

Historicising Interpolations in the Isaiah-Memoir

Csaba Balogh

Protestant Theological Institute of Cluj-Napoca
P-ța Avram Iancu 13, 400124 Cluj-Napoca, Romania
csbalogh@proteo.cj.edu.ro

Abstract

In studies on the composition of prophetic literature, the larger textual layers reinterpreting earlier texts, the so-called *Fortschreibungen*, received much attention. It is well-known that beside these larger literary elaborations prophetic books also contain shorter explanatory interpolations, often called glosses, which intend to clarify a particular imagery of the prophecy (e.g., Isa 9:14). A systematic reading of these short annotations has been neglected, however, in studying the formation of prophetic books. The present article reconsiders the Isaiah-Memoir from this perspective. It identifies editorial interpolations in three distinct pericopes, Isa 8:2, 8:6-7a and 8:23b. It is argued here that the identification of such explanatory additions is the key to understanding notorious textual complexities. Moreover, it points out that these interpolations tend to expose recognisable patterns and common hermeneutical principles. Unlike *Fortschreibungen*, however, these interpolations are not concerned with the reapplication of the prophecy to the era of the editor, but they intend to guide the reader in understanding the prophecies in their original historical setting.

Keywords

interpolations (glosses) – Isaiah 8 – Isaiah-Memoir – prophetic literature – reinterpretation of prophecy – metaphoric language

In studies concerned with the formation of prophetic books, the larger textual blocks, the so-called *Fortschreibungen*, reinterpreting earlier texts have received considerable attention. However, it is widely recognised that the Old

Testament also contains shorter annotations by which a scribe or an editor of a primary source aimed to clarify his understanding of a text read or reproduced. It is common to refer to such expressions, phrases or even entire verses as glosses or interpolations.¹ Such short additions are generally treated as loose annotations, neglecting their systematised analysis. The present article aims to deal with this problem and present the preliminary results of a contextual reading of explanatory interpolations in the Isaiah-Memoir.

Clarifying remarks are occasionally closely interwoven with the annotated text itself so that it can be difficult to determine whether the annotations are indeed later additions or merely explanatory adjustments belonging to the original composition.² However, there can be two important indications that a particular annotation is secondary in its context. First, the current form and place of the annotation raises syntactical and grammatical problems in the verse where it is now inserted. Second, an exegetical remark often provides a specifically focused reading which deviates from a supposedly more original meaning that can be established based on the larger context. Such circumstances strengthen our suspicion of dealing with secondary interpolations.³

-
- 1 The concept is ubiquitous in exegetical studies and critical commentaries. See for example F. Delitzsch, *Die Lese- und Schreibfehler im Alten Testament* (Berlin, 1920), pp. 132-143; G. R. Driver, "Glosses in the Hebrew Text of the Old Testament", in *L'Ancien Testament et l'Orient. Etudes Presentes aux Vies Journees (OBL 1; Louvain, 1957)*, pp. 123-161; E. Tov, "Glosses, Interpolations, and Other Types of Scribal Additions in the Text of the Hebrew Bible", in *The Greek and Hebrew Bible. Collected Essays on the Septuagint (VTSup 72; Leiden, 1999)*, pp. 53-74. E. Tov is critical towards using the designation "glosses" indiscriminately, arguing that, in accordance with its technical meaning, this term should be reserved to "a word inserted between the lines or in the margin as an explanatory equivalent of a foreign or otherwise difficult word in the text", while other types of interlinear additions should be labelled as "interpolations" (see Tov, "Glosses", pp. 53-54; cf. also pp. 58, 62-63). Nevertheless, distinguishing between glosses and interpolations is not always easy, and a too restrictive terminology may even hinder recovering intentional literary interconnections between what are now perceived as different types of interpolations. I shall use here the term "interpolation" in a general sense, not excluding the notion of "gloss".
 - 2 Cf. M. Fishbane, "Inner-Biblical Exegesis", in M. Sæbø (ed.), *Hebrew Bible / Old Testament. The History of Its Interpretation. I/1: Antiquity* (Göttingen, 1996), p. 36. See, e.g., Gen 12:6; 1 Sam 9:9.
 - 3 On the general phenomenon of inner-biblical interpretation, see J. L. Kugel and R. A. Greer, *Early Biblical Interpretation* (Philadelphia, 1986); M. Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford, 1985); Y. Zakovitch, *מבוא לפרשנות פנים מקראית*, (Even Yehuda, 1992); K. Schmid, "Innerbiblische Schriftauslegung: Aspekte der Forschungsgeschichte", in R. G. Kratz et al. (eds), *Schriftauslegung in der Schrift* (FS O. H. Steck; BZAW 300; Berlin, 2000), pp. 1-22; B. D. Sommer, "Inner-biblical Interpretation", in A. Berlin and M. Z. Brettler (eds), *The Jewish Study Bible* (Oxford, 2004), pp. 1829-1835; B. M. Levinson, "The Phenomenon of

1 Interpolations in Isaiah

Among others, the book of Isaiah is widely known to contain several interpolations of this kind. A few examples are mentioned here shortly by way of illustration and introduction to a more specific inquiry into the use of such annotations in the so-called Isaiah-Memoir.

1.1 *Isaiah 3:1*

Isa 3:1a	For look, the Lord YHWH of the hosts removes from Jerusalem and Judah support and staff (מִשְׁעֵן וּמִשְׁעֵנָה)
Isa 3:1b	—every support of bread (בֶּל מִשְׁעֵן-לֶחֶם) and every support of water (וְכֹל מִשְׁעֵן-מַיִם).

In Isa 3:1b, the phrase “every support of bread and every support of water” is often viewed as a secondary addition to the original prophecy.⁴ This phrase provides a particular interpretation of the word pair מִשְׁעֵן וּמִשְׁעֵנָה that appears to challenge the original intention of Isa 3:1a. The main concern of the judgment prophecy in Isa 3:1-7 is the removal of the current leaders of the nation and the installation of children as officials instead, resulting in a total political chaos in the country. While מִשְׁעֵן and its feminine counterpart מִשְׁעֵנָה do not appear elsewhere in this particular form, the variant מִשְׁעֵן is known from 2 Sam 22:19 || Ps 18:19, where YHWH is said to be the “support” of the psalmist. Similarly, the feminine variant מִשְׁעֵנָה is used a symbol of supportive political power (beside its usual sense of “staff”) in Isa 30:6 and Ezek 29:6 that call Egypt a “staff of reed” (מִשְׁעֵנָה [הַ] קָנָה) for Judah upon which he relies.⁵ It is therefore most probable that the word pair מִשְׁעֵן וּמִשְׁעֵנָה originally referred to officials and leaders and not to bread and water as v. 1b suggests.⁶ The editor inserting Isa 3:1b may have thought about מִשְׁעֵן being used here in its literal sense of “staff”, rather than its figurative connotation. He connected מִשְׁעֵן with another well-known metaphor of the Bible, “the staff of bread”, usually spelled out as

Rewriting within the Hebrew Bible: A Bibliographic Essay on Inner-Biblical Exegesis in the History of Scholarship”, in idem, *Legal Revision and Religious Renewal in Ancient Israel* (Cambridge, 2008), pp. 95-181.

4 See B. Duhm, *Das Buch Jesaja* (Göttingen, 1968), p. 44; G. B. Gray, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Isaiah* (ICC; Edinburgh, 1948), p. 63; G. Fohrer, *Das Buch Jesaja* (ZB; Zürich, 1960), Bd. 1, p. 58; H. G. M. Williamson, *Isaiah 1-5* (ICC; London, 2006), p. 243.

5 See further מִשְׁעֵן in relation to political support in Isa 30:12; 31:1 (probably also Isa 10:20).

6 The combination of a masculine and feminine form expresses totality. Cf., e.g., 2 Sam 19:36; Nah 2:13; Gray, *Isaiah*, p. 66; Williamson, *Isaiah*, p. 232.

מִטֵּה-לֶחֶם.⁷ The removal—or rather “breaking” (שבר)—of the staff of bread alludes to famine. However, this latter form of judgment was not the original concern of the current passage. The purpose of this exegetical remark was to reveal what may have been considered an enigmatic metaphor in the original prophecy, but it offers an interpretation which differs from the tendency of the primary text, and it obstructs syntactically the natural course of the prophetic rhetoric.

1.2 *Isaiah 9:13-14*

Isa 9:13	So YHWH will cut off from Israel head and tail (ראש וזנב), palm branch and reed in one day.
Isa 9:14	<i>The elder and the dignitary—he is the head (הוא הראש), the prophet teaching lies—he is the tail (הוא הזנב).</i>

In a careful analysis of these verses, Goshen-Gottstein has shown how unique the structure of v. 14 is in Biblical Hebrew, arriving at the conclusion that this verse is secondary in its context. Formally, he considered v. 14 an antecedent of Qumranic Peshier-type annotations,⁸ corroborating what had long ago been suggested in commentaries on Isaiah. For although the pericope in which vv. 13-14 are now located is replete with uncertainties, it is nevertheless likely that ראש וזנב described originally the different poles of the Israelite society, viz. those of higher and lower social status (cf. Deut 28:13.44; Isa 7:20). V. 15 speaks in similar terms about “the leaders of this people” and “those being led”, and v. 16 mentions “the young men” of YHWH with “his orphans and widows”. All of Israel has committed sin against YHWH, and all of them are subject to judgment (Isa 9:16). From a structural point of view, v. 14 impedes the clear flow of thoughts in three sequential verses expressing the total depravity of the Israelite society. From a contextual point of view, v. 14 diverts the attention of the reader from the original scope of the prophecy.⁹ The intention of the interpolation in Isa 9:14 appears to have been similar to Isa 3:1b: it was supposed to wit the meaning of an earlier cloudy Isaianic metaphor for the later reader.

7 See Lev 26:26; Ps 105:16; Ezek 4:16; 5:16; 14:13. In Ezek 4:16 this motif is combined with the idea of lack of water as well. For this explanation of the exegetical interpolation in Isa 3:1, see also Gray, *Isaiah*, p. 63.

8 M. H. Goshen-Gottstein, “Hebrew Syntax and the History of the Bible Text. A Peshier in the MT of Isaiah”, *Textus* 8 (1973), pp. 100-106.

9 For the later origin of v. 14, see, e.g., Duhm, *Jesaia*, p. 94; Gray, *Isaiah*, p. 186; H. Wildberger, *Jesaja. Kapitel 1-12* (BKAT 10/1; Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1972), p. 205.

1.3 *Isaiah 7:17*

Isa 7:17 | YHWH will bring on you and on your people and your ancestral house days (יָמִים) that never have come from the day (לְיָמִים) that Ephraim turned away from Judah
—*the king of Assyria* (אַתְּ מֶלֶךְ אַשּׁוּר).

The connections of v. 17 with its current context are hotly debated. The standpoint we take in this regard closely influences our interpretation of the objectives of v. 17. Some consider vv. 17-25 one unit, while others would like to relate v. 17 to the previous prophecy (vv. 10-16).¹⁰ The latter option, connecting Isa 7:17 to the preceding verse, appears to be more convincing, however.¹¹ Originally this prophecy of Isaiah promised salvation in connection with the threat posed by Aram and Israel to Jerusalem: before Immanuel reaches a lifetime to distinguish between good and bad, the land of Aram and Israel will be deserted (v. 16). In such context, v. 17 with its rather enigmatic prediction of “days” that have never been known since Ephraim turned away from Judah should most likely be read as a promise of a prosperous future. This glorious picture is overshadowed by “the king of Assyria” (אַתְּ מֶלֶךְ אַשּׁוּר), which transforms the earlier salvation prophecy into a pronouncement of doom regarding Judah.¹² The probability that the phrase אַתְּ מֶלֶךְ אַשּׁוּר is a later interpolation is reinforced by the awkward formulation of the verse: “YHWH will bring upon you (...) days (...): *the king of Assyria*”. The later editor inserting this interpretive note

10 For the first option, see Gray, *Isaiah*, pp. 136-37; for the second, see J. Barthel: *Prophetenwort und Geschichte. Die Jesajaüberlieferung in Jes 6-8 und 28-31* (FAT 19; Tübingen, 1997), pp. 131-132; W. A. M. Beuken, *Jesaja 1-12* (HThKAT; Freiburg, 2003), pp. 189-90; H. G. M. Williamson, “Poetic Vision in Isaiah 7:18-25”, in A. J. Everson and H. C. P. Kim (eds), *The Desert Will Bloom. Poetic Visions in Isaiah* (Atlanta, 2009), pp. 77, note 1. Duhm, *Jesaja*, p. 76, argues that the role of the later v. 17 was to connect two already existing pericopes, vv. 10-16 with vv. 18-25. This view, however—as Gray, *Isaiah*, p. 136, well noted—, raises serious problems.

11 Syntactically speaking, v. 17 has no introduction which would delimit this verse from the previous oracle, either as the beginning of an independent prophecy, or as a part of elaborative comments (vv. 18-25). Such transitions from primary texts to secondary elaborations are usually marked in biblical texts in one way or another (in the subsequent verses, new ideas are introduced by בְּיָוֶם הַהוּא [בְּיָוֶם הַהוּא]). On the contrary, v. 17 appears as a natural follow-up to v. 16 (much like v. 15 continues v. 14; both connected asyndetically).

12 Cf. M. A. Sweeney, *Isaiah 1-39 with an Introduction to Prophetic Literature* (FOTL 16; Grand Rapids, 1996), p. 155. For the later provenance of the phrase “the king of Assyria”, see further Duhm, *Jesaja*, p. 77; Gray, *Isaiah*, p. 137; Barthel, *Prophetenwort*, p. 139; Beuken, *Jesaja 1-12*, p. 189; Tov, “Glosses”, 63, note 27.

probably had the larger context in view that exposes threats for Ahaz on various occasions.

2 Interpolations in the Isaiah-Memoir

Isaiah's so-called prophetic memoir (*Denkschrift*) (Isa 6:1-9:6), dealing with the events around 734 B.C., is believed to form the most ancient core of the Isaianic prophecies. I shall limit my analysis of interpolations here to Isa 8:1-9:6. It shall be argued that the identification of later editorial annotations is the clue to interpreting three notorious textual difficulties. I begin with a case that has already been suspected of containing later editorial remarks, namely Isa 8:6-7.

2.1 *Isaiah 8:6-7*

Isa 8:6	<p style="text-align: right;">יַעַן כִּי מָאָס הָעַם הַזֶּה אֶת מֵי הַשִּׁלּוֹחַ הַהַלְכִים לְאֵט וּמְשׁוֹשׁ אֶת־רִצְיוֹ וּבְנִי־רַמְלִיָּהוּ</p> <p>Because this people has rejected the waters of the Shiloah flowing gently and <i>softly</i>(?) / <i>joyfully</i>(?) —<i>Rezin and the son of Remaliah,</i></p>
Isa 8:7a	<p style="text-align: right;">וְלָכֵן הִנֵּה אֲדַנִּי מֵעַלָּה עֲלֵיהֶם אֶת־מֵי הַנְּהַר הַעֲצוּמִים וְהַרְבִּים אֶת־מְלֶדֶת אֲשׁוּר וְאֶת־כָּל־כְּבוֹדוֹ</p> <p>therefore, look, the Lord will bring up against them the powerful and mighty waters of the Euphrates —<i>the king of Assyria and all his multitude.</i></p>
Isa 8:7b	<p>And it will rise (וַעֲלֶה) above all its channels, and overflow (וַהֲלֹךְ) all its banks.</p>

Vv. 6-7a are obviously based on parallelism. They follow a *יַעַן כִּי* [...] *וְלָכֵן* prophetic predictive formula: “because this people has rejected (...), therefore, look, I shall bring upon them (...).”¹³ In this syntactical structure, *מֵי הַשִּׁלּוֹחַ*, the modest water source of Jerusalem, corresponds to *מֵי הַנְּהַר*, the mighty waters of the Euphrates. One is tempted to extend the parallelism to the characterisation of these waters as well: the Euphrates is “powerful and mighty”, and the Shiloah is flowing, “gently and *מְשׁוֹשׁ*”. Yet this is the point where the problem occurs, for in the MT, the word *וּמְשׁוֹשׁ* is connected to the following line, *אֶת־רִצְיוֹ וּבְנִי־רַמְלִיָּהוּ*.

13 See Isa 29:13-14; cf. also 2 Kgs 1:16; Ezek 25:3-4.6-7; 29:6-8.9-10.

The difficulty is created by the uncertainties related to the meaning of the term *מְשׂוֹשׁ*. This lexeme is most often viewed as a construct form of the noun *מְשׂוֹשׁ*, “rejoicing” (denominative from *שׂוֹשׂ/שׂוֹשׂ*, “to rejoice”). The phrase is rendered accordingly as “and they rejoice with Rezin and the son of Remaliah”. It has been argued that there was some pro-Samaritan and anti-Assyrian group in Jerusalem planning to remove Ahaz that is being addressed here by Isaiah.¹⁴ However, apart from the fact that such historical speculations fall short of textual support, the reasoning is challenged by exegetical and—more importantly—grammatical reasons.¹⁵

Emending *וּמְשׂוֹשׁ* to *וּמְסֹס* qal inf. abs., from *מָסַס*, “to melt” (here: “melting [in fear] before Rezin and the son of Remaliah”),¹⁶ would solve some of the

14 H. Klein, “Freude an Rezin. Ein Versuch, mit dem Text Jes. viii 6 ohne Konjektur auszukommen”, *VT* 30 (1980), pp. 231-33; D. Barthélemy, *Critique textuelle de l'Ancien Testament* (OBO 50/2; Fribourg, 1986), p. 50; Barthel, *Prophetenwort*, pp. 200-202; M. A. Sweeney, “*ûmšššš* in Isaiah 8:6”, in *Form and Intertextuality in Prophetic and Apocalyptic Literature* (FAT 45; Tübingen, 2005), p. 41; Beuken, *Jesaja*, p. 213.

15 Concerning the first, *הָעָם הַזֶּה* generally refers to the people of Judah in Isaiah. Cf. W. Gesenius, *Philologisch-kritischer und historischer Commentar über den Jesaja* (Leipzig, 1821), pp. 330-331; K. Fullerton, “The Interpretation of Isaiah 8:5-10”, *JBL* 43 (1924), pp. 255-264; Sweeney, “*ûmšššš*”, p. 36; Beuken, *Jesaja*, p. 217. But Judah’s “rejoicing with (אֶת) Rezin” would hardly make any sense. See K. Marti, *Das Buch Jesaja* (KHAT 10; Tübingen, 1900), p. 84; Gray, *Isaiah*, p. 146; Fullerton, “Isaiah 8:5-10”, pp. 255-64. The information we glean from Isa 7:3; 8:12-15 suggests that the whole Judah (not just a small group) was disappointed by the threat of the northern coalition.

As for the grammatical reasons, while the syntagmatic structure of a noun in st. cstr. followed by a preposition (**וּמְשׂוֹשׁ אֶת־רִצִּין*) is not unknown (cf. Isa 9:2; 14:19; 2 Sam 1:21; GKc §130a; P. Joüon and T. Muraoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew* [Rome, 1991], §129m-n [= JM]), in such cases, there is a clear constructive relationship between the nouns preceding and following the preposition. The preposition is merely used to clarify the limits of this relationship. *וּמְשׂוֹשׁ אֶת־רִצִּין* would mean “and the rejoicing of/with Rezin” (as much as *שִׂמְחַת בְּקִצִּיר* in Isa 9:2 is actually the same as *שִׂמְחַת קִצִּיר*), and this entire phrase would be the object of the verb *מָצַא*: “Because this people has rejected the waters . . . and the rejoicing of/with Rezin . . .”, which is obviously inappropriate. Moreover, *מְשׂוֹשׁ* cannot function here as a predicate (contra Gesenius). No such function is attested for nouns in a constructive relationship (in Gen 49:4, *פָּחַז* is elliptically connected to the predicate *אֶת־הָאֵל*), and denominative nouns are not used as predicates. These observations also render the atypical understanding of A. Auret, “Another look at *וּמְשׂוֹשׁ* in Isaiah 8:6”, *OTE* 3 (1990), pp. 107-114, unlikely.

16 *מָסַס* appears generally (19x) in the niph. form, but once in the hiph. (Deut 1:28) and once in the qal (Isa 10:18). Cf. F. Hitzig, *Der Prophet Jesaja* (Heidelberg, 1833), pp. 98-99; Marti, *Jesaja*, p. 84. Cf. also Duhm, *Jesaja*, p. 80.

shortcomings noted for the nominal *וּמְשׁוֹשׁ* above. However, the inadequacy of the preposition *אֶת* (instead of *מִלְפָּנַי*, or *מִן*) remains a further grave problem.¹⁷

While accepting the form *וּמְסֹס*, Giesebrecht suggested that this infinitive should actually be related to the *preceding* expression, *הַהֲלִיכִים לְאֵט*, as another adverbial characterisation of the flowing waters of the Shiloah. The phrase *אֶת־הַרְצִיץ וּבְגֵן־רְמֵלֵיהֶוּ* is considered by Giesebrecht a gloss explaining the symbol of the Shiloah, similar to the gloss in v. 7 that explains the symbol of the Euphrates (see below).¹⁸ Giesebrecht's attractive proposal has, however, raised a number of questions, and his view has been received with a high dose of scepticism. The disbelief was fuelled by three particular problems: the semantic nuance of *מסס*, the ancient textual witnesses and especially the apparently awkward way of thinking of a presupposed glossator. But is that scepticism really justifiable?

מסס niph. is used in the sense of "to melt, to become soft, to be consumed" in relation to melting wax (Ps 22:15), mountains (Ps 97:5; Isa 34:3; Mic 1:4), or flax rope when catching fire (Judg 15:14). The niph. part. form is used of "feeble" or "meagre" animals (1 Sam 15:9). Although the meaning of Isa 10:18 is clouded by enigmatic language, the verb *מסס* qal describes here a situation in which a state of wealth (*כְּבֹד*) or the human body (*בְּשָׂר*) diminishes or is consumed in fire.¹⁹

Two variant spellings of *מסס*, namely *מאס* II (!) and *מסה*, essentially underline this picture. In Ps 58:8, *מאס* is used in the sense of "flow away, melt away": *יִמְאָסוּ כְּמַוּ-מֵיִם יִתְהַלְכוּ־כִּוְ-לָמוֹ*, "let them melt, let them go away like water", implying somehow a relationship between the flowing waters and the verb *מאס* (= *מסס*). In Ps 6:7 and 147:18, *מסה* hiph. means "to liquefy, cause to melt/flow": *יְהוָה* causes ice to melt by his word and by his breath he makes waters flow (*יִזְלוּ־מֵיִם*).²⁰

To conclude, in Isa 8:6, *מְסֹס* in combination with the verb *הִלַּךְ* can be translated as "to flow softly, meagrely, diminishingly". The imagery is in strong contrast with the *ever growing* (cf. *עָלָה*, "to rise") and abundant (*הַרְבִּיבִים*) waters of the Euphrates in v. 7, inundating the whole country.²¹

17 Cf. F. Giesebrecht, "Die Immanuelweissagung", *Theologische Studien und Kritiken* 61 (1888), p. 225; Gray, *Isaiah*, p. 148; Sweeney, "*umššōš*", pp. 38-39. *אֶת* demarcates the object in Deut 1:28; 20:8.

18 Giesebrecht, "Immanuelweissagung", pp. 227-229; cf. also W. Popper, *Studies in Biblical Parallelism. Parallelism in Isaiah* (Berkeley, 1917), pp. 347-348.

19 Isa 17:4 probably parallels this passage, using the hiph. of the verb *רזה*, "to make lean" in a similar context.

20 For the interchange of *נזל* and *מסה*, compare also Judg 5:5 with Ps 97:5.

21 For the adverbial use of the inf. abs., see GKC §113h-k. The original vocalisation of *וּמְשׁוֹשׁ* (whether st. cstr. or abs.) remains a question. The st. cstr. can be the result of reading this

However, although the textual witnesses do have problems in rendering the Hebrew text, at least 1QIsa^a, 4QIsa^f, the Peshitta and the Vulgate apparently presuppose a variant of *וּמְשׁוֹשׁ*, that is spelled either with a *וּ* or *שׁ* rather than *וּ*.²² In view of this evidence, altering the consonantal text with Giesebrecht and others is hard to justify.

But is that altering necessary at all? Can we retain the meaning outlined above without emending the current form of the text? Several concrete examples from Biblical Hebrew show that the *וּ* / *שׁ* interchange can occasionally be a mere issue of orthography.²³ But in Isa 8:6 *מְשׁוֹשׁ* is probably more than a simple orthographic variant. According to Muraoka, “occasional substitution of *וּ* for *שׁ* may result in possible *double entendre*”.²⁴ That could actually be the case in Isa 8:6 as well. The waters of the Shiloah are flowing slowly / meagrely, but also joyfully (*מְשׁוֹשׁ*), i.e. they bring joy to the city of David. This idea was well-known in the cultic poetry that Isaiah was also familiar with. A clear expression of this is found in the Immanuel-Psalms (where else?), Ps 46:5: “there is a river whose streams make glad (*יִשְׁמְחוּ*) the city of God . . .”.²⁵

It remains an intriguing question—and this is actually the major reason why most exegetes are reluctant to consider the phrase in v. 6b a later

word in conjunction with the following expression. But the inf. cstr. might actually also be correct and explained in relation to the compound expression, *לְאַט וּמְשׁוֹשׁ*, with the prep. *לְ* used elliptically. See esp. Isa 60:15: *מְשׁוֹשׁ דְּדוֹר וְדוֹר // וְיִשְׁמְחוּ לְגֵאוֹן עוֹלָם*. For a recent study on the phenomenon of elliptic prepositional phrases and prepositions in Biblical Hebrew, cf. C. Miller, “A Reconsideration of ‘Double-Duty’ Prepositions in Biblical Poetry”, *JANES* 31 (2009), pp. 106–110.

- 22 Vulg.: *et adsumpsit magis Rasin . . .*, “and took up rather (or: esteemed higher) Rasin . . .” (from *מָשָׂה*, “to take up”; cf. 2 Sam 22:17; Ps 18:17). The Targ. and LXX are more problematic. The Aramaic *וְאִתְרַעֲיָאוּ בְרַצִּין* means “and they desire Rezin”. Hebrew *שׁוֹשׁ* is never rendered by *רָעִי* in the Targ. (contra Sweeney, “*umššōš*”, pp. 40, 42), but it does translate Hebrew *רָצָה* (Gen 33:10; Isa 42:1; Hag 1:8; Mal 1:8; etc.) and sometimes *נָשָׂא* (Ex 35:21.26; 36:2). Similarly, in the LXX of Isa *βούλωμαι* often renders Hebrew *חָפַץ* (so also the Targ.!) and in Ex 36:2 perhaps *נָשָׂא*.
- 23 Cf. JM §5m. Cf. *סוּג*, generally, but once as *שׁוּג*; *שָׁכַר* generally, but once (Ezr 4:5) as *סָכַר*; *כַּעַשׂ*, but *כַּעַשׁ* in Job; etc.
- 24 JM §5m note (5); cf. GKC §6i-k. Muraoka refers to *הַשְּׁרִיר* in Hos 8:4. Similarly in Eccl 1:17 once the form *שְׁכָלוֹת* is found, but the book uses *סְכָלוֹת* on six other occasions. Note also *בְּשׁוּרֵי* in Hos 9:12 that can also be read as *בְּסוּרֵי*.
- 25 See further also Ps 36:9; Isa 12:3; 33:21. Expressions with double meanings are well-known in the so-called Janus-parallelisms, on which see, e.g., C. H. Gordon, “New Directions”, *BASP* 15 (1978), pp. 59–60; D. T. Tsumura, “Janus Parallelism in Hab. III 4”, *VT* 54 (2004), pp. 124–128.

interpolation²⁶—in what sense וּבְנֵי־רַמְלִיָּהוּ וּבְנֵי־רֶזֶן וּבְנֵי־פִיִּיז may have functioned as an exegetical note in the mind of a later editor? Giesebrecht believed that this phrase paralleled the accusative construction at the beginning of the verse: the people rejected the waters of Shiloah, i.e. Rezin and Peqah.²⁷ While such a reinterpretation may seem as missing the point of the original prophecy, we must be aware that ancient scribes have several other similar hermeneutical surprises in store (cf. above).

Nonetheless, another solution that has not yet been pondered seems to me more likely. The later editor may have understood the verb מָאָס in Isa 8:6 not in its regular (and here certainly the original) sense of “to reject”, but as מָאָס II, i.e. a variant of מָסַס / מָסָה, mentioned above, “to melt, to become soft”. The slowly flowing waters of the Shiloah were regarded not as a reference to a policy of remaining still and trusting YHWH, but as a symbol of the insignificance of the adversaries Rezin and Peqah. If this nation melts in fear because of *such* slowly flowing waters, YHWH will bring upon them the more violent waters of Assyria. Such an interpretation of the metaphor could have been facilitated by the larger context, in particular Isa 7:4, where Isaiah says to Ahaz:

Isa 7:4

Watch out and be calm! Do not be afraid and do not soften your heart (וְלֹא־יִרְדָּ אֶל־יִרְדָּ) before these two smoking stubs of firebrands, because of the burning anger of Rezin and Aram and the son of Remaliah.

Isa 7:4 uses the syntagmatic construction רָכַךְ + לֵבֵב that has a closely related meaning to מָסַס + לֵבֵב.²⁸ מָסַס and its variant מָאָס II may express the idea of “becoming soft” also without the additional לֵבֵב, as it is the case in 2 Sam 17:10 and probably Job 42:6.²⁹ Such parallels make the hypothesis likely that the editor interpreted מָאָס in Isa 8:6 in a similar sense. Besides, Isa 7:4 also uses a disparaging metaphor for the adversaries of Ahaz that could have provided additional stimulus to read Isa 8:6 in the light of the metaphoric language of

26 Cf. Fullerton, “Isaiah 8:5-10”, p. 268; Sweeney, “*uměšós*”, p. 39. It is surprising, however, that at the same time Sweeney does consider the highly autonomous rereading of Isa 8:6 by 66:14-18 possible.

27 Giesebrecht, “Immanuelweissagung”, pp. 227-228.

28 Cf. Deut 1:28; Josh 2:11; 7:5; 14:8; etc. In Deut 20:3 and 8 both רָכַךְ and מָסַס (cf. also יִרָא!) appear in the same context, with a similar semantic nuance. מָסַס appears in a medical context in Job 7:5 with the sense of רָכַךְ in Isa 1:6.

29 In the heavily disputed text of Job 42:6, מָאָס can best be explained as “to become humble/soft”, as a sign of penitence, and not as “to reject”, which hardly makes any sense (cf. par. נָחַם, “to repent”). The synonym רָכַךְ is also used as expressing both cowardice and humble spirit; for this latter sense, see 1 Kgs 22:19; 2 Chr 34:27.

7:4. Finally, interpreting מַאֵס in the sense of “to become soft” (coward, timid) may have been regarded by a later editor as more appropriate in view of the notorious וּמִשׁוֹשׁ.

The idea that אֶת־מֶלֶךְ אֲשׁוֹר וְאֶת־כָּל־כְּבוֹדוֹ in v. 7 is a later interpolation is widely accepted and need not be dealt with in detail.³⁰ In both cases, the editor proposes to explain the meaning of a prophetic metaphor. It is important to emphasise again, however, that this explanatory addition intends to relate the text historically to its original Isaianic context.

2.2 *Isaiah 8:23*

Isa 8:23a	Nevertheless, there will be no gloom ³¹ for the one who was in anguish.
Isa 8:23b	<p style="text-align: right;">כָּעַת הֶרְאִשׁוֹן הַקָּל אֶרְצָה זְבֻלוֹן וְאֶרְצָה נַפְתָּלִי וְהֶאֱחָרוֹן הַכְּבִיד דְּרֹךְ הַיָּם עֵבֶר הַיַּרְדֵּן גְּלִיל הַגּוֹיִם</p> <p>As the first time he humiliated —<i>the land of Zebulun, and the land of Naphtali</i>—, but finally he glorified —<i>the way of the sea, the other side of the Jordan, Galilee of the Nations</i>—,</p>
Isa 9:1a	the people walking in the darkness will see great light,
Isa 9:1b	on those living in the land of deep darkness a light will shine.

I begin my discussion of these verses with an outline of my basic semantic starting points in which I follow the larger exegetical consensus. (1) Although suggestions have been made to interpret הֶרְאִשׁוֹן / וְהֶאֱחָרוֹן as subjects (“the first one”, “the last one” referring to two different monarchs),³² it is more convincing to consider them adverbs forming a (direct or elliptical) constructive

30 E.g., Gray, *Isaiah*, p. 147; Wildberger, *Jesaja*, p. 322; Kaiser, *Jesaja*, p. 181; Sweeney, *Isaiah*, p. 171. As scholars usually note, this interpolation disturbs the fluent connection between the metaphoric language of v. 7a and v. 7b.

31 The particle לֹא (not לֹא־) is used before nominal predicates in forceful negations (cf. JM §160c-d).

32 See J. A. Emerton, “Some Linguistic and Historical Problems in Isaiah VIII 23”, *JSS* 14 (1969), pp. 158-60; H. Eshel, “Isaiah viii 23: An Historical-Geographical Analogy”, *VT* 40 (1990), p. 109 (“as then”).

relationship with *קָטַת*, to be translated as “first / former time” and “last / latter time”.³³ (2) The two hiph. verbs, *הִקְלִי* and *הִכְבִּיד*, form an antithetic construction in the sense of “treat with contempt” (cf. 2 Sam 19:44; Isa 23:9; Ezek 22:7) and “treat with honour” (cf. Jer 30:19) respectively.³⁴ Actually both verbs can be used with two senses in Hebrew (literal and abstract). *קָלַל* hiph. means “to make light”, but also “to treat with contempt”. *כִּבֵּד* hiph. means “to make heavy”, but also “to treat with honour”.³⁵ It would not be desirable, however, to take the literal meaning from one word and combine it with the abstract sense of the other, as this appears in some translations and commentaries on Isa 8:23.³⁶ When the two verbs appear side by side, they are used in opposition to one another (1 Kgs 12:10; 2 Chr 10:10).

After these initial remarks, I turn to examining the meaning of v. 23b in its context. What is its relationship with the previous and following verses? The proper delimitation of the beginning of the new prophecy, and with it the connections, scope and meaning of v. 23, is disputed basically between two main positions. (1) Some consider 9:1-6 an entirely independent text, connected only superficially and redactionally to the previous verses. Accordingly, v. 23a, v. 23b or the whole of v. 23 is seen as a later redactional bridge intending to connect the prophecy of judgment in chapter 8 with a later prophecy of salvation.³⁷ The most important reason for exegetes to drop v. 23b from 9:1-6 appears to be

-
- 33 Cf. H. Barth, *Die Jesaja-Worte der Josiazeit. Israel und Assur als Thema einer produktiven Neuinterpretation der Jesajaüberlieferung* (WMANT 48; Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1977), pp. 143-44; P. D. Wegner, “Another Look at Isaiah viii 23b”, *VT* 41 (1991), pp. 481-484; J. Høgenhaven, “On the Structure and Meaning of Isaiah VIII 23b”, *VT* 37 (1987), pp. 219; H. G. M. Williamson, “First and Last in Isaiah”, in H. A. McKay and D. J. A. Clines (eds), *Of Prophets’ Visions and the Wisdom of Sages. FS Whybray* (London, 2009), p. 98; R. A. Young, *Hezekiah in History and Tradition* (VTSup 155; Leiden, 2012), p. 153. For *קָטַת* used as a masc. noun, cf. Isa 13:22; 36:1; Ezek 7:7.12; etc. *קָטַת* is mostly used in constructive relationships. If standing alone, *קָטַת* means “in time” (Num 23:23) or “now, currently” (Judg 21:22) (with clear temporal connotations). Despite Emerton’s attempts, this latter sense cannot be applied to Isa 8:23. Jer 50:17, a text often mentioned with Isa 8:23, also uses *הִיאֲתָרוֹן* and *הִיאֲאֵשֶׁן* temporally.
- 34 Gray, *Isaiah*, p. 163; Wildberger, *Jesaja*, p. 372; Barth, *Jesaja-Worte*, pp. 144-145; Høgenhaven, “Structure”, p. 219.
- 35 Each of these meanings requires its own syntagmatic constructions. The meaning “to make lighter” requires *מִן* (1 Sam 6:5; 1 Kgs 12:10), “to make something (acc.!) heavy” presupposes *עַל* (1 Kgs 12:10; Isa 47:6; Hab 2:6).
- 36 Cf. Emerton, “Some Problems”, pp. 163-165 (“treat with contempt” and “treat with harshness”); Eshel, “Isaiah viii 23”, pp. 104-109.
- 37 Cf. Duhm, *Jesaja*, p. 88; Gray, *Isaiah*, p. 161; Fohrer, *Jesaja*, p. 136; H. W. Wolff, *Frieden ohne Ende. Eine Auslegung von Jes. 7,1-7 und 9,1-6* (BibSt 35; Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1962), pp. 61-62.

the wordy and prosaic style of v. 23b, which is in strong contrast with the neat poetic form of the subsequent verses. (2) More often, however, scholars are tempted to recognise in the historically learned author of this verse the very same poet of Isa 9:1-6.³⁸ The formal deviances between Isa 8:23 and 9:1-6 are either overbridged by rewriting the Masoretic Text,³⁹ or—more often—simply tacitly ignored.

In my view, both approaches have their weaknesses. If v. 23b is detached from the following pericope, it would be difficult to identify its scope.⁴⁰ On the other hand, however, it must also be admitted that—even beyond the formal irregularities of v. 23b noted above—in its current form, the entire sentence in v. 23b is oddly hanging in the air, without any clear logical connection to Isa 9:1ff that was supposed to introduce: “(As) In the former time he humiliated the land of Naphtali . . . , (so) in the later (time) he glorified the way of the sea . . .”. How could that be related to Isa 9:1? In order to overcome this logical deficiency, many have argued that the second half of the parallelism in 8:23b should be seen as a predictive future form rather than a preterite description, signalling a turning point that is about to appear in 9:1.⁴¹ Meticulous philological and structural analysis has, however, overruled this possibility concluding that both verbs should be understood on the same temporal level, namely as referring to the past.⁴²

There is another grave problem inside v. 23b itself, rarely receiving the attention it deserves, as noted especially by Alt and Barth. Based on the antithetic structure of this verse (cf. הַרְאֲשׁוֹן | הָאֲחֻרֹן and הַקֶּל | הַכְּבִיד), one would expect the geographical names in the two verses to correspond to one another: the same geographical region that had first been subdued, was later liberated. But as Alt himself concludes, “diese Erwartung wird jedoch durch den überlieferten Text keineswegs erfüllt”.⁴³ Therefore, he comes forward with the suggestion to alter the text by inserting the names הַר גִּלְעָד and עֲמֻק הַשָּׁרוֹן as corresponding to הִים and הַיַּרְדֵּן respectively. Barth is more restrained with emendations, and invests great effort in pointing out the necessary overlaps between the two verse lines. In the end, however, he still has to alter the

38 E.g., Barth, *Jesaja-Worte*, pp. 142-143.

39 See A. Alt, “Jesaja 8, 23–9, 6. Befreiungsnacht und Krönungstag”, in *Kleine Schriften zur Geschichte des Volkes Israel* (München, 1953), Bd. 2, pp. 211-212, composing several new lines to the “poem”.

40 As noted also by Barth, *Jesaja-Worte*, pp. 142-143. Cf. Alt, “Befreiungsnacht”, pp. 207-209.

41 E.g., Duhm, *Jesaja*, p. 88; Fohrer, *Jesaja*, p. 136; Wildberger, *Jesaja*, p. 372; Beuken, *Jesaja*, pp. 244-245.

42 Emerton, “Some Problems”, pp. 157-158; Barth, *Jesaja-Worte*, p. 147.

43 Alt, “Befreiungsnacht”, p. 209. Similarly Barth, *Jesaja-Worte*, pp. 145, 156-157, 160.

text—though on a smaller scale than Alt did. He comes to the version: **גוֹיִם מֵעֵבֶר הַיַּרְדֵּן גְּלִילָה גּוֹיִם**, “the Way to the Sea *from* beyond the Jordan *towards* Galilee of the nations”. Consequently he maintains that the lands of Zebulon and Naphtali correspond to this *region* of the “Way to the Sea”.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, I am not convinced that it is worth sacrificing the Masoretic Text for such modest results. The regions described in the two verse lines are not even roughly overlapping.

As noted earlier, the unevenness on textual level can occasionally be caused by the presence of later explanatory interpolations. In fact, I believe that the geographical list of Isa 8:23b is such a later interpretive remark of an editor of the book of Isaiah.⁴⁵ If these annotations are removed for the sake of reconstructing a hypothetical original version, we obtain a rather smooth text, with v. 23b receiving its logical place between Isa 8:23a and 9:1:

Nevertheless,⁴⁶ there will be no gloom for the one who was in anguish.⁴⁷
 As the first time he humiliated, // but finally he glorified,⁴⁸
 the people walking in darkness // will see a great light,
 those living in the land of deep darkness, // a light will shine upon them.

We have seen a few examples of such historicising interpolations above that would make this hypothesis at least plausible. The prophecy of Isa 9:1-6 envisages the deliverance of Israel *analogous to* a salvation act of YHWH in the past, in the time of Gideon (cf. v. 3). As in those days the oppression of the former

44 Barth, *Jesaja-Worte*, pp. 160-161. He actually follows the emendation proposed already by Procksch.

45 So far as I am aware, this possibility has not yet been raised in the analysis of this text.

46 V. 23a connects this prophecy to the previous text. The terms **מוֹצֵק** and **מוֹעֵף** (cf. v. 22), as well as the pronominal sg. 3. fem. suffix **לָהּ** derives from the earlier prophecy (cf. **בָּהּ** in v. 21). V. 9:1a again uses **הוֹשֵׁק** which corresponds to **הַשְׁכָּה** in v. 22. The land of deep darkness (**אֶרֶץ צִלְמוֹת**), generally used in relation to the land of the dead (Job 10:21; 38:17), essentially parallels the description of vv. 19-21, the gloomy world of Molech and the dead ghosts.

47 The sentence can also be interpreted as “it is not gloom that is for the one who was in anguish”. The emphatic negation of a noun with **לֹא** would support such a rendering (cf. JM §160c-d mentioned above).

48 2 Chr 25:19 and Neh 5:15 may provide two examples where the **כבד** is used intransitively. It is also possible, however, that the verbs in Isa 8:23 are actually transitive, but the object phrase is 9:1a, attached elliptically to the previous verse lines. On object ellipsis, see especially C. Sinclair, “The Valence of the Hebrew Verb”, *JANES* 20 (1991), pp. 63-81. On backward ellipsis, see C. Miller, “A Linguistic Approach to Ellipsis in Biblical Poetry”, *BBR* 13 (2003), pp. 251-270.

times was followed by the salvation of the latter times,⁴⁹ the people now walking in darkness will also experience relief from the enemies.

It remains a question what the role of the later geographical interpolation could have been, and how it came to be connected with two poetic lines? In the exegetical literature, v. 8:23b was traditionally thought to refer (at least partially) to 732 B.C., when Tiglath-pileser III subdued Damascus and Northern Israel, as described by 2 Kgs 15:29 (cf. 1 Chr 5:26).⁵⁰ This idea was based on the geographical list in v. 23, which shows similarities to 2 Kgs 15:29. However, the close connections of Isa 8:23-9:6 with the previous pericope⁵¹ suggest rather that these verses were composed for this specific location, that is to proclaim salvation for Judah rather than Israel.

How the editor arrived to the current list of names from Northern Israel which is closely akin to (and, indeed, possibly inspired by) the list of 2 Kgs 15:29, is a question that may be explained from the prophecy itself. I suggest that, in interpreting Isa 8:23ff, the phrase *מְדִיָּן* in Isa 9:3 was of crucial importance. This temporal designation alluding to the era of Gideon's wars in Judg 6-8 (cf. Isa 10:26!) and sounding like *כְּעֵת הֶרְאִשׁוֹן* in Isa 9:1 may have led the editor to believe that Isa 8:23 was dealing with the future of Northern Israel. It is striking to see at a closer look that Gideon's liberating wars were concentrated in the same geographical areas as those mentioned in the interpolations of Isa 8:23b: from the region of Mt Tabor, at the borders of Zebulon, Naphtali and Manasseh, to Succoh and Peniel in the Gilead of the Transjordan area.⁵² It is tempting to conclude that, in explaining the references of *כְּעֵת הֶרְאִשׁוֹן* and *הַיָּמֵי מְדִיָּן*, the editor intended to draw further attention to the connections between Isaiah's time and "the days of Midian" that this prophecy referred to. The geographical locations noted played a prominent role in both the occupation narratives of Tiglath-pileser (2 Kgs 15:29) and the liberation narratives of Gideon (Judg 6-8). As in Gideon's days the hard times of foreign rule were followed by decades of freedom from oppression, so this people now walking in darkness will see the light of salvation.

49 This is actually a recurring motif in the book of Judges, from where the example of Isa 9:3 was taken.

50 Rashi connected the lines about Zebulon and Naphtali to 2 Kgs 15:29 and the rest with 1 Chr 5:26 (*הַקָּל*, "deal mildly" / *הַכְּבִיד*, "deal harshly"; cf. the Vulgate). For other suggestions regarding two campaigns behind Isa 8:23, see Alt, "Befreiungsnacht", pp. 209-211; Høgenhaven, "Structure", p. 220; Wildberger, *Jesaja*, p. 372; Barth, *Jesaja-Worte*, p. 161; Eshel, "Isaiah viii 23", pp. 104-109 ("the first one" is Ben-Haddad from 1 Kgs 15:18-20).

51 See note 46 above.

52 Cf. Judg 6:35; 7:22-24; 8:5,8,18.

This comment, a unified list of geographical names, might have originally been inserted as one marginal (?) note but split in two in the process of textual transmission.⁵³ While the details of the process remain unclear, v. 23b is probably not an isolated case of this scribal procedure.⁵⁴

2.3 *Isaiah 8:2*

Isa 8:1	Then YHWH said to me: Take a large tablet and write on it in common characters (?): “Belonging to Maher-shalal-hash-baz”,
Isa 8:2	so that I may appoint reliable witnesses (וְאֶעֱיֶדָה לִּי עֲדִים נְאֻמָּנִים) — <i>the priest Uriah and Zechariah son of Jeberechiah</i> (אֵת אֹרְיָה הַכֹּהֵן וְאֶת־זְכַּרְיָהוּ בֶן יְבֶרְכֵיָהוּ).
Isa 8:3	And I went to the prophethess, and she conceived and bore a son. Then YHWH said to me: Name him “Maher-shalal-hash-baz”.

This text is a written report narrative of the prophet's personal encounter with YHWH during a certain period of time. Stepping beyond the much debated connotations of גְּלִיּוֹן and בְּהֶרֶט אָנוּשׁ that need not concern us now, I would like to highlight two other problematic points receiving relatively little attention. First, what is actually the role of the two witnesses, Uriah and Zechariah in this narrative? Why would Isaiah need them at all? To cite one of the concise classics on Isaiah, G. B. Gray stated the problem as follows: “(…) it is not entirely clear why an inscription publicly exposed long before it was verified by events required witnesses; they would be more necessary for a document sealed and put away for a time.”⁵⁵ Clearly, the named persons do not play any further role either at the birth of the child or later in the book. The difficulties of v. 2 were also noted by Kaiser, who suggested that v. 2 as a whole needs to be dropped as a later legend intending to underline the authenticity of an earlier text.⁵⁶

53 Strikingly, in Mat 4:15, the five names appear in a continuous form: “land of Zebulon, land of Naphtali, on the road by the sea, across the Jordan, Galilee of the Nations . . .”.

54 For another case where originally coherent pericopes (including editorial additions) were split in the text's compositional history, see Isa 29:15-25, as discussed in Cs. Balogh, “Blind People, Blind God: The Composition of Isaiah 29,15-24” *ZAW* 121 (2009) pp. 48-69, esp. pp. 60, 67.

55 Gray, *Isaiah*, p. 144. Contra Wildberger, *Jesaja*, p. 317; Barthel, *Prophetenwort*, p. 190.

56 O. Kaiser, *Der Prophet Jesaja. Kapitel 1-12* (ATD 17; Berlin, 1984), pp. 175, 177-178. Cf. also H. Gressmann, *Der Messias* (Göttingen, 1929), p. 239, n. 1; U. Becker, *Jesaja—von der Botschaft zum Buch* (FRLANT 178; Göttingen, 1997), p. 94.

In v. 2., there is also a second syntactical-grammatical problem related to the word וְאֶעֱיֵדָה, a hiph. cohortative form of עוּד.⁵⁷ The existing textual variants can be explained as exegetical attempts to clarify the difficulties related to the cohortative וְאֶעֱיֵדָה, and the MT most probably preserved the correct reading.⁵⁸ MT is backed by 4QIsa^e and on a consonantal level by the Vulgate.

If we now take a closer look at the syntax of the first two verses, we observe a construction of imperative(s) followed by וְ attached to a cohortative form. There are several examples of this syntagmatic structure in the Old Testament:

Gen 49:1	הָאֶסְפוּ וְאֶעֱיֵדָה לָכֵן אֵת אֲשֶׁר־יִקְרָא אֶתְכֶם בְּאַחֲרֵית הַיָּמִים Gather together <i>that</i> I may tell you [...]
Deut 31:28	הִקְהִילוּ אֵלַי [...] וְאֶדְבַּרְהָ [...] וְאֶעֱיֵדָה בְּכִם אֶת־הַשְּׁמַיִם וְאֶת־הָאָרֶץ Gather to me [...] <i>so that</i> I may recite the words [...], <i>and that</i> I may appoint heaven and earth to witness against them.
Ps 81:9	שְׁמַע עַמִּי וְאֶעֱיֵדָה בְּךָ Listen, my people, <i>so that</i> I may testify against you.

A glimpse at these examples makes clear why ancient and modern exegetes were bothered by the cohortative וְאֶעֱיֵדָה. They show that when an imperative is followed by a cohortative connected by a וְ, a clause of purpose is formed where the cohortative expresses the intention of the main clause.⁵⁹ If Isa 8:1-2 is adapted to this conclusion, one should translate: “Take a large tablet and write on it (...) *so that* I may appoint reliable witnesses”. But this means that the witness is actually not a person, but the tablet or document itself with its divine oracle.⁶⁰

57 עוּד hiph. “to witness, testify” (e.g., 1 Kgs 21:10.13), “to warn” (e.g., Jer 11:7), “to appoint witness” (Jer 32:10.25.44).

58 1QIsa^a (והעד), the LXX (καὶ μάρτυράς μοι ποιήσων) and the Peshitta (*wshd*) render a hiph. imperative, “and appoint (me) witnesses”, as God’s third command to the prophet. This option is followed by Duhm, *Jesaja*, pp. 78-79. The Vulgate’s *et adhibui* (act. perf. sg. 1.) retains the consonants of MT, but renders the cohortative as a perfect consecutive, where the verb refers to the prophet’s own initiative, “and I appointed witnesses”. This variant is generally followed in commentaries and translations. Cf. Gray, *Isaiah*, p. 144; Kaiser, *Jesaja*, p. 174; Wildberger, *Jesaja*, p. 313; Beuken, *Jesaja*, p. 211. The Targum’s וואס היד can be aph. imperative, as well as aph. impf. sg. 1.

59 For further examples, see Gen 17:1-2; 32:10; Josh 10:4; 1 Sam 14:12; 15:16; 2 Sam 14:7; 2 Kgs 6:19; 7:9; Job 10:20; Psa 39:14; 50:7; 90:12; 119:18; Prov 27:11; Jer 6:5; 33:3; Jon 1:7.

60 עוּד is often used in relation with impersonal objects. See Gen 31:44.48.52 (heap of stones); Deut 31:19.21 (text of a song); Isa 19:20 (altar and stele). Cf. also עוּדָה used in the same sense

To be sure, this interpretation coincides with how the idea of testifying and testimony appears elsewhere in Isaiah. In Isa 30:8, in an encounter similar to Isa 8:1, the prophet is told as follows:

Isa 30:8 | Go now, write it before them on a tablet, and inscribe it in a book, so that it may be for the time to come, as a witness (לְעֵד; cf. *BHS*) forever.

Although the exact content of this tablet is uncertain, it can probably be identified as a תּוֹרַת יְהוָה, “instruction of YHWH”, mentioned in v. 9.⁶¹ Be it as it may, it is sufficiently clear that the document itself, or perhaps more precisely the content of the prophetic writing was supposed to function as a testimony for the days to come.

Isa 8:16 is the other well-known text where תְּעוּדָה, another derivate of עוֹד, is used similarly in connection with a writing.

Isa 8:16 | Bind up the testimony (תְּעוּדָה), seal the instruction (תּוֹרָה) among my disciples.

The instruction and testimony should probably be identified with the short warning in 8:11-15.⁶² The least we know for sure is that תְּעוּדָה is a written prophecy. These parallels underline the hypothesis above that, in an Isaianic context, the עֵדִים נְאֻמָּיִם of Isa 8:2 can refer to a written document, the short prophecy of “Maher-shalal-hash-baz”.

Of course, there is a problem with this explanation. עֵדִים is plural, the writing is only one witness. According to the Old Testament, at least two witnesses were needed for a valid testimony (Num 35:30; Deut 17:6; 19:15).⁶³ In fact, I believe that the second testimony is offered in the connected story about the birth of Isaiah's son. This child becomes the second witness of the very same divine objective that was recorded on the tablet of Isaiah. This is clearly illustrated through the structure of the narrative of Isa 8:1-4: there are two distinct revelations to the prophet, the sentence וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֵלַי appears twice, on both occasions giving the very same message that should serve as a testimony: מִהֵרָ שָׁלַל חֶשׁ בָּז.

in Gen 21:30; Josh 24:27; very often in Deuteronomy and the Psalms for the recorded divine decrees. Note also עֵדוּת.

61 Cf. Barthel, *Prophetenwort*, pp. 405-406; Cs. Balogh, “Prophetic Instruction and the Disciples in Isaiah 8:16”, *VT* 63 (2013), p. 4.

62 See Hitzig, *Jesaja*, pp. 237-238; Balogh, “Prophetic Instruction”, pp. 8-11.

63 See also Mt 18:16; Joh 8:17; 2 Cor 13:1; Heb 10:28; 1 Tit 5:19.

Isa 7 offers another parallel where the prophetic message of assurance (7:4-9) is connected to a reinforcing sign (אֹת), the ominous child Immanuel (7:10-17). Again, in Isa 8:16,18, the written testimony appears juxtaposed with the children of Isaiah presented as living omens (אֹתוֹת) of the divine assurance. Finally, in Isa 19:20, אֹת and עֵד appear again to have a similar meaning and function. In this text, too, the altar of YHWH in Egypt and his stele on its border are mentioned as a double testimony to YHWH in the land of Egypt.

“The priest Uriah and Zechariah son of Jeberechiah” inserted by the editor of the book of Isaiah apparently intended to clarify the reference to the witnesses identifying those with concrete persons, contemporaries of the prophet Isaiah. Being aware of the connections of these prophecies to the person of Ahaz, he chose two names closely related to this king that he may have been familiar with from historical sources (cf. also Isa 8:23 with 2 Kgs 15:29), such as—or similar to—2 Kgs 16:10 (Uriah, the priest) and perhaps 18:2 (Zechariah, father-in-law of Hezekiah).⁶⁴

3 Conclusions and Prospective Remarks

Shorter phrases or even entire verses with problematic readings are often identified by exegetes as loose “glosses”. This study suggests that editorial interpolations are not merely unrelated annotations from various periods. Typical explicatory phrases from Isa 8:2, 8:6-7a and 8:23b analysed in this study tend to expose recognisable patterns, a coherent scope and a common hermeneutical principle. These short annotations all aim to illuminate what was perceived as an enigmatic prophetic metaphor or unclear reference in the original text. The results above may have significant consequences for studying the

64 Unfortunately, we cannot identify the literary sources the editor had access to. זְכַרְיָהוּ בֶן יְבֶרְכִיָּהוּ does not appear elsewhere in the Bible, and זְכַרְיָהוּ is a very common name. זְכַרְיָהוּ בֶן יְבֶרְכִיָּהוּ is known from Zech 1:1, and there is late Jewish tradition connecting the two (cf. bMak 24b; note that LXX, Peshitta and Vulgate render בְּרִכְיָהוּ in Isa 8:2 over against MT, 1QIsa^a and Targum). The phenomenon of identifying unnamed figures in biblical and post-biblical Judaism has been discussed extensively by Y. Zakovitch, “לכלם שמות, עיוני מקרא ופרשנות—יקרא” — על זיהוי אלמונים בספרות המקרא (Ramath Gan, 2009), pp. 441-468. With respect to Isa 8:2, Zakovitch argues for the dependence of Zech 1:1 on Isa 8:2 (p. 455). He maintains that the historical books often served as literary sources in (re)naming anonymous figures (p. 467). In this case, it is the connection of one of the witnesses, Uriah, the priest, with 2 Kgs 16:10-11 which suggests that the editor may have sought to identify the witnesses of Isa 8:2 with contemporaries of Ahaz.

compositional history of biblical books, in particular Isaiah. They suggest that it is not only the larger text blocks, the so-called literary *Fortschreibungen*, that should be analysed in relationship to one another but also shorter explanatory remarks.⁶⁵

However, there is also a major difference compared to these more extensive literary elaborations of Isaiah's prophecies. Unlike *Fortschreibungen* which reorganise different sections by splitting up the verses of the original prophecy, inserting in-between new and contemporising annotations, and unlike the even later comment-types in the Qumranic Peshar-literature, these editorial remarks are not concerned with the reapplication of the biblical texts to the new historical situation of the editor. On the contrary, the purpose of the concretising annotations in the verses studied above was to help the reader understand the prophecies in their original historical situation. In this sense, they may be called historicising interpolations. Further conclusions regarding this divergent hermeneutical philosophy and a more precise temporal delimitation of these annotations will have to wait until the results of further investigations emerge.⁶⁶

65 This point was also emphasised by Tov, "Glosses", pp. 72-74, especially in relation to the book of Ezekiel.

66 An earlier version of this study was presented at the Annual Conference of the European Association of Biblical Studies in Leipzig (2013-07-31, section Hebrew Bible / Old Testament Studies).