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 1

INTRODUCTION

> 'It is an irony of the present situation in Old Testament study that, just as newer methods of reading and discussing texts, prophetic and other, are being applied, our greatly increased knowledge of prophecy in its wider Near Eastern setting requires that we pay renewed attention to Israelite prophecy as an historical phenomenon with precursors and parallels in sibling Near Eastern cultures.'[1]

The present study focuses on prophecy as a historical phenomenon by offering a comparison between parts of First Isaiah and the Assyrian prophecies.[2] In the first part of this study the material from First Isaiah and from seventh-century Assyria is investigated in its own right, in order to create the conditions for a valid and fruitful comparison between parts of the book of Isaiah and the Assyrian prophecies. The second part of this study contains a comparison of the Isaiah tradition in its earliest shape on the one hand and the prophetic material from seventh-century Assyria on the other. The comparison consists of three elements: the interrelation of prophetic oracles and historical events; the functions of the prophets; and the literary development of prophecy. The present study aims to contribute to three issues relating to prophecy:

1) This studies deals with the question of which parts of First Isaiah can be dated to the Assyrian period, i.e. the eighth to the seventh century BCE. It offers an exploration of the earliest stages of the Isaiah tradition, its origin and development in the Assyrian period, long before it was expanded into the prophetic book as we have it. This is of importance for the question of the character of the prophet described in the earliest, prophetic material. What kind of prophet was the historical Isaiah, and how did he develop into one of the great prophetic figures? Recently, Uwe Becker has formulated the question like this:

> War Jesaja der "klassische" Gerichtsprophet des 8.Jh.s, für den man ihn gewöhnlich hält? .... War Jesaja im Kontext der vorexilischen judäischen Staatsreligion wirklich ein Außenseiter, ein

[1] Gordon 1995: 29.

[2] The Assyrian prophecies are often referred to as the 'Neo-Assyrian prophecies', since they date from the Neo-Assyrian period. In this study, I refer to these prophecies as the 'Assyrian prophecies' and to the Neo-Assyrian period as the 'Assyrian period'.

> einsamer Rufer? Die Beantwortung dieser Fragen fällt heute schwerer denn je, und sie kann gewiß nicht allein am Jesajabuch entschieden werden.[3]

New insights gained from redaction-historical and literary focus on the book of Isaiah have challenged the traditional understanding of First Isaiah as representing essentially the preaching of the historical prophet. The issue of the earliest stages of the Isaiah tradition has to be addressed anew. According to Becker, it cannot be solved by the exegetical study of the book of Isaiah alone.[4] The present study intends to provide a new answer to this question.

2) This study furthermore aims to contribute to the question: how does biblical prophecy relate to prophecy as a socio-historical phenomenon? The relation between the biblical images of the prophets, in particular that of the 'classical prophets', and the prophetic figures that functioned in ancient Judah and Israel, is a complex issue. The present study attempts to answer this question with regard to the prophet Isaiah.

3) The main interest of this study is of a comparative nature. The study deals with the prophetic material from First Isaiah and the phenomenon of prophecy in Judah from a comparative perspective. As a counterpart, the prophetic material from seventh-century Assyria is dealt with. The comparative aim is to illuminate the earliest stages of the Isaiah tradition, to increase our understanding of the prophetic material of seventh-century Assyria, and to develop further the comparative study of prophecy by taking one of the prophetic books into the focus of attention.

In this introductory chapter, I present an overview of the recent developments in the study of First Isaiah (1.1) and in the study of prophecy (1.2). These two sections provide a context for the issues introduced here. The final section of this chapter deals with the aim and focus of the present study.

1.1 Recent Developments in the Study of First Isaiah

1.1.1 Shifts of Focus

The last three decades of research on the book of Isaiah are characterised by an increasing diversity in scholarly approach.[5] The eighth-century core of the book and the view taken of the historical prophet, formerly more or less agreed upon, have become more and more a matter of controversy.[6] Two major changes in the recent study of Isaiah can be singled out. First, emphasis on Isaiah as a prophetic personality has changed into an emphasis on the book of Isaiah. Second, as the focus of interpretation had shifted to the book as a whole, the strictly tripartite division of the book was challenged.

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[3] Becker 1999: 152. See also Steck 1996: 6-7; Köckert 2003: 112-114.

[4] For similar views, see Nissinen 1993: 249-250, Rösel 2003: 121, and Höffken 2004:144, who concludes: 'Rein buchintern verfahrende Analysen sind auf die Dauer sehr unbefriedigend.'

[5] Steck 1996: 5-6. Becker (1999: 151) describes the current research on Isaiah as 'eines methodisches beliebigen, diffusen Nebeneinanders von Richtungen und Positionen'. For an overview of the history of research on the book of Isaiah, see Becker 1999; Hardmeier 1986; Höffken 2004; Seebaß 1995; Seitz 1992; Tate 1996.

[6] Becker 1999: 4.

Following Bernhard Duhm's theory of three independent Isaiahs – First, Second and Third Isaiah[7] – most twentieth-century exegetes approached First Isaiah in relative isolation from the rest of the book.[8] During most of the twentieth century, the exegesis of First Isaiah was marked by a relative consensus. The main exegetical task was to identify and to describe the views and preaching of the historical prophet. To this end, scholars distinguished between 'authentic' and 'unauthentic' material within First Isaiah.[9] The approach was largely atomistic: the core of First Isaiah was perceived as being a collection of eighth-century texts to which divergent fragments had been added in the exilic and post-exilic periods. The understanding of the prophet's life and ministry was important for the exegesis. Isaiah was perceived as one of the great prophets, who lived and worked in eighth-century Jerusalem (c. 740-701 BCE). His forty-year-long ministry was usually divided into several stages.[10] Isaiah was described as a genius, a poet, and a great theologian.[11] The presumed 'life of the prophet' functioned as a starting point for the exegesis: passages from First Isaiah were connected with the various stages of his career. As one of the classical eighth-century prophets, Isaiah was regarded as having been essentially a prophet of judgement,[12] whose preaching was, at least in certain respects, radically new.[13] Since Isaiah was regarded as being essentially a prophet of judgement, passages from First Isaiah that promise salvation were disputed. Some exegetes held that Isaiah only preached judgement and doom and that words of salvation had to be unauthentic.[14] Others, taking a subtler view, argued that although he was a prophet of judgement, he spoke certain words of salvation as well.[15] In any case, the material of First Isaiah was analysed and reconstructed in conformity with the supposed spirit and teaching of the prophetic personality. The context of ancient Near Eastern prophecy played no role of importance for the study of First Isaiah.

In the second half of the twentieth century, the rise of redaction criticism led to an increased attention to the literary afterlife of the prophetic texts.[16] Scholarly focus moved from Isaiah as a prophetic personality to the book of Isaiah as a literary product. Whereas Hans Wildberger's commentary on First Isaiah,[17] focusing on Isaiah as a prophet-theologian,[18] can be characterised as the culmination of the earlier approach, Otto Kaiser's

[7] Duhm 1922. For an outline of Duhm's position, see Seitz 1991: 1-14.
[8] Höffken 2004: 27.
[9] Becker 1968: 44-68.
[10] Höffken 2004: 22.
[11] See e.g. Von Rad's qualification: 'Die Verkündigung Jesajas ist das gewaltigste theologische Phänomen des ganzen Alten Testamentes' (1960: 158).
[12] E.g. Becker 1968: 9; Herrmann 1965; Kilian 1983: 95; Kraus 1982: 464; Von Rad 1933: 109-121; 1960: 182-194; Würthwein 1952.
[13] E.g. Von Rad 1960: 421. See Kratz (2003b: 1-6) for the positions of Wellhausen, Duhm, Von Rad and Albertz on this issue.
[14] E.g. Kilian 1983: 96; Seebaß 1995: 315.
[15] E.g. Becker 1968: 13.
[16] Kraus 1982: 467; Kilian 1983: 139.
[17] Wildberger 1965-1982.
[18] Wildberger's commentary concludes with a synthesis of the prophetic ministry of the prophet Isaiah and his preaching (1965-82: 1577-1667). See Becker 1999: 135-136.

revised edition of his commentary on Isaiah 1-12 principally shifted the focus to the history of development of the book of Isaiah, away from the eighth-century prophet.[19]

Among scholars the insight grew that the various parts of the book of Isaiah were more intertwined than a strict application of the theory of a tripartite division allowed for.[20] The exegetical focus turned to the book of Isaiah as a whole, and the issue of the compositional, redactional and theological unity of the book became central to research.[21] As a result, the independent existence of Third Isaiah is usually rejected,[22] and the redactional relationship between a first and a second main part of the book has become a major issue.[23] These developments were consequential for the study of First Isaiah. It became accepted that this part of the book does not only contain early material, but also material from later, even from the latest, redactional stages. Furthermore, whereas scholars had previously focused on the prophetic personality, it was recently argued that the image of the prophets which emerges from the books called after them, such as the book of Isaiah, is first and foremost of a literary character.[24] Scholars have become increasingly aware of the gap between the book and the historical prophet, and some have even claimed the impossibility of bridging it.[25]

1.1.2 Approaches to the Book of Isaiah

Assyria Redaction

Whereas the exegesis of First Isaiah previously concentrated on the identification of the Isaianic material, implying that the 'unauthentic' texts were theologically less interesting, the rise of redaction criticism stimulated the appreciation of texts representing later developments of the prophetic tradition. One of the first major redaction-critical contributions to First Isaiah is Hermann Barth's study *Die Jesaja-Worte in der Josiazeit*.[26] Barth dealt with texts from First Isaiah relating to the contemporary Assyrian empire, which were, according to the scholarly majority of his time, not from Isaiah. Barth interpreted these texts as a coherent redaction of the earlier, Isaianic texts and situated them in the reign of Josiah (640/39-609 BCE).[27] By distinguishing between the Isaianic view of Assyria and a later, seventh-century view, Barth relieved the prophet Isaiah of a heavy burden, and proposed a coherent solution to a range of ambiguous passages. Barth

[19] Kaiser 1981.
[20] Becker 2004: 40.
[21] Steck 1996: 11-14; Becker 1999: 3-4.
[22] E.g. Steck's argument (1989: 361-406) that Isaiah 56-66 is not an independent composition but a series of textual expansions relating to the development of a 'Großjesaja'; similarly Rendtorff 1984: 295-320; Berges 1998: 13.
[23] E.g. Steck (1985: 80) argues that Isa 35 forms a redactional bridge between two formerly independent collections (a First and Second Isaiah), as part of a 'Great Isaiah redaction' to be dated to the Hellenistic period. By contrast, Williamson (1994: 113) qualifies Second Isaiah as a literary expansion to, and elaboration on, an earlier version of First Isaiah, carried out by an author who both depended on First Isaiah and edited it.
[24] Steck 1996: 9; Becker 1999: 6; 2004: 31; Ben Zvi 2003.
[25] E.g. Auld 1983; Carroll 1983; and effectively Kaiser 1981.
[26] Barth 1977.
[27] The main passages from First Isaiah which Barth attributes to the Assyria Redaction are 8:9-10; 8:23b-9:6; 10:16-19; 14:24-27; 17:12-14; 28:23-29; 30:27-33; 31:5.8b-9 and 32:1-5.15-20.

explained them as a literary continuation of the Isaiah tradition: an Assyria Redaction during the reign of Josiah. The value of his study lies in the meaningful interpretation of a series of passages regarded as non-Isaianic but nevertheless of importance. Despite his new approach, Barth remained within the boundaries of previous scholarship to First Isaiah: he saw Isaiah as a classical prophet of judgement and he attributed a great number of texts from First Isaiah to the historical prophet. As a result, Barth reckoned with the existence of an earlier version of First Isaiah, a 'Proto-Isaiah booklet', consisting of Isa 2-32*, in the late seventh century. Barth's ideas have found much scholarly approval, though in most cases with some modifications.[28]

Jacques Vermeylen proposed a similar view in his study *Du prophète Isaïe à l'apocalyptique*.[29] He identified several collections of eighth-century prophetic sayings as the core of the book of Isaiah.[30] As a result of elaborations on these collections during the reigns of Manasseh and Josiah, a Proto-Isaiah booklet (Isa 2-33*) came into existence at the end of the pre-exilic period.[31] Various later redactions, continuing into the second century BCE, ultimately produced the book of Isaiah. Ronald Clements adopted Barth's hypothesis in his commentary on First Isaiah. He modified Barth's view to some extent,[32] and characterised the seventh-century redaction as the Josiah Redaction.[33] Furthermore, in his study *Isaiah and the Deliverance of Jerusalem*, he qualified the story of 2 Kgs 18:17-19:37 (Isa 36-38) as a product of the same circles responsible for the Josiah Redaction.[34] With regard to the eighth-century material in First Isaiah, Clements maintained a traditional position. Though acknowledging that decisive criteria for dating prophecies to the eighth century are often lacking,[35] he nevertheless assumed the Isaianic character of many passages traditionally attributed to Isaiah. According to Clements, Isaiah himself laid the foundation for the book as he composed his memoirs of the Syro-Ephraimitic crisis, in Isa 6:1-8:18.[36] Furthermore, Clements described the prophet Isaiah in traditional terms, as 'one of the greatest figures of the religious and political story of ancient Israel'.[37]

Recent studies have elaborated on the hypothesis of a seventh-century redaction.[38] Erich Bosshard-Nepustil followed the suggestion of an Assyria Redaction and added an exilic Assyria-Babylonia Redaction that announced salvation after punishment, and a post-exilic

[28] For an overview of the positions of Barth, Vermeylen and Clements, see Höffken 2004: 29-33. Earlier, Mowinckel, in various studies (e.g. 1933), proposed a seventh-century development of the Isaiah tradition as being the work of a so-called Isaiah-school.
[29] Vermeylen 1977-78.
[30] See Vermeylen 1977-78: 656-657.
[31] See Vermeylen 1977-78: 673-692.
[32] Clements' main modifications consist of the attribution of 8:23b-9:6 to Isaiah himself, and the qualification of Isa 2-4 as resulting from a later, exilic redaction. This leads to a seventh-century Proto-Isaiah booklet of Isa 5-32*.
[33] The main passages from First Isaiah which Clements attributes to the Josiah Redaction are 8:9-10; 10:16-27.33-34; 14:24-27; 17:12-14; 28:23-29; 29:5-8; 30:27-33; 31:5.8-9 and 32:1-5.15-20.
[34] Clements 1980b: 95; cf. Clements, 1980a: 6.
[35] Clements, 1980a: 7.
[36] Clements, 1980a: 4.
[37] Clements, 1980a: 11.
[38] E.g. L'Heureux 1984; Sheppard 1985; Gonçalves 1986; Sweeney 1996b.

Babylonia Redaction concerned with restoration.[39] In this way, he produced a detailed redaction history of First Isaiah.[40] Furthermore, Jörg Barthel in his study *Prophetenwort und Geschichte* adopted Barth's thesis.[41] Barthel's study focuses on Isa 6-8 and 28-31, which are regarded in their literary core (Isa 6-8*, 28-31*) as stemming from the hand of Isaiah. In opposition to the proponents of a radical redaction criticism (see below), Barthel aimed to vindicate the historical Isaiah, but in a way that transcends the traditional, exegetical approach.[42] He made a principal distinction between the original, oral messages of Isaiah, relating to specific historical situations, and the later stage in which the messages were cast into written form by the prophet himself, thereby creating a new literary context for the prophecies. According to Barthel, the literary record of the prophetic words involved interpretation, which produced a literary context with its own constellation of meaning ('Sinnzusammenhang').[43] In addition, Barthel adopted Barth's theory of a seventh-century Assyria Redaction, which led to the assumption of a 'Proto-Isaiah booklet' (Isa 1-32*) in the late pre-exilic period. Among the recent commentaries on First Isaiah that have adopted the suggestion of a seventh-century Assyria Redaction, are those of Marvin Sweeney,[44] Joseph Blenkinsopp,[45] and Wim Beuken.[46]

Barth's position built on earlier scholarship, since the question he aimed to solve was based on a majority view among exegetes with regard to the issue of which texts from First Isaiah were Isaianic and which were not. Barth intended to clarify certain ambiguous passages that seemed to be of pre-exilic origin but that were difficult to harmonise with the preconceived picture of the prophet Isaiah. Thus, Barth provided a new answer to an old question.[47] Scholars who adopted the Assyria Redaction, on the one hand contributed to the new approach to the book of Isaiah by addressing the literary and redactional development of the prophetic heritage. On the other hand, they did not fundamentally question the traditional view of the earliest stage of the Isaiah tradition: the prophet Isaiah and his preaching.

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[39] Bosshard-Nepustil 1997.
[40] Bosshard-Nepustil 1997: 234-267.
[41] Barthel 1997.
[42] Barthel 1997: 465.
[43] Barthel 1997: 27; cf. 1997: 459, as a 'Sinnentwurf sui generis'.
[44] Sweeney (1996a) discerns an eighth-century Isaianic layer of 5:1-10:34; 14:24-27, and 28-32*, and a seventh-century Josianic edition, consisting of Isa 5-12; 14-23*; 27; 28-32; 36-37.
[45] Blenkinsopp 2000a. Blenkinsopp (2000a: 73-74) shows awareness of the recent shifts of focus in the study of Isaiah in qualifying the book as essentially a post-exilic literary construct, but nevertheless presumes a significant Isaianic substratum within First Isaiah. For the seventh-century Assyria Redaction, see Blenkinsopp 2000a: 91-92. Blenkinsopp (2000a: 88) reckons with the existence of a 'Proto-Isaiah booklet', an earlier version of First Isaiah in the pre-exilic period, with which, as he assumes, the author of Second Isaiah was familiar.
[46] Beuken on Isa 28-39 (Beuken 2000). Beuken proposes that the Assyria Redaction incorporated the Isaianic material, consisting of the units 28:1-29, 29:1-14, 29:15-24, 30:1-33 and 31:1-9, and considers the narratives of Isa 36-39 to be influenced by the Assyria Redaction.
[47] For a critical discussion of Barth's thesis, see Becker 1997: 212-219; 1999: 128-130.

Radical Redaction Criticism

An important shift in the exegesis of Isaiah was achieved by Otto Kaiser's revised commentary on Isaiah 1-12, in which he presented a radical redaction-critical analysis.[48] In Kaiser's view, the book of Isaiah is a product from the post-exilic period. Although he identified a small collection of earlier prophetic words, consisting of critical sayings and announcements of judgement, he attributed them to anonymous prophets from the late pre-exilic period rather than to Isaiah.[49] Kaiser's view was based on his understanding of Isa 6-8, the so-called *Denkschrift*, usually attributed to the eighth-century prophet, but regarded by Kaiser as a literary text from the fifth century.[50] From this understanding it followed for Kaiser that the other literary complexes within First Isaiah dated from a similarly late, or even later, period. Kaiser formulates his approach as: 'die Forderung […], dem Propheten grundsätzlich jedes Wort abzusprechen, das auch aus einer anderen Zeit erklärt werden kann'.[51] This principle and Kaiser's exegetical position have been strongly criticised.[52]

Uwe Becker strengthened the radically critical position in his study *Jesaja – von der Botschaft zum Buch*.[53] First, he made a stronger and more consistent case for a late dating of most parts of First Isaiah. According to Becker, the earliest, eighth-century material from First Isaiah is limited to a handful of passages, among them 6:1-8* and 8:1-4*.[54] The earliest redaction of these texts consisted of 6:9-11 and 8:5-8, and this redaction dates from the early post-exilic period. As a consequence, the rest of the book of Isaiah is of a still later date. Among the late redactional material we find Isa 1-4, qualified by Becker as various successive introductions, an anti-Assyrian Redaction, less extensive and dated considerably later than by Barth, and Isa 28-31, which according to Becker is dependent on the stories of Isa 36-38.[55] Becker's study changes the image of the historical Isaiah. The few fragments identified as Isaianic, portray Isaiah as a prophet of salvation who announced the destruction of Judah's enemies and who was closely connected to the court and cult of Jerusalem. It was only with the first (post-exilic) redaction of the Isaianic material (e.g. 6:9-11 and 8:5-8) that the prophet was turned into a preacher of judgement.[56] In this way, Becker turned the tradition view of the prophet Isaiah upside down.

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[48] Kaiser 1981.

[49] Kaiser 1981: 19-20. Later, Kaiser adopted a somewhat milder view, acknowledging the existence of a small collection of Isaianic sayings (Kaiser 1983: 4; 1994: 29-66).

[50] Kaiser 1981: 119.

[51] Kaiser 1983: 4.

[52] See e.g. Hardmeier 1986: 19. Hardmeier (1986: 5, 14-19) criticises the 'neo-literary-critical approach' of Kaiser and others for their radically late dating based on linguistic and stylistic observations and on claims of the literary dependency of Isaiah on other texts (such as Second Isaiah and Jeremiah) based on presumed text-text-relations. Hardmeier (1986: 17-18) particularly criticises Kaiser's claim that Isa 7:1-9, and by extension the complete Isaiah tradition in its early version, was influenced by Deuteronomistic theology.

[53] Becker 1997.

[54] In addition to 6:1-8* and 8:1-4*, Becker accepts 17:1b.3*; 18:1-2*; 20:3-4*; and 28:1-4*.7-10* as Isaianic.

[55] Becker 1997: 227.

[56] Becker 1997: 286-287.

Becker's study has met with criticism, but was also praised as a 'Zäsur in der Jesajaforschung', providing a basis for further research.[57] It may be noted that Becker, despite his critical position, still accepts the historicity of the prophet Isaiah and the possibility of approaching the historical prophet through redaction-historical analysis. Becker's position has been criticised, and rightly so in my view, for the two hundred-year gap that is assumed to exist between the Isaianic material and its earliest redaction.[58] It may be more likely that the Isaianic material had already been developed in the late pre-exilic and exilic period, rather than having remained dormant for two centuries.

The Book of Isaiah as a Literary Unity

Recent contributions, mainly by Anglo-American scholars, approach the book of Isaiah as a compositional and redactional unity.[59] Whereas some scholars have abandoned the historical-critical approach altogether in favour of a literary, synchronic approach,[60] others have combined a literary approach with a redaction-historical interest.[61] David Carr has described the recent search for thematic or intertextual unity within the book of Isaiah.[62] He discussed various macro-structural proposals regarding the book of Isaiah as a textual unity, such as chapter 35 or chapters 36-39 as a transition between two different parts of the book,[63] and chapters 1 and 65-66 as a cohesively paired introduction and conclusion to the book of Isaiah as a whole.[64] Carr argued that no single structural perspective successfully organises the book as a whole,[65] since redactors have added material without exhaustively integrating it or adapting the existing tradition to their conceptions.[66] Unity in the book of Isaiah is of a necessarily complex character,[67] or, in the words of Ulrich Berges, a 'disziplinierter Chaos'.[68]

Further contributions to the study of the book of Isaiah as a whole and the search for unity within the book include the publications of Rolf Rendtorff,[69] and the study by Berges, *Das Buch Jesaja*, in which a synchronic and a diachronic analysis of the book of Isaiah are combined.[70] Berges argued that the literary study of the book of Isaiah in its final form cannot be separated from redaction-critical study focusing on the intentions of the final editors, the community of intended readers, and on the question of the historical development of the book of Isaiah.[71] The unity of the book is the result of a long process.

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[57] Dietrich 1999: 335 and 337.
[58] Dietrich 1999: 336-337; Barthel 2003: 135.
[59] See e.g. Melugin and Sweeney (eds) 1996; Broyles and Evans (eds) 1997; Tate 1996.
[60] E.g. Watts 1985; 1987; O'Connell 1994.
[61] E.g. Seitz (1991) attempts to explain the development of the Isaiah tradition by considering Isa 36-39 as a bridge between a First and a Second Isaiah.
[62] Carr 1993.
[63] Isa 35: Steck 1985. Isa 36-39: Ackroyd 1982; Clements 1982; Sweeney 1988: 32-34; Laato 1998.
[64] Sweeney 1988: 21-24, 97-98; Tomasino 1993.
[65] Carr 1993: 70-71.
[66] Carr 1993: 77-78.
[67] Rendtorff 1996.
[68] Berges 1998: 46.
[69] Rendtorff 1984; 1989.
[70] Berges 1998. For an overview of Berges' study, see Höffken 2004: 74-78.
[71] See also Deist 1989: 12-13.

It has become generally acknowledged that priority should be given to the text, i.e. to the book of Isaiah in its final form. This twofold change of focus, from the prophet to the text and from parts of the text to the whole, has been called a paradigm shift in the study of Isaiah.[72] The study of the text however must also include the historical question of how the text has come into being, i.e. the question concerning the development of the Isaiah tradition into the book. Scholars have rightly argued that the point of exegetical departure must be what we have, the text of Isaiah, and not any preconception about the historical prophet and his preaching. However, exploration of the origins and earliest development of the Isaiah tradition remains part of the exegetical agenda.[73]

1.1.3 Approaches to the Prophet

Isaiah the Eighth-Century Prophet

When we come to the study of the prophet Isaiah, the first thing to be noted is that the shifts of focus discussed above have hardly altered the view of Isaiah as a classical prophet at all. In the words of Uwe Becker: 'das Interesse an der Prophetenperson und ihrem "Ausnahmecharakter" [ist] ungebrochen'.[74] The nineteenth-century understanding of the preaching of the great prophets as 'ethical monotheism' (Kuenen, Wellhausen, Duhm) may have been replaced by labels such as social criticism and the uncompromising preaching of judgement, the great prophets and their preaching generally maintained a unique status.[75]

Scholars with a historical interest tend to attribute a maximum number of texts to the historical Isaiah.[76] Walter Dietrich, for instance, aiming to describe Isaiah's political theology,[77] discerned three political crises during Isaiah's ministry, 734-733, 713-711 and 705-701 BCE, and argued that Isaiah prophesied both the punishment of Assyria which implied salvation for Judah, and the punishment of Judah because of the anti-Assyrian policy. Dietrich solved the apparent contradiction by assuming a radical change in Isaiah's preaching from a prophecy of salvation to a prophecy of judgement.[78] Jesper Høgenhaven, who in his study *Gott und Volk bei Jesaja* explored Isaiah's theological position,[79] also suggested biographic solutions to apparent contradictions within the proposed corpus of Isaianic texts. Though the prophet announced salvation for Judah until the destruction of the Northern Kingdom, afterwards, provoked by Hezekiah's anti-Assyrian policy, his message changed to announcements of judgement and doom. In a similar way Antti Laato in his study *Who is Immanuel?* explained the origin of the messianic expectation against the

[72] E.g. Berges 1998: 11; Blenkinsopp 2000a: 73; Becker 2004: 31. See further Gordon 1995; Deist 1989; Steck 1996: 7-14.
[73] According to Berges, redaction-historical analysis is a necessary part of the study of Isaiah, and 'der hypothesenartige Charakter der zu erzielenden Ergebnisse sollte nicht abschrecken, sondern gehört zu den Lasten jeder Wissenschaft' (1998: 47). Similarly Steck 1996: 122.
[74] Becker 2004: 33; cf. 2002a: 12.
[75] Becker 2004: 33-34.
[76] See also Becker 1999: 132.
[77] Dietrich 1976.
[78] Dietrich 1976: 101-114.
[79] Høgenhaven 1988.

background of Isaiah's biography.[80] By taking 9:1-6 and 11:1-9 as Isaianic, Laato suggests Isaiah's messianic hope was born in a situation of crisis (734-733 BCE).[81]

These studies work from the basic assumption that Isaiah is one of the classical prophets from the eighth century, who stood in opposition to the establishment of his time. This assumption however is at least to some extent at odds with recent exegetical developments focusing on the prophetic books. The new approach to the book of Isaiah certainly leaves room for a historical prophet, but asks for a reconsideration of the traditional preconceptions concerning the historical prophet and his preaching.

Judgement and Salvation

The joint occurrence of prophecies of salvation and prophecies of judgement within First Isaiah has been a subject of ongoing discussion. Among the solutions proposed, we find theological, rhetorical, biographical and literary-critical explanations.[82] Wildberger attempted to bring both perspectives together on a theological level.[83] Others explained it as part of the prophet's rhetoric, for instance Georg Fohrer, who considered Isaiah a prophet of repentance whose words of judgement had a pedagogic intention.[84] The converse was supported by Hans Walter Wolff who saw Isaiah as a prophet of judgement whose call for repentance referred to a stage already past.[85] Others tried to solve the contradiction against the background of changes during the life of the prophet, who initially preached salvation and later on judgement. This was the argument of Høgenhaven (see above) and Hans Werner Hoffmann, who suggested that Isaiah called for repentance, until he understood in 701 BCE that Judah had lost its chance of escaping judgement.[86]

Rudolf Kilian attempted to solve the matter by arguing that all passages proclaiming salvation and repentance were by definition not Isaianic. In his view, Isaiah had 'nie etwas verkündet, was mit einem Verstockungsauftrag von allem Anfang an nicht vereinbar wäre'.[87] Similarly, Wolfgang Werner argued that Isaiah is the 'Prophet der Verstockung Israels',[88] whereas all mentions of salvation are of post-exilic origin.[89] This position has been criticised for being a *petitio principii*.[90] Most scholars accepted that prophecy of

[80] Laato 1988.
[81] The extreme position for the tendency to attribute as much as possible from First Isaiah to the historical prophet is represented by Hayes and Irvine 1987 and Gitay 1991.
[82] Köckert (2003: 105-111) provides an overview of solutions suggested by Von Rad, Wildberger, Fohrer, Kilian and Joachim Becker. The latter suggested that prophecy of salvation was a fundamental aspect of Isaiah's repertoire (Isa 7:10-16, 8:1-4, 9:1-6, 11:1-5), and concluded 'daß man dem Propheten den Character eines *Heilspropheten* im üblichen Sinne nicht absprechen kann' (Becker 1968: 29). Yet, according to Joachim Becker, Isaiah also prophesied Judah's punishment.
[83] Similarly Barth 1977: 52, 189; Hardmeier 1986: 27-31.
[84] Fohrer believes that the aim of preaching judgement was repentance: 'Es wird kein Gericht geben, wenn der Mensch von seinem bösen Wege auf den Weg des göttlichen Willens umkehrt! Das steht im Hintergrund aller Worte des Propheten' (1960: 37).
[85] Wolff 1977; similarly Schmidt 1977.
[86] Hoffmann 1974.
[87] Kilian 1983: 130. For the term *Verstockungsauftrag*, see under 'The Isaiah Memoir' below.
[88] Werner 1982: 12.
[89] Werner 1982: 197.
[90] Becker 1999: 29; cf. Gordon 1995: 15.

salvation in one way or another was part of Isaiah's prophetic preaching. However, it was generally agreed that prophecy of judgement played the decisive role in his preaching. Isaiah was essentially, although according to most scholars not exclusively, a prophet of judgement.[91]

In recent contributions, the battlefield has to some extent been shifted from the level of the historical prophet to later, redactional stages. Jürgen Werlitz, for instance, exploring Isa 7:1-17 and 29:1-8 – both texts combining themes of salvation and punishment – argued that these passages originate from the exilic period or later. In the case of 29:1-8, he discerned a literary-critical distinction between words of judgement, from an exilic origin, and words of salvation, from a post-exilic origin.[92] Furthermore, 7:1-17, in Werlitz's view, is in its literary core an exilic composition that deliberately juxtaposes salvation and judgement.[93] However, even among adherents of a radical redaction-historical approach, the debate concerning the character of the historical Isaiah continued. Whereas Kaiser maintained the image of Isaiah as a prophet of judgement, Becker described him as a prophet of salvation.[94]

The joint occurrence of prophecy of salvation and prophecy of judgement within First Isaiah has not been decisively solved, and no image of the prophet Isaiah can be taken for granted. A possible indicator of a solution may be pointed out here. It has been broadly accepted that Isaiah's message contained *some* positive aspects, such as the Immanuel prophecy (7:14-16) and the announcement of destruction of Judah's enemies (8:1-4, 28:1-4). A popular way of dealing with these positive aspects was to suggest that they had been part of Isaiah's preaching but had been, in one way or another, overruled. Either the positive message had been conditional from the outset and thus implicitly overruled by the disbelief of the recipients, or Isaiah's message had initially (partly) been positive, but at a later stage during his prophetic career changed into prophecy of judgement. In any case, the positive aspects represent an earlier, superseded stage, whereas prophecy of judgement, characterising Isaiah as a classical prophet, became decisive for Isaiah's message. This transition from 'earlier' (positive) to 'later' (negative) has traditionally been projected onto the life of the prophet. However, given the recent shift in the exegesis of Isaiah, it would be natural to suggest that this transition may have taken place at some stage in the redactional development of the Isaiah tradition. Becker has formulated the question as follows: 'Ist die 'unheilstheologische Wende' *biographisch-psychologisch* aus dem Leben des Propheten heraus oder aber *literarisch-redaktionsgeschichtlich* mit der Buchwerdung zu erklären?'[95]

In my view, the second alternative merits serious attention (though I would like to stress that this need not result in a one-dimensional picture of the historical Isaiah as a 'Heilsprophet'). The exegetical issue of what kind of prophet emerges from the earliest layer of the Isaiah tradition, is of course related to a broader, religious-historical question: are the 'classical prophets' a specific type of prophets, or do they represent a specific image

[91] Deck 1991.
[92] Werlitz 1992: 307-320.
[93] Werlitz 1992: 213-250.
[94] Becker 1997: 286-287.
[95] Becker 2004: 57; similarly Collins 1993: 13.

of prophets, which exists in the biblical literature but not in the ancient world? Again, the second alternative deserves consideration (see 1.2.4 below).

The Isaiah Memoir

Isa 6-8, traditionally called the Isaiah memoir (*Denkschrift*), has played a decisive role in scholarly views of the relation between the historical Isaiah and the text of First Isaiah. For a great scholarly majority, Isaiah is the author of an early version of Isa 6-8. This perception defines the view of Isaiah as a 'writing prophet', which subsequently can be used as a model for the rest of First Isaiah. Similarly, scholars who challenged this common view, such as Kaiser and Becker, took as their point of departure the *Denkschrift* as well; a change of view on the *Denkschrift* led to a different assessment of First Isaiah as a whole.[96]

Traditionally, two elements within the Isaiah memoir are considered of particular importance. In the first place, 6:9-11 is commonly regarded as the testimony *par excellence* for Isaiah as a prophet of judgement and, by extension, as a *locus classicus* of biblical prophecy:[97]

> He (Yahweh) said, 'Go and say to this people: Keep listening, but do not comprehend; keep looking, but do not understand. Make the mind of this people dull, and stop their ears, and shut their eyes, so that they may not look with their eyes, and listen with their ears (...). Then I said, How long, O Yahweh? And he said: Until cities lie waste without inhabitant, and houses without people, and the land is utterly desolate.

Secondly, 7:9b, the conclusion of a prophecy to Ahaz, 'If you do not stand firm in faith, you shall not stand at all', was believed to identify Isaiah as the originator of the concept of faith as a condition for salvation. This has been often interpreted as an important moment in the history of prophecy. Whereas prophets in Israel and among other nations, for centuries had promised salvation *tout court*, Isaiah, as one of the first classical prophets, demanded faith as a condition for salvation, and, when this condition was not met, announced Yahweh's punishment instead. It was held that the prophet Isaiah was the author of 6:1-8:18 in its literary core, and that this text represented his memoirs concerning the so-called Syro-Ephraimitic crisis (734-732 BCE).[98] This position functioned as an important pillar in twentieth-century exegesis of First Isaiah, and has remained popular.[99] The image of Isaiah following from this position was that of a preacher of judgement and as an apostle of the condition of faith. This view, however, has become challenged.

First, doubt was raised by the observation that 6:9-10, the hardening order (*Verstockungsauftrag*), as it is formulated (see the quotation above) cannot be qualified as a prophetic *announcement*, but must be regarded as *reflection* on the prophetic task.

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[96] In the preface to his commentary on Isaiah 1-12, Kaiser (1981: 9) explains that his understanding of the *Denkschrift* was fundamental to his assessment of First Isaiah as a whole. Once it is allowed that the *Denkschrift* is a composition reflecting the situation of the sixth century, the rest follows almost automatically.

[97] Becker 1999: 146.

[98] For the understanding of Isa 6-8 as Isaiah's memoir, the views of Bernhard Duhm and Karl Budde have been of fundamental importance, see Barthel 1997: 38; Reventlow 1987: 62-67.

[99] E.g. Barthel 1997: 60-65; Blum 1996: 550-552; Clements 2000: 89-102.

Generally, scholars attempted to overcome this difficulty in either of two ways. Some proposed to distinguish between the present formulation of 6:9-10, which might be secondary, and the message of hardening as such, which from the outset was part of Isaiah's prophetic preaching.[100] However the interpretation of 6:9-10 as the product of Isaiah's own reflection has become more popular: 'Jesaja verarbeitet produktiv seine Erfahrungen des Scheiterns seiner Botschaft als gottgewollten Vorgang'.[101] In this way, 6:9-10 effectively is Isaiah's reformulation of what he during his ministry had come to understand as Yahweh's intention.[102]

The weakness of this solution is that it requires speculation on the life of the historical prophet and his psyche. Some scholars have therefore proposed a different solution. Uwe Becker and Ulrich Berges have argued on literary-critical, redaction-historical, but particularly on intent-critical (*tendenz-kritische*) grounds, that the 'message' of 6:9-11 must be separated from the vision report preceding it (6:1-8). They believe that the vision report in an earlier version was reinterpreted and reworked from a judgement-theological perspective in the exilic or post-exilic period (6:9-11).

A second point of doubt follows from the interpretation of 7:1-17. Whereas Isa 6 and 8 are first-person accounts (Isaiah is narrator), 7:1-17 is a third-person account about Isaiah.[103] Furthermore, it has become clear that 7:1-17 is related to other texts, such as 2 Kgs 16 and 2 Kgs 18-20 (Isa 36-39). Various scholars, such as Kaiser, Becker and Werlitz, have suggested a (post)exilic origin for 7:1-17, interpreting the account as reflecting the Hezekiah stories of 2 Kgs 18-20 (Isa 36-38) and as presenting Ahaz as the antitype of Hezekiah.[104] This does not exclude the possibility that 7:1-17 embodies earlier, prophetic material, but it renders the view of 7:1-17 as an account written by Isaiah unlikely.

Once it is realised that Isa 6-8 is not a literary unity *aus einem Guß* but a redactional composition, the authorship of Isaiah needs to be reconsidered. Furthermore, the Isaianic provenance of the hardening order (6:9-10) and the principle of the condition of faith (7:9b) are to be reconsidered too. The *Denkschrift*-hypothesis can no longer function as a pillar of the exegesis of First Isaiah.[105]

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[100] E.g. Von Rad 1960: 158-162.

[101] Höffken 2004: 119. This is the position of Wildberger 1965-82: 242. Furthermore, Hardmeier (1986: 24 and 28) qualifies the announcement of hardening (*Verstockung*) in 6:9-10 as fictive, and reflective of the failure of Isaiah's preceding preaching, but nevertheless maintains Isaiah's authorship of 6:1-8:18. See further Hardmeier 1986: 22: 'allein schon die Textform von Jes 6,1-8,8* [weist] das Dargestellte als Retrospektive aus'.

[102] This has sometimes been designated as a retrojection of Isaiah's negative experiences as a prophet. For this discussion, see Hardmeier 1986: 21-24.

[103] The proposal to change 7:1-17 into a first-person account has to be rejected. E.g. Barthel 1997: 120; Reventlow 1987: 65.

[104] Kaiser 1981: 143-144; Werlitz 1992: 225-231; Becker 1997: 24-60. Among the scholars that have suggested a connection between 7:1-17 and 2 Kgs 18-20 (Isa 36-38) also Ackroyd (1982; 1984) and Blenkinsopp (2000b) can be mentioned.

[105] Cf. Reventlow 1987: 67.

1.1.4 The Current State of Affairs

The discussion between Uwe Becker and Jörg Barthel illustrates the current state of affairs with regard to the prophetic books in general and that of Isaiah in particular.[106] Whereas Becker's minimum amount of early material characterises Isaiah as a 'Heilsprophet',[107] Barthel reckons that a substantial literary layer within Isa 6-8 and 28-31 can be attributed to the hand of Isaiah or one of his disciples.[108] Becker and Barthel agree however on various important issues: 1) The search for the origins of the prophetic books, and thus for the earliest stages of the prophetic traditions, is an indispensable aspect of critical exegesis.[109] 2) The point of departure for this search can only be what we have to hand: the written texts of the prophetic books, and not what we have in mind: concepts of the historical prophet and his preaching.[110] 3) The words of Isaiah are not directly accessible since they have been integrated in written compositions. Their *Sitz im Leben* is overshadowed by their *Sitz in der Literatur*.[111]

Becker and Barthel agree that Isa 6-8, the *Denkschrift*, in its literary core (6:1-11, 7:1-17, 8:1-18) is 'eine gewachsene Größe'.[112] Within Isa 6 and 8, both make a distinction between *prophetic material* representing the initial preaching of Isaiah – i.e. the vision of Isa 6*[113] and a prophecy against Ephraim and Aram in 8:1-4 – and *reflective material* that belongs to the literary level of Isa 6 and 8 as written compositions, e.g. 6:9-10 and 8:5-8.[114] However, Barthel and Becker fundamentally disagree with regard to the provenance of the earliest composition, 6:1-11 and 8:1-18. In his monograph, Barthel argued that Isaiah himself wrote it shortly after the events of 734-732 BCE, affected by the rejection of his words by the people. The compositions 6:1-11 and 8:1-18 are marked by the prophet's later insight that the rejection of his words was due to Yahweh's will and that the punishment of

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[106] Becker 2003; Barthel 2003. Recently, Wagner (2006) published a monograph on Isa 6:1-9:6. In his view, the earliest, eighth-century layer of the *Denkschrift* consists of 7:2-8a.9-14.16-17; 8:1-4.6-8, whereas 6:1-11*, 7:20 and 9:1-6, which he equally considers as Isaianic material, were added to it during later stages. Whereas Wagner's assessment of Isa 6:1-9:6 to an important extent (in particular with regard to Isa 6 and 8) resembles that of Barthel 1997, I find Barthel's analysis of 7:1-17 as a later reworking of early oracular material, and of 9:1-6 as part of a seventh-century redaction, more convincing than that of Wagner. In general, Wagner remains close to the traditional position by attributing the following aspects to the preaching of the historical prophet: 1) an initially supportive message (7:2-9*, 14-17*, 20; 8:1-4); 2) announcements of judgement over Judah (6:9-11; 8:6-8); and 3) a vision of future peace (9:1-6). The importance of Wagner's study lies in the traditio-historical investigation of the material included in Isa 6:1-9:6.

[107] Becker 1997: 286; Becker 2003: 119, 123.

[108] For an overview of their positions, see Köckert 2003: 114-116.

[109] Becker 2003: 117; Barthel 2003: 133.

[110] Becker 2003: 123; Barthel 2003: 125, 133.

[111] Becker 2003: 123; Barthel 2003: 133. In this respect, Barthel and Becker stand in opposition to the assumption by earlier scholarship that prophetic words can be lifted up from their literary context with relative ease (cf. Höffken 2004: 23). According to Barthel, the prophetic words cannot be easily grasped, since the basic literary context in which they are included is already characterised by reflection on, and interpretation of, the prophetic words.

[112] Becker 2003: 122; Barthel 2003: 130.

[113] Whereas Becker discerns an original vision report (6:1-8*), Barthel acknowledges an original visionary *experience* of Isaiah behind 6:1-8, but not an original report.

[114] Becker 2003: 120-122; Barthel 2003: 129-132.

the people had become irreversible.[115] The *Verstockungsauftrag* (6:9-10), in Barthel's view, is not part of the original visionary experience, nor is it fictitious (contra Becker). Instead, it follows from Isaiah's reflection on the rejection of his words.[116] Within 6:1-11, two radically different experiences of Isaiah merge: an earlier visionary experience (behind 6:1-8), and a later experience that the people rejected his message (behind 6:9-11). Yet, Barthel does not accept a literary-critical distinction between 6:1-8 and 6:9-11.[117]

Becker, in a continuation of his earlier thesis, suggests the existence of a small collection of Isaianic words (6:1-8*, 8:1-4*, and some further texts), preserved in a Jerusalem archive. Some time after the collapse of the Judaean state in the sixth century, these prophetic words underwent a literary reworking, marked by *Unheilstheologie* (e.g. 6:9-11*, 8:5-8*). This reworking represented the birth of prophecy of judgement and formed the initial stage of the development of the prophetic books.[118] Whereas the 'unheilstheologische Wende' between 8:1-4 and 8:5-8 is obvious,[119] the case of 6:1-11 is more ambiguous. On the one hand, a literary-critical distinction between 6:1-8 and 6:9-11 cannot be decisively proven.[120] On the other, 6:9-10 is evidently formulated secondarily, and attempts to attribute it to the level of the historical Isaiah are equally uncertain.[121]

Barthel and Becker both regard 7:1-17 as a *Fremdkörper* within Isa 6-8.[122] In his monograph, Barthel qualified 7:1-17 as a 'Neugestaltung' of earlier, prophetic words, which is marked by a dynastic-critical tendency and which reacts to the disastrous events of 701 BCE.[123] Becker, by contrast, proposes the literary dependency of 7:1-17 on the Hezekiah stories, 2 Kgs 18-20 // Isa 36-39, and argues that 7:1-17 deliberately pictures Ahaz as an antitype of Hezekiah.[124] In my view, Becker is right to regard 7:1-17 as mirroring the Hezekiah stories: Ahaz is purposefully portrayed as an antitype of Hezekiah, and Barthel's argument for regarding 7:1-17 as the earlier composition is unconvincing.[125] Barthel on the other hand is right to distinguish within 7:1-17 between the composition and the earlier prophetic material included in it. Whereas the 'unheilsprophetische' outlook of

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[115] Barthel 1997: 81, 109-110. For a similar position, see Blum 1996; 1997.
[116] Barthel 1997: 106-107; 2003: 129.
[117] Barthel 2003: 128-129.
[118] Becker 2003: 120-122.
[119] Becker 2003: 120; Barthel 2003: 131-133.
[120] Barthel 2003: 128. Becker's main trump is the intent-critical argument that 6:9-11 aims to explain the sixth-century disasters as having been caused by Yahweh himself. Becker (2003: 121) characterises this as a 'Versuch einer Theodicee', which is criticised by Barthel 2003: 128.
[121] According to Barthel (2003: 129), Isa 6:1-11 combines Isaiah's memories of a visionary experience in the past (his commission as a prophet) and his later experience that the message he preached was rejected. Barthel argues that the *Verstockungsauftrag* resolves the conflict between intent and effect of the prophetic message by attributing it to Yahweh, but has to admit: 'aber auf der Ebene der prophetischen Erfahrung bleibt er ungelöst'.
[122] Becker 2003: 122; Barthel 2003: 130.
[123] Barthel 1997: 151-153.
[124] Becker 2003: 122-123; see further Becker 1997: 21-60.
[125] Barthel (2003: 130) argues that since the announcement of 7:17 relates to the events of 701 BCE, and since it depicts the events as disastrous, 7:1-17 cannot be dependent on the Hezekiah stories, which present the events of 701 from a focus on Jerusalem's salvation. However, the question of whether 7:1-17 depends on the Hezekiah stories must be decided through textual analysis (see chapter 2.1.2) and the connection between 7:1-17 and 701 BCE does not hold.

7:1-17 presents Yahweh's judgement on the Davidic dynasty as a whole (7:9b, 7:13-14a.17), the 'heilprophetische' oracles are addressed to Ahaz as an individual (7:4-9a, 7:14b.16).[126] The essence of Becker's approach to Isa 6 and 8 is the distinction between the original 'heilprophetische' words and their later 'unheilstheologische' edition. It is difficult to understand why Becker does not apply a similar approach to 7:1-17. That 7:1-17 as a composition reflects the Hezekiah stories, does not exclude the possibility that it incorporates earlier prophetic material. The composition 7:1-17 has a profoundly negative tendency,[127] but it incorporates prophetic words that are marked by a positive tone.

Both Barthel and Becker make a distinction within Isa 6-8 between the earliest material representing prophetic activity and a later, reflective, literary context. Whereas the early material has a positive nature, the later reflective material has a markedly negative nature. The question is however how to qualify the basic literary compositions of Isa 6:1-11 and 8:1-18. In his recent contribution, Barthel no longer explicitly identifies Isaiah as the author, but he still argues for an early date close to the prophetic preaching. His first argument is that Becker's explanation, which assumes a two hundred-year gap between the prophetic words in the eighth century and their first literary reworking in the early post-exilic period, is inadequate.[128] In this, I agree with Barthel (see below). Secondly, Barthel argues that the more we explain the prophetic books as products of later reflection, the more we lose the incalculable speaking and acting of God which the prophets announced and which determines the beginning and direction of the tradition process. The biblical God of history is then killed by reflection, and becomes a God of theory.[129] This theological argument ignores the fact that the entire prophetic tradition is presented in the shape of 'nachträgliche theologische Reflexion' – be it from the hand of Isaiah himself or from (much) later redactors.[130] More importantly, this argument reveals a theological *parti pris*.[131] Barthel, in the end, demands an exceptional status for the biblical prophets such as Isaiah.[132] This is at odds with the current view that the point of departure and the grounds of exegesis cannot be a perception of the historical prophet, but only the text.

Becker defends a principal distinction between the prophetic words and their literary edition. He enforces his argument by pointing out the analogy between Isaiah and the Assyrian prophets as being both *Heilspropheten*.[133] Barthel opposes this by stating that the issue of the 'proprium' of Old Testament prophecy is oversimplified when similarity with

[126] Barthel 2003: 130.
[127] Contra Becker 2003: 123.
[128] Barthel 2003: 135.
[129] Barthel 2003: 135.
[130] Becker 2004: 47-48.
[131] Cf. Barthel's disqualification of critical exegesis as an exponent of a general 'säkularisierten Bewusstseins' (2003: 135).
[132] Isaiah's words may somewhat resemble the ancient Near Eastern oracles but the driving force behind his 'Heilsworten' is not the well-being of the state, the dynasty or the temple, but 'die Wahrnehmung des "Heiligen Israels" als der Tiefendimension aller Geschichte' (Barthel 2003: 132-133).
[133] Becker 2003: 117-119; cf. 1997: 287.

ancient Near Eastern prophecy becomes the criterion for the exegetical analysis.[134] As an appeal for methodological care, this criticism is justified (see 1.3.1 below).

Neither Barthel's nor Becker's position is fully convincing. Becker's main thesis falters since it is incomprehensible why a post-exilic author would suddenly pick up some fragments of ancient *Heilsprophetie* kept away for two centuries, in order to rework them into compositions of *Unheilstheologie*.[135] Barthel's portrayal of Isaiah as not only a deliverer of prophetic words but also as an interpreter who afterwards reflected on his own message and reworked it into literary compositions, has not been made historically plausible either. A critical review of their respective positions however shows a direction for further study.

1) The discussion of the positions of Barthel and Becker leads to the suggestion that a distinction can be made between early *prophetic material* (6:1-8, 7:4-9a, 7:14b.16, 8:1-4) on the one hand, and later *reflective material* (6:9-11, 7:9b, 7:13-14a.17; 8:5-8) that marks the literary composition of Isa 6-8 in its basic form on the other. Isa 6-8* is a literary composition in which earlier prophetic words are incorporated, and the intent of the literary composition clearly differs from the earlier, prophetic words.

2) The literary Isaiah presented in the book must be carefully distinguished from the historical prophet, who can only be a result of reconstruction.[136] The search for the historical prophet, the words to be attributed to him, and their earliest, literary development, should however not only be a literary-critical, but also a historical exercise. The literary development of the prophetic tradition must be illuminated from a historical perspective, and the reconstruction of the historical prophet must be historically plausible. Exegetical analysis should be guided by historical awareness, and not by a theological *parti pris*.[137]

3) The historical question about the eighth-century prophet cannot be solved by the study of the book of Isaiah alone.[138] It is not unreasonable to expect that the historical prophets, to a greater or lesser extent, resembled their ancient Near Eastern counterparts.[139] It is however of methodological importance to bring in the analogy at the right moment, i.e. *after* the exegetical and historical analysis, and not as a criterion for it, and to carry out a complete comparison instead of just claiming similarity.

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[134] Barthel 2003: 134. Further criticism relates to Becker's dependence on terminological argumentation and 'Sprachstatistik', and the ease of dating passages from First Isaiah late by claiming literary dependence on parts from other biblical books; see Barthel 2003: 133. Hardmeier's criticism (1986: 5, 14-19) against the 'neo-literary-criticism' of Kaiser, to a great extent applies to Becker too (see note 52).

[135] Dietrich 1999: 336; Barthel (2003: 135) states: 'die Frage, warum das schmale jesajanische Erbe überhaupt eine geradezu explosionsartig sich entwickelnde literarische Arbeit freigesetz hat, bleibt ungeklärt'.

[136] Barthel 2003: 126-127.

[137] Contra Barthel 2003: 135.

[138] Becker 1999: 152.

[139] Becker 2003: 119.

1.2 Recent Developments in the Study of Prophecy

1.2.1 The Rise of the Comparative Study of Prophecy

With the discovery of the royal archives of Nineveh at the end of the nineteenth century, the first direct evidence of Mesopotamian prophecy, the Assyrian prophecies from the seventh century BCE, became available. Despite their availability in transliteration and translation,[140] the Assyrian prophecies for many decades hardly received any attention. Their neglect – in Manfred Weippert's words their "Aschenputteldasein" – continued into the 1970s.[141]

It was the prophecies in the Old Babylonian letters from Mari, discovered since the 1930s, which effectuated an important shift in the study of prophecy. Some time after the first discoveries it had become widely recognised that the Mari archives contained a number of letters reporting prophetic oracles that were to be seen as a counterpart to Israelite prophecy.[142] Martin Noth, for instance, pointed out that the similarities between prophecy in Mari and in the Old Testament were undeniable and significant, because 'etwas wirklich Vergleichbares sich sonst in der ganzen Welt des alten Orients bisher nicht gefunden hat'.[143] This not only confirms that the Assyrian prophecies were often ignored as a counterpart to Israelite prophecy, but it also shows how the Mari prophecies fitted into a concept of historical development as a forerunner of Israelite prophecy. In Noth's view it could not be doubted that the Mari prophets to some extent paralleled the Old Testament prophets, since both functioned as messengers of the divine. The Mari prophets however represented a preceding stage of prophecy.[144]

The Mari prophecies were held to provide insight into the prehistory of prophecy and to resemble Israelite prophecy on the level of primitive, pre-classical, ecstatic prophecy.[145] However, with regard to the *content* of the prophetic messages, the gap between Mari and the Old Testament was regarded as huge, especially with regard to the great prophets. For Noth, any comparison in content between the biblical prophecies and the Mari prophecies was out of the question.[146] As formulated in his *Geschichte Israels*: 'Wir kennen zu dieser Erscheinung der "Prophetie" (i.e. biblical prophecy) kein wirkliches Gegenstück aus der Geschichte der Menschheit.'[147] This represented a common view of biblical scholarship. The classical prophets from the eighth-century onwards, it was held, had no counterpart in the ancient Near Eastern world. As formulated by Hans-Joachim Kraus:

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[140] For the earliest publications, see Parpola's bibliography (1997: CIX-CX).
[141] Weippert 1985: 56; 2001a: 32-33. Notable exceptions are Greßmann (1914), who pointed out similarities between the Assyrian prophecies and Second Isaiah, and Langdon (1914), who observed that 'the similarity of style between these oracles and the Hebrew Prophets is altogether striking' (1914: 146); cf. also Guillaume 1938: 48; Herrmann 1965: 55-59.
[142] Schmitt 1982: 7; cf. already Haldar 1945: 90.
[143] Noth 1957: 239.
[144] Noth 1957: 239.
[145] For an overview of the literature on Mari, including studies dealing with prophecy, see Heintz 1990: 17-124, and subsequent updates, Heinz 1992-98.
[146] Noth 1957: 241.
[147] Noth 1956: 232.

> Dominant ist also die Gerichtsbotschaft. Ob überhaupt und in welchem Ausmaß Heilsankündigungen mit der Gerichtsbotschaft der vorexilischen Propheten verbunden waren, wird von Fall zu Fall sorgfältig zu ermitteln sein. Eines ist gewiß: Zu diesem Auftreten der alttestamentlichen Propheten gibt es kein wirkliche Parallele in der Geschichte der Religionen, allenfalls partielle Berührungspunkte.[148]

The Mari prophecies effected a change within the study of prophecy, which the Assyrian prophecies had failed to do. Several reasons may be mentioned for this. First, the Assyrian prophecies were ignored partly because they were in most cases not clearly presented as prophecies.[149] Second, the Mari prophecies were more easily accessible.[150] Third, the early provenance of the Mari prophecies, in the eighteenth century BCE, helped their popularity as the example of extra-biblical prophecy *par excellence*, whereas the seventh-century date of the Assyrian oracles added to their marginality. The Mari prophecies conveniently fitted in a historical scheme of development representing a kind of primitive, pre-classical prophecy, far removed in time from the great classical prophets. The Assyrian prophecies, by contrast, dated from what was considered the heyday of classical prophecy, which according to scholarly preconceptions was beyond comparison. A fourth reason for the neglect of the Assyrian oracles may lie in the fact that prophetic activity was considered to be typical of West-Semitic culture and alien to Mesopotamian culture.[151] This worked well for the Mari prophecies, which were explained as being influenced by the West-Semitic population stratum of northern Mesopotamia. Again, the Assyrian prophecies did not fit into the scholarly preconceptions.[152]

The uniqueness of the classical prophets was usually related to their social criticism and their prophecy of judgement. Furthermore, it was often held that their unique preaching grounded in their perception of history as the playground of the realisation of Yahweh's plan. The prophetic perception of history was regarded as unparalleled.[153] This has been criticised by Bertil Albrektson who demonstrated that the concept of God's purposeful control of history and the belief in the course of events as a realisation of divine intentions were common notions in the ancient Near East.[154] Henry Saggs, building on the views of Albrektson, qualified both the Mari prophecies and the Assyrian prophecies as counterparts of Old Testament prophecy.[155] Yet, he did not challenge the common view: 'although uniqueness cannot be claimed on grounds of mechanism, when we come to look at the

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[148] Kraus 1982: 542. See further e.g. Schmökel 1951: 55-56; Herrmann 1965: 13-15, 306-308; Malamat 1966: 208; Nötscher 1966: 187; Huffmon 1968: 101-124; Saggs 1978: 144-152, 187; Schmitt 1982: 129; Koch 1995: 14, 17.

[149] They were often presented as 'priestly oracles' or as 'oracles', see e.g. Pfeiffer 1955; Biggs 1969.

[150] See Nissinen 1993: 218.

[151] E.g. Oppenheim 1977: 222.

[152] See Ellis 1989: 145. In the 1970s and 1980s the view dominated that the oracular activity of the prophets had been imported to Assyria from the West.

[153] See e.g. Lindblom 1962: 106, 325; Saggs 1978: 67; and recently Barthel 2003: 132-133.

[154] Albrektson 1967: 96. Albrektson points out that what may be regarded as 'unique' from the perspective of the religious commitment of modern exegetes, is not necessarily 'unique' in the context of the ancient Near East.

[155] Saggs 1978: 139-152.

nature of the message, it may be possible to see a significant difference'.[156] Whereas the Mesopotamian prophecies relate to royal affairs, the classical prophets in Israel address the people as a whole. Their messages transcended the immediate historical context, being universal statements about God's nature and his demands upon man. In this way, the canonical prophets transcended the limitations of ancient Near Eastern religion, including traditional Yahwism. So, if there is one unique aspect of Israel's religion, it is, according to Saggs, 'canonical prophecy'.[157]

Until today, the classical prophets are often granted a *status aparte*. They are held to represent a high-spirited and moral prophecy of judgement, whereas the ancient Near East offers parallels for a more primitive 'pre-classical' type of prophecy. Some notable exceptions to the common view can however be mentioned. Morton Smith, in a sketch of the common religion in the ancient Near East, also mentions the prophets who 'everywhere claimed to know by revelation the country's state of obedience or disobedience and the rewards or punishments soon to be allotted'.[158] Similarly, Friedrich Ellermeier rejected a sharp distinction between prophets of salvation and prophets of judgement, arguing that the Mari prophets show traces normally considered as typical of the classical prophets of the Old Testament.[159] These dissenting voices deserve renewed attention.

1.2.2 Recent Study of Biblical Prophecy

Recent monographs on biblical prophecy have not fundamentally altered the traditional view. Klaus Koch's study of the classical prophets aimed to comprehend them as theologians and to display their 'geistiges Eigenprofil'.[160] In Koch's presentation, the great eighth-century prophets are representatives of 'Unwiderrufliche Unheilsprophetie'. Their radical social criticism and announcements of judgement are without parallel in the ancient Near East.[161] Isaiah is depicted along traditional lines and characterised as the 'wortgewaltigste' among the classical prophets.[162] Isaiah's *geistiges Eigenprofil* is a theological synthesis of main themes found within First Isaiah. Joseph Blenkinsopp rejected the conventional distinction between 'primitive' and 'classical' prophecy,[163] but nevertheless described the eighth-century prophets as representing a new type of intellectual leadership,[164] marking a decisive turning-point in Israel's history.[165] Although Blenkinsopp stated that the prophetic books are post-exilic compositions, he proceeded with apparent ease from the books to the historical prophets and accepted a traditional picture of Isaiah's life.[166]

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[156] Saggs 1978: 149.
[157] Saggs 1978: 187.
[158] Smith 1952: 145.
[159] Ellermeier 1968: 165-223, esp. 172. According to Ellermeier (1968: 217) the principal difference does not lie in the content of the prophecies, but in the fact that the messages of the biblical prophets are considered to be still theologically relevant, whereas the Mari prophecies are not.
[160] Koch 1995: 9.
[161] Koch 1995: 14.
[162] Koch 1995: 119.
[163] Blenkinsopp 1996: 66; 1995: 140.
[164] Blenkinsopp 1995: 141.
[165] Blenkinsopp 1996: 82.
[166] Blenkinsopp 1996: 97-110.

In a programmatic contribution, Ferdinand Deist indicated future directions for the study of prophecy.[167] In his view, the traditional paradigm focusing on the personalities of great prophets whose words and deeds were recorded in the books bearing their names was to be abandoned. Whereas historical-critical analysis remains necessary for reconstructing the development of the prophetic books,[168] Deist's suggested grounding a new paradigm for the study of the prophets in the socio-anthropological approach to ancient Israelite society.[169] However, this program of situating the prophets within a reconstruction of ancient Israel based on archaeology and shaped by socio-anthropological theory, has met with difficulties. Robert Wilson's study *Prophecy and Society* (1980) has become a famous monument rather than the beginning of a new paradigm.[170] Wilson described the Old Testament prophets from a socio-anthropological point of view, dividing them into peripheral prophets and prophets taking a central position in society. However, Wilson did not deal with the question of the extent to which the biblical material could be accepted as a reliable source for pre-exilic prophecy.[171] Studies in the fields of new archaeology and socio-anthropology have made great progress, but it has proved difficult to deploy them for the study of Israelite prophecy.[172] Paula McNutt's assessment of prophecy, in the context of the reconstruction of ancient Israel, may illustrate this: 'we are still far from understanding the nature and functions of prophets in ancient Israel and Judah'.[173]

During the last few decades, biblical scholars have displayed an increased uneasiness with regard to historical prophecy. It is broadly recognised that the depiction of prophecy in the Hebrew Bible is historically questionable. As the historical and prophetic books of the Old Testament nowadays are most often approached as being first and foremost literary compositions from the Persian and Hellenistic period, they can no longer be regarded as straightforward sources of prophecy as a historical phenomenon in pre-exilic Israel. Some scholars have even raised the question of whether the biblical prophetic books have anything to do with the phenomenon of prophecy in pre-exilic Israel at all.[174] Hans Barstad has described this trend as follows:

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[167] Deist 1989.
[168] Deist 1989: 16.
[169] Deist 1989: 14-18.
[170] See Kselman 1985: 124.
[171] Wilson's study, an important contribution to Israelite prophecy from a socio-anthropological angle, does not distinguish between an analysis of the portrayal of prophets in the Old Testament and the reconstruction of prophecy as a socio-historical phenomenon. Wilson offers a sociological analysis of biblical depictions of prophets, which are first and foremost literary images.
[172] Socio-anthropological depictions of Israelite prophecy have often been based on the views of Max Weber; e.g. McNutt 1999: 179-181; Blenkinsopp 1995: 115-119. However, Weber's understanding of the prophet as an individual bearer of charisma who by virtue of his mission proclaims a religious dogma or divine instruction, does not work for the ancient Near East and should not be applied to Israelite prophecy either; see especially Petersen 1981: 9-15.
[173] McNutt 1999: 179.
[174] Various scholars have emphasised the gap between the prophetic books as literary products of the post-exilic period and the phenomenon of pre-exilic prophecy. For a critical review of this position, see Barstad 1993a; Heintz 1997.

> [B]y reducing what we find in the 'prophetic writings' of the Hebrew Bible to postexilic literary creations with little or no connection at all back into the history that went before, it may seem that recent scholarship has postulated an impassable tradition gap, and made whatever pre-exilic prophetic activity there was quite unavailable to us.[175]

The difficulty can be surpassed by acknowledging that prophetic texts such as First Isaiah are not pure poetry but rather the outcome of a literary and redactional development. In order to decide to what extent it is 'prophetic', the earliest stages of the Isaiah tradition have to be explored, at first through exegetical and historical analysis, and secondly also from a comparative perspective which includes ancient Near Eastern prophecy.[176] The comparative study adds to our understanding of prophecy and supplies analogies that may confirm the exegetical and historical analysis. The route from the biblical texts to prophecy as a socio-historical phenomenon in pre-exilic Israel runs through exegesis and historical analysis on the one hand, and comparative study on the other.

1.2.3 Recent Comparative Study of Prophecy

The Assyrian prophecies have become the subject of comparative research since the 1970s, initially through the contributions of Manfred Dietrich, Herbert Huffmon, and Manfred Weippert.[177] The comparative studies were based on the view that Mesopotamian prophecy belonged to the same cultural-historical world as its Israelite counterpart preserved in the Old Testament. Prophecies from Mari and Assyria were the most obvious sources for comparative study, as they represent the only two corpora of prophetic oracles outside the Bible.[178]

Preliminary Issues

An important issue was the definition of prophecy. The following definition of Weippert has found scholarly approval:

> Prophecy is at stake when 'a person (a) through a cognitive experience (a vision, an auditory experience, an audio-visual appearance, a dream or the like) becomes the subject of the revelation of a deity, or several deities and, in addition, (b) is conscious of being commissioned by the deity or deities in question to convey the revelation in a verbal form (as a "prophecy" or a "prophetic speech"), or through nonverbal communicative acts ("symbolic acts"), to a third party who constitutes the actual addressee of the message'.[179]

This definition concentrates on the prophetic experience and consciousness, which are however beyond our control.[180] A simpler definition that focuses on the prophetic function

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[175] Barstad 1993a: 43.
[176] Cf. Barstad 1993a: 46.
[177] See the bibliography in Parpola 1997: CX-CXI.
[178] Nissinen 1993: 217.
[179] Weippert 2001b: 197; translation by Nissinen 1998: 5. For a slightly different version, see Weippert 1988: 289-290; Barstad 1993a: 46.
[180] Petersen 2000: 41.

as messenger of the god(s) would be: 'The prophet is a mediator who claims to receive messages direct from a divinity, by various means, and communicates these messages to recipients.'[181]

According to a recent insight, the notion of prophets as intermediaries is applicable to prophecy throughout the ancient Near East.[182] Furthermore, some facets shared by Mesopotamian, Syrian and Israelite prophets have been formulated which can tentatively function as a point of departure for comparative study: 1) prophets present communications from the divine world and serve as mediators; 2) they can draw upon inspiration through ecstasy, dreams, or visions; 3) their messages are immediately understandable; 4) they offer assurance but can also admonish or exhort the addressee.[183]

In many recent publications on prophecy enumerations of the non-biblical prophetic material can be found.[184] The evidence mainly stems from Mesopotamia and from West-Semitic areas.[185] Previously, the dominant view was that prophetic activity was typical of West-Semitic culture, and 'deeply alien' to Mesopotamian culture,[186] where it was introduced only in eighth to seventh-century Assyria due to western influence.[187] However, a growing amount of examples of non-biblical prophecy and the widespread attestation of prophetic oracles and references to prophetic figures in time and place, has stimulated the view that prophecy was at home in the ancient Near East as one of the common forms of divination, in the West-Semitic areas as well as in Mesopotamia.[188] According to a recent understanding, there were, generally speaking, prophets in the ancient Near East, although not necessarily everywhere and at every time, who delivered oracles, although not necessarily always in the same way. They did not, however, always get attention, nor would their messages necessarily have been recorded.[189]

Comparisons

Some of the main topics that have become the subject of comparative study of prophecy may be mentioned.

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[181] Grabbe 1995: 107.
[182] Petersen 2000: 39.
[183] See Huffmon 2000: 48.
[184] E.g. Ringgren 1982; Weippert 1988: 294-305; Ellis 1989: 134-145; Malamat 1989: 70-121; Huffmon 1992; Lemaire 1996: 427-429; Nissinen 2000a: 235-237; Nissinen 2004: 25-28. See in particular the recent sourcebook on ancient Near Eastern prophecy, Nissinen 2003a.
[185] Ancient Egypt generally falls outside the scope of comparative study of prophecy. Although various literary compositions from ancient Egypt have been qualified as 'prophetic literature', it has been argued by Shupak (1990) that prophetic oracles are not attested in ancient Egypt: 'The image of a prophet functioning as divine messenger is absent in ancient Egypt. We look in vain for divinely inspired prophecy, or prophecy associated with symbolic revelations and visions' (1990: 24). For a similar view, see Nötscher 1966: 163-170; Ben Zvi 2000: 2, note 3.
[186] Oppenheim 1977: 222.
[187] Tadmor 1975; 1982; Spieckermann 1982: 302; Von Soden 1985: 187; Hutter 1996: 107; Malamat 1997: 315-317. See Gordon 1993: 64-67, for a discussion of this hypothesis.
[188] Millard 1985: 133-134; Ellis 1989: 130-135, 144-146; Nissinen 1993: 222-224; Parpola 1997: LXVII; Durand 1997: 118; Sasson 1998: 115-116; Pongratz-Leisten 1999: 49-51; Weippert 2001a: 58; Charpin 2002: 32-33.
[189] See Nissinen 1993: 223; Nissinen 2003a: 4.

Similarities between the Assyrian prophecies and parts of Second Isaiah, noticed long ago,[190] became a popular issue of comparative study.[191] Both sides represent prophecy of salvation, in which a deity presents itself (e.g. 'I am Yahweh'), in which the formula 'Fear not!' occurs, and in which salvation through divine intervention is promised. Whereas it was previously held that Second Isaiah depended on the Assyrian sources,[192] Weippert established the view that the Assyrian oracles and the salvation oracles in Second Isaiah are examples of a similar genre, 'oracles for the king'.[193] Isa 45:1-7, addressing King Cyrus, is a pure form of the genre 'oracle for the king', whereas in the other salvation oracles within Second Isaiah the role traditionally taken by the king had been shifted to the people.[194]

A further point of comparison was found in the connection of prophecy with the royal office. Prophetic oracles provide ideological support of the royal dynasty, both in Israel (2 Sam 7:5-17), in Mari,[195] and in Assyria.[196] Among the shared themes we find the concepts of the king's divine election, the divine promise to destroy the king's enemies, the promise of peace for the land, royal succession, and the divine paternity of the king.[197]

Various similarities in prophetic designations have been noted. The Hebrew term *nābî'* has a counterpart in the designation *nabûm*, which occurs in a Mari text and in Emar.[198] The term *nābî'* further occurs in the Lachish ostraca.[199] The title *ḥōzeh*, 'visionary', is attested on the Zakkur Stele and in the Deir 'Allā plaster texts.[200] Furthermore, scholars have suggested that throughout the ancient Near East, including Israel, prophets functioned as divine messengers or intermediaries,[201] operated in groups,[202] were connected with the royal court,[203] and could perform symbolic actions to support their message.[204] The close relation between prophetic oracles on the one hand, and dreams and visions on the other has been pointed out.[205] It has been noted that throughout the ancient Near East, prophecy often relates to foreign politics and political-military situations, in particular situations of

[190] Greßmann 1914.
[191] The similarities between the Assyrian prophecies and Second Isaiah became more generally acknowledged only much later, in particular through the work of Dijkstra (1980: 136-170), a first form-critical study to make fully use of the Assyrian prophecies, and further through Spieckermann 1982: 302; Van der Toorn 1987: 95; Weippert 1982; Nissinen 1993: 235-236. For an overview, see Weippert 2001a: 37; 1988: 311, note 49.
[192] Greßmann 1914: 289-290.
[193] Weippert 1982. According to Weippert (1972), this oracular genre had its original *Sitz im Leben* in the ancient Near Eastern ideology of holy war; cf. Heintz 1969; Dion 1970; Van der Toorn 1987; Kang 1989. In Weippert's view, this genre was at home in pre-exilic Israel as well (1981: 105-108; 1982: 11; 2001a: 58).
[194] Weippert 1981: 92-111; 1982: 9-11; 1988: 304-314.
[195] Malamat 1980: 79-82.
[196] Ishida 1977: 90-92.
[197] See Nissinen 1993: 233-234.
[198] Fleming 1993a: 1993b.
[199] Parker 1994.
[200] Huffmon 2000: 65; Dijkstra 1995; Lemaire 2001b.
[201] E.g. Polley 1980: 149-150; Gordon 1993: 74-75; Petersen 2000: 37-39.
[202] Huffmon 2000: 64.
[203] Huffmon 2000: 64-65.
[204] Anbar 1993: 3; Huffmon 2000: 67.
[205] Gordon 1993: 69-74.

crisis.[206] Furthermore, reactions to prophetic messages from the ruling officials have been the subject of investigation.[207]

The earlier thesis that certain Psalms are to be qualified as cultic prophecies has been revived with the help of the Assyrian prophecies. John Hilber explored Ps 110,[208] and a range of further Psalms, such as Ps 2; 81; 89; 132,[209] from a comparative perspective, taking into account the Assyrian prophecies from the seventh century. On the basis of similarities between the Psalms and the Assyrian prophetic oracles, with regard to style, form, theme and ideology, Hilber aimed to demonstrate that the Psalms under consideration have a prophetic character.[210]

In addition to similarities, scholars have pointed out differences between Israel and its *Umwelt* with regard to prophecy. In particular differences in the content of the prophetic messages and differences with regard to the function and status of prophets have been emphasised.[211]

Most recently, the comparative study of prophecy has resulted in a range of collective volumes.[212] In particular Martti Nissinen put the Assyrian prophecies on the comparative agenda,[213] and published a sourcebook of ancient Near Eastern prophecies, entitled *Prophets and Prophecy in the Ancient Near East* (2003). Because of the influx of comparative contributions dealing with the material from Mari and Assyria, the phenomenon of ancient Near Eastern prophecy has become well known.

The role of the biblical prophetic books in the comparative study of prophecy has however remained very limited. These books have received attention mainly on the level of expressions, metaphors and similes.[214] Moshe Weinfeld, for instance, attempted to disentangle the prophetic books by discerning a range of literary patterns and motifs, for which he tried to provide counterparts in ancient Near Eastern texts.[215] The prophetic books have however not been studied from the angle perhaps most expected: as prophecy that has been developed into literary texts. The prophetic books have been established in biblical scholarship as literary compositions based on prophetic traditions that were developed over the course of time. For this reason, one would expect comparisons not only with

[206] Anbar 1993.
[207] Parker 1993; Roberts 1997a.
[208] Hilber 2003; 2005: 76-88.
[209] Hilber 2005.
[210] Hilber (2003) concludes that Ps 110 is a cultic enthronement prophecy from the monarchic period. Furthermore Hilber (2005) concludes that the origin of the psalms containing first-person divine speech is to be explained from the model of cultic prophecy.
[211] Malamat 1998: 62; Huffmon 2000: 63-64. McFadden (1983: 133) referring to Oppenheim, argues that prophecy was dominant in Israel and technical forms of divination in Mesopotamia.
[212] Nissinen (ed.) 2000; Ben Zvi and Floyd (eds) 2000; Grabbe and Haak (eds) 2001; Lemaire (ed.) 2001; Kaltner and Stulman (eds) 2004.
[213] See bibliography.
[214] Nissinen 1993: 242-247; 1991: 268-294; Weippert (1985) discusses similes from the Assyrian oracles that depict the goddesses Ištar and Mullissu as protectors of the king, comparable to Old Testament passages where Yahweh is pictured as the protector of his people.
[215] Weinfeld (1977) points to mouth-purification (Isa 6 and the *mīs pî* ritual), dreams and visions, the motif of morality versus cult, and the motif of violation of morality as a cause for destruction.

Mesopotamian prophecies, but also with literary texts from the ancient Near East, in particular literary texts with a prophetic imprint or closely resembling the genre of prophecy. This kind of comparative study has however not been undertaken. Literary prophetic texts from the ancient Near East are nevertheless available. First, there is a range of texts from seventh-century Assyria that can be qualified as prophetic compositions. These texts are based on, or inspired by, prophetic oracles, but are to be regarded as literary compositions.[216] A second category is formed by the so-called literary-predictive texts (or literary prophecies), which have received due scholarly attention since the 1960s.[217] These texts however have hardly been exploited in a comparative study to prophecy:

> Unfortunately, the literary prophecies are often dissociated from OT prophecy because they are literary. This ignores the fact that much OT prophetic literature may well be literary in origin rather than merely the recording of oral prophecies. It is here that the Akkadian literary prophecies are very relevant to a study of OT prophecy: they demonstrate that written prophecies can be *scribal* creations.[218]

The reason why the prophetic books have not been fully included in the comparative study of prophecy is probably the common view that these books form a literary genre *sui generis*.[219] However, the recent exegetical approach to the prophetic books from a perspective of literary expansion and redactional development calls for a new step in the comparative study of prophecy. The literary afterlife of prophecy, in particular the issue of the transition from prophecy to literature, should become a subject of comparative study.

1.2.4 The Classical Prophets Revisited

The comparative study of prophecy has left the opinion concerning the classical prophets mostly unaltered. The preaching of the classical prophets was and is generally considered as something without parallel in the history of the ancient Near East. The image of the classical prophets as true prophets, opposed to the wicked establishment of their time and characterised by a sharp rejection of moral abuse and prophecy of judgement, functioned as one of the pillars of the commonly accepted view of Israel's religion and Old Testament theology.[220] Because of this, the status of the classical prophets as historical figures was hardly questioned at all.

The classical prophets were clearly distinguished, both from their adversaries, the false prophets, and their predecessors, the pre-classical prophets. Weippert, for instance, held

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[216] Examples are SAA 9 3 and 9, SAA 3 13 and 44-47; for these texts, see chapter 6.2.1 and 6.2.2.

[217] These texts include the Šulgi and Marduk prophecies (Borger 1971); the Dynastic prophecy (Grayson 1975b); and the Uruk prophecy (Hunger and Kaufman 1975). On these texts, see Ellis 1979; 1989: 157; Grabbe 1995: 92-94. These texts are to be distinguished from prophetic oracles since they do not have an oral background, and are to be qualified as literary compositions (Grayson 1975: 13; Ellis 1989: 147).

[218] Grabbe 1995: 94. So far, the literary prophecies have only been related to biblical apocalyptic texts; see Grayson 1980: 184; Kaufman 1977; Lambert 1978; Ringgren 1983; Tadmor 1981; cf. Ellis 1989: 147, 172.

[219] E.g. McFadden 1983: 128.

[220] For a critical assessment of this common view, see Cryer 1991: 79.

that the history of Israel and Judah was marked by the controversy between prophets who promised salvation and the classical prophets who foretold punishment. He regarded the Mesopotamian prophecies as being important for a better insight into the phenomenon of salvation prophecy in Israel that had disappeared together with the dynasties it had supported, whereas the messages of the oppositional prophets had been considered worth preserving and finally resulted in the prophetic books.[221] Furthermore, the view of a transition from the early, pre-classical prophets to the classical prophets as an important change, taking place during the ministry of the prophet Amos, was again defended by Jörg Jeremias.[222] Scholars still widely hold that the classical prophets, such as Amos, Isaiah and Jeremiah, began to write down their messages themselves in response to the dismissive reaction of the people to their preaching, and that this was how the genre of the prophetic books originated.[223] In this way, scholars have remained inclined to accept a vital connection between the historical prophets and their preaching, and the prophetic books named after them.

Recently however some scholars have questioned the historical validity of the image of the classical prophets. Following the recent shift of focus from the prophetic personalities to the prophetic books as literary products, the prophetic books are regarded, first and foremost, as compilations from the Persian period or later. Instead of reading the prophetic books as having emerged from the mind of prophetic personalities, they are now approached as the end-result of a lengthy development of prophetic traditions. Nissinen has expressed his doubts whether the biblical images of the great prophets represented the situation of prophecy as a socio-historical phenomenon in pre-exilic Israel and Judah.[224] Others completely rejected the image of the classical prophets as a historical reality.[225] Uwe Becker concluded his monograph on First Isaiah with the thesis that the historical Isaiah was a prophet of salvation.[226] In a further study, he argued that the classical prophecy of judgement was never a historical phenomenon, but a literary creation from post-exilic times. Only in the course of the development of the prophetic books was the image of the classical prophets of judgement created:

> Am Anfang stand vielmehr die "vorklassische" Heils- und Mahnprophetie […]. Die Art der Prophetie ist aber nur noch sehr gebrochen in den Büchern der Propheten enthalten, weil diese in der erkennbaren Absicht entstanden sind, das eingetretene Unheil rückblickend als Erfüllung längst zuvor ergangener prophetischer Unheilsansagen zu begründen.[227]

The recent view that the prophetic books are the end-result of lengthy and complicated literary-redactional developments leaves room for the following suggestion. At the basis of

[221] Weippert 1988: 310-311.
[222] Jeremias 1996: 496: 'Der Wandel von den "früheren" zu den "späteren" Propheten, der in der Entstehung der neuen Literaturgattung Prophetenbuch seinen Ausdruck fand, hat sich in der Biographie des Amos selber vollzogen.'
[223] Jeremias 1996: 484-485. This is also a main thesis of Barthel 1997.
[224] Nissinen 1993: 253.
[225] E.g. Loretz 1992.
[226] Becker 1997: 286-287.
[227] Becker 2001: 162. See also Kratz 1997: 22.

the traditions that ultimately developed into the prophetic books may have lain short prophetic words that initially were orally delivered. It is this earliest stage of the prophetic traditions that may be compared to the examples of ancient Near Eastern prophecy.[228] In this light, the question may be considered of whether the classical prophets as ethical preachers and foretellers of judgement might be a later, exilic or post-exilic image.[229] These suggestions, although not yet sufficient to establish a new understanding of prophecy in ancient Israel, merit serious attention.

1.3 Aim and Focus of the Present Study

1.3.1 Question of Research

The history of research presented above leads to the following conclusions.

1) An unbroken scholarly tradition takes First Isaiah as a direct source for pre-exilic prophecy and the figure presented in it as one of the great historical prophets. However, we have also seen that the recent shift of focus to the book as a whole, has rendered problematic the relationship between the book and the phenomenon of pre-exilic prophecy. The question of the historicity of the figures behind the prophetic books has become a matter of debate.

2) We have seen that the comparative study of prophecy has recently become a fruitful enterprise. However, one major field still not explored is a comparative study focusing on the prophetic books. There is furthermore discussion with regard to the classical prophets as historical figures, the phenomenon of prophecy in ancient Israel, and the earliest stages of the traditions that ultimately resulted in the prophetic books.

The best way to deal with these issues is undertaking a comparative study of prophecy that includes the earliest layers of the prophetic traditions behind the biblical prophetic books. The first step must be the exploration of the origin of the prophetic traditions and their initial developments, long before they resulted in the books as we have them. The second step is to include these early prophetic traditions in a comparative study of prophecy in the ancient Near East. The present study aims to contribute to this project. First, it explores the origin and earliest development of the Isaiah tradition. Second, it includes this in a comparative study of prophecy, focusing on the seventh-century Assyrian prophecies. This study has an analytical part (I), consisting of chapters 2 and 3, and a comparative part (II), consisting of chapters 4, 5 and 6. The reason for the division into two different parts is that the prophetic material from First Isaiah and from seventh-century Assyria must be investigated in its own right first, before a comparison is undertaken. In particular for the Isaiah material this is important from a methodological point of view: one must choose on exegetical and historical, and not on comparative grounds, which parts of the book represent the earliest prophetic tradition and its first development in the Assyrian period. Only after the earliest stages of the Isaiah tradition have been identified and the prophetic material explored, can it be studied from a comparative perspective.

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[228] See Kratz 2003: 54-67; cf. Lemaire 2001a: 15.

[229] Cf. Collins 1993: 13: 'Something happened which removed biblical prophecy from that whole area (i.e. ancient Near Eastern divination), and it is my contention ... that the 'something' was a literary development rather than a sociological or an anthropological one.' Cf. Weippert 2003: 286.

1.3.2 Analytical Part

Part I of the study consists of a description of the material, which is used for the comparison carried out in the second part. Chapter 2 presents an exegetical analysis of First Isaiah as a source of pre-exilic prophecy and its earliest development. Chapter 3 consists of a description of the Assyrian sources relating to prophecy.

The exegetical analysis of First Isaiah (chapter 2) needs some introduction. Traditionally, First Isaiah has been seen as an obvious source for the Assyrian period. Although First Isaiah was believed to include later elements as well, its natural background was regarded to be the pre-exilic period. Exegesis aimed at identifying a 'Proto-Isaiah', a version of First Isaiah from the eighth or seventh century, written by the historical prophet or his followers.

Following the recent shift of perspective as regards the book as a whole, the first part of the book no longer can be regarded as consisting of an eighth-century 'Proto-Isaiah' plus a series of later extras. Instead, the book must be regarded as a literary product of a much later period. Throughout the book we find evidence of redactional attempts to establish literary structures within the book as a whole, which implies that passages within First Isaiah may belong to the latest redactions.[230] Furthermore, the Isaiah tradition has undergone a complex development in the course of time. Not only was new material added at various stages, but existing material was also reworked and reinterpreted. First Isaiah is not an anthology of pre-exilic material supplemented by later elaborations, but part of an extensively edited literary compilation from post-exilic times that contains material from several ages. We should reckon with an ongoing tradition that through a series of formative stages resulted in the book of Isaiah, which may be visualised in the following schema.[231]

Emergence and development of the Isaiah tradition				*Development into the book of Isaiah*		
1 historical prophet	2 collection of oracles	3 first literary elaboration	4 substantial literary complex	5 redactions, addition of new complexes	6 final redactions	7 book of Isaiah
Assyrian period			Babylonian period		Persian-Hellenistic period	

Point of departure

My research question differs from that of the earlier exegesis. In the past, scholars searched for 'authentic' passages in order to explain them as aspects of the preaching of a prophetic personality, who, as a great prophet of judgement belonged to a decisive stage in Israel's religious development. My research question is also different from that of recent scholars who primarily have a literary interest in the book of Isaiah. Instead, my question is a historical one: which parts of First Isaiah can be plausibly dated to the Assyrian period? The aim of the exegetical chapter is not to present a redaction history of First Isaiah, but only to decide which material from First Isaiah can be dated to the Assyrian period.

[230] Clements 2002: 116.
[231] For a similar description of this process of development, see Collins 1993:16.

It is generally acknowledged, both by adherents of a moderate exegesis of First Isaiah and those advocating a minimalist approach, that the earliest material within the book of Isaiah stems from the Assyrian period, and that this material is to be found within the first part of the book. However, scholars hold different views with regard to the question of which parts of First Isaiah stem from the Assyrian period, and they have ended up with increasingly different results.[232] Since the pre-exilic origin of the material involved no longer can be taken for granted, the question regarding the earliest material within First Isaiah has to be addressed anew.[233] Instead of assuming that material from First Isaiah originates from the Assyrian period, scholars must adduce grounds that make this plausible. The divergence of scholarly positions shows that exegetical analysis does not produce indisputable answers. Exegesis rather provides a set of tools to be used to support a particular view, to render it plausible and convincing. Here I present my view of the Isaiah tradition in the Assyrian period – to be worked out in chapter 2 – consisting of three steps.

1) For the identification of the material belonging to the Assyrian period I take as my point of departure references to historical entities and circumstances of the eighth and seventh centuries. Texts within First Isaiah display a profoundly historical interest in various episodes of the Assyrian period, which can hardly be considered as being complete literary inventions of later times.[234] The historical clues are the following:

i) The names Ephraim (i.e. Northern Israel) and its capital Samaria occur in oracles predicting the downfall of Northern Israel (7:4-9; 8:1-4; 17:1-3; 28:1-4). Most of these oracles refer to Aram and Damascus as well, the point being that Israel and Aram would be punished for their aggression against Judah. These passages make most sense in the later part of the eighth century.

ii) References to 'Cush' (Nubia) also point to the Assyrian period since the Cushite (25th) Dynasty ruled over Egypt from the later part of the eighth century until 669 BCE. Although the term Cush appears in later texts as well,[235] references to the Cushite empire as

[232] Williamson (2004: 181-182) points out that earlier scholars generally accepted the Isaianic character of a fair amount of material from First Isaiah. Recently however the amount of uncontestedly Isaianic material has diminished. As a result, fewer 'certain' passages remain with which more disputed passages can be compared. In the end, 'less and less can be securely regarded as original'. Williamson (2004: 182) refers to this as to 'a tendency to snowball'. See also Barthel 1997: 25.

[233] Williamson (2004: 183) states: 'The current situation demands the adoption of a whole new agenda.' Similarly Steck 1996: 69-70.

[234] The abundance of historical figures mentioned within First Isaiah is in marked contrast to the rest of the book. Apart from Isaiah (1:1; 2:1; 7:3, 13; 13:1; 20:2, 3; ch. 37-39 *passim*), the following are mentioned: Uzziah (1:1; 6:1; 7:1); Jotham (1:1; 7:1); Ahaz (1:1; 7:1-17 *passim*; 14:28; 38:8) and Hezekiah (1:1; ch. 36-39 *passim*); the Aramaean king Rezin (7:1, 4, 8; 8:6); the Israelite king Pekah, son of Remaliah (7:1, 4, 5, 9; 8:6); a certain Ben Tabeel (7:6); three 'sons': Shear-jashub (7:3), Immanuel (7:14; 8:8, 10), and Maher-shalal-hash-baz (8:3); the two witnesses, Uriah and Zechariah (8:2); the officials Shebna (22:15; 36:3, 11, 22; 37:2), Eliakim (22:20; 36:3, 11, 22; 37:2) and Joash (36:3, 11, 22); the Assyrian kings Sargon (20:1) and Sennacherib (36:1; 37:17, 21, 37); Sennacherib's sons Adrammelech, Sharezer and Esarhaddon (37:38); the Cushite king Taharqa (37:9); and the Babylonian king Merodach-baladan (39:1). By contrast, the only historical figure mentioned by name in the second part of the book is Cyrus (45:1).

[235] E.g. Isa 43:3; 45:14; Jer 46:9; Ezek 30, also in Isa 11:11, usually regarded as part of a late passage, 11:10-16.

a political and military power are likely to reflect the situation of the late eighth or early seventh century (18:1; 20:3-5; 37:9). Furthermore, references to Cush and Egypt in the context of prophetic warnings against Judah's search for assistance from them against Assyria probably stem from the Assyrian period. Military alliances with Egypt under Cushite rule were a historical reality in the late eighth century. Passages from First Isaiah that warn against such an alliance are likely to date from the Assyrian period, i.e. the earliest version of 18:1-6; 19:1-4; 20:1-6; 30:1-5 and 31:1-3.

iii) References to 'Assyria' are a further indication of early material.[236] The view that 'Assyria' in First Isaiah is a *chiffre* for a later empire (Babylonia or Persia) has to be rejected.[237] Within First Isaiah, Assyria and Babylonia are distinguished as different powers (23:13; 14:22-23 and 14:24-27).[238] Furthermore, since the Isaiah tradition is rooted in the Assyrian period it is reasonable to attempt to understand 'Assyria' as Assyria.[239] In particular those passages describing Assyria as a political-military superpower fit in with the Assyrian period.[240] The passages that, in all likelihood, refer to the Assyrian empire from a contemporary perspective are the earliest forms of 7:20; 8:1-4; 10:5-34; 14:24-27; 20:1-6; 30:27-33 and 31:8-9.

iv) First Isaiah contains various historical dating formulae, some of which presumably belong to an early layer introducing material that originates from the Assyrian period. Isa 6:1 introduces a vision report; 14:28 introduces an oracle against the Philistines; and 20:1 introduces a report of a prophetic performance.[241]

v) Finally, the accounts of 7:1-17, 20:1-6 and 36-39 describe activities of the prophet Isaiah situated in the Assyrian period. These accounts contain material that to some extent corresponds to contemporary external sources.[242] Although they are in their present shape marked by a later elaboration, these accounts are probably rooted in the Assyrian period.[243]

As appears from the historical clues, the main issue in the second half of the eighth century in Judah was the question of whether or not to resist Assyrian imperialism. In the periods 734-732, 722-720, and 713-711 BCE, several of Judah's neighbour states resisted

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[236] 7:17, 18, 20; 8:4, 7; 10:5, 12, 24; 11:11, 16; 14:25; 19:23, 24, 25; 20:1, 4, 6; 23:13; 27:13; 30:31; 31:8; chapter 36-37 *passim*.
[237] Höffken 2004: 133-134.
[238] The name *'aššûr* is mentioned in several later texts as well, but these are to be distinguished from the earlier passages. The later occurrences partly consist of glosses and additions to earlier passages, such as 7:17b, 7:18, 8:7 and 10:12. In various other cases *'aššûr* functions as a geographical description, no longer as the name of a current superpower (11:16; 19:23-25; 27:13.); for this and other reasons these passages are generally considered as of a late date.
[239] Contra e.g. Werner 1982: 171-178, 190-193; 1988: 33.
[240] See Machinist 1983a.
[241] By contrast, the dating formulae in 1:1 and 7:1 are to be regarded as late. For 1:1, see Sweeney 1996a: 71-72; for 7:1 (dependent on 2 Kgs 16:5), see chapter 2.1.2.
[242] Williamson (2000: 184) mentions as a main principle in the search for pre-exilic material within First Isaiah: 'where the account of a purportedly early event for which there is no other direct evidence in the biblical text is corroborated by some contemporary external source which could not, in all probability, have been known to a later biblical writer'. In such case a pre-exilic origin is plausible.
[243] Cf. Williamson 2004: 185-186. I deal with Isa 7:1-17 and 20:1-6 in chapter 2; Isa 36-37 is dealt with in chapter 6.

Assyrian dominance, and in 705-701 BCE Judah attempted to free itself from Assyria's rule. Material from First Isaiah that can be connected with these major political events can with some confidence be dated to the latest part of the eighth century.[244] The most secure ground for identifying the earliest stratum within First Isaiah is the political controversy of the late eighth century.[245] The earliest layer of the Isaiah tradition in my assessment consists of prophetic words relating to particular, historical contexts from the eighth century.

A second identifiable layer of the Isaiah tradition consists of passages dealing with the destruction of Assyria and the restoration of Judah. In these passages it is emphasised that it is Yahweh who carries out Assyria's destruction (10:16-19; 10:26a.27a; 10:33-34; 14:24-27; 30:27-33; 31:4-5.8-9), as part of his dealings with the entire world (14:26-27; 30:27-28; cf. 8:9-10; 17:12-14; 18:1-6). Closely related to the theme of Assyria's destruction is that of Judah's restoration: the reign of a new, ideal, Judaean king, in 9:1-6, 11:1-5 and 32:1-2. The themes of Assyria's downfall and the reign of the ideal king are two sides of the same coin, as both result from Yahweh's intervention. These passages in all likelihood date to the Assyrian period. Yet they clearly differ from the eighth-century prophetic material (as will be worked out in 6.1.3 and 6.1.4). I suggest regarding them as the product of a revision of the Isaiah tradition in the late seventh century.[246]

2) The second step of my assessment of the Isaiah tradition in the Assyrian period is based on the fundamental difference that can be perceived between the Isaiah tradition in the Assyrian period – the eighth-century prophetic material and the seventh-century revision – on the one hand, and the later transformation of the Isaiah tradition on the other. In particular within Isa 6-8 and 28-32, the prophetic material and its first revision can be distinguished from a later elaboration that put a decisive mark on these chapters. Isa 6-8 and 28-32 in their basic literary version represent textual complexes in which the earlier Isaiah tradition is extensively reworked and in which a new view of Isaiah's prophetic ministry is presented.[247] These literary complexes represent a thorough reworking of the

[244] Related to 734-732 BCE are the oracles of Isa 7*, 8:1-4* and 17:1-3*; related to 722-720 BCE are the oracles of 28:1-4*, 14:28-32*, and 10*; related to 713-711 BCE is 20*; related to 705-701 BCE are the sayings within 28-31*, the critical sayings of 5* and 10:1-2 and 18-19*, 22*. This will be worked out in particular in chapter 4.1.

[245] This is also the position of Høgenhaven (1990: 351) and Höffken (2004: 144): 'Nach meinem Eindruck sprechen gerade ältere Schichten in PJ die Politsprache der damaligen Zeit, wie sie assyrische Königsinschriften (usw.) dokumentieren'.

[246] See also Collins 1993: 38-39.

[247] For a similar approach to the Amos tradition, see Kratz 2003a. Kratz (2003a: 54-67) argues that a distinction must be made between the basic literary layer (*Grundbestand*), and the presumed original prophetic words. The prophetic words, transmitted orally or in writing, are rooted in a particular historical context in which they were originally understood, whereas the literary elaboration of these words in the context of the developing prophetic tradition afterwards reinterpreted them. According to Kratz (2003a: 67-89) the *Grundbestand* of Amos 3-6 is marked by the characteristic of the literary prophetic tradition: unconditional judgement. Within this *Grundbestand* Kratz identifies sayings that originated as independent prophetic words (3:12; 4:1*; 5:2.3.7.18*.19.20; 6:1a.3-6a.13). These sayings originally related to specific historical situations but received a new role within the literary composition. The sayings point to a situation of great international tension and military threat against Israel, and are to be situated in the second half of the eighth century. The aim of the prophet was to prevent a political catastrophe. The words of the 'historical Amos' thus differ fundamentally from the 'literary Amos', the latter being a product of the ongoing prophetic tradition.

Isaiah tradition in the light of the events of the early sixth century. The suggestion that the disastrous events of the early sixth century left their marks on the Isaiah tradition is not new (e.g. Clements 1980c). However, in my view these marks are much more decisive than scholars have previously acknowledged (in this respect I agree by and large with Becker 1997). The disastrous events of the sixth century – the fall of Jerusalem, the collapse of the state, the end of the dynasty, the Babylonian exile – led to a profound reconsideration of the past. Far from being given up, the Isaiah tradition was thoroughly reworked in order to get it into lines with a new view of Israel's past and in order to use the authority of the figure of Isaiah as a spokesman of the new view. This view was essentially that the destruction of Judah and Jerusalem was the result of Yahweh's punishment because of the sinful disobedience of the people. It was this transformation of the Isaiah tradition, presumably in the sixth century, which created the image of Isaiah as a prophet of judgement.

The eighth-century prophetic material within First Isaiah and its earliest elaboration in the Assyrian period however are distinctly different from what is supposedly the main characteristic of biblical prophecy: the proclamation of unconditional judgement. The eighth-century prophetic material is partly marked by positive aspects (e.g. Isa 7*, 8*, 28:12*, 30:15*), and the critical sayings apply to a quite specific group of people; furthermore, the seventh-century revision is of an unambiguously positive tone. Isa 6-8 and 28-32 in their later literary version however present the positive message as a superseded stage: the positive message was rejected and what remains is the preaching of judgement, applied to the people as a whole.[248] This important transition must not be projected onto the prophetic biography, but is to be taken as an indication of different stages of development of the Isaiah tradition.

3) The final step of my assessment of the Isaiah tradition in the Assyrian period relates to the forms of the material. The eighth-century prophetic material consists of oracles and sayings that in all likelihood originally were orally delivered. This material can be qualified as prophetic in a strict sense. The passages that in my view belong to the seventh-century revision of the Isaianic material do not have an oral background but are literary from the outset. With regard to the nature of the seventh-century revision, the following may be observed. The eighth-century prophetic material can essentially be connected with three historical periods: 734-732, 723-720 and 705-701 BCE. The material relating to each period was probably preserved in the form of a collection of prophetic words, and each of these three collections was probably revised in the late seventh century. The revision turned the collections into textual compilations consisting of eighth-century prophetic words on the one hand, and of new material on the other. In the analysis of the texts (chapter 2.4, chapter 6.1) I will attempt to make plausible that the seventh-century revision took the form of three compilations, each revising a small collection of prophetic words. Furthermore, each compilation followed a similar pattern of dating formula and prophetic commission, followed by the prophetic words to which some comments were added, and concluding with a portrayal of the reign of the ideal king.

These three steps – historical clues within First Isaiah, distinction between the profiles of the early material and the later (exilic) reworking of the Isaiah tradition, and the early

[248] See also Collins 1993: 49-50.

forms and format of the eighth-century prophet and the seventh-century revision material – form my conception of the Isaiah tradition in the Assyrian period. In the discussion of the material from First Isaiah in chapter 2, I will attempt to demonstrate that this is the most plausible way to deal with the earliest stages of the Isaiah tradition.

Chapter 3 needs less introduction. For the non-biblical prophecy, I focus on the prophetic material from seventh-century Assyria. This material consists of collections of prophetic oracles, single oracles, oracles reported or quoted in letters, oracles included in royal inscriptions, and oracles reworked into literary texts. There are several reasons for giving priority to the Assyrian prophecies over other extra-biblical prophecies. The first reason is the relative abundance of prophetic material from seventh-century Assyria. Second, perhaps even more important than the relative wealth of material, is the integration of prophetic oracles and references to prophets in the literature of that period, such as letters, royal inscriptions, and literary texts. Third, the Assyrian prophecies are close to the period of Isaiah. Whereas the Mari prophecies date from the eighteenth century, the Assyrian prophecies stem from the first half of the seventh century. This is close to the earliest prophetic material within First Isaiah, which dates from the late eighth century.

Whereas the emphasis is on the Assyrian prophetic material in a strict sense (chapters 4 and 5), some further texts will be taken into account in order to explore the transition from prophecy to literature (chapter 6). These additional texts consist of two groups. The first group is formed by texts that stem from seventh-century Assyria. These texts can be qualified as prophetic compositions. They are closely related to the prophetic oracles, in particular to the oracles that are reworked into literary texts.[249] The second group of texts consists of the so-called literary-predictive texts (sometimes called literary prophecies or pseudo-prophecies).[250]

1.3.3 Comparative Part

The second part of this study contains a comparison of the Isaiah tradition in its earliest shape on the one hand, and the prophetic material from seventh-century Assyria on the other.[251]

The comparison focuses on three aspects: the interrelation between prophecy and historical events in Judah and Assyria (chapter 4), the functions of the prophetic figures (chapter 5), and the secondary adaptation and elaboration (the 'literary afterlife') of prophecy (chapter 6). A necessary condition for an adequate comparison is clarity with regard to procedure and significance.[252] The kind of comparison to be carried out in this study is a historical comparison.[253] The rationale for a historical comparison is the relative closeness, geographically and historically, of the societies to which the units of comparison

[249] See also note 216 above.
[250] See also note 217 above.
[251] Whereas the focus of this study is on the prophetic material from seventh-century Assyria, other examples of ancient Near Eastern prophecy are occasionally taken into account as well.
[252] Etzioni and DuBow (1970: 7) define comparative study as 'a design whereby the same process of data-collection and data-analysis is carried out within a number of spatial units'.
[253] To be distinguished from a phenomenological or typological comparison; see Bloch 1970; Barstad 2000: 5-6; Talmon 1978: 325.

belong, their mutual influence on one another, and their shared cultural aspects.[254] The various ancient Near Eastern cultures have a common ground, shared by Judah and Israel as well,[255] and prophecy forms one aspect of this.[256] The material from First Isaiah on the one hand and the Assyrian prophecies on the other, comply with the conditions for historical comparison: 1) there is similarity or analogy between the observed phenomena; 2) there is a certain dissimilarity between the environments in which the phenomena occurred;[257] and 3) though the phenomena occur at approximately the same point of time, they are independent of each other rather than causally related.[258]

Comparative Procedure

For a valid comparison it is important to compare 'like with like'.[259] In their final version the biblical books do not resemble the Assyrian texts, which are of a more rudimentary state. Neither does it make sense to compare prophetic oracles from Mesopotamia to the multi-layered textual complex of First Isaiah. However, after a careful distinction between prophetic oracles and sayings – orally delivered messages going back to prophetic activity – on the one hand, and the literary development of the prophetic tradition on the other, it is possible to compare 'like with like'. First, prophetic material, preserved within First Isaiah, can be compared with extra-biblical prophetic oracles. Second, the literary extensions to the prophetic material can be compared with literary prophetic texts from the ancient Near East, which likewise have a literary *Sitz im Leben*.

The procedure of a historical comparison implies the selection of two (or more) apparently analogous phenomena, in this case texts from First Isaiah and the Assyrian prophecies, a description of how they resemble or differ from each other, and an explanation of the similarities and differences.[260] Several fallacies are to be avoided. First, the phenomena in question have to be explored in their own right. Instead of explaining aspects of Judaean prophecy through the Assyrian prophecy or *vice versa*, both phenomena have to be explained within their own historical contexts, and compared from their respective contexts.[261] Secondly, the comparative study, instead of merely listing similarities or dissimilarities, must take into account the cultural context in order to establish the significance of apparent parallels.[262] Both in Judah and in Assyria, prophecy was part of the cultural, religious and social system. Given the shared ancient Near Eastern tradition on the one hand, and the particular circumstances of Judah and Assyria on the

[254] Bloch 1970: 41.
[255] E.g. Vriezen 1969: 14-15; cf. Van der Toorn 1994: 1-2.
[256] Cf. Weippert (2001a: 58) for the view 'daß es eine gemeinaltorientalische – oder wenigstens syrisch-mesopotamische – prophetische Sprache gab, an der sowohl die assyrischen Prophet(inn)en als auch Deuterojesaja partizipierten'.
[257] The first two conditions are formulated by Bloch 1970: 39.
[258] The third condition is formulated by Etzioni and DuBow 1970: 11.
[259] Cf. Saggs 1978: 79.
[260] Bloch 1970: 39.
[261] Cf. the consideration expressed by Saggs 1978: 17.
[262] Barstad 2000: 8.

other, one would expect to find both similarities and differences, the significance of which can be established within a contextual interpretation.[263]

Comparative Aim
The comparison is carried out on the basis of texts. Furthermore an attempt will be made to proceed to a further stage of comparison, consisting of an analysis of the socio-historical phenomena behind the texts.[264] Chapter 4 offers a comparison between the Isaianic material and the Assyrian prophecies with regard to the relationship between prophecy and historical events. The Assyrian prophecies relate to various historical situations during the reigns of Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal. The prophecies from First Isaiah dating from the Assyrian period can be related to specific historical situations as well. A comparison will be carried out with regard to the way in which the prophecies functioned in their respective historical contexts. Chapter 5 deals with the function of the prophetic figures in Judah and Assyria. The position of the Assyrian prophets and the Judaean prophets within their respective societies is not evident. Whereas the latter have been the subject of ongoing debate, the former have not received much attention.[265] One of the questions addressed in this chapter is: are the classical prophets a specific type of prophets, or rather a specific prophetic image, present in the biblical literature but not in the biblical world? With regard to Isaiah, it will be argued that he was not a classical prophet in the traditional sense. Instead, he resembled prophets elsewhere in the ancient Near East to the extent that he was principally supportive of the Judaean state (which does *not* mean that he was a *Heilsprophet*). Chapter 6 describes the adaptation, elaboration and reworking of the prophetic oracles. Many of the Assyrian prophecies enjoyed a (literary) 'afterlife'. They were quoted in letters, re-applied to new situations, and republished and reworked for new occasions. Furthermore, various kinds of literary texts were composed, based on the genre of prophetic oracles. The literary functioning of Assyrian prophetic texts will be compared with the earliest literary revision of the prophetic oracles in First Isaiah in the Assyrian period. The suggestion of a revision of the Isaiah tradition in the late seventh century will play an important role in this respect.

1.3.4 Conclusion
This study aims to provide a depiction of the Isaiah tradition in the Assyrian period – its origin and earliest development – which meets demands of plausibility from a historical and exegetical point of view (chapter 2), and to give a presentation of the prophetic material from seventh-century Assyria (chapter 3). The main purpose of this study is to present a comparative perspective on the Isaiah tradition in the Assyrian period and the prophetic material from Assyria which sheds light on three issues: the interrelation between prophecy and historical circumstances (chapter 4), the function of the prophets (chapter 5), and the literary development of prophecy (chapter 6).

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[263] For the contextual approach, see Hallo 1990. For the term 'context' and the 'contextual approach', see Hallo 1997: XXV: the context of a text is '... the geographical, historical, religious, political and literary setting in which it was created and disseminated. The contextual approach tries to reconstruct and evaluate this setting, whether for a biblical text or one from the rest of the ancient Near East.'
[264] Cf. Barstad 2000: 11.
[265] A notable exception is Nissinen 2000b.