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Isaiah among the Ancient Near Eastern Prophets : a comparative study of the earliest stages of the Isaiah tradition and the Neo-Assyrian prophecies

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CHAPTER 4

PROPHECY IN ITS HISTORICAL SETTING

This chapter deals with the prophetic material from First Isaiah and from seventh-century Assyria in their respective historical settings and aims to illuminate the relationship between prophetic oracles and historical events. Its purpose is to explore one of the main characteristics shared by the eighth-century prophetic material from First Isaiah and the Assyrian prophecies: the prophetic words relate to events of great political importance and intervene in the political scene. It will be demonstrated that, notwithstanding the immense differences between Judah and Assyria as political entities, prophecy to some extent played a similar role in situations of crucial political importance. Prophetic words and oracles take root in, and relate to, concrete historical situations. They interfere with contemporary events and seek to influence the imminent future. In order to demonstrate this, I will describe various relevant episodes in eighth-century Judah and seventh-century Assyria, and discuss the prophetic materials connected with them. The chapter contains two main parts: historical events in Judah and prophetic oracles from First Isaiah (4.1), and historical events in Assyria and the Assyrian oracles (4.2). A final section (4.3) presents a balance of similarities and differences between the ways Isaiah's oracles and the Assyrian oracles relate to their respective historical contexts.

4.1 Historical Events in Judah and Prophetic Oracles from First Isaiah

The first Judaean king to enter an Assyrian royal inscription is Ahaz, listed in one of the summary inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser among rulers who submitted to Assyria and offered tribute in 734 BCE.[1] By the second half of the eighth century BCE the kingdom of Judah

[1] Summary inscription 7, l. 11' (ITP: 170-171), ^{m}*Ia-ú-ḫa-zi* ^{kur}*Ia-ú-da-a+a*, 'Jehoahaz of Judah'. The earlier view that Azriyau, a ruler defeated by Tiglath-pileser in 738 BCE, may be identified with King Azariah/Uzziah of Judah, has now mostly been abandoned. Annal 19*, l. 1-12 (ITP: 58-63), describing Azriyau's actions, present him as an Aramaean ruler (esp. l. 9-11). The identification with Azariah/Uzziah of Judah was based on a connection with another text, K 6205, which includes a reference to the land of Judah. However, Na'aman (1974: 36-39) has shown that K 6205 is part of a text dating to the time of Sennacherib (the Azekah inscription, discussed in 4.1.7). This implies there is no reason to identify Azriyau as a Judaean king. Instead, Annal 19* suggests he was the ruler of Hamath and Hadrach; so Weippert 1976-80: 205; Galil 1996: 61; Veenhof 2001: 249.

was a political state of modest dimensions, ruled by the royal house of David.[2] For the kingdom of Judah, the eighth-seventh century BCE proved to be an important period. Assyria's takeover of Syria-Palestine in the late eighth century opened up Judah to international trade and to neighbouring civilisations. After the downfall of Israel and the establishment of direct Assyrian rule in the North, the way for Judah was clear to become a player in regional political affairs. From the second half of the eighth century onwards Jerusalem expanded and Judah's importance increased.[3] Furthermore, Judah became integrated into the Assyrian economic sphere and played a role in the southern trade network.[4]

In the ninth century, after a period of temporary weakness (c. 1100-900 BCE), a new wave of Assyrian expansion began. The policy of westward expansion brought Assyria into conflict with the North-Syrian states on the Euphrates, and subsequently with Damascus and other Syrian states.[5] Assyria's military successes had however not resulted in permanent supremacy over the West.[6] It was Tiglath-pileser III (745-727 BCE), who by adopting a new political-military strategy 'reshaped the map of the ancient Near East.'[7] Whereas his predecessors had conquered and plundered the Neo-Hittite and Aramaean states along the west of the Euphrates and had occasionally reached as far as the Mediterranean coast, Tiglath-pileser aimed to establish a permanent rule in these regions. After the defeat of Sarduri II of Urarṭu and the fall of Arpad (741/40 BCE), many Western kingdoms, including Israel, Damascus and Tyre, were forced to submit to Assyria. This situation is probably reflected in a tribute list in Tiglath-pileser's Iran Stele, which refers to Menahem of Israel, together with Rezin of Damascus[8] and Tuba'il of Tyre.[9] In 738, the Assyrian army returned to the West and defeated a coalition headed by Tutamu of Unqi and Azriyau of Hamath.[10] The kingdom of Unqi was turned into an Assyrian province and Hamath was reduced to a rump state ruled by king Eni-ilu. The outcome of this campaign is reflected in another list of rulers upon whom Tiglath-pileser imposed tribute (Annal 13*), which mentions Menahem of Samaria together with Rezin of Damascus and Hiram of

[2] The process of state formation in Judah is a much-debated issue. For the current state of the discussion, see Vaughn and Killebrew (eds) 2003, and Herzog and Singer-Avitz 2004.
[3] For the expansion of Jerusalem, see Geva 2003; Killebrew 2003: 335-338. Steiner (2001: 110-111) points out that in the seventh century Judah developed into a strongly centralised state, with Jerusalem taking a central position, surpassing the other cities in the region in size.
[4] Evidence of trade relations with Greece or Cyprus, Syria and perhaps Arabia indicates that during the seventh century Jerusalem profited from international trade under the *Pax Assyriaca*; see Steiner 2001: 109-110; Zimhoni 1990: 49; Dalley 2004a: 389-390, 393.
[5] Lambert 2004: 353; Veenhof 2001: 236-239; Na'aman 1991a: 80-83.
[6] Veenhof 2001: 240-249.
[7] Tadmor ITP: 9; see also Veenhof 2001: 251.
[8] I follow the conventional spelling Rezin; for the historical spelling Raḫiān, Weippert 1973: 46-47, note 83.
[9] Iran Stele iii A l. 5 (ITP: 106-107). According to the reconstruction of Tadmor (ITP: 267), Tuba'il was king of Tyre in 740.
[10] See note 1 above.

Tyre.[11] During the next stage, 734-732 BCE, Tiglath-pileser conquered Philistia, Trans-Jordan, Israel and Aram-Damascus.

4.1.1 The Historical Events of 734-732 BCE

With the campaigns of 734-732, Tiglath-pileser aimed to achieve control over the Mediterranean coast from Phoenicia to the Egyptian border and to consolidate Assyria's hegemony in southern Syria and Palestine.[12] Through the campaigns, Assyria gained control over both routes to Egypt, 'the Transjordanian desert road which goes south from Damascus, and the Levantine road with goes south from Samaria towards the Mediterranean coast, and passes the great coastal cities of the Phoenicians and the Philistines'.[13] The Assyrian Eponym Canon mentions Philistia as the region on which the campaign of 734 was focused, and the land of Damascus as the main target of the campaigns of 733 and 732.[14] Among the remains of Tiglath-pileser's annals are some fragments that deal with the campaign of 733.[15] In addition, various summary inscriptions from Tiglath-pileser's reign deal with events of 734-732.[16]

The campaign of 734 was directed at the Mediterranean coast. The Assyrians invaded Philistia by marching south from Phoenicia along the coastal highway. One of the main events of this campaign was the conquest of Gaza.[17] The Assyrian inscriptions claim that Hanunu of Gaza fled to Egypt because of the Assyrian army, but returned after Gaza had been conquered. Tiglath-pileser restored him to the throne and imposed a large tribute upon him. The Assyrian king established a centre for international commerce (*bīt kāri*) at Gaza,

[11] Annal 13* l. 10-12 (ITP: 68-69), similar to Annal 27 (ITP: 89). By 738, Tuba'il had been succeeded by Hiram, who was king until at least 734/733 (ITP: 267).

[12] Two recent studies on the Syro-Ephraimite crisis are Asurmendi 1982 and Irvine 1990. Both present a survey of the Assyrian sources and the biblical material, and both offer a reconstruction of the events (Asurmendi 1982: 48-51; Irvine 1990: 75-109). The reconstruction presented here differs from theirs in some respects. 1) Both Asurmendi and Irvine, in my view, overestimate the scale of the anti-Assyrian rebellion. Neither Edom nor Gaza nor Egypt actively participated in the rebellion (contra Asurmendi 1982: 49-51; Irvine 1990: 69-70). 2) Both assert that the campaign of 734 BCE against Philistia was a reaction against the anti-Assyrian league, just as the campaigns of 733 and 732 BCE were; Asurmendi 1982: 48; Irvine 1990: 70: 'The Assyrians responded to the Western revolt in 734/733 by marching against Philistia'. This is, however, unlikely. As Tadmor (1966: 88) pointed out, with the campaign of 734 the Assyrians aimed to dominate the Mediterranean seaports. In order to remain in control over the coastal commerce however Assyria had to consolidate its power in Syria-Palestine. After the campaign against Philistia, it appeared that the rulers resisting Assyria's supremacy, Rezin, Hiram and Pekah, could also induce others, such as Mitinti of Ashkelon, to join their rebellion. For that reason, the Assyrians returned in 733 and 732 BCE, to break the resistance. 3) Asurmendi (1982: 48) and Irvine (1990: 108-109) situate the threat posed to Ahaz *before* Assyria's campaign against Philistia. I suggest however that the Syro-Ephaimitic crisis is best situated *after* Assyria's campaign against Philistia.

[13] Dalley 1998: 86.

[14] Millard 1994: 44-45.

[15] According to Tadmor's reconstruction, 733 BCE is Tiglath-pileser's thirteenth regnal year; the annals from his twelfth and fourteenth year (734 and 732) are lost.

[16] Unlike the annals, the summary inscriptions are not organised chronologically, but geographically or thematically; see Tadmor, ITP: 275.

[17] Described in Summary inscription 4, 8'-15' (ITP: 138-141); Summary inscription 8, 14'-19' (ITP: 176-179); Summary inscription 9, 13-16 (ITP: 188-189). See further ITP: 222-225.

and erected a royal stele in the city of the Brook of Egypt (*naḥal Muṣur*).[18] Hanunu's flight to, and return from, Egypt may suggest that he sought support against Assyria among the Egyptian rulers, but in vain.[19] Assyria achieved control over the international trade routes via the Mediterranean coast.[20] Tiglath-pileser's royal stele at the Brook of Egypt symbolised the Assyrian takeover and marked the southern border of the west part of the Assyrian empire.[21] In the course of the campaign of 734, several rulers submitted to Assyria and paid tribute. Summary inscription 7 contains a list of rulers who paid tribute to Assyria, and the final part of this list concerns rulers who submitted to Assyria in 734:

> Matanbi'il of Arvad, Sanipu of Ammon, Salamanu of Moab, […]
> [Mi]tinti of Ashkelon, Jehoahaz of Judah, Qausmalaka of Edom […]
> and Hanunu of Gaza.[22]

Tiglath-pileser claims to have received their tribute,[23] consisting of gold, silver and all kinds of valuable material and treasures. Ahaz's submission and tribute offered to Tiglath-pileser in 734 represents the first direct contact between Assyria and Judah. This is more or less confirmed by the biblical account of 2 Kgs 16:5-9, where Ahaz's appeal to Tiglath-pileser is presented as the beginning of Judah's servitude to Assyria. It is uncertain whether any other events mentioned in Tiglath-pileser's summary inscriptions are to be situated during the campaign of 734.[24]

Despite Assyria's successful campaign of 734, parts of southern Syria and Palestine resisted Tiglath-pileser's hegemony. During 737-735, while Assyrian forces were occupied in other areas, several rulers who had previously been subdued by Assyria, such as Rezin of Damascus and Hiram of Tyre, had thrown off the Assyrian yoke. In Israel, the usurpation of

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[18] ITP: 223-226.
[19] For an explanation of Hanunu's stay in Egypt and return to Gaza, see Kahn 2001: 16, note 89.
[20] See Tadmor 1966: 88. According to Becking (1992: 9), the Assyrian aim was 'control over the overseas-trade via the Phoenician harbour-cities as well as control over trade with Egypt and the caravan-routes to the Arabian peninsula'. Economic motives were a major factor in Assyria's military expansion, see Veenhof 2001: 231.
[21] Kahn 2001: 16-17.
[22] Summary inscription 7, r. 10'-12' (ITP: 170-171). The inscription was written in 729/728 BCE; the kings mentioned in the fragment quoted are the tribute-bearers of 734, see Tadmor ITP: 268. Hanunu of Gaza, mentioned in last position, apparently was the only ruler from this list who initially resisted Assyria's dominion.
[23] Summary inscription 7, r. 7', *madattu* (restored).
[24] The events described in Summary inscription 8 l. 2'-9' and 10'-13' (ITP: 176-177) are sometimes situated during the campaign of 734 BCE, since they are followed by a description of the Hanunu episode. According to Irvine (1990: 46-49) the passage deals with Arvad rather than with Tyre, but this is based on the assumption that it describes an event from the campaign of 734 because it precedes the episode of Hanunu of Gaza. However, since the summary inscriptions may list events in geographical sequence rather than chronological order (as Irvine [1990: 26] acknowledges), the passage may deal with events from the campaign of 733. It is known that Hiram of Tyre rebelled against Assyria. Lines 2'-9', dealing with a rebel king (possibly Hiram) of a Phoenician city ('in the midst of the sea', line 4') is likely to describe an event of 733/732. Similarly, lines 10'-13' are likely to reflect events of 733/732 and may deal with Israel and the killing of Pekah; so Na'aman 1986: 72-73.

Pekah, which ended the reign of Pekahiah son of Menahem, probably marked a transition to the anti-Assyrian camp led by Rezin of Damascus (c. 736 BCE). Against this background, the remark of 2 Kgs 15:37, that during the reign of Jotham, Judah was troubled by Rezin of Damascus and Pekah of Israel, can be understood.[25]

In order to secure its control over the coastal commerce and its supremacy in Syria-Palestine, Assyria had to break the resistance. This was the purpose of the campaigns of 733-732. In the inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser, various rulers and states are accused of rebellion against Assyria: the Arab queen Samsi, 'who broke her oath of Šamaš',[26] Mitinti of Ashkelon, who broke the loyalty oath,[27] Hiram of Tyre and Rezin of Damascus,[28] and perhaps Israel.[29] It is clear that Rezin took a leading role. The revolts of Mitinti of Ashkelon and Hiram of Tyre are connected with Rezin's policy.[30] The biblical material connects Pekah of Israel with Rezin's anti-Assyrian politics and confirms Rezin's leading role. The rebellion of the Arab queen Samsi may be connected with Rezin's politics as well, since in the annals of 733 the Assyrian measures taken against Samsi directly follow those against Rezin.[31] The Assyrian inscriptions thus point to a joint rebellion. However, they do not refer to a coalition of joint forces against Assyria. Apparently, no battle was fought against the coalition, but Tiglath-pileser took action against the rebelling countries one by one.

The annals of Tiglath-pileser's thirteenth year (733 BCE) deal with Rezin's defeat, his flight to Damascus, the siege of Damascus, the conquest of his cities, and the annexation of his land.[32] The fragment ends with a reference to Queen Samsi of the Arabs, who is accused of having violated 'the oath of Šamaš'.[33] Another fragment from the annals of 733 BCE (annals 18 and 24) deals with Israel and Ashkelon. Israel's territories in Galilee and Trans-Jordan (Gilead) were occupied and annexed, and some of the inhabitants were deported. The kingdom was reduced to a rump state consisting of the central hill country around Samaria. In the course of these events, perhaps after the fall of Damascus in 732, a regime

[25] Rezin's aim was not only to resist Assyria's hegemony but also to achieve his own hegemony in the region. Pekah of Israel probably was under his influence, and the purpose of the Syro-Ephraimite crisis was to appoint a ruler over Judah, who would be under his supervision as well. In this respect Oded (1972) was right when he presented the Syro-Ephraimite crisis as an inner-Palestinian conflict. It cannot be denied however that Rezin's ambitions brought him in conflict with Assyria.
[26] ITP: 80-81.
[27] ITP: 82-83.
[28] ITP: 186-187, '[Hi]ram of Tyre, who plotted together with Rezin [...]'.
[29] Na'aman 1986: 72-73.
[30] ITP: 82-83 (Mitinti); ITP: 186-187 (Hiram).
[31] ITP: 80-81. There is no evidence that any Egyptian ruler supported the anti-Assyrian resistance led by Rezin (contra Irvine 1990: 69-70). Na'aman (1991a: 92) and Irvine (1990: 53-54) may be right that the Assyrian campaign of 734 aimed to block off the way for a possible Egyptian intervention in Palestine. Note however that Schipper (1999: 141) argues that until the takeover by the Cushite (25th) dynasty, Egypt suffered from a weak period 'in der an eine aktive Außenpolitik Ägyptens nicht zu denken war'.
[32] Summary inscription 9 r. 3-4 (ITP: 186-187), reads: 'The wide [land of Bit-]Haza'ili (Aram) in its entirety, from [Mount Leb]*anon as far as the cities of Gile*[ad, Abel ….] [on the bor]der of Bit-Humria (Israel) I *annexed* to Assyria. [I placed] *my eunuch* [over them as governor].' (Tadmor's translation).
[33] For the Samsi episode, ITP: 228-230.

change took place in Samaria: Pekah was killed and succeeded by Hoshea, who made obeisance to Tiglath-pileser in 731.[34]

Ashkelon's king Mitinti had submitted to Assyria in 734, but soon afterwards broke the loyalty oath. In the Assyrian annals Mitinti's rebellion is connected with the resistance of Rezin of Damascus, by stating that Mitinti became insane (or panicked) when he saw Rezin's defeat.[35] It is not clear how Mitinti fell from power, but he may have been killed by the people of Ashkelon in an effort to avert an Assyrian attack.[36] Mitinti was succeeded by Rukibtu, possibly his son. Thus, the campaign of 733, aiming to end the resistance in southern Syria and Palestine, included measures against Rezin of Aram, the Arab queen Samsi, Mitinti of Ashkelon, the Kingdom of Israel, and probably Hiram of Tyre.[37]

Since Damascus had not been captured in 733, the campaign of 732 was again focused on Rezin of Damascus. Although the annals of 732 are lost, the expected outcome is the death of Rezin.[38] The fact that Tiglath-pileser did not return to Syria-Palestine implies that he was satisfied with the accomplishments of 734-732. Furthermore, the fall of Damascus and the death of Rezin are confirmed by the account of 2 Kgs 16:5-9.

> [5] Then King Rezin of Aram and King Pekah son of Remaliah of Israel came up to Jerusalem for war; they enclosed Ahaz, but were unable to fight.
> [6] At that time the king of Edom recovered Elath for Edom, and drove the Judaeans from Elath; and the Edomites came to Elath, where they live to this day.[39]
> [7] Ahaz sent messengers to King Tiglath-pileser of Assyria, saying, 'I am your servant and your son. Come up, and rescue me from the hand of the king of Aram and from the hand of the king of Israel, who are attacking me.'
> [8] Ahaz also took the silver and gold found in the house of Yahweh and in the treasures of the king's house, and sent a bribe to the king of Assyria.
> [9] The king of Assyria listened to him; the king of Assyria marched up against Damascus, and took it, carrying its people captive to Kir; then he killed Rezin.

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[34] Summary inscription 13 l. 17'-18' (ITP: 202-203) describe Israel's affairs as follows: '[the land of Bit-Humria], all of whose cities I had [devastated] in my former campaigns, […] its livestock I had despoiled and had spared the city of Samaria alone – … they overthrew (Peqah) their king.' (Tadmor's translation). Pekah was succeeded by Hoshea, who was recognised as ruler by Tiglath-pileser after he had offered tribute at Sarrabanu (731 BCE); see Summary inscription 9 r. 9-11 (ITP: 188-189).
[35] Annal 18 l. 9'; annal 24 l. 14' (ITP: 82-83).
[36] See Irvine 1990: 36. Assyria's dealings with Ashkelon may be connected with the siege of Gezer. This siege, not mentioned in the inscriptions, is known from a relief of Tiglath-pileser. The army that besieged and conquered Gezer may have had Ashkelon as its destination.
[37] Hiram of Tyre surrendered and paid tribute. After this, he and his son Matan remained vassals of Assyria. Tiglath-pileser's actions against Tyre which led to Hiram's surrender are probably to be situated not during the campaign of 734, but during one of the subsequent campaigns of 733 and 732; Irvine 1990: 58-59.
[38] See Tadmor ITP: 281.
[39] מֶלֶךְ אֱדוֹם 'king of Edom' in the original text became מֶלֶךְ אֲרָם 'king of Aram' and the name 'Rezin' was added from verse 5; 'Edom' and 'Edomites' is to be read in the entire verse (cf. 2 Chron 28:17). So Tadmor and Cogan 1979: 496-497.

This account reflects various events of 734-732, but deliberately puts them in a different light, as I will argue. 2 Kgs 16:5-9 is a composite account.[40] First, verse 6, which is only loosely connected with the rest of the account, is not historical but betrays a particular agenda.[41] Furthermore, 16:7-9 give the impression of continuing verse 5, but this is misleading. Since verse 5 already reveals that Rezin and Pekah were unsuccessful, the appeal of Ahaz to Tiglath-pileser (verse 7) does not follow smoothly. Moreover, 16:7-9 do not mention the (ending of) Jerusalem's siege, nor Rezin's return to Damascus, nor the fate of Pekah of Israel.[42] Whereas verses 7-9 were composed as a continuation of verse 5 (as is evident from verse 7b), verse 5 once stood on its own as a short note concerning the reign of Ahaz.[43]

Verse 5 is a relatively early note concerning the Syro-Ephraimite crisis, which in itself is not negative about Ahaz. The extension of 16:7-9 refers to the events of 734-732, but deliberately puts them in a different perspective. On the one hand, it reflects Ahaz's submission to Assyria and his tribute to Tiglath-pileser in 734. On the other, it reflects Assyria's campaign against Damascus (733-732) and its outcome: Rezin's death.[44] However, whereas in the Assyrian inscriptions these events are unrelated, in 16:7-9 they have become connected. From Tiglath-pileser's inscriptions it appears that in the course of the campaign against Philistia (734 BCE), Ahaz submitted to Assyria and paid tribute. Furthermore, in the campaigns of 733-732 BCE Assyria broke the resistance of Damascus and its allies. There was no specific connection between Ahaz's submission and the campaigns against Rezin and his allies in 733-732 BCE. This is however what 2 Kgs 16:7-9 adds in its interpretation of the events: it is claimed that Tiglath-pileser came to Palestine at Ahaz's request, in order to save him from the Syro-Ephraimite aggression. This presents the events of 734-732 from a Judaeo-centred perspective. Historically, Tiglath-pileser was motivated by a policy of westward expansion. From the later Judaean perspective, he came to Palestine at the request of Ahaz. Whether or not Ahaz asked for Tiglath-pileser's help while threatened after the Assyrian army had left the scene, remains uncertain.[45] It is however evident, 1) that Tiglath-pileser had his own motive for the campaigns of 733-

[40] Irvine 1990: 88; Tadmor and Cogan 1979: 494. In 2 Kgs 16, a 'historical report' (16:5-9) and a 'cultic report' (16:10-18) have been combined. The composition of 2 Kgs 16 is very critical of Ahaz; Irvine 1990: 79.

[41] According to Tadmor and Cogan (1979: 496-498), 16:5 and 6 refer to two different events. Aram has nothing to do with the war between Edom and Judah, and the capture of Elath is not connected with the Syro-Ephraimite crisis. In Summary inscription 7, King Qaushmalaka of Edom is mentioned (just as Ahaz) among the rulers who submitted to Tiglath-pileser in 734, and there is no evidence that he, either before or afterwards, joined the anti-Assyrian camp. For 16:6 a seventh- or sixth-century background may be suggested. At that stage, Edom adopted a position hostile to Judah. The insertion of verse 6 aimed to contribute to the negative depiction of King Ahaz: during his reign Judah lost territory to Edom. For this interpretation, see Tadmor and Cogan 1979: 496-498.

[42] Cf. 2 Kgs 15:29-30 for the measures of Tiglath-pileser against Pekah of Israel.

[43] Irvine 1990: 85-86.

[44] For a similar interpretation, see Irvine 1990: 88.

[45] According to Irvine (1990: 86-89 and 299) Ahaz's appeal to Tiglath-pileser is unlikely to be historical. Oded (1993) however presents a range of cases in the Assyrian royal inscriptions where the quest of help from a vassal is followed by a response of the Assyrian king.

732,[46] and 2) that 16:7-9 turned the events upside down by presenting Ahaz's tribute to Assyria as a bribe for his rescue from his enemies and by presenting the arrival of the Assyrian army in Palestine as being motivated by Ahaz's request.

Whereas 16:5 is a relatively early note, 16:7-9 is an extension from a later hand. It describes how Assyria became involved in Judah's affairs. In 2 Kgs 16:7-9, Ahaz is depicted as a powerless king who in a situation of crisis submits to a powerful king, begging him for help and buying his assistance with a large sum.[47] 2 Kgs 16:7-9 is not a neutral description. 1) Ahaz implores Tiglath-pileser to rescue him from the hands of his enemies (יֹשַׁע מִן כַּף). The expression often denotes rescue initiated by Yahweh, but Ahaz appeals to a foreign king.[48] 2) The term שֹׁחַד ('bribe') bears a negative connotation.[49] 3) The self-address of Ahaz to Tiglath-pileser, 'I am your servant and your son', confirms that he chose the Assyrian king rather than Yahweh for his rescue.[50] 16:7-9 seems to assume an ideological contrast between Ahaz and Hezekiah. Whereas Hezekiah trusted in Yahweh and prayed to Yahweh to rescue (ישׁע) him from the hand of Sennacherib (2 Kgs 19:19), Ahaz begged Tiglath-pileser to rescue (ישׁע) him from the hands of his enemies (2 Kgs 16:7).[51] The interpretation of 16:7-9 as a critical passage is supported by the broader picture of the relation between Judah and Assyria as found in 2 Kings. It was Ahaz who made Judah be subjected to Assyria,[52] whereas it was Hezekiah who, thanks to his trust in Yahweh, successfully threw off the Assyrian yoke. 2 Kgs 16:7-9 is not as overtly critical of Ahaz as Isa 7:1-17, or as 2 Kings 16 in its final shape. In the course of time the picture of Ahaz became increasingly negative. Whereas the earliest material concerning Ahaz (the prophetic material in Isa 7* and 8*, the note of 2 Kgs 16:5, and the source behind 16:10-18a) is not negative at all towards him, the later compositions of Isa 7:1-17 and 2 Kings 16 give, in different ways, a negative picture of Ahaz, based on a contrast between Ahaz and Hezekiah.[53] I would suggest that 2 Kgs 16:7-9 reflects an early stage of this Ahaz-Hezekiah contrast: instead of buying help and becoming dependent on Assyria, Ahaz should have trusted in Yahweh, as Hezekiah did.

The events of 734-732 BCE can be summarised as follows: 1) In 734 BCE, Tiglath-pileser conquered Philistia. Ahaz, together with several other rulers from the region, submitted to Assyria and paid tribute. 2) The anti-Assyrian resistance, led by Rezin of Damascus, continued (c. 737-733 BCE). Ahaz's refusal to cooperate with the anti-Assyrian

[46] Oded (1993: 64, note 4) concedes that 'It is more likely that the connection between Ahaz's appeal and the Assyrian campaign was not causal but to a large extent chronological – the Assyrian military campaign would have taken place even without the call for help.'
[47] Cf. Lemaire 2004: 371-372.
[48] Historical appeals for help to the Assyrian king are formulated differently; see Oded 1993: 68-69.
[49] Tadmor and Cogan 1979: 499-500. The fact that this bribe partly consisted of the silver and gold from the temple of Yahweh adds to the critical depiction of Ahaz; see also Irvine 1990: 86-87.
[50] The Davidic king was regarded as both servant and son of Yahweh; see Irvine 1990: 87-88.
[51] In both cases, the request was granted: the king of Assyria listened to his request (2 Kgs 16:9); Yahweh listened to his request (2 Kgs 19:16, 20).
[52] Tadmor and Cogan 1979: 505.
[53] The contrast between Ahaz and Hezekiah reached its climax in 2 Chron 28; see Smelik 1998: 180-182. Many commentators suggest that 2 Chron 28:7, dealing with a coup d'état of a certain Zichri from Ephraim, which almost succeeded, derives from an early, historical source (see Irvine 1990: 95). If this is correct, the report concerning Zichri adds to the threat that was posed to King Ahaz.

politics brought him into a critical situation. 3) In the campaigns of 733-732 BCE, Tiglath-pileser broke the resistance, which resulted in Assyrian dominance over the region, regime changes in Ashkelon and Israel, and presumably Rezin's death.

The situation mentioned under 2), reflected in the prophetic material within Isa 7* and 8*, and summarised in the note of 2 Kgs 16:5, is appropriately called the Syro-Ephraimite crisis.[54] This crisis – the plan of Rezin to kill Ahaz and to replace him with a cooperative ruler – is best situated after Assyria's campaign of 734 BCE against Philistia, for the following reasons. First, we have an analogy in the case of Mitinti of Ashkelon. Both Ahaz and Mitinti were among the kings that submitted to Tiglath-pileser in 734 BCE. Soon afterwards Mitinti broke his loyalty oath and joined the rebellion, either inspired or persuaded by Rezin of Damascus. Second, Ahaz's submission to Tiglath-pileser in 734 BCE meant that he, from Rezin's perspective, had joined the wrong camp. This would have motivated Rezin to take action against him. Third, the advice of Isaiah, reflected in the prophetic material of Isa 7* and 8* (see below), not to take action and not to give in to the pressure of Rezin and Pekah (Isa 7:4) fits into the period between the Assyrian campaigns of 734 and 733/732 BCE. In all likelihood, Ahaz had sworn a loyalty oath in 734 BCE, just as had Mitinti of Ashkelon. Ahaz's oath-enforced bond with Assyria may explain Isaiah's advice and Ahaz's persistence not to join the anti-Assyrian rebellion.[55] Fourth, the note in 2 Kgs 16:5 and the oracles of Isaiah suggest that the plan of Rezin failed. If there was a siege of Jerusalem it was broken off prematurely. This fits the period between Assyria's campaign to Philistia in 734 BCE and the subsequent campaign directed against the rebellious kingdoms.

4.1.2 Prophetic Words relating to 734-732 BCE

As can be inferred from the prophecies to be situated in this period, the prophet Isaiah played an encouraging role during the Syro-Ephraimite crisis. The prophecies to be connected with the circumstances of 734-732 BCE, are 7:4-9a, 7:14b.16, 7:20, 8:1-4 and 17:1b-3.[56]

Isa 7:4-9a*

> Take heed, be quiet, do not fear, and do not let your heart be faint because of these two smouldering stumps of firebrands.
> Because Aram has plotted evil against you, saying: "Let us invade Judah, terrify it, and cleave it open for ourselves and let us make the son of Tabeel king in it!" –

[54] The earliest layer of Isa 7:1-17 focuses on the evil intentions of Rezin and the fear of Ahaz and his people. The note of 2 Kgs 16:5 furthermore states that Rezin and Pekah came up to Jerusalem. Rezin and Pekah intended to kill Ahaz in order to get someone on the throne who would cooperate with their anti-Assyrian politics. They were however unsuccessful. Their plan to accomplish a regime change failed. Since it is uncertain how much fighting was involved, I prefer the term Syro-Ephraimite crisis, rather than Syro-Ephraimite war.
[55] See also Dalley 1998: 88-89.
[56] For the exegetical analysis of the prophetic material discussed in this chapter, see chapter 2.

> Therefore thus says the Lord Yahweh: 'It shall not stand, and it shall not come to pass.' For the head of Aram is Damascus, and the head of Damascus is Rezin, and the head of Ephraim is Samaria, and the head of Samaria is the son of Remaliah.

The earliest layer of 7:1-17, consisting of 7:2-3a*.4-9a*.14b.16 (see chapter 2.1.2), presents a coherent picture: Rezin, with Pekah as an ally under his supervision, intends to replace Ahaz of Judah with an anti-Assyrian king, cooperative with Rezin. This policy, posing a threat to Judah, terrifies Ahaz (7:2, 4, 16). The plan to kill and replace Ahaz makes sense in the political circumstances of the period. A regime change could secure the adoption of the anti-Assyrian politics advocated by Rezin.[57] When the oracle 7:4-9a was delivered, Jerusalem was not yet under siege (cf. 7:2). This may however have happened (soon) afterwards (cf. 2 Kgs 16:5). Under the threatening circumstances, pictured in 7:2 and 7:6, Isaiah urges Ahaz neither to give in to the pressure of the anti-Assyrian rulers, headed by Rezin, nor to go out to wage war against the Aramaean-Israelite army that was ready to invade Judah. Instead, he is to stay in Jerusalem and wait, for Yahweh promises him that the plan of Rezin will fail.[58] 7:6 presents a quotation from the mouth of Rezin. Quoting the adversaries is a characteristic of the prophecies of Isaiah (see 5:19, 10:8-9.13-15, 28:10, 28:15, 29:15). The quotations are fictitious, some of them evidently (10:8-9.13-15, 28:10, 28:15), others most probably.[59] The function of the fictitious quotations from the adversaries is rhetorical. The quotation functions to reveal the self-willed, arrogant attitude of the adversary speaking. The adversary speaks as if Yahweh is a negligible quantity. This reveals his hubris and already anticipates his downfall and punishment.

The identity of the 'son of Tabeel' (7:6) is disputed.[60] Various scholars have suggested that behind *ṭāb'al* figures the Phoenician name Ittobaal,[61] pronounced *toba'l* and deliberately changed into *ṭāb'al*, 'good for nothing', perhaps already by the prophet himself (such a denouncement would be characteristic of prophetic language). This possibility is attractive since the predecessor of Hiram of Tyre was named Ittobaal. The son of Ittobaal would then be a Phoenician prince, related to Hiram of Tyre who took part in the rebellion of Rezin. However, this remains uncertain and other possibilities have been suggested as well.[62] In any case, the 'son of Tabeel' is contrasted with the 'son' Immanuel. In contrast

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[57] Examples of such regime changes: Pekah, who took the throne from Pekahiah (loyal to Assyria) and adopted a policy of rebellion against Assyria; Hoshea who took over from Pekah (anti-Assyria), and resumed a policy of loyalty; Mitinti of Ashkelon who rebelled against Assyria, succeeded by Rukibtu who resumed a policy of loyalty.

[58] The similarities between Isa 7:4 and Deut 20:3 do not imply that 7:4-9a is a 'war oracle' (contra Williamson 1998b: 251, note 27). Oracles of encouragement, depending on the circumstances, may contain different promises and admonitions. Deut 20:1-4 deals with a situation of war and promises that 'it is Yahweh your God who goes with you, to fight for you against your enemies, to give you victory', whereas in Isa 7:4-9a the situation is an evil plan, which, according to the oracle will not come true.

[59] It is quite unlikely that Isaiah knew Rezin's political agenda in detail.

[60] The name *ṭāb'al*, 'good for nothing', is often regarded as a Masoretic distortion of *ṭāb'el*, 'God is good'.

[61] See Dearman 1996 (going back to Vanel 1974; cf. Asurmendi 1982: 53-54).

[62] Some scholars have proposed to connect the name with the 'land of Ṭab'el' ('son of Ṭab'el' then meaning: 'someone from Ṭab'el'). They point to 'Ayanûr the Ṭabelite' (ND 2773, l. 4-5, Saggs

with the candidate-king, the 'son of Tabeel', depicted as an illegitimate pretender to the throne, the prophet presents the 'son' Immanuel as a hopeful sign for Ahaz and his dynasty. The contrast between the two royal figures in the prophetic words is deliberate.

The oracle 7:4-9a shares various important features with extra-biblical prophetic oracles.[63] 1) The phrase 'fear not' (7:4). Nissinen has written a study on the phrase 'fear not' in ancient Near Eastern texts.[64] He refers to the difference between justified 'fear' and unjustified 'anxiety'. Whereas an individual must pay reverence to a legitimate authority, whether royal or divine, he should not be anxious when confronting anything that should not be feared. The phrase 'fear not' is an exhortation to show fearlessness before illegitimate powers and to refrain from unjustified anxiety.[65] The phrase 'fear not' prominently occurs in the Assyrian prophecies,[66] as encouragement in the face of the enemy, or connected with promises for future support.[67] The phrase 'fear not' in an oracle means 'trust me': the addressee is encouraged to trust in the power and promise of the deity and not to fear any illegitimate power.[68] The phrase is appropriately called an 'encouraging formula'.[69] The formula functions as a sign of the divine acceptance of the king's rule.[70] This is also the case in the prophecy on the Zakkur Stele: 'F[e]ar not, for I have made [you] king, [and I will st]and with [you], and I will deliver you from all [these kings who] have forced a siege against you!'[71]

2) In order to emphasise that the enemies should not be feared, they are ridiculed by derogatory metaphors. Isa 7:4 refers to Rezin and Pekah as to 'these two smouldering stumps of firebrands'. In the Assyrian oracles we find comparable depictions: enemies that roll as 'ripe apples' before the king's feet (SAA 9 1 i 9'-10'), enemies as 'plotting weasels and shrews' (SAA 9 1 v 3-5), and as 'butterflies' (SAA 9 3 iii 24).[72] Prophetic oracles make abundant use of metaphors, both in Judah and Assyria, and one category consists of contemptuous depictions of the enemy. The metaphor of 7:4 is meaningful: pieces of wood

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2001). This is however problematic since no convincing explanation has been provided in what way 'the Ṭabelite' was connected with the politics of Rezin and Pekah (see Dearman 1996: 37-40). Since the name *ṭb'l* is attested on various seals from monarchic Judah, Wagner (2006: 139-140, note 39) proposes that the 'son of *ṭb'l*' could have been a Judaean.

[63] Conrad (1985: 52-62) discusses Isa 7:4-9 in comparison with the prophecy on the Zakkur Stele, the prophecy for Ashurbanipal SAA 9 7, and the dream report in Ashurbanipal's Prism B v 63-68 (BIWA: 225). Conrad argues that in 7:4-9 Ahaz is *not* ordered to become actively engaged in battle: the king must remain passive; Yahweh will fight for him.

[64] Nissinen 2003b. The phrase, within oracles of encouragement comparable to 7:4-9a, furthermore occurs in Isa 10:24, 2 Kgs 19:6 (Isa 37:6) and Hag 2:5.

[65] Nissinen 2003b: 131-132.

[66] Nissinen 2003b: 148-158.

[67] Nissinen 2003b: 149.

[68] See also Weippert 1981: 78.

[69] Nissinen 2003b: 132.

[70] Nissinen 2003b: 159.

[71] Translation from: Seow, in: Nissinen 2003a: 203-207. For a reconstruction of the historical events referred to in the oracle, see Margalit 1994.

[72] See further SAA 9 7 r. 1-2, concerning the enemies: 'I will break the thorn, I will pluck the bramble into a tuft of wool, I will turn the wasps into a squash' (Parpola's translation); and SAA 3 13 r. 9-10: 'Your ill-wishers, Ashurbanipal, will fly away like *pollen* on the surface of the water. They will be squashed before your feet like *burbillātu* insects in spring!' (Livingstone's translation).

taken from the fire are not burning anymore, only smouldering. This suggests that, although one must be careful of them (and not touch them!), they will be extinguished soon. The image underscores the message: do not act; soon the threat will disappear.[73]

3) An important element within prophetic oracles of encouragement is the deity's assertion that he or she is the one who acts, whereas the king has to stay, to remain quiet and to leave things to the deity.[74] Similarly, Isaiah urges Ahaz to keep quiet in view of the threat (7:4). In this context, it means not to wage war, not to undertake military activity. The urge to be careful (הִשָּׁמֶר) occurs in other oracles as well.[75] The admonition to keep quiet and not to act functions as assurance that it is the deity who governs the events. The deity takes care, the king should not fear. Similarly, Isa 7:7 implies that Yahweh will take care of the situation.

4) An important theme of the oracle is Ahaz's legitimate kingship versus the illegitimate pretension of Rezin, Pekah, and the son of *ṭāb'al*. The illegitimacy of the latter is implied by 7:7. Verses 5 and 6 draw a contrast between Ahaz's legitimate kingship and the illegitimate throne candidate: 'Aram has plotted evil against *you* (i.e. Ahaz)' (7:5); the enemies intend to make the 'son of Tabeel' king (7:6). It has been suggested that the conclusion of the oracle (7:8a.9a) implicitly says, 'for the head of Judah is Jerusalem, and the head of Jerusalem is the son of David'.[76] Yahweh's election of Ahaz is the reason why Ahaz needs not to fear.[77] This supports a contrast between Ahaz as legitimate king, and his opponents with their illegitimate candidate. A similar contrast is present in some of the Assyrian prophecies. In SAA 9 1.8 Esarhaddon's mother Naqia contrasts the illegitimate but apparently successful half-brothers of her son, with her own son Esarhaddon, the legitimate but so-far unsuccessful, crown prince. The Assyrian prophecies continually picture the king as the legitimate ruler,[78] whose enemies will be annihilated.

Among the characteristics of oracles of encouragement, two themes stand out as particularly important: divine legitimation of the king, and self-presentation of the deity as the principal actor in history who protects the king and takes care of his enemies.[79] Isa 7:4-9a is an oracle of encouragement, a typical response from the deity delivered through the mouth of a prophet, in a situation in which the king is severely threatened his enemies.

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[73] Cf. Wildberger 1972-82: 279.

[74] For examples in the Assyrian prophecies: SAA 9 2 ii 18', 'I am the one who says and does!'; 2 ii 2', '[stay] in your palace' (Parpola's restoration); perhaps 9 1 i 26'-27', 'I will rise in woe, you sit down!' (see Van der Toorn 1987: 83). See further Ištar's message (in a dream) to Ashurbanipal: 'You stay here in your place! Eat food, drink beer, make merry and praise my godhead, until I go to accomplish that task, making you attain your heart's desire.' Prism B v 63-68 (BIWA: 225); translation Nissinen 2003a: 148.

[75] 2 Kgs 6:9 (cf. 1 Sam 19:2), within a prophetic oracle as a warning to take heed in a dangerous situation. The same term occurs in an oracle quoted in Lachish ostracon 3 (see Seow in: Nissinen 2003a: 214-215).

[76] See Wildberger 1972-82: 271.

[77] Conrad 1985: 57.

[78] See e.g. SAA 9 1 iv 5-6 and 20-21, 'Esarhaddon, legitimate heir (*aplu kēnu*), son of Mullissu'.

[79] This is also clear from Wagner 2006: 130-136, who presents three Assyrian prophecies (SAA 9 1.1, 1.2, 1.6) as a counterpart to Isa 7:4-9. In Wagner's estimation (2006: 141) Yahweh functions as 'Schutzgottheit der Dynastie', as does Ištar of Arbela in the Assyrian prophecies.

Isa 7:14b.16

> Look, the young woman is pregnant and is about to bear a son, and you must name him Immanuel. For before the child knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land before whose two kings you are terrified will be deserted.

This oracle further encourages Ahaz. In addition to 7:4-9a, this oracle indicates the moment of Yahweh's intervention. Yahweh announces that the aggressors will be annihilated before the child knows what it wants. The moment of punishment will come fast, within a few years.[80] The situation probably was the same as that of 7:4-9a: Judah, and Ahaz in particular, are threatened by Rezin and Pekah. The announcement of 7:16 intensifies that of 7:7. Whereas 7:7 announces that the evil plan of the enemies to replace Ahaz will not come true, 7:16 announces that the enemies, within a few years, will be punished: their land will be deserted.[81] Although their display of aggression terrifies Ahaz, soon they will be annihilated. The desertion or abandonment of the land probably refers to the deportation of the inhabitants. Rezin and Pekah planned actions that involved the land of Judah (7:6); the punishment involves their own land too.

The identity of the 'young woman' is unknown. Most likely she was Ahaz's wife, and Immanuel Ahaz's son. The name Immanuel purposefully contrasts with *ben ṭāb'al* of 7:6. Whereas *ben ṭāb'al* is the desired result of Aram's *rā'â* (7:5-6), Immanuel will choose between *ṭôb* and *rā'*. The child itself is a sign of the good news, represented by his name.[82] A further link between the oracles 7:4-9a and 14b.16 is provided by the verb קוץ: 7:6 'to terrify' (hi.); 7:16 'to be terrified' (qal). The name Immanuel is an assurance that Ahaz and his people need not fear the enemy, since Yahweh is at their side. This corresponds with the ideology expressed in the Assyrian oracles, such as the phrase: 'Fear not, Bel, Nabû and Mullissu are standing [with you]'.[83] Verse 16 announces the imminent destruction of the land of the enemies, Rezin and Pekah. Although Yahweh does not explicitly announce that he himself will punish the enemies, the implicit message of the name Immanuel is that he will take care of it. The divine promise to deal with the enemies is a prominent feature in Assyrian prophecies as well.

Isa 7:20

The announcement of 7:20 makes clear how Yahweh is going to intervene to punish Aram and Israel:

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[80] Irvine (1990: 163) comments: 'Isaiah meant to suggest how events and circumstances would unfold in the *imminent future* (my emphasis) and so thought of the child's development within the first year or so after his birth.' If the threat posed to Ahaz was at its height soon after the return of the Assyrians following the campaign of 734, the oracles 7:4-9a and 7:14b.16 are to be situated in late 734-733.

[81] In 7:16, the lands of Rezin and Pekah are presented as a unity ('land' singular). The early material within Isa 7:1-17 (7:2*.4-9a*, 7:14b.16) consistently presents 'Aram and Ephraim' as one enemy.

[82] In 7:14a Immanuel is presented as a sign (אות). In some Mari letters prophetic figures are referred to as 'signs' (*ittu*) as well (ARM 26/1 207 l. 4 and 212 r. 2').

[83] SAA 16 60 r. 14'-15'; see also the oracle on the Zakkur Stele: '[I will st]and with [you]' (see above).

> The Lord will shave with a razor hired beyond the River the head and the hair of the feet (pubic hair), and it will take off the beard as well.

The 'razor' mentioned in this announcement denotes the Assyrian king. The Assyrian king is symbolised as a hired razor in the hand of Yahweh. This resembles to some extent the depiction of Esarhaddon in one of the Assyrian prophecies: 'Esarhaddon, king of Assyria, cup full of lye, double-bladed axe!'[84] The Assyrian king is a deadly poison and a lethal weapon.[85] In the same prophecy Ištar addresses Esarhaddon as 'Esarhaddon, true heir, son of Mullissu, angry dagger in my hand'.[86]

Yahweh has hired the Assyrian king in order to punish Ahaz's enemies,[87] to defeat and humiliate them. The expression 'hired razor' also reveals an important difference between Isaiah's oracles and the Assyrian prophecies. Whereas Ištar takes action through the hand of her own king, Yahweh intervenes by mobilising a foreign power.[88] This role of Assyria in Isaiah's prophecies of course corresponded to the current political reality. Both in the prophecies of Isaiah (7:20; 8:1-4; 10:5-6; 28:2) and in the Assyrian royal inscriptions, the Assyrian king is represented as the agent of the divine anger.[89]

The prophecy of 8:1-4 is quite explicit about what will happen to Aram and Ephraim:

> Then Yahweh said to me, Take a large tablet and write on it in common characters, 'Maher-shalal-hash-baz.' And I took reliable witnesses (the priest Uriah and Zechariah son of Jeberechiah).
> And I went to the prophetess, and she conceived and bore a son. Then Yahweh said to me, Name him Maher-shalal-hash-baz; for before the child knows how to say 'father' or 'mother', the wealth of Damascus and the spoil of Samaria will be carried away by the king of Assyria.

The time-span indicated in verse 4 is again more narrowly defined than in 7:16, referring to an even more imminent future. 8:1-2 points to the public role of the prophet. The large tablet with an easily readable saying on it was probably meant for the people in Jerusalem. The reliable witnesses were to testify (afterwards) that it had been a genuine prediction by Isaiah. In this way, 8:1-2 illustrates the communal aspect implied by the name Immanuel, 'God is with *us*'. The announcement in 8:4 is straightforward: Damascus, the capital of Aram, and Samaria, the capital of Israel, will be captured and plundered. This refers to 7:8a.9a, where Damascus and Samaria are mentioned as well. The point of 7:4-9a was that the plan of Rezin and Pekah would fail: they would not be able to put another king on the throne of Jerusalem, because they were not authorised to do so. Whereas Rezin and Pekah

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[84] SAA 9 1 iv 5-13.
[85] In a smimilar way Ashurbanipal is depicted as a battleaxe in SAA 3 26 l. 3'.
[86] This passage, which is not without difficulties, is discussed in 4.2.4.
[87] Note the difference between Isaiah's prophecies and 2 Kgs 16:7-9. According to 7:20, 8:1-4, 10:5-6 and 28:2, Assyria is Yahweh's agent, summoned to punish Judah's enemies. By contrast, according to 2 Kgs 16:7-9, Ahaz appealed to the Assyrian king to save him (rather than trusting in Yahweh), and in this way brought Judah under Assyrian rule.
[88] For the motif of hiring military forces (שכר), cf. 2 Sam 10:6; 2 Kgs 7:6; Jer 46:21.
[89] On the motif of the Assyrian king as the 'rod of wrath in the hand of the gods', Oded 1991: 226-227.

would not be able to get into Jerusalem (7:4-9a), 8:4 announces that their own capital would be captured and plundered. This is again an element of retribution: what they tried to accomplish in Judah, would happen to themselves as a punishment.

An important feature of the oracles from Isa 7* and 8* is their partial repetition. The announcements of 7:7, 7:16, 7:20 and 8:4 can be read as a series. There is an element of repetition, but also an element of increasing explicitness. Step-by-step the announcements reveal how and when Yahweh is going to punish the enemies for their aggression.[90] The actions of Yahweh, furthermore, mirror the plan of the enemies: over against their throne candidate *ben ṭāb'al* stands the son Immanuel; over against their plans against Judah (7:6) stands the abandonment of their own land (7:16); over against their intention to enter Jerusalem in order to kill Ahaz, stands the spoliation of their own cities (8:4).

A final announcement to be mentioned here is 17:1b-3:

> See, Damascus is about to cease to be a city, and to become a heap of ruins. Her cities will be deserted for ever, and become places for flocks. The fortress will disappear from Ephraim, the kingdom from Damascus, says Yahweh of Hosts.

The announcement fits the circumstances of 733-732. This word specifically announces the fall of Damascus and the annexation of the land of Aram into an Assyrian province, and the conquest of Israel.

The prophecies discussed in this section were probably delivered in the period 734-732. The intended regime change in Jerusalem was not accomplished, presumably because of the (expected) arrival of the Assyrian army. Furthermore, during the campaigns of 733-732, Tiglath-pileser annexed territory from Aram and Israel, which was provincialised. Damascus was, in all likelihood, captured and plundered in 732. The only element not fulfilled as yet was the capture and spoliation of Samaria.

The prophecies discussed here can be characterised as pro-state. The oracles assert that Yahweh governs the events. He protects his legitimate king and uses Assyria as his agent. Symbolic names underscore the prophetic message of encouragement. The prophetic material cannot be qualified as royal propaganda however. It is based on concepts from royal ideology, but uses them in order to adopt a particular position. The prophet takes a political position, and supports and admonishes the king through encouraging prophecies.

4.1.3 The Historical Events of 723-720 BCE

Tiglath-pileser was succeeded by Shalmaneser V, who ruled for a short period (727-722). In 733, Tiglath-pileser had reduced the Kingdom of Israel to a rump state consisting of the hill country surrounding Samaria. King Hoshea initially paid tribute to Assyria but at some

[90] The phenomenon of repetition occurs in the Assyrian prophecies too, in a somewhat different way. The deity often refers to previous words (e.g. SAA 9 1 15'-17', 'What words have I spoken to you that you could not rely upon?'; Parpola's translation) in order to increase the reliability of the oracle at stake. The element of repetition in the prophecies of Isa 7* and 8* probably served a similar goal.

point acted treasonably and negotiated with a king of Egypt (2 Kgs 17:3-4).[91] Shalmaneser invaded Israel and according to the Babylonian Chronicle (i 28) 'destroyed Samaria'. This apparently refers to the capture of the city of Samaria.[92] The chronicle does not mention the year, but a dating in 723 or 722 is likely.[93] Hoshea probably was taken captive to Assyria (2 Kgs 17:4).

When Shalmaneser died in 722, Sargon seized power in a struggle for the throne. During the turbulent years of 722-720, various countries and kingdoms tried to free themselves from Assyrian rule. The Chaldean prince Merodach-baladan occupied the throne in Babylonia and made an alliance with Elam. Various Syro-Palestine kingdoms and provinces, headed by the king of Hamath, rebelled against Assyria. After Sargon had settled internal affairs in his first year, Assyrian troops fought against the Babylonian-Elamite forces in his second year. The Assyrians lost the battle,[94] and Sargon left Babylonia and Elam undisturbed for some ten years.[95] In his third year Sargon was able to deal with the rebellious Syro-Palestinian kingdoms.[96] At Qarqar he defeated a coalition of rebellious provinces, including Arpad, Ṣimirra, Damascus, and Samaria, which was headed by Yau-bi'di (Ilu-bi'di) of Hamath.[97] Subsequently, Samaria was captured. After that, Sargon invaded Philistia,[98] went south and defeated an Egyptian army, which had come to the aid of Hanunu of Gaza, under the command of Re'e, the *tartānu* (commander-in-chief) of Egypt. According to a recent reconstruction of the chronology of the Cushite (25th) dynasty, this was the *tartānu* of Shabaka, the Cushite king who had come to the throne in 722/21, and had conquered Egypt in 720.[99] The suggestion that Re'e (not identified in other sources) was the *tartānu* of the Cushite ruler of Egypt,[100] is confirmed by reliefs from

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[91] 2 Kgs 17:4 refers to 'King So' of Egypt'. This king has been identified as Tefnakht of Sais, Osorkon IV and the Cushite king Piye; see Schipper 1998; Kahn 2001: 14; Younger 2002a: 290, note 4. In any case, the Egyptian ruler did not come to the rescue of Hoshea; so Schipper 1999: 153.

[92] Younger 2002a: 290; Becking 1992: 24-25; Veenhof 2001: 255.

[93] Becking (1992: 53) argues that the fall of Samaria took place in 723.

[94] See Grayson 1975a: 73: 33-35.

[95] Brinkman 1984: 48-49. Sargon's next campaign against Babylonia was in 710 (Brinkman 1984: 46-60).

[96] So Dalley 1985: 33-34. It has been claimed that the Assyrian scribes antedated the fall of Samaria to Sargon's first year (721). Tadmor argues they did so for ideological reasons: the first year had to contain an important achievement (Tadmor 1958: 34-39). However, the passage from the annals on which this is based is very fragmented (Fuchs 1994: 87, Annals l. 11: [$^{lú.uru}$*sa-me-r*]*i-na-a-a*). Becking (1992: 39-45) argues that the passage could equally refer to another city.

[97] Younger 2002a: 292; Veenhof 2001: 255.

[98] The conquest of the cities Gibbethon and Ekron, depicted on a relief in Sargon's palace, was part of the campaign of 720 BCE; see Uehlinger 1998: 755, 766; Russell 1999: 114-123; Younger 2003: 242-243.

[99] Kahn 2001: 1-18, esp. 11-13. Previously, the conquest of Egypt in the second year of Shabaka, was connected with the rebellion of Iamani of Ashdod in 712 (or 711, following Fuchs 1998: 124-131). However, Sargon's Tang-i Var rock inscription published by Frame 1999, shows that Shabaka's successor Shabatka reigned as early as 706. This implies that Shabaka was king in 721-707/6. The conquest of Egypt in Shabaka's second year is to be dated to 720 (February); see Kahn 2001: 11.

[100] Conversely Veenhof (2001: 256), who suggests that it is the *tartānu* of Tefnakht of Sais. However, according to Kahn's chronology (2001: 18), Tefnakht had already died in 726/5. Schipper (1999: 154-157) argues that Re'e was the *tartānu* of Osorkon IV, because Sargon's Display inscription, after mentioning the defeat of Re'e, continues with a tribute brought by Arab rulers and by the Pharaoh of

Sargon's palace at Khorsabad concerning the campaign of 720 on which Cushite soldiers are depicted.[101] The Assyrian account claims that the Egyptians were defeated, Gaza was conquered, Hanunu was deported to Assyria, and the city of Raphia on the Egyptian border was captured.[102]

Evidently, the capture of Samaria was part of a larger military campaign.[103] Sargon claims to have deported a great number of inhabitants from the capital and the district of Samaria; one inscription mentions 27,290 deportees, another 27,280.[104] The capture of Samaria and the conquest of the land were regarded as important achievements, since the events are referred to in eight different inscriptions.

Both Shalmaneser and Sargon claim to have captured Samaria. However, since the accounts of 2 Kgs 17:3-6 and 18:9-11 describe only one fall of Samaria, scholars have suggested that either Shalmaneser claimed to have achieved what his successor accomplished, or that Sargon took the credit for what his predecessor had done.[105] Others have proposed that Shalmaneser started the siege of Samaria in 723/22, which was concluded after his death by Sargon in 720.[106] Babylonian and Assyrian sources however refer to two different captures.[107] From 2 Kgs 17:3-4 we may infer that Shalmaneser captured Samaria in 723 or 722, and took Hoshea prisoner to Assyria. This is indirectly confirmed by Sargon's inscriptions, which mention no king of Samaria, neither Hoshea nor another king.[108] It is likely that Shalmaneser had already turned the rump state of Samaria into an Assyrian province. After Shalmaneser's death, Samaria joined a coalition of rebelling provinces, supported by Yau-bi'di of Hamath. In 720, the city was captured again, and Sargon deported a number of its inhabitants to various locations throughout the Assyrian empire.[109]

The report on which 2 Kgs 17:5 and 18:10 are based presumably telescoped two different sieges, that of 723/22 and that of 720, into one three-year siege. In this way, 2 Kgs 17:3-6 and 18:9-11 combine the deeds of Shalmaneser (the captivity of Hoshea which put an end to Samaria as a kingdom) and Sargon (the deportation of Samaria's population) into

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Egypt (referring to Osorkon IV). This argument is however inconclusive. In this episode, Sargon's Display inscription brings various different events together: the defeat of Re'e (720), and the tribute of Osorkon and various Arab rulers. The Arabs were not involved in 720, and the tribute of Osorkon IV probably dates from 716 (see 4.1.5 below).

[101] See Franklin 1994: 264-267, with figures 3, 4, and 5; Uehlinger 1998: 749-750, 766; Kahn 2001: 12.

[102] Younger 2002a: 293; Younger 2003: 237.

[103] Younger 2002a: 291, 293.

[104] Display inscription l. 24 (Fuchs 1994: 196-197); Nimrud Prism iv 31 (Gadd 1954).

[105] See Becking 1992: 33.

[106] Galil 1996: 90-92.

[107] For this suggestion of a twofold conquest, see Tadmor 1958: 34-39; Veenhof 2001: 256; and particularly Becking 1992: 21-56.

[108] Sargon in his inscriptions is frequently designated 'conqueror of the land of Omri (or Samaria)'. Mention is made of the conquest of the country and of the deportation of the inhabitants, but not of a king of Samaria.

[109] Younger 2002a: 293-301; Becking 1992: 47-56; cf. 2 Kgs 17:6 and 2 Kgs 18:11.

an account of a single king who put an end to the Northern Kingdom. This was probably done for the sake of the story: there could only be *the* fall of Samaria.[110]

Sargon's campaign against the West in all likelihood involved action against the Kingdom of Judah too. In the Nimrud inscription Sargon describes himself as 'the subduer of (the land of) Judah, which lies far away' (*mušakniš māt Yaudu ša ašaršu rūqu*).[111] The claim that he made Judah submit does not reveal whether he did so by peaceful means or by military action.[112] Since this inscription presumably dates from 717/16, it has to refer to the campaign of 720.[113] Furthermore, one of the Nimrud letters mentions Judaean emissaries: 'the emissaries (*ṣīrānu*) of Egypt, of Gaza, of Judah, of Moab, of the Ammonites, entered Calah on the twelfth (with) their tribute (*madattu*) in their hands'.[114] The text is dated between 720 and 715,[115] and reflects Sargon's successful campaign of 720.

After the battle of Qarqar and the conquest of Samaria, the Assyrian army moved on to Philistia, where it conquered Gibbethon, Ekron, Gaza and Raphia. It is likely that Judah was involved when the Assyrians went from Samaria to Philistia. As a result, Judah submitted to Assyria. Sweeney has suggested that Isa 10:27b-32 reflects events from Sargon's campaign of 720 pertaining to Judah.[116] In my view, not only 10:27b-32, but also 10:5-15* and 10:24-25 (i.e. the early prophetic material within 10:5-34), reflect the situation of 720 (see below).

A disputed text is the so-called Azekah inscription,[117] which refers to an Assyrian assault against the Judaean city of Azekah, apparently mentions Hezekiah, and refers to a 'royal city of Philistines (Gath or Ekron),[118] which [Hezek]iah had captured and strengthened for himself'.[119] The Azekah inscription has been connected with Sargon's campaign of 720,[120] with Sargon's campaign against Ashdod in 711,[121] and with

[110] See Becking 1992: 56, for a similar explanation: 'In my opinion the deuteronomistic author of 2 Kgs 17:6b//18:11b, living at least a century after the events, was no longer aware of the double conquest of Samaria and consequently conflated all of the events and attributed them to one king.'
[111] Nimrud inscription l. 8 (Winckler 1889: 168-173).
[112] Dalley 1998: 85. The term *mušakniš* (< *kanāšu*), points to the imposition of Assyria's authority, but does not need to imply military conquest; Becking 1992: 55.
[113] Na'aman 1994b; 1994a: 235; Frahm 1997: 231-232. I disagree with Becking (1992: 53-55), who suggests connecting the phrase of Sargon's subjugation of Judah with a campaign against Judah in 715. Becking's suggestion is based on 2 Kgs 18:13, which mentions an Assyrian military campaign against Judah in the fourteenth year of Hezekiah, which, according to Becking, was 715. However, the dating in 2 Kgs 18:13 is secondary and unreliable (according to 2 Kgs 18:2, Hezekiah reigned for 29 years; according to 2 Kgs 20:1-11, Hezekiah during a sickness, coinciding with the siege of 701, was granted fifteen more years of reign; *ergo*, the campaign of Sennacherib was dated in Hezekiah's fourteenth year, 2 Kgs 18:13). 2 Kgs 18:13 does not refer to a campaign of 715, but to the campaign of 701.
[114] ND 2765, l. 34-39 (Saggs 2001: 219-221); Saggs' translation. For this text, see also SAA 1 110.
[115] Postgate 1974a: 118.
[116] Sweeney 1994; see also Younger 2002a: 292, and Younger 2003: 238.
[117] Na'aman 1974.
[118] Younger 2002a: 238-239.
[119] Na'aman 1974: 27.
[120] Frahm 1997: 229-232; Fuchs 1994: 314-315.
[121] Galil 1992: 61-63; Galil 1996: 98.

Sennacherib's campaign of 701.[122] Since the connection with 701 in my view is the most likely,[123] I refer to the Azekah inscription under 4.1.7.

4.1.4 Prophetic Words relating to 723-720 BCE

Various prophetic words from First Isaiah can be connected with the events of 723-720 BCE: 14:29.31; 28:1-4; 10:5-15; 10:24-25; 10:27b-32.

Isa 14:29.31

> Do not rejoice, all you Philistines, that the rod that struck you is broken.
> For from the root of the snake will come forth an adder, and its fruit will be a flying fiery serpent.
> Wail, O gate; cry, O city; melt in fear, O Philistia, all of you!
> For smoke comes out of the north, and there is no straggler in its ranks.

This prophetic saying is to be dated after the events of 734-732 and before those of 723-720. The oracle reacts to the death of Tiglath-pileser in 727 BCE. Tiglath-pileser had been the first Assyrian king that invaded Philistia and proceeded as far as the border of Egypt, in 734. For this reason, he is appropriately designated as 'the rod that struck you (i.e. Philistia)'. Furthermore, with the campaigns of 733-732 he had broken the Syro-Palestinian resistance against Assyria's hegemony led by Rezin of Damascus. When Tiglath-pileser died, Palestinian rulers perhaps fostered the hope that Tiglath-pileser's expansion would remain an exception. Some of them may have been ready to throw off the Assyrian yoke. This prophetic saying warns the Philistines however not to rejoice about Tiglath-pileser's death. This means that the prophecy warns against the hope that with the death of Tiglath-pileser Assyrian dominance in the region will come to an end. In reaction to this hope, the prophecy makes a clear political statement: the politics of expansion of Tiglath-pileser, reaching as far as Philistia, to the border of Egypt, will be continued by his successors. There is no reason for joy, only for lament, because the oppression will increase. The prophetic imagination already sees the Assyrian army approaching led by Tiglath-pileser's successor.

Apart from its explicit meaning, the prophecy has an implicit message. The word addressed to the Philistines implicitly warns the political leaders of Judah that the death of Tiglath-pileser does not mean that the Assyrian yoke has been broken. Similar hopes, in the prophecy attributed to the Philistines, may have been fostered in Judah. As in 734-732 BCE, the prophet advocates a policy of submission and rejects the anti-Assyrian politics. Shalmaneser V (727-722 BCE) who campaigned in Syria and conquered Samaria,[124] probably did not campaign against Philistia. His successor Sargon II, however, campaigned against Philistia in 720. Philistia was again submitted to Assyria and the cities Gibbethon, Ekron, Gaza and Raphia were conquered. Thus, 14:29.31 forms a prelude to the campaign of Sargon II in 720 BCE.

[122] Na'aman 1974: 30-36; Na'aman 1994a: 245-247.
[123] See Na'aman 1994a: 245-247; Younger 2003: 238-240.
[124] Veenhof 2001: 254-255.

Isa 28:1-4

> Woe, proud garland of the drunkards of Ephraim – a fading flower is his glorious beauty, which is on the head of the fertile valley! See, the Lord has one who is mighty and strong; like a storm of hail, a destroying tempest, like a storm of mighty, overflowing waters. He hurls down to the earth with his hand, and tramples with feet the proud garland of the drunkards of Ephraim. And it will be like a first-ripe fig before the summer; whoever sees it, eats it up as soon as it comes to hand.

The 'garland', a wreath of flowers worn like a crown, probably symbolises the city of Samaria. The 'drunkards of Ephraim' represent the inhabitants of Samaria as being arrogant and overconfident. The image of drunkenness stands for being blind to reality out of misplaced self-confidence.[125] The destruction of Samaria is announced. The agent of Yahweh, 'one who is mighty and strong', must be Assyria (cf. 7:20; 8:4; 10:5-6). Assyria will destroy Samaria and its inhabitants. As elsewhere in the prophetic oracles (e.g. 7:16 and 8:4), the promptness of the destruction is asserted (28:4).

Contrary to the prophecies connected with the events of 734-732, Samaria is no longer presented in connection with Damascus. The reason for this is that by 732 the Assyrians had dealt decisively with Damascus and Rezin, whereas Ephraim-Samaria remained a kingdom, although of a reduced size. Samaria was captured by Shalmaneser in 723/22, and by Sargon in 720. From the point of view of Isaiah's prophecies, the conquest of Samaria settled an old score. According to the announcement of 8:4, made in c. 733, the spoils of Samaria would be taken to Assyria. This finally happened in 723/22 and 720.

The word of 28:1-4 is likely to be connected with the events of 722-720, when, after Shalmaneser's death, Samaria joined a revolt against Assyria. During the revolt, led by Yau-bi'di of Hamath, the anti-Assyrian politics adopted by Samaria for some time probably appeared to be an attractive option. The prophecy of 28:1-4 however announces the disastrous outcome of this politics. The glory of Samaria is already fading away; soon Samaria will be swallowed by the Assyrians. As in the case of 14:29.31, the implicit meaning is to warn against the adoption of anti-Assyrian politics in Judah. After Shalmaneser's death, for some years Assyria seemed unable to maintain its hegemony in the West. This was the moment that Samaria joined the rebellion, led by Yau-bi'di, and this probably was also the moment that the prophet Isaiah pointed out the disastrous outcome of these politics, emphasising once again that Samaria would be destroyed, and warning the Judaean politicians.

Storm and flood function as an image of destruction. Assyria is depicted with this kind of terminology elsewhere too (e.g. Isa 28:17-18). Images of natural disaster, such as storm and flood, are popular metaphors or similes for military invasions. The prophetic word is however more than a political assessment. It asserts that behind the political scene Yahweh governs the events: he orders Assyria to take action.

Whereas 28:1-4 can be regarded as a prophetic word announced during the rebellion of 722-720 BCE, the prophecies included in Isa 10 are to be interpreted as reflection on the events of 720, Sargon's campaign to the West, which also involved Judah.

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[125] See Oeming 1994: 3; cf. Job 12:24-25; Isa 19:13-14; Nah 3:11.

Isa 10:5-15

I present Isa 10:5-15* in its earliest form, a prophecy consisting of 10:5-9.15a:

> Woe, Assyria, my rod of anger, my club of fury! Against a godless nation I send him, and against the people of my wrath I command him, to take spoil and seize plunder, and to tread it down like the mire of the streets.
> But this is not what he thinks he should do, nor does this accord with his intentions, for it is in his heart to destroy, and to cut off many nations. He says:
> "Are my officials not all kings? Is not Calno like Carchemish?
> Is not Hamath like Arpad? Is not Samaria like Damascus?"
> Shall the axe vaunt itself over the one who wields it, or the saw magnify itself against the one who handles it?

This prophetic word is closely connected with the prophecies discussed above, but also adds a new perspective. On the one hand, Assyria is once again presented as Yahweh's agent, as in 7:20, 8:4, 28:1-4. Here, Assyria is presented as the agent of Yahweh sent against a 'godless nation', which refers to Ephraim/Samaria,[126] to trample it down (מִרְמָס 10:6; cf. רמס 28:3), and to take spoil and seize plunder (cf. 8:4). Assyria is ordered to carry out Yahweh's judgement against Ephraim-Samaria. Finally, the old bill has been paid off: Samaria is captured and plundered. Yahweh's commission of Assyria as formulated in 10:5-6 resembles the way Assyrian kings presented themselves as being commissioned by their god Aššur to punish the enemy and to conquer the world: '... the great Lord Aššur ... gave in my hand an 'angry sceptre' (*šibirru ezzu*) to smite the enemy, he entrusted me to spoil and pillage (*ana ḫabāti šalāli*) the land that had sinned against Aššur ... in order to expand the borders of Assyria ...'.[127] The principal difference is that Isaiah presents the powerful Assyrian king as an agent of Yahweh, not of Aššur. This may be considered a response to Assyria's imperialistic ideology.[128]

The new perspective in 10:5-15* is Assyria's condemnation. Assyria is criticised for not behaving like an obedient rod in the hand of Yahweh, but having an agenda of its own. As described above, the conquest of Samaria was only one stage of Sargon's campaign to the West, which indeed was directed against 'many nations' (10:7).[129] The Assyrian conquest and annexation of many nations offended Yahweh.

However, why would the prophet care whether Assyria's measures against Ephraim involved many other nations as well? In my view, Judah is again implicitly present in the prophetic word. Whereas in the prophecies against Philistia (14:29.31) and Samaria (28:1-4*), the Judaeans are implicitly warned not to yield to the temptation to adopt a politics of rebellion against Assyria, here Judah is implicitly present in the worldwide Assyrian

[126] Cf. 28:1-4, where the image of the inhabitants of Samaria as being drunk points to their self-confidence and godlessness.
[127] Borger 1956: 98, Mnm. A l. 30-35; translation based on Weinfeld 1998: 35.
[128] See Levine 2005: 411-427, esp. 414. Generally, I agree with Levine that material from First Isaiah from the Assyrian period in various ways reacts to the Assyrian imperialistic ideology.
[129] The series of six cities in 10:9 is most likely to be connected with Sargon's campaign of 720; see Sweeney 1994: 466-467.

conquest. As discussed above, Sargon's campaign of 720 affected Judah too. Certain actions made Sargon the 'subduer of the land of Judah'. Although Judah had not joined the rebellion, it became nevertheless involved, probably after the conquest of Samaria, before the invasion of Philistia. Whereas in 734, when Ahaz submitted to Assyria and paid tribute, no Assyrian army had entered Judah, in 720 probably for the first time an Assyrian army entered Judah.

Whereas previously Assyria's military actions were seen as having been ordered by Yahweh as a punishment for Judah's enemies (7:20; 8:1-4; 28:1-4), Judah's involvement in Assyria's military actions in 720 led to a reinterpretation: Assyria's expansion is condemned as a self-willed, arrogant, godless enterprise (10:5-15*; 10:24-25; 10:27b-32).

Isa 10:24-25

> Thus says the Lord Yahweh of Hosts: O my people, who live in Zion, do not be afraid of Assyria when it beats you with a rod and lifts up its staff against you on the way to Egypt. For in a very little time the limit will be reached, and then my anger will be directed at their destruction.

The oracle depicts Judah as suffering from Assyria's expansion while the latter marches from Phoenicia, through Philistia, along the *via maris*, to the border of Egypt. The Assyrian army took this road a number of times, but the connection with 720 is most likely.[130] First, Sargon's claim to have subdued Judah fits the expression of Assyria beating Judah with a rod and lifting up its staff against them. Moreover, the critical, negative depiction of Assyria equals that of 10:5-15* and 10:27b-32, not that of the prophecies connected with the events of 734-732. Assyria no longer is presented as Yahweh's agent sent to destroy Judah's enemies, but as a self-willed aggressor, whose aggression illegitimately affected Judah too.

The people of Jerusalem are encouraged with the typical phrase 'do not fear' (cf. the discussion of 7:4-9a above). As in 10:5-15*, Assyria is condemned for its behaviour toward Judah and Jerusalem in the context of its wider expansion. Once more, the emphasis on the imminence of the outcome of the announcement (cf. 7:16; 8:4; 28:4) functions as encouragement.

Isa 10:27b-32

> He has marched from [Samaria], come to Aiath, passed through Migron. At Michmash he stores his baggage. They have crossed over the pass: 'Geba will be our quarters for the night'. Ramah trembles, Gibeah of Saul has fled. Cry aloud, O Bat-Gallim! Listen, O Laishah! Answer him, O Anathoth! Madmenah is in flight, the inhabitants of Gebim flee for safety. This very day he will halt at Nob, he will shake his fist at the mount of daughter Zion, the hill of Jerusalem.

This saying refers to a military expedition of the Assyrians. Coming from Samaria, they approach Jerusalem from the north. Apparently, the army left the main road from Beth-El

[130] The 'way to Egypt' refers to the coastal highway, along which Sargon in all probability marched on his way to Gaza and Raphia (see Hayes and Kuan 1991: 178).

to Jerusalem in order to bypass fortified Mizpah, and approached Jerusalem along the central ridge.[131] This would mean that the aim was not to conquer Judah's fortified cities, but to quickly march to Jerusalem. At Nob (Mount Scopus) the army halted in order to intimidate the people of Jerusalem. The saying does not describe a huge army preparing for a siege of Jerusalem, but refers to a specific military expedition, aiming to intimidate and quickly subjugate Jerusalem and Judah to Assyria.[132] 10:27b-32 probably describes the scene which made Sargon the 'subduer of Judah'. After the capture of Samaria, when the main army headed for Philistia (Gaza and Raphia), Judah was involved too. An army quickly marched to Jerusalem, not to lay siege to it, but probably to intimidate it, to collect tribute, and to remind its king and leaders of Assyria's hegemony.

In 14:29.31 Isaiah announced that the Assyrian rule of Philistia would not end with the death of Tiglath-pileser, but that his successor(s) would strengthen the bonds of Assyria's dominance. In 28:1-4 he announced that Yahweh would take action against Samaria through the hand of the Assyrians. Both came true with the campaign of Sargon in 720. However, Sargon did not only conquer Samaria and secure Assyria's control over the Mediterranean seaports, but also subdued Judah, with a display of power and intimidation. This provoked the question: If Assyria is Yahweh's agent, why then is Judah also affected? The three prophetic words of Isa 10* can be read as attempts to solve this difficulty. 10:5-15* distinguishes between the conquest ordered by Yahweh and the program of expansion set up by Assyria itself. The point of 10:5-15* is that Sargon's conquest of Ephraim and Samaria was justified, whereas his submission of Judah was illegitimate, against the will of Yahweh. 10:24-25 and 10:27b-32 furthermore criticise Assyria's display of aggression against Judah, and 10:25 makes explicit what was already implied in the *woe* of 10:5-15*: Yahweh is going to punish Assyria. Although one could argue that this announcement did not exactly come true, the violent death of Sargon in 705 (see 4.1.7 below) in all likelihood added to the credibility of the prophet. At last, Yahweh had punished Sargon for his display of aggression against Judah and Jerusalem.[133]

4.1.5 The Historical Events of 716-711 BCE

Sargon consolidated Assyria's hegemony in the West and secured Assyria's trade interest. In 716, Assyrian forces marched to the Philistine coast. Sargon, in one of his inscriptions, states: 'I opened the sealed-off harbour of Egypt, mixed Assyrians with Egyptians and let them trade with each other.'[134] Sargon subjected territories as far as 'the city of the river of

[131] Blenkinsopp 2000a: 261; Sweeney 1994: 464; Wildberger 1972-82: 431.
[132] Sweeney 1994: 464-465.
[133] I would suggest connecting the earliest expansion of 10:5-15*, namely the rhetorical, literary additions of 10:13-14 and 15b to the original word of 10:5-9.15a (see chapter 2.3.2), with the death of Sargon II in 705. The additions of 10:13-14.15b emphasise the hubris of the Assyrian king, and hence allude to his downfall. Furthermore, the 10:13-14 contains motifs that react to the Assyrian royal ideology, e.g. the motif of the removal of boundaries in 10:13 (see Machinist 1983a: 725); cf. also the prophecy SAA 9 2.3, where Ištar of Arbela promises: 'I will abolish the boundaries of all the lands and give them to you' (ii 15'-16').
[134] See Kahn 2001: 9.

Egypt' and established an Assyrian trade colony near Gaza.[135] With the Assyrian army nearby, the Egyptian ruler Osorkon IV (Shilkani) presented a gift (*tāmartu*) consisting of '12 great horses whose like did not exist in Assyria'.[136] During Sargon's reign, the international trade with Egypt and Greece flourished. At this period, Judah cooperated with the Assyrians. Judah played a role in the international trade, and the Assyrians apparently felt free to send troops and traders down through Judah and through Philistine territory.[137] Despite trading relations, the interest of dominating Philistia and Phoenicia kept a potential conflict between Assyria and the Cushite rulers of Egypt alive.

Troubles occurred in the Philistine city of Ashdod. According to Sargon's inscriptions, King Azuri of Ashdod planned rebellion and incited the neighbouring kings against Assyria. Apparently without much result, for Sargon states that he replaced Azuri with Aḫimiti, his brother.[138] This probably happened in 716 or 715.[139] The citizens of Ashdod however did not accept Aḫimiti as their king and instead appointed a man called Iamani. This man, referred to in the Assyrian texts as *ḫupšu*, 'a commoner', led a rebellion against Sargon, between 715 and 712. According to Sargon's Nineveh prism, the Ashdodites tried to muster support from local rulers and from Pir'ū of Egypt, presumably Shabaka.[140] They sent good-will gifts to Shabaka, and implored his alliance:

> To the k[ings] of the lands of Philistia, Judah, Edom and Moab, (and to those) who live at the sea, those who are (all) indebted to pay tribute and gifts to Aššur, my Lord, <they sent> (letters full of) deceitful and malicious words, to antagonise them against me. To Pharaoh, king of Egypt, a king

[135] Both Tiglath-pileser (ITP: 178) and Sargon (Fuchs 1994: 88) claim to have set up trading stations on the border of Egypt, and to have appointed local Arabs to take charge of the operations.
[136] Fuchs 1998: 28-29; see Younger 2003: 240. This gift is significant as an illustration of the competition between the Cushites and the Assyrians. When the Cushite king Piye defeated the Egyptian rulers in 734, they brought him their finest horses as a mark of his lordship (see the stele of Piye, in: TUAT I/4: 570-571). Osorkon IV was one of them. After Shabaka's conquest of Egypt in 720, Osorkon IV was a vassal of Shabaka. In 716, however, he gave a similar gift of fine horses to Sargon, which marked his transfer to a new overlord. See Kahn 2001: 9; Schipper 1999: 156-157. Another Assyrian text mentions that 'Pir'ū, king of Egypt' sent a tribute of gold and precious stones to Sargon; this is also likely to be Osorkon IV, and this tribute is dated to 716 (Tadmor 1958: 78) or 715 (Fuchs 1998: 131).
[137] Dalley 2004a: 389. For the relations between Judah and Assyria in this period, see Saggs 2001: 219-221 (ND 2765, l. 34-38) and 128 (ND 2608). Apparently, a contingent of Judaean soldiers fought at the side of the Assyrians in the campaign against Urarṭu; see Dalley 2004a: 288.
[138] Annals, l. 241-245 (Fuchs 1994: 132-133), Great Summary inscription, l. 90-93 (Fuchs 1994: 219).
[139] Younger 2002a: 312-313.
[140] For the text see Fuchs 1998: 44-46 and 73-74. Kahn (2001: 4) and Younger (2002a: 313-314) identify this Pir'ū as Shabaka. Conversely, Fuchs (1998: 131) argues that Pir'ū sending tribute in 715 (Shilkani/Osorkon IV) must be the same Pir'ū referred to here. However, the Assyrian texts refer to Shilkani/Osorkon IV as to Pir'ū in the context of his paying tribute in order to demonstrate that the legitimate ruler of Egypt submitted to Assyria. The Cushite rulers however had adopted this title too, so that in the context of Iamani's request to Egypt, the Cushite king may very well be referred to as Pir'ū.

> that could not save them (*malku lā mušēzibīšunu*), they brought (*našû*) their goodwill gifts (*šulmānu*),[141] and kept imploring him for assistance (*erēšu kitra*).[142]

Iamani's reliance on Egypt, misplaced from the Assyrian point of view, is described in ideological terminology. The rebels implored a powerful king for assistance, offering him a payment for military aid against Assyria. Sargon dealt with the rebellion of Ashdod in 712 or 711. Isa 20:1 says that Sargon sent his *tartānu*, which may imply that he himself stayed in Assyria. This has been connected with a note in the Eponym Chronicle, saying that the king stayed in the land in 712.[143] However, this may be unfounded, as the statement that the king stayed in the land probably means that no campaign was conducted at all. The campaign against Ashdod is therefore to be dated to 711.[144] Isa 20:1 nevertheless could be right that Sargon himself did not join the campaign, but sent his *tartānu*. The Nineveh prism relates that Sargon sent his troops on a military expedition to Ashdod; it is only in his later inscriptions that Sargon claims that he personally went to Ashdod in order to end the rebellion.[145] From the Assyrian inscriptions it appears that Iamani at the approach of the Assyrian army fled to the border of Egypt and Ethiopia, where he received asylum from Shabaka. The Assyrians conquered Ashdod, Gath and Ashdod-Yam and turned them into an Assyrian province governed by Assyrian officials.[146] In 706, Shabatka (Shebitku), who had succeeded Shabaka, extradited Iamani and handed him over to the Assyrian king.[147] The Ashdod stele,[148] erected in Ashdod after the conquest of 711 BCE (and apparently destroyed during the anti-Assyrian revolt that broke out after Sargon's death in 705 BCE)[149] testifies to the Assyrian conquest of Ashdod.[150]

In Sargon's Nineveh prism, quoted above, Judah is mentioned in relation to the rebellion of Iamani. Apparently, Iamani had taken diplomatic efforts to incite local rulers, among them Hezekiah of Judah, to join his rebellion against Assyria. From the description in the Assyrian sources however it seems that neither the surrounding kings nor the Cushite king of Egypt came to his assistance. Apparently, Shabaka did not send him military aid, though he granted him asylum. There is no evidence of Assyrian measures taken against Judah in this period. This suggests that Hezekiah was not persuaded by the Ashdodite envoys to join the rebellion, and that the Assyrians had as yet no reason to take action against Judah.[151]

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[141] The word *šulmānu*/*šulmannu* 'goodwill gifts' is often used with the connotation of 'bribe, inducement'.
[142] Translation based on Fuchs 1998: 44-46, 73-74 (fragment VIIb).
[143] For the Eponym Chronicle, see Millard 1994: 47, 60.
[144] Fuchs 1998: 83-87.
[145] See the Great Summary inscription, l. 97-101 (Fuchs 1994: 348).
[146] See the Great Summary inscription, l. 104-109 (Fuchs 1994: 220-221); Younger 2002a: 315.
[147] See Sargon's Tang-i Var rock inscription; Frame 1999. The inscription confirms that Iamani was handed over to Assyria in 706, and identifies the Cushite king who extradited him as Shabatka (Shebitku). For the implications for the chronology of the Cushite (25th) dynasty, see Kahn 2001.
[148] For the Ashdod stele, see Tadmor 1971.
[149] Tadmor 1971: 192-195; Kapera 1976: 91-92.
[150] Tadmor (1971: 195-197) assumed that the stele dealt with the Ashdod revolt and interpreted fragments I and III in this light. For fragment II, see Kapera 1976: 93.
[151] So also Na'aman 1994a: 240; Younger 2003: 242-243.

4.1.6 Prophetic Material relating to 716-711 BCE

The information that Sargon's *tartānu* undertook the campaign rather than Sargon himself (Isa 20:1) may be reliable.[152] Iamani had taken efforts to involve Egypt in his rebellion. Since the Cushite ruler of Egypt would be a powerful helper, it may have appeared an attractive option for the Judaeans to join the rebellion. However, as far as we know, Hezekiah did not join the rebellion, in agreement with Isaiah's position.

Isaiah's symbolic action reported in Isa 20* predicted the Assyrian victory over Egypt and Cush. Isaiah's appearing naked and barefoot depicted the Cushites and Egyptians being taken away by Assyria as deportees and captives. The report of Isa 20* is reliable for several reasons. First, we know of other eye-catching public performances with a symbolic meaning carried out by prophetic figures.[153] Second, the crudeness of the act may suggest that the report of Isa 20* became part of the Isaiah tradition at an early stage. Third, the message of Isa 20* resembles that of the prophecies relating to the period 705-701 BCE (see 4.1.8 below). The image of the captive Egyptians and Cushites being led away barefoot and naked corresponds with the depiction of deportations of inhabitants of conquered cities and defeated enemies on Assyrian reliefs.[154] Isaiah's symbolic action depicts the Egyptians and Cushites in the context of the Ashdod rebellion. Yet it is meant as a lesson for a different group of people, as appears from 20:5: 'And they shall be dismayed and confounded because of Cush their hope and of Egypt their boast.' Who are the people that will be dismayed and confounded? In my view, there are two possibilities. They may be the leaders from Judah that regarded rebellion against Assyria as an attractive option. Or they may be the political leaders of Ashdod who sought the assistance of the Cushite king of Egypt (see 20:1). In the latter case, the implicit message would still be one for the Judaeans: trusting in the Cushite king of Egypt against Assyria is pointless.

4.1.7 The Historical Events of 705-701 BCE

Sargon's disgraceful death in 705 BCE on the battlefield in Anatolia caused consternation in Assyria and led to revolts throughout the empire.[155] The Chaldean prince Merodach-baladan returned to Babylon and took the throne in 703. Although his reign lasted for nine months only, he assembled some powerful allies, including Elam and several Arab tribes.[156] If the story of 2 Kgs 20:12-19 has a base in history, it is best situated in this period.[157] Among Western rulers, the rebellion seems to have been widespread. In the inscriptions of Sennacherib concerning 701, eight Western kings are mentioned that paid fourfold to

[152] Fuchs 1998: 45-46.
[153] An example is found in the report in the Mari letter ARM 26/1 206: a prophet (*muḫḫû*) of Dagan devours a raw lamb in front of the city gate.
[154] See Oded 1979: 34-35, for examples of Assyrian reliefs on which captives or deportees are pictured as being led away barefoot and/or naked.
[155] Because Sargon's body was lost on the battlefield he did not receive a proper royal burial. This was regarded as an indication of a divine curse because of some grave offence committed by Sargon. Sargon's son Sennacherib distanced himself from his father in various respects: he replaced Sargon's new capital, Dur-Sharukkin, by Nineveh as the royal capital, and he was hesitant to present himself as Sargon's son in his inscriptions; see Frahm 1999: 82-83.
[156] Brinkman 1984: 57.
[157] Na'aman 1994a: 244; Brinkman 1984: 57, note 268.

Assyria, which probably means that they had stopped paying tribute after the death of Sargon and thus joined the revolt against Assyria. In addition to these eight kings, Lulî of Sidon and Tyre, Ṣidqā of Ashkelon, and Hezekiah of Judah, are mentioned as the rulers that persisted in their rebellion when the Assyrian army arrived in 701.

In Hezekiah's perspective, the time was ripe for throwing off the Assyrian yoke. First of all, the problems for Assyria seemed to be great, with so many rulers revolting supported by strong allies. Second, according to the thinking of the time, Sargon's violent death and the loss of his body, so that it could not be buried, showed that the gods had reversed Assyria's good fortune.[158] Third, the Cushite rulers of Egypt were ready to intervene in Palestinian affairs.[159] In all likelihood, Hezekiah had concluded an alliance with them to support him with military aid. Fourth, Hezekiah had much to gain by rebellion. At this time, the Kingdom of Judah had become relatively important, and Hezekiah probably was a strong king within the region. Hezekiah acted as overlord of Ekron, and perhaps of other Philistine cities as well, and presumably controlled part of the trade from Egypt via Philistia.[160] The huge punitive tribute Hezekiah was forced to pay in 701, indicates that Hezekiah had amassed a great wealth.[161]

Sennacherib dealt with the revolt in the West in 701. The Assyrian version of the events is found in several inscriptions.[162] The information offered by the inscriptions must however be handled with care. First, the account does not present an exactly chronological report of the events, but has a geographical, or topical, arrangement.[163] Second, the triumphal tone of the texts gives the impression that the campaign was successful in every respect and that Sennacherib completely mastered the situation. On closer reading however we find indications that Sennacherib experienced serious opposition and was obliged to

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[158] Dalley (2004a: 391) suggests that Sargon's disgraceful death excused his vassals from their oaths of loyalty.

[159] See Schipper 1999: 217, for a general assessment of the Cushite interests in intervening in Palestine.

[160] Dalley 2004a: 393.

[161] Dalley (1998; 2004a) suggests that the Davidic dynasty was related by marriage to the Assyrian royal house. According to Dalley, the Assyrian queens Yabâ and Atalyā (or Atalia), the consorts of Tiglath-pileser III and Sargon II respectively, found at Nimrud (see Damerji 1999) are to be identified as Judaean princesses. The difficulties involved in this suggestion have been discussed by Younger 2002b and Achenbach 2002 (cf. also Frahm 2000: 492-493; 2002: 1114; Radner 1999: 433). Furthermore, Judah's political history of the late eighth century can be plausibly reconstructed without assuming a marital relationship between the Davidic dynasty and the Assyrian royal house. To mention the two most important cases, the events of 734-733 and the events of 701: 1) Dalley (1998: 88) comments with regard to the loyalty oath which Ahaz probably swore in 734: 'This oath-enforced bond, quite apart from the question of marriage alliances, explains why Judah did not resist Assyria, nor join Samaria and Damascus in their bid for independence'. 2) With regard to 701, Dalley (1998: 97) comments: 'Atalyā was almost certainly the mother of Sennacherib. If she was a Judaean directly related to Hezekiah, we have a special explanation for the tolerance shown to Hezekiah and to the cult of Yahweh by both Sargon and Sennacherib.' However, this special explanation is not necessary. Sennacherib's dealing with Judah in 701 was not exceptional: there are examples of similar practice 'especially in regions which lay just beyond provinces directly governed' (Dalley 1998: 92; cf. 97-98).

[162] For the relevant Assyrian texts in transcription and translation, see Mayer 2003: 186-200.

[163] Knauf 2003: 142.

negotiate on several occasions. The Assyrian inscriptions present the following geographical-topical sequence (references are to the Chicago Prism).[164]

Episode	Inscriptions
1	Dealings with Lulî of Sidon (ii 37-49)
2	Eight Western kings pay homage (ii 50-60)
3	Ṣidqā of Ashkelon captured and deported to Assyria (ii 60-68)
4	Conquest of territory north of Ashkelon (ii 68-72)
5	Dealings with Ekron (ii 73-iii 17) a. Nobles who had delivered Padî to Hezekiah ask Egypt-Cush for help b. Egyptian-Cushite army comes and is defeated near Eltekeh c. Eltekeh and Timnah conquered, nobles of Ekron executed d. Padî restored on throne
6	Dealings with Hezekiah (iii 18-49) a. 46 Judaean cities conquered, huge booty taken b. Hezekiah enclosed in Jerusalem c. Parts of Judaean territory given to Philistine kingdoms d. Hezekiah pays a huge tribute

A historical reconstruction of the campaign results in a slightly different picture. The first target of the campaign was Sidon. The rebellious king Lulî fled to Cyprus and his capital, it is claimed, was conquered without a fight. Sennacherib installed Ittobaal as the new king. The rulers from Samsimuruna, Sidon, Arwad, Byblos, Ashdod, Ammon, Moab and Edom, visited Sennacherib at Ushu (Old Tyre) and paid homage.[165] The inscriptions state that the eight Western kings brought 'sumptuous gifts (and) their heavy greeting-presents fourfold'.[166] This apparently indicates these kings had withheld their tribute since the death of Sargon in 705, and now had to pay up for the past years.[167] Although they had joined the revolt, Sennacherib offered them the opportunity to submit, in order to avert an Assyrian invasion. This lenient attitude benefited Sennacherib in various ways. The submission of these kings meant that he had their armies at his disposal, it isolated the rulers persisting in their rebellion, such as Hezekiah and Ṣidqā of Ashkelon, and it saved the Assyrian army time.[168]

The next stage was the invasion of Philistia. The Assyrians conquered the coastal region ruled by Ashkelon, the largest and most powerful Philistine kingdom at that time.[169] Ṣidqā, king of Ashkelon, had refused to submit to Sennacherib at Ushu. Since the conquest of Ashkelon itself is not claimed in the Assyrian inscriptions, the conquest of Ashkelon's northern territory was apparently enough to effectuate the surrender of Ṣidqā and his family. They were not killed, but deported to Assyria. Presumably, the Ashkelonite king,

[164] Gallagher (1999: 91-142) presents an extensive commentary on the six episodes of the campaign.
[165] Mayer 2003: 175.
[166] Translation from Mayer 2003: 188.
[167] Gallagher 1999: 106-110.
[168] Gallagher 1999: 105-112.
[169] Knauf 2003: 142.

realising that his refusal to submit in Ushu had made his position impossible, surrendered after negotiations.[170]

It is difficult to decide what happened next. According to Knauf's reconstruction the Assyrians bypassed Ekron and marched on to Timnah, which was probably in Judaean hands. He suggests that Ekron was not much of a threat to the Assyrians and that it was enough for the moment to cut off the rebels from their Judaean ally.[171] This is possible, although it cannot be excluded that the Assyrians already at this point had conquered Ekron and executed the rebellious nobles. What seems certain, however, is that the remark of the reinstallation of Padî as king of Ekron (episode 5d, above) runs ahead of the events. It is highly unlikely that Hezekiah released his prisoner before the Assyrians put him under severe pressure.[172]

The Assyrians invaded Judah and conquered 46 cities in the Shephelah and the Negev, including Lachish, where the Assyrian king had his headquarters. The conquest of the Judaean city of Azekah, as described in the Azekah inscription is best situated during this campaign as well.[173] The Assyrian inscriptions present the conquest of Judah as the climax of the campaign. A close reading indicates however that Sennacherib's victory was incomplete. There is a mysterious gap between episode 6a-b and episode 6c-d. Evidently, a great part of Judah was ravaged by the Assyrian army and massive booty was taken from the conquered areas (episode 6a).[174] Furthermore, Jerusalem was not besieged with attack and storming, but blockaded with several forts.[175] The goal of a blockade was to force the city to submission through starvation.[176] However, the fall of the city is not claimed. Episode 6c and 6d, instead, deal with the aftermath of Sennacherib's campaign: parts of Judah's territory were given to the Philistine kingdoms, and Hezekiah *afterwards* sent a huge punitive tribute to Nineveh. What is missing is the surrender of Hezekiah. Apparently, Hezekiah did not come to Lachish to do obeisance and present his tribute, but stayed in Jerusalem.[177] Only at the last moment did he accept submitting a huge tribute to Sennacherib, which was sent to Nineveh afterwards. The explanation that the king travelled

[170] Gallagher 1999: 127.
[171] Knauf 2003: 144.
[172] Knauf 2003: 144.
[173] For the inscription, also referred to as Sennacherib's Letter to God, see Na'aman 1974. Na'aman (1994a: 245-247) persuasively argues that the Azekah inscription refers to the campaign of 701. Similarly Mayer 2003: 170. Na'aman accepts that the Philistine city mentioned in this text is Ekron (not Gath).
[174] The Assyrian account claims that Sennacherib took a huge number of people and animals from Judah (205,105). Mayer (2003: 182) suggests this sum includes both people and cattle taken from all conquered territories, in Philistia and Judah. Others have suggested that something is wrong with the number.
[175] Mayer 2003: 179-181; Van der Kooij 1986: 97-98.
[176] See Gallagher 1999: 133-134, for several examples. Mayer 2003: 181: 'Ultimately, the effects of building such forts were similar to the effects of full-scale siege but without the costs.'
[177] Gallagher (1999: 141) observes that the later Bulls inscriptions 1, 2, and 3 claim that Hezekiah submitted at Sennacherib's feet. This reflects the Assyrian ideal of a vassal's behaviour, but does not provide a reliable depiction of the historical events.

faster than the tribute caravan,[178] is inadequate; the claim that Hezekiah sent tribute *after* Sennacherib had returned, is unique in the Assyrian inscriptions:[179]

> This Hezekiah – the fearsome splendour of my rule overwhelmed him, and he sent the Urbi[180] and his elite troops, which he had stationed in Jerusalem, his royal city, as reinforcement and had acquired as help, together with 30 talents of gold, 800 talents of silver, (... etc.), and also his (own) daughters, his palace women, singers male and female, after me to Nineveh, my royal city.[181]

The circumstances of Hezekiah's surrender are unknown. Although Jerusalem was not captured, he gave up and sent his tribute to Nineveh. I suggest connecting Hezekiah's surrender with the outcome of the battle of Eltekeh. In the Assyrian account, the battle of Eltekeh is interwoven with the dealings with Ekron (episode 5) and positioned *before* the conquest of Judah. This, in my view, has to do with the geographical-topical arrangement of the inscription: Phoenicia – Philistia – Judah. Furthermore, it makes for a better finale: Hezekiah's huge punitive tribute bestows more glory and honour on Sennacherib than the close victory at Eltekeh and negotiations at Ekron.[182] The Assyrian account only blames the nobles from Ekron for their alliance with Egypt.[183] Historically, this is unlikely. Hezekiah, who held Padî captive in Jerusalem, in all likelihood acted as Ekron's overlord.[184]

The presentation of the events of episode 5 in the Assyrian account is not historically reliable.[185] If the Egyptian army had been in Philistia before the Assyrians arrived, Ashkelon's king Ṣidqā would probably not have surrendered.[186] Furthermore, if the battle of Eltekeh had taken place at the point where it is put in the Assyrian account, Hezekiah probably would have sent his army as well. It is more likely that the Egyptian army arrived later. They came to the aid of Hezekiah and Ekron; the arrival of the Egyptian army meant a relief for Hezekiah: the conquest of Judah was abandoned and his surrender postponed.[187]

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[178] Mayer 2003: 181.
[179] Gallagher 1999: 132.
[180] The meaning of ^{lú}*Urbi* is uncertain. Mayer (2003: 183-184) suggests reading *ubri* (metathesis), 'strangers', here: 'mercenaries'. Gallagher (1999: 136) mentions a suggestion of Tadmor: a West-Semitic derivation, ארב 'to lie in ambush', hence 'ambushers'. Elat (2000) takes up the earlier view that they are Arabs. As he points out, Merodach-baladan of Babylon was allied with certain Arab tribes (^{lú}*Urbi* occur among the allies of Babylonia in the inscription of Sennacherib's campaign of 703; Luckenbill 1924: 25:1, 39-42, 54:52, 57:12). It is possible that Merodach-baladan's Arab allies cooperated with Hezekiah as well.
[181] Chicago iii 37-49; Taylor iii 29-41. This translation follows Gallagher 1999: 136-140, and Borger, in: TUAT I: 390. The translation given by Mayer 2003: 189-190 ('… the Urbi and his elite troops … ceased their services (*iršû baṭlāti*). Together (*itti*) with 30 talents of gold, …, he also sent his daughters …'), has been proved wrong by Gallagher 1999: 136-140.
[182] Knauf 2003: 144.
[183] Gallagher 1999: 127.
[184] Cf. Knauf 2003: 144.
[185] Contra Gallagher 1999: 123-125.
[186] So Knauf 2003: 144.
[187] My reconstruction largely corresponds to that of Veenhof (2001: 266-267) and Knauf (2003).

Sennacherib claims to have defeated the Egyptians, but the wording of the inscriptions suggests it was a close victory. The victory is described in dry phrases, 'I fought with them and I defeated them', and instead of describing the pursuit and annihilation of the enemy forces, the inscription continues with the capture of two unimportant towns. This suggests that the battle ended in a close victory.[188] It was followed by negotiations, which took place near Ekron. Sennacherib showed no mercy to the nobles of Ekron: they were executed. After the retreat of the Egyptians, Hezekiah at last was forced to submit. As a result, Padî returned from Jerusalem and was reinstalled on the throne in Ekron. The Philistine kingdoms Gaza, Ekron, Ashdod received parts of Judah's territory.[189] Hezekiah had to pay a huge punitive tribute. The Assyrian army withdrew from the area, and Hezekiah's tribute was sent after Sennacherib to Nineveh. The outcome of 701 was disastrous for Judah. A great part of Judah's territory had been ravaged,[190] and the conquest and subsequent tribute left Judah bankrupt.[191] Although Sennacherib's campaign was less easy-going than the inscriptions may suggest, the campaign certainly was effective.[192]

The biblical story concerning 701 in 2 Kgs 18:13-19:37 reflects a later view. It has been argued that 2 Kgs 18:13-19:37 can be read as an ongoing story, whose coherence is marked by the motif of the 'return' or 'withdrawal' of the Assyrian king.[193] This coherence does however not change the view that the composition is based on three different parts, conventionally referred to as A (18:13-16), B1 (18:17-19:9a.36-37), and B2 (19:9b-35).[194] Whereas part A (18:13-16) is based on an early historical report, B1 (18:17-19:9a.36-37) is a later story, to be situated in the seventh century. Finally, B2 (19:9b-35) is a later extension to the B1-story,[195] dating from the exilic period.[196]

2 Kgs 18:13-16 (part A) is based on an early report and contains historical information. 1) Sennacherib captured the fortified cities of Judah, but not Jerusalem. 2) Hezekiah was forced to submit. 3) Hezekiah paid a huge punitive tribute. The payment mentioned in 2 Kgs 18:14 partly corresponds to that of the Assyrian account. The early account does not conceal the fact that Hezekiah had brought Judah into a disastrous situation: Judah's cities were captured, Hezekiah admitted he had sinned, i.e. broken his loyalty oath by rebelling against Assyria, and the treasures, not only from the palace but also from the temple were handed over to the Assyrian king.[197]

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[188] Gallagher 1999: 121; Knauf 2003: 146-147.
[189] This is sometimes explained as a reward for their loyalty, but it is more likely that Sennacherib, from a policy of 'divide and rule', strengthened the Philistine kingdoms at Judah's cost, perhaps to create a buffer with Egypt.
[190] According to Stern (2001: 130), all territory south of Jerusalem, the settlements in the Shephelah and the Negev, were destroyed.
[191] Knauf 2003: 146; Mayer 2003: 184.
[192] Na'aman 1991a: 96.
[193] Van der Kooij 2000: 109.
[194] See Van der Kooij 2000: 108; Gonçalves 1986.
[195] Van der Kooij 1986: 107-108.
[196] Na'aman 2000; 2003.
[197] The early account has been adapted in several ways. First, the dating in 18:13 is secondary (see note 113 above). Second, the moment of Hezekiah's surrender, while Sennacherib was at Lachish,

The first narrative account B1 (2 Kgs 18:17-19:9a.36-37) contains various elements that reflect its retrospective character. It concludes with the murder of Sennacherib (19:37), which happened in 681 BCE.[198] Furthermore, Taharqa is referred to as 'king of Cush' (19:9), whereas he reigned from 689-664.[199] The story is to be understood from its conclusion: the murder of Sennacherib. The narrative explains Sennacherib's murder as Yahweh's wrath for the offence committed by this king against Jerusalem.[200] Although this story presents a later, seventh-century, perspective on 701, it may testify to some important historical elements: at the moment Judah was invaded by the Assyrian army and Jerusalem threatened, Hezekiah still counted on Egypt's assistance (see the speech of the Rabshakeh, 2 Kgs 18:21-24); and the Assyrian invasion of Judah was broken off when the news arrived that Taharqa was coming with his army (2 Kgs 19:8-9a.36).[201]

The suggestion that Sennacherib reacted remarkably leniently to Hezekiah's rebellion has to be reconsidered. Sennacherib's dealings with the Kingdom of Judah were not lenient at all. Lachish and many other cities were ravaged and plundered and many people were deported to Assyria. Hezekiah personally received milder treatment, but he had to pay a huge price for his life and throne. Hezekiah's treatment is not without parallel. Rebellion of a ruler otherwise known as a loyal vassal was sometimes regarded as an incident, a once-only mistake, for which the ruler was punished but not executed. This happened particularly in regions that lay just beyond directly governed provinces.[202] Since Ahaz's submission in 734, Judah had not caused any trouble to Assyria. The Judaean kings were probably regarded as loyal vassals, and Hezekiah got away with a severe punishment, a reduction of land and a huge payment, but saved his life and throne.

The depiction of Hezekiah in the Assyrian inscriptions has to be understood from this outcome of the events. Since he had not been executed as a rebel but stayed on the throne, the Assyrian inscriptions do not depict him as a rebel. Instead of accusing him of breaking the loyalty oath, he is described as 'Hezekiah, who did not submit to my yoke'.[203] Various later inscriptions even seem to present Hezekiah as a king that was subdued for the first time: 'I overthrew a vast district, the land of Judah, and the strong and mighty Hezekiah, its king, I made submit at my feet and he pulls my yoke'.[204] Hezekiah for the rest of his reign

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may be questioned, since this is not mentioned in the Assyrian royal inscriptions. This element probably followed from the inclusion of part A in the ongoing composition of 18:13-19:37.

[198] For this story, see further chapter 6.1.2.

[199] See Van der Kooij 2000: 113-116.

[200] Van der Kooij 2000: 118.

[201] According to this reconstruction, the 'report' (or 'rumour') of the arrival of the Egyptian army (2 Kgs 19:7) was not fake, but sound, as is usually the case in the biblical historical books (1 Sam 2:24; 1 Sam 4:19; 2 Sam 4:4; 1 Kgs 2:28; 10:7).

[202] Dalley 1998: 92.

[203] Chicago Prism iii 18-19; Mayer 2003: 187, 189.

[204] Gallagher (1999: 130, note 13) argues that Hezekiah in these later inscriptions (Bull inscriptions) is qualified as *šepṣu mitru* 'strong and tough' rather than *šepṣu bēru* 'a notorious rebel' (cf. Mayer 2003: 194). Gallagher (1999: 142, note 71) points out that the qualification *šepṣu mitru* 'strong and tough' only occurs in the inscriptions of Sennacherib and that it refers to peoples that had not yet been subdued by Assyria.

remained submissive to Assyria; his successor Manasseh is depicted in Assyrian sources as a loyal vassal.[205]

4.1.8 Prophetic Words relating to 705-701 BCE

Many of the prophecies from First Isaiah that can be dated to the eighth century, relate to the circumstances of 705-701 BCE. This is sufficiently clear for the following words: 28:7b-10; 28:14-18*; 29:15; 30:1-5*; 30:6-8; 31:1.3a; and furthermore: 18:1-2*; 19:1b-4; 22:15-19. Finally, I will argue that the *woe*-sayings of 5:8-23* and 10:1-2 are also to be connected with this period.

The historical situation of 705-701 is of great importance for a proper understanding of these prophetic words. In Jerusalem, a controversy was going on as to whether or not to adopt a policy of rebellion against Assyria while relying on help from Egypt. At some point Hezekiah concluded an alliance with the Cushite king of Egypt, to support Judah in a revolt against Assyria. The Assyrian inscriptions accuse the leaders of Ekron of concluding an anti-Assyrian alliance with Egypt. However, Hezekiah probably acted as overlord of Ekron, since Ekron's king Padî had been taken prisoner to Jerusalem. This implies that Judah was involved in the alliance with Egypt too.[206] Prophetic words from Isaiah, connected with 705-701, reflect the policy of rebellion adopted by Judah and the diplomatic efforts Judah made to conclude an alliance with the Cushite overlords of Egypt (30:6-8; 30:1-2*; 31:1-3a*; 28:14-18*). As argued above, the Assyrian inscriptions are silent about Judah's alliance with Egypt, because of the outcome of the events. Since Hezekiah was not executed as a rebel but bought off his life and throne, he was not depicted as a rebel in the Assyrian inscriptions.

Alliance with Egypt (Isa 30:1-5*.6b-8; 31:1; 28:15-18*; 18:1-2*; 19:1b-4)

The alliance between Judah and Egypt was based on negotiations and consisted of a formal and binding agreement concerning military aid from Egypt, ruled by the Cushite (25th) dynasty, that was paid for by Judah. Situations in which a less powerful king facing a military conflict with a stronger king asked another, equally strong ruler for help, occurred quite often. For the understanding of Isaiah's prophecies it is important to show how such political alliances were perceived. In the Assyrian royal inscriptions from the eighth and seventh century, we find two profoundly different perceptions of military alliances. When Assyria assists a smaller king who is in trouble, the alliance is presented in positive terms.

[205] Some indications of Judah's pro-Assyrian attitude after 701 can be mentioned. 1) On a sculpture from Sennacherib's palace in Nineveh some soldiers, likely to be Judaeans, are depicted among the royal bodyguard (Barnett 1998: I, 135 and II, 484). This implies that the Judaeans were regarded as reliable allies (Dalley 2004a: 391-392). 2) Ussishkin (1995: 289-303) argues that the Siloam tunnel was not built for defence purposes in preparation for 701, but as part of a prestigious royal building project influenced by the magnificent royal architecture in the main Assyrian cities, in particular Nineveh. Dalley (1998: 91; 2004a: 397-398) argues that the Siloam tunnel was an imitation on a small scale of Sennacherib's great irrigation constructions for his famous palace garden (cf. Knauf 2001).

[206] Dalley (2004a: 391) suggests that on the Lachish relief Cushite soldiers are depicted: the people depicted as deportees from Lachish are identifiable as Judaeans, but the people being punished, 'grovelling in front of the king', are Cushite soldiers (for the pictures, Barnett 1998: II, 322-352).

The troubled king, often presented as a loyal vassal, is threatened by enemies. The king humbly implores the Assyrian king to help him and the Assyrian king comes to his aid and defeats the enemies. It is presented as a justified military intervention.[207] When however the alliance is concluded with another superpower, Urarṭu, Elam or Egypt, against Assyria, it is depicted in negative terms.[208] The negative depiction of anti-Assyrian alliances in the Assyrian royal inscriptions is explored here, because it closely resembles Isaiah's negative depiction of Judah's anti-Assyrian alliance with Egypt.

The Assyrian royal inscriptions present the following depiction of anti-Assyrian alliances. The ruler requesting assistance often is an Assyrian vassal and the alliance means a violation of his loyalty oath (*adê*) to Assyria. Out of fear of Assyria, the rebel king seeks for an alliance with a strong king. The agreement for military help against Assyria is not sanctioned by the gods but a purely human affair,[209] and therefore unreliable.[210] The alliance is further condemned by the claim that it was bought by a bribe.[211] The king supplying military assistance on request did not do so out of noble motives but only for his economic advantage. The aim of the military assistance is help or rescue but this aim is never attained. The typical epithet of the helper-king is ally or helper 'that could not save him' (*lā mušēzibīšu*). The allied forces do not stand a chance against Assyria, because they put their trust on the wrong side. The rebel trusts in his own strength or in the military forces coming to his aid. The illegitimate and pointless character of the anti-Assyrian alliance is illustrated by the following passage from an inscription of Sennacherib:

> The Babylonians opened the treasury of the temple Esagila; they took the gold and silver of Marduk and Zarpanitu, the property of the temple of their gods, and they sent it as a bribe to Umman-menanu, king of Elam, a man who had no sense at all, saying: 'Gather your army, prepare your camp, hurry to Babylon, come to our aid, for you are our trust'.[212]

The Assyrian king, by contrast, trusts in his god.[213] Among the examples of anti-Assyrian alliances in the Assyrian royal inscriptions,[214] we find three cases where Palestine kings ask

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[207] See for examples and discussion, Oded 1993.

[208] Liverani (1982) has presented a description of this ideological complex, which he calls the '*kitru*-institution'.

[209] E.g. BIWA, Prism A ii 111-115: King Gyges, who 'did not heed the word of Aššur, but, his heart being proud, trusted in his own strength', sent his forces to assist Psammetichus, king of Egypt against Assyria; Sargon's Display inscription, l. 112-113 (Fuchs 1994: 222-223): 'Muttallu of Kummah, wicked Hittite, who did not fear the command of the gods, plotter of evil, speaker of lies, trusted in Argišti, king of Urarṭu, an ally that could not save him.'

[210] The smaller king ran the risk that the stronger king, even after a payment, would *not* send military aid. See e.g. Sargon's Annals, l. 308-309 (Fuchs 1994: 153), where the rebel Merodach-baladan seeks the help of the king of Elam: 'this evil Elamite took the bribe, but being afraid of my weapons he turned around and told him: I am not coming'.

[211] Terms for the payment are *ṭa'tu* 'bribe' (e.g. Fuchs 1994: 153, Ann. l. 309; Luckenbill 1924: 42, l. 34), *šulmānu* 'greeting-gift' often as a bribe, (e.g. Fuchs 1998: 46, l. 32), *kadrû* 'present', 'bribe' (e.g. Fuchs 1994: 153, Ann. 309), *maḫīru* 'exchange' (e.g. Borger 1956: 13, l. 33).

[212] Luckenbill 1924: 42:31-38.

[213] See e.g. Borger 1956: 49, Esarhaddon's Nin. A iii 27-29, 'they (the allied enemies) trusted in their own strength, I however trusted in the great gods, my lords'.

for assistance from Egypt: 1) Hanunu of Gaza received assistance from the king of Egypt: 'he (i.e. the king of Egypt) provided him Re'e, his [*tartānu*] as assistance, and he went into battle against me (i.e. Sargon). At the command of Aššur, my Lord, I defeated them, after which Re'e like a herdsman (Akk. *rē'û*) who has been robbed of his sheep, escaped completely alone'[215] (see 4.1.3). 2) The leaders of Ashdod and their king Iamani 'brought (*našû*) their goodwill gifts (*šulmānu*)[216] to Pharaoh, king of Egypt, a king that could not save them (*malku lā mušēzibīšunu*), and kept imploring him for assistance (*erēšu kitra*)'[217] (see 4.1.5). 3) The alliance of the rebels of Ekron with the Cushite king of Egypt, in 701 BCE:

> The high officials, the nobles, and the people of Ekron, who had thrown into chains Padî, their king, who was loyal to the treaty and oath with Assyria, and had handed him over like an enemy to Hezekiah, the Judaean, became afraid because of the pollution they had caused. They requested help (*katāru*) from the kings of Egypt, troops, archers, chariots and the cavalry of the king of Cush, an army beyond counting, and they came to their assistance. Near Eltekeh their battle lines were drawn up against me, while they sharpened their weapons. Trusting to Aššur, my Lord, I fought with them and I defeated them.[218]

The Ekronites are pictured as criminals, who transgressed the treaty with Assyria by throwing King Padî who remained loyal to his oath into chains to Jerusalem. The army that came to their aid is depicted as numerically superior. Sennacherib, by contrast, is presented as trusting in his god.

In reality, anti-Assyrian alliances were of course as formal and binding as pro-Assyrian alliances.[219] However, as demonstrated above, the Assyrian royal inscriptions in ideological terms emphasise the illegitimate character of the anti-Assyrian alliances. The prophet Isaiah strongly opposed rebellion against Assyria and rejected an alliance with Egypt. He denounced his opponents by using terms and images that are to a great extent similar to the Assyrian descriptions of anti-Assyrian agreements. The prophetic sayings 28:15-18*, 29:15, 30:1-5*, 30:6b-8 and 31:1*, contain a range of elements that resemble the negative ideological depictions of the anti-Assyrian alliances as found in the Assyrian royal inscriptions. In 30:1-5* the policy of alliance with Egypt for help against Assyria is described as rebellion against Yahweh, which stresses the illegitimate character of the alliance:

> Rebellious sons – oracle of Yahweh – to carry out a plan, but without involving me, to make an alliance, but against my will, not to aid and not to profit, but to bring shame and disgrace.

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[214] Listed by Liverani 1982: 49-50.
[215] Fuchs 1994: 90, l. 53-55. Cf. also the Display inscription, l. 25-26 (Fuchs 1994: 197-198).
[216] *šulmānu*/*šulmannu* 'goodwill gifts', often in the sense of 'bribe' or 'inducement'.
[217] Translation based on Fuchs 1998: 44-46, 73-74, fragment VIIb; for this passage see 4.1.5 above.
[218] Chicago Prism ii 73-iii 3; Taylor Prism ii 69-79 (Mayer 2003: 186-191). For the text see Frahm 1997: 53-54 (cf. Luckenbill 1924: 31: ii 74-81; 69:22-25).
[219] Liverani 1982: 60-62.

The 'rebellious sons' are the political leaders of Judah.[220] Their rebellion consisted of the violation of the loyalty oath (*adê*) with Assyria.[221] 30:6b-8 criticises the economic basis of the agreement with Egypt:

> Through a land of trouble and distress, where lioness and lion roar, viper and serpent fly, they carry (נשׂא) their riches on the backs of donkeys, and their treasures on the humps of camels, to a people that cannot profit them (hi. לא יעל). Yes, Egypt is wind, and vain their aid (עזר), therefore I have called her, 'Rahab who sits still.'
> Go now, write it before them on a tablet, and inscribe it in a document, so that it may be for the time to come as a witness forever.

Judah's riches and treasures are carried off to Egypt, but without any profit. This equals the bribe for help against Assyria, as often mentioned in the Assyrian inscriptions. Furthermore, Egypt is referred to as עַם לֹא יוֹעִילוּ, 'a people that cannot profit them'; 'profit' however here means 'save'.[222] Egypt is 'a people that cannot save them', which resembles the Assyrian expression the helper or king 'that could not save him' (*lā mušēzibīšu*). The references to Egypt's help correspond to Assyrian terminology: עזר, 'to help' (30:7) resembles the Assyrian *katāru*, 'to come to aid',[223] whereas עֶזְרָה, 'help' (31:1) equals Assyrian *kitru*, 'military aid':[224]

> Woe them that go down to Egypt for help (עֶזְרָה) and who rely on horses, but did not look to the Holy One of Israel nor consulted Yahweh!

The denouncement of the rebels and their intended helper both in the Assyrian inscriptions and in the sayings of Isaiah is dressed in similar ideological cloths.

The presumed helper Egypt is described with contempt in Isaiah's sayings, in particular in 28:15-18*:

> Because you have said, 'We have made a covenant with death, and with Sheol we have an agreement; when the overwhelming scourge passes through it will not come to us; for we have made lies our refuge, and in falsehood we have taken shelter' –
> Therefore thus says the Lord Yahweh: Look, I am about to lay a foundation stone on Zion, a massive stone, and I will make justice the line, and righteousness the plummet; but hail will sweep away the refuge of lies, and waters will overwhelm the shelter, your covenant with death will be annulled, your agreement with Sheol will not stand; when the overwhelming scourge passes through you will be beaten down by it.

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[220] Ruppert 1986: 960.
[221] The loyalty oath (*adê*) was sworn not only by the gods of Assyria, but also by one's own gods, in the case of the Judaean kings: Yahweh; see Dalley 1998: 88, 98.
[222] The verb יעל hi. is used in parallelism with נצל hi. 'to save' (1 Sam 12:21; Prov 10:2; 11:4; Isa 44:9-10, 17; 47:12-13; 57:12-13). For a meaning similar to Isa 30:6, see Prov 11:4 (riches do not profit, i.e. save, in the day of wrath, but righteousness delivers from death).
[223] Cf. Josh 10:4, 6; 1 Kgs 20:16; 1 Chron 12:19; 2 Chron 28:16; Ezek 32:21.
[224] Cf. Judg 5:23; Isa 20:6; Jer 37:7; Lam 4:17; Nah 3:9.

This prophecy refers to Judah's anti-Assyrian alliance with Egypt. First, the 'overwhelming scourge' is Assyria. The addressees, Judah's political leaders (see 28:14), have made an alliance with a third party in order to obtain protection against Assyria. From the historical context, we know that this was the Cushite king of Egypt. This interpretation is confirmed by the parallel between 28:15 and 30:2. 28:15, 'we have made lies our refuge (מַחְסֶה)', corresponds to 30:2, 'to take refuge (חסה) in the protection of Pharaoh'. Furthermore, the references to 'treaty' and 'agreement' in 28:15 correspond to the alliance with Egypt referred to in 30:1.[225] The rejection of Egypt's help in 28:15, 17 as 'lies' and 'falsehood', resembles that of 30:7: 'vain and void' (הֶבֶל וְרִיק).

28:15-18* characterises the alliance with Egypt as a 'treaty with death'. This means that relying on Egypt against Assyria is a fatal mistake, which leads to certain death. 28:15 is a fictitious quotation by which the prophet ridicules his opponents through ironical language. In strong terms, Egypt's help is rejected, as in 30:7. There Egypt is called 'Rahab who sits still,' a power that comes to nothing, and whose help is worthless. Egypt is depicted as being totally unreliable, like the kings on whom the rebels trust in the Assyrian inscriptions. The terms 'death' and 'Sheol' (metaphorical language typical of prophetic oracles, cf. e.g. 7:4) characterise the pointlessness of the alliance with Egypt. In the Assyrian royal inscriptions, the Assyrian king is often cast in the role of the divine hero (Marduk or Ninurta), whereas the enemies are cast in the role of the powers of chaos (such as Tiamat).[226] It is likely that the terms chosen for Egypt in 28:15, 'death and Sheol' and in 30:7 'Rahab', likewise cast them in the role of the powers of chaos, the proverbial loser of the battle.[227]

In Isa 18:1-2* and 19:1b-4, Cush and Egypt are mentioned in passages that can probably be connected with the situation of 705-701. The saying of 18:1-2* describes the diplomacy of Cush as being in vain. The Cushite king allied himself with Judah and Philistine cities to assist them against Assyria, for a payment, but it will lead to nothing:

> Woe, land of whirring wings, in the region of the rivers of Cush, which sends envoys by the Nile in vessels of papyrus on the waters!

Similarly, 19:1b-4 announces the defeat of the Egyptians and their subjection to a 'fierce king'. This probably refers to an Assyrian king. The announcement resembles the message of Isa 20*. In both cases, the background is the suggestion that Egypt's intervention in Palestine will bring them into conflict with Assyria, and that Assyria as a result will conquer Egypt. Although this only came true during the reigns of Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal, the prophecy makes sense in the context of 705-701 BCE.

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[225] Blenkinsopp 2000c: 474; contra Day 1989: 58-64.

[226] See Annus 2002: 94-101, for several clear examples. Furthermore, in Sennacherib's inscription concerning 701, it is said of the Cushite-Egyptian forces that had come to the aid of Ekron, that 'they sharpened their weapons'. This alludes to Enuma Elish 4:92 (see Gallagher 1999: 120-121), where the divine powers allied with Tiamat are said to 'sharpen their weapons' before the battle with Marduk.

[227] Assyria, depicted as a raving storm in 28:15-18*, the 'overwhelming scourge', is perhaps associated with the storm god, the cosmic hero. Egypt is associated with the forces that are to lose: Rahab (the West-Semitic counterpart of Tiamat), and Môt, the god of the underworld. On the association between Egypt with the underworld, see also Spronk 1999: 685; cf. Ps 87:4.

Both in the Assyrian inscriptions and in Isaiah's sayings, the rebels and their allies are depicted as being self-willed and self-confident. The Assyrian royal inscriptions present anti-Assyrian agreements – military aid in exchange for a payment – as not divinely sanctioned but based on a wrong kind of trust.[228] A similar contrast between the divine and the human sphere,[229] is found in 30:1-2* and 31:1.3* (cf. also 29:15). Egypt's help is searched for, but without Yahweh's consent. The Judaeans trusted in Egypt's military force instead of in Yahweh. It is foolish to seek human protection while opposing the will of God.[230] This is, of course, a polemical point of view. The Judaeans who advocated an alliance with Egypt surely did not agree that they acted against Yahweh's will. They probably *had* consulted Yahweh (cf. 28:7b-10). The suggestion that the controversy was between a prophet who wanted to involve Yahweh in state politics, and his opponents operating as secular politicians, fails to recognise the polemical character of the prophetic sayings.[231] Moreover, in the ancient Near East politics was too interwoven with religion for secular politics ever to be spoken of at all.[232] However, accusing one's opponents of ignoring God's will or acting against God's will is a well-known motif in ancient Near Eastern texts.[233] The alleged self-confidence of the opponents is contrasted with consulting Yahweh (31:1).[234]

Of course Assyria's enemies trusted in their own gods too, but according to the Assyrian point of view, rebellion against Assyria automatically implied alienation from the gods and trusting in oneself. Similarly, in the political controversy of 705-701 in Judah, the advocates of each position based their views on what they regarded as Yahweh's will. Both

[228] BIWA: 17, A i 56-57 / B i 55-56: 'He (i.e. the Cushite king Taharqa) forgot the power of Aššur and Ištar, and the great gods, my lords, and trusted in his own strength (var. his own wisdom)'.
[229] BIWA: 99, B v 35, concerning the Elamite king Teumman: 'Teumman who did not respect the gods'.
[230] Høgenhaven 1989: 134.
[231] Contra Dietrich 1976; Barthel 1997. Høgenhaven (1989: 125) gives the following description: 'In particular, scholars have striven to reconstruct the prophetic vision(s) of a "religious" or "Yahwistic" policy, which, it is assumed, was advanced by the prophets as an alternative to the "secular" politics usually conducted by the kings of Israel and Judah.'
[232] The concept of secular, man-made politics occurs in ancient Near Eastern texts as an example of what must be avoided. A well-known example is King Naram-Sin, who according to the Cuthian legend blatantly ignored the will of the gods (for the text, see Goodnick Westenholz 1997: 317). Naram-Sin's hubris was punished by the gods. In this way, he learned that man must trust in the gods, not in human powers (see Goodnick-Westenholz 1997: 264).
[233] E.g. Esarhaddon in his description of the struggle for the throne of Assyria, qualifies in retrospect the actions of his brothers as being opposed to the will of the gods: 'I (Esarhaddon) said to myself: Their deeds are arrogant, they trust in their own plans. What will they do in their disregard of the gods?' (Borger 1956: 42). This is, of course, Esarhaddon's point of view. His brothers would have described their deeds quite differently.
[234] Cf. the oracles reported in the Mari letter ARM 26/1 199. Both the oracle from Lupaḫum, *āpilum* of Dagan and that of a *qammatum* of Dagan of Terqa contain the admonition: 'without consulting the god, the king shall not conclude a treaty!' The historical situation was the conclusion of a treaty of peace between Zimri-Lim of Mari and Ibalpiel of Eshnunna. The oracles show that the god Dagan of Terqa objected to the treaty. Despite his objections, Zimri-Lim accepted the peace treaty with Ibalpiel.

the Assyrian inscriptions and the Isaiah's prophecies represent a partial point of view; those involved in the agreement held a different opinion.

The prophet's opponents (Isa 28:7b-10; 22:15-18)

From Ahaz's submission to Tiglath-pileser in 734 until Sargon's death in 705, Judah did not rebel against Assyria. Yet, rebellion always was a political option that presumably had its advocates among the Judaean elite and political rulers. At least in 722-720 and c. 712 (4.1.3 and 4.1.5 above) rebellion may have seemed an attractive option. Isaiah's prophetic words consistently imply that Judah should remain loyal to Assyria. Evidently, a fierce political debate was going on in Judah. In 705, following the death of Sargon, the time appeared to be ripe for rebellion. At this stage, when the scales were tipped for rebellion, Isaiah's polemic became particularly harsh. In a series of critical sayings, Isaiah detested his political opponents.

Who were Isaiah's opponents? First of all, conspicuously *not* included in the prophetic criticism, at least not explicitly so, is King Hezekiah. Evidently, as the head of the Judaean state, Hezekiah ultimately took the decision to adopt a policy of rebellion. The reason why Hezekiah nevertheless is not mentioned in Isaiah's sayings will be discussed below. The people addressed in Isaiah's critical words can be found within the followings groups. Closely around the king stood the עַבְדֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ ('the king's servants'), court officials closely connected with, and dependent on, the king. A wider circle around the king formed the שָׂרִים, the socio-political elite.[235] This group consisted of the upper part of the wealthy and upper-class elite of Judah, entangled in a common interest with the dynasty in Jerusalem and obtaining a firm footing at the royal court. The שָׂרִים can be considered an institution besides the king, which took part in the exercise of authority and power.[236] On the one hand we have the king's advisors, and on the other, the powerful leaders of Judah, who were in a position to exert pressure on the king.

Besides, 28:7b-10 deals with the religious experts, 'priest and prophet', who thanks to their access to the will of Yahweh, were in a position to authorise political decisions. Members of this last group are referred to in 28:7b-10:

> The priest and the prophet reel with strong drink, they are confused with wine, stagger with strong drink; they err in vision, stumble in giving verdict. All tables are covered with filth, vomit is everywhere.
> Whom will he (i.e. the priest) teach knowledge, and to whom will he (i.e. the prophet) explain the message? To those who are weaned from milk, taken away from the breast? For it is *ṣaw lāṣāw ṣaw lāṣāw qaw lāqāw qaw lāqāw – a bit here, a bit there*.

The saying accuses religious experts of being dazzled by drink, unable to advise the political decision-makers. Their advice and messages are only fit for small children; they talk stupidity. The criticism is to be understood as being not directed at priests and prophets in general, but at those religious experts that supported the anti-Assyrian policy. Whereas Isaiah, with his words, authorised a policy of loyalty toward Assyria, other religious experts

[235] See Rüterswörden 1985: 94-95.
[236] This characterisation is based on Niemann 1993.

authorised the opposed position of resistance against Assyria. Isaiah portrays these religious experts as being drunk. In this way, he insinuates that they sat at the table of the upper classes and spoke words the leaders of Judah wanted to hear. According to Isaiah, they speak in drunkenness, which means that their advice is unsound and their visions are unreliable. Their being drunk also suggests that they are blind to the real situation. In short, Isaiah accuses these priests and prophets of incompetence and of fraudulent, fake, divination.

Isaiah's denouncement of these priests and prophets has a parallel in the examples of Assyrian religious experts who accuse colleagues of incompetence and of fraudulent verdicts.[237] A message from the gods that was regarded as unacceptable could only be explained as a fraud. A clear example of this is found in the letter SAA 10 179 to King Esarhaddon. In this letter, Kudurru, an expert in divination, reports to the king how he became against his will involved in a conspiracy.[238] He states that he was forced to perform a divination: 'Will the *rab ša rēšē* take over the kingship?'.[239] Kudurru performed the divination, with a positive outcome. Since this outcome is, of course, unacceptable to the king, Kudurru continues: '[By the gods of the king], my [lord]: The extispicy [which I performed was] but a colossal fraud! (The only thing) [I was th]inking of (was), "May he not kill me." [Now th]en I am writing to the king, lest [the king my lord] hear about it and kill me.'[240]

Isaiah's reaction to the prophetic visions and priestly verdicts supporting a policy of rebellion was similar. Rebellion against Assyria posed a threat as great to the state of Judah, as a conspiracy against the king in Assyria. Any prophecy, verdict, or extispicy supporting it could be nothing but a fraud. It was a non-prophecy or a non-extispicy, produced either by force and from fear of being killed (SAA 10 179), or by religious experts too drunk to understand what they were talking about (28:7b-10). As Kudurru disqualifies his own extispicy, Isaiah ridicules the visions and verdicts of his colleagues who authorise the policy of rebellion. Isaiah claims that the policy of rebellion is not backed up with trustworthy divine messages. On the contrary, this policy is against Yahweh's will (30:1-2*; 31:1*).

Isaiah's main criticism is however reserved for the political leaders advocating rebellion. They are criticised in 28:14-18*, 29:15, 30:1-5*, 30:6-8*, 31:1.3* (see above) and 5:8-23*, 10:1-2* (see below). The question as to whether or not to rebel against Assyria was not a calm discussion of pros and cons, but a deep controversy involving the issue of good versus bad leadership. A basic explanation of Isaiah's criticism against the political leaders is that their wrong policy in the eyes of the prophet makes them bad leaders. The rejection of the anti-Assyrian politics goes hand in hand with accusing the proponents of ignoring Yahweh and portraying them as robbers of the poor. Isaiah

[237] SAA 10 72, l. 6-17; 10 23 and 10 51. For the harsh competition and rivalry among the religious experts at the royal court of Assyria, see Van der Toorn 1998.
[238] For a historical reconstruction, see Nissinen 1998: 133-134.
[239] This title is often translated as 'chief eunuch', but Dalley (2001: 198-206) questions this, suggesting that *ša rēšē* does not necessarily mean eunuch, but can mean 'courtier', often pointing to relatives of the king placed in the highest offices (2001: 205).
[240] SAA 10 179, r. 19'-23' (Parpola's translation). The phrase 'but a colossal fraud', is a free rendering of *alla šāru meḫû*, 'nothing but wind and storm'; Nissinen 1998: 134.

criticised his opponents on a political level for the attempt to conclude an alliance with Egypt, on a religious level for their self-willed ignorance of Yahweh's will, and on a social level for violating justice and righteousness. These accusations can be grouped together, as they all form part of the same blackening of the political leaders.

Isaiah's rejection of a particular policy did not imply however the rejection of the state of Judah. Quite the contrary: the political elite that planned rebellion, according to Isaiah, threatened Judah's peace. Their policy of rebellion against Assyria posed a direct threat to the Judaean state. For this reason, Isaiah depicted his opponents as *enemies of the state*, who threatened Judah's well-being, the order protected by Yahweh. Internal enemies of the state figure also in the Assyrian prophecies. High officials who conspired against the king posed a threat to the Assyrian king, and hence to the well-being of Assyria. In various prophetic oracles, the gods promise to track down the disloyal officials and to punish them.[241] Disloyal Assyrian officials, as potential rebels, posed a threat to the Assyrian king and thus to Assyria.[242] Similarly, Judah's political leaders advocating rebellion, from Isaiah's point of view posed a threat to Judah's well-being. Both in Isaiah's prophecies and in the Assyrian prophecies, these people are depicted as enemies of the state.

The prophetic announcements against the enemies of the state were not unrealistic. If a conspiracy against the Assyrian king was revealed, the participants were executed.[243] Similarly, the political leaders of a rebellious state were punished by the Assyrians: executed, as happened to the political leaders of Ekron in 701, or deported to Assyria. A similar fate for the political leaders of Judah is referred to in 28:18 'when the overwhelming scourge passes through you will be beaten down by it,' and more specifically in 22:15-18:

> Thus says the Lord Yahweh of Hosts: Come, go to that *sōkēn* (an official), [Shebna] (and say to him): What do you think you are doing *here*, and whom do you think you can rely on *here*, that you have cut out a tomb for yourself *here*?
> Look, Yahweh is about to hurl you away violently, O mighty man! He will seize firm hold on you, whirl you round and round, and throw you like a ball into a wide land. *There* you shall die, and *there* your splendid chariots shall lie, oh you disgrace to your master's house!

The focus of this oracle is the misplaced trust of the *sōkēn* addressed. The oracle emphasises that a policy of rebellion inevitably leads to punishment and deportation of the political elite to which the *sōkēn* belongs. The oracle announces the inevitable outcome of the revolt against Assyria: the deportation of the ruling class. The oracle depicts the *sōkēn* as feeling fine and safe in Jerusalem: he expects to enjoy a peaceful life and ultimately a peaceful end. The prophet however opens his eyes (cf. 22:17, Look!). Instead of dying in peace in his own country, the *sōkēn* will be taken into captivity to Assyria (22:18) and die on foreign ground. The background is the Assyrian policy to deport the political elite of a rebellious nation in order to break local resistance.

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[241] SAA 9 2.3, ii 9'-10'; 2.4, iii 31'-33'; 3.5, iv 22-30; see furthermore SAA 10 284, r. 4-9.
[242] See also SAA 10 2 and 10 112.
[243] Cf. e.g. the Chronicle of Esarhaddon: 'In the eleventh year the king of Assyria put many of his magnates to the sword' (Grayson 1975a: 86:29; 127:27).

The *sōkēn*, later but perhaps adequately identified as Shebna, was evidently a high-ranking royal official (cf. 'your splendid chariots', 22:18), probably involved in the political decision-making.[244] Remarkably, the final words of the oracle, 'oh you disgrace to your master's house!', dissociate the king from the policy of rebellion propagated by the *sōkēn* and his colleagues. The expression 'your master's house' in an address to a high official refers to the king and his dynasty.[245] The disastrous outcome of the policy of rebellion will be a disgrace to the king of Judah and his dynasty, and the *sōkēn* is blamed for this. The king's dissociation from Isaiah's critical sayings will be explained below.

Isa 5:8-23* and 10:1-2

[8] Woe them that join house to house, who add field to field,
until there is no room left in the midst of the land!
[11] Woe them that rise early in the morning in pursuit of strong drink,
who linger in the evening to be inflamed by wine!
[18f] Woe them that drag iniquity along with cords of falsehood,
who drag sin along as with cart ropes,
who say, 'Let him make haste, let him speed his work that we may see it;
let the plan of the Holy One of Israel hasten to fulfilment, that we may know it!'
[20] Woe them that call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness,
who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!
[21] Woe them that are wise in their own eyes, and shrewd in their own sight!
[22f] Woe them that are heroes in drinking wine and valiant at mixing drink,
who acquit the guilty for a bribe, and deprive the innocent of their rights!
[10:1f] Woe them that make iniquitous decrees, who write oppressive statutes,
to turn aside the needy from justice and to rob the poor of my people of their right,
that widows may be their spoil, and that they may make the orphans their prey!

The *woe*-sayings of 5:8-23* and 10:1-2 are usually interpreted as prophetic protest against a social crisis in the eighth century.[246] Blenkinsopp describes this presumed crisis as follows: 'This was a situation in which the system of patrimonial domain was being undermined both by the emerging state apparatus, hungry as always for land, and members of powerful families, a process eventuating in vast social changes including the formation of latifundia and the prevalence of rent capitalism.'[247] This interpretation is to be reconsidered. First,

[244] The term *sōkēn* has been connected with the West-Semitic title *skn*/*sākinu*, denoting a high-ranking royal official (see Fox 2000: 178-182). Van Soldt (2002, esp. 827) pointed out that the *sākinu* of Ugarit was the highest official in the city-state, endowed with judicial authority, charged with the care for royal messengers, and functioning as a political stand-in if the king was unable to perform his political duties. The terminological parallel does not mean that the *sōkēn* in eighth-century Judah held the same position as the *sākinu* of Ugarit, but may confirm that the *sōkēn* addressed in 22:15-18 was a high-ranking royal official.
[245] Cf. Gen 44:4, 8; 2 Sam 12:8; 2 Kgs 10:2-3; Zeph 1:8-9.
[246] See Houston 2004: 130, with note 1.
[247] Blenkinsopp 2000a: 213. See further Wildberger 1972-82: 183-202; Albertz 1994: I, 159-160 (1992: I, 248-249).

evidence for a social crisis in the eighth century only stems from the prophetic books,[248] and the conclusiveness of this evidence must be questioned.[249] Second, the abuses criticised in Isa 5:8-23* and 10:1-2 are hardly characteristic of eighth-century Judah but rather are of all times and places.[250] Instead of relating the *woe*-sayings of 5:8-23* and 10:1-2 to presumed inner-Judaean economic developments, I suggest to relate them to the historical circumstances of the late eighth century. The central issue in late eighth-century Judah was what position to adopt toward Assyrian imperialism. Generally speaking, Assyrian imperialism put pressure on the Judaean society, as it led to 'an outflow of precious metal and other valuables in tribute'.[251] This was however not what the prophet complained about. What the prophet criticised was the payment to Egypt: 'they carry their riches on the backs of donkeys, and their treasures on the humps of camels, to a people that cannot profit them' (30:6). This payment probably had to be raised by taxation, and since Isaiah regarded it as a waste of money, it was, in his view, a robbery of the people. Furthermore, the period 705-701 probably saw a wartime economy, characterised by royal confiscation and organised distribution.[252] The preparations for war were expensive.

I suggest connecting the *woe*-sayings of 5:8-23* and 10:1-2 with the conflict of 705-701 between Isaiah and the political leaders of Judah who advocated the rebellion against Assyria. Several arguments can be mentioned. First, Isaiah elsewhere condemns the economic burden of the rebellion (30:6). Second, the reproach of the hedonistic lifestyle of the leaders (cf. 5:11) can be compared with the reproach of the *sōkēn* in 22:15-19. According to 22:15-19, the *sōkēn* is wrong to expect a peaceful lifetime and burial because of the policy of rebellion which he supports. Similarly, the opulent lifestyle of the upper class is despicable in the prophet's eyes, *because* of their politics of rebellion, which according to the prophet inevitably leads to war with Assyria.[253] Third, because of their policy of rebellion, Isaiah regards his opponents as wicked leaders and enemies of the state, and this is exactly how they are portrayed in 5:8-23* and 10:1-2.[254] True leadership, according to ancient Near Eastern values, means securing social justice and observing the will of the gods.[255] The Judaean leaders have failed in both respects: they acted against Yahweh's will and trusted in their own wisdom, and they committed crimes against social justice. In order to demonstrate that the political leaders had adopted the wrong political position, the prophet pictures them as having gone astray in every respect: they are accused not only of oppression of the poor and self-willed arrogance, but also of greed, dipsomania,

[248] Houston 2004: 131-132
[249] Becker 2004: 59; see also Houston 2004: 131-136.
[250] Cf. Neh 5:1-5, where in a fifth-century context exactly those features are described that are considered as characteristic of the social crisis in the eighth century.
[251] Houston 2004: 146; De Geus 1982: 56.
[252] The *lmlk*-seal impressions on jar handles have been interpreted as reflecting a pre-war and wartime operation, kingdom-wide and controlled by the government; see Halpern 1991: 21-27; cf. Fox 2000: 216-235.
[253] See Kratz 2003a: 81, 86, who argues with regard to the *woe*-sayings in Amos, directed against the elite of Samaria, that especially in critical circumstances (as it was uncertain when and how Assyria would strike back) the opulent lifestyle of the elite appeared all the more despicable to the prophet.
[254] Cf. Houston 2004: 141.
[255] See Nissinen 2003d.

hubris and impertinence. Isaiah does not present a description of the social problems of his time, but blackens a particular part of the ruling class. Fourth, a number of parallels between sayings that clearly deal with the political issue of 705-701 and the *woe*-sayings of 5:8-23* and 10:1-2 confirm this interpretation: the motif of drunkenness (5:11, 22; see 28:7b-10),[256] falsehood and iniquity instead of justice and righteousness (5:18; 10:1-2; see 28:15-18, esp. 28:16-17a), the notion of the self-willed leaders that do not care for Yahweh's will (5:19, 21; see 30:1-2*; 31:1; 29:15), and the association of the opponents with the powers of darkness (5:20; see 29:15; 28:15).

The accusing of the political elite of corruption, oppression of the weak and injustice, is to be understood from the stand-point of the prophet's rejection of an alliance with Egypt. According to the prophet, a policy of rebellion meant a shift from security grounded in divine strength to security grounded in human might, bought at the cost of injustice and oppression.

A final issue to discuss is the absence of references to King Hezekiah in the critical sayings of Isaiah relating to 705-701. As head of the political state Hezekiah was responsible for Judah's rebellion against Assyria, strongly rejected by Isaiah. Why then is he not mentioned in the criticism? The suggestion that Isaiah did not bother to mention him because he was a weak king, not in control of the political decisions, is not convincing.[257] Quite the contrary, Hezekiah seems to have been a relatively strong king, who managed to stay on the throne even after the critical events of 701. The reason for Isaiah's not mentioning him must have been different. As argued above, Isaiah was loyal to the Judaean state – Judah's well-being was the whole point of his harsh polemics of 705-701. Since the king was the divinely appointed head of the state, it was hardly possible to criticise the king, at least not in a direct way, without becoming an enemy of the state oneself. Instead of blaming the king, Isaiah blamed those who advised him and put pressure on him. In this way, his criticism is directed at members of the upper class, the political leaders that advocated a policy of rebellion.[258]

The best way to criticise state politics without criticising the king himself is to blame the royal advisors.[259] An example of a prophetic oracle that similarly avoids direct criticism of the king is found in the Mari letter ARM 26/2 371. This letter reports prophetic words from the *āpilum* of Marduk of Babylon. According to the prophet, Išme-Dagan, the king of the Assyrian city Ekallatum, who was staying in Babylon under the protection of King Hammurabi in Babylon, had offended Marduk. The offence was that Išme-Dagan had sent goods and treasures from Marduk's temple in Babylon as a goodwill gift to the king of Elam. The prophet announced that Išme-Dagan would pay dearly for this robbery of Marduk.[260] Significantly, the prophetic message only addresses Išme-Dagan, not

[256] Cf. also 28:1-4, where drunkenness is an image for self-willed arrogance.
[257] Contra Wildberger 1972-82: 1128.
[258] See in particular 22:18, where the *sōkēn* is accused of being a 'disgrace' to the house of his master, i.e. the king.
[259] Cf. Esarhaddon's 'Letter to the God', where the king of Šubria who has neglected the command of Esarhaddon, his overlord, tries to excuse himself by claiming: 'My princely counsellors told me unreliable lies' (Borger 1956: 103, ii 20; translation from Lanfranchi 2003: 100).
[260] ARM 26/2 371, see Roberts 2002b: 246-249; Nissinen 2003a: 73-74; Heimpel 2003: 64, 325.

Hammurabi, the king of Babylon. This is remarkable, since it is hardly conceivable that Išme-Dagan could dispose of the possessions of the temple of Marduk without Hammurabi's consent. Although the representatives of the Marduk temple must have been furious at their own king Hammurabi, the prophet avoids direct criticism against him, but instead focuses on his protégé Išme-Dagan.[261]

Isaiah's criticism is mainly directed at the political leaders of Judah. The lack of direct criticism against the king agrees with Isaiah's role in 734-732 (cf. in particular 7:4-9a*) and with the later picture of the prophet in the Hezekiah stories (2 Kgs 18-19). This implies that the prophet Isaiah, although being radically opposed to the politics of rebellion, did anything but reject Hezekiah or the Davidic dynasty.

4.1.9 Evaluation

In the first part of this chapter, I have discussed four episodes from the late eighth century and argued that the early prophetic material from First Isaiah is to be connected with these events. Apart from the revolt of Ashdod in c. 712 BCE (4.1.5) and the report of Isaiah's symbolic act attributed to this period (Isa 20*; 4.1.6), three periods stand out as situations to which Isaiah's prophecies relate: 734-732, 722-720 and 705-701 BCE. Significantly, Isaiah's prophecies are interconnected with exactly the three direct encounters between Judah and Assyria in the late eighth century: 734, 720 and 701 BCE. The main issue reflected in the prophecies of Isaiah is the perception of Assyria's imperialism. First, Isaiah saw Assyria as Yahweh's agent to destroy Judah's enemies. Second, he condemned Assyria for swallowing up Judah in its illegitimate, unlimited expansion. Third, he rejected rebellion against Assyria while trusting Egypt. This view implied that Yahweh himself would punish Assyria for its offences against Judah, but that rebellion against Assyria was a serious mistake. Isaiah's political assessment appeared to be correct, and this, in my view, made his words worth preserving.

4.2 Historical Events in Assyria and Oracles from Assyrian Prophets

The Assyrian prophetic oracles relate to historical situations of major importance. Although many of them contain clues for determining their historical background, some uncertainty has to be taken for granted.[262] The second part of this chapter explores the events to which the oracles relate and demonstrates that prophecy played a role at several key moments during the reigns of Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal. The first period to mention is 681 BCE: the death of Sennacherib and the subsequent struggle for kingship, between Esarhaddon and his brothers. These events have been dealt with in previous studies of the Assyrian prophecies.[263] In addition, seven further episodes from the reigns of Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal will be explored as moments to which Assyrian oracles can be related.

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[261] This text is further discussed in chapter 5.1.4.

[262] Nissinen's statement '[m]ost of the prophecies are easily datable and can be more or less firmly associated with historical events' (2003a: 101), is too optimistic.

[263] Weippert 1981: 92-99; Parpola 1997: LXVIII-LXXI; Nissinen 1998: 15-30.

Parpola and Nissinen have greatly contributed to the exploration of the historical background of the Assyrian prophecies.[264] Nissinen gave the following assessment of the prophecies to Esarhaddon: 1) the oracles of SAA 9 1 are proclaimed during Esarhaddon's war against his brothers in 681; 2) the oracles of SAA 9 2 deal with the stabilisation of Esarhaddon's rule and the restoration of the cults of the Babylonian gods; these oracles were probably delivered at the beginning of Esarhaddon's reign (680-679); 3) SAA 9 3 consists of oracles and cultic commentaries attached to Esarhaddon's enthronement ritual in Ešarra, the temple of Aššur in Assur, which took place at the end of the year 681.[265]

In my view, the oracles of SAA 9 1 and 2 do not exclusively relate to the limited period of 681-679 BCE.[266] A first issue to reconsider is the date of the oracle collections. Parpola's suggestion that SAA 9 1 dates from 673, together with Esarhaddon's Nineveh A inscription,[267] may be correct. The suggestion that SAA 9 2 and 3 were composed as early as 680 (SAA 9 3) and 679 (SAA 9 2),[268] is however unlikely, since both contain references to events that took place later during the reign of Esarhaddon (see 4.2.3 below). Moreover, there is no compelling reason to assume that all oracles from a particular collection must relate to the same historical situation. On the contrary, it seems clear that they do not. This means that the individual oracles must be dated on the basis of clues provided by the oracles themselves, and that the (later) collections of oracles are to be dated independently.

4.2.1 Esarhaddon's Rise to Power (681 BCE)

According to a common view, Esarhaddon ascended the throne of Assyria by the end of 681 after he defeated his elder brothers who had murdered Sennacherib and had rebelled against him (Esarhaddon) as the legitimate crown prince. This view is based on Esarhaddon's account of the events in the Nineveh A inscription.[269] However, this account is rarely approached with appropriate suspicion.[270] Granted that there is evidence to support Esarhaddon's claim that he was at some stage appointed as crown prince of Assyria,[271] a critical reading of his own report indicates that he lost his father's favour afterwards:

> Malicious gossip, slander and falsehood they (i.e. Esarhaddon's brothers) wove around me in a godless way, lies and insincerity. They plotted evil behind my back. Against the will of the gods

[264] Parpola 1997; Nissinen 1998; 2003a: 97-101, 133-136.
[265] Nissinen 2003a: 101. Parpola (1997: LXVIII-LXIX), although allowing for some variation in dating between the various oracles of the collections, similarly attributes all oracles from SAA 9 1, 2 and 3 to 681-679 BCE.
[266] Cf. Weippert 2002: 37. As I have argued in chapter 3.1.1, SAA 9 3 is not a collection of oracles.
[267] Parpola 1997: LXIX-LXX.
[268] Parpola 1997: LXIX-LXX.
[269] Borger 1956: 40-45.
[270] Parpola 1980: 175; Frahm 1997: 18; Porter 1993: 13-26; Nissinen 1998: 15-30. See Tadmor 1983: 38-41, for a more critical discussion of this passage. The inscription was composed in Adar (XII) 673/2 (Borger 1956: 64). It seems likely that the composition of the Nineveh A inscription is to be connected with the appointment of Ashurbanipal as crown prince of Assyria (Parpola 1997: LXIX-LXX).
[271] See Nin. J l. 1 (Borger 1956: 68-69) and SAA 12 88, both undated. Parpola's identification of SAA 2 3 as succession-*adê* for Esarhaddon (Parpola 1987: 178-180) is questionable, since it rather seems to be an oath of loyalty to Sennacherib himself (see l. 1-4).

> they alienated my father's well-disposed heart from me, though in secret his heart was affected with compassion, and he still intended me to exercise kingship.[272]

The claim that Sennacherib, although his actions suggested otherwise, still intended Esarhaddon to become king, is suspicious. Once Esarhaddon had become king, Sennacherib's 'secret favour' could not be verified anymore, because he was dead. Esarhaddon's confession that he fell from his father's favour, however, is important from a historical point of view. This must have been a public fact that could not be concealed afterwards. The claim that Sennacherib in secret still favoured Esarhaddon attempts to neutralise his public misfortune. Historically, Esarhaddon's fall into disfavour was presumably the reason for his flight from Nineveh to save his life.[273] After his flight, Sennacherib was killed on 20 Tebet 681. Since Sennacherib was probably killed before Esarhaddon had been replaced as crown prince, Esarhaddon presumably was still the official crown prince.

Although it is commonly accepted that Esarhaddon's brother Arda-Mullissi was the offender, or one of the offenders, the murder of Sennacherib cannot be considered a closed case. The letter SAA 18 100 (ABL 1091),[274] usually regarded as the main evidence, accuses Esarhaddon's brother Arda-Mullissi of a plot to murder Sennacherib. However, this letter was probably written afterwards, and sent to Esarhaddon after he had prevailed in the conflict.[275] Besides, the letter probably intended to discredit certain officials. For these reasons, the letter must be treated with caution. It is clear that during Esarhaddon's reign the official reading was that Arda-Mullissi (together with one or more of his brothers) had killed Sennacherib. This official reading, authorised by King Esarhaddon, is also echoed in other sources.[276] This is, however, not the end of the matter. The Babylonian Chronicle refers to the murder of Sennacherib without identifying the murderer:

> Sennacherib, king of Assyria, was killed by his son in a rebellion. (...) The rebellion continued in Assyria (...). On the *twenty-eighth/eighteenth* day of the month Adar Esarhaddon, his son, ascended the throne in Assyria.[277]

Esarhaddon's Nin. A inscription, on the other hand, does not accuse any of Esarhaddon's brothers in particular, but accuses them generally:

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[272] Nin. A i 26-31, Borger 1956: 41-42.
[273] Nin. A i 32-40, Borger 1956: 42-43.
[274] Previously edited by Parpola 1980: 180-181.
[275] The addressee is missing, but it may be assumed that the letter was addressed to King Esarhaddon.
[276] In the accounts from Berossus' Babyloniaca (third century BCE), Arda-Mullissi is identified as the murderer as well: Ardumuzan/Adremelos (see Mayer Burstein 1978: 24-25). Since Esarhaddon's vassals and allies would have had to promote his account of the events, the sources available to Berossus were anything but impartial. Similarly, 2 Kgs 19:37 (Isa 37:38), mentioning Sennacherib's sons Adrammelech and Sharezer as the murderers, seems to be based on the official Assyrian reading (see Mayer Burnstein 1978: 25). If Zawadzki (1990: 69-72) is right that traditions concerning the death of Queen Semiramis in fact mirror the death of Sennacherib, the account of Ctesias of Cnidos is of interest, because this ascribes the murder of Semiramis ('Sennacherib') to her son Ninyas, born from her second marriage ('Esarhaddon').
[277] Grayson 1975a: 81, l. 34-38; Grayson's translation.

> After that, my brothers became frenzied and committed everything that both gods and men consider improper. They plotted evil and set up an armed rebellion in Nineveh against the will of the gods, and in their strife for exercising kingship they butted each other like young goats.[278]

The aim of this accusation is to discredit all his brothers,[279] leaving only Esarhaddon worthy of the kingship. It is difficult to ascertain who murdered Sennacherib. Evidently, it was not Esarhaddon himself, since he had fled from the Assyrian heartland. It is, however, very possible that someone belonging to Esarhaddon's faction killed Sennacherib; after all, Sennacherib's death was in the interests of Esarhaddon, since though fallen into disgrace, he still was the official crown prince. For this reason, I agree with Borger's suggestion:

> Die Unklarheiten in Asarhaddons Darstellung, wo merkwürdigerweise Asarhaddon seine älteren Brüder nicht einmal ausdrücklich des Vatermordes bezichtigt, sowie der Umstand, daß es Asarhaddon gelungen ist, sehr rasch am meisten von der Ermordung seines Vaters zu profitieren, lassen es doch zweifelhaft erscheinen, ob Asarhaddon wirklich ganz unschuldig am Tode seines Vaters gewesen ist.[280]

According to Esarhaddon's inscription (Nin. A i 45-47), the gods took Esarhaddon's side in the struggle for the throne:

> Giving me their firm positive answer, they constantly sent me this oracle of encouragement (*šīr takilti*): 'Go ahead, do not hold back! We will constantly go by your side; we will kill your enemies'.[281]

Although the 'oracle of encouragement' (*šīr takilti*) is the outcome of extispicy rather than a prophetic oracle,[282] it resembles the prophetic oracles that can be dated to the period of the struggle for the throne. Oracle 1.2 mentions Esarhaddon's succession to the throne and can be dated to before his accession:

> King of Assyria, fear not! I will deliver the enemy of the king of Assyria for slaughter. […] your succession [I will keep] you safe and […] you. I am the Gr[eat Lady, I am Ištar o]f Arbela (i 30'-37')

Ištar of Arbela assures Esarhaddon that she will keep him safe (*taqānu*) for succession (*ridûtika*, 'your succession').[283] By addressing Esarhaddon as 'king of Assyria' and

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[278] Nin. A i 43-44, Borger 1956: 42. See also Tadmor 1983: 40.
[279] Sennacherib's sons known by name are: Aššur-nadin-šumi (the eldest son; killed by the Elamites in 694), Arda-Mullissi, Aššur-šuma-ušabši, Aššur-ili-muballissu, and Nergal-šumu-x. Another son may be referred to in the biblical account (2 Kgs 19:37) as Sharezer; Frahm 2002: 1114-1115.
[280] Borger 1982-85: 392.
[281] Nin. A i 60-62.
[282] Nissinen 1998: 33-34.
[283] Cf. Nin. A i 18 (Borger 1956: 40), where Esarhaddon refers to the oath of loyalty enforced on all Assyrians, 'to protect my succession' (*aššu naṣār ridûtīya*). Parpola's reading ˈÉˈ-*re-du-te-ka* (*bēt redûtēka*) is improbable. Of ˈÉˈ only two verticals are visible, which could represent many signs. The

referring to his rivals as 'the enemy of the king of Assyria' the goddess makes clear that Esarhaddon is the legitimate successor of Sennacherib. This fragment corresponds with Nin. A i 38-40, where Esarhaddon states: the great gods provided me a 'secure place' and 'protected me for the kingship'. Oracle 2.5 probably belongs to this period as well:

> Esarhaddon, fear not! I will put Assyria in order, I will appease the angry gods with Assyria, I will tear out the (…) of your enemies, I will shed the blood of the enemies of my king. I will protect my king. I will bring enemies in neckstocks and vassals with tribute before his feet. I am your father, I am your mother; I raised you between my wings. I will see you success! Fear not, Esarhaddon, I will place you between my arm and my forearm. In woe I will vanquish the enemies of my king. I will put Assyria in order, I will put the king[ship] of heaven in order (2 iii 19'-34').

The deity promises Esarhaddon to reconcile (*salāmu* D) the angry gods with Assyria. The anger of the gods – caused by the rebellion and the murder of Sennacherib – was perceived as the heavenly counterpart of the political unrest in Assyria, which is referred to as well.

Furthermore, Esarhaddon's mother Naqia appears in various oracles that can be situated in the period that Esarhaddon had fled Nineveh (1 v 8, v 13-20, 2 i 13', iv 28'). According to oracle 1.8, Naqia had implored Ištar of Arbela to take Esarhaddon's side against his rival brothers. This may indicate that Naqia had sent someone to Arbela to deliver her request to the goddess. The oracle is the following:

> I am the Lady of Arbela. To the king's mother: Because you implored me thus: 'Those of the right and the left you have placed in your lap, but my own offspring you made roam the wild,' Well then, fear not, o king! The kingship is yours, the power is yours!

Naqia's supplication contrasts the unfavourable fate of Esarhaddon with the favourable position of his brothers. The phrase 'those of the right and the left' refers to Esarhaddon's brothers, who at that time occupied honourable positions, at the right and left side of the king.[284] Esarhaddon, by contrast, was a refugee: he had fled from Nineveh. This supplication, referring to the situation after Esarhaddon's flight and before the death of Sennacherib, is answered by the announcement that Esarhaddon is the legitimate king. The final sentence of the oracle is Ištar of Arbela's reply to Naqia's request, directly addressed

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expression *bīt ridûti* does not go with a suffix (CAD s.v. *ridûtu*, 326-327), whereas *ridûtu* meaning 'royal succession' does (Borger 1956: 40, Nin. A i 12, 18; BIWA: 36, Prism A iii 18). Hecker (1986: 57) translates similarly: '[….] deiner Nachfolgeschaft'. The historical situation renders the restoration *bēt redûtēka* even more unlikely, since Esarhaddon did *not* stay in the 'palace of succession', but had fled Nineveh (cf. Nissinen 1998: 20-21). See also Weippert 2002: 40.

[284] SAA 10 185:5-13 gives a description of Esarhaddon's appointment of Ashurbanipal as crown prince of Assyria and Šamaš-šum-ukin as crown prince of Babylon, and concludes: 'You have placed the first on your right, the second on your left side!' (Parpola's translation). From this phrase it may be inferred that oracle 1.8 'those of the right and the left' refers to Esarhaddon's rival brothers. Cf. SAA 9 3 iv 23-24, '[the ones at the right and] left side', probably referring to the high courtiers standing at both sides of the king.

to her son Esarhaddon, addressed as 'king'. A second oracle addressing Naqia is 2.1. Here, the goddess Banitu speaks:

> I will put [.....] in order and consolidate the [throne/crown[285] of Esarha]ddon. [.....] we are the goddesses[286] [.....i]n Esagila [.....] Esarhaddon, king of Assyria. I will seize[287] [his enemies] and trample them [*under my foot*]. Fe[ar not], mother of the king ([*lā tapa*]*lliḫi ummi šarri*). (2 i 6'-14').

After the announcements that the goddess would bring order and that Esarhaddon's enemies would be destroyed, the oracle ends with the encouragement of Naqia.

In oracle 1.7, a deity promises to kill Esarhaddon's enemies: 'The weasels and shrews that have plotted (*dabābu*), I will cut them to pieces before his feet' (v 3-7). The degrading characterisation 'plotting weasels and shrews', refers to Esarhaddon's rival brothers and their supporters.[288] Esarhaddon is referred to in the third person. This suggests that the oracle is directed to Naqia, who is addressed in the enigmatic phrase 'You (fem.) are you, the king is my king!' (v 8-9). This probably means: *You*, Naqia, take care of yourself; *I* (the deity speaking) will take care of Esarhaddon.

A fourth oracle that refers to Naqia, is 2.6. The phrase [*l*]*ā tapalliḫi*, 'fear not!' (iv 28'), addresses a feminine subject, probably Naqia.[289] The goddess speaking might be Urkittu (Ištar of Uruk), as restored by Parpola in iv 8': [^{d}*ur-k*]*i-tú*. The following phrases can be read: '[*I am Urk*]*ittu*, praise me! ... I will guard you ... Fear not! ... [I will pr]otect you ... I will put your kingship in order'. Furthermore, Babylon is mentioned (iv 4') and the god Aššur (iv 2', 29').[290]

The four oracles referring to Naqia, stem from various cities (Arbela, 1 v 25, and Assur, 2 i 14', are mentioned) and involve various deities (Ištar of Arbela, 1 v 12, Banitu, 2 i 5', [Urk]ittu, 2 iv 8').[291] It seems that Naqia actively searched for support for Esarhaddon in various cities and from various deities. Some of the oracles relate to Babylonia as well. The goddesses presenting themselves in oracle 2.1 express a concern with Esagila (2 i 9'); and in oracle 2.6, Urkittu (Ištar of Uruk) perhaps refers to Esagila and clearly to Babylon (2 iv 4'). All deities involved are presented as being on Esarhaddon's side. The likeliest explanation is, that these oracles belong to the period when Esarhaddon was not in the heartland of Assyria. During his absence, his faction, in which his mother Naqia played a prominent role, was striving for his cause. More insight into these events is provided by a report from the Babylonian astrologer Bel-ušezib (SAA 10 109). The letter, addressed to Esarhaddon early in his reign, refers to the events of 681:

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[285] Cf. 1 iii 21; cf. 2 ii 5.
[286] Apparently, another goddess has presented herself as well.
[287] Cf. Weippert 2002: 42, for a different interpretation: '[Auf seine Feinde] schlage ich ein'.
[288] Cf. Nin. A i 28 (Borger 1956: 41) 'they (i.e. the brothers) plotted (*dabābu*) evil behind my back'. In both cases, the actions of Esarhaddon's rivals are described as plotting, conspiring (*dabābu*).
[289] Parpola's completion 'mother of the king' is plausible.
[290] Weippert (private communication) proposes to read in iv 2' ^{d}MAŠ, 'Ninurta' (instead of Aššur).
[291] For SAA 9 5 see chapter 3.1.1.

[7'] I am Bel-ušezib, your servant, your dog, the one who fears you [….]
[8'] the words which I heard in Nineveh as many as were available [….][292] –
[9'] Why has [the king not sum]moned the prophets and prophetesses (*raggimānu raggimātu*)?[293]
[10'] I [who] with my own mouth blocked the exorcist[294] for the well-being of the crown prince my lord,[295]
[11'] whom your [...] saved from being executed[296] [...] to the 'city of confusion' (URU.*ašīt*[*i*]) [...],
[12'] regarding my murder and that of your servants [they plotted] everyday,
[13'] and the sign (*ittu*) of kingship of my lord the crown prince Esarhaddon,
[14'] which I told to the exorcist Dadâ and the queen mother, saying: 'Esarhaddon
[15'] will rebuild Babylon and restore Esagila and [*honour?*] me' –
[16'] Why has the king until now not summoned me? And in [….]
[17'] he/they went [to][297] the 'city of confusion' (URU.*ašīti*), was this excellent structure/design (*šiknu*, i.e. of Esagila);
[18'] and as I told it to the crown prince my lord, it has been done to the king my lord [….]'

This is part of a report dealing with the period right before Esarhaddon's accession, but the letter is written afterwards. Thus, the letter describes a situation in which Esarhaddon was referred to as crown prince (l. 10', 13', 18'), but at the moment of writing, Esarhaddon is king (l. 16', 18'). Bel-ušezib claims that during the period that Esarhaddon had fled Nineveh, he reported the words that he heard in Nineveh, as many as were available. This seems to refer to the prophetic oracles that were delivered in favour of Esarhaddon, since Bel-ušezib continues: 'why has [the king not] summoned the prophets and prophetesses?'

Bel-ušezib emphasises that his striving for the well-being of crown prince Esarhaddon brought great risks to him: he was nearly executed, probably by Esarhaddon's brothers and their men, but he escaped to the URU.*ašīti* (l. 11', again l. 17'). I suggest reading this as *āl ašīti*, 'the city of confusion',[298] and taking it as a reference to Babylon.[299] In the following

[292] For l. 7'-8' cf. SAA 10 110 r. 8-9, 'I am [a dog of the king], my [lord, reporting] to the king, my lord, whatever I hear' (from another letter by Bel-ušezib). In line 9' a new sentence begins.
[293] I propose to restore l. 9' as [LUGAL *la iš-ši*], as l. 16'. Instead of 'summon' the translation 'pay attention to', is also possible (CAD s.v. *našû*: *ammīni re-e-ši la iš-ši* 'why did he not pay attention to me?'). In either case, Bel-ušezib's complaint is that the king has neglected the message of the prophets and prophetesses and of Bel-ušezib himself, namely that Esarhaddon was to become king *in order to* rebuild Babylon and to restore Esagila.
[294] The phrase is uncertain (CAD s.v. *parāku* follows Parpola). In this passage, Bel-ušezib refers to his deeds for the benefit of Esarhaddon as crown prince. One of his brave deeds apparently was that he personally, 'with his own mouth', countered the spell of an exorcist against Esarhadon. This exorcist must have been someone different from the exorcist Dadâ mentioned in l. 14'.
[295] The second half of l. 10' should be taken with the first half.
[296] Parpola's restoration [*al-li*]-*ka* at the beginning of l. 11' is improbable between two verbal forms with an enclitic *ma*; instead, [*x x*]-*ka* is probably the subject of the clause; *ú-še-zi-ba-am-ma* (*ezēbu* Š with suffix 1st person singular) needs a 3rd person singular subject.
[297] The preposition *ana* may be restored at the end of l. 16'.
[298] URU.*a-ši-ti* is unlikely to be a form of *asi'tu* (*isītu*, *asa'ittu*), 'tower' (contra Parpola, SAA 10 109), since the spelling *a-ši-ti* is not attested for *asi'tu*. Besides, *asi'tu* preceded by the URU-determinative means 'storehouse' according to CAD. Instead, it could be taken as *āl ašīti*, 'city of confusion', referring to Babylon. The same expression occurs also in another letter, SAA 16 29, which similarly refers to Esarhaddon as crown prince and addresses him as king. The author of this

lines, an excellent design or structure (*šiknu*) is mentioned, which probably points to Esagila, again with a reference to the *āl ašīti*, 'the city of confusion', Babylon. In Babylon Bel-ušezib received the *ittu*, the 'sign' that promised kingship to crown prince Esarhaddon. He claims to have immediately reported it to the exorcist Dadâ and the queen mother Naqia, leading figures of Esarhaddon's faction in Nineveh.[300] The *ittu* was the following: 'Esarhaddon will rebuild Babylon and restore Esagila, and [*honour?*] me'. The term *ittu* can refer to a range of ominous signs; here it is likely to refer to an oracle from Marduk. First, the deity appears to speak in the first person (*yā*[*ši*] 'me', l. 15'), which is an indication of prophecy. Furthermore, Bel-ušezib was familiar with prophetic oracles, judging from the beginning of his report, and from another letter in which he quotes a prophecy from Marduk.[301] Because this *ittu* concerns Babylon and Esagila, it is likely to represent an oracle from Marduk as well. The point of the passage is that Bel-ušezib explicitly connects the promise of kingship with Babylon's restoration, and strongly argues that now Esarhaddon has become king he should restore Esagila (see 4.2.2 below).[302]

Scholars have been surprised that the Babylonian cities did not revolt after Sennacherib was murdered, given their resistance to Assyrian dominance in preceding decades.[303] This may indicate that Babylon and other Babylonian cities supported Esarhaddon in his fight for the throne.[304] Whereas the focus often is on Esarhaddon's initiative in Assyria's improved relations with Babylonia,[305] part of the initiative for this may have come from the Babylonian cities themselves. At least part of Babylonia took Esarhaddon's side in the conflict.[306]

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letter, Mardî, points to his loyalty to Esarhaddon in the difficult period: 'I constantly prayed to [B]el, Nabû and Šamaš for the king, my lord, saying: "May the crown prince, my lord, seize the royal throne of his father's house! I am his servant and his dog, who fears him; may I see light under his protection".' Like Bel-ušezib, this Mardî had to flee, *ana libbi* URU.*i-si-ti* (l. 6). Here too URU.*i-si-ti* may be read as *āl išīti*, 'city of confusion' (with *isītu* as variant spelling of *išītu*, 'confusion'; cf. Luukko 2004: 74-75). Like Bel-ušezib, Mardî fled to the 'city of confusion' (Babylon), in order to save his life during the struggle for the throne in 681.

[299] *ešû* 'to confuse' is used in connection with cities (e.g. KAR 158 r. 111-112 'who tramples down the corners of the world, who throws all the cities into confusion' [*a-šu-ú kalu ālāni*]). See also *ešītu* 'confusion', 'political disorder', in the expression *ina ešīti māti* 'in the disordered state of the country' (CAD s.v. *ešītu*). After Sennacherib's measures against Babylon in 689, including the deportation of Marduk to Assyria, the city is described as *namûtu*, 'wasteland', and *karmu*, 'heap' (Borger 1956: 14). In oracle 2.3 (ii 24') the phrase *ina ṣēri lemni balli*, 'in the evil desert of confusion', probably refers to Babylon too (see 4.2.2 below). Finally, a similar reference to Babylon is found in the letter SAA 10 169, where apparently king Esarhaddon is quoted, as saying with respect to Babylon: 'The city was in ruins, and I have resettled it and established its freedom!'

[300] This Dadâ apparently made a great career during the reigns of Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal; see Mattila 1999: 360.

[301] SAA 10 111 r. 23-26.

[302] SAA 10 109 l. 13'-15', cf. also l. 24', r. 14-15.

[303] See e.g. Porter 1993: 28-30.

[304] It were presumably (some of) the ancient Babylonian cities, in particular Babylon, that supported Esarhaddon in his struggle for kingship.

[305] E.g. Porter 1993: 6.

[306] See De Jong 2004.

The precise moment of Esarhaddon's return to Assyria is unknown. A retrospective passage in oracle 3.5 probably refers to this moment. Ištar of Arbela rhetorically asks: 'did I not bend the four doorjambs of Assyria and did I not allow you (to enter)?' The later accounts of Esarhaddon's fight against his brothers, found in the Nineveh A inscription and in the prophetic text SAA 9 3.3 are heavily coloured with mythological motifs and do not present a historical picture.[307]

The reality of 681 BCE was that Esarhaddon's kingship started with a bitter fight. He and his faction were deeply involved in the bloodshed. Esarhaddon was supported by Naqia, Dadâ, Bel-ušezib, Mardî,[308] and others, who mobilised support for him in various cities and from various deities, including those of Babylonia. Historically, we only know the outcome of the fight for the throne: Esarhaddon defeated his rivals and acceded to the throne, two months after Sennacherib's death. These two months of war form the historical background for various oracles from the collections of SAA 9 1 and 2 (1.2, 1.7, 1.8, 2.1, 2.5 and 2.6, see above). In these oracles, the gods support Esarhaddon and encourage him, addressing him as the rightful successor whose enemies will be annihilated.

4.2.2 Esarhaddon's Accession to the Throne and First Regnal Years

According to Esarhaddon's Assur A inscription (679 BCE), his accession was accompanied by all sorts of favourable omens, including prophetic oracles:

> Prophetic oracles (*šipir maḫḫê*) concerning the everlasting establishment of the foundation of my priestly throne, were constantly and regularly provided. Good omens in dreams and ominous utterances, concerning the establishment of the throne, and the duration of my reign, kept occurring to me. When I saw these favourable signs, I became confident and pleased.[309]

Various oracles can be connected with the period immediately after the accession.[310] Oracle 1.4 can be situated in this period. The deities Bel (Marduk), Ištar of Arbela, and Nabû promise Esarhaddon that the gods will support him as they before have supported him. Ištar of Arbela reminds Esarhaddon: 'I appeased Aššur with you' (ii 31'). Since no deteminative

[307] For mythological overtones in Esarhaddon's Nin. A account, see Annus 2002: 100. The prophetic text SAA 9 3.3, furthermore, presents Aššur's intervention against Esarhaddon's rivals in mythological terms. I doubt whether the phrase 'I filled the river with their blood' (3.3 ii 23) can be de-mythologised into a 'battle at the riverbank' (Nissinen 1998: 26-27). The prophetic text SAA 9 3.3 (in relation to the account in the Nin. A inscription) is discussed in chapter 6.2.1.

[308] See SAA 16 29.

[309] Ass. A i 12-26. This inscription was composed in 679 (Borger 1956: 6), not long after Esarhaddon's accession to the throne. A similar description is found in the later Nin. A inscription ii 3-7 (673 BCE): 'Prophetic oracles (*šipir maḫḫê*), messages of the gods and the goddess (i.e. Ištar), were constantly sent to me and encouraged my heart.'

[310] The short oracle 1.3 may reflect the happy occasion of Esarhaddon's throne ascension: 'I (i.e. Ištar of Arbela) rejoice with Esarhaddon, my king! Arbela rejoices!' Furthermore, 1.9 probably relates to Esarhaddon's ascension. This fragment is not an oracle, but perhaps the introduction to an oracle that is lost: 'Well-being for Esarhaddon, king of Assyria! Ištar of Arbela has gone out to the desert and has sent an oracle of salvation to her calf in the city. [...] at [her] coming out [...].'

is used, Aššur may either stand for Assyria or the god Aššur.[311] Ištar has restored the disturbed relationship of Esarhaddon with Assyria/Aššur. In either case it refers to the period of trouble after the murder of Sennacherib: the war between members of the royal family and the bloodshed in Assyria. Thus, the oracle looks back at the events of 681. Both Bel (Marduk) and Ištar of Arbela make furthermore clear that Esarhaddon as the legitimate throne candidate, had been protected by the gods since he was born.[312] The gods had supported him, through the difficulties, until he became king, and they would keep on supporting him. The three gods speaking in this oracle in different words give a similar message: Esarhaddon will be protected in the future as he was in the past.

Furthermore, two oracles from the prophet La-dagil-ili, 1.10 and 2.3, can be dated at, or shortly after, Esarhaddon's accession, as is indicated by the references to his palace (1 vi 25-26, 2 ii 2, 9) and royal crown (2 ii 5):

> [I am the Lady of Arb]ela. [Esarhaddon, whos]e bosom [Ištar] of Arbela has filled with goodwill, could you not rely on the previous word that I spoke to you! Now you can rely on (this) later one as well – therefore praise me! When the day declines, let them hold torches. Praise me in front of (them). From my palace I will let go out trembling.[313] You shall eat safe food and drink safe water, and you shall be safe in your palace. Your son and grandson will exercise kingship in the lap of Ninurta.

> [I am the La]dy of Arbela. [Esarhaddon, king of] Assyria, [fear not!] .... Your enemies, as many [they are .....] your palace [….] I will [reconcile] Assyria with you. I will [pro]tect you by day and by dawn and [consolidate] your crown. Like a winged bird ov[er its young] I will chirp over you, go round and turn around you. Like a good puppy dog I will run around in your palace, and smell your enemies. I will keep you safe in your palace. I will make you overcome anxiety and trembling. Your son and your grandson will exercise kingship before Ninurta. The territories of the lands, I will give them to you in their totality. Mankind is deceitful; I am the one who speaks and acts, I am the 'noisy daughter',[314] I smell, catch and deliver (them)[315] to you. As for you to

[311] The parallel (partly restored) in 2 ii 3', 'I will [reconcile] Assyria with you' supports the interpretation of 'Assyria' (so Weippert 2002: 14, n. 55). However, for the motif of the reconciliation of the king with the god Aššur through Ištar's intermediation (so Parpola in SAA 9: 6), a parallel can be found in the prophecy of SAA 13 139, which refers to the reconciliation of Ashurbanipal with Bel (Marduk) upon the intercession of Mullissu (see Nissinen 2002: 16). In the latter case, the anger of Bel (Marduk) related to the violent events of the war between Šamaš-šum-ukin and Ashurbanipal (see 4.2.8).

[312] Cf. Nin. A section 27 (Borger 1956: 39-40, l. 4-7), where Esarhaddon is referred to as 'the beloved of the Great Gods whom Aššur, Šamaš, Bel, Nabû, Ištar of Nineveh and Ištar of Arbela called to the kingship of Assyria when he was still a child'; see Nissinen 1998: 19.

[313] Translation suggested by Weippert (private communication) '[Z]ittern lasse ich [v]on meinem Palast ausgehen'. The meaning is that the goddess promises she will intimidate and deter the adversaries and enemies of Esarhaddon, so that the king will live in safety.

[314] Parpola (SAA 9) translates: 'I am the one who says and does. I will sniff out, catch and give you the "noisy daughter".' According to Parpola, "noisy daughter" is a metaphor for "corrupt men" ('daughter' means 'mankind' and 'noise' means 'corruption'). Nissinen (2003a: 113) translates: '… I am the one whose words and deeds are reliable. I am the one who sniffs out and captures the riotous people and gi[ves] them to you.' Weippert (2002: 42-44) objects to this interpretation. Since the

> me: praise me! Collect these words of mine from Arbela in the inner quarter of your palace. The gods of Esagila languish in the wild of confused evil.[316] May two burnt offerings be quickly sent out to their presence, so that they may come and announce your well-being.

In several ways these oracles differ from the ones to be situated in the context of Esarhaddon's rise to power (4.2.1). The announcement of divine actions against the enemy (Esarhaddon's rivals) is changed into the general promise 'Your enemies, as many [they are]' (2 ii 1'). The focus is on Esarhaddon's protection in his palace (1 vi 19-26; 2 ii 6'-12'), the kingship of his progeny (1 vi 27-30; 2 ii 13'-14'), and praise for the goddess (1 vi 13,18; 2 ii 21').[317]

An important issue in the first years of Esarhaddon's reign was the restoration of Babylon.[318] Bel-ušezib, in his already mentioned letter, emphasised the connection between Esarhaddon's kingship and Babylon's restoration.[319] The demand found in oracle 2.3, regarding sacrifices to the suffering gods of Esagila, so that they will announce Esarhaddon's *šulmu*, his well-being, is related to this issue.

In oracle 2.2 a deity, possibly Bel (Marduk),[320] promises Esarhaddon to protect him, and announces his *šulmu* (i 33').[321] The best preserved part of this oracle is as follows:

> Fe[ar not] Esarhaddon. [Like] a good [boat]man I will [k]eep [the ship] in a good quay;[322] as before, in future I will [go] around and protect [you as] your guard. [The guard over] the lands is very strong. [Sixty gods are standing at] my [right], sixty gods at my left. Esarhaddon, king of Assyria, I will vanquish yo[ur enemies]. [...] I am their Lord (i 15'-24').

A clue for situating this oracle lies in the phrase 'as before, in the future I will [go] around and protect [you as] your guard'. The deity promises to protect Esarhaddon, as he did before. This refers to past events, presumably to the troublesome period in 681. The oracle itself thus belongs to a later stage. In the conflict over the succession, in 681, certain

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passage reflects the energy and vigour of the goddess, Weippert (2002: 44) translates: 'Ich bin es, die spricht (und) handelt! Eine Tatkräftige bin ich!'.

[315] No explicit object is mentioned, but clearly the king's enemies are indicated.

[316] The expression 'evil and confused desert' (*ṣēru lemnu ballu*) probably refers to Babylon. According to Esarhaddon's Bab. inscriptions, Babylon had become a *namûtu*, 'wasteland' and a *karmu*, 'heap' (Borger 1956: 14; Fassung a: 42 and Fassung b:10).

[317] If Parpola's restoration of the name La-dagil-ili in SAA 9 3 in iv 31 is correct, this third prophecy of La-dagil-ili (3.5) probably relates to the early years of Esarhaddon's reign too (for this oracle, see chapter 5.1.4).

[318] See Borger 1956: 16-26, episode 12-37; Borger 1972: 33-37.

[319] SAA 10 109, 13-15, 24, r. 14-15.

[320] Cf. the parallel concerning the 'sixty gods' in 1 ii 22', 25', where Bel (Marduk) is speaking.

[321] There may be a connection between oracle 2.3, demanding for sacrifices to the gods of Esagila, so that they will announce Esarhaddon's *šulmu* and oracle 2.2 in which a deity – possibly Bel (Marduk) – announces Esarhaddon's *šulmu*. Perhaps oracle 2.2 was spoken in reaction to the offerings that were required in oracle 2.3. For the connection between the offering of sacrifices to the gods by the king and a message of well-being (*šulmu*) for the king sent by the gods, see SAA 13 43 l. 1-4.

[322] Similarly Weippert 2002: 42.

Babylonians had taken Esarhaddon's side.[323] Moreover, various Babylonian deities had supported Esarhaddon, and promised him kingship through prophetic oracles and other means.

However, one does not get 'owt for nowt'. From the Babylonian perspective, Esarhaddon was to become king in order to restore Babylon and Esagila. This thought is adopted in Esarhaddon's Babylon inscription. The Babylon inscription describes the destruction of Babylon and the deplorable state of the city and its temples (due to Sennacherib actions in 689 BCE).[324] The inscription further narrates that when Marduk's heart became peaceful again, he appointed Esarhaddon as king in order to restore the evil situation: the state of destruction of Babylon and Esagila (Marduk's temple).[325] This is accompanied by favourable omens concerning the restoration of Babylon and Esagila.[326] These favourable omens resemble the *ittu* reported by Bel-ušezib ('Esarhaddon will rebuild Babylon and restore Esagila', see 4.2.1 above). The earliest version of the Babylon inscription (Bab. A) is dated to 680.[327] It presents Esarhaddon as a typical Babylonian ruler and displays a pro-Babylonian tendency.[328]

During Sennacherib's reign the relation between Assyria and Babylonia had been disturbed, with as its climax Sennacherib's siege and capture of Babylon and the deportation of Marduk's statue to Assyria.[329] The Babylonian support of Esarhaddon indicates that the Babylonians considered him to be the likeliest candidate to turn their fate. This proved to be a right calculation: when Esarhaddon became king he soon started rebuilding activities in Babylon and the restoration of Esagila. The first copies of his Babylon inscription, dealing with the restoration of city and temple date to 680, implying that the work had been started by then.[330] Other Babylonian and Assyrian cities saw their sanctuaries restored as well.[331]

The oracles relating to Esarhaddon's first years as a king, confirm the impression that prophecy, though evidently supportive of the king, should not be regarded as merely royal propaganda. Besides the encouraging aspect, a demanding aspect has to be accounted for too (this will be explored in chapter 5).

4.2.3 External Threat and Internal Instability (c. 675 BCE)

The unit 2.4 in my view consists of various oracles which are introduced as divine words, ii 30', 38': 'Word of Ištar of Arbela, word of Queen Mullissu', 'word of Ištar [of Arbela] to […]' (see chapter 3.1.1). The various words apparently stem from one prophetess: Urkittu-

[323] Cf. SAA 18 100 (ABL 1091), a Babylonian letter that connects certain Babylonians with Esarhaddon's side in the conflict of 681.
[324] It should however be kept in mind that 'language of destruction' in the royal inscriptions does not always correspond with reality – kings may claim to have utterly destroyed a city, whereas the real damage was limited; see Dalley *forthcoming*.
[325] Bab. A and D, Episode 11:9-13 (Borger 1956: 16).
[326] Borger 1956: 16.
[327] Porter 1993: 95; cf. 1993: 100.
[328] See Porter 1993: 95-97.
[329] See Porter 1993: 29 and 39.
[330] Porter 1993: 43, 169. For the text, see Borger 1956: 16-26.
[331] Porter 1993: 61-62.

šarrat from Calah (iii 18'). As a heading to the words, ii 29' states: 'Thus you shall answer the disloyal ones'.[332] This may indicate that what follows is some sort of anthology. iii 7'-10' confirms that the divine words are meant as a reaction to anxious or disloyal people: 'How, how (to answer) those who to the many [….] men [say] thus: 'when the land becomes hostile, let us not stay in Calah and Nineveh!' The goddess reacts in ii 31'-34', 'I will look, I will listen, I will search out, and I will put the disloyal ones into the hands of my king', and in iii 11'-17':

> You, keep silent, Esarhaddon! I will choose the envoys of the Elamite and the Mannean. I will seal the writings of the Urarṭian. I will cut off the *heel*[333] of Mugallu. Whoever is lone, whoever is oppressed, fear not under the protection of Esarhaddon, king of Assyria.[334]

The references to the foreign nations are indicative of the oracle's date. Esarhaddon went on campaign against the Manneans in 675.[335] In 674 he concluded a peace treaty with Urtaku, king of Urarṭu.[336] Furthermore, an expedition against Mugallu of Melid was undertaken in 675, which forced Mugallu to ask for peace.[337] These circumstances provide an approximate date for this text, presumably shortly before these events.

Preceding the campaign against the Manneans, the Babylonian scholar Bel-ušezib wrote a letter to Esarhaddon (SAA 10 111), which concludes with an oracle of Marduk announcing the defeat of the enemies (r. 23-26): 'Bel has said: "Esarhaddon, king of Assyria (sits) on the throne like Marduk-šapik-zeri, and while he is seated there I will deliver all the countries into his hands".' Although Bel-ušezib is uncertain with respect to the best military strategy in the war against the Manneans (see the rest of SAA 10 111), he is convinced that Marduk has decided the destruction of Mannea.[338] Marduk-šapik-zeri is a former king of Babylon (1081-1069 BCE). According to the oracle, Marduk regards Esarhaddon as the legitimate king of Babylon and ruler of the world. This can be taken as an indication that important military campaigns were guided not only by technical divination, but could also be inspired by prophetic oracles.

From the passage from 2.4 quoted above it appears that this period was troubled by internal unrest as well. Internal turmoil was not restricted to the period just before Esarhaddon's accession. At various points during his reign a threat of conspiracy or social instability occurred. A major uprising, led by a Babylonian called Ṣillaia, has been dated to

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[332] Or: 'This is how she (i.e. the goddess) answers the disloyal ones'.
[333] The word *igbu* may be a Neo-Assyrian form of Babylonian *eqbu* 'heel'.
[334] The protective shadow (*ṣillu*) of the king is a common expression, see e.g. SAA 10 160, 43; 207, 20 and r. 3; 259 r. 10; 294 r. 22. The reassurance of these people to a great extent parallels the encouraging words of Isaiah addressed to the people of Zion (Isa 10:24-25*) and to the 'weary' (Isa 28:12*). Furthermore, Esarhaddon is presented by Ištar as the protective shadow of the lone and the oppressed, just as the ideal king and his officials are described as the protective rock and refuge of the people in Isa 32:1-2. Cf. Isa 14:28, also presented as an 'answer' to people.
[335] Starr 1990: LIX-LX; queries SAA 4 28-34 and letters SAA 10 111 and 112.
[336] Borger 1956: 58-59:26-33; Parpola and Watanabe (1988: XVII) refer to ABL 328 and 918.
[337] Esarhaddon Chronicle, Grayson 1975a: 126:15; Starr 1990: LVII-LVIII, queries SAA 4 1-12.
[338] For a commentary on this letter, see Fales and Lanfranchi 1981.

this period (c. 675/674).[339] One of the letters referring to this conspiracy is by the already mentioned Bel-ušezib (SAA 10 112). After having assured the king he will have further successes in the war against the Manneans (l. 3-27), the second part of the letter deals with a conspiracy against the king, led by Šuma-iddin, the governor of Nippur.[340] Bel-ušezib mentions various persons involved, among them Ṣillaia. He advises the king to take immediate action, encouraging the king as follows: 'The great gods said to Bel: "May it be in your power to exalt and to abase". You are Marduk of the people; Bel destined your glori[ous ....] (to be) like destinies. [Let the king, my lord] act in a way corresponding to Bel: abase the high and [exalt] the low.'[341] Both in the oracles of 2.4 and in this letter of Bel-ušezib it is made clear that the problems, external and internal, will be solved, and that the king will rule to the benefit of the good people: 'Whoever is lone, whoever is oppressed, fear not under the protection of Esarhaddon, king of Assyria' (2.4 iii 16'-17').

4.2.4 Ashurbanipal's Appointment as Crown Prince (672 BCE) and the War against Egypt

Esarhaddon's first campaign against Egypt of 674 was unsuccessful: the forces of the Cushite king Taharqa defeated the Assyrian army.[342] In the following years, the war against Egypt was a major issue. In my opinion, two oracles from SAA 1 can be connected with this period: 1.1 and 1.6. Oracle 1.1 belongs to the time that Esarhaddon was already king of Assyria.[343] The first part of the oracle (i 6'-17') refers to the past:

> What wind has risen against you whose wing I have not broken? Your enemies will roll before your feet like ripe apples. I am the Great Lady, I am Ištar of Arbela, who has cast your enemies before your feet. What words of mine that I spoke to you could you not rely upon?

Ištar refers to her deeds in the past, when she saved Esarhaddon from his enemies. The interrogative *ayyu*, 'what wind' (i 6'), 'what words' (i 15'), has a frequentative force. The goddess points out that she has always saved Esarhaddon and let him prevail over his enemies. In the second part of the oracle Ištar of Arbela stresses that she will support Esarhaddon this time too: 'I will flay your enemies and give them to you. I, Ištar of Arbela, will go before and behind you. Fear not!' (i 19-24'). A further clue is provided in i 25, where Ištar says: 'you are in cramp/stiffness' (*atta ina libbi muggi*)'. The word *mungu/mug(g)u*, not often used, is also attested in a letter referring to Esarhaddon's disease.[344] That Esarhaddon suffered from a disease is well-known. Parpola has argued that he suffered from a rheumatoid disease of which stiffness was part. According to Parpola's reconstruction, Esarhaddon was seriously ill in 672 and 670, before he died of it in 669.[345] I

[339] Dietrich 1970: 39-50; Frame 1992: 84-88; Nissinen 1998: 138-139.
[340] SAA 10 112 r. 7-8.
[341] SAA 10 112 r. 29-33 (Parpola's translation).
[342] Babylonian Chronicle; Grayson 1975a: 84:16; see Tadmor 1983: 41-43.
[343] Contra Parpola 1997: LXVIII; Nissinen 1998: 25.
[344] SAA 10 37 r. 1, 7, see Parpola 1983: 336-337. CAD gives for *mangu* / *mungu* 'stiffness', 'paralysis'.
[345] Parpola 1983: 230-236; see also Porter and Radner 1998: 146.

would suggest that 672 makes most sense as a date for this oracle. The promise of the goddess to flay Esarhaddon's enemies, probably applies to foreign enemies.[346]

The second oracle to be situated in this period is 1.6. This oracle contains the announcement: 'I will take you safely across the river' (iv 3-4), which has been connected with Esarhaddon's crossing the Tigris in 681, referred to in Nin. A i 84-86.[347] However, the motif 'crossing the river' is common in Assyrian royal inscriptions,[348] and Weippert rightly states that this announcement could relate to any military campaign to the West.[349] The designation of Esarhaddon in this oracle as *aplu kēnu*, 'true heir' (iv 5-6 and [20]), does not point to the period before his ascension to the throne either,[350] since it is in fact a royal epithet.[351] Oracle 1.6 is concerned with the consolidation of Esarhaddon's kingship, which suggests that he was already king. The oracle is likely to relate to one of the military campaigns undertaken by Esarhaddon. The text is as follows:

> I am Ištar of [Arbela]. Esarhaddon, king of A[ssyria], in Assur, Nineveh, Calah and Arbela I will give long days and everlasting years to Esarhaddon my king. I am your great midwife, I am your beautiful wet nurse. I have established your throne under the great heavens for long days and everlasting years. In the (bed)room of gold in the midst of heavens I watch, I let a lamp of amber shine before Esarhaddon, king of Assyria, and I watch him like the crown of my head.
>
> Fear not, O king. I hereby say to you: I did not lie to you, but I gave you trust, and I will not let you come to shame. I will take you across the river in safety. Esarhaddon, true heir, son of Mullissu, angry dagger[352] in my hand! I will destroy your enemies. Esarhaddon, king of Assyria, cup full of lye, double-bladed axe![353]
>
> Esarhaddon, I will give you long days and everlasting years in Assur, Esarhaddon, I will be your good shield in Arbela. Esarhaddon, tr[ue] heir, son of Mullissu, I am constantly thinking of you, I have (always) loved you intensely. By a lock of your hair I keep you in heaven. On your right, I make smoke rise up, on your left, I kindle fire [….]

The oracle has two main themes: the protection of the king and consolidation of his kingship, and the king as a weapon in the hand of the goddess that will conquer all the enemies. The middle part deals with a military campaign to the West. The strong

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[346] Note that on the Lachish relief soldiers are pictured as being cast down to be flayed (the figure is included in Parpola 1997: 28). According to Dalley (2004a: 391) these are Cushite soldiers (see note 206 above).

[347] Parpola 1997: 8, and Nissinen 1998: 25.

[348] For Esarhaddon, cf. Borger 1956: 112:10. According to Parpola (1997: LXIX) and Nissinen (1998: 25), it refers to Esarhaddon's crossing the Tigris before his final conquest of Nineveh (681 BCE).

[349] Weippert 2002: 37.

[350] Contra Nissinen 1998: 25.

[351] See Seux 1967: 43 note 47. The designation is used by various kings, among them Ashurbanipal (SAA 3 7 r. 8) and Nebuchadnezzar II (Langdon 1912: 10:5, 12:14, 44:1, 50:3).

[352] The expression 'angry dagger' is disputed and uncertain; see Weippert 2002: 40-41; Nissinen 2003a: 108, note d.

[353] The suggestion to read GÍN as *pāšu*, 'blade', proposed by Langdon (1914: 131), refuted by Parpola, (1997: 8), and argued again by Weippert (2002: 41-42) makes sense. The alternative is 'axe of two shekels' (so Parpola; Nissinen). The point of the image is that Esarhaddon is a dangerous weapon in the hand of the goddess.

encouragement 'I did not lie to you' makes sense if one assumes that a second campaign against Egypt is in mind, after the defeat of 674.

If the oracles 1.1 and 1.6 date to the period immediately preceding the campaign of 672 to Egypt, oracle collection 1 cannot date from 673.[354] This need not imply however that the connection between the collection and the appointment of Ashurbanipal as crown prince in 672 (as suggested by Parpola) has to be given up. On the contrary, the possible connection becomes even stronger. The oracles 1.1 and 1.6 take an important part within the collection: 1.1 at the beginning, and 1.6 in the middle as the longest oracle. In 672, these two oracles dealing with the campaign against Egypt, were combined with a series of earlier oracles, into a collection which demonstrated the legitimacy of Esarhaddon's kingship and his hegemony over the world. This collection was also supportive of Ashurbanipal's position as crown prince of Assyria. Furthermore, the collection composed for the purpose of supporting Ashurbanipal's appointment as crown prince, also contained the promise to the king, and the crown prince, that Egypt would be defeated.

Significantly, in the oracle SAA 9 7, dealing with Ashurbanipal's appointment as crown prince, the war against Egypt also takes a prominent position. These words of Mullissu to Ashurbanipal can be dated to before the ceremony of Ashurbanipal's appointment as crown prince. Mullissu promises to protect him in the palace of succession, and to keep him safe for the kingship (3-6):

> This is the word of Queen (?)[355] Mullissu: Fear not, Ashurbanipal! Thus: until I will do and give to you as I have promised, (namely) until you exercise the kingship over the sons of the bearded courtiers and the next generation of eunuch-*courtiers*,[356] I [will take ca]re of you in the palace of succession.

The passage that follows (lines 7-11) probably refers to an *adê* ceremony for Ashurbanipal:

> [Thus: ...] he shall gird [you] with the diadem […][357] [thus: ……. The king]s of the lands will say to one another: '[… let us] go, with regard to Ashurbanipal, the king (i.e. Esarhaddon) *has witnesses* […].[358] [Like his fathers] decreed our fathers' and grandfathers' [fate]s,[359] may [now

[354] See the suggestion of Parpola, mentioned in note 267 above.
[355] According to Parpola (1997: 38), the sign LUGAL ('king') here stands for 'queen'. I agree with Weippert that this is not entirely convincing. Weippert (1997: 155-156; 2002: 48-50) alternatively suggests taking *abat šarre/amāt šarri* as a technical term for 'appellation to the king'; he translates: 'Eine Petition/Appellation der Mullissu an den König ist dies'. Although the following prophecy is not a petition or appellation, according to Weippert (2002:50) the term was nevertheless used in order to draw the king's close attention to the prophecy. This explanation is not entirely convincing in my view.
[356] So Weippert 1997: 153.
[357] Weippert (1997: 154) quotes a restoration from Parpola which has not been adopted in Parpola's edition: [AD-*ka ina ri-š*]*a-ti*, '[Your father] will [joy]fully gird (your temples) with the royal headband'. Nissinen 2003a: 127: '[your father] will gird the diadem'. Cf. SAA 10 185: 7-9 'You (Esarhaddon) have girded a son of yours (Ashurbanipal) with the diadem and entrusted to him the kingship of Assyria.'
[358] The words [*ni*]-*il-lik ina* UGU followed by the name Ashurbanipal, are translated by Parpola (1997: 38), Nissinen (2003a: 127), and Weippert (2002: 51), as: 'let us go to Ashurbanipal'. In my

h]e judge between us.' [Mullis]su has said: '[The king]s of the lands, <you will show them the ways>,[360] you will set their feet upon the roads.'

This prophecy pictures Ashurbanipal as the future sovereign king who rules over his vassals. Ashurbanipal was appointed as crown prince in Iyyar (II) 672, on which occasion all Assyrians assembled in order to swear a loyalty oath.[361] The difference in dating indicates that the oath-taking ceremonies took at least several days.[362] Royal functionaries such as astrologers, haruspices, exorcists, physicians and augurs probably had already taken the loyalty oath on 15 and 16 Nissan (I).[363]

I am not convinced by Weippert's suggestion that lines 3-11 are a quotation of an earlier oracle (delivered on Ashurbanipal's appointment as crown prince) in the context of a later oracle sometime during Ashurbanipal's reign.[364] In my view, it is a prophecy consisting of two parts. Lines 1-13 refer to the *adê*-ceremony at Ashurbanipal's appointment as the crown prince. Lines 12-13 form a conclusion to this part, by taking up a prophecy within the prophecy. The reason for the extra prophetic formula '[Mullis]su has said' in line 12 can be easily explained. In lines 9-11, the goddess cites the vassal kings; in order to make clear that in lines 12-13 the goddess is speaking herself again, an extra speaking formula is inserted.[365]

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view, [*ni*]-*il-lik* must not be taken with *ina muḫḫi*, since *alāku ina muḫḫi* means 'to march against'. Instead, the preposition *ina muḫḫi* is used in the context of the conclusion of the *adê* 'on behalf of' Ashurbanipal. Esarhaddon concluded the *adê* 'on behalf of' (*ina muḫḫi*) his son (cf. SAA 2 6:41-44). The gods normally act as witnesses to the loyalty oaths, but the phrase *ši-i-bi ra-ši* ˹*x*˺ is obscure (cf. Weippert 2002: 51, note 214). This passage is likely to refer to the ceremony of the loyalty oath, taken by the vassal kings on behalf of the crown prince Ashurbanipal.

[359] Line 10 restore [*ki-i* AD.MEŠ(*abbū*)-*šu* NAM.ME]Š(*šīmāte*). See Weippert 2002: 51, for a slightly different restoration.

[360] Weippert (2002: 51) suggests reading the beginning of line 13 as [*a*]*t-ta ḫu-la-a-ni tu-saḫ-mil-šu-nu*. The first part [*a*]*t-ta ḫu-la-a-ni* is attractive, since it seems uncertain whether there is space for Parpola's restoration [*ta-pi-a*]*l* at the beginning, and since *ḫūlāne*, 'ways' makes for a good parallelism with *ḫarrānāte*, 'roads', in the following clause. However, I am not entirely convinced by Weippert's reading *tu-saḫ-mil-šu-nu* – instead of Parpola's *tu-kal-lam-šú-nu* 'you will show them' – as a second person singular of the perfect of *ḫamālu* Š. The phrase 'you made them plan ways' is paraphrased by Weippert as '[Die König]e der Länder *ließest* [*d*]*u* Wege *ins Auge fassen*', which seems a rather free rendering.

[361] Prism A i 11-22 // F i 10-17 (BIWA: 15-16). The beginning of line 13 remains problematic.

[362] Most documents date the event to 18 Iyyar (II): Ashurbanipal's Prism F i 11 (BIWA: 15), Esarhaddon's Tarbiṣu-inscription A l. 40 (Borger 1956: 72), most versions of Esarhaddon's succession-*adê* (SAA 2 6:664); alternative dates are 12 Iyyar (Prism A i 12; BIWA: 15) and 16 Iyyar (SAA 2 6:664Q).

[363] See SAA 10 6 and 7.

[364] Weippert 1997: 156-157; 2002: 47-51.

[365] The perfect form *taqṭibi* can be understood either as a performative '[Mullis]su hereby says …' (cf. 1 iii 31'), or as referring to a promise previously made by Mullissu. In any case, lines 12-13 conclude the first part of the prophecy, and in line 14 the second part begins. The fact that the second part is marked as dealing with another subject (line 14), confirms that the first and second part of the oracle are one the same level: both contain divine promises for Ashurbanipal.

The second part of the prophecy begins in line 14: 'Secondly, let me tell you …', and deals with foreign affairs. Mullissu announces that she will deal exhaustively (*gamāru*)[366] with the Cimmerians like she did with Elam (line 14).[367] Further, she promises the defeat of Egypt (r. 1-5):

> I will break the thorn, I will pluck the bramble[368] into a tuft of wool, I will turn the wasps into a squash. *Ḫallalatti enguratti*! You will say: what does it mean, *ḫallalatti enguratti*? *Ḫallalatti* I will enter Egypt, *enguratti* I will come out.

This passage is somewhat uncertain. The point of the first sentence is the promise that the goddess is going to turn something that is harmful (prickly) into something harmless (soft). In other words, she will take the sting out of Egypt. The meaning of the saying *ḫallalatti enguratti* is unknown.[369] The prophecy ends with Mullissu's assurance that she will take care of Ashurbanipal.[370]

The importance of the Egyptian affair is indicated elsewhere by an oracle quoted in a letter to king Ashurbanipal (SAA 10 174). The letter describes how Esarhaddon, when he marched out to Egypt in 671, was encouraged in the temple of Sin outside the city of Harran with a prophetic oracle: two crowns, probably symbolising Upper and Lower Egypt, were placed on Esarhaddon's head, and he received the message 'You will go and conquer the world with it!' According to the author of the letter, this was exactly what happened: '[So he we]nt and conquered Egypt' (the letter is discussed in chapter 6.2.1).

4.2.5 The Presumed Conspiracy of Sasî (671/670 BCE)

The Assyrian official Nabû-reḫtu-uṣur in several letters reports to king Esarhaddon about an alleged conspiracy led by a man called Sasî.[371] Nabû-reḫtu-uṣur is convinced that the life of the king is threatened by the conspiracy headed by Sasî, which has its base in the city Harran.[372] Nissinen has suggested connecting the conspiracy revealed by Nabû-reḫtu-uṣur with a coup d'état of 671/70, the outcome of which is reflected by the Chronicle of Esarhaddon: 'In the eleventh year, the king of Assyria put many of his magnates to the sword.'[373] Nissinen connected a range of further letters with this coup d'état, among them SAA 10 179, in which the Babylonian scholar Kudurru writes to the king that he was forced

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[366] Parpola's translation of *a-ga-mar*, 'I will finish', is unlikely since a comparison is made with the case of Elam, which was settled with a peace treaty in 674.
[367] For a correction of Parpola's reading, see Ivantchik 1993: 40-41.
[368] The sequence *a-šab-bir ma-a mur-din-nu* is perhaps better read as *a-šab-bir-ma a-mur-din-nu*.
[369] Suggestions in Parpola, SAA 9, 39; Weippert 1997: 154, note 27.
[370] 'You whose mother is Mullissu, fear not! You whose nurse is the Lady of Arbela, fear not! I will carry you on my hip like a nurse. I will place you (like) a pomegranate between my breasts. (.....) You, fear not, my calf that I rear.' (r. 6-11).
[371] Parpola's first edition of the letters is published in Nissinen 1998: 109-115. They are republished, with minor changes, as SAA 16 59-61, and in Nissinen 2003a: texts 115-117. Lambert's critical remarks concerning Parpola's edition in Nissinen 1998 (Lambert 2002b: 212) are not yet mentioned in the later editions. One case will be mentioned below.
[372] See Nissinen 1998: 127.
[373] Grayson 1975a: 86:29; 127:27. See Nissinen 1998: 108-153, in particular 128. Cf. also Starr 1990: LXIII.

to perform the treasonous divination 'Will the *rab ša rēšē* take over the kingship?' The divination was positive, but Kudurru in his letter assures the king that the divination was not valid, and begs the king to spare his life.[374] A difficulty with Nissinen's reconstruction is, that in 671/70 Sasî did not hold the office of *rab ša rēšē* (a highest-rank military officer).[375] Who was the leader of the conspiracy: the *rab ša rēšē*, Sasî, or still someone else? The identity of the 'many magnates' that were executed in 670 is unknown. Not everyone accused in a letter addressed to the king was also executed. Sasî, for instance, accused by Nabû-reḫtu-uṣur, seems to have been still in office during the reign of Ashurbanipal.[376] The letters of Nabû-reḫtu-uṣur represent his subjective point of view.[377]

In Nabû-reḫtu-uṣur's letters prophecy plays a prominent role.[378] In the first letter, SAA 16 59, he reports a prophetic oracle in favour of Sasî, which the current editions present as follows:

> A slave girl of Bel-aḫu-uṣur [...] upon [...] on the ou[tski]rts of H[arran]; since Sivan (III) she has been enraptured and speaks a good word about him: 'This is the word of Nusku: the kingship is for Sasî; I will destroy the name and the seed of Sennacherib' (ABL 1217 r. 2'-5').[379]

Uncertain are the reading H[arran],[380] and the translation 'enraptured'.[381] Yet, it is clear that the prophecy supports Sasî and announces the death of Esarhaddon, 'the seed of Sennacherib'. In his letters Nabû-reḫtu-uṣur attempts to counter this oracle of Nusku by quoting and paraphrasing various prophetic oracles in favour of king Esarhaddon. The oracles serve as reinforcement of his advice to the king to take action against the people accused in his letters. In the same letter SAA 16 59, two oracles are quoted or paraphrased. The first is referred to as *dabābu* (word) of the goddess Nikkal:

> Hear me, O king my lord![382] The word of Nikkal[383] […] 'May the […] die! May […][384] [save] your life and the life of your family, may they be your father and your mother,[385] and may they li[ft up …]; you must not destroy your life, you must not […] the kingship from your hands.'

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[374] See Nissinen 1998: 133-134. For the letter of Kudurru see also 4.1.8 above.
[375] Nissinen 1998: 147-150.
[376] Nissinen 1998: 145. Nissinen (1998: 135-150) analyses the evidence and cautiously discusses various possibilities.
[377] More officials were accused than were actually punished. Royal officials were forced by oath to report any (presumed) conspiracy against the king. Many accusations probably were merely based on rumours, but nevertheless reported, in order to fulfil the obligations to the king.
[378] For the background of the letters, see Nissinen 1998: 116-127.
[379] Taken from Nissinen 2003a: 171; cf. SAA 16 59.
[380] According to Lambert's review (2002b: 212), this reading is 'entirely wrong'. Lambert suggests reading l[ú SA]G (*ša rēšēn*) 'royal official', which changes the phrase 'on the outskirts of Harran', into 'in association with the royal official'. In this case, Nissinen's interpretation (1998: 123-124) is to be revised. However, it need not be doubted that Harran was the centre, or one of the centres, of the conspiracy (see SAA 16 59 [ABL 1217] l. 8').
[381] The interpretation of *sarḫat* as 'enraptured' (Parpola *apud* Nissinen 1998: 111, note 430; Nissinen 2003a: 172 note b) remains uncertain.
[382] Four times in these letters, the phrase 'Hear me, O king my lord' occurs in connection with a divine word (SAA 16 59 [ABL 1217] l. 8, 12; SAA 16 60 [CT 53 17] r. 18, left edge 1).

> Hear me, O king my lord! Do not dis[regard this] word of Nik[kal] (SAA 16 59 [ABL 1217] l. 8-12).

The second is only a fragment: 'Let me gather yo[ur …] [… you], stay in safety in your palace[386] […] until […] [may …] die, save your life!' (ABL 1217 r. 22-23). In Nabû-reḫtu-uṣur's second letter, SAA 16 60, we find paraphrases or quotations of four different oracles. The first is, again, presented as a *dabābu* (word), this time of the goddess Mullissu:

> Those who sin against [your father's goodness, yo]ur fa[ther's loyalty oath and] your loyalty oath, and who [plot against yo]ur [life], they (i.e. the gods) will [place them] in [your] hands,[387] [and you shall delete] their name from Assyria[388] and from [your pa]llace. This is the word of Mullissu; [the king my lord] should not be ne[glectful] about it (SAA 16 60 [CT 53 17] l. 5-9).[389]

A subsequent oracle of Ištar of Nineveh is quoted: 'Ištar of Nineveh says: 'I […], I have done, I have […] from [your] palace[390] […]' (SAA 16 60 [CT 53 107] 12-14). Further on apparently an oracle is paraphrased:

> Interrogate them! Let them tell you the […] of the people who conspired with them, and let these people die! Fear not![391] Bel, Nabû and Mullissu are standing [with you].[392] Let the people die quickly and [save] your life (SAA 16 60 [CT 53 17] r. 13'-16').

With as a continuation 'Hear me, O king my lord! Sa[ve] your life!' (SAA 16 60 [CT 53 17] r. 18'-19'). Finally, an oracle of Bel (Marduk) is quoted, in which the god demands gold and precious stones: 'Hear me, O king [my lord]! Bel […] to […] "let *xx* […] constantly bring gold and precious stones […] safety for […] that he/I may prolong your li[fe]. Take care of yourself".' (SAA 16 60 [CT 53 17] e. 1-2).

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[383] Weippert 2003: 288 makes mention of a collation of ABL 1217 by K. Deller reading NIN.LÍL! 'Mullissu' instead of Nikkal in lines 5 and 8.
[384] Perhaps restore [Bel, Nabû and Mullissu], see SAA 16 60 [CT 53 17] r. 15'.
[385] Cf. SAA 9 2.5 'I am your father and your mother' (iii 26).
[386] Cf. SAA 9 1.10, 'You shall be safe in your palace' (vi 25-26); 2.3, 'I will keep you safe in your palace' (ii 11').
[387] Cf. SAA 9 2.4, 'I will search out, and I will put the disloyal ones into the hands of my king' (ii 32'-33').
[388] Cf. SAA 10 284, 'we (i.e. Ištar of Nineveh and Ištar of Arbela) shall root out from Assyria those who are not loyal to the king our lord'.
[389] The same fragment occurs in a third letter SAA 16 61 (CT 53 938) l. 5-9, which is a fragment, resembling the second letter, SAA 16 60 (there are only a few minor differences between the two, cf. Lambert 2002b: 212).
[390] Cf. SAA 9 1.10, 'I will banish trembling from your palace' (vi 19-21; cf. Parpola's note in this phrase in SAA 9).
[391] 'Fear not!' often occurs in prophetic oracles. If a human author admonished the king not to fear, he would use the expression 'the king should not be afraid' (*šarru (lū) lā ipallaḫ*); Nissinen 2003b: 135. This confirms that the passage quoted paraphrases a prophetic oracle.
[392] Cf. SAA 9 1.4, 'When your mother gave birth to you, sixty great gods stood with me (i.e. Bel) and protected you: Sin was at your right, Šamaš at your left, sixty great gods were standing around you and girded your loins' (ii 20'-26').

Nabû-reḫtu-uṣur reveals the presumed conspiracy to the king as he was obliged.[393] The prophecy supporting Sasî clearly is an example of a prophecy forbidden by the king.[394] Such a prophecy is high treason. Nevertheless, Nabû-reḫtu-uṣur does not picture it as pseudo-prophecy.[395] Although his speaking about an *amtu*, 'slave girl', may indicate that the prophecy was enforced, produced by illegitimate means, he nevertheless presents it as a 'real prophecy' (*dabābu damqu* 'a positive word'). Nabû-reḫtu-uṣur took the prophecy of Nusku very seriously,[396] for he attempted to counter it by paraphrasing from several oracles supportive of Esarhaddon.[397]

4.2.6 Ashurbanipal's War against Mannea (c. 660 BCE)

Ashurbanipal's fourth campaign, c. 660,[398] was directed against Aḫšeri, king of Mannea,[399] who rebelled against Assyria. In the account of the war, we read:

> Ištar, who dwells in Arbela, delivered Aḫšeri, who did not fear my lordship, up to his servants, according to the word that she had said in the very beginning: 'I will, as I have said, take care of the execution of Aḫšeri, the king of Mannea.'[400]

The Assyrian records (Prisms A, B, and C) narrate that Aḫšeri was killed in a revolt by his own people, in the wake of the Assyrian military threat, and that his body was desecrated.[401] This fulfilled Ištar's prophecy. Aḫšeri's son Ualli became subject to Assyria's rule and the case was settled. The phrase 'in the very beginning' probably refers to the beginning of the campaign against Mannea. The oracular phrase itself refers to an earlier oracle as well, 'as I have said'.[402] Ištar of Arbela announced that she would destroy king Aḫšeri of Mannea. This encouraged Ashurbanipal to undertake the campaign. At the beginning of the campaign Ištar of Arbela repeated her announcement: 'I will, as I have said, take care of the execution of Aḫšeri, the king of Mannea'. After the successful campaign, the oracle was inserted in the royal account, to demonstrate that Aḫšeri's death by the hand of his own people was the work of the goddess (see further chapter 6.2.1).

4.2.7. Ashurbanipal's War against Elam (653 BCE)

The war against the Elamite king Teumman (653)[403] is described in Ashurbanipal's Prisms B and C.[404] The inscriptions narrate that Teumman planned war against Assyria while

[393] Nissinen 1998: 116-118.
[394] See SAA 2 6 l. 116-117.
[395] Contra Nissinen 1998: 121, 151-152. A comparable case is 2 Kgs 9:1-13, where a prophet proclaims to the military commander Jehu: 'Thus says Yahweh, the God of Israel: I anoint you as king over the people of Yahweh, over Israel. You shall strike down the house of your master Ahab' (2 Kgs 9:6b-7a).
[396] So also Nissinen 1998: 150-151.
[397] Nissinen 1998: 121-122.
[398] Nissinen 1998: 46-47; Starr 1990: LXXV, note 267.
[399] See SAA 4 267-269.
[400] Prism A iii 4-7; BIWA: 35.
[401] BIWA: 35.
[402] See Nissinen 1998: 52.
[403] For the dating in 653, see Frame 1992: 123-124.

Ashurbanipal celebrated a festival of Ištar in Arbela. Ashurbanipal appealed to Ištar in prayer, and the goddess answered him: 'Ištar heard my desperate sighs and answered me: "fear not!" She encouraged my heart: "Because of the prayer you sent up, your eyes filled with tears, I feel compassion".'[405] The answer was probably given in the form of a prophetic oracle. First, the goddess is presented as speaking. Second, the formula 'fear not' is used, particularly at home in prophetic oracles. Third, the combination of a supplication addressed to the goddess followed by the goddess' answer in the form of a prophetic oracle, is paralleled in oracle 1.8.[406] According to the royal inscriptions, in the same night Ištar's oracle of encouragement was specified by a dream, witnessed by a *šabrû*.[407] In this dream Ištar appears as a mighty warrior. She states that she will go to war and defeat Elam. Ashurbanipal, in the dream, responds that he will accompany her, but Ištar commands him to stay in Assyria and let her accomplish the task ahead. The dream report concludes with the following description: 'She sheltered you in her sweet embrace, she protected your entire body. Fire flashed in her face, and she went raging away, directing her anger against Teumman, king of Elam, who had made her furious.'[408]

The description has much in common with the prophetic oracles: Ištar's protection of the king, and the motif of divine war (the goddess fights for the king). Encouraged by the 'messages of the goddesses' and the 'unchanging message of Ištar',[409] Ashurbanipal fights against Elam: 'On the command of Aššur and Marduk, the great gods, my lords, who encouraged me with good omens, dreams, speech omens and prophetic messages (*šipir maḫḫê*), I defeated them in Tell Tuba.'[410]

Various further prophetic oracles relate to this episode. A similar sequence of Teumman's plotting, Ashurbanipal's prayer and Ištar's answer, is found in the literary text SAA 3 31 l. 7-r. 2, but Ištar's oracle is almost completely lost (l. 18-r. 2). When the Assyrians marched against Elam, Teumman took shelter in Susa. The Elamite army was crushed and Teumman was killed. The oracle SAA 9 8 probably announces these events:

> Words [concerning the Elam]ites:[411] As [Aššur?] says:[412] 'I have go[ne and I ha]ve come.' He said this five or six times, and after that: I have gone to the [j]avelin,[413] I have pulled out the snake which was inside it, I have cut it (in pieces) and I have destroyed the javelin. And thus: I will destroy Elam. Its army will be levelled to the ground. In this manner I will finish off Elam.

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[404] BIWA: 97-105.
[405] Prism B v 47-49 // C vi 46-48 (BIWA: 100). The oracle is specified in a dream report of a *šabrû*.
[406] Nissinen 1998: 53. See further chapter 5.1.2.
[407] The *šabrû* 'visionary', 'dreamer' was closely related to *maḫḫû* and *raggimu* (see chapter 5.1.5).
[408] Translation by Nissinen 2003a: 148.
[409] Prism B v 77-79; BIWA: 103-104.
[410] Translation by Nissinen 2003a: 149.
[411] Weippert (2002: 51) suggests reading 'Words [of the ….]', whereby the person who delivers it is presented by a gentilic form *–a-a* ('Die Wörte [des …] …äers').
[412] L. 2 can be read as *ki-i* ^{d}[*x-x*] *i-qab-bi*. The insertion of any name is of course uncertain. The verbal forms are masculine (although that may not be conclusive). The restoration [*aš-šur*] is attractive (see chapter 3.1.1) and cf. Ashurbanipal's letter to Aššur (see note 416).
[413] I follow Weippert (2002: 52), 'Zu der *nar'antu* bin ich hingegangen'; contra Parpola (SAA 9), 'I have come from the [m]ace'.

The fierce language, 'its army will be levelled to the ground' equals the description in Prism B v 96-99. The terms 'javelin' (*nar'antu*) and 'snake' (*ṣerru*) in all likelihood refer to Elam and Teumman respectively.[414] According to this imagery, Teumman is pulled out of his country and 'cut into pieces' (*batāqu*; cf. *nakāsu* in Prism B vi 3; C vi 134), and Elam is broken (*ḫapû* l. 8 and 9). Weippert interprets: 'Wie ich die *nar'antu* zertrümmert habe, werde ich das Land Elam zertrümmern'.[415] The oracle describes a symbolic act carried out by the deity. This resembles what Ashurbanipal writes in his letter to Aššur: 'in the assembly of his army you (i.e. Aššur) cut off his (i.e. Teumman's) head'.[416]

In a letter to Ashurbanipal by Nabû-bel-šumate (ABL 839),[417] referring to the events of 653, prophecy plays a role again. The letter, in a postscript, connects the defeat of Teumman with an oracle of Nabû and Marduk:

> Nabû (and) Marduk, your gods, have tied [your enemies] and placed them [unde]r your feet, saying: 'May he govern all the [land]s! Let him place a prin[ce] from amongst his servants to the governors[hip of El]am and let him place another in the Sealand!' [Bel] and Na[bû] have destroyed Elam *on your behalf* saying [....][418]

The author paraphrases an oracle in which political advice is included concerning the Assyrian rule of Elam and the Sealand.[419] Through the divine word, the writer advised the king to reorganise the rule over Assyria and the Sealand by appointing princes as governors over these countries.[420]

4.2.8 The War against Šamaš-šum-ukin (652-648 BCE)

The cause of the war between Ashurbanipal and Šamaš-šum-ukin in 652-648 was the rivalry between Assyria and Babylonia in general and the rivalry between Ashurbanipal and his brother Šamaš-šum-ukin in particular.[421] Ashurbanipal, king of Assyria and sovereign of the Assyrian empire, was the overlord of his brother Šamaš-šum-ukin, who was governor of Babylonia. Ashurbanipal kept his brother on a tight rein,[422] but after eighteen years Šamaš-šum-ukin took his chance and revolted (652 BCE). Šamaš-šum-ukin was supported by several of the main Babylonian cities, the Chaldean and Aramaean tribes, the Sealand, and Elam.[423] After the initial success of Šamaš-šum-ukin, the Assyrians began to win ground from 650 onwards in Northern Babylonia, the heart of the resistance. The siege of Babylon, Šamaš-šum-ukin's capital, from mid-650 onwards, marked the beginning of the end of the

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[414] See Nissinen 2003a: 129, for the snake as a prominent symbol in Elamite religion and art.
[415] Weippert 2002: 52.
[416] Ashurbanipal's letter to Aššur, r. 6 (Bauer 1933: 83). See also Prism A v 7-8: 'Teumman, whose head I had cut off (*nakāsu*) according to the instruction (*našpartu*) of Aššur' (BIWA: 47).
[417] Published by Mattila 1987.
[418] ABL 839 r. 11-18; translation based on Mattila 1987.
[419] As a letter dealing with a political issue and concluding with an oracle, ABL 839 is best compared with SAA 10 111 (see 4.2.3).
[420] Mattila 1987: 30.
[421] See Frame 1992: 131-132.
[422] See Frame 1992: 109-114 and 130.
[423] Frame 1992: 133.

rebellion, even though it took two more years before Babylon fell and Šamaš-šum-ukin died (648).[424] Ashurbanipal's Prism A offers a lengthy account of the war. It begins with a description of Šamaš-šum-ukin's rebellion, which is followed by a dream report in which the god Sin announces the destruction of the enemies:[425]

> At that time a *šabrû* was sleeping … and had a dream: It stood written on the pedestal of Sin: 'Whoever has evil plans against Ashurbanipal and picks a quarrel with him – these people I will finish off with an evil death. I will make an end of their life with a swift sword, a rain of fire, famine and pestilence.' I (i.e. Ashurbanipal) heard this and trusted the word of Sin.[426]

The subsequent description of the war is presented as the outcome of this dream: the enemies of Ashurbanipal were annihilated by sword, fire, starvation and pestilence. The reason for presenting the war with the help of this schema of divine prediction and its outcome was to justify the brutal facts: the civil war, the siege of Babylon, and the death of Šamaš-šum-ukin. Various prophetic texts serve the same purpose.

The prophetic text SAA 9 9 is dated by its colophon to Nisan (I) 650. This is in the midst of the war, three months before the siege of Babylon began.[427] The leitmotif of the prophecy is the life of Ashurbanipal.[428] The goddess speaking in the oracle (Ištar of Arbela or Mullissu) emphasises how hard she struggles for Ashurbanipal's life. SAA 9 9 is not an oracle written down immediately from the mouth of the prophetess, but a product of literary elaboration. It is a literary text in which a previously reported prophetic oracle has been reworked. This will be further explored in chapter 6.2.1. Several elements within the text are reminiscent of the original prophetic oracle that lies at its base. The colophon contains the expression *ša pî*, 'by mouth of', which points to the original oral deliverance of the oracle. The middle part of the text contains phrases characteristic of prophetic oracles: 'My arms are strong and will not let you fall before the gods. My hip is alert and will keep carrying you.' And the goddess' announcement of the destruction of the enemy and the return of an enemy (probably Elam) to his country. Clearly, the goddess encourages Ashurbanipal in a difficult situation, and assures his survival. SAA 9 9 is not the only prophetic text relating to the war between Ashurbanipal and Šamaš-šum-ukin. Other examples are SAA 3 13, the Dialogue of Ashurbanipal and Nabû, and SAA 3 44, a composition of divine words. These texts can be qualified as literary texts reminiscent of oracular language. For this reason, they are discussed in chapter 6.2.2.

Because of the huge impact of the war, afterwards there was a strong need to justify what had happened. This is clear from the oracle reported in SAA 13 139.[429] From the reverse, it appears that the author of the report is Aššur-hamatu'a, a priest or a high temple functionary, probably in the temple of Ištar of Arbela. He added to the oracle the following remark: 'I implored Bel and prayed to him, and sent Nabû-šarru-uṣur, a tracker of my

[424] For a detailed survey of this course of events, see Frame 1992: 137-157.
[425] Prism A iii 118-127 (BIWA: 40-41).
[426] Translation by Nissinen 1998: 55.
[427] Babylon was besieged on IV-11 650, see the Šamaš-šum-ukin chronicle (Grayson 1975a: 19).
[428] 'Life', *balāṭu* in l. 8, 16, 20, 21, [25], cf. 6 and r. 3.
[429] SAA 13 139; corrected versions in Nissinen 2003a: 168; Nissinen and Parpola 2004.

contingent.' The obverse contains an oracle of Bel (Marduk). Nissinen and Parpola suppose that Aššur-hamatu'a instantly recorded the oracle when he heard it, then added a comment on the reverse and sent it to the king.[430] The oracle is the following:

> I [am] the Lord![431] I have entered and made peace with Mu[ll]issu. Ashurbanipal, king of Assyria, whom she raised: Fear not! [I] am the Lord! I have spared (him) for you (i.e. Mullissu). Ashurbanipal is in a country of loyalty. Him together with his country I have spared for you.[432] I left your city in peace and safety. Mercy and compassion […] *about four lines broken away.*

Nissinen and Parpola (2004) relate this oracle to the return of Marduk's statue to Babylon (668), but it is more likely to be connected to the aftermath of the war against Šamaš-šum-ukin. Since none of Aššur-hamatu'a's letters is dated (SAA 13 138-142),[433] arguments for dating 13 139 are to be drawn from the content of the oracle quoted. The interpretation of Nissinen and Parpola is based on the word 'I have entered' (*ētarba*). Because *erēbu* 'to enter' is a technical term for the return of a divine statue to its temple, they state that it is 'virtually certain that *e-tar-ba* here refers to Bel's return to his (newly restored) temple in Babylon, Esaggil.'[434] This is however not convincing. First, *erēbu*, 'to enter', is used in various ways.[435] It is used, for instance, in descriptions of divine processions: whereas *aṣû* 'to go out' marks the beginning of a procession, *erēbu* 'to go in' marks its end. Descriptions of processions in letters often contain the expressions *ina šulmi* 'in peace' and *ina šalimti* 'in safety', to emphasise that the procession was untroubled.[436] This is what we find in the oracle too. There is no compelling reason to connect *ētarba* specifically with Marduk's return to Babylon in 668. Moreover, the oracle as a whole supports a different understanding. Marduk asserts: 'I have entered and made peace with Mullissu.' The result of this reconciliation is worked out in the next few lines. After that, Marduk concludes that he left Mullissu's city in peace and safety. Thus, Marduk says that he came to Mullissu's

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[430] Nissinen and Parpola 2004: 212.
[431] The logogram EN stands for Bel, 'the Lord', a designation of the supreme Babylonian god Marduk.
[432] The form *artēanki* in l. 6 and 9 does not come from *riāmu* (contra lexicon SAA 13: 192), but from *rêmu* (*re'āmu*), 'to take pity', 'to have mercy'. CAD s.v. *rêmu*, 264: 'I have spared (him) for you (i.e. Mullissu). Ashurbanipal is in a country of safety/firmness. Him together with his country I have spared for you' (CDA gives *râmu* II 'to love'; and *râmu* III [Ass. *riāmu*], NA 'excuse/remit'). Nissinen and Parpola 2004: 206: 'to grant/bestow' or 'remit/excuse' a thing requested or pleaded for. The verb takes a direct object denoting the thing granted or excused and an indirect object denoting the beneficiary. Mullissu is the indirect object, whereas Ashurbanipal (and his country) are the direct object. Thus, *artēanki* means 'I (Marduk) have spared (him, i.e. Ashurbanipal [direct object]) for you (Mullissu [indirect object])'. Nissinen and Parpola (2004: 207) translate: 'I have spared for you Ashurbanipal in a country of truth'. In this case, however, the adjective (written as GIN) should have had a subjunctive ending. I prefer the suggestion by CAD s.v. *rêmu*, 264: 'I am sparing (him) for you'.
[433] Radner 1998: 186-187.
[434] Nissinen and Parpola 2004: 202; also 216.
[435] See Pongratz-Leisten 1994: 159.
[436] Cf. SAA 10 98:7-9: 'Aššur and Mullissu left (the temple) in peace (*ina šulmi*) and entered it in safety (*ina šalimti*)'. For further examples see Pongratz-Leisten 1994: 162-163; cf. Nissinen and Parpola 2004: 208.

city, entered (*ētarba*), made peace, and left again (*attūṣi*). This is procession terminology, used in an imaginative way, which is, of course possible in an oracle.

In the oracle Marduk describes how he made peace with Mullissu. The use of *salāmu* (G), 'to make peace', implies that Marduk was angry, but relented toward Mullissu. As a result, Ashurbanipal is encouraged (Fear not!). The explication of the reconciliation is that Marduk has spared Ashurbanipal and his country. This makes sense against the background of the events of 652-648. In SAA 9 9, the goddess Mullissu or Ištar of Arbela appears as an intercessor for Ashurbanipal in front of 'the assembly of the gods' (*puḫur ilāni*). Given the outcome of the events, the goddess' intercession was successful: Ashurbanipal survived and Šamaš-šum-ukin died. This is also the issue in the oracle of SAA 13 139. The oracle implies a heavenly scene to be understood as a council of the gods.[437]

The oracle reported in SAA 13 139 resembles other prophetic oracles in various ways: the god's presentation ('I am Bel'), the direct address of Ashurbanipal, and encouragement formula 'Fear not!'. The oracle of 13 139 is therefore likely to be a prophetic oracle as well. The theme of reconciliation appears in several other prophetic oracles. In four cases *salāmu* (D) 'to pacify', occurs; Ištar of Arbela promises to pacify Assyria and the angry gods, which means she will reconcile them through intercession.[438] Oracle 2.5 contains the phrase: 'I will put Assyria in order (*taqānu* D) and reconcile (*salāmu* D) the angry gods with Assyria'. The 'angry gods' parallel the social-political disorder. In this oracle, to be situated during Esarhaddon's struggle against his brothers for the throne, Ištar of Arbela promises Esarhaddon that she will restore the order in Assyria and pacify the angry gods. This closely corresponds to 13 139, where Marduk says he has put aside his anger with result that Ashurbanipal and his country are safe. The verb *salāmu* (G) often has a political meaning with the connotation of voluntarily submitting to a superior power. Marduk's reconciliation with Mullissu, the spouse of Aššur and 'mother' of Ashurbanipal, implies the acknowledgement of Babylonia's subordination to Assyria.[439] The main message is that Babylonia and Assyria have made peace again. The likeliest historical background, therefore, is the war against Šamaš-šum-ukin. After the violent events, the damaging of Babylon and the interruption of the cult, the gods, Marduk in particular, had to be

[437] So Nissinen and Parpola 2004: 216. Marduk's statement 'I entered' means that he entered the gods' assembly. I disagree with Nissinen and Parpola (2004: 202-204) that this 'divine council' must be located in Esagila. That Esagila from the Babylonian perspective is the seat of the divine council (cf. Enuma Elish) does not prevent the Assyrian view that the seat of the divine council is Aššur's temple Ešarra. Since Marduk says that after the 'meeting' he left Mullissu's city, which is Assur, as Nissinen and Parpola (2004: 208) agree, the 'meeting' is to be located in Assur.

[438] SAA 9 1.4 'I reconciled Aššur with you' (ii 31'); 2.3 'I will reconcile Assyria with you' (ii 3'); 2.5 'I will put Assyria in order, and reconcile the angry gods with Assyria' (iii 19'-20'); 2.6 '[I will re]concile …' (iv 19'). For other attestations of *salāmu*, cf. e.g. SAA 10 111 r. 19: 'Marduk is reconciled with the king, my lord'.

[439] So Nissinen and Parpola 2004: 204. The rare spelling of Assyria as KUR-AŠ ('the single country'), in a word of Marduk, could be an implicit acknowledgement of Assyria's hegemony over Babylonia (so Nissinen and Parpola 2004: 204-205). Nissinen and Parpola (2004: 202) further suggest that the writing of Marduk's name without divine determinative reflects the Assyrian view of Marduk's subordination to Aššur.

reconciled.[440] The oracle reported in SAA 13 139 contains Marduk's message of reconciliation.

4.2.9 Evaluation

The second part of this chapter shows that the Assyrian prophecies that have been recorded relate to political key events.[441] A first issue of crucial importance is the divine legitimation of the king. Both in the difficult circumstances of 681 (4.2.1) and during the events of 672 (4.2.4), the gods proclaimed through prophetic oracles that Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal respectively, were the legitimate Assyrian kings. Furthermore, the gods, through the prophetic voice, confirm Assyria's superiority, whenever Assyria's hegemony is challenged by strong enemies, such as Elam and Egypt. Finally, the gods promise the protection of the king when his position is threatened, either by conspiracies, as in the case of Esarhaddon, or by an insurrection, as in the case of Ashurbanipal in 652-648.

4.3 Conclusion

It has been argued in this chapter that prophecy played a role in situations of crucial political importance. The prophetic sayings of Isaiah can be connected with various key moments of Judah's political history of the late eighth century, and the prophetic oracles from Assyria relate to several key moments of the times of Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal. When we compare both sets of prophecies, some significant similarities can be discerned. On both sides, the claim that God or the gods govern the historical scene plays a prominent role. It is the deity who is in command and decides the course of the events. Furthermore, on both sides we find the deity's affirmation that he (she) is on the king's side. The gods are presented as intervening in situations of crucial importance.

The prophetic material discussed in this chapter is basically pro-state. Both in the prophetic material from First Isaiah and in the Assyrian prophecies an ideal image functions as a frame of reference. In the Isaianic material, the ideal image pictures the people governed by the Davidic king in justice and righteousness as living a peaceful life under Yahweh's protection. In the Assyrian prophecies, the ideal image depicts the king as protected by the gods – in particular Ištar and Mullissu – himself the protector of his subjects; there is peace in the land, the rule of heaven and earth is in harmony, and Assyrian hegemony is unthreatened. In both cases the prophecies fiercely react against any challenge to the ideal situation – both external enemies and internal adversaries. Isaiah's conflict with the leading politicians of Jerusalem is to be seen in this light. Not only was there competition between the prophet and his opponents with regard to the issue of what foreign politics to adopt, but also the prophet saw their pro-Egyptian policy as a threat to Judah's well-being, challenging the ideal of a peaceful life. Isaiah's fierce reaction can be compared to the way in which action was taken in Assyria against those threatening the well-being of the king, which meant the well-being of the state (cf. e.g. SAA 10 284). Isaiah fulminated against the Judaean leaders advocating rebellion precisely because he regarded their politics

[440] The New Year festival was not celebrated in Babylon for three years because of the war, see the Akītu-chronicle, Grayson 1975a: 132:18-23.
[441] In this respect the Assyrian prophecies resemble the Mari prophecies; see Durand 1997: 132.

as a mortal threat to Judah's well-being. His loyalty to state and king serves as an explanation for the absence of any direct reference to King Hezekiah in his critical sayings.

This does not mean that prophecy was royal propaganda. Prophets were supportive of the state, but did not necessarily agree with every decision of the king. On the one hand, the prophetic material contains cases of divine encouragement of the king in threatening situations. Examples are Isaiah's prophecies in 734-732 (see 4.1.2) and the prophecies for Esarhaddon in 681 (see 4.2.1). On the other hand, there are cases of divine direction to the king either to undertake or to refrain from certain actions. Examples are the demand not to trust in the military aid of Egypt (see 4.1.8) and the demand to restore Babylon and Esagila (see 4.2.2). This leads to the conclusion that prophecy in Judah and Assyria to an important extent functioned in a similar way.

There is an important difference between Isaiah's prophecies and the Assyrian prophecies as well. Isaiah's critical sayings against Judah's political leaders (4.1.8) are characterised by a quite different tone of voice than the Assyrian prophecies, which are mostly encouraging. The Assyrian prophecies frequently announce the destruction of the king's enemies, but mainly consist of positive, beneficial promises to the king. Isaiah, on the other hand, although his ideal view of Judah's society is clear, formulates his messages mostly negatively: *against* Aram and Ephraim, *against* Assyria, and, in particular, *against* Judah's political leaders. As an explanation, two issues can be mentioned, apart from the obvious fact that prophecy found different expressions in different times and places. 1) The situation of late eighth-century Judah was quite different from that of seventh-century Assyria. Whereas the Assyrian prophecies were concerned with the well-being of the king and his divine legitimacy, in Judah the survival of the state was at stake. The Assyrian prophecies, at least the extant ones, focused on the king; Isaiah's prophecies addressed the king when he was threatened (Isa 7*), but otherwise took a somewhat broader perspective on the state of Judah. The difference in tone may reflect different circumstances. Whereas the Assyrian king, despite occasional troubles, marched victoriously throughout the Near East, Isaiah witnessed the political abolition of neighbouring political states and wanted to avoid a similar fate for Judah. 2) The prophetic material at our disposal is limited. The Assyrian prophecies stem mainly from the royal archives, so a royal focus should not surprise us. Isaiah's prophecies, on the other hand, were preserved probably because his political assessment proved to be right. The analysis of this chapter shows that prophetic oracles in Judah and Assyria functioned in a more or less similar way. However, the same prophetic phenomenon found different sorts of expressions. At the one end we have the Assyrian prophecies, mainly from the royal archives, with their positive tone, at the other end Isaiah's prophecies, in which a negative tone predominates. Somewhere in between there are, for instance, the Mari prophecies. Notwithstanding the difference in expression, the prophecies from Isaiah and the Assyrian prophecies demonstrate a similar phenomenon. Isaiah, in his prophecies, supported the king and the well-being of the state of Judah; and in the Assyrian oracles, the gods exercise their power on the king by making strong cultic demands on him. Even in Assyria, the king was not invulnerable. The same prophetic voice that encouraged and legitimised the king, could also formulate demands on him, or even choose the side of his adversaries, as will be elaborated in chapter 5.