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## **Guarded, Besieged or Devastated? Some Remarks on Isaiah 1:7-8, with Special Reference to 1QIsaa**

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## Guarded, Besieged or Devastated?

Some remarks on Isaiah 1:7-8, with  
special reference to 1QIsa<sup>a</sup>

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Two of the three so-called major prophets of the Hebrew Bible, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, begin with the story of the call of the Prophet. However, the third, Isaiah, begins not with the prophet's commission (which is described in chapter 6), but rather with a section that is usually dated at the end of Isaiah's appearance as a prophet, during the siege of Jerusalem by the Assyrian king Sennacherib (see Isa. 36-37). The description found in the verses 7 and 8 is particularly well-suited to this period. Thus we read in the Revised Standard Version:

7. *Your country lies desolate, your cities are burned with fire;*  
in your very presence aliens devour your land;  
it is desolate, as overthrown by foreigners.

8. *And daughter Zion is left like a booth in a vineyard,*  
like a shelter in a cucumber field, like a besieged city.

The view that these verses describe the devastation of the land and the siege of Jerusalem, which took place at the end of Isaiah's appearance as a prophet, is in agreement with Isa. 6:11. In this verse, which is part of Isaiah's commission, we read that Isaiah must continue to proclaim his message until the land has become a desert and the cities have been destroyed. In Isa. 1:7 the land *has* become a desert and the cities *have* been destroyed (אדמה "earth", שממה "desolation" and ערים "cities" in both 6:11 and 1:7).

Anyone who looks up these verses in other Bible translations will meet with some remarkable differences. Instead of "as overthrown by foreigners", the New English Bible has "desolate as Sodom in its overthrow", and instead of "a besieged city", this translation has "a city well-guarded". The ancient versions, too, in particular the Septuagint (LXX) and the great Isaiah Scroll from Qumran (1QIsa<sup>a</sup> = Qa) contain several readings that merit our attention.

### Isaiah 1:2-9

The pericope 1:2-9 describes the rebellion of the people of Israel against their God and the disaster that has therefore afflicted them. It depicts how the land has been devastated and how only Jerusalem has remained intact.

The first two verses (1:2-3) contain God's accusation against his people. This accusation is embedded in the literary genre of a father's lament about his rebellious sons, which is clearly reminiscent of Deut. 32. The opening in Isa. 1:2, **שמעו שמים והאזיני ארץ כי יהוה דבר**, "Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth, for the Lord has spoken" closely resembles Deut. 32:1, **האזיני השמים ואדברה ותשמע הארץ אמרי פי**, "Give ear, O heavens and I will speak; hear O earth, the words of my mouth". In Deut. 32, as in Isa. 1:2-3, the father/son metaphor is employed to describe the relation between God and his people. In the elaboration of this image, the verb **קנה** "to create" (?) is used in Deut. 32:6, which is comparable to the use of **קנה** in Isa. 1:3 (although here the form may be derived from another root **קנה**, meaning "to acquire"). The plural **בנים** "sons" in Deut. 32:5, 20 and Isa. 1:2 is also interesting, because the plural is only rarely found in such contexts. In other places in the Old Testament, the singular **בן** "son" is used as a designation for the people as a whole, e.g., Exod. 4:22. In Deut. 32, the sons act corruptly (**שחת** *hi.* vs. 5) and are without understanding (the root **בין** in 32:28, 29 as in Isa. 1:3). In Deut. 32:17 the people of Israel have proceeded to serve gods they did not know before (**אלהים לא ידעום**), while in Isa. 1:3 the people's alienation from their God has gone so far that they no longer know their own God (**לא ידע**).

In verse 4 there follows a cry of woe, in which the sin of the people is described. The words used here (**חטא** "sin", **עון** "guilt", **רעע** *hi.* "to do evil", **שחת** *hi.* "to act wickedly", **עזב** "to abandon") also appear in the description of rebellion that is part of the threat of disaster in Lev. 26 and Deut. 28 and 31.

In 1:5-6 the land is compared to a body that is in a terrible condition, after being beaten all over. A number of words that are used in Lev. 26 and Deut. 28 to describe physical diseases (**נכה** *hi.* "to strike", **מכה** "wound", **חלי** "illness") have been incorporated into this metaphor. In addition to the lexical similarities, there are also thematic affinities to Lev. 26 and Deut. 28: again and again the people have been struck down, but have not repented.

In 1:7 we are given a dreary view of the devastated land. As in Lev. 26 and Deut. 28, strangers eat the fruits of the land. In 1:8 we read that only Zion remains, as a poor and vulnerable booth, as a "protected" or a "besieged" city (see below).

In 1:9 we find the motif of the remnant, which plays such an important role in the Book of Isaiah. This, too, reminds us of Lev. 26 (vs. 32) and Deut. 28 (vs. 62, **מעט** "few, little"). The comparison with Sodom and Gomorrah, previously alluded to in vs. 7 (**מהפכה** "overthrow", see below) and vs. 4

(רעע *hi.* "to do evil", as in Gen. 19:7, 9), is made explicit here (cf. Deut. 29:22; 32:32 and below, note 3).

The connecting lines that can be drawn from Isaiah 1:2-9 to Lev. 26 and Deut. 28-31 are highly significant: What is happening here is that which has already been announced by Moses: disaster will be visited upon the people if they do not listen to their God.

### "Devastation" or "Awe"

In the Masoretic Text (MT) of vs. 7 **שַׁמְמָה** is found twice, both times vocalized as a noun: **שַׁמְמָה**. LXX supports the consonantal text of the MT, but the second time it has **ἡρημώθη** "has been devastated", which reflects **שַׁמְמָה** (perf. 3rd pers. sing. fem. of the verb **שָׁמַם**). In Qa the second **שַׁמְמָה** has been radically changed to read **שָׁמְמוּ עֲלֶיהָ**, "they were awestruck in face of this". Now it is remarkable that **שָׁמְמוּ עֲלֶיהָ** also occurs in Lev. 26:32, where it is followed by **וְהָיְתָה אֶרְצְכֶם וְעִירֵיכֶם יְהִיוּ חָרְבָה** "your land will lie desolate and your cities will be in ruins", which is highly reminiscent of **וְהָיְתָה אֶרְצְכֶם וְעִירֵיכֶם שָׁמְמוּ עֲלֵיכֶם שְׂרֵפֹת אֵשׁ** "your land lies desolate, your cities are burned with fire" from the verse under discussion. It appears that in Lev. 26, too, where the root **שָׁמַם** occurs a total of eight times, it is used in the sense of "to be desolate, devastated" as well as "to be appalled". Thus it will be clear that the lines that connect this pericope with Lev. 26 are reinforced by the variant reading in Qa.<sup>1</sup>

### "Sodom" or "strangers"

"As overthrown by foreigners" at the end of verse 7 is the translation of **כַּמְהַפְכַת זָרִים**. "Desolate as Sodom in its overthrow" from the New English Bible reflects the change from **זָרִים** "strangers" to **סֹדֹם** "Sodom", a reading that is also found in the critical apparatus of the *Biblia Hebraica*

<sup>1</sup>This variant is discussed extensively by J. Koenig, *L'herméneutique analogique du Judaïsme antique d'après les témoins textuels d'Isaïe*. Supplements to *Vetus Testamentum* 33 (Leiden 1982) pp. 218-221. For Koenig, the parallel with Lev. 26 indicates the true meaning of this variant: "...elle introduisait dans le texte d'Is le rappel de la Loi. Voilà sa vraie portée pour le milieu et l'époque d'utilisation [...] La Loi était la critère de l'interprétation dont le Prophète était l'objet, et inversement le Prophète offrait une application de la Loi" (p. 221). However, in view of the connecting lines between Isa. 1:2-9 and Lev. 26 remarked upon above, "le rappel de la Loi" cannot be something new put forward by the scribe of Qa. Rather the echo of Lev. 26 already present in Isa. 1 has been strengthened in Qa. Moreover, it would not do to draw conclusions concerning the theological status of the Law and the Prophets in the scribe's milieu solely on the basis of this variant.

*Stuttgartensia*. The most important argument in favour of this reading is the fact that the other five times that *מהפכה* "overthrow" occurs in the Old Testament, it is followed by *סדם* (in Deut. 29:22 and Jer. 49:18 *כמהפכת סדם ועמרה* "as the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah"), and in Isa. 13:19, Jer. 50:40 and Am. 4:11 *עמרה ואת סדם ואת אלהים את סדם כמהפכת* "as God's overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah"). However, a serious objection to the assumption that here, too, *כמהפכת* should be followed by *סדם*, is the lack of support from any of the ancient versions. Moreover, each time that *מהפכת* is followed by *סדם*, it is followed by *עמרה* as well. In 1:9 and 10, too, the two cities are mentioned together.

If we adhere to the *lectio difficilior* *זרים*, there are two alternative interpretations: We can regard it either as a subjective genitive ("an overthrow brought about by strangers") or as an objective genitive ("an overthrow that strangers undergo"). The first interpretation (subjective genitive), which is followed by most of the modern Bible translations, is also found in the Septuagint. It is in keeping with the first half of the verse, where we read that the *זרים* eat the fruits of the land. It is also in accordance with the use of *זרים* elsewhere in the Prophets, where it is nearly always used in the context of the devastation brought about by the *זרים*, rather than the fate that they themselves have to suffer. The second interpretation (objective genitive) is supported mainly by the Jewish exegetical tradition, represented by the mediaeval commentator David Qimḥi (Radaq, c. 1160-1235 AD), and others. This understanding of the text does justice to the fact that in similar contexts the grammatical subject of the verb *הפך* is always God<sup>2</sup> and that *מהפכה* is only used in relation to Sodom and Gomorrah. In this interpretation, *זרים מהפכת* is an allusion to the overthrow of these two cities, which are mentioned explicitly in verse 9. In that case the purport of the text is as follows: Just as once Sodom and Gomorrah, the prototypes of "strangers" (cf. Radaq: *זרים מיראת האל*, "strange to the fear of God") were overthrown, now Israel, which has turned into a "stranger" (cf. vs. 2-4), has been devastated.<sup>3</sup>

Another interpretation of *זרים מהפכת* is given by the well-known Jewish exegete Rabbi Shelomo Yitzḥaḳi (Rashi, 1040-1105 AD): The land has been given into the hands of strangers (*כנחלה הנהפכת לזרים*) "as a heritage turned over to strangers". Rashi harks back to the translation of these words

<sup>2</sup>Gen. 19:21, 25, 29; Deut. 29:22; Jer. 20:16; Amos 4:11; Jonah 3:4; Job 9:5.

<sup>3</sup>See D. Barthélemy, *Critique textuelle de l'Ancien Testament 2. Isaïe, Jérémie, Lamentations. Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis 50/2* (Freiburg/Göttingen 1986) pp. 1-3. See further Deut. 29:22-23. Here, too, the devastation of Sodom and Gomorrah is included in an announcement of judgement.

in the Targum, which reflects the same interpretation (אתחלפת לנוכראין). An interesting parallel for this connotation of הפך is offered by Lam. 5:2 זרִים נחלתנו נהפכה לזרים ("our inheritance has been turned over to aliens").<sup>4</sup>

David Qimḥi and Abraham Ibn Ezra (1089-1164 AD) mention a further possibility, namely that זרִים is related to the word זָרַם ("current, stream"): The land is devastated and desolate as a land that has been inundated by a great flood.

With regard to כמחפכת, it should also be noted that LXX has a passive participle, which possibly reflects מחפכת (participle *pu'al*), and that the preposition כ has been left untranslated in LXX.

### "Left" or "collapsed"

In MT, the first word of verse 8 is ונתרה (RSV: "is left"), while Qa has ונתרת with the Aramaic ending *-t*. The few times that we find this ending in Biblical Hebrew we have to do with either an archaism (in particular in early poetic texts, e.g., Deut. 32:36 אוֹלַת), or an Aramaism (in particular in the later books of the Bible, e.g., Ezek. 46:17 שַׁבַּת, as in Qumran Hebrew). The Aramaic influence on the morphology of the verb is quite strong in Qa, so that this form does not stand alone in this respect. And yet there is a possible explanation for the fact that it is precisely this form that receives that Aramaic ending.<sup>5</sup> It is namely remarkable that the *waw* after the *nun* is omitted. Even in the MT, forms with prefixes of *pe-yod* verbs are nearly always spelled plene, i.e., with the mater-lectionis *waw*. Given the fact that Qa shows a strong increase in the use of the vowel letter *waw*, the defective spelling ונתרת is striking.<sup>6</sup> This suggests that the form in Qa is derived from ונתר instead of ותר, but the meaning of ותר in Biblical Hebrew (*qa*: "to start up, run off", *pi*: "to leap, jump") is not suitable in our verse. However, what does fit the context is the Aramaic root ונתר, which means "to collapse, crumble". This interpretation of the verb is in keeping with the image of a vulnerable lodge, which appears in these lines (compare Job 27:8). Accordingly, the translation of the Qa text of 1:8 is "And daughter

<sup>4</sup>A. B. Ehrlich, *Randglossen zur hebräischen Bibel* 4 (Leipzig 1912) ad loci. See further Jer. 6:12: ונסבו בתיהם לאחרים.

<sup>5</sup>Apart from פתחת in 48:8, of which the interpretation is uncertain, this is the only case of the ending *-t* for the 3rd pers. sing. fem. of the suffix conjugation.

<sup>6</sup>For the use of the *waw* as vowel letter, see E. Y. Kutscher, *The Language and Linguistic Background of the Isaiah Scroll (1QIsa<sup>a</sup>)*. Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah 6 (Leiden 1974; translation of Hebrew edition 1959), pp. 126-148; E. Qimron, *The Hebrew of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, Harvard Semitic Studies 29 (Atlanta, 1986) § 200.11.

Zion is collapsed as a booth in a vineyard" etc.<sup>7</sup>

### "Guarded" or "besieged"

In MT the last word of verse 8 is נצורה (from the root נצר "to guard"; compare 27:3). The ancient translations (LXX ὡς πόλις πολιορκουμένη,<sup>8</sup> Targum כקרתא דצירין עלה, Peshitta ܩܪܬܐ ܕܥܝܪܝܢ ܥܠܗ and possibly also the Vulgate *sicut civitas quae vastatur* and Symmachus περιπορθημένη) seem to assume the same consonants, but a different vocalization: נצורה (from the root צור "to besiege"), a reading which is recommended by the critical apparatus of the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* and is also found in most of the modern translations. Qa has נצודה, a form which may be seen as the result of the interchange between the two similar letters ד and ר, but this is not necessary.<sup>9</sup> צוד occurs in Biblical Hebrew in the sense of "to hunt" and probably also "to lie in wait for"; in Mishnaic Hebrew it can also mean "to capture". In Lamentations, too, it is used to indicate the harm that the enemies do to Daughter Zion (3:52, 4:18). It is difficult to establish the precise meaning of a "hunted" or "captured" city, but it is clear that the picture of Jerusalem as a "guarded" city, which we find in the MT, has disappeared.

### Sennacherib, Nebuchadnezzar, Antioch or Titus

Above we compared MT, Qa and LXX on a word level. However, the differences we noted have a bearing on the context of Isa. 1:2-9 as a whole, and even beyond. In MT the whole land is devastated (vs. 5-7), and only Jerusalem has been left standing (vs. 8). The idea of the remnant and the so-called "Zion tradition", two central themes in the Book of Isaiah, are closely related. The remnant that has survived is the remnant in Zion (vs. 8-9, compare 4:3).<sup>10</sup> As noted in the introduction, this is highly reminis-

<sup>7</sup>Koenig, *Herméneutique* pp. 295-297. Cf. P. Wernberg-Møller, "Studies in the Defective Spellings in the Isaiah-Scroll of St Mark's Monastery" *Journal of Semitic Studies* 3 (1958) pp. 244-264, esp. p. 250; Kutscher, *Isaiah* p. 191. Compare the *nif'al* of יתר in Qa 4:3, 7:22, 30:17 and the *hif'il* in 1:9.

<sup>8</sup>Compare LXX 27:3, where the MT also has נצר and the LXX πολιορκούμενος, but here the relation between the Hebrew and the Greek text is rather complicated.

<sup>9</sup>On the interchange of ד and ר, see E. Würthwein, *Der Text des alten Testaments: eine Einführung in die Biblia Hebraica* (Stuttgart 1988<sup>5</sup>) p. 119 and E. Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible* (Assen/Maastricht-Minneapolis, 1992) pp. 245-246. In MT for example Jer. 2:20 (Ketiv/Qere) and 2 Sam. 22:43 / Ps. 18:43.

<sup>10</sup>For the Zion tradition, see G. von Rad, *Theologie des Alten Testaments 2. Die Theologie der prophetischen Überlieferungen Israels* (München 1987<sup>9</sup>) pp. 162-175.

cent of the situation in Judah in 701 BC: Sennacherib and his armies have overrun the whole country, destroying cities and villages, and now they are besieging the only fortress that is left, Jerusalem.

In Qa the destruction that has crushed the country has also afflicted Jerusalem. In 1:8 the city has been "hunted" or "captured" (נצודה instead of נצורה or נצורה) and has collapsed (ונתרת instead of ונתרת!) like a booth. It is quite possible that the pericope 1:2-9 in Qa is a description of the destruction brought about by Antioch IV. This Seleucid ruler marched on Jerusalem together with his armies, executed a bloodbath among the inhabitants, and carried off the treasures of the Temple. In the anxious years that followed, both the city and the land suffered greatly at the hands of Antioch.<sup>11</sup> This interpretation of Qa is supported by other variant readings. One of these variants is in 22:5, where "battering down walls and crying out to the mountains" (מקרקר קר ושוע אל ההר) in the MT has become "He who destroys his sanctuary on the mountain" (מקרקר קדשו על ההר). And in 31:5-6 Qa has a totally different version from that of the MT: God attacks the city and the temple, but rescues the remnant that has been converted.<sup>12</sup> This understanding of variant readings in Qa is substantiated by other passages in the Qumran documents, which show that the members of the Qumran community regarded the important events of their time as the fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecies.

While in MT 1:8-9 the remnant spoken of is the remnant in Zion, in Qa there is no longer any link between Jerusalem and the remnant that has been saved. It is probable that the scribe of Qa regarded his own Qumran community, which just had left Jerusalem, as the remnant referred to in 1:9.

It seems likely that the translator of LXX Isaiah also saw the events that took place from 169 BC onwards as the fulfilment of the pericope 1:2-9. To assess this view, we would have to make a careful study of the Greek translation of the Book of Isaiah, an undertaking which is beyond the scope of this article.<sup>13</sup>

In a later period, these verses were linked to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Roman general Titus in 70 AD, as in the *Apologia Prima pro Christianis* of the mid-second-century Christian apologist Justin

<sup>11</sup>Compare E. Schürer, G. Vermes, F. Millar, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ (175 B.C. - A.D. 135)* I (rev. ed. Edinburgh 1973) pp. 151-156.

<sup>12</sup>A. van der Kooij, *Die alte Textzeugen des Jesajabuches. Ein Beitrag zur Textgeschichte des alten Testaments*. Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis 35 (Freiburg/Göttingen 1981) pp. 83-84, 86-87.

<sup>13</sup>Van der Kooij, *Textzeugen* pp. 33-60. See, for example, pp. 44-49 concerning 22:1-11 and compare this with the above remarks on Isa. 22:5 in Qa.

Martyr,<sup>14</sup> and a few decades later in the works of Irenaeus (c. 130-202)<sup>15</sup> and Tertullian (c. 160-225).<sup>16</sup> The church father Jerome (348-420) sees a partial fulfilment of the lines under discussion in the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians. From 605 to 586 BC the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar conducted several campaigns against the land of Judah and its capital Jerusalem, and eventually destroyed the city (2 Ki. 24-25). However, for Jerome, too, Isaiah's prophecy was not truly fulfilled until the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 AD.<sup>17</sup>

### "Fulfilment interpretation"

One of the most notable characteristics of the biblical exegesis in the Qumran documents is the "fulfilment interpretation" (*Erfüllungsinterpretation*). This interpretation is rooted in the conviction that the fulfilment of that which was long ago foretold by God's prophets, is taking place in the present. It is well-attested – though certainly not exclusively – in the so-called *pešer* literature, in which a biblical quotation is followed by its *pešer*, and which often reads historical and eschatological events into the biblical prophecies. We also find "fulfilment interpretation" in the Pseudepigrapha, in the New Testament (see, e.g., 1 Pet. 1:9-10), in Targum Jonathan<sup>18</sup> and, as we have seen, in the Septuagint. This manner of actualizing prophecies is even found in the Old Testament itself.<sup>19</sup>

According to the interpretation put forward in the present article, traces of this type of exegesis are also to be found in Qa. The idea that Qa contains interpretative variants is in itself not new. It occurs as far

<sup>14</sup> *Apologia* I, 47 [Saint Justin. *Apologies. Introduction, texte critique, traduction, commentaire et index*, A. Wartalle, ed., Études Augustiniennes (Paris 1987) p. 163].

<sup>15</sup> E.g., *Adversus Haereses* IV, 4 [Iréne de Lyon. *Contre les hérésies, livre IV* 2. *Texte et traduction*, A. Rousseau, ed., Sources Chrétiennes 100 (Paris 1965) p. 421].

<sup>16</sup> E.g., *Adversus Iudaeos* XIII, 4 [Quinti Septimi Florentis Tertulliani *Opera* 2. *Opera Montanistica*, A. Gerlo, ed., Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina 2 (Turnhout 1954) pp. 1390-1391].

<sup>17</sup> Thus in his commentary on Isaiah in the discussion of verse 7: *Haec sub Babylonis ex parte completa sunt... Plenius autem atque perfectius quid futurum ist sub Romana captivitate describitur...*, [S. Hieronymi *Presbyteri Opera* 1,2. *Commentariorum in Esaiam Libri I-XI*, M. Adriaen, ed., Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina 73 (Turnhout 1963) p. 13].

<sup>18</sup> Van der Kooij, *Textzeugen* pp. 161-175.

<sup>19</sup> M. Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford 1985) pp. 458-499.

back as Barthélemy (1950)<sup>20</sup> and later on Chamberlain (1955),<sup>21</sup> Rubinstein (1955)<sup>22</sup> and Brownlee (1964).<sup>23</sup> These authors dealt mainly with isolated verses, and devoted only little attention to the context of Qa or to methodological questions. The so-called "messianizing" variant readings, in particular, aroused interest, but the term "messiah" was used in a loose and inadequately defined manner, without any particular attention to the context of Qa. Van der Kooij, in his 1978 dissertation, was the first to express the view that Qa also testifies of the use of "fulfilment interpretation"; in other words, that a number of variant readings in Qa can best be explained on the basis of the scribe's application of Isaiah's prophecies to his own time.<sup>24</sup>

From the earliest discoveries of the Dead Sea Scrolls, "fulfilment interpretation" in the documents of the Qumran community, especially the *pešer* literature, aroused interest. Therefore, it is remarkable that it was not until a more recent phase of the study of Qa that this manuscript, too, has been acknowledged as bearing witness to this approach to the biblical text.

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<sup>20</sup>D. Barthélemy, "Le grand rouleau d'Isaïe trouvé près de la Mer Morte" *Revue biblique* 57 (1950) pp. 530-549, esp. pp. 545-549: "Les variants messianique".

<sup>21</sup>J. V. Chamberlain, "The Functions of God as Messianic Titles in the Complete Qumran Isaiah Scroll" *Vetus Testamentum* 5 (1955) pp. 366-372.

<sup>22</sup>A. Rubinstein, "The Theological Aspect of Some Variant Readings in the Isaiah Scroll" *Journal of Jewish Studies* 6 (1955) pp. 187-200.

<sup>23</sup>W. H. Brownlee, *The Meaning of the Qumran Scrolls for the Bible. With Special Attention to the Book of Isaiah* (Oxford 1964) pp. 165-215.

<sup>24</sup>A. van der Kooij, *De oude tekstgetuigen van het boek Jesaja* (Utrecht 1978) [translation and revision: *Textzeugen*]; see also Koenig *Herméneutique*.