Prophecy and Foreign Nations

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Mohr Siebeck

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Prophecy and Foreign Nations

Aspects of the Role of the "Nations"
in the Books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel

edited by

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and Matthijs de Jong

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Preface

In 2016, the editors of this volume initiated a research group under the auspices of the European Association for Biblical Studies (EABS). This group devoted itself to highlighting various aspects concerning "Prophecy and Foreign Nations" with respect to the books of the three so-called major prophets, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. The present volume contains some of the papers read and discussed at the research group's sessions at the EABS conferences, which were held in 2016 in Leuven, 2017 in Berlin, and 2018 in Helsinki. Of these three meetings, the first one dealt with the book of Isaiah, the second with the book of Jeremiah, and the third with the book of Ezekiel.

We look back gratefully on those days of intense scholarly discussion in a collegial and amicable atmosphere – and we look forward to the days when it hopefully will be possible again to meet not only digitally but in real life – הנה ימים באים.

Unfortunately, the book has become less voluminous than we had planned. Not all participants of the meetings were able to hand in their paper for publication, and therefore important aspects of our topic and our discussion are not, or not sufficiently, represented. Hence one might argue that the book cannot keep what its ambitious title "Prophecy and Foreign Nations" promises. But a volume presenting collected essays would never claim to exhaust a subject anyway. Its purpose is rather to address certain aspects of it and to stimulate further discussion and research, which has been our primary task from the beginning.

At the same time, by now the above-mentioned conferences lie several years in the past, and of course research has since moved on. Several reasons have led to a significant delay in the publication, and we cannot but apologise wholeheartedly. However, we are convinced that none of the articles has become outdated in any respect. "Prophecy and Foreign Nations" is a topic which still does not belong to the over-researched fields in Old Testament / Hebrew Bible Studies, so it is our conviction that this volume contains something to contribute to the present stage of research.

Our gratitude goes to the EABS, for accepting the proposal for our research group, to the publishers of Mohr Siebeck, especially to Tobias Stäbler and Markus Kirchner, for their patience, and to the editors of the series FAT for accepting our manuscript, to Simon Büchner, Dr. Sarah Köhler, Dr. André Zempelburg, and

Johannes Seidel for their editorial work with this book, and to Martina Boltres and Julius Sperling for preparing the indices. All's well that ends well.

Erfurt / Jena / Leiden, October 2021   Hannes Bezzel
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Introduction

HANNES BEZZEL / UWE BECKER / MATTHIJS DE JONG

Over the last decades, research on the prophetic books of the Hebrew Bible has undergone a major change. While, in the wake of 19th century philosophy and hermeneutics, scholars had been interested first and foremost in the "historical" prophet as a religious genius and in this person's "original" utterings, since the second half of the 20th century scholarly interest has turned to "the prophets" as literature. Of course, this does not mean that there were no longer debates over the question of the "originality" of certain texts or over the specific character of the "historical" Israelite and Judahite prophets – quite the opposite. But these discussions notwithstanding, it cannot be denied that the phenomenon of the prophetic *book* as a literary genre *sui generis* has drawn more and more attention.[1] This holds true for synchronic research with its interest in the so-called final form of the book as well as for the diachronically interested analysis of the book's literary history. In this context, especially for scholars interested in diachronic research, the comparison with the extra-biblical Ancient Near Eastern corpora of prophecies or divinatory texts[2] has become an important issue. The questions concerning the origins of the biblical prophetic books and the emergence of theologically reasoned prophecy of doom in particular have been rethought against this backdrop.[3] Accordingly, the focus of scholarly attention has been mainly on the interrelation between salvation prophecy and a theology of judgment. This fact is anything but surprising, since the main interest of Christian theology in the prophets has always been in interpreting the texts addressing "Israel". Compared with that, the – often unpleasant – Oracles concerning foreign Nations have passed a little bit from view, even though these texts take up a large part of the biblical prophetic tradition. As a consequence, in a recent publication on the topic, Martin Sweeney regarded it as a worthy task to try a fresh "attempt at stimulating research on the Oracles concerning the Nations".[4]

Responding to this stimulus has been one of the goals of the EABS research group "Prophecy and Foreign Nations". It has been our intention to investigate

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[1] Cf. BECKER, Wiederentdeckung.

[2] Cf. the groundbreaking study by NISSINEN, Potential.

[3] Exemplarily for the (German) discussion of the past years, see the debate between Joachim Jeremias and Reinhard Kratz: JEREMIAS, Rätsel, and KRATZ, Rätsel.

[4] SWEENEY, Foreword, xvii.

the role of "foreign nations" in the books of the three so-called major prophets, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, and, in so doing, to approach the current discussion of the literary history of the prophetic books from a different angle. The leading questions have been:

– What is the literary and theological interrelation of the Oracles concerning foreign Nations with Ancient Near Eastern (salvation) prophecy on the one hand and with Israelite prophecy of doom as represented in the prophetic books on the other?
– Was there a fixed genre of "prophecy concerning foreign nations", and if so, what was its *Sitz im Leben*?
– How can the intertextual relationship between the respective passages of the several biblical books be determined?
– Which processes of re-reading and rewriting the tradition finally led to a kind of uniform prophetic image which is reflected by the so-called tripartite eschatological pattern[5] of the prophetic books?

The contributors to the three session meetings at the conferences in Leuven 2016, Berlin 2017, and Helsinki 2018 took different approaches in the engagement with these leading questions. Synchronic as well as diachronic questions were brought to the fore, text-critical and redaction-critical problems were treated as well as questions concerning literary composition and reader response. As a result, in this volume meticulous case studies stand side by side with articles which take a broader perspective. Though sometimes proceeding from different general propositions and therefore differing in their exegetical conclusions, the several contributions, knowingly or not, comment on and complement each other.

Archibald L. H. M. van Wieringen starts by focussing on the text-immanent reader of the book of Isaiah. According to him, Isa 13–23 can be read as the centre of the entire book. Whereas Isa 6–12 and 36–39 deal with the Aramean and Assyrian crisis, chapters 13 and 21 speak of Babylon. In so doing, they create something like an invisible centre, since the Babylonian conquest of Jerusalem, is not mentioned explicitly but only retrospectively, as an overcome crisis, in Isa 40–66, which van Wieringen calls "the second part of the book" (22). Thus, the corpus of Oracles concerning foreign Nations serves as a bridge between the different parts of the prophetic book as well as between their narrated times, i. e., the Assyrian, Babylonian, and the Persian Period.

Uwe Becker traces the origins of the Oracles against the Nations in Isa 13–23 back to the prophet Isaiah himself: The prophet's announcements against

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[5] The idea of a "tripartite eschatological pattern," including the succession of prophecy against the own people, prophecy against foreign nations, and salvation prophecy for the own people, probably was brought up first by Georg Fohrer, see FOHRER, Grundstrukturen, 7. Whether this structure can be found in which prophetic book and how it might be interpreted, is a matter of discussion, though.

Israel and Aram in Isa 8:1–4 and 17:1.3* – still without a theological interpretation – form the basis for the later steps in the development of Isa 13–23. After the destruction of Jerusalem these announcements would have been transferred to Judah (Isa 8:5–8) and interpreted as a divine punishment for the sins of the people. A further step is marked by the anti-Assyrian prophecies in Isa 10:5–11* + 14,24–25a: They are not simply a political announcement that Assyria will fall but reflect – in a meta-historical way – the power of YHWH in history: He is able to use foreign nations as an instrument of punishment (10:5) but also limits the power of these nations when Jerusalem/Zion is affected (Isa 10,11* + 14:24–25a; see also Isa 29:1–4 + 29:1.3.8). Subsequently, Becker reasons, the word against Assyria was divided by the prophecy against Babylon in 13:1a.17–22.

The third contribution concerned with the book of Isaiah turns to the theologically difficult and reception-historically influential pericope about Edom in Isa 63:1–6. Burkard M. Zapff analyses the text diachronically as well as synchronically. The passage appears to be a classic example of *Fortschreibungs*-literature, marked by a dense network of references throughout the entire book of Isaiah. According to Zapff, the rare expression of a "day of revenge" may serve as a diachronic guideline. A development can be detected which begins with the "day of YHWH" in Isa 13:6 and 21:9, extends over Isa 34:8 and 61:2, and culminates in Isa 63:4. Furthermore, Isa 63:5 takes up 59:16. All in all, the pericope proves to be one of the youngest pieces of the prophetic book. Synchronically read, however, the words about Edom are not God's last word concerning the nations. This will be Isa 66:18–24.

The second part of this volume deals with the book of Jeremiah and opens with an article by Hendrik G. L. Peels. One of the central issues regarding the "nations" and Jeremiah is the differences between the Hebrew and the Greek version of the book. While in Jer[MT] the Oracles concerning foreign Nations constitute the final section of the book, in Jer[LXX] they are to be found in the middle, directly following the pericope about the cup of wrath in Jer 25. Furthermore, the respective oracles themselves are presented in different order in the two versions of the book. Which of them represents the older is an intensely debated question. Contrary to the majority of present scholars, Peels advocates the view that Jer[MT] represents the older compositional structure, at least regarding the relative position of the separate oracles to each other. As an argument he brings forward the oracles concerning Egypt, Elam, and Babylon. While the prominent placement of Egypt in Jer[MT] befits well the role of this global player in the wider context of the book, the priorisation of Elam in Jer[LXX] could be explained by the political situation in the second half of the 4th century around the collapse of the Persian Empire.

Matthijs J. de Jong focuses on Jer 28:8–9, a text commonly considered as proof for the existence of "prophecies against the nations" as a distinct kind of prophecy in the late monarchic era. De Jong, however, argues that Jer 28 does

not testify to a subgenre of prophecy, but rather to the appearance of foreign nations in prophetic oracles in general, in which they figure as "the enemy" who will be trampled down. As De Jong understands Jer 28:8–9, it is not Jeremiah, but Hananiah who prophesies "war" – for Babylonia. And it is Jeremiah who prophesies "peace" – again for Babylonia. In 28:1–14*, which in De Jong's view belongs to the earliest narrative traditions relating to Jeremiah, the prophet Jeremiah is depicted as announcing Babylonia's good fortune, thereby implying that Judah's survival depends on submission. During a much later, redactional stage, Babylonia's ruination became part of the preaching ascribed to Jeremiah. It is in this redactional sphere that we can situate the Oracles concerning the Nations. Accordingly, they constitute a literary development, not a subclass of oral prophecy.

Two contributions to this volume, Else K. Holt's, and Hannes Bezzel's, deal with the special designation of Jeremiah as a "prophet to the nations" in Jer 1:5. Both articles, however, approach the topic from a different methodological starting point. Else K. Holt works synchronically. She points out that the "nations" in the book of Jeremiah fulfil four different functions which are equally mirrored by the respective roles of Israel. Accordingly, Jeremiah as a prophet to the nations goes hand in hand with YHWH as a God for all nations, and thus comes at least close to an already monotheistic theology.

Rannfrid I. Thelle takes a close look at the passage concerning Moab in Jer 48. From the perspective of a synchronic reading of the Masoretic Text and with a broader view at the canonical images of Moab, she asks for the role of Judah's eastern neighbour in the concept of the book. The important observations that the length of the chapter signifies its weight within the OAN[6] corpus, and that there are numerous links with the pericopes about the foe from the north in Jer 4; 6; and 10 lead her to the conclusion that Moab, the close relative and often arch enemy, serves as a mirror for Judah's fate. All in all, the relationship between Judah and Moab, and, using the metaphor of the mirror, Judah's self-relation, stays ambivalent. In Jer 48, elements of irony and mockery go hand in hand with empathy and even pity. With this case study and by means of applying the leading metaphor of the mirror[7] to the OAN, Thelle provides an option for rethinking the theological function of these texts in general beyond their traditional interpretation as implicitly salvific for Judah according to an assumed tripartite eschatological pattern.

A diachronic approach is taken by Hannes Bezzel. As Else Holt, he proceeds from Jeremiah's title as a "prophet for the nations" (נביא לגוים) in Jer 1:5. With this designation defined as a secondary addition to the call narrative, whose aim it is to include the corpus of the OAN into the prophetic book, the question arises

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[6] In the following, OAN be the abbreviation for Oracles against the Nations.
[7] Cf., regarding the book of the Twelve, HAGEDORN, Die Anderen.

how the status of those pieces which in the Masoretic version are to be found in
Jer 46–51 may be defined in redaction-critical terms. As a test case, Bezzel turns
to the first oracle concerning Egypt in Jer 46:1–12 and analyses the motifs and
the vocabulary of the poem. As Thelle observes in the case of the Moab oracle,
he exhibits many references to the first part of the book of Jeremiah, which, from
a redaction-critical point of view, reach into two different literary strata. At the
same time, the pericope is marked by the usage of special vocabulary when it
comes to the description of weaponry. Parallels to this terminology can be found
in what one might call "late" texts of the Hebrew Bible. Consequently, contrary
to a current trend in Jeremiah research to ascribe all or most of this poem as well
as of the OAN in general to a historical prophet Jeremiah, Bezzel provides two
alternatives. Either the double poem can be regarded as literary unitary. Then, its
language points to a dating rather later than the 6th century. Or one carves out
a literary kernel which might be found in Jer 46: 5a, 6b, 7, (8b), 12, representing
an "un-Jeremian" (mocking) lament about an Egyptian defeat, possibly the one
at Carchemish in 605. In both cases the starting questions, when, how, and why
Jeremiah was made a "prophet for the nations" need further consideration.

Miklós Kőszeghy asks for the provenance and historical setting of the oracles
concerning Babylon in Jer 50–51^{MT}. He denies the option of ascribing the corpus
or parts of it to the prophet Jeremiah or, more precisely, to the same person that
is responsible for the major part of Jer 1–25, not least because of the different
general view on the Mesopotamian metropolis here and there. Recapitulating
what is known of the history of Babylon in the Persian Period, however, leads
him to the conclusion that it is not possible to unambiguously provide a historical
setting which would befit the scenarios depicted in the two chapters. At the same
time, Kőszeghy argues that the text displays a historical memory not too far off
the city's prosperity in the 6th century. All in all, he distinguishes four strata
of tradition: 1) Older war oracles such as Jer 51:17–20 which predated 612 BCE;
2) pieces announcing retribution for what Babylon had done to Jerusalem in
586; 3) quotations from other parts of the book of Jeremiah and the prophetic
literature as a whole; and 4) pieces rendering the anti-Babylonian perspective
at the Judean court soon before the catastrophe, as it is literarily represented by
Hananiah in Jer 27–28.

Another three contributions apply themselves to the book of Ezekiel. As Else
Holt does with respect to the book of Jeremiah, Andrew Langley asks for the lit-
erary and theological function of the OAN in the book of Ezekiel. Langley builds
his theses mainly on two observations: The first one is that the block of OAN
is embedded between the announcement that the temple will be demolished in
Ezek 24:21 and its fulfilment in 33:21. Not totally unlike Thelle's interpretation,
Langley claims that the communicative purpose of the OAN was to make the ex-
iles, as the implicit addressees, understand their own hybris and transgression.
Although he does not use the metaphor, this seems to be not far from the idea of

mirroring the fate of the other. Langley's second point is the recognition formula, which occurs throughout the entire material, and here "in the context of both judgement and salvation" (163). From this, Langley develops the theology of the OAN in the book of Ezekiel as vindication of YHWH by means of a dialectical relationship between justice and mercy.

As in the second part of the volume, the broad perspective on the OAN corpus in Ezekiel as a whole is accompanied by two contributions which focus on exegetical and philological details. Lydia Lee and Reettakaisa Sofia Salo both deal with the differing textual traditions of the Masoretic Text and the Septuagint. Lydia Lee focuses on the dirge over the Tyrian king in Ezek 28:11–19, and here especially on the description of the king in 28:11b–15. In a combination of text-critical and literary-critical methodology, mostly by comparing the MT with the Old Greek as it is prominently represented by Papyrus 967, Lee identifies some additions and reconstructs an earlier Hebrew stage of the pericope. This text-critical and literary-critical decision notwithstanding, it is the MT which had preserved the original understanding of the passage. In v. 14, it compares the Tyrian king with a cherub, a divine being, whereas in LXX he has secondarily become a mortal being by turning the point of comparison towards the direction of the high priest.

The last article in the book draws a line to its first section. Reettakaisa Sofia Salo treats Ezek 35, the oracle against Seïr, and thus touches on the topic of Burkard M. Zapff's contribution about Isa 63. Her main interest, however, lies in the relationship between the different textual traditions. By carefully comparing all extant versions of Ezek 35:6–15, she is able to provide a nuanced interpretation of the evidence. On the one hand, in direct comparison with the Old Greek, the MT gives clear evidence of pre-Masoretic redactional activity after the time when Ezek[LXX] was translated into Greek. On the other hand, in the case of Ezek 35:7 a scribal error or even the replacement of an incomprehensible formulation might be considered. Thus, the short passage gives witness to both the authoritative status of the text and the possibility of altering this text even by omission of at least small parts of it if found necessary.

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Isaiah 13–23 and Its Text-Immanent Reader

Archibald L. H. M. van Wieringen

Chapters 13–23, a highly complex corpus in the Book of Isaiah, are known as the "Oracles against the Nations." In this contribution I would like to examine this text corpus from the text-immanent reader's perspective. The reader *in* the text, the text-immanent reader, is "manipulated" by the text.[1] For a text corpus in a book, this has to be done in two ways: from within and from without. First, I will focus on the text-immanent reader as he is guided by the text of Isa 13–23. Next, I will discuss the position of the text-immanent reader as directed by the broader context of Isa 13–23 as a part of the Book of Isaiah as a whole.

Part I: The Text-Immanent Reader's Perspective from Within

1. The Local Aspects in Isaiah 13–23

First of all, the text-immanent reader in Isa 13–23 is influenced by the order of the nations mentioned in the text, creating the local aspects of the Oracles against the Nations. Based upon the headings, Isa 13–23 contains two movements, both starting with Babel and ending with Jerusalem. The movement from Babel to Jerusalem is made twice in order to intensify this movement. These two movements can be schematised as follows:[2]

	distant East	*nearby East*	*distant West*	*final destination*
first movement	Isa 13–14: Babel	Isa 15–16: Moab Isa 17–18: Damascus	Isa 19: Egypt	[Isa 20: Jerusalem]
second movement	Isa 21:1–10: Babel	Isa 21:11: Dumah (Edom) Isa 21:12–16: Arab		Isa 22: Jerusalem
transitional text			Isa 23: Tyre	

Fig. 1: Movements in Isa 13–23

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[1] For the idea of the "text-immanent reader" see: van Wieringen, Reader-Oriented Unity, 3–7; van Wieringen, Psalm 114, 46–48 and the literature mentioned there.

[2] van Wieringen, Reader-Oriented Unity, 86–87. Cf. also: Tull, Isaiah 1–39, especially 257.

Both movements begin in the distant East and go via the nearby East to the final destination Jerusalem. In both movements, the distant East is Babel. It is true that chapter 14 mentions Assur, but it discusses Assur under the heading concerning Babel. This is expressed syntactically in Isa 14:24–27 by using the qatal-form (יְהוָה) נִשְׁבַּע *(the Lord) had sworn*, indicating that what is happening to Babel, previously happened to Assur.

From the distant East, the movement approaches Jerusalem by mentioning the nearby East. The first time, Moab and Damascus, the capital of Aram, are mentioned; the second time Dumah and Arab. Dumah is a toponym for Edom or for some place in Edom. Because in the oracle concerning Arab, Dedan and Tema are mentioned, places which are considered as belonging to Edom, the indication Arab is parallel to the indication Dumah.[3]

After mentioning the (distant and nearby) East, the distant West receives its place in the first movement through the mentioning of Egypt. The couple East-West, with Jerusalem in the middle, seems to suggest that foreign nations are surrounding the capital city Jerusalem. However, such a West is absent in the second movement. A pincer movement has not been completed.

Jerusalem forms the final destination of the movements. The first movement is accomplished in chapter 20. This chapter, however, does not have a heading mentioning Jerusalem, parallel to the other headings in chapters 13–23. Nevertheless, this chapter is very remarkable because it is the single narrative text amid all the discursive texts in Isa 13–23. Because chapter 20 has no heading, but is nevertheless recognizable as a sub-unit, it indicates that the first movement, although having reached Jerusalem, is still open-ended. The eventual and final destination, however, is גֵּיא חִזָּיוֹן *the Valley of the Vision*, indicating Jerusalem, in chapter 22.

Chapter 23, concerning Tyre, is a transitional text leading on to chapters 24–25. Because in this text, Tarshish is mentioned, which has to be located in the western Mediterranean, I consider this text as parallel to the West-element in the first movement.

This double order of toponyms means that, for the text-immanent reader, the two topographical poles of Babel and Jerusalem are in focus. Because of the double movement and because of the nearby East, the tension between these two topographical poles is intensified.

Assur is absent in the headings, but is nevertheless present in the text. From a topographical point of view, Egypt is not part of a movement from Babel to Jerusalem, but is nevertheless present in the text, even with a separate Egypt-heading. For the text-immanent reader, this implies that Assur and Egypt must have something to do with the main movement from Babel to Jerusalem.

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[3] See also: Delitzsch, Jesaia, 261–62.

2. The Temporal Aspects in Isaiah 13–23

Next, the text-immanent reader is influenced by the temporal elements in Isa 13–23. In the scheme below, these elements are outlined.[4]

	end of Babel / now-moment	end of Assur	Hezekiah	end of Ahaz	end of Syro-Ephrai-mite War	now-moment	end of Syro-Ephrai-mite War	open
first movement	13:1–14:23	14:24–27		14:28–32	15:1–16:12	16:13–14	17:1–18:7 19:1–25 as well?	
			20:1–6					
second movement	21:1–10					21:11–12 21:13–17		
			22:1–25					
transitional text								23:1–18

Fig. 2: Temporal elements in Isa 13–23

Isa 13–23 can be read as a journey back in time. The formal headings already suggest a past perspective and, therefore, a "back in time." The headings make it clear that the nations are listed as belonging to the past.

However, the beginning of the Oracles against the Nations evokes a temporal tension for the text-immanent reader: on the one hand, the heading in 13:1 creates a past perspective, on the other hand, as from 13:2 onwards, a kind of a now-moment is also created. 13:2 starts with a direct speech without any introductory formula. Not only is it not made explicit who is speaking to whom, but the moment in time of the direct speech is not marked either. This implies that the text-immanent reader starts with an unknown moment in time, which, therefore, suggests a kind of a now-moment: time seems to start at the moment the direct speech begins.

The use of the particle הִנֵּה + participle, indicating a *futurum instans*,[5] in the v. 9 and 17 intensifies the idea of a now-moment. Furthermore, the wᵉqatal-forms characterize 13:19–14:2, indicating Babel's future, elaborated upon in the וְהָיָה בְּיוֹם-formula in 14:3.

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[4] See also: van WIERINGEN, Oracles against the Nations.
[5] WALTKE and O'CONNOR, Biblical Hebrew Syntax, 627 (§ 37.6f).

This implies that the text-immanent reader primarily has a past perspective and that this past perspective explicitly starts at the moment of Babel's inevitable decline.

It is from this moment in time that the decline of Assur is discussed in 14:24–27.[6] The qatal-form, which has a past perspective, characterizes this text: נִשְׁבַּע יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת *the Lord of hosts had sworn* (v. 24a). This means that Assur's past decline is the proof of Babel's imminent decline.

In order to magnify the parallelism between the divine speeches concerning Babel and concerning Assur, the wᵉqatal-forms characterize both. What the Lord announced in the past concerning the future decline of Assur, he did indeed bring about; so, what he announces now concerning Babel, he will bring about as well. The past perspective of the heading proves the trustworthiness of the Lord's words.[7]

The next text-passage, 14:28–32, is about the year of the death of King Ahaz. The introductory formula again contains a qatal-form, indicating the past perspective: בִּשְׁנַת־מוֹת הַמֶּלֶךְ אָחָז הָיָה הַמַּשָּׂא הַזֶּה *in the year of the death of King Ahaz this oracle had come*. This means that the text-immanent reader has moved from the time of the Assyrian decline, to the time of the end of King Ahaz' reign. This also implies that, although the text of 14:24–27 leaves open which concrete Assyrian threat the Lord is speaking about, the Assyrian crisis under King Hezekiah, King Ahaz' successor, is the most plausible one.

The next temporal indication can be found in 16:13–14, concluding the oracle against Moab. A double temporal indication is used: מֵאָז *in the past* in v. 13 and וְעַתָּה *now* in v. 14.

This first temporal indication is in line with the text-immanent reader's journey back in time. Before the year of King Ahaz' death, the period of King Ahaz' reign takes place, which implies that 15:1–16:12 is related to the Syro-Ephraimite War. Without mentioning Ahaz and the enemies in the Syro-Ephraimite War, Rezin and Pekah, and even without mentioning Assur, the negative consequences of this crisis become visible and are interpreted as a divine intervention.

From a textual perspective, the וְעַתָּה-moment itself cannot be situated during King Ahaz' reign. To what textual moment of time is this now-moment related? There are three possibilities. Firstly, the now-moment could be linked to the moment of time mentioned just before the moment of time of 15:1–16:12, which means it is linked to the year of King Ahaz' death. If this is the case, the text makes clear that Moab should not think that it can take advantage of Ahaz' death (14:28–32). The death of a king always implies a moment of crisis. A new king must still establish his power, which could take some time – a period bearing a high risk of possible revolts in or against the new king's realm.

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[6] See also, from a diachronic perspective: CLEMENTS, Isaiah 14,22–27, 253–62.
[7] See also: RENDTORFF, Book of Isaiah, 40.

However, there is a second possibility. All moments in time are about the end of a reign: the end of Babel, the end of Assur, the end of King Ahaz, the end of the nations involved in the Syro-Ephraimite War. The reign of Hezekiah is, however, missing. In his journey back in time, the text-immanent reader leaps over Hezekiah's reign. His reign is nevertheless present, and especially so, through the mentioning of the year of King Ahaz' death, which is the beginning of King Hezekiah's reign. If this is the case, the text-immanent reader is prepared for the time of Hezekiah, which will be discussed in the last text-passage of the movement from Babel to Jerusalem. The text increases the tension about what occurs during King Hezekiah's period of time, first by not mentioning Hezekiah, next by mentioning a now-moment, and finally by discussing the reign of the still unmentioned[8] Hezekiah in the concluding chapter 20.

The third and last option is to link the now-moment to the beginning of the series of Oracles against the Nations, which means to the beginning of the text-immanent reader's journey back in time, where, besides a past perspective, a now-moment is also present. If this is indeed the case, Moab is discussed from a Persian perspective. More important, however, is that the text-passage 16:13–14 reminds the text-immanent reader of the opening now-moment, in order to keep the text-immanent reader aware of the journey back in time.

The oracle against Damascus in chapters 17–18 can be seen as a continuation of the time present in 15:1–16:12 concerning Moab. Damascus is the capital of Aram, which was explicitly involved in the Syro-Ephraimite War by its King Rezin. Just as in 15:1–16:12, neither the Syro-Ephraimite War nor Assur is mentioned. It is the textual order of time which makes the text-immanent reader aware that these times of war are being discussed.

The oracle against Egypt in chapter 19 can be read as a continuation of the oracle against Damascus, which implies a continuation of the textual time of chapter 17–18.

Whereas, after the explicit moments of time in 16:13–14, the textual indications of time are scarce in chapters 17–19,[9] chapter 20 opens with a concrete temporal phrase about the Assyrian King Sargon (v. 1). This moment of time belongs to King Hezekiah's reign, but he is not mentioned anywhere in the narration of chapter 20.

In the second movement from Babel to Jerusalem, the text-immanent reader's journey back in time is repeated, but briefly, without using many temporal phrases. Only the main moments are mentioned again.

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[8] The fact the King Hezekiah is not mentioned in the text itself is hardly noticed; e.g. Watts, Isaiah 1–33, 1264; Beuken, Jesaja 13–27, 209.

[9] See also: Lack, Symbolique, 66.

The fist repetition is the starting point in time. The journey back in time re-starts with Babel's decline. The *Sproßerzählung*[10] in v. 8–9, characterised by the wayyiqtol-forms וַיִּקְרָא and וַיַּעַן, emphasises the past perspective.

The short oracle in 21:11–12 is characterised only by a participle: קֹרֵא in v. 11. In contrast to the wayyiqtol-form וַיִּקְרָא in v. 8, this participle suggests a now-moment. Because the oracle in 21:13–17 does not have a new moment of time, 21:11–17 forms the repetition of the now-moment.

Chapter 22, which has Jerusalem as its decor, forms the repetition of King Hezekiah's time. Again, Hezekiah is not mentioned anywhere in chapter 22, but the names of his staff-members Shebna and Eliakim make his presence un-deniable for the text-immanent reader.[11]

3. The Communication towards the Text-Immanent Reader in Isaiah 13–23

In chapters 13–23, the text-immanent reader is explicitly involved in the double movement from Babel to Jerusalem back in time in the chapters concerning the final destination Jerusalem, chapters 20 and 22. Babel is playing the role of the villain. But does this imply that Jerusalem is playing the role of the "good guy?" The movement ends in Jerusalem twice, and twice the situation in Jerusalem is problematic.

In chapter 20, a critical situation is described. There is a foreign army, be-sieging Ashdod. Will Jerusalem be the next city to be besieged? The King of Jerusalem is not mentioned in chapter 20. Does this imply that there is a lack of leadership? According to a commission of the Lord, the character Isaiah, the son of Amoz, plays a role. The meaning of this role is not clear to the addressees – even after the character Isaiah has played this role for three years. Therefore, the Lord explains the role of the character Isaiah in the direct speech in v. 3–6. Isaiah plays the role of someone who is about to be exiled: naked and barefoot. This exile-role that Isaiah acts out is meant for Egypt and Cush. Assur will lead away the people of Egypt and Cush: a shameful abduction, with bared buttocks.

This scene, however, is not without meaning for Jerusalem itself. In v. 6, an embedded direct speech is rendered within the Lord's direct speech. It is spoken by the inhabitants of הָאִי הַזֶּה *this coastland*.[12] The expression הָאִי הַזֶּה *this coast-land* is unique in the Hebrew Bible. Because of the fact that no toponym is used to indicate which coastland is meant, the text-immanent reader has to fill in which coastland is involved. Ashdod is situated in the coastal area and, there-

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[10] Schneider, Grammatik, 199–200 (§ 48.4.5).
[11] For chapter 22 as a climax of chapters 13–23 see also: Lack, Symbolique, 64.
[12] Delitzsch, Jesaia, 255.