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

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Citation

Jong, M. J. de. (2006, December 7). *Isaiah among the Ancient Near Eastern Prophets : a comparative study of the earliest stages of the Isaiah tradition and the Neo-Assyrian prophecies*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/12302>

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CHAPTER 3

THE ASSYRIAN PROPHECIES

The Assyrian prophecies date from the first half of the seventh century BCE, from the reigns of the Assyrian kings Esarhaddon (681-669 BCE) and Ashurbanipal (669-631 BCE). Most of the Assyrian prophecies have been published in Parpola's edition.¹ A further range of prophecies and texts referring to prophetic figures has been published and discussed by Nissinen (1998). Besides, Nissinen has published a source book of ancient Near Eastern prophecy (2003a), in which all prophetic material from seventh-century Assyria is included both in transcription and translation.² In this study, I have adopted Parpola's numbering of the oracles (as does Nissinen 1998; 2003a). The quotations from the oracles and other Assyrian texts are according to my own translation unless specified otherwise.

3.1 *Sources of Assyrian Prophecies*

3.1.1 *The Corpus of SAA 9 (Nissinen 2003a: 101-132)*

In Parpola's edition (SAA 9: 4-43; followed by Nissinen 2003a: 101-132) the prophetic texts are divided into two types: (a) collections of prophetic oracles (SAA 9 1-4), and (b) reports of prophetic oracles (SAA 9 5-11). According to Parpola, the single oracles, written on small horizontal tablets (*u'iltu*), are first-hand reports of oracles (type b), whereas the oracle collections (type a), written on large vertical tablets (*tuppu*), are second-hand compilations based on the first-hand reports of oracles.³ This procedure – the content of small tablets meant for instant use at some later stage copied on larger tablets meant for archiving – is on itself plausible. However, Parpola's application of the distinction between second-hand collections and first-hand reports is misleading. Four of the seven texts

¹ Parpola 1997 (SAA 9). Reviewers praise Parpola's edition and translation of the prophetic oracles; Weippert 2002: 39; Cooper 2000: 441. Parpola's edition of the prophecies contains many textual restorations, most of which have been adopted in Nissinen 2003a: 101-132. Many of these restorations are convincing, but not all. Furthermore, Parpola has included an introduction to Assyrian prophecy in the broader context of Assyrian religion (1997: XIII-XLIV). Parpola's views as displayed in the introduction have met with criticism from various reviewers; see Cooper 2000; Frahm 2001; Porter 2000; and Weippert 2002: 4-13.

² Nissinen 2003a: 97-188. For earlier literature on the Assyrian prophecies, see Parpola 1997: CIX-CXII, Weippert 2002: 39, and particularly, Nissinen 2003a: 101-177.

³ Parpola 1997: LIII.

labelled as report by Parpola are written on horizontal tablets (SAA 9 5-8), three on vertical tablets (SAA 9 9-11). Of the latter, SAA 9 10 and 11 could very well be letters to the king in which a prophetic oracle is reported (first-hand texts).⁴ SAA 9 9 however certainly is a library copy, which presents a prophetic oracle in a literary, elaborated form.⁵ The four texts on horizontal tablets (SAA 9 5-8), on the other hand, are not all straightforward, oracular reports. SAA 9 7 and 8 contain oracles but both show traces of elaboration. SAA 9 7 could be an archival copy,⁶ and may combine various oracles.⁷ SAA 9 8 may similarly contain various divine words, and could be an archival copy too.⁸ SAA 9 5 and 6 are probably first-hand texts, but SAA 9 5 is a derivative of prophecy rather than an oracular report. This leaves only the fragment SAA 9 6 as an example of Parpola's 'reports' (small horizontal tablets containing a first-hand report of a prophecy). I suggest a different qualification of the texts from SAA 9. Oracles delivered by prophets were reported to the king either in a letter (e.g. SAA 9 10, 11; further examples below), or in a report (e.g. SAA 9 6). Such reported oracles could be archived in different ways. They could be copied by a scribe either on a large tablet as part of a collection (SAA 9 1, 2, 4) or on a smaller tablet (SAA 9 7, 8). Or they could be elaborated into a literary text (SAA 9 9, and, to some extent, SAA 9 3).

SAA 9 1

This tablet contains a collection of prophetic oracles. Nine different prophetic oracles can be identified. Of eight of them, the colophon has been preserved, in which the prophet(ess) who delivered the oracle is mentioned. The unit numbered as 1.9 presents a description of activities of Ištar of Arbela. It is not formulated as a prophetic oracle (contra Parpola and Nissinen), but the unit refers to an oracle. Ištar of Arbela is said to have sent a *šulmu*, a message of well-being, to Esarhaddon. Because the end of this unit is broken, it is unclear whether it was followed by a colophon comparable to the oracles of this collection.

SAA 9 2

The tablet contains a collection of prophetic oracles. Five straightforward prophetic oracles can be identified. In addition, the unit 2.4 seems to be a compilation of several oracles. Most of the colophons have been preserved (2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4).

2.4 (ii 29'-39', iii 1'-17'), a compilation of various oracles:

Introductory remark (ii 29'); presentation of oracles as *abutu* of Ištar of Arbela and *abutu* of Mullissu (ii 30'); oracle (ii 31'-37'); presentation of oracle as *abutu* of Ištar of Arbela (ii 38');

⁴ The form of these tablets (see Parpola 1997: LXI-LXII) suggests they are letters. Note that these texts were included in CT 53, Parpola's copies of Assyrian letters.

⁵ Parpola correctly states that SAA 9 9 resembles SAA 9 1-4 (1997: LIII), and is a library copy rather than a report (1997: LXI). It is difficult to understand why Parpola and Nissinen nevertheless present this text as a report.

⁶ Cf. Parpola 1997: LX.

⁷ Nissinen (2000a: 247-248) points out that SAA 9 7 and 9 are examples of secondary prophecy: they are written in polished style by experienced hands on tablets intended for archival storage.

⁸ Parpola (1997: LXI) suggests this tablet may have been written by Ashurbanipal's chief scribe Ištar-šumu-ereš.

oracle (ii 38'-39') [break of about two lines at the end of column ii; break of about two lines at the beginning of column iii]; continuation of oracle (iii 1'-17'); colophon (iii 18'); ruling.

SAA 9 3

This text is to be divided in two main parts. The first part consists of a tripartite composition in which the god Aššur figures (3.1, 3.2, 3.3). The second part consists of two 'divine words' (*abutu*) of Ištar of Arbela. Parpola's presentation of this text as another oracle collection, consisting of five individual oracles, delivered by the prophet La-dagil-ili (1997: LXIII-LXIV; adopted by Nissinen 2003a: 118) is to be rejected. The colophon following the fifth unit (3.5) mentions a prophet: [*La-dagil-i*]li *raggimu* [*Arbail*]āya. The restoration of the name La-dagil-ili is uncertain,⁹ but the unit 3.5 clearly is a prophetic oracle. The unit 3.4 can perhaps be attributed to the same prophet, because this unit too is also presented as an *abutu*, a divine word of Ištar of Arbela. However, 3.4 is not formulated as a straightforward prophetic oracle, but is rather to be qualified as a derivative of prophecy. The first part of the text, the tripartite composition of 3.1-3.3 forms a different case. This composition is separated from the 'words' of 3.4 and 3.5 by a double ruling, which indicates that it is a different text. Moreover, this composition has its own colophon (ii 27-32), in which no prophet is mentioned. None of the individual units, 3.1, 3.2 and 3.3, is a prophetic oracle. Whereas Parpola has adequately labelled 3.1 as an 'introduction' (1997: 22), the two following units (3.2 and 3.3) are designated as *šulmu*, 'message of well-being'. They are formulated as divine words, but not as prophetic oracles. The composition of 3.1-3.3 has been labelled as a liturgy of a ritual.¹⁰

SAA 9 4

The text contains a fragment of an oracle for Esarhaddon, comparable to those in SAA 9 1 and 2. The tablet may be a fragment of another collection of prophetic oracles.

SAA 9 5

This tablet contains one textual unit, presented as a divine word (*abutu*) of Ištar of Ar[bela]. Ištar speaks in the first person and refers to Esarhaddon in the third person. The text is to be qualified as a literary derivative of prophecy, comparable to unit 3.4. Parpola presents this text as an oracle addressed to the queen mother, Naqia, by restoring the first line as *abat Issār ša Arbail* [*ana ummi šarri*]¹¹ (SAA 9; adopted by Nissinen 2003a: 125). This restoration is based on the phrase *qablīki ruksī* 'gird your loins!' (line 4), addressed to a female subject. In my view, it is however unlikely that Ištar of Arbela gives this command

⁹ Although the name is almost completely lost, Parpola's arguments for this identification (1997: CVI, note 266) are rather strong: oracle 3.5 contains elements that are paralleled in the oracles 1.10 and 2.3, attributed to La-dagil-ili: 1) the phrase *atta ana ayyāši* 'as for you', occurs both in 3.5 and in 2.3; 2) both 1.10, 2.3 and 3.5 contain cultic demands from the side of the goddess. These arguments, however, only apply to 3.5. There is no evidence for attributing all the units of this tablet to La-dagil-ili (contra Parpola).

¹⁰ See Van der Toorn 200b: 73.

¹¹ This goes back to the suggestion by Weippert 1981: 77.

to Naqia.¹² Furthermore, the suggestion that Ištar's knees are bent for Esarhaddon (restoration in Nissinen 2003a: 125, line 2) is unlikely as well. In my view, the text presents Ištar of Arbela in her role as intercessor for Esarhaddon, who mobilises divine support for him (as in SAA 9 3.4):

- ¹ Word of Ištar of Arbela [.....]
² my knees are bent for [*Mullissu*].
³ Mullissu [listen] to [my] cry,
⁴ tie your belts, [*take action for the sake of*]
⁵ of Esarhaddon, king of Assyria. [.... DN and]¹³
⁶ Ninurta [*will go/stand*] at [my] right and left [...]
⁷ [...] his enemies under [his] foot [.....]
⁸ in/out/of the Palace of the desert [.....]
⁹ I will give security for [Esarhaddon]¹⁴
¹⁰ _ r. 2
^{r. 3} the enemy who/of [.....]
^{r. 4} the enemy who/of [.....]
^{r. 5} we have cast [before his feet]¹⁵ and [go] [...]
^{r. 6} glorify (pl.) Mullissu!
^{r. 7} [...] their [.....]¹⁶

SAA 9 6

This tablet contains a single textual unit, which consists of a fragmented report of a prophecy. It is an oracle of Ištar of Arbela, delivered by the prophet Tašmetu-ereš. It is uncertain to which period this oracle can be attributed.¹⁷

¹² In various prophetic oracles Naqia is addressed as representative of her son Esarhaddon (SAA 9 1.7, 1.8, and probably 2.1, 2.6). In most of these cases, Esarhaddon is addressed too (1.8, 2.1, 2.6). In 1.7 the oracle concludes with the phrase *atti attīma šarru šarrīma*, literally 'you are you, the king is my king', which means, you (Naqia) take care of yourself, I (the goddess) take care of the king. Naqia, as elsewhere Esarhaddon, is ordered to remain quiet – it is the goddess who will act. From this perspective it is unlikely that Ištar urges Naqia to 'gird her loins'. Instead, the text describes how Ištar mobilises divine help for Esarhaddon.

¹³ At the end of this line another god is probably mentioned, since it would be unlikely that Ninurta stands (or goes) at both sides (cf. SAA 9 1 ii 24'; 2 i 21'). See the prophetic oracle included in the Old Babylonian Epic of Zimri-Lim: 'The king goes forth with forceful heart! Adad goes at his left side, Erra, the mighty one, at his right side.' (Nissinen 2003a: 90, lines 140-142).

¹⁴ Parpola's restoration [*aš-šur*-PAB-AŠ MAN KUR-*aš-šur*] ('Esarhaddon, king of Assyria') seems too long in comparison with his interpretation of the rest of this text. A shorter alternative would be [Esarhaddon, my king].

¹⁵ Parpola's restoration [*ina* IGI(*pān*) GÌR.2.MEŠ(*šēpē*)-šú] is convincing (cf. SAA 9 1 i 44', 4:4). He translates however the preterit *nīkrur* with a future tense.

¹⁶ The reading and interpretation of this line is very uncertain.

¹⁷ Parpola (SAA 9: 33, 35) presents it as an oracle for Esarhaddon, but without arguments.

SAA 9 7

This tablet contains a single textual unit, which probably consists of an elaboration of various prophetic oracles. The oracles are from the goddess Mullissu, delivered by the prophetess Mullissu-kabtat.

SAA 9 8

This tablet contains a single textual unit, which may consist of an elaboration of prophetic oracles. As an alternative to Parpola's edition (SAA 9: 40; adopted by Nissinen 2003a: 129), the first two lines may be read as follows:

¹ Words (*dibbī*) [concerning the Elam]ites:

² As [Aššur?] says (*ki-i* ^d[*aš-šur?*])¹⁸

SAA 9 9

This tablet contains a textual unit, which consists of an introduction referring to two goddesses (l. 1-7), an oracle in which a goddess speaks in the first person singular (l. 8-28), a blessing of the king again referring to two goddesses (r. 1-3), and a colophon (r. 4-7). This text is to be qualified as a prophetic oracle in an elaborated literary form.

SAA 9 10

This tablet contains a single textual unit, which probably consists of a report of a prophetic oracle (comparable to SAA 9 6). The oracle is delivered by the prophetess Dunnaša-amur.

SAA 9 11

This tablet, of which the obverse is completely lost, probably is a letter in which a prophetic oracle is reported (r. 4-5).

3.1.2 Oracles Reported in Letters

The purpose of a report of a prophetic oracle is to *inform* the king of what messages from the gods – either promises or demands – have been uttered. In the cases of oracle report, the circumstances of the deliverance of the oracle, such as the situation and the name of the prophet(ess), are of importance.

SAA 10 24 (not in Nissinen 2003a)

A letter to Esarhaddon, reporting an incident in which an oracle of Marduk and Zarpanitu is delivered (r. 7-11).

SAA 10 352 (Nissinen 2003a: 164-166)

A letter to Esarhaddon, reporting the deliverance of two prophetic oracles in the context of a substitute king ritual (l. 22-r. 4).

¹⁸ In SAA 3 44, divine words to be attributed to the god Aššur, are identified as *dibbī* 'words' as well (SAA 3 44 r. 30). The suggestion presented here has the advantage that the god who speaks is identified.

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SAA 13 37 (Nissinen 2003a: 167-168)

A letter to Esarhaddon, reporting the deliverance of a prophetic oracle, which contains the demand for a throne (l. 7-r. 9).

SAA 13 139 (Nissinen 2003a: 168)

A letter to Ashurbanipal, reporting a prophetic oracle, which deals with the reconciliation between Marduk, and Mullissu and Ashurbanipal (obverse).

SAA 13 144 (Nissinen 2003a: 169)

A letter to the king, reporting the deliverance of a prophetic oracle, which demands the return of certain objects (r. 7-s. 1).

SAA 13 148 (Nissinen 2003a: 169)

Fragment of a letter to the king, referring to a message (*šipirtu*) to the king, probably by Istar of Arbela, delivered by a votary (*šēlūtu*) of the goddess.

SAA 16 59 (Nissinen 2003a: 170-172)

A letter to Esarhaddon, reporting the deliverance of a prophetic oracle (*abutu*) of Nusku, in which the kingship of a certain Saši is proclaimed. The oracle is delivered by a female slave (ABL 1217 r. 3'-5').

3.1.3 Oracles Quoted, Paraphrased, or Referred to in Letters

The purpose of a quotation or paraphrase of a prophetic oracle in letters is to support the point of view of the author before the king. The divine word is used as an argument. The circumstances of the original deliverance of the oracle are not of importance; no reference to the prophet(ess) is included. The point is the argumentative force of the divine message.

SAA 10 109 (Nissinen 2003a: 152-155)

Bel-ušeziḫ reminds Esarhaddon that he reported (*qabû*) the 'sign' (*ittu*) of Esarhaddon's kingship. This 'sign' probably was a prophetic oracle, which is quoted (l. 13'-15').

SAA 10 111 (Nissinen 2003a: 155-157)

Bel-ušeziḫ quotes a prophetic oracle of Marduk concerning Esarhaddon's supremacy, which was delivered previously (Bel *has said*; r. 23-26).

SAA 10 174 (not in Nissinen 2003a)

Marduk-šumu-ušur reminds Ashurbanipal of an oracle of Sin to his father Esarhaddon, announcing the conquest of Egypt (l. 10-14).

SAA 10 284 (Nissinen 2003a: 158)

Nabû-[nadin]-šumi paraphrases an oracle of Istar of Arbela and Istar of Nineveh concerning the destruction of Esarhaddon's enemies (r. 4-7).

SAA 16 59 (Nissinen 2003a: 170-172)

Nabû-reġtu-ušur, aiming to protect Esarhaddon against a supposed *coup d'état*, paraphrases an oracle, referred to as *dabābu* (word) of Nikkal (ABL 1217, l. 8-12).

SAA 16 60 (Nissinen 2003a: 172-174)

Nabû-reġtu-ušur, aiming to protect Esarhaddon against a supposed *coup d'état*, paraphrases an oracle, referred to as *dabābu* (word) of Mullissu (CT 53 17, l. 5-9). Furthermore he quotes an oracle of Ištar of Nineveh (CT 53 107, l. 12'-14'), paraphrases a subsequent oracle (CT 17, r. 13'-16'), and finally quotes an oracle of Bel containing a demand for gold and precious stones (CT 53 17, s. 1-2).

SAA 16 61 (Nissinen 2003a: 174-175; a fragment similar to SAA 16 60)

Nabû-reġtu-ušur, aiming to protect Esarhaddon against a supposed *coup d'état*, paraphrases an oracle, referred to as *dabābu* (word) of Mullissu (l. 4-9).

ABL 839¹⁹ (not in Nissinen 2003a)

Nabû-bel-šumate quotes a prophetic oracle of Nabû and Marduk concerning Assyria's rule of Elam and the Sealand (r. 11-18).

3.1.4 Other Messages from Deities

Two messages addressing the king are characterised as a *šipirtu* (message) of a deity:

SAA 3 47 (not in Nissinen 2003a)

The text contains a message from Ninurta, orally delivered, recorded, and in a later stage copied onto a tablet from Ashurbanipal's library.

SAA 13 43 (not in Nissinen 2003a)

A message (*šipirtu*) from a deity (probably Aššur) to the king. Nothing points to an originally oral deliverance of this message.

3.1.5 Oracles Integrated into Ashurbanipal's Royal Inscriptions

Prism A (F, B, C); BIWA: 35, 221 (Nissinen 2003a: 144-145)

A word (*amātu*) of Ištar of Arbela announcing the death of Aḫšeri (iii 4-7)

Prism A (F, T); BIWA: 57-58, 242 (not in Nissinen 2003a)

A word (*amātu*) of Nanâ announcing her return to Uruk (vi 107-117)

Prism B (C); BIWA: 100, 225 (Nissinen 2003a: 146-150)

A word of Ištar of Arbela announcing the defeat of Teumman (v 47-49), followed by a dream.

¹⁹ Published by Mattila 1987.

Votive inscription to Marduk; BIWA: 202 (not in Nissinen 2003a)

A message (*šipru*) from Marduk announcing the defeat of the enemy (l. 24-26)

It is a matter for discussion whether the prophecies in the royal inscriptions represent real prophetic oracles or rather literary creations.

3.2 Characteristics of Prophetic Oracles

A prophetic oracle may be defined as a direct word presented as spoken by a deity in the first person, addressed to a third party, and orally delivered by a functionary of the deity, a prophet. Indications for prophetic activity are the following.²⁰

3.2.1 Terms indicating Prophetic Activity

1) *raggimu* (feminine *raggintu*; for the term see chapter 5.1.1) designates a prophetic figure in the Neo-Assyrian period. It is attested in the following texts:

MSL 12 226:134	lexical text	<i>lú.šabra</i> (PA.AL) = ŠU-u (<i>šabrû</i>) = <i>rag-gi-mu</i>
SAA 9 3 iv 31	prophecy (SAA 9 3.5)	<i>raggimu</i> as deliverer of oracle
SAA 9 6 r. 11	prophecy (SAA 9 6)	[<i>raggimu</i>] as deliverer of oracle
SAA 9 7:1	prophecy (SAA 9 7)	<i>raggintu</i> as deliverer of oracle
SAA 2 6:116	<i>adê</i> -text	<i>raggimu</i> , <i>mahhû</i> , <i>šā'ilu amat ili</i>
SAA 7 9 r. i 23	administrative list	<i>raggimu</i>
SAA 10 109:9	letter referring to prophets	<i>raggimānu</i> and <i>raggimātu</i> spoke in favour of Esarhaddon's kingship
SAA 10 294 r. 31	letter referring to a prophet	reference to <i>raggimu</i> in obscure passage
SAA 10 352:23, r. 1	letter reporting an oracle	<i>raggintu</i> declares PN as (substitute) king
SAA 13 37:7	letter reporting an oracle	<i>raggintu</i> demands for a throne

2) The verb *ragāmu* is attested four times meaning 'to prophesy', three times in texts mentioned above (SAA 9 6 r. 6, 8, 12; SAA 10 352 e. 23 and SAA 13 37:10), and once where it identifies another oracle:

SAA 13 144 r. 7	letter reporting an oracle	woman demands return of objects
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3) *mahhû* (feminine *mahhûtu*), 'ecstatic', a figure associated with prophetic activity in the Mari letters, occurs in texts from the Neo-Assyrian period as well, but mostly without reference to prophetic oracles.²¹ In connection with prophecy, *mahhû* is attested in the expression *šipir mahhê*, 'messages from ecstasies', in the royal inscriptions of Esarhaddon

²⁰ Cf. Nissinen 1998: 9-11, for a similar set of criteria.

²¹ SAA 2 6:117, an enumeration in an *adê*-text (Nissinen 2003a: 150-151); SAA 3 34:28 and 35:31, two versions of a ritual text (Nissinen 2003a: 151-152); SAA 12 69:29, a decree for temple maintenance (Nissinen 2003a: 166-167); and SAA 3 23:5, in the phrase: 'he wailed like an ecstatic' (not in Nissinen 2003a).

(Ass. A ii 12 and Nin. A ii 6),²² and Ashurbanipal (Prism B v 95 and Prism T ii 16).²³ Since the expression *šipir mahḥê* probably refers to prophetic messages, it may be suggested that cases where a *šipru* is mentioned in the royal inscriptions, may refer to a prophetic oracle as well (e.g. the *šipru* of Ištar, Prism B v 78-79). In one case, a *šipru* is actually quoted: a message of Marduk to Ashurbanipal in which the god announces the destruction of Ashurbanipal's enemy.²⁴ SAA 9 10 s.1 refers to MÍ.GUB.BA, *mahḥūtu*,²⁵ probably in connection with an oracle that is lost.²⁶

3.2.2 Oracles as Spoken Divine Words

References to 'prophets' (*raggimu*, *mahḥû*) and 'prophesying' (*ragāmu*) provide a firm criterion for identifying prophetic oracles. Further evidence can be found in references to the oral deliverance of oracles, since it is characteristic of prophecy that the deity speaks through the mouth of the mediator.

1) The oracles in the compendia SAA 9 1 and 2 are divine speeches in the first person, that come 'from the mouth' (*ša pî* of PN in SAA 9 1; *issu pî* of PN in SAA 9 2) of individuals. Although these people are not explicitly identified as *raggimu* or *mahḥû*, the same expression is used in SAA 9 9 r. 4, *ša pî* of PN, and this woman, Dunnaša-amur, is identified as a *mahḥūtu* in SAA 9 10 s. 1-2.

2) A designation for a divine word is *abutu* 'word' in the construction *abat* followed by a divine name. A range of oracles are introduced as *abutu* of a deity: SAA 9 2.4 (ii 30', 38'), 3.4, 3.5, 5:1, 7:2; SAA 16 59 (ABL 1217) r. 4-5; Prism A iii 4-7 (BIWA: 35, 221) and Prism A vi 113-117 (BIWA: 57-58, 242). Besides, the term *dabābu* was used (SAA 16 59 [ABL 1217] 8, 12; SAA 16 60 [CT 53 17] 8 // SAA 16 61:8).

3) In the oracles themselves, the deity often refers to other oracles as his/her *words* and to the *oral character* of the prophecies:

SAA 9 1 i 15'-16'	Words that I have spoken to you
SAA 9 1 ii 17'-18'	I speak to you
SAA 9 1 iii 31	I have spoken to you
SAA 9 1 vi 7-8	The previous utterance I spoke to you
SAA 9 2 ii 22'-23'	Collect these words of mine in your palace
SAA 9 2 ii 34'	I will speak to the multi[tudes]
SAA 9 7:3	The things I said to you
SAA 9 7:12	(Mullissu) has said thus:
SAA 9 7:14	Secondly, let me tell you:
SAA 9 8:1	Words [concerning the Elamites]
SAA 9 8:2	As [Aššur?] says:
SAA 9 8:4	He s[ai]d it five, six times

²² Borger 1956: 2, 45.

²³ BIWA: 104, 141.

²⁴ BIWA: 202, Votive inscription to Marduk, l. 24-26.

²⁵ Cf. Parpola 1997: XLVI, CII, note 228; Parpola however suggests to read MÍ.GUB.BA here as *raggintu*.

²⁶ SAA 9 10 s. 1-2: 'PN said: '[...]''; thus the prophetess, who [...]'.

SAA 3 47:4-5	Say to ..., thus speaks DN:
SAA 10 109:8	Words (revealed by the prophets)
SAA 10 111 r. 23	Bel has said:
SAA 10 174	(the deity) said thus:
SAA 10 284	according to what Ištar of Nineveh and Ištar of Arbela have said
SAA 16 60 (CT 53 107:12')	Ištar of Nineveh says thus:
Prism A iii 7	As I (Ištar) have said
Prism A vi 117	(the word which) she had said
Prism B v 47	(Ištar) said to me

These characteristics distinguish the prophetic oracles not only from texts relating to forms of technical divination,²⁷ but also from closely related phenomena, such as message-dreams and prophetic compositions. Being straightforward, first person messages of a deity, prophetic oracles are distinctive from message-dreams, which involve visual experience,²⁸ and references to their oral deliverance distinguish the oracles from the prophetic literature, which presents a deity speaking.

Furthermore, texts that in themselves are not clearly recognisable as prophetic oracles, can be identified as such based on analogies with clearly identified oracles:

1) SAA 9 11 contains the passage: 'I will vanquish the enemy of Ashurbanipal [...] Sit down! I will put the lands in orde[r ...]' (r. 4-5). This can be recognised as (a report of) an oracle, given the parallels in e.g. SAA 9 2.5 ('I will vanquish the enemies of my king. I will put Assyria in order, I will put the kin[gdom of] heaven in order').

2) The word in SAA 10 174:14 is introduced with *mā*: 'you will go and conquer (*kašādu*) the lands with them (*ina libbi*, i.e. two crowns placed on Esarhaddon's head)'. This can be accepted as a prophetic oracle based on the parallel with the oracle reported in SAA 13 37: '[L]et the [t]hrone go! I shall conquer (*kašādu*) my king's enemies with it (*ina libbi*)'.

3) SAA 16 60 (CT 53 17) r. 13-16 is identifiable as a paraphrase of a prophetic oracle, because of the expression *lā tapallah* and the phrase 'Bel, Nabû and Mullissu are standing [with you]' (cf. SAA 9 1.4); besides, the phrase 'let ... die, save your life!' occurs in an oracle of the goddess Nikkal in another letter from the same author as well (SAA 16 59 [ABL 1217] 8-12).

Being spoken, divine words, the prophetic oracles are not abstract religious speeches, but deal with particular historical situations.²⁹ Many of them deal with royal legitimacy, whether addressed to the king, the crown-prince, the king's mother, a rebel, or a substitute king. In addition, they announce the defeat of the king's enemies or contain demands from the deity. The Assyrian prophecies resemble other examples of ancient Near Eastern prophecy. The prophetic material from Mari and from elsewhere corroborates the oral

²⁷ Weippert 1981: 71.

²⁸ E.g. the dreams referred to in Ashurbanipal's royal inscriptions (Prism B v 50-76; Prism A ii 95-110; Prism A iii 118-127; Prism A v 95-103) and in the letters SAA 10 361 and 365.

²⁹ Weippert 1981: 71-72. For this, see chapter 4.2.

character of prophecy.³⁰ Furthermore, the prophetic oracles from Mari and elsewhere support the relationship between prophecy and kingship as found in the Assyrian prophecies. This does not mean that prophetic oracles in the ancient Near East were necessarily addressed to the king. Since the evidence for ancient Near Eastern prophecy comes from royal correspondence, royal archives and steles, the relationship with kingship is obvious, but not necessarily representative of all prophecy.

3.2.3 Characterisation of the Assyrian Prophecies

A prophetic oracle can be recognised by several characteristics: it is a first-person message from a deity, which is addressed to a recipient (mostly the king) in the second person; it relates to the imminent future; and it is orally delivered by a prophet(ess). Oracles of this type are found in SAA 9 oracle collection 1 and 2; oracle 3.5; the fragment of collection 4; the fragment of an oracle report, text 6; the oracles of text 7. These prophetic oracles are clearly recognisable as divine messages. In most of them the deity introduces itself with *anāku* followed by a name or a title. Ištar of Arbela appears most often, but Mullissu, Bel (Marduk), Nabû and probably Banitu and Urkittu appear as well. Other oracles are formally introduced as a ‘word’ (*abutu*) of the goddess (Ištar of Arbela or Mullissu).³¹ In these cases, the goddess does not present herself within the oracle through the *anāku*-formula. In most oracles the king is addressed (sometimes the king’s mother or the crown prince). The recipient is often, but not always, encouraged with the phrase ‘fear not!’ (*lā tapallah*). All oracles show a concern for the imminent future, either by announcing divine action against the enemies, or by promising divine protection, restoration, reconciliation, and kingship.

Outside the corpus of SAA 9 we find prophetic oracles reported or quoted in letters to the king or embedded in royal inscriptions. None of them displays the full set of characteristics mentioned above. They are significantly shorter than the prophetic oracles of SAA 9. This might be explained by suggesting that within reports, oracles were abbreviated to what was conceived their core message. Their deviant presentation may exist in the following points:

- 1) The identification of the deity speaking is missing in the prophecies reported in SAA 10 352 l. 25 and r. 2-4, and SAA 13 37 l. 11-r. 9 (all delivered by a *raggintu*).
- 2) The second person address is missing in the oracle reported in SAA 16 59 (ABL 1217 r. 4-5, *abutu* of Nusku), in the prophecy SAA 9 8 (*dibbī* of a deity), and in several prophetic oracles embedded in Ashurbanipal’s inscriptions: Prism A iii 4-7, an *amātu*

³⁰ The oracles reported in the Mari letters were orally delivered. This is indicated by the use of the verbs *qabû* and *dabābu*, ‘to speak’ and the noun *awātum* ‘word’ (see ARM 26/1). Cf. the Zakkur Stele, referring to the oracles addressed to King Zakkur: ‘Baal-šamayin answered me’ (l. 11); ‘and [Baal-šamayin] said to [me]’ (l. 15); see Seow, in: Nissinen 2003a: 204.

³¹ The *abat damiqti* of Ištar of Uruk (Borger 1956: 17) probably refers to a prophetic oracle as well. The expression *abat* followed by a divine name may find a parallel in the expression *abat šarri*, if the latter is taken as referring to the verdict of the king as the most powerful authority (see Postgate 1974b: 424).

(word) of Ištar of Arbela,³² A vi 113-115 (F, T), an *amātu* (word) of Nanâ,³³ and the votive inscription to Marduk, l. 24-25, a *šipru* of Marduk.³⁴

3) An explicit promise or announcement concerning the future is missing in the oracle reported in SAA 13 139, and in the oracle in SAA 3 47, an orally delivered prophecy classified as *šipirtu* of Ninurta (r. 3).

4) No mention of a prophet, as if the deity spoke directly to the king: in SAA 10 174 (l. 14 introduces the message with *mā*), in Ashurbanipal's inscriptions B v 47-49 (C vi 46-48), *iqbā*,³⁵ and in SAA 13 43, a message, *šibirtu* (r. 7), of a god to the king.

5) The king is referred to in the third person in the prophetic oracle reported in SAA 13 144 r. 8-17 (introduced with *ragāmu*, r. 7) and in SAA 10 111 r. 24-26 (oracle of Bel/Marduk).

6) Apart from omitting certain characteristics, some letters quote prophecy in a rather flexible way. SAA 10 284 r. 6-8 seems to be a rather free quotation of a prophetic oracle, and Nabû-reštu-ušur paraphrases several prophetic oracles in his letters to Esarhaddon (SAA 16 59-61). SAA 10 24 reports on a man who claimed to have received a prophetic message (r. 7-11).

These messages too are to be qualified as prophetic oracles.³⁶ Remarkably, references to *raggimu*, 'prophet', and *ragāmu*, 'to prophesy', occur more often outside the SAA 9 corpus than in texts included in SAA 9.

A further group of prophecies consist of prophetic oracles in an elaborate, literary form. In various cases, prophetic oracles have been incorporated into a literary text. The two main examples are SAA 9 3 and 9 (see for these, and other examples, chapter 6.2.1).

1) SAA 9 3 contains a tripartite text concerning the god Aššur and the king (3.1, 3.2, 3.3), separated with a double ruling from two following units presented as an *abutu* of Ištar of Arbela. The Aššur-composition may be classified as a ceremonial-cultic text. Two passages described as *šulmu*, 'message of well-being' (3.2, 3.3) are embedded in a description of a ceremony for Aššur (3.1) and an *adê* (loyalty oath)-ceremony (ii 27-32). The purpose is the exaltation of Esarhaddon as victorious king and of Aššur as king of the gods. The first *šulmu* seems to include a prophetic oracle (i 35-ii 2); the second *šulmu* consists of divine speech, but is not a prophetic oracle proper. It has been suggested that the *šulmu*-texts were recited at an enthronement ritual.³⁷ The following unit (3.4) presented as an *abutu* of Ištar of Arbela, describes an *adê*-ritual. The reason that these texts were put on one tablet may be found in the fact that the Aššur-composition and the first *abutu* of Ištar (3.4) both deal with an *adê*-ceremony.

2) SAA 9 9 is a literary text, which incorporates a prophetic oracle in an elaborate form.

³² BIWA: 35.

³³ BIWA: 57-58.

³⁴ BIWA: 202.

³⁵ BIWA: 100.

³⁶ Two further prophetic oracles can be mentioned: SAA 9 10 s. 1-2, 'Dunnaša-amur said: '[...]''; thus the prophetess, who [...]' and SAA 13 148.

³⁷ Van der Toorn 2000b: 77.

3.3 *Literary Texts bearing a Resemblance to Prophecy*

Whereas the prophetic material introduced above is part of the focus of this study (chapter 4.2; chapter 5.1; chapter 6.2.1), some further texts will be taken into account in chapter 6 (6.2.2 and 6.2.3), dealing with the transition from prophecy into literature and with the phenomenon of literary prophecy. These additional texts consist of two groups. The first group comprises texts from seventh-century Assyria. These texts, stemming from the reign of Ashurbanipal, can be qualified as literary derivatives of prophecy. Although they probably have no oral background, they contain material closely resembling the prophetic oracles. The following examples can be mentioned:

1) The composition of SAA 3 13 contains material strongly reminiscent of the prophetic oracles (especially lines 24-26, which read like a prophetic oracle), but it is a literary text.³⁸

2) The texts SAA 3 44, 45, and 46 are compositions of divine words. SAA 3 44 relates to the war of Ashurbanipal against Šamaš-šum-ukin; 3 45 consists of divine announcements that encourage Ashurbanipal in the war against Teumman; and 3 46 is a fragment of a text similar to 3 44.

Since these texts are particularly close to the prophetic oracles that received a literary elaboration, they are of importance for the investigation of the transition from prophecy into literature in seventh-century Assyria.

The second group consists of so-called literary-predictive texts. The texts have sometimes been labelled as literary prophecies or pseudo-prophecies, but these terms are somewhat misleading, since the texts are not prophecies in a strict sense.³⁹ Nevertheless, these texts bear some resemblances to the genre of prophecy. They contain descriptions of political events cast in a predictive style. These predictions are mostly regarded as being for the greater part *vaticinia ex eventu*. In various cases, the texts explicitly claim that the future course of events has been revealed by the gods.⁴⁰ Several of these literary-predictive texts will be taken into account in chapter 6, since they provide a counterpart to the seventh-century revision of the Isaiah tradition, which equally has a literary character. The texts discussed in chapter 6 are known as the Marduk Prophecy, the Šulgi Prophecy,⁴¹ the Uruk Prophecy,⁴² and the Dynastic Prophecy.⁴³ These texts contain pseudo-predictions of political events, which in each case cover a broad period of time and are referred to without any mention of the names of rulers. A further characteristic element of these texts is their betrayal of a particular interest or agenda.⁴⁴ They aim to justify or glorify a specific situation: the reign of a particular king. To this end, the texts culminate in the description of

³⁸ Nissinen 1993: 219; Pongratz-Leisten 1999: 75: 'literarische Kreation in Anlehnung an die Gattung der Prophetensprüche'.

³⁹ Weippert 1988: 291-294.

⁴⁰ In the Marduk Prophecy, Marduk, speaking to other gods, 'reveals' the future course of events; in the Šulgi Prophecy, Šulgi claims to have received a divine revelation; the Uruk Prophecy may have been cast as a revelation by a divine speaker (see chapter 6, note 265). Furthermore, the Poem of Erra, mentioned below, is presented as a divine revelation as well (tablet 5: 42-46).

⁴¹ Edited by Borger 1971.

⁴² Edited by Hunger 1976: 21-23; Hunger and Kaufman 1975.

⁴³ Edited by Grayson 1975b.

⁴⁴ Ellis, 'Observations', 156.

the reign of an ideal ruler, who defeats the enemies, restores the temples and provides well-being for the people.⁴⁵

An adequate label for these texts is literary-predictive texts.⁴⁶ They do not go back to prophetic intermediation and have no oral background, but from the outset are literary compositions.⁴⁷ The fragments of the Marduk Prophecy and Šulgi Prophecy stem from Neo-Assyrian archives. These texts were apparently treated as (part of) a series.⁴⁸ The Uruk Prophecy stems from Late Babylonian Uruk and displays a Neo-Babylonian interest; the Dynastic Prophecy is believed to date from, and to relate to, the Hellenistic period.

The final text that will be taken into account in chapter 6 is the Poem of Erra, which bears some important resemblances to the literary-predictive texts. This poem may date from the eighth century BCE or somewhat earlier, but is likely to incorporate older elements.⁴⁹ Although the literary-predictive texts and the Poem of Erra are not exclusively connected with seventh-century Assyria, there was a clear seventh-century Assyrian interest in, at least, the Marduk Prophecy and the Poem of Erra. The literary-predictive texts (and parts from the Poem of Erra) are relevant for this study, since they show that written ‘prophecies’ can be scribal creations.⁵⁰ With regard to the issue of the transition from prophecy into literature and the phenomenon of literary prophecy (chapter 6), these texts provide an analogy to the literary character of the development of the Isaiah tradition.

⁴⁵ Nissinen 2003c: 134-135; Beaulieu 1993: 41. These four texts can be distinguished from the so-called text A, text B and LBAT 1543, which can be seen as some kind of astrological compositions. For the latter texts, see Biggs 1967; 1985; 1987.

⁴⁶ Ellis 1989: 148; cf. Weippert 1988: 294. For a discussion of these texts, see Ellis 1989: 148-156; Nissinen 2003c. The label ‘Akkadian apocalypses’ (Halla 1966: 240-242; Lambert 1978; Grayson 1980: 184) has been rejected by Borger (1971: 24) and Nissinen (2003c: 142-143). The designations ‘literary prophecies’ and ‘pseudo-prophecies’ are not entirely wrong, but can be misleading.

⁴⁷ Nissinen 2003c: 139-140.

⁴⁸ Borger 1971. The Marduk Prophecy is preserved in the following way. Ten fragments, according to Borger’s reconstruction, are presumably part of the same tablet (K 2158 +), with a colophon from Ashurbanipal’s library (iv 17’-19’). A small fragment of a different copy of the same text contains the first part of lines 25-36 of column i (Sm 1388), and stems also from the library of Ashurbanipal. The text Assur 13348 ek, a further duplicate, contains a substantial fragment of the final part of the text. This tablet belonged to the library and archive of a family of exorcists in Assur. The texts from this archive mostly date from the Sargonid period (ranging from 713 BCE – 612 BCE). The precise date of this fragment is uncertain (Pedersén 1986: 41-44, 56, 76).

⁴⁹ Dalley 2000: 282.

⁵⁰ Grabbe 1995: 94.