס. The verb מסס means "melt," in passages such as Ex 16:21 (manna melts as a result of the sun), and in Ps 68:3 (wax melts from fire). Thus, verses 17–18 combine two unusual motifs: the destruction by fire of a forest representing a human body representing Assyria in verses 17–18a, and the melting away of a נסס in verse 18b.

The noun נסס is hapax, and many scholars interpret it by reference to the Akkadian verb *nasāsu/nazāzu*, which means rustling or swaying, and is widely used in reference to trees.[107] If this is the meaning of the word,

106. In Gen 49:6 it appears in parallel to נפש, person, and in Ps 16:9, it appears in parallel to לב and בשר.

107. Chan, "Rhetorical Reversal," 727 n. 41 cites these scholars. The Akkadian verb has several meanings, all of which are connected to the emitting of sounds, including squeaking, hissing, and rustling. It is widely used in reference to trees, and when used in connection with trees (and only in such connections) it has the meaning "to sway to and fro, to tremble." (CAD, N_{II}, s.v. *nazāzu*, p. 141; one is reminded of Christina Rosseti's famous poem: "Who has seen the wind?/Neither you nor I/But when the leaves hang trembling/the wind is passing by.") Chan's translation "It will be as when a weak person despairs," cannot be admitted because no such parallel usage exists for the Akkadian verb.

then the phrase refers to the melting of a tree, and verse 18b parallels the "destruction of forest" imagery in verse 18a. But the word does appear in epigraphic Hebrew and in Ammonite, and appears to mean the bearer of a standard or נס. In his discussion of an inscription recently discovered at Tel Moẓa, just west of Jerusalem, Vainstub notes that the noun נס appears frequently in Isaiah (5:26, 11:10, 11:12, 13:2, 18:3), and means banner.[108] Vainstub notes the important function of standard-bearers in the Neo-Assyrian period, in which standards were borne in front of chariots in combat.[109] The phrase והיה כמסס נסס might therefore mean "it shall be like the melting of a standard-bearer," comparing the destruction of Assyria's forest to the melting-away of its standard-bearer.

Verse 18 is thus similar to the unusual imagery in verse 16, which described thinness attacking the fat. The elimination of fat requires that the fat melt (even burning solid fat requires that it first melt as part of being burned), and we thus have a close connection between the elimination of fat in verse 16b and the melting in verse 18b. The melting is either that of a tree, representing the forest, or of a standard-bearer, representing the Assyrian forces, the כבוד of Assyria. Throughout verses 16–18, we find the elimination of fat, the burning of a forest representing the "body" of Assyria, and the melting imagery of verse 18b. The end result of this melting and burning is the few trees that remain in verse 19.

The unusual imagery in verses 16–19 is paralleled in an Assyrian ritual text in which we find the imagery of melting of flesh, combined with the ceremonial burning of wood, as part of an *akītu* investiture ceremony. In Sargonid Assyria, the *akītu* ceremony was observed as a victory celebration of the Assyrian king. The ritual was celebrated to mark the king's achievement of supremacy over enemies who are demonized. In it, the smell of kindled cedar represents the smell of the loose flesh of evil gods, not specified by name. The ritual text parallels the victory of the king to a mythological victory of Ninurta, who avenges Enlil by defeating evil gods.[110] I first present

108. Daniel Vainstub, "Engraved Inscriptions," in *Salvage Excavations at Tel Moza: The Bronze and Iron Age Settlements and Later Occupations*, Israel Antiquities Authority Reports 39, ed. Zvi Greenhut and Alon de Groot (Jerusalem: Israel Antiquities Authority, 2009), 137–47. Vainstub notes a possible connection between the verb נסס in Biblical Hebrew (attested in Ps 60:6) and Akk. *nasāsu/nazāzu*. Further supporting Vainstub's understanding of epigraphic נסס as standard bearer is the finding of a scepter head in the same area as the inscription, dating from the same period (Zvi Greenhut, "The Egyptian-Blue Scepter Head," in the same volume, 149–52, here 152).

109. Vainstub, "Engraved Inscriptions," 141.

110. The historical context of this ceremony has been discussed by many scholars, including Alasdair Livingstone, *Mythical and Mythological Explanatory Works of Assyria and Babylonian Scholars* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1986), 147, who views some of

the text itself and then discuss the context of the ritual it describes, and the parallels between the ritual text and Isa 10:16–19.

> The king, who wears on his head a golden tiara from the inside of the temple and sits on a sedan chair, while they carry him and go to the palace, is Ninurta, who avenged his father. The gods, his fathers, decorated him inside the Ekur, gave him the sceptre, throne, and the staff, adorned him with the royal melammu, and he went out to the mountain.
>
> The cedar which they burn in front of them is the loose flesh of the evil gods; they smelled the scent and went into hiding.[111]

The text is an explanation of a state ritual in mythological terms: people in the rituals are said to correspond to victorious gods in the myths, while animals or objects correspond to those defeated.[112]

The king here is said to correspond to the god Ninurta, who avenges the killing of his father Enlil by defeating the evil gods. (Enlil was equated to Assur throughout Assyrian mythology and religion.[113]) While in this text these evil gods are represented by kindled cedar, in a different but related ritual text from Nippur it is the sap of the cedar that is equated with the fat and pus of the demonic Anzû.[114] As is well known in Mesopotamian mythology, Anzû represents the forces of disorder, and is known for having stolen the tablet of destinies; Ninurta here represents the forces of order (one of his epithets is *sāniq mitḫurti*, "overseer of the universal equilibrium"),[115] and is therefore personified by the king himself.

The correspondence to the unusual imagery in Isa 10:16–19 is clear. As noted above, the unusual nature of the imagery in Isa 10:16–19 consists in combining the description of the burning of the forest that represents Assyria with the elimination of Assyria's fat. The representation of Assyria as a forest

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the understanding of the ritual in this text as Babylonian, rather than Assyrian; and by Annus, *The God Ninurta*, 6 and 90–101, who emphasizes its connection to the Assyrian triumphal *akītu.* Note that the references to text VAT 8917 are to SAA 3, no. 39, discussed here.

111. The text is cited from Alasdair Livingstone, *Court Poetry and Literary Miscellanea;* SAA 3:102 (Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1989), text number 39, reverse lines 20–25. The translation largely follows Livingstone. I discussed this text in *The Unbeatable Light,* 74 and presented a preliminary discussion of its relationship to Isa 10:16–19 at pages 232–36.

112. Livingstone, *Mystical and Mythological Explanatory Works*, 115.

113. Annus, *The God Ninurta,* 39.

114. Livingstone, *Mystical and Mythological Explanatory Works*, 131.

115. Annus, *The God Ninurta,* 158.

is hardly surprising, as Chan notes, and is clearly due to the importance of victory over cedars as a trope in Assyrian royal inscriptions. But the elimination of Assyria's body fat is highly unexpected in Isaiah and difficult to explain.

This ritual text, like Isa 10:16–19, intertwines burning wood with that of the melting or wasting-away of flesh, and describes a scene in which both phenomena are linked to each other. In Isa 10:16–19, the forest that represents Assyria is burned in a way that thins the fat of Assyria. This imagery closely corresponds to the ritual text cited above, in which pieces of cedar are burned to symbolize the melting of the flesh of the evil gods. As in Isa 10:16–19, wood is burned and is equated with the elimination of flesh. In both, the burning of wood is indicative of victory over a challenger. The wasting away of flesh and its melting is seen in both texts as symbolizing the defeat of the challenger. Both texts conclude with the elimination of the challenger: in Isa 10:19, the forest symbolizing Assyria is decimated, while at the end of the ritual text, the evil gods go into hiding. It appears, given the larger context of imagery in Isa 10:5–19, that the unusual motifs in Isa 10:16–19 derive from and intentionally modify the motifs used in this ritual.

That is not to say that Isa 10:16–19 directly relate only to the specific text cited above, but rather reflect knowledge of the ritual itself, and its explanation.[116] This knowledge was probably communicated orally to Isaiah, directly or second-hand, by Judahite officials returning from Assyria, and/or by Assyrian officials posted at one of the many Assyrian administrative centers that developed during the reign of Sargon II along the main international route.[117] The repeated mention of the fat of Assyria's body in Isa 10:16–18 is similar to the use of cedar sap to represent the fat of Anzû in the Nippur text. In all likelihood, neither text is itself the source of the imagery we find in Isa 10:16–19, but these and similar texts serve as our only source of knowledge about the rituals described to Isaiah by his informants.

There is an interesting reversal here, in that Isa 10:16–19 describe the melting of the fat of Assyria, while in the Assyrian ritual the fat and flesh are those of the evil figures whom the king (represented by Ninurta) opposes. "Assyria" in Isa 10:16–19 is cast in the role assigned to the opponents of Assyria in the ritual. This continues a technique seen in seen in 10:5–15, in which the "Assyrian" is portrayed, arrogant and disrespectful of borders, as though he were Rusa, the Assyrian opponent. In both

116. While the explanations for many rituals were not disclosed during their performance, this ritual is connected to royal conquests and royal accomplishments, and it is difficult to imagine that its meaning was not publicized.

117. Such centers, many of which were "roadside provisioning centers" or *bīt mardīte*, are discussed above; see bibliography in notes 16 and 17 in the present chapter.

passages, it is YHWH who assumes the role Assyria assigns to Assyria, the role of punishing the one who challenges the established hierarchy and political order in the universe. In the letter to the gods, Rusa challenges order; in the ritual texts, this is the role of the evil gods, the killers of Enlil, and Anzû; but throughout Isa 10:5–19, it is Assyria who challenges God.

There are many other points of correspondence between the use of Assyrian imagery in Isa 10:5–15 and its use in 10:16–19, and these passages ought to be discussed together.

One such point of correspondence is the reference in Isa 10:5 and 15 to the staff, which was said to be given to the Assyrian king by the gods, and which was used as part of the coronation ritual.[118] The ritual that stands behind 10:16–19 refers to the staff (*ḫaṭṭu*) as well as the robe, crown, and the throne of the king. Both Isaiah passages therefore reference Assyrian texts or rituals that involve the physical "royal markers" worn by the king.

A second point of correspondence, related to the first, are the references to Ninurta, whom the king personifies in the *akītu* ritual text. Ninurta is the bestower of royal regalia, including the throne and scepter.[119] Therefore, referring to the king's scepter also is a way of referencing Ninurta. In the letter to the gods, the king is portrayed as ascending the mountains to do battle and re-establish order, by subduing the forces of disorder. Such battles in the mountains against forces of disorder are hallmarks of Ninurta mythology.[120] Ninurta is said to return from the mountains with the booty of plundered cities. This certainly corresponds to the portrayal of Sargon in the letter to the gods, which intentionally equates Sargon with Ninurta by evoking established portrayals of this god.[121] It does this by describing Sargon as returning from the mountains, having defeated enemies, and bearing the plunder of defeated cities, and also explicitly, by describing Sargon as the seed of the city Aššur in line 113, cited above. Since the god Aššur was equated with Enlil, and Ninurta was the son of Enlil, the result seems to be that Sargon is Ninurta.

118. Livingstone, "New Dimensions in the Study of Assyrian Religion," 166.

119. Annus, *The God Ninurta,* 54.

120. Ibid., 7, 115.

121. See the discussion of Ninurta's mythological enemies in the mountains and his return bearing plunder in Annus, *The God Ninurta,* 7. A further point of comparison between Ninurta and Sargon in the letter to the gods is unstated: Ninurta is known as the avenger of his father's killers, while Sargon, in defeating Urartu, eliminates the shame stemming from his predecessors' failure to defeat Assyria's main rival. A possible comparison to Ninurta in outdoing the Anzû bird is discussed above, note 81. On the awareness of the Anzû myth in ancient Israel, see Noam Mizrahi, "The Textual History and Literary Background of Isa. 14.4," *ZAW* 125 (2013): 433–47.

The importance of Ninurta can be seen more generally: the Assyrian king's battles are ritually correlated with those of this god, who was seen as the preserver of the hierarchical order in the universe. We return below to the importance of Ninurta in discussing the context in which the ritual texts were performed, and the context in which the letter to the gods was read.

I begin by discussing the setting of the Assyrian *akītu* ritual discussed above, in which the king represents Ninurta. The *akītu* originated in Babylonia not later than the early second millennium, and came to celebrate Marduk's victory over Tiamat.[122] More generally, the ceremony was meant to renew Marduk's control over the cosmic forces of disorder and to guarantee the continuation of the traditional world-order.[123] But even in Babylonia, the *akītu* ritual was not solely in honor of Marduk: a similar ritual was celebrated in honor of Ninurta, a month after that honouring Marduk.[124] This ritual was also connected to preservation of the existing world-order, since Ninurta, as keeper of the royal regalia and of the tablet of destiny, was the guardian of this order. The ritual described in the text above is clearly connected to rituals known at Nippur in Babylonia;[125] the text itself was discovered in Assur[126] and the temple of Assur in Assur, like that of Enlil at Nippur, was known as the Ekur.[127] There is good reason to see the ritual described in the text as having been performed in Assyria, since the text itself is Assyrian, and since the *akītu* ordinances of at least one Assyrian temple prescribe that its rituals follow those of Nippur.[128]

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122. In earlier periods, the festival may have had other mythological connections, but the connection to Marduk's victory over Tiamat is firmly established by the first millennium. Julye Bidmead described the Babylonian festival as "a political device employed by the monarchy and/or the central priesthood to ensure the supremacy of the king, the national god, and his capital city" (*The Akitu Festival: Religious Continuity and Royal Legitimation in Mesopotamia* [Piscataway: Gorgias, 2004], 2). As such, it was dedicated to preserving the existing political hierarchy.

123. Beate Pongratz-Leisten, "The Interplay of Military Strategy and Cultic Practice in Assyrian Politics," in *Assyria 1995: Proceedings of the 10th Anniversary Symposium of the Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project*, ed. Simo Parpola and Robert McCray Whiting (Helsinki, September 7–11, 1995), 245–52, here 251.

124. Annus, *The God Ninurta,* 61–66.

125. Livingstone, *Mystical and Mythological Explanatory Works*, 146.

126. Livingstone, *Court Poetry*, xxiv.

127. Livingston, *Mystical and Mythological Explanatory Works*, 146.

128. This is the temple of Eganšankalamma at Arbela, whose importance is discussed below; Livingstone, *Mystical and Mythological Explanatory Works*, 117.

Akītu rituals were observed in Assyria at least from the time of Sargon II.[129] The Assyrian *akītu* differed from that celebrated in Babylon in that it focussed on royal accomplishments. This royal *akītu* "was probably a borrowing from Ninurta's *akītu* in Nippur."[130] In Assyria, there were both regularly-scheduled *akītu* celebrations in Assur[131] and a triumphal *akītu* marking the successful conclusion of a military campaign. Like that celebrated in Babylonia, the former served as a means of legitimating the established order, but it focused specifically on Assyrian notions of kingship, placing the king at the center and re-enacting his domination of the periphery.[132] Annus describes the latter type of *akītu*, which celebrated the triumphal return of an Assyrian king from a military campaign, and which were celebrated in the Assyrian cities that served as the points of return for the Assyrian armies, specifically in the city of Arbela. Such triumphal *akītus* served as the preliminary for a subsequent *akītu* festival in the city of Assur some days later.[133]

It is primarily this triumphal *akītu*, after a military campaign, that concerns us here. This triumphal *akītu* has its mythic background in the return of Ninurta in the Angim myth.[134] The king's battle against political enemies is seen as reflecting Ninurta's mythic battle against demons or evil gods.[135] Annus has argued that the return of Ninurta from the mountains, which is clearly referenced in the ritual text cited above, was the background for the Assyrian triumphal *akītu*, conducted after the king returned victorious.[136] Amar Annus has noted that "Only after his victorious return does the king become fit for kingship … . On the ceremonial level, the triumphal return of the king or his divine counterpart enables the ritual of enthronement."[137] Thus, it is the king's return from war that makes him fit for kingship. In Assyria, the granting of the royal regalia in the ritual text is not related to the beginning of

129. Annus, *The God Ninurta,* 91.

130. Ibid., 67.

131. See discussion of dates of these festivals in Annus, *The God Ninurta,* 67–69 and 90–91 and in Pongratz-Leisten, "The Interplay of Military Strategy and Cultic Practice in Assyrian Politics," 246.

132. Pongratz-Leisten, "The Interplay of Military Strategy and Cultic Practice in Assyrian Politics," 252. Annus, *The God Ninurta,* 90, notes that it served "as the comprehensive meeting of all the magnates, which served as a visual demonstration of royal power and the unity of the empire. It corresponded to the assembly of the gods in the religious texts."

133. Annus, *The God Ninurta,* 90–94, with literature there.

134. Ibid., 27.

135. Ibid., 95

136. Ibid., 27, 31–32.

137. Ibid., 27.

the king's rule (what is called in Britain the coronation) but to his victorious return from war. At this ceremony, to demonstrate that the king fulfilled the function of an Assyrian king, the ritual of the burning of cedar to represent the defeat of the "evil gods" took place. In this ritual enactment, the king was equated with Ninurta, and the enemies he had defeated with the "evil gods."

We have no clear text indicating that a triumphal *akītu* was held to commemorate the return of Sargon II from his battle with Rusa of Urartu. But it is highly probable that such a celebration was held, given the importance that Sargon attached to his victory, and given the apparently public reading of the letter. Furthermore, in a detailed study of the route of this campaign, Levine has noted that its return was through Arbela.[138] The campaign began in the middle of the summer[139] and while we do not know how long the campaign lasted, it is possible that the return coincided with the month of Elul, when we know that triumphal *akītu* celebrations were held at Arbela.[140] In such a celebration, Sargon II would clearly have enacted the role of Ninurta, as described in the *akītu* ritual text cited above. If we suppose that Sargon's return from Urartu was followed first by a triumphal *akītu* in which some version of the burning of cedar ritual took place, and then by a festival in the city of Assur, at which the letter to the gods was proclaimed, we have a highly interesting series of ritual events to which Isa 10:5–15 and 16–19 respond: Isa 10:5–15 respond to the letter to the gods, relating the victory, while Isa 10:16–19 respond to the triumphal *akītu* celebrating the victory. Thus, two different texts with cultic contexts, each of which was connected to a triumph of Sargon II over enemies, are subverted in Isa 10:5–15 and 10:16–19.

But the parallels between Isa 10:5–15 and 10:16–19 and their respective Assyrian antecedents need not be as simple as parallels to a series of ritual events that occurred in the late summer of 714 BCE in Arbela and Assyria. It remains unclear whether the letter to the gods was proclaimed ceremonially, and the evidence for a triumphal *akītu* after Sargon's eighth campaign is purely circumstantial. But neither can we ignore the conceptual and performance-related links between the letter to the gods and the triumphal *akītu* celebration. Whether or not it was proclaimed publicly, the letter clearly has a ritual and cultic context; Hurowitz considers that it was intended as a votive gift to the gods.[141] Similarly, whether

138. Levine, "Sargon's Eighth Campaign," map at 145.

139. The letter to the gods indicates that the campaign began in the month of Dumuzi, corresponding roughly with July.

140. Pongratz-Leisten, "The Interplay," 246.

141. Hurowitz, "Shutting Up the Enemy," 104–7.

or not the campaign against Urartu ended in a triumphal *akītu*, such rituals were known in Sargon's time, and the idea that such a ritual performance would symbolize Assyrian victory was current. The motifs contained in the letter to the gods, and those we know from the ritual texts, became known to Isaiah. We cannot determine the manner in which this occurred; it is unnecessary to posit that he was familiar with the written texts themselves or that he witnessed these rituals.[142] But it appears that through contact with Judahites who spoke with Assyrian officials, or through direct contact with these officials, he learned of these motifs. He understood enough of the context of these motifs to know their connection to Assyrian victories and some of their connection to the political hierarchy that undergirds Assyrian royal ideology. The triumphal *akītu* ritual in particular was designed to celebrate the king's maintenance of Assyria's ideological hierarchy, in which Assyria, with the king at its head, was meant to rule other countries, by providing a theological justification for this hierarchy. Isaiah used his knowledge of this ideological context to rework motifs from these rituals and texts in two distinct passages. These subvert Assyrian royal ideology by emphasizing a different hierarchy, of God over Assyria. These two passages may well have been composed separately, with 10:16–19 post-dating 10:5–15 by several months or years, but it very strongly appears that the latter passage was intended as an addition to the former, rather than an independent composition.

In them, Isaiah uses specific elements of Assyrian performances related to the king's triumph over enemies in describing a triumph of YHWH over Assyria. In 10:5–15, he describes how God has decreed punishment on Assyria for its arrogance and will punish Assyria as Assyria punished Rusa. In 10:16–19, he does so by re-envisioning the part of the triumphal *akītu* ritual as one in which YHWH burns the wood of Assyria and melts its flesh.

In so doing, Isaiah not only attacks the ritual itself and the specific motifs of the letter to the gods. He goes far beyond this to attack central doctrines underlying Assyrian imperial legitimacy. The triumphal *akītu* is supposed to demonstrate the victory of the king, who represents Ninurta, over the forces of chaos. The letter to the gods emphasizes how the victory of the king over Rusa was due to Rusa's refusal to obey the

142. We should emphasize that it is entirely probable that Isaiah never heard either of these texts or witnessed the performance of any triumphal *akītu* rituals. He may only have heard about the contents of the letter to the gods and about the triumphal *akītu* from Judahite emissaries to Assyria or from Assyrian officials positioned in the Land of Israel.

borders set by the gods. But by casting Assyria in the role first of Rusa (in Isa 10:12–14) and then of the evil gods who represent chaos (in Isa 10:16–19), Isaiah undermines Assyria's claim to be the guardian of order in the universe. Furthermore, by casting YHWH in the role of the guardian of order, Isaiah argues very clearly against Assyrian doctrines of royal invincibility and omnipotence.

10. Isaiah 10:20–23

> (20) It shall be on that day that the remnant of Israel and those saved of the house of Jacob will no longer rely on their smiter, but will faithfully rely on YHWH the Holy One of Israel. (21) A remnant shall return, a remnant of Jacob, to the Powerful God. (22) For if Your people Israel shall be like the sand on the sea, a remnant shall return of them. The destruction has been decreed; it sweeps away righteousness. (23) For the Lord YHWH of Hosts is making a destruction and has so decreed in the midst of all the land.

The passage is commonly dated later than the eighth century.[143] Both Wildberger and Vermeylen acknowledge that the passage contains vocabulary characteristic of Isaiah, such as בית יעקב, קדוש ישראל, א-ל גבור, and that the reference to the" smiter "in verse 20 correlates to the staff imagery in 10:5, 10:15, 10:24, and 10:26. Wildberger argues that the passage cannot refer to Assyria as Israel's smiter) based on a limited and selective historical survey).[144]

But the passage fits well into the historical framework of the period of Sargon. Having attacked Assyria's claim to legitimacy, Isaiah here argues that Israel ought to transfer its loyalty from Assyria to YHWH. 10:20–23 focuses on the idea of a "remnant" returning to YHWH. The word "return" here, as in Hos 14:2, signifies a shift in allegiances: this is clear from the opening verse of the unit, 10:20: "On that day, the remnant of Israel and

143. Barth, *Die Jesaja-Worte*, 38–39 considers this passage to contain prophetic ideas of the "remnant" and correlates it to the period of the destruction of the First Temple. See also Vermeylen, *Du Prophète Isaïe à l'apocalyptique*, 265 and literature cited there; Wildberger, *Isaiah: A commentary*, 435 and literature cited there.

144. Wildberger, *Isaiah 1-12*, 38–39. Vermeylen argues that the Isaian language attests the later date of the two components he identifies in this passage. Note, however, that קדוש ישראל in this passage is used in an implied critique of Israel for its loyalty to God, just as in 1:4 and 31:1, and is similar to its use in the accusation that the king of Assyria mocks God in 37:23. This contrasts with the use of קדוש ישראל in chapters 40–55, where it consistently refers to God as redeemer. See the interesting discussion of Rolf Rendtorff, *Canon and Theology: Overtures to an Old Testament Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 160–62. I am indebted to Dan'el Kahn for the reference.

those saved of the House of Jacob will not continue to rely on their smiter, and will faithfully rely on YHWH, the Holy One of Israel." The shift in Israel's remaining alliances is clearly the result of the defeat of Assyria by YHWH described in 10:5–19.

Verses 20–21 directly engage with Assyrian notions of vassals' disloyalty. At least two texts of Sargon II speak derisively of "the gods they relied on" in reference to disloyal vassals: one is the reference to Samaria in the Nimrud prism (discussed above), and the second is the extensive discussion in lines 335–345 of Sargon's letter to the gods of how the people of Muṣaṣir would rely upon the god Haldi.[145] The subsequent lines describe the extensive plundering of this temple by Sargon II. These texts (along with many other Assyrian royal inscriptions) mock those who rely for their security on any force other than Assyria. Isa 10:20–21 mock the notion of relying on Assyria, calling Assyria "the smiter" of Israel. And verse 23 provides a further reason for not relying on Assyria: the Lord YHWH of Hosts will wreak destruction over land. Such destruction, which had previously been wrought primarily by Assyria, will henceforth be wrought by God. This transfer of supremacy from Assyria to God, which is the topic of verses 5–19, is encapsulated in verse 23.

The notion of a "remnant" of Israel remaining to return to God, after Assyrian deportations, is expressed clearly in verse 22. As we have seen earlier, such a notion is expressed clearly in Isa 6:13 and implicitly in 8:8, both of which seem to date to the Assyrian period.

In light of this brief discussion, it is far from clear that these verses are a later intrusion, or that they post-date the Assyrian period. They differ from the surrounding verses: both the preceding units and the subsequent ones (verses 24–26) describe God's battle with Assyria, while 10:20–23 describe Israel's reaction to this battle. But perhaps this difference results not from an editorial intrusion from a far later period, but from the nature of Isa 10:5–11:10 as a sort of "rolling composition" that originated in a short unit (10:5–15) to which additional units were added, not by editors in far later periods, but by Isaiah, and perhaps by other authors of the Assyrian period, who understood the full meaning of the anti-Assyrian polemic and developed it.[146]

145. Muṣaṣir was a small state between Urartu and Assyria, whose king repudiated his vassal status shortly before 714.

146. The type of *fortschreibung,* or rolling composition, I am suggesting here differs from that proposed by Barth and Vermeylen primarily in regard to the time frame in which additions were made.

11. Isaiah 10:24–26

This passage shares many themes with 10:5–15, and both Roberts and Machinist judge that it may form a conclusion to 10:5–15.[147] Like 10:5–15, it describes God's attack on Assyria in a dramatic fashion. In verse 24, it clearly resumes the motif of the staff held by Assyria as an instrument of conquest. Verse 25 revisits the motif of God's anger, which figured so prominently in 10:5–7 as the instrument of subversion of Assyria's staff. As a result of this anger, the staff reappears in verse 26, this time in the hand of YHWH, rather than in that of Assyria. The motif of the transformation of the staff from that of Assyria to that of YHWH is central in the drama of this short passage. The transition represents the change in momentum that the prophet predicts: from a political reality in which Assyria continuously increases its domination of the southern Levant to one in which its advances are decisively checked.

> (24) לכן כה אמר ה' י' צ'באות אל תירא עמי ישב ציון מאשור, בשבט יככה ומטהו ישא עליך בדרך מצרים (25) כי עוד מעט מזער וכלה זעם ואפי על תבליתם. (26) ועורר עליו י'הוה צ'באות שוט כמכת מדין בצור עורב, ומטהו על הים, ונשאו בדרך מצרים.
>
> (24) Therefore says the Lord YHWH of Hosts, "Fear not my people, who dwell in Zion, from Assyria. With their staff they will smite you, and raise their rod against you on their way to Egypt. (25) For soon, in a very short while, anger will end and my wrath will be upon their תבלית."[148] (26) And YHWH of Hosts will rouse upon him a whip like the smiting of Midian at Zur-oreb; His staff will be like that on the sea, and He will carry him away like Egypt.

Although this passage resumes many of the themes of 10:5–15, its rhetoric differs. The passage is not addressed to Assyria, but is meant as an oracle of reassurance to Judah, and specifically to Jerusalem. It fits in well with the historical context described in the introduction to this chapter, in which inhabitants of Jerusalem had begun to fear that Assyrian campaigns,

147. Machinist, "Ah Assyria," 187, considers this probable; Roberts, *First Isaiah*, 172, considers this fairly certain.

148. The word is hapax, but not necessarily unintelligible. It seems to derive from a combination of the word תכלית, or end (which would fit well into the context, echoing the verb earlier in the verse), with the word תבל, used in Lev 20:12 as a term for abomination. תבליתם may therefore mean something like "abominable end" and is a derisive way of referring to Assyria's impending doom. This sort of "portmanteau" word also seems to appear in verse 33, where מערצה combines the form מערכה, "battle", with the root ערץ, "terror."

which had previously restricted themselves to the vicinity of the main international road running along the coast, and focussed on Philistia, might soon venture far enough inland to threaten Jerusalem. The key to understanding this passage is to recognize the use of several similar phrases in verse 24 and in verse 26, but to note the different meanings these phrases have in each of these verses.[149] Verse 24 reassures the inhabitants of Zion, first of their relationship with God ("my nation"), and then that Assyria remains focussed on Philistia and the border with Egypt. Assyria's staff will indeed be raised against Zion, but only "on the way to Egypt." Assyria has not changed its policy, argues the prophet, and it will continue to invest efforts in controlling the way to Egypt rather than in the Judean highlands.

The obvious response to this reassurance would be to remind the prophet of the changes in Assyrian policy witnessed in the reign of Sargon II that would make the population of Judah less sanguine. The prophet parries this objection in verse 25, assuring Jerusalemites that God's anger will soon check the Assyrian advance. God's anger, which formerly (10:6) empowered Assyria, is now directed at checking and blocking Assyria, and at defending Jerusalem.

Verse 26 then resumes the motifs of the staff and Egypt that formed verse 24. In response to Assyria's staff, God wields a whip. The verse evokes two examples of God's previous defeat of large armies, from different points in historical memory. The first, of Midian, is portrayed in Judges as a population invasion of raiders who despoil the land (Judg 6:5), and in this respect, the experience of Midian is similar to Assyrian transfers of population and exploitation of resources. Both the experiences of Midian and that of Egypt are seen in other Biblical passages as victories not of Israel over their enemies, but of God over those who challenge His mastery, and in this respect both are similar to Isaiah's view of the struggle with Assyria.[150] The mention

149. See the detailed discussion in Matthijs J. De Jong, "A Window on the Isaiah Tradition in the Assyrian Period," in *Isaiah in Context: Studies in Honour of Arie van der Kooij on the Occasion of his Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, VTSup 138, ed. Michaël N. van der Meer, Percy S. F. van Keulen, Wido T. van Peursen, and B. Ter Haar Romeny (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 83–108. I cannot accept his view that verse 26b is a later addition, for the comparison with Egypt engages directly with the cosmic order imagery in 10:5–15 and 10:16–19, and rests on an understanding of that imagery.

150. Besides this verse and Isa 9:3, our knowledge of Israel's struggles with Midian comes only from Judg 6–8. There, the struggle is portrayed as fundamentally theological, from the first dialogue of Gideon and the angel in 6:11–24, through the replacement of Baal's altar by one dedicated to YHWH in 6:25–31, and particularly in the selection of the army in 7:2–7, which emphasizes God's victory rather than Israel's. The battle-cry is quite literally (in 7:18–20) "for YHWH and for Gideon." The episode is meant to establish God's rule over Israel (7:22) and in that respect is like the battle of God against Egypt. For further discussion of the Midian narrative, see Wolfgang

of YHWH raising His staff against Egypt echoes the words of verse 24: ונשאו בדרך מצרים. Here, though, the words בדרך מצרים refer not to the route but the manner of God's victory: He will defeat them like He defeated Egypt.

Evoking the Exodus in verse 26 in describing God's defeat of Assyria is not simply a reflection of the use of the phrase בדרך מצרים in verse 24. The importance of comparing the defeat of Assyria to that of Egypt exists quite independent of the geographic point articulated in verse 24. We have seen in Isa 19:19–25 how Isaiah used the Exodus narrative to describe a re-envisioned Assyrian attack on Egypt. He saw the Exodus as a model for a process that led Egypt to accept God as universal sovereign. In 10:26, though, a slightly different aspect of the Exodus narrative is evoked by the mention of the staff. The staff evokes the dramatic defeat of Egypt, referencing both the plagues narrative and that of the Red Sea, and the description of the staff as "upon the sea" more directly references the latter. Isa 19:19–25 shows Isaiah's familiarity with the plagues narrative, and 10:26 seems to show his familiarity with the Red Sea narrative.

Both of these, and especially the Red Sea narrative, are key elements in God's victory in the Exodus narrative in Ex 5–15, a victory achieved when God's sovereignty is recognized. These chapters, with their emphasis on the plagues and the Red Sea as the means through which God defeats Pharaoh, seem to intentionally reference the cosmic combat cycle of events.[151]

The cosmic combat cycle of events appears in many ancient Near Eastern epics, of which the most famous are the Enuma Elish epic of Mesopotamia, the Baal Cycle of Ugarit, and the myths concerning Ninurta and Anzû. In all of these, a threat to world order is posed by a threatening divine force. A new deity arises which vanquishes the threatening force – in a dramatic combat that saves the world. By doing so, this deity achieves sovereignty over the gods and over the world. Thereafter, the sovereignty of this deity is recognized in various ways: by establishing a temple in his honor (in the Baal cycle), or by a festival at which this deity's feats are recounted (as in Enuma Elish). In Mesopotamia, this festival was identified with the *akītu* ritual, and is connected to the ritual's role in preserving the political hierarchy, which was seen as the practical expression of world order.

Bluedorn, *Yahweh versus Baalism: a Theological Reading of the Gideon-Abimelech Narrative,* JSOTSup 329 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), and literature cited there.

151. First noted by Umberto Cassuto, "The Israelite Epic" [Hebrew], *Kenesset* 8 (1943), 121–42, and translated in *Biblical and Oriental Studies* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1973), 69–109. Discussed in Frank Moore Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973), 138–39; Stan Rummel, "Narrative Structures in the Ugaritic Texts," in *Ras Shamra Parallels: The Texts from Ugarit and the Bible* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1981), 3:221–332, and many subsequent studies.

Despite important differences, the parallels to the Exodus narrative as told in Ex 5–15, with their dramatic defeat of Pharaoh, are clear. In this narrative, the threat is not to world order as a whole, but to the liberty of the Israelites to worship their God (and the notion that this worship is fundamental to world order is surely a hallmark of Biblical thought). The malicious agents are not disorderly gods, but Pharaoh, who refuses to recognize the sovereignty of YHWH, and ties this refusal to his refusal to allow Israel to worship YHWH (Ex 5:2). The plagues narrative repeatedly emphasizes that the goal is to achieve Pharaoh's recognition of God's sovereignty (Ex 7:17, 8:6, 8:18, 9:14-9:16, 9:29). At the end of the plagues, a festival acknowledging God's sovereignty is instituted (Ex 12). Ex 14–15 emphasize that recognition of God's sovereignty is the goal of the Red Sea episode (for example in 14:4), and when that recognition is achieved (14:25 and 14:30), Israel sings to celebrate YHWH's triumph. The song focusses on both Egypt and Canaan recognizing the sovereignty of YHWH. It envisions the establishment of a home for YHWH (Ex 15:12–17), and the song concludes by describing the "new world order" characterized by YHWH's everlasting sovereignty.[152]

By referencing God's victory over Egypt in Isa 10:26 as the model for God's impending victory over Assyria, the passage seeks to link the victory over Assyria to the victory over Egypt. Just as the victory over Egypt was not simply a military victory, but required that Egypt recognize YHWH as sovereign, so too is the battle with Assyria one for recognition of the sovereignty of YHWH. It is a struggle for the establishment of a new hierarchy, in which Assyria recognizes (as Egypt did long ago) that YHWH is supreme over empire.

These dramatic conflicts over hierarchy are referenced earlier in this chapter, in the Assyrian texts and rituals to which Isa 10:5–15 and 16–19 respond. Isa 10:16–19 reference the triumphal *akītu*, which, in arguing for the political legitimacy of the Assyrian king, pretend to celebrate the sovereignty of Ninurta and Marduk.[153] This sovereignty was achieved by their having vanquished, at the beginning of time, the forces of chaos (Ninurta in the mountains and Marduk in the sea).[154] The triumphal *akītu* was designed

152. I discuss the parallels among the different epics, and their correlation to Exodus in "The Exodus Narrative as an Expression of the Cosmic Combat Motif," in *A Common Cultural Heritage: Studies on Mesopotamia and the Biblical World in Honor of Barry L. Eichler*, ed. Grant Frame, Erle Leichty, Jeffrey Tigay, Karen Sonik, and Steve Tinney (Potomac, MD: CDL Press, 2011), 97–110.

153. Annus, *The God Ninurta,* 39. Annus argues that Marduk's elevation is due to his equation to Ninurta, and that in Neo-Assyrian times, Nabu was elevated to prominence because he too was equated to Ninurta (44).

154. Ibid., 94. For further detailed discussion of how both Marduk's combat against Tiamat in Enuma Elish and Ninurta's battle against Anzû in the Myth of Anzû use the battle over cosmic order to argue for the political legitimacy of Mesopotamian

to emphasize the equation of the king with these chaos-defeating gods, and thereby to argue that Assyria is the great defender of order in the universe. The myths telling of this victory are re-enacted at the *akītu*. Thus, the reference to the triumphal *akītu* in Isa 10:16–19 evokes Mesopotamian cosmic combat myths and their connection to the enshrinement of political order.

The references to Assyria's defeat of Rusa in 10:5–15 also evoke the Assyrian enshrinement of the existing political order. In the letter to the gods, the enemy represents disorder and violation of boundaries while the king represents order and the wisdom to maintain these. These are precisely the aspects of the letter to the gods subverted by Isaiah in 10:5–15. The enemy is the one who challenges Assyrian sovereignty, and thereby challenges the Assyrian concept of order. In the narrative presented in the letter to the gods, the Assyrian king represents the victory of Assyrian concepts of order and righteousness.[155]

The rhetorical goal of at least three of the sub-units found in Isa 10:5–26 is to argue against the political hierarchy that lies at the base of Assyrian royal ideology. While Assyrian royal ideology holds that Assyrian sovereignty is equivalent to world order, Isaiah here subverts this premise in various ways. In 10:5–15, he presents Assyria in the character of Rusa, who himself epitomizes challenges to Assyrian sovereignty and therefore to world order. Assyria, these verses argue, is not the great force preserving order in the universe. On the contrary, it is YHWH who is the preserver of righteousness and order, and He will vanquish the threat posed by Assyria. In 10:16–19, Assyria is equated with the evil gods whose flesh is wasted away while wood is burned. This is meant to undermine Assyria's claim to preserve the world order established by Ninurta and Marduk in their battles against these evil gods. YHWH is the one who will burn Assyria and melt its flesh, showing His supremacy over Assyria. In Isa 10:26, the defeat of Assyria is paralleled to that of Pharaoh of Egypt. Pharaoh's refusal to recognize God is seen in the Exodus and Red Sea narratives as parallel to the forces of disorder found in cosmic combat myths, and the Assyrian versions of these myths underlie the Assyrian political order.

The reference to the Red Sea narrative in Isa 10:26, itself related to the cosmic combat motif, strongly suggests that whoever placed Isa 10:24–26 together with 10:5–15 and 10:16–19 understood how 10:5–15 and 10:16–19 reference both the cosmic combat motif and the related Assyrian ideology of political order. Since this ideology would have been most clearly understood during the Assyrian period, it appears that 10:24–26 were composed during this period. The references to the geographic and strategic focus of Assyrian activity on the "road to Egypt," without disturbing Jerusalem, strongly

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rulers, see Peter Machinist, "Order and Disorder, Some Mesopotamian Reflections," in *Genesis and Regeneration: Essays on Conceptions of Origins*, ed. Shaul Shaked (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 2005), 31–61.

155. Fales, "Narrative and Ideological Variation," 146.

suggest a setting in the reign of Sargon II, although a setting in the period of Esarhaddon cannot be excluded.[156]

Verse 10:27 reverts to focus on re-assuring Jerusalem that the victory of YHWH in the impending combat with Assyria will benefit Jerusalem. It seems to play on the motif of oil as a symbol for a vassal oath, found in line 112 of Sargon's letter to the gods.[157] It describes how Judah's vassalage to Assyria will end, and be replaced by oil. Although oil can function as the symbol of vassalage, here it takes a new, more salubrious symbolism, and is used with reference to its healing functions, as an ointment for placing on the neck of a beast of burden, irritated by the yoke.[158]

(27) והיה ביום ההוא יסור סבלו מעל שכמך, ועלו מעל צוארך, וחבל על מפני שמן.

(27) It shall be on that day: its burden will be removed from your shoulder, and its yoke from your neck, and the yoke will be destroyed from before oil.

This verse forms the transition from the prophecy announcing an impending divine destruction of Assyria to the part of the prophecy describing the fulfilment of the destruction.

12. Isaiah 10:28–34

This passage evokes the geographic focus found in verses 10:24–26. It describes the progress of an imagined Assyrian armed force as it approaches Jerusalem, and its destruction. The progress is enumerated in verses 28–32 and the destruction in verses 32–34; Beuken describes these as a single chain of events moving seamlessly.[159] At the anticipated climax, the moment when the Assyrian triumphal entry to Jerusalem would be expected, one

156. Other reasons for preferring a date in the reign of Sargon II are discussed in connection with 10:28–34, below.

157. On this meaning of oil, see further in Jean-Georges Heinz, "Osée XII 2B á la lumière d'un vase d'alabâtre de l'époque de Salmanasar III et le rituel d'alliance assyrien: Une hypothèse de lecture," *VT* 60 (2001): 466–80.

158. See commentary of R. Isaiah of Trani here.

159. Wim Beuken. "Lebanon with Its Majesty Shall Fall. A Shoot Shall Come Forth from the Stump of Jesse (Isa 10:34-11:1). Interfacing the Story of Assyria and the Image of Israel's Future in Isa 10-11," in *The New Things. Eschatology in Old Testament Prophecy. Festschrift for Henk Leene (Amsterdamse cahiers voor exegese van de Bijbel en zijn tradities.* Supplement series, 3), ed. Ferenc Postma, Klaas Spronk, and Eep Talstra (Leuven, Belgium: Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, 2002), 17–34, here 22.

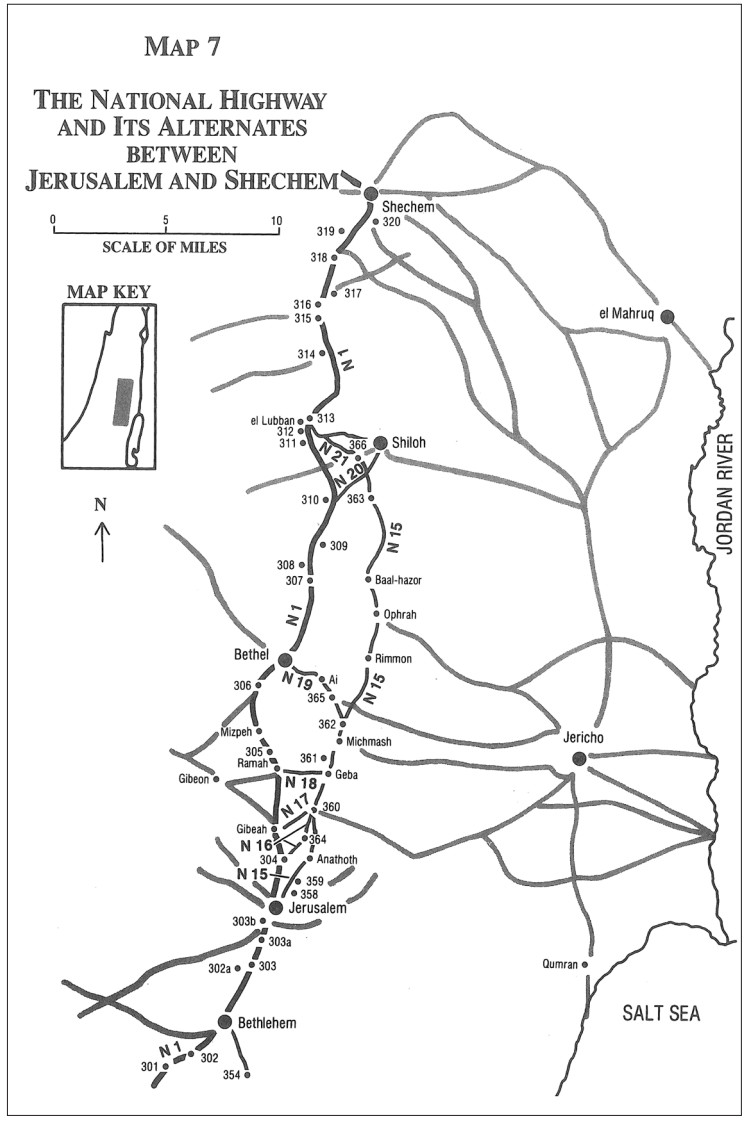

Figure 5.1: Road Map for the Region north of Jerusalem in the Iron II. [160]

160 David A. Dorsey, *The Roads and Highways of Ancient Israel* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 133. The map is used with the kind permission of Sarah Dorsey Bollinger.

finds instead a narrative of destruction. Here, I first treat the geographic descriptions of verses 28–32 and then move to discuss the destruction:

> (28) He comes upon Ai, he crossed over to Migron, at Michmash he deposits his tools. (29) They crossed at the pass; at Geba they lodged at the lodging-place.[161]
>
> The Ramah was alarmed; Gibeah of Saul fled. (30) Cause your voice to call aloud, O Daughter of Gallim. Listen, O Laish. Answer, O Anathoth. (31) Madmena has wandered. The inhabitants of Gebim have taken refuge.[162] (32) This very day, he will stand at Nob, and wave his hand toward the mountain of the daughter of Zion, the hill of Jerusalem.

The passage describes an advance against Jerusalem from the north. The itinerary contains a wealth of geographic detail, which is helpful in determining the date of the passage.

One example of such detail can be found in verses 28–29a, which describe the advance of the invading army through five locations: Aiath, Migron, Michmas, the Maabara crossing, and Geba. Each of these locations can be identified with relative certainty, and the resulting map shows that the list describes an advance diverging from the main route approaching Jerusalem from the north, and running parallel to it approximately 7 km to the east. The main route, which follows the height of the land, runs from Bethel through Mizpah south to Jerusalem. The route described here is an alternative designed to circumvent the fortress at Mizpah. Mizpah was in all periods an important fortified city and the description of an army circumventing it shows that Isaiah attributes to this army a fair degree of strategic foresight.[163]

The first location listed is Aiath, presumably identical to the Ai of Joshua. Ai is usually identified at one of two sites near Deir Dibwan: Et-Tel or Kh. Hian.[164] Michmash is identified in the vicinity of the modern village of Mikhmas, which preserves the name. The route from Deir Dibwan to Mikhmas is dictated by topographic conditions: it must have run in ancient times (as it does today) along the height of the ridges that join the two points, a route indicated by Dorsey on his map. The route passes close to

161. On this phrase, and the possibility that it means either "at Geba they lodged at the lodging place" or "Geba is our lodging place," see Takamitsu Muraoka, "Who lodged at Geba (Isaiah 10: 29)?" *VT* 61.1 (2011): 148–49.

162. Gallim and Gebim may not be toponyms, but rather references to features of the landscape. Both words mean waves and may refer to the lower hills in the region.

163. Yohanan Aharoni, *Land of the Bible: A Historical Geography* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1979), 393.

164. Dorsey, *The Roads and Highways of Ancient Israel*, 136–38.

Kh. el-Hara el-Fawqa and Tel el-ʿAskar/Tel es-Suwan, and either of these or one of the other sites in their immediate vicinity could be Migron.[165] On the south side of Mikhmas is the steep Wadi es-Suweinat, and the most suitable location to pass through it is about 500 m due south of Mikhmas, thus giving the part of the Wadi near this site the name "the pass," מעברה. On the south side of this pass is the village of Jabʿa, which clearly preserves the name of Biblical Geba, and is therefore identified as such. An army trying to bypass Mizpah would logically pass through Wadi es-Suweinat south of Mikhmas, thus arriving at Geba. Geba is an ideal location for an army to camp: higher than the other hills in the immediate vicinity, and surrounded by wadis on most of its northern and southern sides, its natural defenses make it an ideal look-out post. (A look-out tower built by the Crusaders still stands in the center of the village.)

After these five locations, the subsequent passage, in verses 29b–32, does not describe the advance of the army, but rather details how seven locations react in terror, before the Assyrians reappear at Nob in verse 32b. The seven locations in verses 29b–32a are on four different natural routes that connect Jerusalem to Geba. Of the seven, Ramah, Gibeah (Gibeath-Saul), and Anathoth can each be identified, and this provides a sufficient basis for reconstructing the geography of the passage.[166] The inhabitants of these seven locations have heard of the invading army's expected advance to Geba, but do not know which of the four possible routes linking Geba to Jerusalem the invaders will choose. Thus, the inhabitants of all seven locations

165. Moshe Cochavi, *Judea, Samaria, and Golan: The Archaeological Survey of 1968* (Jerusalem: Carta, 1972), 158, 180. See also Yoel Elitsur, "Why Ein Samia Cannot Be Identified as Ai," in *Mehkerei Yehuda ve Shomeron Second Conference* [Hebrew] (Kedumim-Ariel: Makhon ha-Mehkar, Mikhlelet Yehuda ve-Shomeron, 1993), 63–64.

166. These four routes are detailed by Dorsey in figure 5.1.

The first possible route leads west from Geba to Ramah (modern Er-Ram), and from there south along the main route to Jerusalem, following the height of the land. This route would also alarm the inhabitants of Gibeath-Saul, located at Tel el-Ful between modern Bayt Hanina and Pisgath-Ze'ev.

The second heads east from Geba and then south to the modern town of Ḥizma, which preserves the name of Biblical Beth-Azmavet mentioned in Neh 7:28. From there, a natural road leads south through the town of Anata, which preserves the name Anathoth.

The third follows the second until Ḥizma and then continues west to Gibeath-Saul.

The fourth possible route also follows the second until Ḥizma and then continues south-west to Kh. Kaʿkul, located between Pisgat Ze'ev and Shuʿafat, and from there to Jerusalem. For previous studies of this route, see Wildberger, *Isaiah 1–12: A Commentary*, 1:452–55; Roberts, *First Isaiah*, 174–76; Dorsey, *Roads and Highways,* 136–40; Rainey and Notley, *The Sacred Bridge*, 235.

express anxiety, for none of them know which towns will be devastated. Nob is a Benjaminite town close to Jerusalem, perhaps located in the region of Shuʿafat or Mount Scopus.[167] It is the last town reached by the Assyrians in their advance, and from there they clearly expect to conquer Jerusalem. The passage's author clearly considered the geography of the passage carefully.

We now turn to consider the date of the passage based on this geographic analysis. The Assyrian force here portrayed as attacking Jerusalem comes not from the main coastal road leading to Philistia, but from the north, from the direction of the hills of Samaria. An Assyrian force was situated in the city of Samaria during the early part of the reign of Sargon II, when the city was conquered. How long Assyrian forces remained in Samaria after its conquest in 720 BCE is open to question, but by the time deportations to the province of Samaria were undertaken, in the last five years of Sargon's reign (709–705), some Assyrian force must have returned to Samaria, or remained in place throughout, since the deportees were entrusted to the care of the governor in Samaria.[168]

The passage is sometimes seen as describing Sennacherib's attack on Jerusalem in 701.[169] But Sennacherib's annals record how the Assyrian army in 701 advanced along the main international highway leading to Philistia, then turned east to attack Lachish. As Roberts notes, there is no reason to connect this description to 701.[170] It does not make sense as a "prophecy after the event" of 701, describing a geographic route not used in this campaign. Nevertheless, the threat to Jerusalem here is clearly one that fits best in the period of uncertainty about Jerusalem's future that preceded the 701 BCE campaign.

As Roberts notes, the only known attack on Jerusalem from the north was that of the Syro-Ephraimite campaign in the period before 733 BCE.[171] But the threat described in the verses clearly derives from Assyria, as the imagery in verses 33–34 (discussed below) makes clear. It is therefore most reasonable to see this campaign as an imagined one, which did not materialize, which makes use of two points in historical reality: a) the presence of Assyrian forces in Samaria during the reign of Sargon II; b) the path followed by the Syro-Ephraimite forces. Isaiah uses historical memories of the path of the armies of Aram and Israel and imagines Assyrian forces stationed at Samaria as following the same route.

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167. Zechariah Kallai, "Nob" [Hebrew], *Entsiklopedya Mikrait* 5 (1968): 684–85; Hanan Eshel, "Nob, the Priestly City" [Hebrew], *Shomeron U Vinyamin* 1 (1987): 17–21.

168. On the date of the deportations, see Na'aman and Zadok, "Assyrian Deportations to the Province of Samerina," 185.

169. Rainey and Notley, *The Sacred Bridge*, 235.

170. Roberts, *First Isaiah*, 174.

171. Ibid.

That this campaign did not materialize appears clear from the archaeological record. It shows that in the region north of Jerusalem, including several of the sites closest to the region described in Isa 10:32, there was no destruction or abandonment of villages or farmsteads in the late eighth century. On the contrary, these villages and farmsteads continued to grow from the eighth to the seventh century, and reached their height in this period.[172] An Assyrian campaign with a force sufficient to threaten Jerusalem would clearly have wreaked havoc with the daily life of these inhabitants. If such a large force had passed in the region in the late eighth century, we would expect to find signs of abandonment, with villagers escaping into the large walled city for protection, and their farmsteads looted by the invaders. Such behaviour (abandoning villages and taking refuge in the city) is in fact described in Isa 10:31. But no such signs appear in the archaeological record. It appears that Isaiah here imagines a fulfilment of the prophecy issued in 10:5–15.[173]

This imagined fulfilment makes most sense in a period where Jerusalem's future hangs in the balance, and where Assyria's intentions towards Judah are unclear. The passage might date from early in Sargon's reign, as Sweeney and Younger have suggested.[174] If it does date from early in Sargon's reign, it may represent a small Assyrian delegation, coming from Samaria to demand tribute, as though they were dramatic conquerors, thus fitting in with the drama envisioned in 10:5–15 and 10:16–19.[175] But

172. A full discussion of this issue appears in Avraham Faust, "Settlement and Demography in Seventh-Century Judah and the Extent and Intensity of Sennacherib's Campaign," *PEQ* 140.3 (2008): 168–94. For discussion of specific sites in the region around Shu'afat and Mount Scopus, where Nob is thought to be situated, see Yehudah Rapuno and Alexander Onn, "An Iron Age Structure from Shu'afat Ridge, Northern Jerusalem," *Atiqot* 47 (2004): 119–29; and Gabi Mazor, "A Farmhouse from the Late Iron Age and from the Second Temple Period in French Hill, Northern Jerusalem" [Hebrew], *Atiqot* 54 (2007): 1*–14*.

173. The Syro-Ephraimite forces were necessarily much smaller than those of Assyria and would cause far less dislocation, leaving less impression in the archaeological record.

174. Because the archaeological record strongly suggests that no significant campaign took place, the views of Sweeney and Younger, placing a threat to Jerusalem in the context of Sargon's large-scale campaign of 720, also need to be refined. It is of course entirely possible that Jerusalem was threatened in 720, but that no large-scale campaign eventuated. Sweeney, "Sargon's Threat Against Jerusalem in Isaiah 10, 27-32"; and K. Lawson Younger, Jr., "Sargon's Campaign Against Jerusalem: A Further Note," *Biblica* 11 (1996): 108–10.

175. Thus De Jong, "A Window on the Isaiah Tradition," 101. Sending a delegation to arrange tribute payments rather than a large military force is consistent with general Assyrian practice, which preferred relatively cheap diplomacy over costly mili-

it is at least as likely that the prophecy dates from the second half of Sargon's reign, because in this period Judah expected to receive punishment from Assyria, after Judah's collaboration with Ashdod in the revolt of 714. By 709 or 708, Sargon had begun deportations to Samaria, indicating an Assyrian force in the region. And it is the region of the Samarian hill-country that Isaiah imagines as the Assyrians' point of departure on their campaign to attack Jerusalem.

Fulfilling the prophecy in 10:12, this campaign is dramatically stopped in its tracks at the moment it most directly threatens Jerusalem, as described in verses 33–34. The imagery of stopping the campaign uses the imagery of YHWH chopping off the branches, with Assyria likened to a tree.

> (33) Behold, the Master, the Lord of Hosts will lop off the chief branches in a terrifying campaign[176], the high of stature will be chopped down, and the high ones will be brought low. (34) And the thickets of the forest will be lopped off with iron, and the Lebanon (trees) will fall by means of a Powerful One.

The verses explicitly describe the bringing low of those of high stature, and their defeat by a new "Powerful One," thus continuing the theme of new hierarchies of power that has been evident since 10:5.

This imagery continues the reversal of Assyrian imagery: from late in the second millennium and on, many royal inscriptions describe how the Assyrian king demonstrates his fitness for kingship by chopping down trees in the far-away mountains, after undertaking a heroic journey. Chopping trees is an act of bravery and a proof of "kingliness," and here, that act is reversed, with Assyria represented as the tree to be destroyed.

This motif was discussed by Malamat and by Machinist.[177] In the annals of Tiglath-pileser I (1114–1076) a version of this motif appears, emphasizing the king's cutting cedars on his own:

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tary adventures.

176. As noted above, this hapax might be a combination of the words for campaign (מערכה) and terror (ערצ). The root ערצ is used to refer to Babylonian conquerors in Isa 13:11, and to YHWH who acts as Assyrians do in Isa 2:19 and 2:21. These passages suggest that Isaiah uses this root to refer to conquerors who inspire fear, and raise the possibility that the usage in 10:33 is related.

177. Machinist, "Assyria and its Image," 723, and literature cited there, especially Abraham Malamat, "Campaigns to the Mediterranean by Iahdunlim and Other Early Mesopotamian Rulers," in *Studies in Honor of Benno Landsberger on His Seventy-fifth Birthday April 21, 1965*; Assyriological Studies 16, ed. Hans Gustav Güterbock and Thorkild Jacobsen (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), 365–75.

ana Labnana lu allik gušūrī ša erēnī ... akkis aššа

I went to Mount Lebanon, trunks of cedar ... I cut, I carried off[178]

The motif also appears several times in Sennacherib's annals. One such passage is

ina ūmēšuma ^{d} Aššur u ^{d} Ištar rā'imū šangûtiya nābû šumiya

gišmaḫḫē erēni ša ultu ūmē rūqūti išīḫūma ikbirū magal

ina qereb Sirara šadê ina puzri nanzuzū

ušaklimūinni ṣīssun[179]

In those days, the gods Ashur and Ishtar who love my priesthood and call my name,

Boards of cedar which from long-ago days had grown and had become very great,

And stand in seclusion in the midst of the Sirara mountains

They showed me their place of origin.

A different inscription of Sennacherib makes it clear that the work of cutting down the cedars was done by the local vassal kings in the mountain regions.[180] But in the formulation cited here, Sennacherib portrays himself as the preserver of the ancient Assyrian tradition, according to which the king himself must undertake the journey and physically cut down the trees. This formulation mediates between this tradition and the reality by portraying Sennacherib, somewhat mendaciously, as having been told the location of the trees, which enabled his underlings to remove them. Clearly, this tradition was known in the late eighth century, and was an important part of Assyrian royal ideology.

This tradition of the heroic journey, in which the king himself removes the trees, was severely attenuated in the Neo-Babylonian inscriptions. They, like the Neo-Assyrian ones, see the king as responsible for providing precious cedars for building projects. Several inscriptions of Nebuchadnezzar II do describe the king as cutting down the cedars with his own hands, a motif that seems related to the deliberate use of Neo-Assyrian images and motifs

178. RIMA 2:37, Tiglath Pileser I, A.0.87.3, 16–18.

179. RINAP 3/1:139–140, Sennacherib 17, col. vi, lines 47–53. A parallel text appears in RINAP 3/2:36, Sennacherib 39, lines 38–41.

180. RINAP 3/1:225 Sennacherib 34, 68b.

in some of his monuments.[181] But those of many Neo-Babylonian kings do not highlight the heroic journey or the king's role in actually cutting down the trees.[182]

This strongly suggests that Isa 10:28–34, which focus on the reversal of hierarchies as expressed in the chopping down of trees, were composed in the Neo-Assyrian period, when the king's role as woodcutter was seen as reflecting his kingliness.

Here, in Isa 10:33–34, the king is portrayed as having undertaken the heroic journey of conquest, paralleling that undertaken to the mountains, towards Jerusalem. Yet, instead of chopping down trees, he himself is chopped down. At the height of his expressing his kingliness, he is undermined. Isa 10:28–34 therefore fit into the motif repeated throughout 10:5–34, of a dramatic defeat of Assyria by God, leading to the establishment of a new

181. Wadi Brisa C, Section IX, line 19. Published in Rocio Da Riva, *The Twin Inscriptions of Nebuchadnezzar at Brisa (Wadi esh-Sharbin, Lebanon): A Historical and Philological Study* AfO 32 (Vienna: Institut für Orienatlistik, 2012), 62–63. But as Da Riva notes there at p. 94, the reliefs accompanying this inscription use Neo-Assyrian pictorial language; this was done to portray Babylonia as a continuation of the Neo-Assyrian Empire. Similarly, the prism of Nebuchadnezzar known as EŞ 7834, published by Rocio Da Riva, "Nebuchadnezzar II's Prism EŞ 7834 – A New Edition," *ZA* 103 (2013): 196–229; here 208, col. ii 1'–3' describes the sovereign hewing cedars. But this inscription imitates Neo-Assyrian style in many ways, discussed by Da Riva, 197 and 206. On the use of Neo-Assyrian imagery in other reliefs of Nebuchadnezzar in Lebanon, see Da Riva, "Neo-Babylonian Monuments at Shir es-Sanam and Wadi es-Saba (North Lebanon)," *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes* 103 (2013): 87–100, here 93.

182. In the following passages in Nabonaid's inscriptions, we find references to the use of cedar as building material, but no reference to the king himself cutting down the cedar. Several of the texts mention that the cedars came from the Amana mountains, but none mention that the cedars were actually cut by the king. There is no description of an expedition to the west to obtain the cedars and thus the personal aspect of bravery inherent in cedar chopping is absent, in contrast to the Assyrian material. From Schaudig, *Die Inschriften Nabonids von Babylon und Kyros' des Grossen*, Text 2.4 (Ebabbar-Ekurra Zylinder), exemplar 1, col. 1, line 22; Text 2.9 (Ebabbar Zylinder) exemplar 1, col. 2, lines 3–6; Text 2.12 (the Eḫulḫul cylinder), exemplar 11, lines 45–47; Text 2.13 (the Ebabbar cylinder), col. 3, lines 1–12; P4 IV 8–11. In all of these, the emphasis is on the king building, not on his journey or his chopping. In text 2.13, we are told that the king "caused the cedars to be brought" but there is no indication that he is personally involved in the process, other than by issuing orders. This contrasts with the description in Sennacherib's annals, in which the gods show the king the place of origin of the cedars. The clear implication is that without Sennacherib's secret knowledge, the cedars could not be obtained. No such implication is found in any of Nabonaid's texts.

sovereign order, in which a sovereign higher than Assyria replaces Assyria. In both 10:12 and 10:28–34, this battle is located at Jerusalem.

13. Isaiah 11:1–10

Since this passage begins with the image of a shoot emerging from a trunk, it has been seen as directly continuing the imagery of Isa 10:28–34.[183] There is no consensus as to the date of its composition, however. While I cannot identify in 11:1–9 motifs or knowledge that can only date to the Assyrian period, several points of contact with Assyrian motifs should be discussed, as should its place in the larger unit of 10:5–11:10.

In this unit, we find two cycles in which a dramatic Assyrian downfall is followed by a passage discussing the impact of that downfall on Israel. The first such cycle appears in 10:5–23, and consists of 10:5–15 and 10:16–19, each of which predicts a dramatic downfall of Assyria in Jerusalem. These two passages are followed by 10:20–23, which present the impact of Assyria's downfall on Judah. Then, 10:28–34, like 10:5–15 and 10:16–19, predict Assyria's downfall (at Jerusalem, like 10:12) and are followed by 11:1–10, with its seminal importance for the messianic tradition. Unlike 10:20–23, 11:1–10 describe the impact of Assyria's downfall by establishing a wholly new political order in Judah. Rather than relying on vassal kings, Judah will henceforth have its own king, whose differences from that of Assyria are highlighted in these verses. It might not be exaggerating to describe the messianic king here as an "anti-Assyrian" depiction.

The first point of contact between this king and the Assyrian is the imagery in verse 5: "Righteousness will be the girdle of his hips and faithfulness will be the belt of his loins." The expressions of the "belt of the hips" and the "belt of the loins" refer to locations in which battle equipment was kept, so that girding the hips or the loins is often a reference to preparing for conflict.[184] Yet here, the metaphoric imagery describes righteousness, rather than weaponry, in this location. The shoot from Jesse's trunk described here rules not by virtue of force, but by virtue and by divine inspiration, as emphasized in 10:2–4.

A second, and more specific point, is in the unusual depictions of the animals resting together in 11:5–8. These verses have given rise to a lively discussion among the medieval commentators as to whether Isaiah

183. Beuken, "Lebanon with its Majesty," 17–23.

184. Examples of the "belt of the loins" as a preparation for conflict include Jer 1:17 and Job 38:3 and 40:7, as well as the verb in 2 Sam 22:40, parallel to Ps 18:40, and by Isaiah himself in describing preparations for war in 8:9. Weapons were worn on the belt, as in Neh 4:12.

envisioned a change in animal behavior in the expected messianic age, or whether the descriptions are solely metaphoric. This discussion shows that the imagery here is unusual and unexpected, for no other Biblical passage describes future peace by referring to changes in animal behavior. Moreover, the subsequent verse (9) correlates the future in which "they" refrain from hurting, to the land being full of "knowledge of God," a phrase we have seen as indicating a recognition of divine sovereignty. Who are those who are to recognize divine sovereignty? Are these the animals?

It appears that the animal imagery is intended here to illustrate not simply a change in animal or human inclinations, but rather recognition of a sovereign who does not permit anyone to harm others. The correlation between the threats posed by vicious animals and the recognition of a sovereign may have its origins in the Assyrian institution of the animal hunt. Like chopping down cedars in the mountains, an Assyrian king was expected to subdue lions in order to demonstrate his kingliness, so much so that the conflict between king and lion served as the central motif on the official imperial seal.[185] In the literary and pictorial depictions, the king's subduing of lions and the royal hunt more generally were seen as emblematic of his establishment of order. It is reasonable, therefore, to see the imagery in 10:6–9 as a reaction to Assyrian imagery: on the one hand, the Assyrian king dominates the lions by brute force. On the other, the shoot from Jesse's trunk will not need to use any sort of force: the lions will recognize the sovereignty of YHWH and will refrain from "harming or destroying" (as in verse 9). This rejection of force continues the motif seen above in verses 2–4, in which force of arms is rejected in favor of "righteousness" and "truthfulness," which derive from fear of the Lord.

A third point of correspondence, and the most specific in use of motifs, is the formulation in 10:10: והיתה מנחתו כבוד, usually translated "his resting place will be honour." But as Cathcart has shown in his study of Isa 30:15, the Akkadian expression *šubat neḫti* refers to "a peaceful dwelling."[186] The expression is used in many Assyrian inscriptions to describe how the king causes either gods or the people he subjugates to dwell in a specific location. On the one hand, the king is responsible for ensuring the security of those

185. Elnathan Weissert, "Royal Hunt and Royal Triumph in a Prism Fragment of Ashurnasirpal," in *Assyria 1995: Proceedings of the Tenth Anniversary Symposium of the Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project*, Helsinki, September 7–11, 1995, ed. Simo Parpola and Robert McCray Whiting (Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 1997), 339–58, and references there; Bustenay Oded, *War, Peace and Empire: Justifications for War in Assyrian Royal Inscriptions* (Wiesbaden: Ludwig Reichert, 1992), 149–51.

186. Cathcart, "Isaiah 30:15 בשׁובה ונחת and Akkadian *šubat nēḫti/šubtu nēḫtu*, 'Quiet Abode'."

he settles and their prosperity; on the other hand, they must accept the location in which he settles them. As Cathcart notes, "The opposite of *šubat neḫti* is chaos and disorder."[187] In both Isa 11:10 and in the Assyrian texts, expressions from related words (*neḫti,* מנוחה) refer to the acceptance of the monarch's decisions by the population.

14. Isaiah 10:5–34 as a Theological Pivot

As the discussion above has shown, Isa 10:5–34 consist of a series of interrelated passages, which can best be considered as a sort of "rolling composition" composed in the Assyrian period. Three of the passages, 10:5–15, 10:16–19, and 10:28–34, describe a dramatic defeat of Assyria at the hands of God. The first two of these three passages describe Assyria in the guise of an Assyrian enemy, who threatens the cosmic order in the universe. These passages depict YHWH as establishing order, reining in Assyria, and preventing it from violating the cosmic order, in which YHWH reigns supreme.

In 10:24–26, that process of God subduing Assyria is compared to the subduing of Pharaoh at the Red Sea, which led to recognition of God's sovereignty on the part of Pharaoh. The clear implication is that Assyria must recognize the Sovereignty of YHWH, and this will be accomplished in a new enactment of the cosmic combat. Unlike in 19:19–25, where Assyrian sovereignty serves as a model for that of God, here in 10:24–26 (and throughout 10:5–34), God's sovereignty is achieved by overthrowing Assyria. Throughout the three passages noted, the overthrow of Assyria and the establishment of God's sovereignty are compared to the cosmic combat, in which the forces of order overthrow those of disorder and establish new sovereigns.

This establishing and recognition of a new sovereign, after the defeat of Assyria, is described in some detail in 11:1–10, in which a human ruler of Judah is seen as God's representative. This human ruler is in many ways the opposite of the Assyrian king, and his rule results in recognition of God's sovereignty, as detailed in 11:9. The description in 11:1–10 is continued in 11:11–16, parts of which refer to the return from Assyrian exile as a re-enactment of the Exodus, and in 12:1–16, which describe a renewed "Song of the Sea" to be sung by returning Israelites. These passages appear later than 11:1–10, and they continue the Exodus motif seen in 10:24–26.

But 11:10–12:6 are not the only continuation of the motifs found in 10:5–34. Isaiah's description of the events of 701, which we will discuss in the next chapter, draw substantially from the depictions in 10:5–34. Central

187. Ibid., 51.

to Isaiah's description of the events of 701 is his view that Assyria must be defeated in order for YHWH to be recognized as sovereign. This marks a dramatic departure from the view expressed in passages such as 7:17, 8:7, and 19:19–25. The defeat must be dramatic, and must result in a change in the cosmic order. In accordance with this new view, Isaiah interprets the events of 701 BCE.

6

Snatching Theological Victory from the Jaws of Military Defeat: Isaiah's Narrative of Sennacherib's Campaign

In the previous chapter, we saw how Isaiah develops the view that the recognition of YHWH as sovereign requires a dramatic lowering of Assyria's position. This idea is most clearly expressed in 10:5-15, but also in 10:16–19 and in 10:28–34. In all of these passages, the defeat of Assyria is accomplished by God's actions. None of these passages urges Judah to revolt, and there is no evidence that in the years before 705, Isaiah encouraged any such rebellion. On the contrary, the mention of Hezekiah's building projects to fortify Jerusalem, in Isa 22:9–11, contains the critique that "You have not looked towards their Maker, and their Fashioner from afar you have not seen" (22:11b). As noted in the previous chapter, these building projects seem to have been initiated during the reign of Sargon II, and Isaiah critiques them since they involve Judah's reliance on her own forces, rather than those of YHWH.

Although it appears that Isaiah discouraged Judah from actively rebelling during the reign of Sargon, it seems that he encouraged Judah's participation in the general revolt against Assyria that swept the Levant after Sargon's death in 705. Sargon's death precipitated a period of instability, which only ended when Sennacherib assumed control of the empire a year or two later.

Sargon's death sent shock waves throughout the Assyrian world, partly because he died defeated on the battlefield, but largely because the defeat

was of such magnitude as to prevent the retrieval and burial of Sargon's corpse.[1] This defeat and the subsequent disarray prevented an orderly transition of power to Sargon's successor, resulting in a temporary collapse of the centralized Assyrian administration. It appears that none of the kingdoms of the Levant paid tribute in the period immediately following Sargon's death. Most of the kings of the Levant waited for the establishment of a new administration, while a few particularly truculent kings (including Hezekiah and Sidqa of Ashkelon) were resolved to initiate a full-scale revolt.[2]

This chapter will focus primarily on Isaiah's narrative (in chapters 36–37) of the campaign undertaken by Sennacherib in 701 BCE to counter this revolt. But I begin with a brief survey of Isa 14:4–21, the gleeful dirge on the death of the king of Babylon. I discuss why this poem ought to be understood as relating to Sargon's death, and its place in Isaiah's theology.

1. Isaiah 14:4–21

The question of the identity of the "king of Babylon" whose death is celebrated in this passage has interested scholars since the late nineteenth century, when they became aware of the unusual manner in which Sargon II died.[3] Many of these scholars were struck by the unusual similarity between Isa 14:19 and the cuneiform descriptions of Sargon's death, and argued that since the verse referred to Sargon, the passage as a whole does too.

(18) כל מלכי גוים כלם, שכבו בכבוד איש בביתו

(19) ואתה השלכת מקברך כנצר נתעב

1. According to the Eponym Chronicle, Sargon died while battling Qurdi the Kulummaean, an otherwise unknown king. It has been argued that the campaign in which Sargon died was actually directed against Tabal or against the Cimmerians. For these and other questions related to Sargon's death, see the discussion of Hayim Tadmor, in Hayim Tadmor, Benno Landsberger, and Simo Parpola, "The Sin of Sargon and Sennacherib's Last Will," *SAAB* 3.1 (1989): 3–51, here 28–29. On the psychological impact of Sargon's death on the Assyrian army and administration, see Bagg, *Die Assyrer und das Westland*, 243–44.

2. See Sennacherib's inscription, below.

3. For a survey of these studies, see Tadmor, Landsberger, and Parpola, "The Sin of Sargon," 3–5; Percy van Keulen, "On the Identity of the Anonymous Ruler in Isa. 14:4b-21," in *Isaiah in Context: Studies in Honour of Arie van der Kooij on the Occasion of His Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. Michaël Nicolaas van der Meer, Percy S.F. van Keulen, Wido T. Van Peursen, and B. Ter Haar Romeny, 109-24, here 113, n. 114 (Leiden: Brill, 2010); and Roberts, *First Isaiah*, 207 n. 7.

לבש הרגים, מטעני חרב
יורדי אל אבני בור כפגר מובס.

(18) All the kings of the nations, all of them, lie in honour each one in his house.
(19) But you have been thrown out of your grave like an abominable shoot
Dressed in the slain, pierced by the sword

Who go down to the stones of the pit like a trampled corpse.

More recently, Olyan has argued for a re-interpretation of verse 19. Rather than seeing this verse as describing an unburied king, he claims that the passage refers to a king being exhumed from his grave as part of a post-mortem punishment, as a result of which his spirit cannot rest.[4] Partly based on this understanding of verse 19, van Keulen has argued that the identification of this poem with Sargon is untenable.

But a careful reading of the poem shows several converging lines of evidence that counter van Keulen's objections. The first relates to the appellation "king of Babylon" in verse 4a. In contrast to van Keulen's argument that it is difficult to understand why an Assyrian king would be designated king of Babylon, Roberts notes that Sargon calls himself by this name in his Babylonian inscriptions.[5] Sargon conquered Babylon in 710 BCE.[6] This campaign seems to have been part of his policy of expanding Assyrian control to the "four corners," and it is precisely that policy which the prophet attacks in verses 4–21. Calling Sargon "king of Babylon" may be an intentional part of the passage's rhetoric.

The dirge begins in verses 4b–6 with a description of the persecution to which the unnamed oppressor subjected "the nations." His death is celebrated by YHWH breaking "the staff of the wicked, the stick of the rulers," using the staff motif found in Isa 10:5–15 and 10:24–27. He is described as the "smiter" of nations, evoking again the staff imagery and also the description of Assyria as smiter in Isa 10:20. The smiting is said to take place in anger, and the words אף and עברה, which figure so prominently in Isa 10:5, are used.

4. Saul M. Olyan, "Was the King of Babylon Buried Before His Corpse Was Exposed? Some Thoughts on Isa 14, 19," *ZAW* 118.3 (2006): 423–26.

5. van Keulen, "On the Identity," 116 n. 30, following many previous scholars; Roberts, *First Isaiah*, 207 n. 6. Titles similar to "king of Babylon" are found in many other inscriptions, discussed by Tadmor, in Tadmor, Landsberger, and Parpola, "The Sin of Sargon," 25–28.

6. Tadmor in Tadmor, Landsberger, and Parpola, "The Sin of Sargon," 25, notes that the campaign was not provoked by Babylonian opposition but was initiated by Sargon. See the broader discussion of Sargon's Babylonian policy, 25–28.

Verses 7–8 describe the change that eventuates with the unnamed king's death: the cypresses and cedars of Lebanon are no longer in danger of being chopped down. This clearly corresponds to the subversion of the motif of the Assyrian king as chopper of cypresses in 10:33–34.

Verse 9 describes the reception of the king in She'ol, the abode of the dead: all the strong ones of the earth rise in the netherworld to greet him. The phrase used is כל עתודי ארץ, similar to the phrase in 10:13 describing Sargon's plunder of the high mountains. In 14:10–12, the speech of these strong ones is recorded: they rejoice in the mortality of the one who joins them (verse 11), and in his becoming equal to all other kings (verse 10). The emphasis on the mortality of the unnamed king corresponds closely to Isaiah's emphasis on Sargon's lower position in the God-man hierarchy in 10:5–15, especially in 10:15. Both in 10:15 and in 14:10–11, the flesh-and-blood nature of the king is emphasized: in 10:15 this is done by showing distance from God, and in 14:10–11 by showing closeness to other human rulers. In 14:12, he is compared to a star[7] and is finally "chopped down," using the same verb as in 10:34.

Throughout Isa 14:4–12, similarities to the themes and vocabulary of Isa 10:5–34 abound. Isa 14:4–12 emphasize the unnamed king's attempts to gain a higher status through conquest, and contrast this with his reception in She'ol. Sargon's failed attempts to gain status through conquest also lie at the basis of the critique of Sargon in Isa 10:5–15. These similarities to the critique of Sargon in Isa 10:5–15 continue in subsequent verses of chapter 14.

Verses 13–17 record a dialogue between the unnamed king and those who "watch" him. In verses 13–14, the king emphasizes his superior position, and his attempts to equate himself to עליון.[8] These attempts correspond to the critique of Sargon for failure to recognize his subordinate position in Isa 10:5–15. In 14:16–17, the unnamed king's "shaking of kingdoms" is mentioned. This seems to refer to his re-arranging the political status of kingdoms, and thus corresponds thematically to the accusations levelled against Sargon's turning of kingdoms into provinces in Isa 10:5–7. 14:17 also refers to the destruction of cities and to his failure to release prisoners to

7. See the extensive discussion in Roberts, *First Isaiah*, 209–10, discussing the identity of this star.

8. Note the similarity between the idea of עליון on במתי עב here and the similar description of YHWH riding on עב in Isa 19:1, which reflects the imagery of the god Assur riding on the clouds, as discussed in chapter 2 of this book. It appears that Isaiah engages the image of the Assyrian god riding the clouds and the king doing likewise. Assyrian kings did indeed see themselves as equivalents of Assur, as discussed in the Introduction.

their homes, thus evoking Sargon's practice of deporting rebels to other areas of the empire.[9]

Isa 14:18–20 use the battlefield disposal of the corpse to contrast the status of the unnamed king with that of the kings he presumed to dominate. After discussing his failed attempts to gain a lofty status in 14:4–15, verses 18–20 describe how he ends up occupying a lowly status. Not only has he failed to ascend heights, he is in fact lower than all other kings because he is not given a decent burial. Despite Olyan's analysis, it does not appear that an exhumation is described here. The verse certainly describes a defeated corpse on the battlefield, pierced by arrows, and a standard practice of disposing of battlefield casualties is recorded. Upon the conclusion of every battle with significant casualties, burial of the corpses was a matter of great urgency for the surrounding population because of the overwhelming danger of plagues caused by insects inhabiting unburied corpses. Corpses might quickly be covered over with earth, but were then, as soon as possible, taken from where they lay and cast into pits. This was most likely the fate of Sargon's corpse, and it corresponds to the description in these verses.[10]

The identification of the unnamed king of Babylon in Isa 14:4–21 with Sargon is thus not based solely on the description of the burial in 14:19. The burial is only the culmination of a detailed discussion of the question of this king's status, contrasting his attempts to gain status by dominating other kings, and thus to rival עליון, with his flesh-and-blood nature attested by his death. The passage is not simply a parody of a royal dirge, as van Keulen claims, but an attack on attempts by a specific king to gain status, which ultimately result in his unique degradation.[11] In describing how this king attempted to achieve dominion over others, and to rival the gods, the "gleeful dirge" in 14:4–21 references not only the vocabulary of 10:5–34, but also the specific aspects of Sargon's foreign policy that are highlighted in 10:5–34.

The passage makes most sense as a commentary on the events of 705, expressing vindication of Isaiah's conviction, expressed in 10:5–34, that the

9. Noted by Roberts, *First Isaiah*, 212.

10. Ibid., 212. On some of the archaeological evidence related to hasty burial of bodies after defeat in battle, see the evidence from Ashdod (related to the 712 campaign of Sargon II!), summarized in Israel Eph'al, *The City Besieged: Siege and Its Manifestations in the Ancient Near East* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2013), 31–32.

11. See van Keulen, "On the Identity," 118. Van Keulen's conviction that the poem reflects the fall of Assur in 612 stands in contrast to its focus on a specific individual. Nowhere does the poem rejoice on the downfall of a kingdom as a whole and nowhere does it describe the removal of the yoke of tribute. Its focus on a specific king who attempted to dominate nations stands in marked contrast with the kings of Assyria between 627 and 612 who hardly controlled any territory beyond the Assyrian heartland.

downfall of Assyria must be demonstrated by God's actions. In 14:4–21, the defeat and dishonour of Sargon II is understood to show the failure of his attempts to fulfil the propagandistic descriptions of the Assyrian kings as universal rulers, superiors to all other kings, and counterparts of the god Assur. Assyrian hegemony, which threatened not only the political independence of vassal states but also the continued existence of nations, and which claimed to rival God as universal monarch, was finally seen as dead.

2. The Events of 701 BCE: A Single Campaign and a Single Siege

Assyrian power, however, did not die with Sargon. After a short hiatus, Sennacherib emerged as the successor.[12] His first campaign, in 704 BCE, was directed against Babylon, and it took three more years before he initiated his 701 campaign to restore Assyrian hegemony over the Levant.

This campaign is documented in many of Sennacherib's inscriptions, of which the Rassam Cylinder (now known as Sennacherib 4, composed in 700 BCE) is the primary source.[13] It has been studied in countless scholarly publications.[14] Based on Sennacherib's inscriptions, it appears that the first event in this campaign was the flight of the king of Sidon, and the immediate submission of Arwad and Byblos on the Phoenician coast. At this point, or somewhat later in the campaign, Ashdod and the Transjordanian kingdoms of Ammon, Edom, and Moab also submitted. (Gaza appears not to have participated in this rebellion at all, judging from the benefits given to Gaza at the end of the campaign.) The remaining rebels, who are recorded in Sennacherib's inscriptions, consisted of Sidqa king of Ashkelon, Hezekiah king of Judah, and anti-Assyrian elements in the city of Ekron. Sennacherib's forces proceeded as a single unit down the international coastal highway and conquered towns tributary to Sidqa around Jaffa, as a means

12. For a study of Sennacherib's early life, see Eckhart Frahm, "Family Matters, Psychohistorical Reflections on Sennacherib and His Times," in *Sennacherib at the Gates of Jerusalem: Story, History, and Historiography*, ed. Isaac Kalimi and Seth Richardson (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 163–222.

13. Published in RINAP 3/1:55-69. There are many exemplars of this text; the earliest were composed in 700 BCE and others copied later.

14. A small selection of the relevant bibliography can be found in Tadmor, "Sennacherib's Campaign to Judah"; Gallagher, *Sennacherib's Campaign to Judah*; Mordechai Cogan, "Cross-examining the Assyrian Witnesses to Sennacherib's Third Campaign: Assessing the Limits of Historical Reconstruction," in *Sennacherib at the Gates of Jerusalem*, ed. Isaac Kalimi and Seth Richardson (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 51–74; Frederick Mario Fales, "The Road to Judah: 701 BCE in the Context of Sennacherib's Political Military Strategy," in *Sennacherib at the Gates*, 223–48; the many other valuable studies in the same volume.

of pressuring Sidqa to submit. It appears that Sidqa did not submit, leading Sennacherib to proceed southwards to Ashkelon, to remove Sidqa forcibly, and replace him with a more pro-Assyrian royal, Šarru-lū-dāri. Sennacherib then turned his attention inland, where Judah and Ekron still remained as rebel strongholds.

Padi, king of Ekron, was opposed to this revolt, while significant political elements in his city supported it. In a coup d'état that took place before Sennacherib arrived, probably with the support of Hezekiah, these elements took control of the city and Padi was imprisoned in Jerusalem. Possibly before proceeding to Ekron, Sennacherib battled an Egyptian force that had come to assist the rebels somewhere in the Shephelah, near the city of Eltekeh (whose location remains uncertain). He then proceeded to besiege and conquer both Eltekeh and Timnah (at Tel Batash), and then conquered Ekron, apparently without opposition. At Ekron, the rebel leaders were severely punished.

Sennacherib then proceeded to pressure Hezekiah into submission, and it is at this point that the Assyrian inscriptions are supplemented by Biblical narratives. The three relevant narratives appear in 2 Kgs 18:13–16 (known as Source A); 2 Kgs 18:17–19:37, which parallels Isaiah chapters 36 and 37 (known as Source B); and 2 Chr 32. Despite repeated claims that the various sources represent two distinct events, it is quite clear that this is not the case, and that all of the sources noted discuss the events as occurring in 701 BCE.[15]

There are two primary reasons for this conclusion. First of all, no inscription of Sennacherib describes any campaign to Judah after 701 BCE. And secondly, a comparison of the narrative of Sennacherib's inscriptions with those of the Biblical sources shows that Source A and Source B complement each other, with each describing some (but not all) of the events narrated in the Rassam cylinder. Thus we see that the Rassam cylinder narrates the events of a single campaign (a point that is widely accepted), and sources A and B also narrate events of that campaign. Below, I show how some of the events are narrated in source A and some in source B. Both Source A and Sennacherib's inscriptions describe the widespread devastation inflicted in Judah, primarily in the area of the Shephelah north and south of Lachish. Source A describes the capture of "all the fortified cities of Judah" (2 Kgs 18:13), while Sennacherib's inscriptions record the capture and despoiling of 46 walled cities and the deportation of 200,150 people. The archeological

15. A readable summary of the "two-siege" theory appears in William H. Shea, "Sennacherib's Second Campaign," *JBL* 104 (1985): 401–18. The theory is motivated by apparent discrepancies between the Biblical accounts. As I discuss below, these discrepancies are the result of different narratological goals.

record attests to the destruction and abandonment of dozens of sites in the Shephelah region. Many of these sites are located along the trough valley routes linking Tel Beth-Shemesh to Tel Eitun and points south, and along Nahal Lachish, which bisects the trough valley and runs east-west, linking Khirbet el-Qom (Makkedah), Lachish, Tel Burna (Libnah), and Tell el-Hesy.[16]

Both Source B (2 Kgs 19:9 and Isa 37:9) and Sennacherib's inscriptions describe a battle between Egyptian forces and those of Sennacherib in the Shephelah region. The battle clearly did not result in an Assyrian defeat severe enough to cause a withdrawal, but the inscriptions are curiously reticent about the battle's results, suggesting that the Egyptians put up a good fight.[17]

None of the sources describe an Assyrian conquest of Jerusalem; the emphasis Sennacherib placed on reliefs of the conquest of Lachish in his "palace without rival" seem intended to detract attention from the non-conquest of Jerusalem.[18] Similarly, the archaeological record does not record any long-term siege of the city. Sieges typically provoked inhabitants of surrounding towns to take refuge in the walled city (as depicted in Isa 10:31b), and there is no evidence of abandonment or destruction in the rural habitations surrounding the city in this period.[19]

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16. The archaeological literature on evidence for Sennacherib's destruction is voluminous; summaries appear in David Ussishkin, "Sennacherib's Campaign to Judah: The Archaeological Perspective with an Emphasis on Lachish and Jerusalem," in *Sennacherib at the Gates of Jerusalem*, ed. Isaac Kalimi and Seth Richardson (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 75–104; Faust, "Settlement and Demography in Seventh-Century Judah"; James W. Hardin, Christopher A. Rollston, and Jeffrey A. Blakely, "Biblical Geography in Southwestern Judah," *NEA* 75.1 (2012): 20–35. A map of some of the sites containing destruction layers appears in my "Why Sennacherib Did Not Conquer Jerusalem: The Assyrian Policy of Leveraging Territorial Conquest for Political Gain" [Hebrew], *New Studies on Jerusalem* 19 (2013): 57–66.

17. For a fuller discussion about the Egyptian involvement in this campaign, see the debate between Kenneth A. Kitchen, "Egypt, the Levant and Assyria in 701 BC," in *"Fontes atque Pontes": Festschrift Hellmut Brunner,* ed. Manfred Görg (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2016), 243–53; *Ägypten und altes Testament 5* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1983); and James K. Hoffmeier, "Egypt's Role in the Events of 701 BC," in *Jerusalem in Bible and Archaeology: The First Temple Period*, ed. Andrew Vaughn and Anne Killebrew (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 219–34.

18. For a detailed and careful discussion of the difference between the visual portrayal and the Assyrian text, see Russell, *Sennacherib's "Palace without Rival" at Nineveh*, 252–57.

19. Faust, "Settlement and Demography in Seventh-Century Judah." It is relevant to note that of the three Biblical narratives, only the one in Chronicles uses the term "siege" to describe these events.

Despite the non-conquest of Jerusalem, Hezekiah clearly paid a very heavy tribute, gleefully detailed in Sennacherib's inscriptions. The tribute is more laconically narrated in Source A, which emphasizes the despoiling of the Temple treasury (2 Kgs 18:14–16).[20] The Assyrian inscriptions describe how this tribute was sent to Assyria by Hezekiah's emissaries after Sennacherib's departure. This is the first occurrence in the Assyrian annals of such a procedure; previously, tribute was paid during the campaign (as the kings of Arwad, Byblos, and the Transjordanian kingdoms did during this one).[21] This strongly suggests that negotiations of some sort took place between Hezekiah and Sennacherib before this tribute was paid. It is probable that Hezekiah was able to condition the payment on Sennacherib's departure after having devastated the Shephelah region, and thus ensure that Sennacherib did not advance into the Judean hill-country. Assyrian reticence to move forces into the hill country may have played a part in the negotiations and in the Assyrian decision to refrain from attacking Jerusalem.

The events of 701 BCE clearly marked a military defeat for Judah. Many towns were destroyed. The Shephelah region, into which Hezekiah had invested so many resources, and was of such great economic importance, was lost to Judah, and a heavy tribute had still to be paid.[22] But Judah sur-

20. Source A is part of a series of narratives in Kings, including the narrative of Shishak's invasion (1 Kgs 14:25–28) and that of Hazael's invasion (2 Kgs 12:18–19), which are narrative expansions of short entries made into the Temple ledger recording losses to the Temple treasury. For a discussion of these sources, see Nadav Na'aman, "Shishak's Invasion in Light of the Biblical and Egyptian Sources and the Archaeological Record" [Hebrew], *Zion* 63 (1998): 247–76. Acknowledging the origins of this material can help explain the difficult date that appears in 2 Kgs 18:13, which assigns Sennacherib's campaign to Hezekiah's 14th year. The statement is problematic, because other synchronisms in the book of Kings indicate that Hezekiah acceded to the throne between 729 and 727, making his 14th year fall between 717 and 714 BCE, and not in 701. A brief survey of the scholarship on this problematic synchronism appears in Roberts, *First Isaiah*, 449–51. It appears to me that the simplest solution to understanding the synchronism in 2 Kgs 18:13 is to posit that the verse conflates two events that took their toll on the Temple treasury, and which were therefore both recorded in this ledger. One was the series of Assyrian campaigns to the Negev, discussed in chapter 4 of this book, in the years 716–715, after which we know that Judah paid tribute to Assyria; and the second was the campaign of Sennacherib in 701. In the course of composing the passage in 2 Kgs 18 based on that ledger, the compiler of Kings combined the two events either because of some scribal error or, perhaps, to convey his view that the political roots of Sennacherib's campaign lie in the Assyrian policy of expanding control over the interior of the southern Levant, a policy whose origins date to the campaigns of 716 and 715. The editor of Isa 36:1 then added the date from 2 Kgs 18:13.

21. Russell, *Sennacherib's "Palace without Rival"*, 228.

22. On the investment of resources in the Shephelah, see Kyle Henry Keimer,

vived as a nominally independent polity. Furthermore, it is important to emphasize that among the leaders of the three polities (Ekron, Ashkelon, and Judah) who refused to submit in this campaign, Hezekiah alone retained his leadership position. Whether because of the topographic and military challenges involved in sending a force into the hill-country, or because of the amount of tribute Hezekiah offered (or as is more likely, for both reasons), Sennacherib chose not to advance against Jerusalem and not to dethrone Hezekiah. It is out of the survival of Jerusalem that Isaiah weaves the narrative we know as Source B.

Source B is an interesting example of a prophetic narrative. It utilizes specific historical occurrences (including the Assyrian presence at Lachish, the Egyptian expedition, and the negotiations, all noted above) but connects these events together in a specific manner, so as to achieve the rhetorical goal of presenting the campaign as a clash between Assyria and YHWH for mastery in the universe. Below, I explore the techniques used to achieve this goal.

3. Source "B" As an Isaian Composition

This narrative appears in parallel versions in Isa 36:2–37:28 and in 2 Kgs 18:17–19:37. Scholars have traditionally considered the Kings version to be the original source of the narrative, based on textual considerations.[23] But I view this as a composition that originates from the same source as much of the other material in Isa 1–39 treating Assyria, which I have discussed in previous chapters.[24]

"The Socioeconomic Impact of Hezekiah's Preparations for Rebellion" (Ph.D. diss., UCLA, 2011).

23. This position was first presented by Friedrich Heinrich Wilhelm Gesenius, *Philologisch-kritischer und historischer Commentar über den Jesaias,* 3 vols. (Leipzig, 1821), 2:22, 933–35. A summary appears in Brevard S. Childs, *Isaiah and the Assyrian Crisis* (London: SCM Press, 1967), 137–40. Francolino J. Gonçalves, *L'expédition de Sennachérib en Palestine dans la littérature hébraïque ancienne* (Louvain-la-neuve: Université catholique de Louvain, 1986), 342–50, reaches similar conclusions, for historical-critical reasons.

24. For a different rationale for viewing this as originating in Isaiah, see Klaas A. D. Smelik, *Converting the Past. Studies in Ancient Israelite and Moabite Historiography* (Leiden: Brill, 1992), 97–101. The textual problems do not point clearly to the superiority of the Kings text: additions such as "a land of olive oil and honey" and "live and do not die" in 2 Kgs 18:32 and "strange waters" in 2 Kgs 19:24 suggest that the Kings text may be secondary. For a further view, see Roberts, *First Isaiah*, 443. Roberts notes the material has the character of a prophetic story; he considers it likely that the material originated among "disciples of the prophet," but suggests that it may have been composed originally as a separate composition.

This narrative closely corresponds to other material in Isa 1–39 in several related ways. In the first place, the material cites and subverts motifs from Assyrian royal inscriptions, demonstrating knowledge of these inscriptions, and using them to subvert fundamental aspects of Assyrian imperial ideology. And second, like the material discussed in the previous chapter of this book, this narrative portrays a fundamental ideological battle between YHWH and Assyria, in which each claims recognition as universal sovereign. The narrative therefore follows directly from the view of the God-Assyria conflict in Isa 10:5–34. This view is not found elsewhere in the book of Kings.

A further consideration is the unique role that Jerusalem's status fills in this narrative. As I discuss in the rhetorical analysis below, the question of Jerusalem's submission becomes a sort of litmus test through which the ideological battle will be determined: if YHWH succeeds in defending Jerusalem, then Assyria's claims of universal sovereignty will be given the lie. Implied throughout the narrative, and nearly stated in Isa 37:15, is the corollary: if Assyria succeeds in convincing Jerusalem to submit, then the claims of YHWH to be universal sovereign will have been routed ideologically, since God will not have defended the city.

This unique status of Jerusalem relates to the descriptions of Jerusalem in Isa 14:28–32 and Isa 31, which were discussed in chapter 4 of this book. In those passages, God is described as defending Jerusalem, and Jerusalem's status is contrasted with that of the Philistine cities. These passages describe Assyria as interested in the latter, but not in Jerusalem. Although this lack of interest was a function of Jerusalem's geographic location, God is portrayed as active in the defense of the city in passages such as Isa 14:32 and 31:5. By 701 BCE, as we see in Isa 36–37, Assyria was keenly interested in Jerusalem: if not in controlling the city, at least in threatening it as a means of extracting its treasure.

The portrayal of God as defender of Jerusalem in Isa 36–37 does not emerge solely from the events of 701, as some proponents of the "Zion theology" have argued. It emerges from the role of YHWH as defender of Jerusalem in Isa 14:28–32 and Isa 31:1–5. The nature of God's relationship to Assyria changes from those chapters, which reflect the reality of 727 and 712, respectively, to Isa 36–37, which reflects the reality of the period after 701. By the latter period, the prophet viewed the Assyrians as ideological rivals of YHWH, whose claims to universal sovereignty could only be countered by their defeat in battle by YHWH. Out of the events of the threat to Jerusalem in 701, the prophet weaves the narrative of their defeat.

3.1. A Rhetorical Analysis of Source B, Including B-1 and B-2

In this narrative, the threat to Jerusalem is primarily verbal. The narrative begins with the description of a "weighty force" (Isa 37:2) that Sennacherib dispatched.[25] However weighty this force may have been, its mission is clearly to speak to the city; there is no statement anywhere in the narrative suggesting that it engages in any actual fighting. The force positions itself at the upper pool channel, and the emphasis on this location in the narrative seems meant to evoke the position of Isaiah in 7:3. In the narrative of Isa 7–8, the prophet's message (especially in 7:1–17 and in 8:7; discussed in chapter 3) emphasizes the defensibility of Jerusalem, and castigates Judah for overestimating the threat posed by the Syro-Ephraimite forces, and for therefore becoming tributary to Assyria. By emphasizing that the Assyrian forces in 36:2 stand in the same position as the prophet did in 7:3, Isaiah once again evokes that Jerusalem is defensible and foreshadows the collapse of the Assyrian threat.

The verbal threats are formulated as two speeches delivered by Rabshakeh, an Assyrian official, in Isa 36:4–10 and 36:14–20, which Hezekiah's officials and Isaiah discuss in a brief dialogue in 37:3–7. These are followed by a letter of Rabshakeh in 37:10–13, which follows the style of his speeches, by a prayer of Hezekiah (37:15–18), and by a final mocking speech of the prophet delivered against Sennacherib (37:21–32). The narrative ends with the downfall of the Assyrian army in 37:36, and then, in telescoping fashion, narrates Sennacherib's death at the hand of his sons in 37:37–38, an event that only transpired in 681 BCE.

The narrative has been divided into two sections by many scholars: Source B-1, consisting of 36:2–37:9a and 37:36 and including the first two speeches of Rabshakeh, the discussion of Hezekiah's officials and Isaiah, and the final decimation of the Assyrian army; and Source B-2, which consists of 37:9b–35, including the letter of Rabshakeh, Hezekiah's prayer, and the mocking speech of Isaiah.[26] The primary impetus motivating this division is the natural narrative flow from the prophet's optimistic prediction to Hezekiah's officials in 37:6–7, which is fulfilled in 37:36 (and more fully in 37:38). This narrative flow is divided by the intervening material.

As I discuss below, the division of the narrative into B-1 and B-2 is unlikely to reflect the historical process of the narrative's composition. With reasonable certainty, most of the material assigned to B-1 and some of

25. To avoid cumbersome formulations, references henceforth are only to the Isaiah passage; the parallel chapter and verse in 2 Kings can easily be found. Because some of the passages quoted are long, I present them only in translation.

26. Bibliographic references can be found in Roberts, *First Isaiah*, 443 n. 2, to which can be added the extensive survey of Gallagher, *Sennacherib's Campaign to Judah*, 143–274.

the material assigned to B-2 can be dated not later than a few decades after Sennacherib's campaign. On the other hand, some of the material dated to B-2 does appear to belong to later compositional strata. The narrative almost certainly results from a more complex process of composition and addition, and much of the narrative dates from the period shortly after 701. This earlier material (that is, that composed shortly after 701) demonstrates the rhetorical goals of the narrative; these are expanded by the additional material added in source B-2. The interruption of narrative flow (which formed the basis for the division into B-1 and B-2) is designed to heighten narrative tension and to call attention to the goal of the narrative. The narrative aims to portray the Assyrian campaign as a theological threat, rather than a military one.

There is a lively scholarly debate concerning the date of composition of this prophetic narrative. Both the first speech of the Rabshakeh (36:4–10, assigned to B-1) and the mocking speech that concludes the narrative (37:21–32, assigned to B-2) contain clear references to specific motifs we know from Neo-Assyrian royal inscriptions. Both of these passages engage with these motifs and use them in a carefully-crafted polemic against Neo-Assyrian imperial ideology.[27]

On the other hand, the list of cities in Rabshakeh's letter (the list is in 37:12–13; the letter appears in 37:9–13) seems to reflect Babylonian campaigns in the late seventh century.[28] Similarly, the statement in Hezekiah's prayer that Assyria burned foreign gods (37:19) does not fit with what we know of Assyrian policy, and its composition may post-date the Assyrian period.[29] Both these passages are assigned to Source B-2. As I argue below, this later material augments a polemic against Assyrian claims of empire, a polemic that is clearly present in the earlier material I discussed in the preceding paragraph. Therefore, I agree with Cogan and Tadmor's assessment that most of the narrative, including large parts of Source B-2, dates "two or

27. One of the earliest studies of Assyrianisms in these speeches was Chaim Cohen's "Neo-Assyrian Elements in the First Speech of the Biblical Rab-Shaqe," *IOS* 9 (1979): 32–48; and Machinist, "Assyria and Its Image," 729–34, discussed below. Those who have discounted these references, including Ehud Ben-Zvi, "Who Wrote the Speech of the Rab-Shakeh and When," *JBL* 109 (1990): 79–92, do not engage the Assyrian material.

28. Nadav Na'aman, "Updating the Messages: Hezekiah's Second Prophetic Story (2 Kings 19.9b-35) and the Community of Babylonian Deportees," in *Like a Bird in a Cage: The Invasion of Sennacherib in 701 BCE*, JSOTSup 363, ed. Lester L. Grabbe (Sheffield: Sheffield Press, 2003), 201–20, here 208–11. This point is developed by Amitai Baruchi-Unna, "The Story of Hezekiah's Prayer (2 Kings 19) and Jeremiah's Polemic Regarding the Inviolability of Jerusalem," *JSOT* 39 (2015): 281–97, here 286–87.

29. Na'aman, "Updating the Messages," 211, and references there.

three generations later than the prophet (Isaiah)," which would place this material in the mid-seventh century.[30] The later composition of 37:12–3 and 37:19 suggest that these were later additions to the narrative, much of which was already composed in the first half of the seventh century.

In the following, I focus on two lines of analysis to demonstrate that much of the narrative dates from this period: I highlight motifs from Assyrian imperial communications in these speeches, and show how these motifs work as part of an overall rhetorical goal of presenting the Assyrian threat to Jerusalem as a threat to the universal sovereignty of YHWH.

In considering these speeches, it is first necessary to adduce a comparison to the general genre of siege speeches, which are relevant despite the fact that Jerusalem was not actually besieged by Sennacherib, as far as we know. Such speeches are known from around the world, and in particular from ancient Assyria. All attacking armies attempt to obtain the surrender of a city during siege, in order to save military manpower and military equipment. The threat of military conquest is present, but the goal of the attackers is to avoid such conquest, for reasons of convenience.[31] We know of such speeches by the Assyrians from the Assyrian reliefs depicting the siege of a city, in which a scribe reads a message to the defenders, presumably calling on them to surrender.[32] This is also known to us from divination texts, in which kings ask whether they will conquer a particular city "by means of words of peace."[33]

The arguments used by the Assyrians to induce surrender are known to us from several sources. One such text is a report to the king (apparently Tiglath-pileser III) of how Assyrian officials stood and argued with Babylonian officials "at the Marduk gate (of Babylon)" and demanded that they adopt a pro-Assyrian policy. They report that they used "many arguments," that many messages were exchanged, and that they questioned the logic of the Babylonian policy of favouring the Chaldeans.[34] Another is the famous message of Assurbanipal to the Babylonians, in which he encourages the Babylonians to accept his rule and reject that of the rebel king (his brother,

30. Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings*, 244.

31. The presence of the Assyrian army in the Shephelah during the period described in Isa 36–37 means that the Assyrians had the capacity to conquer Jerusalem, and the scenario in Jerusalem is similar to that envisioned in most siege speeches. See the detailed discussion of other records of such negotiation in Eph'al, *The City Besieged*, 43–57.

32. Paul-Emile Botta and Eugène Flandin, *Monument de Ninive* (Paris: Imprimerie National, 1849-1850), 2: pl 145.

33. *dibbī tabūti*. Examples appear in SAA 4:34, no. 30, lines 6–8; SAA 4:48, no. 43, line 9; SAA 4:51, no. 44, lines 8–10; SAA 4:70, no. 63, lines 7–8; SAA 4:244, no. 267, lines 5–7.

34. Referred to as Nimrud Letter ND 2632, in the discussion in Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings*, 242, it is now published in SAA 19:104–105, no. 98.

Shamash-shum-ukin). Both scenarios are quite similar to that in Isa 36–37, in which the Judahites are also called upon to accept Sennacherib's rule and reject that of the rebel king. In the message of Ashurbanipal, the words of the rebel king are denigrated, and the forces at his disposal to further the rebellion are disparaged and compared unfavourably with those at the disposal of Assyria. Pardon is promised if the rebellion ends, and surrender is said to be to the advantage of the Babylonians[35] Behind these arguments stands the claim (real or otherwise) of the overwhelming force of Assyria, which the rebels cannot reasonably hope to beat.[36]

In the three messages of the Rabshakeh in Isa 36–37, these elements decrease in importance from the first to the third message, as theological elements increase. These "standard" or "military-political" elements are present in the first (36:4–10) and second (36:13–20) speeches alongside theological elements, but disappear in his third message (37:10–14). This third message consists solely of theological attacks on YHWH. In the first speech, theological elements are mentioned secondarily (in 36:7); theological elements appear more prominently in the second message, appearing in 36:15 and again in 36:18–20, and as noted, they are the sole topic in the third speech. The third speech develops a trajectory already present in the first two speeches. If we accept Na'aman's view that much (or all) of the third speech dates from the Babylonian period, we see that this speech continues a trajectory established in the earlier material, and does not break new ground in terms of its theological or rhetorical contribution to the narrative.

Below, I examine the messages in succession.

3.2. The First Speech: Isaiah 36:4–10

> (4) Thus said the great King, the King of Assyria: On what have you relied?[37]
> (5) Have you said that strategy and achievement in war are mere words of the lips? Now, on whom have you relied to rebel against me? (6) Behold, you have relied upon this staff of a broken reed, upon Egypt, that if a man leans on it, it will enter his hand and pierce it, so is Pharaoh king of Egypt to all those who trust in him. (7) And if you will say to me: "We trust in

35. W. L. Moran, "Ashurbanipal's Message to the Babylonians (ABL 301) with an Excursus on Figurative *biltu*," in *Ah, Assyria! Studies in Assyrian History and Ancient Near Eastern Historiography Presented to Hayim Tadmor*, Scripta Hierosolymitana 33, ed. Mordechai Cogan and Israel Eph'al (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1991), 320–21. Discussed in Gallagher, *Sennacherib's Campaign to Judah,* 202–5.

36. Arguments of the overwhelming force of the attackers are known to us from siege speeches from elsewhere in the world, most especially from the famous Melian Dialogue in Thucydides, *Peloponnesian Wars*, Book V paragraphs 85–111.

37. Lit., "What is this trust that you have trusted?" מה הבטחון הזה אשר בטחת

> YHWH our God," is he not the one whose high-places and altars Hezekiah removed, saying to Judah and Jerusalem "worship before this altar." (8) Now, wager with my master, the king of Assyria, and I will give you two thousand horses if you can place riders upon them. (9) How can you repel the face of a single governor, from among my master's least significant servants, relying upon Egypt for horses and chariots. (10) And now, is it without YHWH that I have come up against this land to destroy it? YHWH said to me: Go up against this land and destroy it!

Like many Assyrian royal inscriptions, this speech highlights the question of reliance. The introductory verses, verses 4–5, ask on whom the defenders of Jerusalem rely, and what gives them the confidence necessary to oppose Assyria's power. As Cohen showed, the verb *takālu*, indicating trust, is ubiquitous in Assyrian imperial inscriptions, and is used specifically in reference to the misplaced confidence of Assyrian opponents. The verb is used to deride their mistaken belief in the existence of military forces who can challenge Assyria.[38] But while the formulations indeed reflect Assyrian diction, the emphases in the speech do not.

The speech alternates between accusing Hezekiah of relying on Egypt (verses 6, 8–9) and accusing him of relying on YHWH (verses 7 and 10). The accusation of reliance on Egypt fits with what we know historically of the rebels of the southern Levant in this campaign. The imputation that allies are weak and will not succor the defenders is a frequently-found motif in siege speeches; it appears in the Melian dialogue, where the Athenian attackers discount the chances of Sparta aiding the defenders of Melos (verses 104–110).[39] The imbalance of power and the futility of awaiting allies are also implied in the message of Ashurbanipal to the Babylonians. But the discussion of trust in YHWH is unique in a siege speech.[40] Although Assyrian inscriptions frequently accuse their enemies of possessing "gods in which they trust" (*ilāni tiklišun*),[41] that accusation appears in the post facto description of the Assyrian victory, not in the inducement to surrender.

The nature of the discussion of reliance on YHWH is even more unusual. In verse 7, YHWH is portrayed as a deity who can only be

38. Cohen, "Neo-Assyrian Elements," 39–41. Further discussion appears in Gallagher, *Sennacherib's Campaign*, 190–91. Additional examples of Neo-Assyrian diction in the speech include the formulation "the great king" and the reed motif, on which see Cohen, "Neo-Assyrian Elements," 38–39 and 41–43.

39. See discussion in Eph'al, *The City Besieged*, 48–50.

40. As Gallagher notes in *Sennacherib's Campaign*, 191.

41. See references ibid., 190–91.

propitiated through sacrifice, and who is aghast at the cult centralization imposed by Hezekiah. In verse 10 YHWH is portrayed as commissioning the Assyrians and ordering the devastation of Judah. The idea that YHWH commissioned the Assyrians appears clearly in many of the Isaiah passages cited in chapter 3 of this book, and stands behind Isa 10:5. Both themes (propitiation by sacrifice and commissioning of the Assyrians) are specifically marshalled to oppose the idea that YHWH might defend Jerusalem: He is said to oppose Hezekiah because of his centralization of worship, and to support Assyria. This passage fits well within Biblical thought, and it seems unnecessary to accept Gallagher's tendency to view this as a probable Assyrian composition.

It is much more likely that this speech was composed by Judahites who "clearly understood the features of this (Assyrian) type of propaganda."[42] These Judahites (whom I identify as "Isaiah" and henceforth refer to in the singular) understood Assyrian claims of power, and saw these claims as denigrating the role of YHWH as universal sovereign. He preserved elements of the "original argumentation of the Rabshakeh," but re-interpreted this argumentation in light of his own evolving views of the nature of the conflict with Assyria.[43] And in describing the parleys that took place in Jerusalem between Hezekiah's officials and the Assyrian emissaries, he interpreted Assyrian claims of power as though they explicitly mentioned YHWH and sought to portray Him as standing on the side of Assyria. He did this in order to begin portraying the conflict with Assyria as one in which Assyria denied Judah's God's willingness to protect His land; in subsequent speeches, he portrays Assyria as denying God's ability to do so. As we see below in Isa 37:24–25 (which also contains Assyrian motifs), the author of this narrative interpreted Assyrian claims of empire as though they directly denigrated God and challenged God's authority. The author

42. The formulation I quote is a possibility considered and rejected by Gallagher (ibid., 198). Assyrian inscriptions do on occasion engage in theological debate, as Cogan and Tadmor (*II Kings*, 232) note in regard to the texts stating that Assyria was sent by the Babylonian god Marduk to rescue Babylon from an anti-Assyrian king. But Assyria's knowledge of Babylonian theology and engagement with it cannot be compared to the case of Judah. We know of Assyria's knowledge of Babylonian theology from many sources. No texts suggest even remotely that Assyria knew of Judahite theology. Gallagher (*Sennacherib's Campaign*, 187–89) discusses "How well did the Assyrians know Judean affairs?", but all the inferences he cites show that Assyrian intelligence interested itself in the disposition of Judah's military forces. None of the evidence points to Assyrian interest in Judahite theology.

43. See the comments of Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings*, 243, who argue that the Hebrew text preserves this original argumentation, without containing the *ipsissima verba* of the speaker.

of this passage heard calumnies about God whenever the Assyrians spoke of their invincible power. This develops the motif found in Isa 10:5–15, in which Assyria's assertion of its power challenges God's sovereignty.

3.3. The Second Speech: Isaiah 36:13–20

The second speech emphasizes the question of reliance on YHWH even more prominently, and focuses on this question of YHWH's ability to oppose Assyria:

> (13) Hear the words of the Great King, the King of Assyria. (14) Thus says the King: Do not let Hezekiah seduce you, for he will not be able to save you. (15) Let Hezekiah not cause you to rely upon YHWH, saying "YHWH will surely save us, and this city will not be given into the hands of the king of Assyria." (16) Do not obey Hezekiah, for thus says the king of Assyria: "Send a gift to me, and come out to me, and eat each man his vine and his fig tree and drink every man the water of his pit." (17) I will come and take you to a land like your land, a land of grain and wine, a land of bread and vineyards. (18) Lest Hezekiah incite you, saying "YHWH will save us." Have the gods of the nations saved their land from the hand of the king of Assyria? (19) Where is the God of Hamath or of Arpad? Where is the God of Sefarvayim? Did they save Samaria from my hand? (20) Which of all the gods of these lands who saved their land from my hand, that YHWH should save Jerusalem from my hand?

As Gallagher notes, the speech contains an inducement to surrender, and in that sense is similar to Ashurbanipal's message to the Babylonians and other Assyrian messages demanding surrender.[44] But the inducement to surrender appears only in verses 16–17; the remaining verses of the speech attack the notion of the reliability of YHWH. They specifically attack the idea that YHWH is a universal sovereign, superior in power to the king of Assyria, and incomparable to the gods of the lands. Verses 19–20 implicitly equate YHWH to these gods. That the speech contains Akkadian linguistic elements is beyond question: the double plural אלהי הארצות (the gods of the lands) in verse 20 is an exact translation of the Akkadian *ilāni mātāti*, and עשו אתי ברכה (send me a gift) in verse 16 is an "Aramaic or Akkadian calque."[45] But no Assyrian submission speech devotes such detailed attention to the idea that the god of a particular city is equal in power to the gods of other cities.[46]

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44. Gallagher, *Sennacherib's Campaign*, 202–5 and 210–12.

45. Ibid., 194–96, cites examples of the former, and Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings*, 232, of the latter.

46. Cohen, "Neo-Assyrian Elements," 34 n. 32, discusses the lack of Assyrian par-

The speech here is formulated as a direct attack on the notion of YHWH as universal sovereign. While no Assyrian saw their imperial propaganda as such an attack, Isaiah certainly interpreted it as such, as we saw in 10:5–15, and as we will see again in his final mocking speech in 37:21–32 (especially in 37:24–25). This speech is a classic Isaianic re-interpretation of Assyrian imperial propaganda: when the Assyrians spoke of their universal sovereignty, Isaiah heard an attack on the universal sovereignty of YHWH.

In this light, the reactions of Hezekiah and his officials, who are described as engaging in mourning practices in 37:1–2, are readily understood: they have just witnessed what the prophet sees as a denigration of YHWH. The dialogue between these officials and Isaiah serves to heighten the narrative tension. In the dialogue, acquiescing to the Assyrians' demand for Hezekiah's surrender is seen as tantamount to accepting their denigration of YHWH as universal sovereign. This is explicit in 37:4, in which the Rabshakeh is said to be sent to "denigrate the Living God." Narrative tension is further built by the request that Isaiah pray; he does not accede to this request, but only prophesies Sennacherib's departure. The prayer will only be recorded several verses later, in 37:15–20 (assigned to source B-2), when Hezekiah, rather than Isaiah, prays. This prayer, in many ways, marks the height of the narrative tension.

3.4. The Third Speech: Isaiah 37:10–13

But before reaching that prayer, the third and final message of Rabshakeh is delivered. In this message, there are no inducements to surrender, and no mention of the military weakness of political allies such as Egypt. The message is entirely devoted to denigrating YHWH as universal sovereign, and is the highpoint of the clash of titans.

> (10) Speak thus to Hezekiah king of Judah, saying: "Let not your God in whom you trust seduce you, saying 'Jerusalem shall not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria'." (11) Behold, you have heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all lands, destroying them, and you will be saved? (12) Have the gods of the nations delivered them, which my fathers have destroyed, Gozan, and Haran, and Rezeph, and the children of Eden that were in Telassar? (13) Where is the king of Hamath, and the king of Arpad, and the king of La'ir, Sepharvaim, Hena, and Ivvah?

The equation of YHWH to other gods, mentioned at the end of the previous message, forms the pith of this message. Hezekiah responds to this in his

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allels to the second speech.

prayer, and the role of the third message in the narrative, in many ways, is to provoke that prayer. In the prayer, Hezekiah focuses specifically on the Assyrian attacks on the universal sovereignty of YHWH. He does not ask for mercy for the city, nor does he invoke the Davidic covenant (mentioned in 37:35), but focuses solely and uniquely on the claim that YHWH must save the city because saving the city saves the reputation of YHWH as universal sovereign. Put differently, the political fate of Jerusalem has become a sort of litmus test for Assyrian political claims: only if Jerusalem withstands the Assyrian demands and does not surrender will YHWH's claim to universal sovereignty be vindicated.

4. Hezekiah's Prayer: Isaiah 37:15–20

> (16) YHWH of hosts, the God of Israel, enthroned upon the cherubim, You alone are God of all the kingdoms of the earth; You have made heaven and earth. (17) Incline Your ear, YHWH, and hear; open Your eyes, YHWH, and see; and hear all the words of Sennacherib, who has sent to taunt the living God. (18) It is true, YHWH, the kings of Assyria have laid waste all the countries, and their land, (19) and have cast their gods into the fire; for they were no gods, but the work of men's hands, wood and stone; therefore they have destroyed them. (20) Now therefore, YHWH our God, save us from his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that You, You alone, are YHWH.

The use of "alone" in this verse is directed against Assyria: if Assyria fails to overpower Jerusalem, then the world will know that God, and not Sennacherib, is supreme. The narrative tension has in verse 20 reached its peak: at issue is not the fate of Jerusalem, but the recognition of the universal sovereign. If Jerusalem falls, YHWH's status falls with it, and if Jerusalem stands, YHWH is vindicated.

This focus on the fate of Jerusalem is one of the factors leading Baruchi-Unna to view parts of this speech as deriving from a separate composition, composed during the Babylonian campaigns against Jerusalem, designed to argue that "the rescue of Jerusalem was dependent on the prayer of the king and not on unconditional mythic inviolability."[47] It is entirely probable that parts (or all) of the third speech of Rabshakeh and of Hezekiah's prayer are an addition to the narrative and date from the Babylonian period. But

47. Baruchi-Unna, "The Story of Hezekiah's Prayer," 297.

as I discuss below in regard to Isaiah's mocking speech (37:21–32), we cannot conclude from this that source B-2 as a whole dates to the Babylonian period.

The elements in the present narrative that contain clear references to Assyrian motifs, principally the first speech (36:4–10) and the final mocking speech of the prophet (37:21–32), show far more concern with Assyrian attacks on YHWH than with the Assyrian attack on Jerusalem. It is this focus on the theological that creates the drama in the narrative and establishes that the battle is not over a single city but over a clash between two claimants for universal sovereignty, Assyria and God. The third speech of Rabshakeh and Hezekiah's prayer develop this theme and increase the narrative tension, but do not create this theme. This clash between claimants for universal sovereignty, and the narrative tension generated by this clash, returns us to the cosmic combat motif discussed in chapter 5 of this work, and to the use of this motif in Isa 10:5–34.

5. The Cosmic Combat Motif in Source B

This motif is used to portray specific conflicts as representing a larger conflict over sovereignty in the world. The contestants in these combats each voice a claim to represent a powerful universal force, and struggle over which will achieve the highest place in the hierarchy. The two forces battle in some fashion; one emerges dominant and achieves sovereignty, while the defeated force is utterly debased and removed from any position of power. In Mesopotamia, this motif is developed into the two mythological narratives that celebrate the sovereignty of Ninurta and Marduk, the myths of Anzu and Enūma Elish, respectively. In these myths, the sovereignty of the two gods is threatened by forces that represent disorder, Anzu and Tiamat, and the myths build narrative tension by describing how these forces become stronger and stronger. At the high-point of each myth is a battle between the gods and the forces of disorder, which the gods win. Celebrated in the various *akītu* rituals, these myths are used to buttress Assyrian political hegemony, as the king of Assyria is ceremonially and mythically associated with the two gods who emerge victorious and supreme in the universe.

As discussed in chapter 5, this motif also stands behind the Exodus narrative in Ex 5–15, and especially behind the narrative of the Red Sea. In that narrative, tension is built by the approach of Pharaoh's well-armed forces, leaving the Israelites in despair (Ex 14:9–12). YHWH's defeat of Pharaoh demonstrates His sovereignty, not only over the Egyptian forces, but over Canaan, as appears in Ex 15:13–18. God emerges as Eternal King.

Isaiah 10:5–19 and 24–27 reference the cosmic combat motif through allusions to the events of the Red Sea, Assyrian rituals that evoke cosmic

combat myths, and Assyrian literary compositions that evoke the Ninurta-like status of the Assyrian king. Each unit in these passages (10:5–15, 10:16–19, and 10:24–27) references a different aspect of this combat motif and uses it as a basis for describing the impending battle of YHWH against Assyria. In both 10:5–15 and 10:24–27, this battle is specifically connected with the defense of Jerusalem: in 10:12 it is said to be fought "at Mount Zion and Jerusalem" while in 10:24, the battle is to protect "My people who dwell in Zion."

In weaving together the events of the military defeat of 701 to create a narrative about the universal sovereignty of YHWH, Source B draws on the cosmic combat motif. The choice to use the cosmic combat motif as a narrative framework in which to tie together the different events of the 701 campaign is influenced by the passages in Isa 10:5–34. In searching for the intellectual background to the choice of the cosmic combat motif in Source B, it must be recognized that Isa 10:5–34 specifically correlate YHWH's defense of Jerusalem to His defeat of Assyria, and use the cosmic combat motif as a basis for this defeat.

In other words, Isa 10:5–19 (and probably other parts of Isa 10:5–34) serve as a sort of model for the narrative emphases adopted by Source B. As discussed in the previous chapter, Isa 10:5-15 relate specifically to the period of Sargon II. These verses cannot be understood as reactions to the events of 701.

This proposition departs markedly from the view advanced by Clements, who holds that the Zion tradition (the notion that YHWH will defend Jerusalem) developed in Isaiah in reaction to the events of 701. Clements argues against the views of earlier scholars, especially Mowinckel and von Rad, who held that the Zion tradition in Isaiah represented the Israelite adaption of more ancient cult-legends connected to Jerusalem.[48] They pointed out weaknesses and circularity in the argument that this tradition originated with the Canaanites or Jebusites, an argument Mowinckel advanced based on his cult-mythological interpretation of Ps 46, 48, and 76.[49] Clements argued that "The doctrine of Jerusalem's inviolability emerged not as an adaptation of an ancient myth, but as an interpretation of a series of historical events, and focused most directly on Hezekiah's confrontation with Sennacherib."[50]

48. Clements notes Mowinckel's view that Source B is a "largely unhistorical account of a catastrophe" and that it represents the "carrying over of our cult legend onto historical persons and events." Clements, *Isaiah and the Deliverance of Jerusalem*, 72.

49. "It could certainly be that the psalms themselves are of later date than the tradition reflected in them." Ibid., 74.

50. Ibid., 84.

The problem with Clements' view is that the *events* of 701 (as Mowinckel noted) do not involve any battle for Jerusalem or any defense of Jerusalem. At most, Sennacherib's forces engaged in verbal conflicts with the defenders of Jerusalem as they struggled to convince them to accept Assyrian sovereignty. The idea of a miraculous defense of Jerusalem, in which the city stood in imminent danger of conquest by Assyria, and was defended by YHWH, emerges from Isaiah's narrative in Source B, rather than from the historical events.

The intellectual trajectory that developed the narrative of Source B seems to owe at least as much to the cosmic combat motif as it does to the events of 701. If the cosmic combat motif exercises a decisive influence on the shaping of this narrative, one needs to ask why the narrative's authors chose to portray the events of 701 by referring to the cosmic combat motif. The events of 701 themselves do not provide an impetus to use the cosmic combat motif.

It follows, therefore, that the idea of applying the cosmic combat motif to a battle in which YHWH defends Jerusalem from Assyria pre-dates Source B and exists independently of the events of 701. Rather than searching for this idea in Psalms or in pre-Israelite Jerusalem traditions, we note that this idea is recorded in parts of Isa 10:5–34. In chapter 5, I argued that parts of this passage clearly react to events and literary compositions known from the reign of Sargon II, and are to be dated to that period.[51] Out of the ideas formulated in parts of Isa 10:5–34 emerged the conscious decision to weave together the events of 701 by referring to the cosmic combat motif, and to describe these events as demonstrating irrevocably that YHWH alone is sovereign.

Several stages can therefore be identified in Isaiah's understanding of the nature of God's protection of Jerusalem. These correlate with his changing perceptions of the nature of the political/military threats Judah faces. In Isa 8:5–8, which I discussed in chapter 3, Jerusalem is presented as defensible, mirroring the tendency in Isa 7–8 to discount the Syro-Ephraimite threat. In Isa 14:28–32 and 31:5 (discussed in chapter 3), God is portrayed as protecting Jerusalem, without mentioning a defeat of Assyria; these passages reflect a period in which Assyria was interested primarily in Philistia and the coastal road, and evinced little interest in the interior of the southern Levant. In Isa 10:5–15, 10:24–27, and 10:28–32, Isaiah connects YHWH's

51. This is of course the fundamental disagreement between my position and Clements's: he sees the idea of the inviolability of Jerusalem as developing largely in reaction to the events of 701. See his view of the evolution of this doctrine in *Isaiah and the Deliverance*, 84–86.

defeat of Assyria to Jerusalem, and in 10:5–15, he connects this defeat to a conflict between YHWH and Assyria over sovereignty.

These stages reach their culmination in Source B. Isaiah's account of the events of 701 describes a conflict that is largely verbal and theological. Although the arguments presented by his Assyrian characters use phrases and certain motifs found in Assyrian propaganda, they invest the events with a theological significance that differs significantly from the Assyrian material. These arguments show elements of continuity with Isaiah's framing of political conflicts as attacks on God's universal sovereignty, as part of a larger cosmic combat between God and Assyrian claims of empire. The evolution in Isaiah's perception of the Assyrian political threat to Jerusalem and its theological implications, culminates in his framing Judah's survival of the Assyrian threat in 701 as a clash of titans.

The use of the cosmic combat motif to narrate the events of 701 is itself a subversion of Assyrian rhetoric. Assyrian imperial ideologues used the cosmic combat motif, and its representation in myth and ritual, as a model justifying Assyria's claim of universal hegemony. Isaiah here uses this motif itself, and its representation in history, as a justification of the universal hegemony of YHWH.

6. The Attack on Assyrian Ideology in Isaiah 37:24–26

In tandem with Barth, Clements views Source B as having evolved substantially after Isaiah's time, and as owing its literary form to the writers active in the time of Josiah.[52] In my discussion of Source B up to this point, I have argued that the overall rhetorical goal that governs the shape of the narrative reacts to Assyrian claims of empire, but I have not demonstrated specific passages that subvert specific claims found in datable Assyrian royal inscriptions. Interestingly, such a passage appears not in the material assigned to Source B-1, but in the material assigned to Source B-2.

This passage, which appears at the beginning of Isaiah's mocking poem against Sennacherib in Isa 37:24–26, subverts specific motifs from Assyrian royal inscriptions. In verse 24, it references the speeches delivered by Assyrian emissaries in attempting to subdue Jerusalem, and therefore appears to post-date the composition of Source B-1. It engages with Assyrian claims of universal sovereignty; its knowledge of specific Assyrian motifs and its use of these in undermining key elements of Assyrian ideology point to its having been composed in a period when an intellectual battle against Assyrian

52. Ibid., 84–89.

claims of empire was underway. Therefore, the passage must have been composed between 701 and the middle of the seventh century.

The passage is part of an oracle (37:21–32), addressed to Sennacherib, in which Isaiah responds to Hezekiah's prayer. It begins in verse 22 with a declaration that Jerusalem mocks Sennacherib by "nodding her head after you," thus evoking the idea that Sennacherib had departed, and Jerusalem remains. The last man standing seems to win. The passage goes on to explain why Sennacherib is mocked: verse 23 asks "Whom have you denigrated and disparaged? Against whom have you raised your voice, and lifted your haughty eyes? Against the Holy One of Israel!" This verse clearly establishes the idea that the conflict heretofore described does not have a solely military nature, but is primarily a theological one in which Sennacherib is said to have mocked YHWH.

The content of Sennacherib's denigration of YHWH is then cited in verses 24–25**:**

> (24) ביד עבדיך חרפת ה' ותאמר: ברב רכבי אני עליתי מרום הרים ירכתי לבנון, ואכרת קומת ארזיו מבחר ברשיו, ואבוא מרום קצו יער כרמלו. (25) אני קרתי ושתיתי מים ואחרב בכף פעמי כל יארי מצור.
>
> (24) By means of your messengers, you have denigrated YHWH:
> And you have said: In my many chariots, I have gone up to the peaks of mountains, to the high points of Lebanon, and I have cut down the heights of its cedars, its choicest junipers, and I have reached its highest peaks, its lush forests. (25) I have cooled and drunk water, and I have dried up with the sole of my tread all the rivers of Egypt.

Interestingly, the actions in verses 24b–25, about which Sennacherib is said to boast, do not in any way mention YHWH. Sennacherib is said to boast of several accomplishments: ascending mountain peaks in chariots, cutting down trees, drinking water, drying up watercourses. Nowhere in these verses is Sennacherib said to have mentioned YHWH, yet these boasts are still seen as reflecting denigration of YHWH.

This contrast between the content of verses 24b–25 and the statement "You have denigrated YHWH" reflects the perception seen earlier in this chapter, in Isaiah's interpretation and re-formulation of the Assyrian siege speeches. Isaiah saw the boasts of the Assyrian king as a denigration of YHWH, not because the mere claims of the Assyrian king to these four accomplishments explicitly expressed rejection of YHWH, but because these claims were part of a larger ideology. Assyrian imperial ideology, of which these boasts were a small representation, claimed universal sovereignty for Assyria. This was seen by Isaiah as a threat to the idea of God's sovereignty in the universe. These boasts represent denigration of YHWH because the

Assyrians presented Assur and his representative, the Assyrian king, as universal sovereigns. Assyrian boasts, even without mentioning YHWH, challenged God's sovereignty.

Each of the boasts in these verses do indeed appear in Assyrian royal inscriptions. For reasons that are discussed below, it is extremely unlikely that these boasts could have been formulated without knowledge of the motifs we know from Assyrian royal inscriptions. Whoever composed these verses did so while relying on these motifs, known to him from contacts between Assyrian and Judahite royal officials. I discuss each of these motifs in turn, below.

7. The Cutting Down of Lush Trees in the Mountains

The first motif, which has been discussed in reference to Isa 10:34, is that of cutting down lush trees as an act of bravery.[53] As noted there, Sennacherib's inscriptions record the brave ascent to the mountains and the cutting of trees there:

> In those days, the gods Ashur and Ishtar who love my priesthood called my name, boards of cedar which from long-ago days had grown and had become very great, in the midst of the Sirara mountains, mountains which stand in secret, they showed me their place of origin[54]

This is an extract from one of Sennacherib's longest inscriptions, but the passage noted above is from a section that deals with his palace construction. In discussing these inscriptions, and Machinist's argument that Isaiah passages draw on these, Frahm notes that the source of the timber here is in the Sirara mountains, part of the anti-Lebanon chain north of Damascus, rather than in the Lebanon mountains as appears in Isa 37:24.[55] But Machinist's claim that these and other passages in Isaiah that describe the chopping down of mighty trees in the mountains reference Assyrian inscriptions does not rest on the specific mountain chain whose wood was harvested. Rather, it is based on the understanding that an Israelite scribe could not have invented the motif of cutting down mighty cedars in the mountains as an act of bravery, and that the similarity of the motif found

53. As discussed in reference to Isa 10:16–19, the vocabulary in these verses includes the formulations יער and כרמל, which Williamson saw as later vocabulary, because of their use in Isa 35:2. But their inclusion in this passage, which clearly references motifs found in Assyrian royal inscriptions, makes that very unlikely.

54. RINAP 3/1:137, Sennacherib 17, col. v, lines 46–47. A parallel text appears in RINAP 3/2:35–36, Sennacherib 39, lines 38–41.

55. Frahm, *Einleitung in die Sanherib Inschriften*, 43–45.

in Isaiah to the one found in the Assyrian inscriptions shows that the latter are its source.

That an Israelite scribe could not have invented this motif is clear from its appearance in world literature. Such motifs appear in folk literature of countries in which tall trees grow, and thus appear in folk literature of the Assam and Madras regions in India where such trees are found.[56] No such motif appears elsewhere in Biblical literature, which is reasonable, since such trees do not grow in the Land of Israel, and it would be impossible for local heroes to demonstrate their bravery in this way.

The author of Isa 37:24 took the motif of chopping down mighty trees in the mountains and disregarded the names of the mountain chains mentioned in the Mesopotamian sources. Instead, he referenced a mountain chain known to his audience by virtue of its relative proximity to the Land of Israel, whose cedars were known to his audience by virtue of their role in regional trade.[57] The pair Lebanon and Carmel, which appears frequently in Isaiah (as Williamson has noted), are used as a metonymy for a lush area where trees grow easily, and not as a precise geographic reference.[58] Perhaps the reference to Lebanon was influenced by Assyria's role in dominating the trade of such wood from Lebanon.

8. The Ascent to the Mountains with Chariots and the Water There

The second motif is the ascent into mountains by chariots, itself no small feat. Such a boast appears nowhere in Biblical literature as an act of bravery of an Israelite hero, but is ubiquitous in Sennacherib's inscriptions, appearing in at least three separate texts.[59] These describe his accomplishments in

56. On folk-tales from Assam, see Stith Thompson and Jonas Balys, *The Oral Tales of India* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University, 1958), 189, motif F 614.8; on its trees, see *Encyclopedia Britannica* (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1970), II, 620a s.v. Assam. On the folk-tales from the Madras region, see Thompson and Bayls, *The Oral Tales of India,* 248 motif H 1562.1.1. On trees in Madras, see *Encyclopedia Britannica* s.v. Madras, 14: 557b.

57. On the role of Lebanese wood in regional trade, see Bustenay Oded, "The Phoenician Cities and the Assyrian Empire at the Time of Tiglath-pileser III," *ZDPV* 90 (1974): 38–49, here 48, and Shiego Yamada, "Qurdi-Assur-lamur: his letters and career," in *Treasures on Camels' Humps: Historical and Literary Studies from the Ancient Near East Presented to Israel Eph'al*, ed. Mordechai Cogan and Dan'el Kahn (Jerusalem: Magnes, 2008), 296–311.

58. כרמל in Isaiah does not consistently refer to the mountain of that name, but to lush areas, as in Isa 32:15.

59. These are RINAP 3/1:178, Sennacherib 22, iii 80-iv 11, from which the text is cited; RINAP 3/2:308–310, Sennacherib 222, a short relief on the Judi Dagh mountain;

battling at Mount Nipur (today known as Judi Dagh in eastern Anatolia near the Tigris River) in his fifth campaign, and one of these texts was inscribed in a relief at the mountain.

ina šēpī Nibur karāši ušaškinma
itti qurbūti šēpīya nasqūti u ṣābī tāḫāziya la gāmelūti
anāku kīma rīmi ekdi pānuššun aṣbat
ḫurri naḫalli natbāk šadî mēlê marṣūti
ina kussê aštamdiḫ
ašar ana kussî šupšuqu ina šēpīya aštaḫḫiṭ kīma arme
ana zuqti šaqûti ṣēruššun eli
ašar birkāya mānaḫtu īšâ
ṣēr aban šadî ūšibma
mê nādi kaṣûte ana ṣumēya lu ašti
ina ubānāt ḫuršānī ardešunūtima
aštakan taḫtâšun

At the foot of Mount Nippur I caused my camp to dwell
With my select guards and fighting troops who do not tire
I, like a brave wild-ox went before them.
Through gorges of the streams, outflows of the mountains, and rugged slopes,
I passed in my sedan-chair
In places too difficult for my chair, I jumped on my two feet like a mountain goat
To the highest mountains I ascended against them
In places where my knees became tired,
I sat on the side of a mountain-boulder
Cold water from the waterskin I drank to my thirst
I chased them to the tops of the mountains
I caused their defeat.

These texts describe Sennacherib's bravery in ascending the mountains, and his use of conveyance even in difficult conditions.[60] They highlight his

and a text on bull colossi stationed at the main entrance to the throne room, RINAP 3/2:81, Sennacherib 46, lines 38–42.

60. In RINAP 3/2:81–82, Sennacherib 46, lines 42–44, the king's bravery in ascending difficult mountains is also vaunted, in reference to his campaign in a different region: "None of the kings of the past, before me, had marched through the difficult paths on account of the rugged mountains ... I myself with my combat troops ascended with a struggle the steep mountain peaks." This highlights the importance attached to the king's conveyance even in difficult terrain. Similarly in the Bellino cylinder, RINAP 3/1:52, Sennacherib 3, line 21: "In the high mountains, difficult terrain, I rode on horseback and had my personal chariot carried on (men's) necks."

personal bravery, and feed into the image of the omnipotent hero-king that is a central part of Assyrian imperial ideology. It is difficult to imagine that the boast of entering the mountains with chariots would appear in Isa 37:24 without awareness of this motif in Assyrian inscriptions, especially those of Sennacherib.

These texts emphasize drinking water in the mountains. This motif appears both in the Poem of Erra and in the Gilgamesh Epic, and it indicates the bravery of a hero who thrives on difficult conditions in the countryside, where campaigns take place.[61] In Erra, drinking water in the mountains is contrasted with the easy life of drinking beer in the city.

Sennacherib's inscriptions seem to be the source for the boast of drinking of water in the mountains, which appears in Isa 37:25a. This is a bizarre boast, since it does not appear to indicate any act of bravery in its current context, and seems faintly ridiculous. Disconnected from its original context in Mesopotamian hero stories, it seems to be a "blind motif."

The phrase אֲנִי קַרְתִּי וְשָׁתֵיתִי מָיִם, which I translated above as "I have cooled and drunk water" in verse 25a, is challenging from a linguistic point of view. The difficulty lies in determining the root of the verb קַרְתִּי.

The verb is usually taken as deriving from the root קור, a biform of נקר, which means to dig in the earth or form a hole in stone.[62] Hess, however, noted that the direct object of verbs with similar meanings, חפר and כרה, is always the object that is dug (the hole, pit, or cave).[63] The sentence could therefore be understood as "I dug (some object) and then drank water."[64]

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61. Andrew R. George, *The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 1:207, from the Yale Tablet, col. vi line 269. The reference in Erra appears in Stephanie Dalley's translation in William W. Hallo and K. Lawson Younger, eds., *Context of Scripture* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 1: text 1.113, from Tablet 1, line 58.

62. Thus Rashi and similarly in King James, in NJPS, in NRSV, NEB. An illustrative example of this root appears in Isa 51:1.

63. Richard S. Hess, "Hiphil Forms of QWR in Jeremiah VI7," *VT* 41 (1991): 347–50, here 348.

64. Elnathan Weissert, in his detailed discussion "Jesajas Bescheribung der Hybris des assyrischen Königs und seine Auseinandersetzung mit ihr," in *Assur – Gott, Stadt und land*, ed. Johannes Renger (Weisbaden: Harrassowitz, 2011), 287–310, here 295, suggests understanding שתיתי as meaning "cause to flow," reflecting the Akkadian *šadādu* and based on שתתיה in Isa 19:10. The problem with this approach is that methodologically, one ought first to seek out the most common possible interpretation of a lexeme, and the verb שתה in all other occurrences in the Hebrew Bible clearly means "to drink." On this methodology, see Chaim Cohen, "The 'Held method' for comparative Semitic philology," *JANES* 19 (1989): 9–23.

Such an interpretation does indeed fit with other boasts of Sennacherib. In a text established near the *akītu* house, Sennacherib titles himself *mušaḫru nārē*, or digger of canals, and similarly:

> *mukīn mê šīqāti ina qarbāti māt Aššur*
>
> who prepares irrigation water for the fields of Assur.[65]

The digging of water channels is a widespread boast of Sennacherib. It appears in reference to his activities both in Assur and in Nineveh, and is discussed in detail below.[66]

But the absence of the object being dug in verse 25a creates a certain difficulty in understanding the verse. It is preferable syntactically to understand the phrase אֲנִי קַרְתִּי וְשָׁתִיתִי מָיִם as containing two verbs that share a single direct object, just like Deut 16:12, ושמרת ועשית את החקים האלה.

This requires that we understand the verb קרתי as deriving from the root קרר, to cool, from the substantive קר, cold. Such a verb was identified by both Holladay and McKane in Jer 6:7:

כְּהָקֵיר בור (בֵּיר) מֵימֶיהָ כֵּן הֵקֵרָה רָעָתָהּ חָמָס וְשֹׁד יִשָּׁמַע בָּהּ עַל־פָּנַי תָּמִיד חֳלִי וּמַכָּה

Although that verse is often understood as comparing a well that brings forth water to Jerusalem and brings forth evil, this understanding does not fit with the language of the verse, which refers to the evil itself as הֵקֵרָה. Both of the scholars noted suggested that a better interpretation is: just as a water cistern ensures that the water it contains remains cool, so is the evil of Jerusalem's inhabitants cool and fresh.[67] Their evil was recently created, is still "cool" and hasn't heated up from the sun's heat. This interpretation fits the context, in which the injuries produced by this evil are described as "consistently before me." This indicates that the evil is continuously being produced.

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65. RINAP 3/2:247, Sennacherib 168, line 14, with the note that no previous king had done so. See also discussion in Russell, *Sennacherib's "Palace without Rival,"* 249. See chapter 3 n. 56.

66. See for example the inscription from the Bavian, RINAP 3/2:310–317, Sennacherib 223, and the King Prism (or Heidel Prism), RINAP 3/1:141, Sennacherib 17, col. vii, lines 25–30, cited below.

67. William Lee Holladay, *Jeremiah 1.* Hermenaia (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 204, who also discusses the connection between the roots קור and קרר; and William McKane, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Jeremiah 1* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 143.

This interpretation of Jer 6:7 suggests that a similar verb, קרר/קור, which appears in Isa 37:25a, should indeed be translated "I cooled and drank water." Such a suggestion was raised by Tsevat, who connected Isa 37:25a to Sennacherib's inscriptions.[68]

Three related elements connect Isa 37:24–25a to the passage cited above from Sennacherib's inscriptions. One is the ascent to the mountains in a campaign with chariots, discussed above. A second is the reaching of the highest summits of the mountains, expressed in Isa 37:24 as אני עליתי מרום הרים and by Sennacherib (in the passage cited above, which appears in several different texts) as

> *ana zuqti šaqûti ṣēruššun eli* (I ascended the highest mountains)
> and *ubānāt ḫuršānī ardešunūtima* (I chased them on the tops of the mountains).

The third is the drinking of cold water in the mountains. The passage from Sennacherib's inscriptions, as noted, appears in several different texts, and was clearly an important part of Sennacherib's self-presentation in the years following 701. It is more than likely that these motifs were also used in verbal communication between Assyrian and Judahite officials in these years.

It is extremely unlikely that these three elements would appear in two sources created independently of each other. The three elements create a complex motif, and such complex motifs are generally not developed independently without shared conditions.[69] It is much more likely that Isaiah drew on these elements in creating the Biblical text, in order to show the Assyrian boasts using Assyrian motifs.

Here too, the Assyrian boasts mention a specific mountain range, which is not mentioned in the Biblical text, for the same reason that the mountain ranges in which the cutting down of trees took place was not mentioned.

9. The Drying Up of Watercourses by Means of Feet

The last motif in these verses appears in verse 25b: וְאַחְרֵב בְּכַף־פְּעָמַי כָּל יְאֹרֵי מָצוֹר, "I dried up with the sole of my tread all the rivers of Egypt." Tawil has here argued that the reference is to the digging of canals in the region of Mount Muṣri, north of Nineveh, to provide water to the city of Nineveh, in 694:

68. Matitiahu Tsevat, "Some Biblical Notes," *HUCA* 24 (1952): 107–14, here 109.
69. Albright, *From the Stone Age to Christianity*, 67.

> I mounted an expedition to search for water at the foot of Mount Muṣri, then I climbed high and marched with difficulty to the city Elmunaqinnû. I found sources of water in front of the cities Dūr-Ištar, Šibaniba, and Sulu, then I made their narrow openings bigger and turned (them) into springs.
>
> For a course of those waters, I cut through rugged mountains, confined areas, with picks and directed their outflow into the plain of Nineveh. I strengthened their channels like the base of a mountain. I provided a regular supply of those waters in them.[70]

The continuation of the passage describes the planting of orchards and gardens on newly-tilled soil created behind the dams. As noted above, the building of canals and the re-routing of water courses occupy an important place in Sennacherib's inscriptions and in his self-portrayal.

It seems probable that Sennacherib's activity in this region stands behind the boast in this passage. The passage in Isaiah makes specific reference to the drying up "by means of the sole of my tread" of these water courses. In interpreting this phrase, Weissert has noted a parallel to Deut 11:10, in which foot-activity refers to the building of canals.[71] This suggests that the boast here refers to canal-building activity.

The boast in 37:25b refers specifically to the drying up of water-courses. This might be a reference to the drying up of land, as referred to in the passage from Sennacherib's inscriptions noted above. This motif also appears in other such passages, in reference to the re-directing of the Tebilti canal:

> I raised that area out of the water and made it into dry land.[72]

But both the emphasis on "drying up" and the use of the word מצור here are intended to introduce God's response to Assyrian boasts, in 37:26–8. The word מצור refers to Egypt in Isa 19:6, and the phrase יארי מצרים is common, appearing in Isa 7:18, Amos 8:8, and Amos 9:5, and therefore the phrase יארי מצור should be understood as a reference to the rivers of Egypt.[73]

The phrase יארי מצור may be an example of intentional polysemy, referring on the one hand to Sennacherib's accomplishments north of

70. RINAP 3/1:144, Sennacherib 17, col. viii lines 31–42. Hayim Tawil, "The Historicity of II Kings 19:24 (Isaiah 37:25): The Problem of Ye'orê Maṣor," *JNES* 41 (1982): 195–201.

71. Weissert, "Jesajas Beschreibung," 293–94. He also notes parallels to Ezek 33:2 and 32:13.

72. RINAP 3/1:38, Sennacherib 1, line 76. Other passages also refer to this accomplishment in slightly different language: the Bellino cylinder, RINAP 3/1:54, Sennacherib 3, line 49, and RINAP 3/2:35, Sennacherib 39, lines 25–26.

73. See a different view in Weissert, "Jesajas Beschreibung," 292–93, which is difficult in terms of the usage pattern.

Nineveh, and on the other, re-casting these accomplishments as though they referred to the drying up of the rivers of Egypt.[74] As noted above, there is a tendency in Isaiah's use of Assyrian motifs to ignore the geographic names appearing in the Assyrian motifs, where these would be of little interest to Judahites, and to refer instead to geographic names known in Judah. This tendency seems to be at play in this passage, where the geographic locations in which Sennacherib dried up ground are replaced by the geographic designation יארי מצור.

10. The Response to Assyria's Boasts in Isaiah 37:26–27

As in Isa 10:5–15, the actual Assyrian boasts in 37:24–25 are here followed by a Divine response. As suggested above, the Divine response shapes the phrasing of the boasts, strongly suggesting that 37:24–27 are a single composition. The boast describing Sennacherib's canal-building activities is phrased so as to refer to the drying-up of the rivers of Egypt. The response in verse 26 shows that this was understood as an attempt to boast of YHWH's activities in the Exodus narrative, either the plague of blood or the drying up of the Red Sea:

> (26) הלוא שמעת למרחוק אותה עשיתי מימי קדם ויצרתיה עתה הבאתיה ותהי להשאות גלים נצים ערים בצרות.
>
> (26) Did you not hear? From afar I have accomplished this, from days of yore I have done it, and now I have caused it to come to pass, to lay waste fortified cities in desolate heaps.

The response begins with a rhetorical question, asking Sennacherib if he has not heard of God's accomplishments. This question refers back to Sennacherib's boast of drying up יארי מצור.

But the continuation of the verse highlights other "accomplishments" of Sennacherib: his devastation of cities and turning them into ruins, a point of which Assyrian kings commonly boast in their inscriptions.[75] Just as Sennacherib unjustly appropriates God's accomplishment in his boast

74. On such intentional polysemy, see Shalom Paul, "Polysensuous Polyvalency in Poetic Parallel," in *Shaarei Talmon: Studies in the Bible, Qumran, and the Ancient Near East Presented to Shemaryahu Talmon*, ed. Michael Fishbane and Emanuel Tov (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1992), 147–63; and Shalom Paul, "Polysemous Pivotal Punctuation: More Janus Double-Entendres," in *Texts Temples and Traditions: A Tribute to Menahem Haran*, ed. Michael V. Fox, Victor A. Hurowitz, et al. (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1996), 369–74.

75. See references in Machinist, *Assyria and Its Image*, 725–26.

in verse 25b about יארי מצור, so too does God appropriate Sennacherib's accomplishment in destroying cities in verse 26. God claims to have directed these actions, including Sennacherib's own conquests.

The continuation of verse 26 therefore represents a Divine attempt to return Assyria to its proper proportions, as a servant of YHWH. This was the status it occupied in passages such as 7:17. Assyria is being portrayed here as a tool in God's hand, just as it was in 10:5–6, before it opposed this status in 10:7.

This attempt to control Assyria is illustrated in the bull imagery in verses 27–29. Verse 27 is a continuation of the claim of conquest in verse 26, but it deliberately uses grass imagery so as to lead into the equine or bovine imagery in verse 29.

> (27) וישביהן קצרי יד חתו ובשו היו עשב שדה וירק דשא חציר גגות ושדמה לפני קמה.
>
> (27) And their inhabitants, short of power, are terrified and embarrassed, they became greenery of the field and green grass, the straw on roofs, and an unripened field.

Verses 28–29 focus on YHWH's control of Assyria, expressed by means of bull imagery, which has special meaning in this context:

> (28) ושבתך וצאתך ובואך ידעתי ואת התרגזך אלי. (29) יען התרגזך אלי ושאננך עלה באזני ושמתי חחי באפך ומתגי בשפתיך והשיבתיך בדרך אשר באת בה.
>
> (28) And your sitting, and going out and coming in I know, and also your raging against Me. (29) Because of your raging against Me, and your complacency has come in my ears, I will place my ring in your nose and my bridle on your lips, and I will cause you to return on the path you came.

The promise to return Sennacherib to Assyria is phrased as part of a divine act to regain control of Sennacherib by bridling him and placing a ring in his face, as is done to cows and horses. But the imagery evokes Assyrian usage. While there is no evidence that Assyrians ever actually pierced the lips of their enemies, the famous stele of Esarhaddon, portraying his victory over Sam'al, shows him holding a rope in his hands, as two of his enemies kneel before him, with the rope connected to piercings in their cheeks.[76] This may be a more common Assyrian way of portraying control of enemies. The imagery then subverts Assyrian assertions of control, portraying Assyria as

76. Nevling Porter, "Language, Audience and Impact in imperial Assyria," 58.

the *nakru*, or enemy, just as was done in Isa 10:5–15. Isaiah here portrays YHWH as the dominating Assyrian, with Assyria as the dominated enemy.

The victory song continues in verses 30–32, describing how the Judahites will survive. In Sennacherib's campaign, the Judahites lost control of the Shephelah with its rich grain reserves, and survival was a source of worry. These verses promise that the grain that grows without sowing (from the kernels that fell to the earth in previous years) will suffice for Judah until the population can sow and reap.

This oracle of reassurance in verses 30–32 highlights how the flow of ideas in 37:24–32 parallels that in Isa 10:5–34. In that passage, Assyrian boasts in 10:8–11 and 10:13–14 are placed together with YHWH's response in 10:12 and 10:15. Here, Assyrian boasts in verses 24–25 are countered by YHWH's response in verses 26–29. In verses 28–29, Assyria assumes the role of the dominated enemy, and YHWH is the dominating superpower. But after that response, as we see in verses 30–32, comes an oracle of reassurance addressing the question "How does the battle between YHWH and Assyria affect the individual Judahite's future?" This concatenation of the Assyrian boasts together with YHWH's response, and then reassurance to individual Judahites worried about Assyrian devastation, is also found in 10:5–34. As we noted in chapter 5 of this book, 10:20–23 and 10:24–27 express concern for how this battle between YHWH and Assyria would affect the individual Judahites. Thus, the same flow of ideas is found in 10:5–34 and in 37:24–32.

11. Conclusion

The Assyrian boasts quoted in 37:24–25 are actual Assyrian boasts, which do not in any way mention YHWH. Yet Isaiah understands them as denigration of YHWH because they place Assyria in the position of universal sovereign. In 37:26, he reminds Assyria of its correct place in the universal hierarchy, and in 37:28–29, he portrays Assyria as the dominated enemy, with YHWH as dominator.

That trend seems to continue in verse 36. In this verse, the clearly impossible number of 185,000 dead Assyrians is mentioned. Within our current understanding of population numbers, the figure is impossible by several orders of magnitude.[77] But the exaggeration of numbers of the dead or conquered enemies is hardly an innovation in this verse; on the contrary, it is a well-known Assyrian behavior, of which the figure of 200,150 exiles from the Shephelah, which appears in Sennacherib's narrative of this campaign, is only one example. Often, as De Odorico has shown, numbers are exaggerated

77. See the numbers in Magen Broshi and Israel Finkelstein, "The Population of Palestine in Iron Age II," *BASOR* 287 (1992): 47–60.

by placing a thousand indicators in front of a number in the hundreds, or by multiplying a number by several decimal places.[78] Adopting this practice at this point in the narrative continues the tendency found in 37:28–29, of portraying YHWH as the Assyrian, who exaggerates his numbers, and the Assyrian as the enemy, whose numbers are exaggerated.

This small point illustrates the nature of the passage as a whole. It engages in an intellectual battle against Assyrian imperial ideology. It uses the large motif of the cosmic combat, which Assyrian imperial ideology used to justify Assyrian hegemony, as the structure of the narrative. In 37:24–25 it cites Assyrian boasts, and portrays these as denigration of YHWH, because it argues that the whole enterprise of Assyrian imperial ideology denigrates the one true universal sovereign. In 37:28–32 it turns the Assyrian into the enemy, and portrays YHWH as the victorious sovereign. The death of Sennacherib in 37:37–38 may be a slightly later addition to the narrative.[79] But the overall narrative clearly dates from a period where Judah's intellectual and theological battle with Assyria was relevant, and where such a battle could only be waged by engaging the complex motifs that Assyria used in conveying its ideology.

Militarily, Judah was defeated. The Shephelah was still devastated; despite the reassurance in 37:30–32, Judahites would experience difficulties and privations. In Isa 1:2–20, those privations are described, and Isaiah attempts to interpret them to the remaining remnant. This passage references Assyrian motifs of vassal loyalty, without in any way mentioning Assyria. To this passage, and to two others that treat Assyria similarly, we now turn our attention.

78. Marco De Odorico, *The Use of Numbers and Quantifications in the Assyrian Royal Inscriptions*. Vol. 3 (Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 1995).

79. The statement that Sennacherib would die by the sword in his land in 37:7b also appears to be such an addition, but perhaps it reflects a certain degree of assurance or hope that the fate that met Shalmaneser V and other of Sennacherib's predecessors would overtake him.

7

After All Ends, He Alone Rules and Is Feared

1. A Move to Theological Introspection

The question of rebellion against Assyria, which had occupied Judah's elite since the beginning of Assyrian domination, had been settled by the 701 campaign. Judah appears to have accepted that it would remain tributary to Assyria for some time, and did so for over half a century following 701. As it had lost valuable income from the Shephelah lands, and still needed to pay tribute to Assyria, Judah gradually expanded into regions that previously appeared liminal. Judah continued to settle the Negev region, exploited its trade potential, and settled the "wilderness" region between the Judean highlands and the Dead Sea.[1] But Judah's economic recovery took some decades, and it is clear that in the aftermath of the 701 campaign, Judah suffered economically from the loss of the Shephelah, and psychologically from the deaths and exile of its citizens from that region.

1. On settlement patterns in the late eighth century and in the seventh century, see Faust, "Settlement and Demography in Seventh-Century Judah." For a more detailed discussion of the Negev region specifically, see Yifat Thareani-Sussely, "The Archaeology of the Days of Manasseh Reconsidered in Light of Evidence from the Beersheba Valley," *PEQ* 139.2 (2007): 69–77, and more recently, Gunnar Lehmann, "Survival and Reconstruction of Judah in the Time of Manasseh," in *Disaster and Relief Management - Katastrophen und ihre Bewältigung*, Forschungen zum Alten Testament 81, ed. Angelika Berlejung (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 290–309.

Isaiah 36–37 create a narrative out of the events of this campaign. Isaiah 1:2–20, as I discuss below, focus on the aftermath of the campaign. In this aftermath, after the "hurly-burly" of the campaign was done, the question of "How should Judah react politically to Assyria?" was no longer relevant. The question of Judah's relationship to Assyria had been settled, as had the question of Jerusalem's status. In contrast to the dramatic portrayal in Isa 36–37, Isa 1:2–20 seem characterized by introspection on theological questions. From Isa 1:2–20, it would appear that after 701, the ideological ferment that derived from questioning these issues gave way to introspection.

Prior to 701, the dynamic political situation in which Assyria threatened Judah raised the theological-political question of how God would deal with Assyria, coupled with the purely theological question of how Assyria's ideological claims fit with belief in the universal rule and unlimited abilities of YHWH. After 701, the political situation became much more static, and the theological-political question lost its relevance. What remained was the necessity of resolving the inherent contradiction between Assyria's claims of empire and YHWH's claims as Sovereign. This had to be resolved while recognizing that Assyria would, for the foreseeable future, remain Judah's political sovereign.

To resolve this contradiction, Isaiah moves in 1:2–20, and even more so in 2:2–4 and 2:5–22, to a longer-range strategy that recognizes the reality of Assyrian power and its permanence, while affirming YHWH's supremacy over empire. This strategy demonstrates Levine's point that "those who respond, internalize,"[2] since Isaiah accepts Assyria's permanence while inverting its propaganda. In doing so, he adopts the Assyrian concept of universal sovereignty, adopts Assyrian descriptions of sovereignty, and subverts them by applying them to YHWH. The question of the inherent clash between YHWH and Assyria is absent; instead, the prophet argues for God's sovereignty, using motifs taken from Assyrian claims of empire. In 1:2–20 this argument is advanced regarding Judah, in 2:2–4 regarding "many nations," and in 2:5–22 in regard to the world in general.

Since the questions treated in the passages discussed in this chapter are purely theological, rather than political, it is important to explore the theology that motivates Isaiah. One clear demonstration of this underlying theology becomes apparent by comparing two of the passages examined in previous chapters, 10:13–14 and 37:24–25. In both, Isaiah cites actual Neo-Assyrian boasts, of Sargon and Sennacherib, respectively. These boasts are portrayed as implicit attacks against the authority of YHWH, which require YHWH to respond. As discussed in reference to 10:13–14, Isaiah portrays Assyria as acting like the enemies Assyria itself criticizes, and

2. Levine, "*Assyrian Ideology and Israelite* Monotheism," 422.

describes YHWH as the sovereign who must punish those rebels. In 37:24–25, he describes Assyrian boasts as inherently denigrating YHWH. If Isaiah was familiar with the motifs we know from Assyrian texts, as these passages indicate, he was surely aware that Assyrians nowhere engaged in direct verbal attacks on YHWH. Yet he interprets Assyrian boasts as attacks on God.

This interpretation of Assyrian boasts can only be understood by positing that the larger ideology, of which these specific boasts were a small expression, denigrated YHWH. This ideology claims for Assyria the role of universal ruler and asserts its king's omnipotence.

But this still begs the question of why Isaiah chose to interpret Assyrian claims of empire as attacks on God. It appears to me that Isaiah did so because he considered YHWH to be an omnipotent universal sovereign, and therefore viewed Assyrian claims as an attack on YHWH's role.

Such a theology is generally considered in Biblical studies to be an ideological development that does not pre-date the period of Isaiah. For this reason, Levine argued that:

> In the Judean society of First Isaiah's time, the immediacy and inescapable force of the Assyrian threat demanded a God-idea broad enough to measure up to empire. First Isaiah expounded just such a concept for the first time in biblical literature.[3]

But it is difficult to understand how Isaiah would consider Assyrian claims of empire as attacks on YHWH absent a prior commitment to YHWH as possessing precisely those characteristics which Assyria claimed for its political leaders. If Isaiah did not initially conceive of YHWH as an omnipotent universal Sovereign, why did he view Assyrian claims of empire as impinging on the honour of YHWH?

This cannot be construed as Isaiah defending the honour of YHWH against Assyrian claims that their god was more powerful. Isaiah never formulates the conflict between YHWH and Assyria as a conflict between gods. He never mentions the god Assur, and consistently directs his polemic against claims of the Assyrian king. Isaiah clearly knew that Assyria attributed to the god Assur universal rule, supremacy, and omnipotence; it is impossible to imagine that his knowledge of Assyrian claims of empire was so selective that he knew the motifs used, but did not know one of the central tenets of Assyrian ideology. Isaiah chose to ignore Assur, and by refusing to engage in any sort of polemic about Assur, he refused to recognize his existence.

3. Ibid., 414.

Rather than arguing that YHWH is more powerful than Assur, Isaiah argues that any force claiming to be omnipotent and a universal sovereign inherently sets himself up in opposition to YHWH. Therefore, Isaiah argues that the Assyrian king, in advancing his claims of empire, attacks the authority of YHWH. This argument assumes that God should be universally recognized as Sovereign, and as Omnipotent, beyond the possibility of conflict with rivals. It therefore appears to me that the idea of YHWH as an omnipotent and universal Sovereign underlies and precedes Isaiah's responses to the Assyrian threat.

But regardless of the temporal sequence of these ideas, it is entirely clear that Isaiah did possess a "God-idea broad enough to measure up to empire," one in which YHWH was universal and all-powerful. It is against this theological background that we must understand the ideas of Isaiah 1:2–20.

2. Isaiah 1:2–20

Significant parts of this passage react to the reality of Judah after 701 BCE. This may be seen both through Isaiah's choices of idiom, and the political reality of Jerusalem that he describes.

Among the key verses for our discussion are 1:7–8:

> (7) ארצכם שממה עריכם שרפות אש, אדמתכם לנגדכם זרים אכלים אתה, ושממה כמהפכת זרים. (8) ונותרה בת-ציון כסכה בכרם, כמלונה במקשה, כעיר נצורה.
>
> (7) Your country is a desolation, your cities burned with fire; your land, in your very presence, aliens consume it, and it is a desolation like the turning over by foreigners.[4] (8) And the daughter of Zion was left like a booth in a vineyard, like a hut in a gourd patch, like a city besieged.

While recognizing that many Biblical passages describe destruction using language similar to that in verse 7, Machinist called attention to the similarity between the sequence of phrases in that verse: שממה, שרף, אש אכל אותה and Assyrian diction. The particular consecution is

4. The translation draws on Machinist, "Assyria and its Image," 724. Roberts suggests emending the last word in verse 7 to סדום, but the emendation is entirely conjectural (Roberts, *First Isaiah*, 14). An expression similar to "turning over" the land is attested elsewhere in the Bible, in the phrase לחפר את הארץ in Josh 2:1–3, where it refers to spying the land in preparation for conquest. "Turning over the land" refers to creating destruction, just as turning over soil kills the plants growing on it.

> unique in the Biblical corpus, and this so closely follows the wording and order of the Assyrian formula *napālu* (or *naqāru*), *ina išāti šarāpu, akālu+šu* (not to mention that Isaiah is applying his sequence explicitly to the Assyrians) that the two cannot be dissociated. One may suggest, therefore, that while Isaiah drew on older phraseology known in Israel for his description, his selection and arrangement of that phraseology shows the effect of Assyrian idiom.[5]

Verse 8 describes Jerusalem as isolated and standing out, and emphasizes this with three similes. The first two of these, from agricultural scenery, continue the allusion to the produce of the land, while the third alludes to the reality of a besieged city: on the approach of the attacking army, inhabitants of the villages surrounding the city flee into the city for protection, leaving the countryside desolate. Jerusalem is described as the lone city in Judah; such a reality corresponds only to the period after the 701 campaign. In the subsequent major devastation of Judah, in the early sixth century (597 and 587–586), it was Jerusalem that bore the brunt of the destruction, while the areas surrounding Jerusalem suffered, but not necessarily as deeply.[6]

Both the use of motifs from Assyrian inscriptions in verse 7 and the description of the isolation of Jerusalem in verse 8 make it clear that these verses must date to the period following 701 BCE.[7] It is particularly difficult to argue that the description of Jerusalem remaining isolated amid destruction derives from a later author who knows of Jerusalem's survival from literary sources: source B does not give a full picture of the devastation of much of Judah. This begs the question of whence such a later author would know of Jerusalem surviving when many of Judah's cities were devastated.[8]

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5. Machinist, "Assyria and its Image," 724–25. The specific sequence he cites, "I destroyed" (and/or "I devastated"), "I burned with fire," is ubiquitous in the Assyrian royal inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III, Sargon II, and Sennacherib, and hundreds of examples appear. See Ibid., 724 n. 24 for a short discussion of the lexical variations.

6. See discussions in Avraham Faust, *Judah in the Neo-Babylonian Period: The Archaeology of Desolation* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2012) and in Oded Lipschits, *The Fall and Rise of Jerusalem: Judah under Babylonian Rule* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2005).

7. Levine, in "Assyrian Ideology and Israelite Monotheism," 419, considers this date likely, based on verses 8–9.

8. See the argument in Vermeylen, *Du prophète Isaïe,* 55: "Nous devons nous résigner à avouer notre ignorance: Isa. 1:4-7b[a] provident d'un auteur anonyme du VIIIe ou, plus vraisemblablement, du VIIe ou du début du Vie siècle." At page 57, he assigns these verses to a contemporary of Jeremiah. He sees in verses 8–9 an addition belonging to a post-exilic author (53). Whatever the value of assigning verse 9 to such post-exilic authors (see scholars cited by Vermeylen, *Du prophète Isaïe,* 53), it is impos-

Verses 4–8 are generally considered to be a single literary unit, beginning with the call הוי.[9] Having established the connection of verses 7–8 to the post-701 period, I will now examine verses 4–6:

> (4) הוי גוי חטא, עם כבד עון, זרע מרעים, בנים משחיתים, עזבו את י', נאצו את קדוש ישראל, נזרו אחור. (5) על מה תכו עוד, תוסיפו סרה, כל ראש לחלי, וכל לבב דוי. (6) מכף רגל ועד ראש אין בו מתם, פצע וחבורה ומכה טריה, לא זרו ולא חבשו, ולא רככה בשמן.
>
> (4) Woe! Sinning nation, people heavy with iniquity, seed who do evil, corrupt sons, they have left YHWH, denigrated the Holy One of Israel, and separated themselves, turning around. (5) For what will you continue to be beaten, and continue to rebel? Every head has become ill, every heart is faint. (6) From the sole of the foot to the head, nothing is complete: wound and bruise and a fresh beating. They have not been healed or bound up, nor have they been softened by oil.

This unit argues that the beaten and suffering state of the nation is a direct consequence of the people's sins, and the specific sin leading to this punishment is the act of rebellion against God. Verse 4 focusses on the sin, verse 5 explains the connection between the sin and the illness, and verse 6 describes the illness. It is clear from the transition from verse 6 to verse 7 that the "illness" is a metaphor for the destruction of much of Judah. The "illness" is an appropriate metaphor for devastation by war: as verse 6 makes clear, the illness does not derive from some internal complaint, but from "wound and bruise and beating."

Verses 4–5a describe the sin in very specific language.[10] Verse 4 begins with four expressions of sin (discussed below), and then continues with

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sible to assign verse 8 to this period, since the reality described, of Jerusalem's survival, differs entirely from that of the late seventh or early sixth century. Vermeylen's linguistic arguments are critiqued by John A. Emerton, "The Historical Background of Isaiah 1:4-9." *Eretz-Israel* 24 (1993): 34*–40*, here 35*–36*.

9. On literary units in Isaiah beginning with this word and their origins, see Hays, *A Covenant with Death*, 258–62. Barth, *Die Jesaja-Worte in der Josiazeit*, 190, supports defining the unit as verses 4–8 here, while Roberts includes verse 9 (*First Isaiah,* 21). Vermeylen (*Du prophète Isaïe*) ends the unit at verse 7b[a]. The differences are not material to our discussion, which focusses on verses 4–6 as connected to verse 7.

10. The language is particularly similar to 31:1–2, where, as in this passage, we find קדוש ישראל used in a critique of Israel for their disloyalty to God, and מרעים to describe Assyria's enemies. The suggestion that the illness imagery here depends on passages such as Lev 26:33 and Deut 28:35 is critiqued by Emerton, "The Historical Background of Isaiah 1:4-9," 36*–37*.

three phrases describing increasing disregard for YHWH: עזבו את י' (they abandoned YHWH), נאצו את קדוש ישראל (they denigrated they Holy one of Israel), and נזרו אחור (they separated themselves by turning around.)[11] The expression נאצו את קדוש ישראל is similar to the accusation levelled against Sennacherib in 37:24, and indicates a lack of respect for the power and sovereignty of God.

The argument in verses 4–7 is quite clear, and its center is in verse 5: the devastation of Judah results from the sin of disregard for God. Any objective political observer of Judah in 701 would argue that the devastation Judah suffered resulted from its disregard for the power of its Assyrian overlord. It would certainly have been in the Assyrians' interest to argue for this view in their contacts with the Judean elite, and to remind them of the disastrous consequences of withholding tribute, because such arguments and reminders would encourage timely payment of the tribute.

But in verses 4–7 Isaiah turns this argument on its head: Judah has suffered devastation because of its refusal to acknowledge YHWH as its leader. The rebellion that caused Sennacherib's campaign was not against Sennacherib, but against God. Isaiah here argues that Judah's primary failure was not political, but rather theological. Judah is here accused of the same sin of which Isaiah accused Sennacherib in 37:24: denigrating YHWH.

This is also clear from the language used to describe the sin in verses 4–5a. Two of these expressions parallel those used in Neo-Assyrian royal inscriptions to describe rebels. The first, עם כבד עון, appears only in this passage, and is similar both in meaning and in sound to the Akkadian phrase *arnu kabtu* ("a heavy punishment"), used to describe both the guilt of rebels and the punishment that they incur. In Sennacherib's inscriptions describing disloyal vassals, a*rnu* (or its biform, *annu*) is used in the sense of guilt, together with *gullultu* (sin), thus paralleling the use of חטא and עון in our verse.[12]

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11. נזרו is from the root נזר, meaning "to separate oneself" as in Lev 22:2. This is a unique expression, and it seems to indicate separating oneself and turning around. The meaning is thus opposite to the fairly common Biblical expression הלך אחרי, literally "to walk after," meaning to follow, as in in Jud 13:11, Gen 37:17, Ruth 3:10, and elsewhere. It refers to following God, that is, maintaining loyalty to Him in Deut 13:5 and 2 Kgs 23:3 (and many other verses), and in contrast, refers to following idols, in Deut 11:28, 28:14, 1 Kgs 11:10, Jer 2:5 and 7:9, and elsewhere.

12. In Esarhaddon's inscriptions (including RINAP 4:14, Esarhaddon 1 ii 10, 1 ii 57), this phrase describes punishment of rebels. Akkadian *arnu* most often means "guilt," and in the royal inscriptions refers to disloyalty in a political context. Thus in the Rassam prism of Sennacherib (RINAP 3/1:65, Sennacherib 4, line 47, and in many parallel texts), where the anti-Assyrian elements in Ekron are called *ēpiš anni u gillati*, "doers of guilt and sin."

The second phrase, תוסיפו סרה, appears in verse 5a in connection with the punishment meted out to Judah. סרה in Biblical Hebrew usually means "lie," as in Deut 19:16. This meaning, however, fits poorly in this verse, and nearly all translators render סרה as rebellion (so RSV, NIV, Roberts). This meaning corresponds to the usage of the Akkadian *surrātu* in the royal inscriptions, where it is consistently used in reference to rebels. Thus, in Sennacherib's inscriptions, Marduk-baladan is called *karaš surrāti*, lit., "of a lying stomach," a phrase used in a string of epithets including *ayābu lemnu* (an evil enemy), *barannû* (rebel), and *ēpiš lemnūti* (evil doer).[13] The phrase *surrātu* is also used in the passage cited in chapter 4 in reference to the rebellion of Yamani, whom Sargon accuses of sending words of *surrātu* to the kings of Philistia, Judah, Moab, and Edom. Thus, the usage of סרה in this passage seems to be influenced by the Akkadian.[14]

Both of these usages appear to show that language Assyria used to refer to its rebellious vassals is here being used in reference to Judah. Judah is said to have rebelled against YHWH's sovereignty, and this rebellion brought about the invasion of 701.

That Judah is guilty of disregard for YHWH is hardly a new idea in Isaiah. In many passages in Isa 7–8, which I discussed in chapter 3, Isaiah accuses Judah of disregard for YHWH, and threatens that God will send Assyria as a consequence. Regard for God is contrasted with regard for Assyria in 8:11–13. Judah's elite is accused of disregarding YHWH by disdaining the prophet's advice to avoid reacting to the Syro-Ephraimite threat (7:13), and God will punish Israel in consequence (7:17–20 and 8:7–8). Similarly, I argued (in chapter 2) that Isa 6 should be read as an encouragement to view God as the true universal sovereign, and a warning that regarding Assyria as sovereign will cause God to use Assyria to bring disaster upon Judah (6:11–12). The disaster having now arrived, Isaiah reverts to an emphasis found in earlier passages.

Isaiah is not exclusively a prophet of destruction. Isa 10:5–34 and 36–37 are full of reassurance to Israel and a promise to defeat Assyria. This promise does not necessarily contradict Isaiah's condemnation of Judah's behavior. The promise of Assyria's defeat was fulfilled in the sense that Jerusalem withstood the Assyrian challenge, and Judah was not utterly destroyed. However, Judah suffered significantly, and Isaiah returns to the theme that vassalage to Assyria led Judah to disaster. It is important to emphasize

13. RINAP 3/1:32, Sennacherib 1, line 6.

14. The Akkadian phrase also appears in the vassal-treaty of Esarhaddon, and there is a lively debate on the influence of this phrase on Deut 13:6, which describes speaking lies about God to encourage rebellion. The debate is summarized in Crouch, *Israel and the Assyrians*, 89–92.

that the passages studied in the preceding chapters do not indicate a sharp movement from impending disaster in Isa 6–8 to reassurance and salvation in Isa 10:5–34 and 36–37. This is indicated nowhere more clearly than in Isa 31:1–5, which disdains rebellion against Assyria, while also promising Divine protection for Jerusalem against any possible threat from Assyria. Like Isa 1:4–8, 7:13, and 8:11–13, Isa 31:1–5 critiques Israel for seeing political powers as primary, while failing to rely on YHWH, and thus being disloyal.

The language of Isa 1:4–8 shows distinct similarities to that of Isa 31:1–5, which, as I argued in chapter 4, was clearly composed in the reign of Sargon.[15] Both passages use "the Holy One of Israel" in the context of a critique of Israel's loyalty to YHWH. Both passages refer to מרעים as ones whom God opposes: in 31:2, the מרעים are the Assyrian enemies who try to encourage Judah to join them, while in 1:4, Judah itself is זרע מרעים. The same idea of reliance on YHWH as a desideratum motivates both passages, and in both passages, the defense of Jerusalem is paramount. In 31:1–5, God will defend Jerusalem, and in 1:8, Jerusalem has indeed been defended. After the partial Assyrian victory of 701, Isa 1:4–8 reflect on Israel's extensive military defeat, while facing the Ashdod crisis in Sargon's time; 31:1–5 emphasize how Jerusalem will survive, and no rebellion is needed. Isaiah's political recommendation changes in accordance with the political situation, but his theology, which views God as paramount, remains constant. It is therefore entirely unnecessary to create an artificial woe/weal dichotomy, arguing (as Barth and Kreuch do) that only passages of one specific type (woe) belong to the prophet of the late eighth and early seventh centuries, while those referring to an Assyrian downfall post-date the Assyrian period. The theological message, that Judah and Israel must at all times regard YHWH as their sovereign and act accordingly, serves as a constant running theme through the passages written at different times and in different political situations in the turbulent late eighth and early seventh centuries.

The unit 1:4–8 emphasizes that the 701 campaign was Israel's punishment for its rebellion against YHWH. The message of the need for true loyalty to YHWH runs not only through this brief unit, but through 1:2–20 as a whole. 1:2–20 has both thematic and structural unity, beginning and ending with the phrase "God has spoken." The passage fits well as a literary unit composed shortly after 701, but I have identified phrases reacting to Assyrian formulations only in the unit discussed above and in 1:18–20

15. The similarity between these passages, as seen from the use of "the Holy One of Israel" in them, has been discussed by Williamson, in his critique of Loretz's view that this title was never used by Isaiah of Jerusalem. He specifically notes that the arguments for the late origin of Isa 1:4 and 31:1, which contain this title, cannot be sustained (Williamson, *The Book Called Isaiah,* 43–45).

(discussed below). Nevertheless, I will devote a brief discussion to the other parts of 1:2–20.

The passage opens with two verses (verses 2–3) describing how God has raised and helped Israel. This forms the basis of Israel's obligation to view God as its sovereign. Verses 4–8 follow, and then verse 9 emphasizes God's role in defending Jerusalem and maintaining it as a "remnant."[16]

Verses 10–17 form a unit critiquing Judah for its emphasis on sacrifices. Sacrifices served to maintain a relationship with God and therefore as a means of seeking forgiveness.[17] Perhaps in the atmosphere of instability following the campaign of 701, people sought out this relatively easy way of restoring or forging a relationship with a Protector. But the passage emphasizes that God does not accept sacrifices as a means of forging or creating such a relationship. He demands instead a deeper expression of dedication than sacrifices: concern for the widow and orphan, pursuing justice, and a measure of equality within society.

These sentiments are foundational to much of modern liberal ethics, but they contain a particular resonance in the context of the Assyrian period. As discussed in chapters 2 and 3, in connection with the beginnings of Judah's becoming tributary to Assyria, the relationship of tribute benefited Judah's elite while helping to impoverish the broad majority of the population, and the callous attitude of the elite is implicitly critiqued in Isa 7 and 8. The emphasis in 1:16–17 on viewing the widow and orphan as equals implies a rejection of the social conception underlying the tributary relationship.

1:10–15 can also be read as a certain rejection of the tributary relationship: Assyria was primarily interested in the economic benefits it derived from tributary states. YHWH is here contrasted with Assyria: He is not interested in the bringing of gifts or in those who come to "be seen by His face" (1:12).[18]

1:10–17, therefore emphasize that a relationship with YHWH differs from a relationship with Assyria. It does not simply involve gifts, but requires a change in how humans view each other. Instead of viewing each human as part of social and economic hierarchy (a view which justifies the social construct of tributary political relationships), humans are all on a fundamentally equal plane. Above them is a single sovereign, who is wholly

16. Although the "remnant" language is seen by Barth (*Die Jesaja-Worte,* 190) as evidence of later authorship of this verse, similar language is used in 37:32, which seems to be an original part of Source B. See further discussion of this language in Emerton, "The Historical Background of Isaiah 1:4-9," 36*.

17. I summarize here Roberts' discussion (*First Isaiah,* 23).

18. This expression appears in Ex 23:15 and 34:24 and parallels the Assyrian expression *tāmartu*, literally a "seeing gift," which designates tribute brought by a vassal.

other and transcends any human characteristics. There are only two levels: human and God. As discussed in reference to Isa 6 in chapter 2, God requires no human assistants.

Verses 1:18–20 return to the idea of forgiveness, the forgiveness that was sought by sacrifices but which sacrifices failed to provide. These verses close the passage by again evoking the idea of God as sovereign in a vassal relationship seen in 1:4–9 and in 1:10–17. They present the two options that stand before a vassal who has offended his sovereign, and therefore parallel the language used by the Rabshakeh in his second speech in Isa 37:13–20. If you accept God as sovereign, "you will eat the best of the land," paralleling the promise made by the Rabshakeh should Jerusalem surrender (37:16). If you persist in rebelling, then "you shall be devoured by the sword," paralleling the implicit threat to Jerusalem in Isa 36–37 should it fail to come to terms with these representatives of the Assyrian army camped nearby. These threats are not specific to Rabshakeh's encounter with Jerusalem; they characterized Assyrian behavior in reaction to any rebelling polity. But issued by God in Isa 1:18–20, they emphasize that Judah's relationship with God carries certain aspects of a sovereign-vassal relationship.

Throughout 1:2–20, these aspects are evoked, as are the contrasts between God's relationship with Judah and Assyria's relationship with its vassals. Although Isaiah's vision of the God-Israel relationship is meant to apply universally, it is framed in terms that resonate especially in Judah after its encounters with Assyria.

3. Isaiah 2:2–4

At the center of this most famous passage in Isaiah lies the concept of YHWH as arbitrator among the nations. As the analysis below shows, Isa 2:2–4 present a detailed explanation of how YHWH will become recognized as judge and legislator and the ramifications of this recognition in the world. This point is emphasized by Schwartz in his analysis of the passage. He compares the passage to Deut 4:6–7, which describes the admiration with which nations will view God's legislation, and notes that only in the Isaiah passage do we find an explanation of how the peoples of the world will become aware of YHWH's "ways" and "paths."[19] The passage reads:

19. Baruch J. Schwartz, "Torah from Zion. Isaiah's temple vision (Isaiah 2:1-4)," *Sanctity of Time and Space in Tradition and Modernity* ed. Alberdina Houtman, Marcel J. H. M. Poorthuis, and Joshua J. Schwartz (Leiden, Boston, Cologne: Brill, 1998), 11–26.

(2) והיה באחרית הימים, נכון יהיה הר בית י' בראש ההרים, ונשא מגבעות, ונהרו אליו כל הגוים. (3) והלכו עמים רבים, ואמרו לכו ונעלה אל הר י', אל בית אלהי יעקב, וירנו מדרכיו ונלכה בארחתיו, כי מציון תצא תורה, ודבר י' מירושלם. (4) ושפט בין הגוים, והוכיח לעמים רבים, וכתתו חרבותם לאתים, וחניתותיהם למזמרות, לא ישא גוי אל גוי חרב, ולא ילמדו עוד מלחמה.

(2) It shall be that at the end of days, the Mountain of the House of YHWH shall stand firm above the mountains, and be taller than the hills; and all the nations shall flow to it.[20] (3) And many peoples shall go and say: "Come, let us go up to the Mountain of YHWH to the House of the God of Jacob; that He may instruct us in His ways, and that we may walk in His paths." For instruction shall come forth from Zion, and the word of YHWH from Jerusalem. (4) He will judge among the nations, and arbitrate for the many peoples, and they shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks: Nation shall not take up sword against nation, they shall never again know war.

The passage presents a series of actions in which each stage of the nations' actions flows from the previous one. The passage begins by describing how the "mountain of the House of YHWH" will be high and therefore visible. As Schwartz notes, "Isaiah attributes the spreading of the fame of Israel's High Court to the miraculous elevation of the Temple Mount, so that peoples can see it from afar."[21] Verse 3 describes how nations from afar are attracted to this mountain, not to worship, but to receive instruction in "paths" and "ways" from YHWH. These nations accept these paths and ways, and more importantly, accept YHWH as arbiter of disputes. As a result, war becomes redundant in verse 4.

The passage is widely considered a late one, since it is thought to reflect a universal idea.[22] However, Schwartz has argued that we ought not to overstate the universal aspects of a passage that speaks of "many nations." In support of a late sixth century date, Sweeney argues that "peaceful submission to YHWH and pilgrimage to Zion by the nations does not appear in

20. The imagery of "flowing" up to a mountain is admittedly difficult. Roberts, *First Isaiah*, 40–41, following *NJPS*, notes that as in Jer 31:11 (following MT verses), 51:44, and Isa 60:5, נהר here may reflect the root, נהר II, meaning "to gaze with joy." He proposes that in our verse, we have a double entendre, in which both meanings are intended. Pinhas Artzi argued that the meaning of movement in our verse clearly indicates that "flow" is intended ("'All the Nations and Many Peoples': The Answer of Isaiah and Micah to Assyrian Imperial Policies," in *Treasures on Camels' Humps: Historical and Literary Studies from the Ancient Near East Presented to Israel Eph'al,* ed. Mordechai Cogan (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2008), 41–53, here 42–43.

21. Schwartz, "Torah from Zion," 25.

22. See bibliography in Schwartz, Ibid., 12 n. 1.

biblical texts until the exilic or early postexilic periods."[23] But the peaceful submission described appears to have its roots in Assyrian imagery, as does the very unique pilgrimage described here. For these reasons, Roberts states that nothing in this passage "is incompatible with a date in the late eighth century," and Artzi has argued for the dependence of the passage on Assyrian conceptions.[24]

I cannot identify in this passage clear linguistic connections to Assyrian formulations. But the motifs used in this passage, in the progression of its ideas, do indeed correspond to motifs we find in Assyrian royal inscriptions. These include the following elements, which I detail below: the elevated mountain or temple that represents the sovereignty of Assur, the tendency of all nations to view the Assyrian capital as a place of guidance in "correct citizen-behaviour" (Artzi's translation of *ṣibitte*), and the description of "peace" as reflecting Assyrian domination. To these motifs can be added the empirical reality of the spread of Assyrian practices and material culture to elites throughout the areas of Assyrian domination. Furthermore, the administrative correspondence indicates that disputes between vassal states were settled by reference to decisions of the Assyrian king. All of these elements, without necessarily proving that the passage dates to the Assyrian period, make this possibility impossible to ignore, and it appears that such a date is probable.

The first element in our passage is the elevation of the "mountain of the House of YHWH" over all other mountains, a stark deviation from the geographic reality in Jerusalem, in which the Temple Mount is dwarfed by the neighbouring Mount of Olives ridge to the east, by the hill on which the modern High Commissioner's palace stands to the south, and by the higher ground to the west. The image of the mountain indicating sovereignty is familiar to us from the Assyrian imagery of the god Assur whose earliest conception, as Lambert showed, is a deified form of the ancient city. In contrast to Jerusalem, the geography of Assyria fits well with the idea of the mountain indicating sovereignty towering over other hills. As Lambert notes, the site of the city is a natural hill, which stands out from the nearby hills and is quite impressive when viewed from its eastern side, where the Tigris River flows.[25] This idea of a high place indicating the rule of Assur is

23. Sweeney, *Isaiah 1-39*, 93, with further discussion in Sweeney, *Isaiah 1-4 and the Post-Exilic Understanding of the Isaianic Tradition,* BZAW 171 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1988), 166–67, where he notes several differences between the imagery here and that found in the Zion psalms. (Ps 2, 46, 48, and 76 are discussed.) The imagery is certainly different, but the difference does not provide a basis for a late date.

24. Ibid., 15; Roberts, *First Isaiah,* 42; and Artzi, "'All the Nations and Many Peoples'."

25. Lambert, "The God Aššur," 85.

also known from the *akītu* house in the city of Assur in the Neo-Assyrian period, at which Assur's rule was celebrated. When Sennacherib rebuilt this house, he raised it "as high as a mountain."[26] Assur himself is called "the great mountain."[27] The motif of the elevated mountain as a symbol of the universal rule of Assur was thus prominent in this period.

The second element, of the nations coming to the Assyrian capitals and receiving instruction in proper behavior, is found in an interesting inscription of Sargon, relating to the building of his capital at Dur-sharrukin, which Artzi cites in connection with our passage:

> *ba'ulāt arba'i lišānu aḫītu atmê la mitḫarti āšibūt šādî u māti mala irte'û nūr ilāni bēl gimri*
> *ša ana zikir* ^{d}*Aššur bēliya ina mēzez šibirriya ašlula*
>
> *pâ ištēn ušaškinma ušarmâ qerebšu*
> *mārē* ^{kur}*Aššur*^{ki} *mudût inī kalamma*
>
> *ana šūḫuz ṣibittē palāḫ ilī u šarrī* ^{lú}*aklī* ^{lú}*šāpirī uma"iršunūti*
>
> People of the four (regions), of foreign tongues, of divergent speech, living in mountains and (flat) land(s), all those who follow the light of the gods, master of all (that is, Shamash),
>
> who, by order of Assur my lord, I took captive by means of my fierce sceptre,
>
> I made them of one mouth and settled them therein.
>
> Natives of Assyria, knowers of the crafts all of them,
>
> to cause (them) to seize (that is, to train them in) "correct behaviour" (ṣibitte), fear of gods and king, as overseers and supervisors, I appointed.[28]

This interesting passage does not necessarily reflect the primary way in which Assyrian culture was spread throughout the dominated lands. Elites in dominated lands used Assyrian material culture, such as imitation palace ware, as a status symbol, showing their identification with the powerful Assyrians.[29] Assyrian *parṣū,* customary practices, thus spread not only by the

26. RINAP 3/2:248, Sennacherib 168, line 32.

27. RINAP 3/1:111, Sennacherib 16, i 15.

28. The text appears both in a cylinder inscription (Fuchs, *Die Inschriften Sargons II aus Khorsabad*, 43–44, lines 72–77) and in a building inscription on bull collosi (Ibid., 72–73, lines 92–97). The differences between these two inscriptions are minor. See also normalization in CAD B 182, I/J 152, R 136.

29. See Christin C. M. Engstrom, "The Neo-Assyrians at Tell el-Hesi: A Petrographic Study of Imitation Assyrian Palace Ware," *BASOR* 333 (2004): 69–81, here 70–72; Lily Singer-Avitz, "On Pottery in Assyrian Style: A Rejoinder," *Tel Aviv* 34 (2007): 182-203.

king forcibly gathering captives to Assyria, but primarily by local elites, in dominated lands, choosing to emulate these practices.

The third element is the link between obedience to the Assyrians and peace. This motif is widespread in the royal inscriptions, appearing, for example, in Sennacherib's "First Campaign Cylinder," where he (obliquely) describes his gaining control of Assyria after a short period of instability following the death of Sargon: "I took command of the population of Assyria amid obedience and peace."[30]

The idea that nations submitted their disputes to Assyria appears to correspond to historical reality. Here too, the motif does not only reflect a literary construct but a certain degree of historical reality. Already in the time of Tiglath-pileser III, nations with disputes, even nations relatively removed from the center of Assyrian activity, submitted them to Assyrian adjudication. This we see from a letter of Qurdi-Aššur (apparently identical with the Qurdi-Aššur-Lamur, governor of Şimirra, known from other letters regarding the wood trade in Sidon), who writes to the king (Tiglath-pileser III) that a messenger reached him from a "Dibonite" bearing a message concerning Moab. The message "is about the fact that the Qedarites went straight away to Moab and defeated it." Qurdi-Aššur, posted in the Levant, lacks the authority necessary to adjudicate the dispute and therefore entrusts the sealed document that the Dibonite brought him into the hands of Qurdi-Aššur's own messenger and sends it to the palace.[31] This degree of involvement by the Assyrian central administration in the affairs of a fairly peripheral nation state attests to the acceptance of Assyria as a dispute-adjudicator throughout the southern Levant.

All of these elements strongly suggest that the vision in Isa 2:2–4 is based on a combination of the ideal projected by the Assyrians in their inscriptions, and by the reality experienced by the inhabitants of the southern Levant in the Assyrian period. The image of an elevated temple expressing the universal sovereignty of a deity, the encouragement of nations to emulate practices in the city that express the rule of that particular deity and his representative (the king), the actual emulation of these practices in different parts of the southern Levant, and the view of the Assyrian king as dispute-adjudicator are all interesting parallels between Assyrian rule and the vision in Isa 2:2–4. In

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On the production of these wares in the southern Levant, see David Ben-Shlomo, "Petrographic Analysis of Pottery: Chalcolithic to Persian Period," in *The Smithsonian Institution Excavation at Tell Jemmeh, Israel, 1970–1990*, Smithsonian Contributions to Anthropology, No. 50, ed. David Ben-Shlomo and G. W. Van Beek (Washington DC: Smithsonian Institution, 2014), 776–94, here 793–94.

30. RINAP 3/1:32, Sennacherib 1, line 5. Translation follows RINAP. The same phrase also appears in RINAP 3/2:293, Sennacherib 213, line 5.

31. SAA 19:35–36, no. 29.

this vision, the mountain of the House of God replaces the Assyrian capitals as an elevated city to which nations turn, nations seek to learn and practice the "ways" and "paths" in place of Assyrian practices, and God replaces the Assyrian king as a sort of universal dispute-adjudicator.

This idea of God replacing Assyria as sovereign corresponds closely with the view of God as sovereign expressed in 1:2–20, discussed above. It also corresponds with the view of God's campaign, expressing God's rule of the land, and modelled on an Assyrian campaign, which we see in 2:5–22, the passage to which we now turn.

4. Isaiah 2:5–22[32]

This passage describes YHWH as demonstrating His sovereignty over a wide swath of land, beginning in Lebanon and Bashan and continuing on to the seacoast (2:13–16). On this "day of the Lord," He imposes His sovereignty over all lofty and proud humans and their possessions (2:12).

The description of this day is based on Assyrian descriptions of the king's campaign, in which he travels long distances in order to force the arrogant and obstinate to accept Assyrian sovereignty. Here, Isaiah adopts and subverts the campaign motif.

The passage implicitly acknowledges Assyrian power, by using motifs taken from the Assyrian campaign to describe YHWH. But while accepting the reality of Assyrian power, it denies the enduring nature of Assyrian sovereignty, since it describes YHWH as the single possessor of true sovereignty. The passage implicitly argues that Assyrian power is temporary, and will be replaced by a more enduring sovereign. The theology in this passage can be called "replacement theology," since it uses motifs used by Assyria to argue for the sovereignty and omnipotence of the Assyrian king in order to argue for the sovereignty of YHWH.

Although Duhm commented that this passage is poorly preserved, more recent scholarship has attempted to trace the historical development of the passage, seeing it as a progressive expansion of an original unit.[33] Bartelt argued that verses 12–16 clearly form a unit.[34] Around these verses, verses

32. This is a revision of my discussion in "The Image of Assyria in Isaiah 2:5-22."

33. Duhm, *Das Buch Jesaja*, 17. For a survey of scholarship on the compositional history of the passage, see Hugh Godfrey Maturin Williamson, "The Formation of Isaiah 2.6-22," in *Biblical and Near Eastern Essays: Studies in Honour of Kevin J. Cathcart*, ed. Carmel McCarthy and John F. Healey (London: Clark, 2004), 57–68, especially 57–60.

34. Bartelt, *The Book Around Immanuel*, 190–204, esp. 202. He argues that verses 5–22 are a coherent unit, linked by vocabulary and theme, but sees 12–16 as a unit within these.

10–11 and 17–19 cohere logically and structurally. Verses 11 and 17 form an inclusio, as do verses 10 and 19, so that it is reasonable to regard at least verses 10–19 as an organic unit. It is possible to regard 5–9 as a later addition to the passage, but they are clearly linked to verses 10–19 since verses 5–9 describe the evils that caused the "Day of the Lord" mentioned in the subsequent verses. Goldstein has argued that verses 20–21 are a later addition, added to explain the animated status of the idols in verse 18.[35] I will discuss the entire passage (2:5–22), but will consider the possibility that verses 5–9 and verses 20–21 are later additions.

Isaiah 2:5–22 is widely recognized in scholarly literature as describing "the day of the Lord."[36] However, there is no generally-accepted definition for the concept of the "day of the Lord." I therefore focus instead on the terminology and narrative in the passage.

In considering this narrative, it is useful to refer to a study by Stuart, who noted that the "day of conquest" in many ancient Near Eastern royal inscriptions expresses the sovereign's achieving sovereignty. He suggests that many of the "day of the Lord" passages can be understood in this context.[37] Isa 2:5–22 narrates such a day of conquest, in which YHWH acts against

35. Ronnie Goldstein, "From Gods to Idols—Changes in Attitude Towards Other Gods in Biblical Literature and the Revision of Isaiah 2:18-21," in *On the Border Line. Textual Meets Literary Criticism. Proceedings of a Conference in Honor of Alexander Rofé on the Occasion of his Seventieth Birthday* [Hebrew], ed. Zipora Talshir and Dalia Amara (Beer-Sheva: Ben-Gurion University of the Negev Press, 2005), 113–53.

36. In Mowinckel's words, this term refers to "the great transformation, when He comes and restores His people, and assumes kingly rule over the world." But the term "Day of the Lord" is given different definitions by different scholars. Because of the way Mowinckel understands the term, he considers this passage to refer to this day. In contrast, von Rad, who defines the Day of the Lord as a pure event of war, which is connected to the tradition of the holy wars of Yahweh in ancient Israel, argued that "The text of Isa. ii 12 ff does not amount to more than an allusion" to this concept. (Sigmund Mowinckel, *He That Cometh*, trans. G. W. Anderson [Oxford: Blackwell, 1956], 145; Gerhard von Rad, "The Origin of the Concept of the Day of Yahweh," *JSS* 4 [1958]: 97–108). For a critique of von Rad's position on Isa 2, see Kevin J. Cathcart, "Kingship and the Day of YHWH in Isaiah 2:6-22," *Hermathena* 125 (1978): 48–59, especially 50. For a more global critique of von Rad's position, see Meir Weiss, "The Origin of the Day of the Lord Reconsidered," *HUCA* 37 (1966): 29–63. For a more recent review of the literature on the concept of the Day of the Lord, see Mark A. LaRocca-Pitts, "The Day of Yahweh as a Rhetorical Strategy Among Hebrew Prophets" (Ph.D. diss., Harvard, 2000).

37. Douglas Stuart, "The Sovereign's Day of Conquest. A Possible Ancient Near Eastern Parallel to the Israelite Day of Yahweh," *BASOR* 221 (1976): 159–64. Most of the texts he cites emphasize a morning-to-evening span of a campaign; our passage speaks in verses 12, 17, and 19 of the defeat of enemies in the span of a day but mentions neither morning nor evening.

the high and lofty, as well as against the targets enumerated in verses 12–16. The high and lofty acknowledge God's sovereignty in verse 17 and again in subsequent verses. The language used to describe this campaign, as well as the targets at which it is directed, and the recognition of sovereignty derive from and refer to language and motifs we know from Assyrian royal inscriptions.

I break the passage into four thematic units (which do not necessarily reflect compositional units): 1) verses 6–8, which accuse Israelites of misdeeds;[38] 2) verses 9–11, which call on humanity to evince humility so as to allow YHWH to become elevated; 3) verses 12–19, which describe the military action; 4) verses 20–22, which conclude the passage.

4.1. Verses 6–8, the Accusation

These verses level four accusations against the "House of Jacob."

(6) כי נטשתה עמך בית יעקב. כי מלאו מקדם, ועננים כפלשתים, ובילדי נכרים ישפיקו.
(7) ותמלא ארצו כסף וזהב, ואין קצה לאצרתיו, ותמלא ארצו סוסים, ואין קצה למרכב־
תיו.(8) ותמלא ארצו אלילים, למעשה ידיו ישתחוו, לאשר עשו אצבעתיו.

(6) For you have forsaken [the ways] of your people, O House of Jacob! For they are full [of practices] from the East, and of soothsaying like the Philistines; they abound in customs of the aliens.[39] (7) Their land is full of silver and gold, and there is no limit to their treasures. Their land is full of horses, and there is no limit to their chariots. (8) Their land is full of idols: they bow down to the work of their hands, to that which their fingers made.

The accusations in these verses provide the basis for the action of YHWH in verses 10–19. Conceptually, the common denominator among the accusations mentioned here is that they lead to hubris, or arrogant pride.[40] Each practice

38. There are various opinions regarding the placement of verse 5, and its placement is not relevant to the present discussion. Some see verse 5 as the conclusion of the vision in 2:2–4, noting parallels between Mic 4:5 and Isa 2:5. But the similarities between the vocabulary of 2:5 and of 2:6, both of which mention בית יעקב are not easily dismissed, and the fact that 2:6 begins with the conjunction כי suggests that 2:5 was considered part of our passage.

39. The translation of this verse follows NJPS.

40. Cathcart, "Kingship and the Day of YHWH," 53, suggests that what is condemned here is the expenditure of wealth on war equipment and manufacture of idols. But this does not take into account the mention of divination in verse 6, nor does it connect to the repeated mention of the "high" and "lofty" in the continuation of the passage.

inflates the individual's sense of self, by giving him tools with which he may more fully control his destiny. Soothsaying and divination were attempts to directly discover an individual's fate; the accumulation of silver, gold, and war materiel (horses and chariots) give the individual practical power; and the description of idolatry in verse 8 clearly states that the progenitors of the idols are the worshippers themselves, thus making idolatry a sort of self-worship.

The connection between these practices and hubris can also be seen from parallels to the evaluation of these practices found in Deuteronomy.[41] But while in Deuteronomy these are connected to disloyalty to YHWH, here the focus is not on disloyalty. Rather, it is on interference with the sovereignty of YHWH, as appears from the next section, verses 9–11. The arrogance and inflated sense of self engendered by these behaviours are labelled in verses 9–11 as humans' "highness" and "loftiness." Verses 9–11 clearly see the bringing low of humans as a necessary prerequisite for the elevation of YHWH alone.

In moving from verses 6–8 to verses 9–11, the passage shifts away from addressing the "House of Jacob" and speaks about humans generally, focusing on their arrogance. This reflects the prophet's view of YHWH's universal reach: while his message is directed to Judah, all of humanity ought, in theory at least, to recognize the sovereignty of YHWH. And because, as we shall see, the Assyrian rhetoric of the campaign on which this passage is based does not refer specifically to Israel, the prophet moves to address humanity as a whole.

4.2. Verses 9–11, the Call for Humility

The idea that the campaign is caused by human haughtiness is neatly encapsulated in verses 9–11:

> (9) וישח אדם וישפל איש, ואל תשא להם.(10) בוא בצור והטמן בעפר, מפני פחד י',
> ומהדר גאנו. (11) עיני גבהות אדם שפל ושח רום אנשים, ונשגב י' לבדו ביום ההוא.
>
> (9) But man shall be humbled, and a person brought low --

41. Deut 8:14 posits that accumulating wealth causes arrogance, leading one to forget the debt of gratitude owed to YHWH. Similarly, the king is cautioned against horse-accumulation, since this is one of the factors that might lead him to have a "high heart," that is, to see himself as superior to the rest of the people in Deut 17:20. (See the comparison between our passage and Deut 17 in Amos Frisch, "Echoes in Prophetic Literature of the Prohibitions Contained in the Law of the King in Deuteronomy" [Hebrew], *Iyyune Mikra u Farshanut* 7 [2005]: 263–81.) Similarly, divination is contrasted with undivided loyalty to God in Deut 18:12–13, as is idolatry.

> Oh, do not forgive them. (10) Go into the rock, and bury yourself in the dirt from before[42] the פחד of YHWH and הדר גאונו.[43] (11) The elevated eyes of man shall be brought low, and the loftiness of people shall be humbled.[44] YHWH alone shall be exalted in that day.

Verse 9 states that even though humans are being lowered and humbled, they are not to be forgiven. Because humans are not forgiven, a campaign will take place during which they must "enter [caves or clefts in] the rock and hide in the dirt" because of פחד יי and הדר גאונו.[45] The haughty eyes of men[46] will then be lowered, as will the loftiness of people, and, as a result of this lowering, only YHWH will be exalted "on that day." The final result of the campaign is the exaltation of YHWH exclusively; this suggests that the raised-up character of the גאה and רם humans before the campaign is perceived as an impediment to the recognition of divine sovereignty.

The declaration "YHWH alone shall be exalted on that day" in verse 11 serves to make explicit a point that is implicit in the transition from verse 10 to verses 12–16: by bringing low those who falsely claim highness, the objectives of the "sovereign's day of conquest" are achieved. These objectives always involve recognition of the rightful sovereign.[47]

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42. Hebrew מפני literally means "from the face of." The basis for the translation "from before," rather than the standard "because of," is discussed below.

43. The terms left untranslated are discussed below.

44. Hebrew רם refers to objects that are high or raised up, as in Ezek 6:13, 20:28, and 34:6, but especially to objects which have power, as in "a great and powerful nation" (עם גדול ורם) in Deut 1:28, and so the English "lofty" closely parallels its meaning.

45. The difference between the "lowering" in verse 11 and the same "lowering" in verse 9 is that the lowering in verse 11 follows upon the hiding in caves, which is the direct result of God's actions. Because it is the result of divine activity, the "lowering" in verse 11 leads to God's being exalted. The "lowering" in verse 9, which is not provoked by a divine action, does not necessarily lead to the exaltation of YHWH.

46. Haughtiness or arrogance are typically expressed by referring to the eyes, as in Prov 21:4 and 30:13, Isa 37:23 (=2 Kgs 19:22), and Ps 131:1. See in contrast Job 22:29, where lowliness is expressed in reference to the eyes.

47. On the recognition of the rightful sovereign as one of the goals of the sovereign's day of conquest, see Stuart, "The Sovereign's Day of Conquest." Verse 11 implies that the hiding in caves described in verse 10 leads to God's being exalted because it is done out of fear of God. Although Kaiser (*Isaiah 1-12*, 52, 65) argued that verse 11 is not part of the nucleus of the poem, the idea it expresses flows directly from the previous and subsequent verses.

4.3. Verses 12–19, the Campaign

Verses 12–16 describe in detail the divine action that was referred to briefly in verse 10:

> (12) כי יום לי' צ'באות על כל גאה ורם, ועל כל נשא ושפל. (13) ועל כל ארזי הלבנון, הרמים והנשאים, ועל כל אלוני הבשן. (14) ועל כל ההרים הרמים, ועל כל הגבעות הנ־ שאות. (15) ועל כל מגדל גבה, ועל כל חומה בצורה. (16) ועל כל אניות תרשיש, ועל כל שכיות החמדה.
>
> (12) For the Lord of Hosts has ready a day against every haughty one and lofty one, against every raised-up one – he will be brought down. (13) Against all the cedars of Lebanon, lofty and raised up and all the oaks of Bashan, (14) against all the lofty mountains and all the raised-up hills. (15) Against every high tower, and every fortified wall. (16) Against all the ships of Tarshish, and against all the desirable boats.

The "day of the Lord" described here is a campaign directed against the haughty (גאה) and lofty (רם) and against possessions, which create arrogance and pride.[48] Several of the possessions enumerated here are used in other Biblical passages as symbols of power and might (the cedars and oaks and the Tarshish ships) and haughtiness and pride (the towers and walls).[49] Both the mountains and the trees are also high (רם) in a literal sense. The result of this action is described in verses 17–19:[50]

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48. גְּאֶה is usually translated "proud," and does indeed have this meaning in this passage, as in Job 40:11–12. But its basic meaning is related to the verb גאה, whose verbal forms refer to height, as in Ezek 47:5 and Job 8:11. The nominal form גאון is usually translated "pride." But pride means, on a basic level, to exalt oneself, or to see oneself as possessing a more elevated stature. This self-exaltation is condemned as pride when it is excessive or presumptuous (the point is illustrated by Isa 16.6, paralleled in Jer 48:29). גְּאֶה has a sense closer to the English "haughty," since a precise definition might be "one who unjustifiably claims a high stature."

49. This point is discussed by Binyamin Uffenheimer, "The transformations of the Day of the Lord in Isaiah 2-4" [Hebrew], *Bet Mikra* 39 (1994): 97–132, at 104. He notes the many verses that use the cedars and oaks as symbols of power and notes that in Gen 11:4 (the tower of Babel) and in Deut 9:1 high buildings are seen as signs of pride and haughtiness.

50. Many scholars, including Duhm, consider verse 17 to be the conclusion of the previous unit, and verse 18 to be the beginning of the next unit. I have here followed Williamson's division of the text's units, but the choice of how to divide the text does not substantially affect the analysis I offer of the text's message or of the parallels.

(17) ושח גבהות האדם, ושפל רום אנשים, ונשגב י' לבדו ביום ההוא. (18) והאלילים כליל יחלף. (19) ובאו במערות צרים ובמחלות עפר מפני פחד י' ומהדר גאונו בקומו לערץ הארץ.

(17) Then man's highness shall be humbled, and the loftiness of man brought low. YHWH alone shall be exalted on that day. (18) The idols shall vanish completely. (19) They shall enter caves in the rock, and dug-outs in the ground, from before the פחד of YHWH and הדר גאונו when He rises to overawe the land.

Verse 17 recapitulates the idea expressed in verse 11. As a result of the divine action described in verses 12–16, humans are lowered and God becomes exalted. Simultaneously, idols are eliminated. These idols are abandoned by humans, as a result of the humans' recognizing divine sovereignty.[51]

Verse 19, like verse 10, refers to the "haughty" and "lofty" people hiding. Throughout this passage, the recognition of divine sovereignty is presented in opposition to human arrogance and haughtiness. For this reason, verses 12–16 present a Divine Campaign against inanimate objects, which represent and feed human pride. Taken as a whole, verses 12–19 describe how those who previously refused to acknowledge divine sovereignty now recognize it.

In the last three words of verse 19, the objective of God's actions is described: He arises to terrify the land. The formulation לערץ הארץ, referring to an act of God designed to demonstrate sovereignty, has no parallel in Biblical literature. The use of the verb ערץ here deserves attention: it is more commonly used in Isaiah than elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, and tends to be used in contexts where YHWH is compared or contrasted to a conqueror, as in 8:12–13.[52]

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51. Goldstein ("From Gods to Idols," 127–28) argued that they are independent actors, and interprets יחלף in verse 18 as similar in meaning to Akk. *ḫalāpu*, "to slip away." (He understands the idols in this passage as independent actors who are the grammatical subject of both יחלף in verse 18 and ובאו in verse 19.) This meaning for יחלף, instead of the more standard "to pass away" or "to vanish" (as in Isa 8:8, Ps 102:27, Job 9:26), makes it difficult to interpret כליל in its usual meaning of "wholly" (which is its usual meaning, as in Lev 6:15–16 and 1 Sam 7:9 and Deut 13:17). The image of the idols "slipping away" wholly lacks the sort of completeness implied by the idols vanishing. The parallels to Akkadian imagery Goldstein cites at 143–46, in regard to demons slipping away, are interesting, but do not seem to fit with the rhetorical force of verse 17, which refers to the idols vanishing while the exclusive sovereignty of YHWH is established.

52. In chapter 5, I discussed 10:33, where the word מערצה may be a sort of portmanteau word, based on מערכה (campaign), but using this verb because of its association with the contrast between YHWH and human conquerors. In Isa 13:11, the root ערץ is also used to describe how God will subdue human conquerors.

4.4. Verses 20–22. Conclusion

(20) ביום ההוא ישליך האדם את אלילי כספו ואת אלילי זהבו, אשר עשו לו להשת־
חות, לחפר פרות ולעטלפים. (21) לבוא בנקרות הצרים ובסעפי הסלעים,מפני פחד
י', ומהדר גאונו בקומו לערץ הארץ. (22) חדלו לכם מן האדם אשר נשמה באפו, כי
במה נחשב הוא.

(20) On that day, men shall throw away to the fruit-bats and the bats,[53] the idols of silver and the idols of gold, which they made for themselves to bow down to. (21) To enter clefts in the rock and the crevices in the stone from before the פחד of YHWH and הדר גאונו, when He rises to terrify the land. (22) Cease to concern yourselves with man in whose nostrils is life, for in what way is he considered?

Verses 20–21 seem to recapitulate the ideas expressed in verses 18–19. The human beings will reject the idols "which they have made for themselves to bow to," and abandon the idols to the cave-dwelling animals, such as bats. The humans will also hide in caves and dugouts, and the reason for their terror is expressed by repeating the phrase "from before the פחד of YHWH and הדר גאונו," found in verse 19. (This phrase in verse 19 echoes and develops a motif found in verse 10, and will be discussed in the next section.) Verse 22 is widely considered an editorial peroration. It nicely encapsulates the unit's contrast between humans and YHWH, but shifts from the unit's focus on recognition of divine sovereignty towards a focus on the ephemeral nature of human life.

Before moving on to consider the many parallels in this passage to Assyrian texts, I briefly discuss the idol imagery in verse 20. Goldstein has argued that verses 20–21 represent a later compositional stratum.[54] But the abandonment of the idols in verse 20 provides an important contrast to the initial action in verse 8. The humans (Israelites in verse 8) filled the land with idols; they themselves must rid the land of idols before the day of the Lord can reach a successful conclusion. The "vanishing" of the idols in verse 18 is insufficient. It therefore seems that verse 20 is part of the same compositional stratum as verse 8. Both verses indicate that the formation and worship of idols is an act of human "haughtiness" because it prevents humans from recognizing the exclusive sovereignty of YHWH. The campaign

53. On the translation of לחפור פרות ולעטלפים, see Saul Lieberman, "לחפר פרות ולעטלפים," in *Studies in Palestinian Talmudic Literature*, ed. David Rosenthal (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1991), 466–69.

54. Goldstein, "From Gods to Idols," 129–43. He argued that the author of these verses rejected the position of the author of verses 18–19, and considered the idols incapable of independent action.

in this passage, which references motifs we know from many Neo-Assyrian sources, is directed against such haughtiness.

5. Parallels Between Isaiah 2:5–22 and the Neo-Assyrian Campaigns

The characterization of God's actions in this passage contains five elements not found in other "Day of the Lord" passages. The elements have distinct and specific parallels to phrases found throughout the royal inscriptions' descriptions of Neo-Assyrian campaigns. These parallels strongly suggest that the description of the divine campaign in Isa 2:5–21 is based on a Neo-Assyrian model.

5.1. First Parallel: Opposition to the Haughty and Lofty

The declared objective of this divine campaign is to bringing low the "haughty" and the "lofty." The targets of the campaign include the demotion of גאה and רם, mentioned in verses 11, 12, and 17, and attacks on objects that feed pride in verses 13–16. This objective corresponds precisely to one of the standard Assyrian characterizations of the enemy against whom the king campaigns, found in royal inscriptions from the thirteenth century down to the Neo-Assyrian period.

The characterization of the enemy as "arrogant," "obstinate," or "proud" is part of a stylized "moral profile" found in Assyrian royal inscriptions. Fales has explained this profile as part of a "unifying vision of the ideology of *nakrūtu*,"[55] a vision that is predicated on the Assyrian ideology of the king as one who cannot legitimately be opposed. By opposing the king, any enemy is automatically guilty of hubris, since he wrongly considers himself on a plane with Assur's representative.

One of the terms used to express this characterization is the adjective *muštarḫu* (or in later Assyrian, *multarḫu*) "proud," which is a precise parallel to Hebrew גאה. This characterization of the enemy often appears in the titulary of royal inscriptions as a general description of the king's campaign activities. Examples of such usage appear as early as the titulary of Tukulti-Ninurta I, a thirteenth-century Assyrian king:

55. Best translated by the English "enemy-ship." "Enmity" is not an appropriate translation, since it designates an emotion rather than a state. The discussion appears in Fales, "The Enemy in Assyrian Royal Inscriptions," 2:427–28. Because of the specific meaning of this term, I use the Akkadian *nakru* in the following discussion, rather than the English "enemy." The term *nakru* can designate any foreign power who does not submit to Assyria.

> *šar kiššati, šarru dannu, šar māt Aššur, kāšid multarḫī …*
> King of the world, strong king, king of the land of Assyria, conqueror of the proud, …[56]

In a display inscription of Shalmaneser III from the *ekal māšarti* ("Fort Shalmaneser") at Calah, the titulary is followed by the following description of the king:

> *ša ina zikir bēlūtišu kibrāte ultanapšaqā, iḫīlū alāni,*
> *zikaru dannu mukabbis kišād ayābīšu*
> *muparrir kiṣrī multarḫī dāiš kullat nākirī*
>
> … at whose lordly command, the (four) quarters are distressed and cities convulsed, strong male who treads upon the necks of his foes, scatterer of the forces of the proud, trampler of all his enemies …[57]

The context makes it clear that the *multarḫī* here are the king's enemies.[58]

As noted in chapter 5, *multarḫī* is also used in line 9 of the letter to the gods of Sargon II as a designation for the enemies: "to muzzle the mouth of the proud (*aššu ḫaṭam pi muštarḫī*) and hobble the knees of the treacherous."[59]

The same term is later used to describe those conquered by Esarhaddon:

> *ina emūq* DN DN *akšud kullat nākiri multarḫi*
> With the power of the gods (names follow), I conquered all of the proud enemies.[60]

It also describes the enemy in Ashurbanipal's inscriptions, where Teumman king of Elam is called *multarḫu ša ikpuda lemuttu,* "the proud one, who planned evil" in the annalistic account of Ashurbanipal's first campaign.[61]

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56. RIMA 1:247, text A. 0. 78. 6, 247, lines 1–3. A similar titulary appears in RIMA 1:262, text A.0.78.16, lines 7–8. Many thanks to Paul Delnero and Matthew Rutz, who many years ago suggested that I investigate the use of the term *muštarḫu.*

57. Inscription on Throne Base, RIMA 3:102, A.O.102.28, ll. 7–9.

58. RIMA translates *multarḫī* here as "rebellious." This is an idiomatically-appropriate translation, since the kings who are called *multarḫī* refuse to recognize Assyrian sovereignty. Nevertheless, the meaning of the word is "proud," from the root *šarāḫu*. The word is translated "boastful" in CAD M/II, 286.

59. Cited from Mayer, *Assyrien und Urartu*, 1:96, line 9. This point is emphasized by Hurowitz, "Shutting Up the Enemy," 111 and by Fales, "Narrative and Ideological Variations," 135–36.

60. RINAP 4:21, Esarhaddon 1, col. iv, lines 78–79. Similarly in RINAP 4:83, Esarhaddon 33, col. ii, line 26: *kullat nākiri multarḫi*, all the proud enemies.

61. Borger, *Beiträge zum Inschriftenwerk Assurbanipals*, 38, Prism A, col. iii, line 37.

Another related term more directly expresses the arrogance inherent in the enemy's refusal to submit. This is the accusation that the enemy "trusted (*takālu*) in his own strength," frequently found in royal inscriptions. In Sargon's letter to the gods, he uses these terms to describe kings whose cities lay astride the roads to the lands of the Medes and Mannaeans, kings who had not previously acknowledged the sovereignty of Assyria:

> *ana emūqi ramānišunu taklūma la idû bēlūtu*
> In their own strength they trusted; they know not lordship.[62]

The very fact that a foreign potentate refuses to submit indicates his *nakru*-status. We find this expressed not only through the term *muštarḫu*, but also in references to an especially obstinate enemy as *ša lā iknušu ana nīriya*, "who did not submit to my yoke," whose obstinacy intensifies his status as an enemy.[63] Mention of obstinacy serves in the annals as a literary justification for the war unleashed against him, and corresponds to a deterministic conceptual understanding of Assyrian sovereignty as universal and inevitable.

A unique way of formulating this concept is found in Sennacherib's inscriptions, and it serves to highlight the obstinacy of specific enemies. These are the adjectives *šipṣu mitru*, used together, which refer specifically to enemies who have not been defeated by previous Assyrian kings. While we might expect this term to refer to enemies who refuse to submit, despite repeated conquests, Gallagher has shown that the reverse is true: these are "virgin" enemies, who have not yet suffered Assyrian conquest.[64]

This phrase appears in Sennacherib's inscription on the Judi Dagh (Mount Nippur), describing cities of the region, which he subdued, but who in his ancestors' days were:

> *šipṣu mitru la idû palāḫ bēlūti*
> strong and obstinate who knew not the fear of lordship.[65]

It appears in an account of Sennacherib's first campaign as an epithet for enemies who were subject to the particularly exemplary punishment of impalement:

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62. Published in Mayer, *Assyrien und Urartu*, l. 66; for other examples, see Borger, *Beiträge zum Inschriftenwerk Assurbanipals*, 17, Prism A, i 57.

63. This phrase is used in reference to Sidqa of Ashkelon in Sennacherib's annals, including in RINAP 3/1, Sennacherib 4 (the Rassam cylinder), line 39, and other texts such as prisms that form Sennacherib 16, col. iii, line 26b and Sennacherib 18, col. ii, line 1´´. It is also used in reference to Hezekiah in Sennacherib 16, iii 74 and 15 iv 6.

64. Gallagher, *Sennacherib's Campaign to Judah,* 141–42.

65. RINAP 3/2:309, Sennacherib 222, line 20.

> *šipṣu mitru ša ana nīriya la iknušu*
>
> strong and obstinate, who had not submitted to my yoke.[66]

And most relevant to our purposes, it is used in reference to Hezekiah, who is elsewhere labeled *ša la kanašu*, "unsubmissive."[67]

> *ušalpiṭ rapšu nagû Iaudi šipṣu mitru Ḫazaqiaya šarrašu ušakniš šēpū'a*
>
> I damaged the wide district of strong and obstinate Judah, I caused its king Hezekiah, to submit at my feet.[68]

What emerges is a characterization not only of the *nakru,* but also of the Assyrian campaign. The campaign's stated goal is to create submission, to bring the *nakru* to acknowledge their status in the hierarchy produced by the determinism of Assyrian imperial ideology. The degree to which a foreign king is considered proud, arrogant, or obstinate is in inverse proportion to the degree to which his kingdom has previously accepted Assyrian sovereignty. This particular type of rhetoric, the use of special terminology for "virgin" enemies, is a particular innovation of Sennacherib. The rhetoric of the campaign therefore shares significant and specific similarities with the language used in Isaiah to describe the actions of YHWH in 2:10–21. The targets of this action, the רם and the גאה, are those who refuse to acknowledge their place in a hierarchy which is as pre-determined as that of the Assyrians. גאה is the closest Biblical Hebrew synonym for Akkadian *muštarḫu*. Thus, close similarities emerge between the characterization of the *nakru* in Assyrian royal inscription, particularly those of Sennacherib, and the identity of the targets of the campaign in Isa 2:10–21. Both refuse to acknowledge the sovereign's sovereignty, and are therefore considered arrogant.

But more important is the similarity in the action expected of the targets of the campaign. It is not sufficient, argues Isa 2:9–11, for the humans to lower themselves and bend down. Those who do these actions in verse 9 are treated to the imprecation "forgive them not." Only those who hide in the caves and the dirt specifically because of the פחד of YHWH and הדר גאונו are to be considered as having completed their task. It is not enough for humans to be lowered, they must acknowledge the sovereignty of YHWH either by hiding from the expression of His sovereignty (as in verses 10–11),

66. RINAP 3/1:37, Sennacherib 1, line 62.

67. See above, note 63.

68. A building inscription, RINAP 3/1, Sennacherib 44, line 20.

or by actively negating acts of haughtiness (as in verses 20–21). Similarly, the *nakru* are expected to "submit to the yoke of Assyria," by acknowledging Assyrian sovereignty through tribute or by being conquered.

This is emphasized particularly in Sennacherib's titulary. The introduction to several of his royal inscriptions contains the following passage, with few or no variations:

> [d] *Aššur šadû rabû šarrūt lā šanān ušatlimannima eli gimir āšib parakkī ušarbâ kakkēya ultu tiāmti elēnīti ša šulmu* [d] *Šamši adi tâmtim šaplīti ša ṣīt* [d]*Šamši*
>
> *gimri ṣalmāt qaqqadi ušakniš šēpū'a*
>
> *u malkī šipṣūti ēdurū tāḫāzī*
>
> *dadmēšun ēzibūma kīma suttinni nigiṣṣi ēdiš ipparšū ašar la a'āri*
>
> The god Assur, the great mountain, granted to me unrivalled sovereignty, and made my weapons greater than all who sit on thrones. He made all of the black-headed ones from the Upper Sea of the Setting Sun (that is, the Mediterranean) to the Lower Sea of the Rising Sun (the Gulf) bow down at my feet.
>
> Thus did obstinate rulers come to fear battle with me. They abandoned their settlements, and they *flew away like bats of crevices to inaccessible places*.[69]

The goals of the Assyrian campaigns and the goals of the divine action described in these verses are also identical.[70] Both aim to extract recognition of the sovereign from those who refuse to acknowledge his sovereignty. The importance of the characterization of the *nakru* as "arrogant" is such that the Assyrian campaigns seem to have had as their primary goal the extraction of the recognition of Assyrian sovereignty from these kings. And in the Biblical account, verse 11b suggests that exaltation of YHWH can only be accomplished through an acknowledgment of His sovereignty.

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69. Emphasis added. This appears in RINAP 3/1:111, Sennacherib 16, col. i, lines 15–26; RINAP 3/1: 128, Sennacherib 17, col. i, lines 11–21; RINAP 3/1: 172, Sennacherib 22 (Taylor prism), col. i, lines 10–19; RINAP 3/1:188, Sennacherib 23 (Israel Museum prism), col. i, lines 9b–17; RINAP 3/1:204, Sennacherib 24, col. i, lines 9b–18. The clear parallel to the bats mentioned in Isa 2:20 is discussed below.

70. For this reason, the parallels to the Assyrian royal inscriptions are much stronger than those Benjamin Uffenheimer notes to the use of "pride" and "haughtiness" in wisdom literature (104-6 "לגלגולי יום ה' ביישעיה ב-ד,"). The parallel to the Neo-Assyrian royal inscriptions is unique and more specific: A campaign is being launched whose goal is to subdue the proud.

5.2. Second Parallel: Terrifying the Land

A second characterization of God's actions in this passage is their declared objective לערץ הארץ "to terrify the land," repeated in verses 19 and 21. Above, I noted the unusual nature of this formulation in Biblical passages, and its particular use in Isaiah in reference to comparisons or contrasts with conquerors. This characterization also indicates a similarity with the motif of the Assyrian campaign. The Assyrian texts do not declare "terrifying the land" as the objective of their campaigns; it is the acknowledgment of Assyrian sovereignty that is the campaigns' goal. Nevertheless, it is entirely obvious that the effect of Neo-Assyrian campaigns on the local inhabitants was terrifying and frightening. The literary descriptions revel in describing the terror of the enemy kings' reactions to Assyrian might.

Thus in Tiglath-Pileser's inscriptions, the terror of Sarduri of Urartu is described:

> *kakkīya iplaḫma ana šūzub napšātišu ēdēnuššu iḫliq*
>
> He feared my weapons and fled alone to save his life.[71]

And Sennacherib's inscription similarly describes the reason for Marduk-apla-iddina's flight:

> *rigim kakkīya dannūti u tīb tāḫāziya ezzi ēdurma,*
>
> The noise of my strong weapons and onset of my terrifying battle he feared.[72]

Perhaps even more significantly, creating fear among those who had previously not submitted, leading to their fleeing and abandoning their settlements, is a central motif in the passage cited above, the passage that recurs in the introduction to many of Sennacherib's inscriptions.

5.3. Third Parallel: Reactions to the Campaign

The reaction of the humans to the advent of the campaign has few parallels in Biblical literature. They hide in the rock and dirt (צור, עפר) in verse 10, in caves in the rock and dugouts in the dirt (מערות צרים, מחילות עפר) in verse 19, and in clefts in the rock and crevices in the stone (נקרות הצרים וסעפי הסלעים) in verse 21. The common denominator of all these places is their

71. Tadmor, *Inscriptions of Tiglath-Pileser III,* 124–25, Summary Inscription 1, line 22, parallel to RINAP 1:98, Tiglath-pileser III 39.

72. RINAP 3/1:177, Sennacherib 22, col. iii, lines 61–62.

inaccessibility, which makes them suitable refuges.[73] The goal aimed at in hiding is not entirely clear: It would seem that the humans hope in this way to escape the onslaught of the campaign, but there is no mention of their escaping punishment, nor is punishment explicitly mentioned as an activity of the campaigner in the passage.

While the goal of hiding is unclear, the factor that causes them to hide is mentioned clearly in verses 10, 19, and 21. Each of these verses states that the humans enter these caves "from before יהוה פחד and הדר גאונו," apparently out of terror of these.[74] The result of hiding is described similarly in verse 11 and verse 20: Both verses speak about an acknowledgement of the sovereignty of YHWH. This is explicit in verse 11 ("YHWH alone will be exalted on that day") and implicit in verse 20, which describes the humans abandoning their idols. The hiding leads to an acknowledgement of divine sovereignty.

The Neo-Assyrian campaign descriptions contain very close similarities to these descriptions of flight and hiding. *Nakru* kings who heretofore refused to acknowledge Assyrian sovereignty are often said to flee the arrival of the campaign and to hide in inaccessible locations. Although the ostensible goal of flight is to escape punishment, the Assyrian literary descriptions portray this act as indicating an acknowledgment of Assyrian sovereignty. It is understood to indicate a policy of future non-resistance, and the Assyrians generally do not bother to pursue these escaping kings. The act of flight and the despoiling of the cities or troops abandoned by the fleeing *nakru* king usually end the description of that king's interaction with the Assyrians.

Often, the inaccessible location to which the *nakru* king flees is a mountain top. Thus in the description of Sargon's eighth campaign:

> To the top of mount Uashdirikka, a difficult mountain, he fearfully ascended.
>
> The progress of my campaign he saw from afar, his flesh trembled.
>
> All the men of his land he gathered and with difficulty he caused them to mount far-away mountains (so that) their place would not be discovered.[75]

---

73. This passage differs from the description of "the channels in the mountains, and the caves" in Judg 6:2. There, the caves were used to hide agricultural produce from the marauding Midianites. In contrast, the locations mentioned in Isa 2:10, 19, and 21 are not used as hide-outs in order to conduct some specific activity. In these verses, fleeing and/or hiding seems to be an end in and of itself, since no activity is conducted in these locations.

74. The different forms of the verb *bw'* used in these verses is a function of the larger context, as discussed above in the literary analysis. Verse 10 is an injunction to hide, verse 19 is a narration of the act of hiding, and verse 21 is a continuation of verse 20.

75. Mayer, *Assyrien und Urartu*, 1:104, lines 82–83.

More frequently, the *nakru* king is said to flee alone, in a desperate attempt to save his life. One example is the flight of Sarduri, described above, and another appears in the annals of Sargon, describing the flight of Amitašši of Karalla:

> *iplaḫma ana šūzub napištišu Šurda šadê ibbalkit*
>
> He feared and to save his life he fled to Mount Šurda.[76]

The flight is not always to a mountain top; other inaccessible locations are also mentioned. In the following passage, describing Sennacherib's third campaign, Lulle of Sidon is said to flee across the ocean. As is often the case in the royal inscriptions, the flight is here said to be provoked by royal *melammu*:

> *Lulle šar Ṣidunni pulḫe melamme bēlūtiya isḫupušuma*
>
> *ana ruqqi qabal tâmtim innabit*
>
> Lulle king of Sidon, fear of the *melammu* of my lordship overwhelmed him,
>
> he fled far away to the midst of the sea.[77]

These descriptions reflect a literary convention and are not simply a reflection of the particular circumstances in each individual campaign. This characterization of the *nakru* kings as fleeing to inaccessible locations is found as far back as the ninth-century inscriptions of Shalmaneser III.[78] This description of flight as an acknowledgement of Assyrian sovereignty is also reflected in part of the passage that recurs in the introduction to many of Sennacherib's inscriptions. Although the passage is cited above, I repeat the relevant part below for ease of reference:

> *u malkī šipṣūti ēdurū tāḫāzī*
>
> *dadmēšun ēzibūma kīma suttinni nigiṣṣi ēdiš ipparšū ašar la a'āri*
>
> Thus did obstinate rulers come to fear battle with me. They abandoned their settlements, and they flew away like bats of crevices to inaccessible places.

76. Fuchs, *Die Annalen des Jahres*, 36, lines 8–9.

77. Rassam Cylinder: RINAP 3/1:63, Sennacherib 4, line 32.

78. Examples from the annals of Shalmaneser III can be found in *RIMA* 3:29, A.0.102.5, col. iii, line 2 and col. iii, line 4.

5.4. Summary of Points of Similarity

Several interesting parallels thus emerge between the descriptions in Isa 2:10, 19, 21 and the Assyrian inscriptions.

First, in both, those who submit are described as proud and reluctant to submit. Second, in both, they abandon settled areas and move towards caves. While in the Assyrian inscriptions this type of movement is part of a widespread literary trope, it is otherwise unknown in Biblical literature. It is not immediately clear what purpose is served in Isa 2:10, 19, and 21 by the movement into caves. Hiding in caves does not appear to protect them from פחד יי and הדר גאונו. It seems most reasonable to understand this motif as reflecting the motif of hiding in inaccessible locations found in Assyrian inscriptions, in which the inaccessible locations can provide refuge from Assyrian vengeance on rebels. Third, the flight into the caves is interpreted in both Assyrian and Biblical passages as implicit recognition of the sovereign's sovereignty.

These three motifs are found in many Assyrian inscriptions, but they all concatenate in the full passage discussed above, from Sennacherib's titulary, which mentions how in recognition of his sovereignty, obstinate rulers abandoned their settlements and hid in crevices, like bats.

A final motif, that of the bats, is a unique parallel between Sennacherib's titulary and Isa 2:20. In Sennacherib's titulary, the flight of the obstinate rulers is compared to the flight of bats to their caves; in Isa 2:20, there is no comparison of people to bats, but only a mention of the caves into which the idols are cast "to the fruit bats and the bats." This statement, at the end of 2:20, is meant to add to the sense of total rejection of the idols.[79] But the parallel to the use of bats at the end of the passage to its use in a very similar context at the end of Sennacherib's titulary is interesting.

Taken together, the four points noted above produce a series of similarities between Isa 2:5–22 (especially verses 11–20) and the descriptions of the Neo-Assyrian campaign that emerges from the royal inscriptions, and especially from the passage in Sennacherib's titulary. Independently, each of the points can be explained without necessarily positing a historical relationship between the Neo-Assyrian campaigns and this passage. However, the combined weight of the evidence makes such an explanation unlikely. Isaiah uses terminology taken from Neo-Assyrian campaigns to describe a campaign which God will wage against those who refuse to recognize His sovereignty.

The points noted suggest that it is not only the experience of the campaign that serves as the basis for the passage in Isa 2:5–22, but also the

79. Roberts, *First Isaiah*, 48, notes the phenomenon that articles left in caves become covered by bat-dung.

literary image of the campaign that we know from the royal inscriptions. Below, I show that Isa 2:5–22 uses the motif of royal *melammu* found in the campaign literature. This sharpens my conviction that it is the literary image of the campaign, rather than its experience, that serves as the basis for the passage in Isaiah, since *melammu* is a literary conceit, rather than an experiential phenomenon.

5.5. Fourth Parallel: Melammu in Isaiah 2:10, 19, 21

Verses 10, 19, and 21 in this chapter contain a recurring phrase: מפני פחד יי ומהדר גאונו. Above, I have not translated this phrase, reflecting the inadequacy of the existing translations. The NRSV renders "from the terror of the Lord and from the glory of his majesty," while NJPS renders "because of the terror of the Lord and His dread majesty." These translations differ both in their rendering of the preposition מפני, and in their construction of the phrase הדר גאונו. NRSV understands this as a standard construct phrase, while NJPS takes הדר as a modifier. In order to create a parallel between the two objects of the preposition, NJPS understands הדר as meaning "dread" (cognate to Akk. *adāru,* "to fear, to be in awe"), a meaning which is otherwise unattested in Biblical Hebrew for this noun.[80]

A particularly interesting part of this repeated formulation is פחד יי. This is not a very common phrase in Biblical Hebrew, and is used elsewhere to refer to fear that humans experience of God.[81]

But the verses under consideration use פחד יי in a syntactically-unique way that differs from the other Biblical usages. In each of verses 10, 19, and 21, פחד יי functions as the object of the preposition מפני (lit., "from the face of"). מפני modifies the verb בוא ("to enter" or "to come").

(10) בוא בצור והטמן בעפר מפני פחד יי ומהדר גאנו.

(19) ובאו במערות צרים ובמחלות עפר מפני פחד יי ומהדר גאונו, בקומו לערץ הארץ.

(21) לבוא בנקרות הצרים ובסעפי הסלעים מפני פחד יי ומהדר גאונו בקומו לערץ הארץ.

80. Usually, הדר refers to an appearance or quality that would cause others to behave with deference towards its possessor. This is the case in Isa 53:2, where the servant is described as lacking both תאר and הדר, leading people not to accord him respect, and in Ezek 27:10, where military equipment is said to give Tyre its הדר.

81. Other than in this passage, it appears four times in Chronicles, where it refers to fear of Divine retribution (2 Chr 19:7) or to paralysis caused by recognition of God's overwhelming military strength (2 Chr 14:13; 2 Chr 17:10), and in 1 Sam 11:7, where it refers either to fear of divine retribution, or to "a great terror." (The translation "a great terror" in that verse is based on the divine element having a superlative sense.)

The Hebrew Bible contains dozens of formulations of this syntax, in which a verb of motion, such as ברח ("escape"), נוס ("flee"), or בוא ("enter/go"), is followed by the preposition מפני and the object of the preposition. In these formulations, the object of the preposition is consistently and invariably the force or person that causes the flight, never the feeling of terror itself.[82] This rule applies to all passages using the verb בוא (in the *Qal*) followed by the preposition מפני and an object, as well as those using the verbs נוס and ברח (both in the *Qal*) and סתר (in the *Niph'al*) in the same way.[83]
One illustrative example is Jer 35:11b, a call to escape the countryside and take refuge in Jerusalem:

ונאמר באו ונבוא ירושלם מפני חיל הכשדים ומפני חיל ארם

We said: Come, let us enter (בוא) Jerusalem from before (מפני) the Chaldean and Aramean forces.

The Chaldeans and Arameans are here the source of the danger. Another example appears in Num 20:6:

ויבא משה ואהרן מפני הקהל אל פתח אהל מועד

Moses and Aaron went (בוא) from before (מפני) the congregation towards the entrance of the Tent of Meeting.

Yet another example of this is Jer 48:44, which is the only other passage with the syntax *nws/bw'/brḥ/nstr* + מפני + object, where the object of מפני is פחד:

הניס (הנס ק') מפני הפחד יפל אל הפחת

He who flees from before the פחד shall fall into the pit ...

---

82. It follows that the word מפני here should be translated "from before," rather than "because of." I have left the preposition untranslated in this discussion in order to focus on the characteristics of the object of the preposition, rather than on the preposition.

83. A partial list of passages using this syntax is:

bw': Num 20:6; Deut 20:19; Jer 41:17–18; Jer 35:11, and Ps 139:7.

nws: 2 Sam 10:14, 10:18, 23:11; Isa 31:8; Am 5:19; Zech 14:5; 1 Chr 10:1, 11:14, 19:15; 2 Chr 13:16.

brḥ: Gen 16:8, 35:1, 35:7; Ex 2:15, 1 Sam 21:11, 1 Kgs 2:7, 12:2; Ps 3:1, 57:1; 2 Chr 10:2.

str: 2 Kgs 11:2; Isa 16:4.

The verb *ṭmn* (*Niph'al*), which is used in Isa 2:10, 19, 21, does not appear in any other Biblical verse together with the preposition *mippenê.* However, its meaning is similar to the verb *str* (*Niph'al*).

In this verse, פחד itself is the terrifying force. This verse emphasizes that the Moabites flee from fear itself, not from an enemy. The verse might best be translated "He who flees from the panic ..."[84] The source of the danger is here, as elsewhere, the object of the preposition מפני.

Isa 2:10, 19, and 21 should also be interpreted in light of this rule of syntax. In other words, פחד י' (one object of the preposition מפני) and הדר גאונו (the preposition's second object) should designate the source of the terror from which humans flee and hide. פחד י', therefore, must refer to the source of the humans' terror. Unlike 1 Sam 17:20, 2 Chr 14:13, 17:10, and 19:7, פחד י' in Isa 2:10, 19, and 21 does not refer to the "fear of God" felt by people but to the actual thing they fear.

For פחד י' to refer to the source of the people's terror, it must mean something other than "fear of the Lord" in this passage. I posit that the word פחד here is a calque, or loan translation, on the Akkadian *puluḫtu.* The literal meaning of this Akkadian word is "fear" (synonymous with פחד*),* but it is used in Akkadian to refer to the terrifying aspect of the *melammu*. (*Puluḫtu* is an abbreviation of the construct *puluḫti melammi*, semantically identical to *pulḫi melammi*.)[85] Elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, יִרְאָה (a synonym of פחד) is used as a loan translation of the Akkadian *puluḫtu*.[86] It is reasonable to suppose that פחד could be used similarly, since one seeking to translate the word *puluḫtu* into Hebrew might well refer to the lexical meaning of *puluḫtu.*

This understanding of פחד solves the syntactic problem in our verse because פחד refers not to the feeling of terror, but to the actual source of terror, viz., the *puluḫtu* of YHWH. As noted above, the *puluḫtu* is a way of referring to the *melammu*, the appearance or mythical covering possessed

84. The motif of fleeing from panic rather than from an enemy is also found in the curse formula in Lev 26:17b and in 26:36–37.

85. On the meaning of *puluḫtu*, see my *The Unbeatable Light,* 81–98. Note that the terms *puluḫtu and melammu* frequently appear in parallel in Akkadian literature, and that the construct form *puluḫti melammi* is also common. The reverse construct, **melam puluḫti* does not exist. This suggests that the term *puluḫtu* may be an abbreviation of the construct *puluḫti melammi*, and that the phrase means "terror of *melammu*" or "terrifying *melammu*." Passages using this construct are found in the annals, on which see *The Unbeatable Light,* 88–89.

86. In Ezek 1:18, the word יִרְאָה appears as a characteristic of the אופנים. The word יראה cannot mean "fear" in this verse, since the phrasing "they had fear" does not conform to normal Biblical Hebrew syntax. If one sought to express the idea that the אופנים were terrifying, one would expect the phrasing "fear seized me." Here, the אופ־ נים are described as possessing יִרְאָה. The crux in this verse was solved by showing that the word יִרְאָה here is a calque on the Akkadian, translating the term *puluḫtu* (Waldman, "A Note on Ezekiel 1:18"). The surrounding context, in which the other components of the vision are described as radiant, supports Waldman's interpretation.

by kings and gods in Mesopotamian literary culture, which prevents others from defeating them. Flight from before the *puluḫtu* of the king is well attested in the Neo-Assyrian annals. Consider the passage already cited above (note 77) from the annals of Sennacherib, which describes the flight of Lulle, king of Sidon, during the third campaign:

> *pulḫe melamme bēlūtiya isḫupušuma ana ruqqi qabal tâmtim innabit*
>
> Fear of the *melammu* of my lordship overwhelmed him, and he fled far away into the midst of the sea ...[87]

This passage illustrates the concept of flight from before a king's *puluḫtu*. It closely parallels the usage in Isa 2:10, 19, and 21, since the flight is specifically to inaccessible locations. Flight to inaccessible locations from the *melammu* of the king is a frequent motif in the royal inscriptions. One example, from a campaign of Ashurnasirpal II against Arbakku:

> *ina pan melamme bēlūtiya iplaḫūma ālānišunu dūrēšunu uššerū*
>
> *ana šūzub napšātešun ana šadî matni šadî danni ēlû*
>
> They took fright in the face of the *melammu* of my lordship; they abandoned their strong cities. To save their lives, they ascended Mount Matnu, a strong mountain.[88]

In some royal inscriptions, such as in the famous Rassam cylinder passage concerning Hezekiah, a more specific parallel to Isa 2:22 appears:

> *šū Ḫazaqiau pulḫī melamme bēlūtiya isḫupūšuma*
> *Urbī ṣābīšu damqūti*
> *ša ana dunnun Ursalimmu āl šarrūtīšu ušēribumma iršû tillāti*
> ...
> *ana qereb Ninua āl bēlūtiya arkiya ušēbilamma*
>
> As for Hezekiah, my terrifying *melammu* of lordship overcame him,
>
> and the Urbi, his elite troops that he had brought in to strengthen Jerusalem, his royal city, and which he had acquired as auxiliaries, ...
>
> he sent after me to Nineveh my lordly city.[89]

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87. *Pulḫu* is semantically identical to *puluḫtu*. RINAP 3/1:63, Sennacherib 4, line 32.
88. RIMA 3:211, A.0.101.1, col ii, line 113.
89. RINAP 3/1:65-66, Sennacherib 4, lines 55–58.

The *pulḫi melamme* or *melammu* of the king causes the *nakru* king to hand over or destroy military equipment and personnel. This decommissioning is of particular importance, since it is these men and materiel that give the *nakru* king the power in which he is said to trust, and it is this trust that leads him not to recognize the Assyrian king's sovereignty.[90] In Isa 2:22, the humans are said to hide in inaccessible locations and abandon their idols, in the face of פחד יי. These idols serve a parallel function to the men and materiel of the *nakru*, since these idols have previously prevented them from recognizing the sovereignty of YHWH. Thus, the *pulḫi melamme*, *melamme,* or פחד of the sovereign causes the abandonment of those objects that have prevented the acknowledgement of the true ruler's sovereignty.

Other linguistic parallels between the recurring phrase in Isa 2:10, 19, and 21 and the language of the Assyrian royal inscriptions relate to the phrase הדר גאונו.

In investigating the meaning of הדר in these verses, we note a syntactic peculiarity. Usually, when הדר appears as the first term in a construct phrase, the second term refers to the person or object that possesses the הדר. Thus, the phrase הדר הכרמל (Isa 35:2) refers to the הדר of the Carmel, and the phrase הדר זקנים (Prov 20:29) refers to the הדר of the elders. Only in post-exilic literature do we find construct phrases in which the noun following הדר is an abstract noun. Thus, we find הדר of kingship in Ps 145:5 and 12, and in Dan 11:20. But in pre-exilic Hebrew, other than in Isa 2:10, 19, 21, we never find הדר in construct with an abstract noun.

This peculiarity of usage can best be explained by positing that הדר גאונו is a calque on the Akkadian *melam bēlūti. Melammu* (which refers to an appearance or covering that renders its possessor insuperable) shares a range of meaning with the Hebrew lexeme הדר (which refers to an appearance that engenders respect and admiration). Because of this shared range, הדר can be used to express the concept of *melammu* in Hebrew.[91] The phrase הדר גאונו is similar both in meaning and in syntactic structure to the Akkadian *melam bēlūti.* הדר parallels *melammu* in meaning, and גאון is similar to *bēlūtu.*[92] Syntactically, the two construct phrases are parallel.

90. The Assyrian view that the *nakru* king's trust in his own strength is arrogant is discussed in chapter 5.

91. On the parallels in meanings between these terms, see further in my *The Unbeatable Light,* 81–98.

92. The noun גאון can mean "highness" or "majesty." It also means pride, but at its basic level, pride means "to exalt oneself, to see oneself as high," and only presumptuous self-exaltation is condemned as pride. Since God's self-exaltation is neither presumptuous nor excessive, God's גאון is not condemnable pride, but rather an expression of His supremacy and majesty. This is seen in Ex 15:7 (וברב גאונך תהרס קמיך "In Your great majesty, You destroy Your opponents"), where there is no hint of any

The syntactic and contextual parallels between Isa 2:10, 19, and 21 and the use of *puluḫtu* and *melammu* in the royal inscriptions support the view that פחד is a calque on Akkadian *puluḫtu*, and הדר גאונו on *melam bēlūti*. This is particularly the case in light of the similar function that these terms serve in these texts: פחד and הדר גאונו, like the *puluḫtu* and *melammu,* cause those who have previously not acknowledged the sovereign's rule to flee.

One objection which can be raised to this thesis is that the syntactic forms are not precisely parallel. Isa 2:10, 19, and 21 use פחד יי and הדר גאונו as distinct elements, each of which is an object of the preposition מפני. In the passage from the Rassam cylinder cited above, we find the longer phrase *pulḫi melamme bēlūti*, and other inscriptions refer either to *puluḫti melammi* or to *melam bēlūti.* In response to this objection, we ought to remember that a precise correspondence in style ought not to be expected, since I am not positing that the author of the Biblical passage sought to imitate precisely the style of annals that he read. On the contrary, he is unlikely to have read these annals; as discussed above, he is more likely to have heard, from the mouths of Assyrian administrators, or from other Judahites who interacted with them, the motifs we know from Assyrian royal inscriptions.

Literary dependence can be demonstrated by showing specific similarities between texts that cannot easily be explained as the product of independent literary development. Such a phenomenon emerges from the comparison of Isa 2:5–22 to the language we know from the Assyrian royal inscription. The similarities between the usages in the two corpora are highly specific, and the Biblical Hebrew syntax in Isa 2:10, 19, and 21 is best explained by reference to the Akkadian formulations we know from the royal inscriptions.

When combining the syntax in Isa 2:10, 19, and 21 and the several similarities described above, it seems clear that much of the unit we know as Isa 2:5–22 was written as a response to the motifs and language we know from the Assyrian royal inscriptions. The author of this passage knew these motifs and language, and expected his audience also to recognize them.

6. The Theological Response in Isaiah 2:5–22

The theological response that emerges from Isa 2:5–22 succeeds precisely where the response in Isa 36–37 fails: it recognizes the reality of Assyrian power. More than simply recognizing this power, the entire response is

damnable pride. Thus, the word גאון has the meaning of majesty or supremacy, besides its meaning of pride. Because of its meanings of majesty and supremacy, it is similar in meaning to Akkadian *bēlūtu.*

based on a motif that only has relevance as a function of this power: the description of the annual military campaign, designed to extract recognition of Assyrian sovereignty from the *nakru*. It takes this literary form, used to laud Assyrian power, and appropriates it by describing that the principal in this future campaign is none other than YHWH, the sovereign whose rule is seen by some as permanently eclipsed by that of Assyria.

It might be argued that the response fails the empirical test: It does not correlate with any discernable political or military reality. It is certainly true that the power of YHWH in this chapter is not one found in the confines of perceptible space and time. But the prophet has no other choice: Acutely aware of Assyrian power, he does not wish to present a prophecy that ties the "Day of the Lord" to a particular time period, since continued Assyrian domination will undermine the truth of such a prophecy. Instead, he uses the uncertainty engendered by Assyrian domination to his advantage, and presents a prophecy which, like the "End of Days" vision in 2:1–4, is disconnected from the constraints of space and time.

Convinced of the essential truth of the sovereignty of YHWH, but uncertain of the time when this sovereignty will be realized on earth, the prophet focuses on that which is certain and refrains from presenting a prophecy bound to specific events. He does not use the language of the eschaton in this prophecy, but rather leaves the question of the timing of these events utterly opaque. The prophecy is rooted in empirical reality, since it depends on the Assyrian campaign motif, but it is not limited by this reality, since it uses this reality as the basis for a timeless vision.

It is this timeless element that has allowed the prophecy to have relevance and resonate outside of its Assyrian context. It serves as the literary basis for the medieval liturgical acrostic used for centuries in the Jewish New Year service, in the section that proclaims divine sovereignty (מלכויות):

וְיֵאָתָיו כֹּל לְעָבְדֶךָ.
וִיבָרְכוּ שֵׁם כְּבוֹדֶךָ.
וְיַגִּידוּ בָאִיִּים צִדְקֶךָ.
וְיִדְרְשׁוּךָ עַמִּים לֹא יָדָעוּךָ,
וִיהַלְלוּךָ כָּל אַפְסֵי אָרֶץ.
וְיֹאמְרוּ תָּמִיד יִגְדַּל ה'.
וְיִזְנְחוּ אֶת עֲצַבֵּיהֶם,
וְיַחְפְּרוּ עִם פְּסִילֵיהֶם.
וְיִטּוּ שְׁכֶם אֶחָד לְעָבְדֶךָ.
וְיֵרָאוּךָ עִם שֶׁמֶשׁ מְבַקְשֵׁי פָנֶיךָ,
וְיַכִּירוּ כִּחַ מַלְכוּתֶךָ.

And they shall all come to serve You
And they shall bless Your weighty name
And the isles shall tell of your victories,
And nations who know You not shall seek you out.
And the ends of the earth shall praise You
And they shall repeatedly declare Your greatness
They shall abandon their idols,
And dig into the earth with their statues.
They shall all turn with one shoulder to worship You
The seekers of Your countenance shall fear you
And they shall acknowledge the power of Your kingship.[93]

93. Cited from Ernst Daniel Goldsmith, *מחזור לימים הנוראים לפי מנהג בני אשכנז לכל ענפיהם* (Jerusalem: Koren, 1970), 227–28.

8

Conclusion: Theology, Politics, and History in Isaiah 1–39

In a work focused, as this work does, on exegesis, the reader ought not to expect a pithy one-line conclusion. To each of the passages treated, I compared motifs known to us from Assyrian imperial propaganda, and considered whether the passage reacts to these motifs. Such reactions were identified based on the test Malul formulated in his examination of the influence of Mesopotamian legal corpora on the Biblical text.[1] After identifying similarities, I weighed the likelihood that these are due to coincidence against the likelihood that the Isaiah passages indicate some form of dependence. The key question in considering each passage is: Is it reasonable that the Isaiah passages were composed without reference to the Assyrian motifs?

1. Assessing the Argument

In her recent study investigating the influence of the succession treaty of Esarhaddon on Deuteronomy, Crouch used a somewhat different methodology for assessing the influence of a Mesopotamian text on a Biblical one. The methodology she elaborates is based on techniques used to identify inner-biblical allusion, and focusses on the question of recognizability,

1. Malul, *The Comparative Method*, 87–91.

highlighting the frequency and distinctiveness of lexical similarities.[2] I believe that a methodology highlighting the different origins of the two corpora is more appropriate in this book. Nevertheless, applying the criteria Crouch elaborates to the passages discussed in this work would not yield substantially different results. Most of the cases discussed treat similarities between Assyrian literary material and passages in Isa 1–39, and in many of these the case for influence of the former on the latter is based on distinct lexical similarities, while in others the similarities consist of shared motifs.

How did these terms and motifs reach Isaiah? Many of the passages I cited from Assyrian royal inscriptions are taken from the titularies, which recur in several inscriptions. Other passages I cited contain motifs which recur in multiple inscriptions. Titularies and recurring motifs figured prominently in the empire's self-conception and in the king's self-presentation (to the extent that the two can be separated). For this reason, they would have figured prominently in the oral discussions Assyrian officials had with Judahite emissaries in the capitals, and with Judahite officials in the southern Levant. Rarely have I cited Assyrian motifs that appear in a single exemplar; the notable exception is Sargon's Letter to the Gods, which appears to have been proclaimed orally and clearly formed an important part of his self-presentation.

To suppose that the motifs found in the texts noted were not transmitted orally to officials of Judah and other tributary kingdoms is to suppose that the empire presented itself entirely differently orally than it did in writing. And there is no evidence to suggest this. The artistic evidence may provide circumstantial support for a consistent self-presentation of Assyria and its king, since the presentation in the reliefs corresponds closely with the presentation in the inscriptions. It stands to reason, therefore, that the oral presentation corresponded to the written record, significant parts of which have come down to us.

Therefore, the Judahite officials and their colleagues in Judah's elite, who formed the primary audience of Isaiah, were part of a "community of knowledge" of Assyrian claims of empire. Allusions to the motifs that formed part of this self-presentation would therefore be identifiable to

2. Crouch, *Israel and the Assyrians*, 21–45, especially 21–34. Among the studies of inner-biblical allusion she cites are Benjamin D. Sommer, *A Prophet Reads Scripture: Allusion in Isaiah 40-66* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998); Jeffrey M. Leonard, "Identifying Inner-Biblical Allusions: Psalm 78 as a Test Case," *JBL* 127.2 (2008): 241–65; and Yitzhak Berger, "Ruth and Inner-Biblical Allusion: The Case of 1 Samuel 25," *JBL* 128 (2009): 253–72.

Isaiah's audience, as would allusions to the larger ideology that Assyria deployed to justify its empire.[3]

As I discuss in chapter 1 of this work, many Assyrian administrative texts attest to the close contact between Assyrian officials and those of the vassal states in the relevant period, and this close contact strongly indicates that such a community of knowledge developed. We know that Judean emissaries reached Assyrian capitals on a regular basis throughout the period discussed in this book, and interacted, in Aramaic, with Assyrian officials. We know that Assyrian officials were posted at key points in the southern Levant during much of this period, and that they interacted with the vassal kingdoms in the region.

Obviously, the strength of the case for influence from Assyrian propaganda varies in the different passages considered. And a certain degree of methodological humility is necessary. No methodology is infallible, and if one applies the standard of "beyond any doubt," then Williamson is right in saying that "nothing can be proved," in regard to the date and influences on each passage.[4] But we can indeed demonstrate not only a preponderance of proof, but also in many cases proof beyond "reasonable doubt" that some of these passages respond to Assyrian propagandistic claims. And this degree of probability cannot be ignored in Biblical studies any more than they can be ignored in legal discussions.

It is important to emphasize that passages which demonstrate such responses "beyond reasonable doubt" also exercise influence on the larger picture. Isa 31:1–5 is arguably the passage containing the strongest case for clear influence from motifs we know from Assyrian inscriptions. It would be too "monstrous a coincidence" to suppose that a passage which speaks of asking Egypt for military help, and repeatedly deploys unusual phrases containing the root עזר and variations on the term רע, does not refer to historical actors bearing the names Azuri and Re'u, who respectively asked for and failed to deliver said Egyptian help. Given this reference, it seems very clear that the motif in 31:4 of shepherds shouting at a lion, who apparently comes to steal sheep, alludes to the ridicule of Re'u, portrayed as fleeing the Assyrian king (frequently compared to a lion) "like a shepherd whose sheep was stolen" in the Assyrian inscriptions. This parrying of Assyrian claims demonstrates quite clearly that the author of this passage was aware of the motifs we know from Assyrian royal inscriptions. Other such clear cases

3. For a discussion of the importance of a "community of knowledge" in assessing the influence of Assyrian imperial texts on Biblical literature, see Crouch, *Israel and the Assyrians,* 43, citing Julie Sanders, *Adaptation and Appropriation: The New Critical Idiom* (London: Routledge, 2006), 97.

4. Williamson, "In Search of Pre-Exilic Isaiah," 182.

of allusion include the reference in 19:19 to the monument on the border with Egypt, and to the campaign portrayal in 2:5–21. From these passages, it can reasonably be inferred that the author or authors of a significant parts of Isa 1–39 were aware of the motifs and ideology we know from Assyrian royal inscriptions. In other words, these passages demonstrate a broader phenomenon.

I freely admit that there are some passages discussed in this work where influence from these motifs may reasonably be denied. Isa 7:18 is an example of such a passage; I noted that my proposal to connect between the "bee in the meadow" imagery in this verse and Assyrian motifs describing the "buzzing" of water in meadows as a result of newly-restored canals is tenuous. One can claim that no case for Assyrian influence has here been demonstrated. But this claim only influences the interpretation of this particular passage; it does not implicate the interpretation of other passages or demonstrate a broader phenomenon.

In surveying the passages in which parallels demonstrate influence beyond any reasonable doubt, I believe that we can include, besides those noted above, 7:20, which describes how God will deploy the king of Assyria against the king of Judah; 10:13–14, which use Assyrian imagery to describe Assyria as the enemy and God as sovereign; and 37:24–25, which describe actual Assyrian boasts as denigrating God. The wide range of responses to Assyrian power in these verses shows how problematic is the approach of those scholars who insist that the Isaiah of the late eighth century must display a consistent response to Assyrian power.

The passages that contain clear responses to Assyrian claims of empire show that, on the contrary, Isaiah expressed a very different view of Assyria in different passages. In Isa 7 and 8, he portrayed Assyria as a divine emissary. In Isa 19:19–25, Assyria is portrayed as causing Egypt to turn to monotheism and to knowledge of God. In 31:1–5, Assyria is portrayed as causing God to defend Jerusalem, but not as an enemy of God. The pivot, which marks the portrayal of Assyria as an enemy of God, appears in Isa 10:5–15. In this passage, and in subsequent passages in 10:16–34, and then in the prophetic narrative about the 701 campaign in Isa 36–37, Assyria is viewed as an inveterate opponent of God, who must be defeated in order for God's sovereignty to be recognized. Finally, Isa 1:4–9 ask Judahites to learn about God's sovereignty from their calamitous encounter with the Assyrian campaign. And Isa 2:5–22 portray a future where the theological lessons of the campaign will indeed be learned.

This range of responses demonstrates, in my view, a political realism. Such realism requires recognizing changing political realities and responding accordingly. The view that a prophet cannot alter his political positions supposes either that the prophet is active only for a short period, or that he is utterly disconnected from political reality. The fact that Isaiah responds

to Assyrian claims of empire shows that he was indeed connected to political realities, and therefore, his changing views of Assyria ought to be expected.

The flexibility demonstrated in his political positions does not extend to his theological positions. Throughout the passages discussed, God is portrayed as omnipotent, as wholly other than the Assyrian king, and as infinitely more powerful than Assyria. This portrayal obtains in passages which describe God as sending Assyria, in those which describe Him as opposing Assyria, and in those which portray Him modelled on Assyria (such as 2:5–22).

In discussing the different portrayals of Assyria found in the different passages, I have proposed a chronological scheme according to which the different passages can be organized. While a very high degree of certainty attaches to the overall influence of Assyrian motifs on the passages discussed, the same cannot be said for the chronological argument that situates particular passages in particular sub-periods. I have made a cautious and persuasive case for situating particular passages within particular sub-periods. But while I have used the placement of these passages within these sub-periods in order to organize the passages discussed, it should be recognized that my fundamental argument relates to the Assyrian influence on these passages, and not to their situation within a specific sub-period. With a high degree of certainty, we can assign the composition of these passages to the hundred years following 745; their placement within a specific sub-period is, I believe, interesting and highly probable, but not more than that.

2. Theology Grounded in History, But Not Limited in History

The underlying methodological argument in this study is that Biblical studies cannot ignore Assyriology. Even if Landsberger were right in claiming for Assyriology the right of "self-definition," as a field without reference to Biblical studies, Biblical studies cannot claim for itself the right to self-define and study the text without any reference to Assyriology or the ancient Near East.[5] It cannot claim this because Biblical Israel was influenced by Assyria, and by other cultures of the ancient Near East. To cut Biblical studies off from Assyriology and ancient Near Eastern studies is essentially to cut the study of the Hebrew Bible from Biblical Israel, and to see it as a sort of ahistorical text.

5. Walther Sallaberger, "Benno Landsbergers „Eigenbegrifflichkeit" in wissenschaftsgeschichtlicher Perspektive," in *Das geistige Erfassen der Welt im Alten Orient Beiträge zu Sprache, Religion, Kultur und Gesellschaft*, ed. Claus Wilcke (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2007), 63–82.

Some have argued for such an approach; perhaps the impetus comes from the view that the Bible is of interest theologically and not historically. I have argued in this study that it is precisely the historical approach, which situates the Hebrew Bible within its ancient Near Eastern context, which allows a more complete understanding of the majesty of Isaiah's theology.

For it is one thing to argue for the majesty of God in a comfortable library or house of study. But as students of theological academies often find out when they enter the "real world," it is quite another to argue this when political reality engages in an unceasing attack on theological postulates. I have shown that Isaiah formulates his theology in an environment rife with what he perceived as such attacks. While he changes his political advice as political circumstances changed, his underlying theology, of the God's transcendence and status as "wholly other" than humans, remains constant.

In his study of Isa 10, Machinist compared the reaction of Isaiah to Assyrian claims of empire, in an environment where Assyria clearly enjoyed political and military supremacy, to that of the Old Bolsheviks.[6] Under Stalinist terror, they continued to uphold their own intellectual freedom, while conceding to Stalin political control of the state. This struggle for intellectual space, while conceding Stalinist political victory, was also the approach taken by Rabbi Joseph Isaac Schneerson, who declared openly, when being forced into exile by Stalin, "Only our bodies went into exile, but not our souls."[7]

Machinist describes how Bukharin, one of the Old Bolsheviks, who knew he would be executed, used his trial to subvert Stalinist language in a struggle to defend his own world view and to delegitimize that of his persecutors: "This was, of course, no mere game but a life and death struggle, if not for physical lives, which for the accused had already been decided, then certainly for ideas."[8]

This formulation, "life and death struggle for ideas," nicely encapsulates Isaiah's ideological agenda in its historical context. But the majesty of this agenda allows it to outlive the particular ideological struggle for which Isaiah's verses were composed. Isaiah's fundamental argument is that Divine Sovereignty cannot be impugned by any human force, under any political or military circumstances. God is sovereign regardless of the abasement to which His loyalists are subjected. This differentiation between political realities and theological truths is fundamental to the capacity of Judaism to

6. Machinist, "Ah Assyria," 208–11.

7. Alter B. Z. Metzger, *The Heroic Struggle: The Arrest and Liberation of Rabbi Yosef Y. Schneersohn of Lubavitch in Soviet Russia*, translated and adapted from the memoirs of the Rebbe (Brooklyn: Kehot Publication Society, 1999), 153.

8. Machinist, "Ah Assyria," 210.

retain its theological core, not only in the relatively short Babylonian exile, but in the long period of subjugation and dispersal that followed the Roman conquest. It encouraged generations of commentators to see their own period as mirroring that of Isaiah, as happened, for example, at Qumran.[9]

But Isaiah's ideological agenda was not formulated specifically for a period of exile and dispersal, but to deal with the normal vicissitudes of politics in a small state struggling for independence against overwhelming odds. It has particular resonance to the period of another such state, the third Jewish commonwealth in the Land of Israel, in which I have the distinct privilege to live and write.

The particular aspect of Isaiah's approach that seems most relevant to my political reality is his combination of political flexibility and theological constancy. He recognizes that different political circumstances require different responses: at times, revolt is needed; at others, political accommodation is required. But while advocating, perhaps more strongly than any other biblical writer, for Divine Sovereignty, Isaiah argues against interpreting the political vicissitudes of Judah as indicating any changes in the fundamental theological truth of God's Sovereignty. Judah must navigate the complexity of international politics according to the rules of the political game, but at the same time, bear Divine Sovereignty foremost in its mind. Divine Sovereignty is not a guarantee of Judahite political success, and Isaiah's political recommendations to Judah seem derived from careful political analysis, and not only from an awareness of Judah's covenant with God.

For a small state bearing the burden of an ancient covenant with God and a challenging regional political environment, it is difficult to combine political practicality and theological constancy. This combination was challenging to the political leadership of Isaiah's time, and it is challenging in our own. Doubly challenging for us, were we to lack his wise and inspired counsel. But his counsel is available, through his book, and I hope that the foregoing has contributed to a deeper understanding of his ideas and message.

9. On the interpretation of Isaiah at Qumran and in later periods, see Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Opening the Sealed Book: Interpretations of the Book of Isaiah in Late Antiquity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006).

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Index to Authors Cited

Index to Biblical Passages Cited

Index to Akkadian Passages Cited

Index to Toponyms

Names such as Judah, Israel, Assyria, and Babylonia, which appear very frequently, are not listed. The Biblical or Assyrian names are used; modern names commonly used in archaeology or Assyriology are listed in parentheses.