



# The Problem with Isaiah's So-Called 'Refrain Poem': A New Look at the Compositional History of Isaiah 9.7-20

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## Abstract

This article argues that Isaiah's so-called 'refrain poem' (*Kehrversgedicht*) in Isa. 9.7-20 is a composite text, going back to two early prophecies with different concerns. Isaiah 9.7-17\* focused originally on the arrogant refusal of the divine word, while Isa. 9.18-20\* reflected on the chaotic social circumstances in Samaria in the eighth century. The refrains in vv. 9, 11cd, 16ef and 20cd were added to these two already connected prophecies at a later stage. The theological summary in v. 12 is yet another addition, closely affiliated with 5.24-25. Unlike v. 12, the refrains do not have the repentance of Israel in view, nor its final destruction, but the fall of Assyria in Isa. 10.5-15, 24-27. The refrains support the theory that the Isaianic collection was formed by means of reusing, restructuring and reinterpreting earlier material.

**Keywords:** Isaiah 9.7-20, refrain poem, *Kehrversgedicht*, book of Isaiah, compositional history, reinterpretation, glosses, Israel.

## 1. Introduction

Isaiah 9.7-20 is generally known as Isaiah's 'refrain poem' (*Kehrversgedicht*), a rather unusual prophetic composition containing a literary motif recurring at more or less regular intervals: 'In spite of all these,<sup>1</sup> his anger has not turned back, and his arm is outstretched still' (9.11, 16, 20). This repeating verse line divides the poem of 9.7-20 into vv. 7-11, 12-16 and 17-20. Since the same 'refrain' also appears in Isa. 5.25 and 10.4, these pericopes are seen as somehow correlated. Opinions differ on the exact nature of this relationship, however.

This study is not aimed at elaborating on the role of Isa. 9.7-20 within the final form of the book.<sup>2</sup> Instead, it will focus on the compositional history of this pericope. The larger context is, however, taken as a starting point and it is considered insofar as it provides information concerning this specific inquiry.

With respect to the relationship between Isaiah 5, 9 and 10, two representative opinions may be distinguished, differing mainly in the extent to which one is willing to reckon with textual manipulations in the compositional history of the Isaianic text. (1) Some scholars adopt the idea that the immediately following Isa. 10.1-4 once belonged to 9.7-20, counting four stanzas of more or less equal length in the original 'refrain poem', Isa. 9.7-10.4.<sup>3</sup> (2) According to a second, nowadays far more widely shared opinion, in its alleged original form, the 'refrain poem' also included parts of Isaiah 5, most notably—with some variations—Isa. 5.(25)26-29(30). However, in this second approach, there are considerable divergences in how scholars reconstruct the original poem, especially the role they assign to Isa. 10.1-4 and the position of Isa. 5.(25)26-29(30) within the structure of the prophecy. Some would consider merely

1. For בבל־זאת, see Job 1.22; 2.10; Ps. 78.32; Jer. 3.10; Hos. 7.10.

2. See on this C.E. L'Heureux, 'The Redactional History of Isaiah 5.1-10.4', in W.B. Barick and John R. Spencer (eds.), *In the Shelter of Elyon* (JSOTSup, 31; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1984), pp. 99-119; B.W. Anderson, "'God with Us"—In Judgment and in Mercy: The Editorial Structure of Isaiah 5-10(11)', in G.M. Tucker et al. (eds.), *Canon, Theology, and Old Testament Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1988), pp. 230-45; A.H. Bartelt, 'Isaiah 5 and 9: In- or Interdependence?', in A.B. Beck et al. (eds.), *Fortunate the Eyes That See: Essays in Honor of David Noel Freedman* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), pp. 157-74.

3. A.W. Knobel, *Der Prophet Jesaja* (Leipzig: Hirzel, 1872), p. 93; D.C. von Orelli, *Die Propheten Jesaja und Jeremia* (Nördlingen: Beck, 1887), p. 43.

Isa. 5.(25)26-29(30) part of the original 'refrain poem' and exclude Isa. 10.1-4 from it, while others would include both. The table below provides an overview of the various theories regarding the content and order of the original poem.

Ewald, L'Heureux, Blum <sup>4</sup>	5.25 + 9.7-20 + 5.26-30
Stade, Löhr, Fohrer, Vollmer, Schoors, Kaiser, Wildberger, Barth, Vermeylen, Clements, Williamson <sup>5</sup>	9.7-20 + 5.25 + 5.26-29(30)
Duhm, Marti, Gray, Fullerton, Procksch <sup>6</sup>	9.7-20 + 10.1-4 + 5.26-30
Fey <sup>7</sup>	9.7-16a + 5.25 + 9.16b-20 + 10.1-4 + 5.26-30
Eichrodt <sup>8</sup>	9.7-9 + 5.25 + 9.10-20 + 5.26a-30

It is clear that disagreements appear at two particular points: the supposedly original location of Isa. 5.25 and the role of Isa. 10.1-4. The first major problem is caused especially by the fact that the stanzas of the

4. G.H.A. Ewald, *Die Propheten des Alten Bundes* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1867), pp. 312-19; L'Heureux, 'Redactional History', pp. 106-107; E. Blum, 'Jesaja und der דבר des Amos. Unzeitgemäße Überlegungen zu Jes 5,25; 9,7-20; 10,1-4', *DBAT* 28 (1994), pp. 75-95.

5. B. Stade, 'Jes. 3,1.17.24. 5,1. 8,1f.12-14. 16. 9,7-20. 10,26', *ZAW* 26 (1906), pp. 138-39; M. Löhr, 'Jesaias-Studien II', *ZAW* 36 (1916), p. 204; G. Fohrer, *Jesaja 1-23* (Zurich: Zwingli Verlag, 1966), p. 144; J. Vollmer, *Geschichtliche Rückblicke und Motive in der Prophetie des Amos, Hosea und Jesaja* (BZAW, 119; Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1971), pp. 130-44; H. Barth, *Die Jesaja-Worte in der Josiazeit. Israel und Assur als Thema einer produktiven Neuinterpretation der Jesajaüberlieferung* (WMANT, 48; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1977), pp. 109-12; J. Vermeylen, *Du prophète Isaïe à l'apocalyptique* (Paris: Gabalda, 1977), I, pp. 177, 185; R.E. Clements, *Isaiah 1-39* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), pp. 66-67; O. Kaiser, *Der Prophet Jesaja. Kapitel 1-12* (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1981), pp. 211-12; H. Wildberger, *Jesaja. Kapitel 1-12* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1972), p. 208; H.G.M. Williamson, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Isaiah 1-27* (London: T&T Clark International, 2006), I, pp. 401-403; Williamson, "'An Initial Problem": The Setting and Purpose of Isaiah 10.1-4', in R.J. Bautch and J.T. Hibbard (eds.), *The Book of Isaiah: Enduring Questions Answered Anew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), pp. 11-20.

6. B. Duhm, *Das Buch Jesaja* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1968), p. 92; K. Marti, *Das Buch Jesaja* (Tübingen: Siebeck, 1900), p. 96; G.B. Gray, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Isaiah I-XXVII* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1912), pp. 177-79; O. Procksch, *Jesaja I* (Leipzig: Diechert, 1930), p. 101.

7. R. Fey, *Amos und Jesaja. Abhängigkeit und Eigenständigkeit des Jesaja* (WMANT, 12; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1963), p. 83.

8. W. Eichrodt, *Der Heilige in Israel. Jesaja 1-12* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1960), pp. 112-13.

refrain poem in 9.7-20 (and 10.1-4) are considerably longer than Isa. 5.25. This difficulty is handled either by altering the structure of the prophecy by inserting 5.25 somewhere into 9.7-20, or—more generally—by presupposing that the original stanza once closed by 5.25 was much longer, but was either lost or intentionally left out when the text of Isaiah came to be restructured by later editors.

Determining the original location of Isa. 5.25 is hampered by problems regarding the proper delimitation and interpretation of v. 25 itself in its current context. While exegetes would often trace the boundary between Isa. 5.24c and 5.25a, this viewpoint relies basically on the premise that v. 25 should be saved for the larger ‘refrain poem’. Syntactically and logically it appears more likely that 5.24c and 5.25ab are in fact closely related.<sup>9</sup> If Isa. 5.24c is considered a later evaluative conclusion to the woe-collection in Isa. 5.8-24b,<sup>10</sup> one may well argue that v. 25ab actually stands in the position for which it was created.

At the same time, v. 25ab and 25c (the refrain) are intrinsically related. Verse 25a refers to the wrath of YHWH and his hand stretched out to smite, using precisely the two basic ideas of the refrain, *חַסֵּד* and *יָדוּת*. This means that v. 25a is either the incentive for the refrain or aware of the refrain. In the first case, v. 25ab should best be placed at the first occurrence of the refrain in the poem, so that relocating it after 9.20 becomes questionable. (In this instance, v. 25ab is either earlier than v. 25c, or both derive from the same author.) In the second case, vv. 24c-25ab should be seen as a later insertion before an already existing refrain.<sup>11</sup>

The second major point of disagreement among the exegetes mentioned above is the role of Isa. 10.1-4. This case is clearer in the sense that an original unity with 9.7-20 in whatever position is difficult to defend. The woe-cry of 10.1 clearly begins a new section, and, in terms of content, the discrepancies between 10.1-4 and 9.7-20 are obvious.<sup>12</sup> Were

9. For the sequence *בִּי...עַל-בְּנֵי*, see Gen. 47.22; Exod. 5.8; Num. 18.24; Deut. 15.11; 2 Sam. 7.27; Job 17.4; Isa. 17.10; 27.11; Jer. 10.21; Ezek. 42.6; Hab. 1.4. For linking Isa. 5.24c-25, see also J.H. Hayes and S.A. Irvine, *Isaiah: The Eighth-Century Prophet* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1987), p. 106; Vermeulen, *Isate*, p. 176; W.P. Brown, ‘The So-Called Refrain in Isaiah 5.25-30 and 9.7-10.4’, *CBQ* 52 (1990), pp. 432-32 (442).

10. So, e.g., Williamson, *Isaiah*, I, p. 391.

11. Marti and Gray detach v. 25ab from the refrain in 25c. But what is left over then is merely the refrain itself.

12. For the details, see Barth, *Jesaja-Worte*, pp. 110-11; Williamson, ‘An Initial Problem’, pp. 11-20.

it not for the appearance of the refrain in 10.4b, one would hardly wish to argue for the literary unity of the two pericopes. Scholars who plead for the independence of 10.1-4 from 9.7-20 generally maintain that Isa. 10.1-4 was relocated or composed as the closing section of 9.7-20 after 5.(25)26-29(30) had been removed to a different location.<sup>13</sup> But what sense would it make from a redactional point of view to remove the closure of the 'refrain poem', thereby generating a hiatus which must then be filled with a new composition? And, more importantly, if—as argued—the refrain could have been added by a later editor to any particular text subsequently created, how can one be sure that 5.25c or, indeed, any of the refrains of 9.7-20, is original and not merely a later *editorial* addition? It is this second question that I would like to address below.

As noted above, studies on the so-called 'refrain poem' differ basically in how they consider the relationship of Isa. 5.25 and 10.1-4 to 9.7-20. In these redaction-critical discussions, the reappearing refrain is assumed to provide the ultimate reason for reading these texts as one unit. However, the very originality of the refrain within 9.7-20 has not really been subject to any serious investigation. Indeed, this has generally been regarded as an indisputable axiom.<sup>14</sup> Insofar as the textual integrity of Isa. 9.7-20 is questioned, discussions are limited by a primeval belief in 'a refrain poem'.<sup>15</sup> Consequently, the text of 9.7-20 is often manipulated in such a way as to produce a sequentially structured text, with stanzas of comparable sizes, *metri causa* being often used as an argument to emend the text in order to achieve this desired uniformity.<sup>16</sup> It is not only structure but semantics and syntax which are subject to the presupposition that Isa. 9.7-20 must form the core of a well-structured 'refrain poem'. Nevertheless, inasmuch as one reckons with the idea that the refrain could have been exploited editorially, it would be a legitimate question to ask whether in Isa. 9.7-20 it is after all original.<sup>17</sup> This requires an independent examination of Isa. 9.7-20 in which the relevant semantic and syntactic data play a pivotal role.

13. See Stade, '9.7-20', p. 139; Williamson, 'An Initial Problem', pp. 11-20.

14. Barth, *Jesaja-Worte*, p. 109.

15. Eichrodt, *Der Heilige*, pp. 112-19; Fey, *Amos*, pp. 84-87; U. Becker, *Jesaja—von der Botschaft zum Buch* (FRLANT, 178; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1997), pp. 148-49.

16. Cf. Eichrodt, *Der Heilige*, p. 114; Fohrer, *Jesaja*, p. 145; Vermeylen, *Isaïe*, p. 177.

17. This possibility was raised in passing by Becker, *Botschaft*, p. 149, but dropped as an improbable idea. More serious questions are formulated by Brown, 'Refrain', pp. 440-41.

The outcome of the investigation is directly related to our interpretation of four specific issues: (1) the cumbersome syntax and logical structure of vv. 7-9, as well as its rhetorical connection to the following verses; (2) the temporal aspects of the verbs, in particular the sequence of *wayyiqtol*s from v. 10 onwards; (3) the meaning and function of v. 12 in its current location; (4) the rhetorical significance assigned to the refrain itself. In addressing these questions I shall analyze the rhetorical subunits (rather than the stanzas delimited by the refrains) of the Isaianic poem.

## 2. Isaiah 9.7-9

The first logical unit of the poem begins with the description of an act of YHWH and includes the reaction of the people in response to this divine act. Verse 10 describes another action initiated by YHWH, in response to the attitude of the audience in v. 9. The syntactic structure of this pericope is difficult, so that translations and interpretations differ on various points. I render and structure the text as follows:

- 9.7 a The Lord had sent a message to Jacob,  
b and it arrived in Israel,  
9.8 a and all the people took notice of it  
b —Ephraim and the inhabitant of Samaria—<sup>18</sup>  
c with pride and arrogant heart by saying:  
9.9 a ‘If bricks will have fallen,  
b with dressed stones we shall build,  
c if sycamores will have been crushed,  
d with cedars we shall replace them’.

18. The phrase ‘Ephraim and the inhabitant of Samaria’ unnecessarily overcrowds the structure of the verse and, from a syntactical point of view, hinders the natural flow of thought in v. 8. This phrase clearly looks like an explanatory parenthesis, a secondary historicizing interpolation aiming to clarify for the later reader how *כלי העם* should be understood (in a biblical context, the terms ‘Jacob’ and ‘Israel’ are ambiguous). See E.J. Kissane, ‘The Qumrân Text of Isaiah IX, 7-9 (1QIsa)’, in *Sacra Pagina. Miscellanea biblica* (Congressus Internationalis Catholici de re biblica, 1; Paris: Gembloux, 1959), pp. 413-18 (413, 415-16); Vermeylen, *Isaïe*, p. 179; Kaiser, *Jesaja*, p. 210; P.A. Kruger, ‘Another Look at Isa. 9.7-20’, *JNWSL* 15 (1989), pp. 127-41 (128). There are two more explanatory interpolations in this pericope (see below). For other comparable cases in Isaianic texts, see C. Balogh, ‘Historicising Interpolations in the Isaiah-Memoir’, *VT* 64 (2014), pp. 519-38.

With rare exceptions<sup>19</sup> the Masoretic reading דְּבַר, 'word, message', is generally accepted over against the LXX, which presupposes דָּבַר (= θάνατον), 'sudden death'. The verb שלח is often linked with דְּבַר in the sense 'to send a message'.<sup>20</sup> The related דְּבַר + נפל is, however, problematic. Translations generally render '(the word) fell upon', but this literal translation is rather awkward in combination with דְּבַר, unattested in any other context. On the few occasions that this combination is used idiomatically in Biblical Hebrew, it refers to the word falling away, that is remaining unfulfilled, which is certainly not applicable here.<sup>21</sup> However, extra-biblical data may suggest a different meaning for this syntagmatic construction. Strikingly, a similar idiom is widely used in Akkadian with the sense 'the message arrives (to)',<sup>22</sup> which would fit Isa. 9.7 exceptionally well as a semantic construction mirroring דְּבַר + שלח.<sup>23</sup>

In v. 8 וַיִּדְעוּ also raises questions. Reading ידע is clearly supported by the LXX, the Peshitta, the Vulgate, and possibly also by the Targum.<sup>24</sup> It is

19. Stade, '9.7-20', p. 140.

20. Exod. 4.28; Judg. 11.28; 1 Sam. 21.3; 2 Sam. 15.36; 2 Kgs 19.8, 16; Pss. 107.25; 147.18; Prov. 26.6; Isa. 37.4, 17; 55.1; Jer. 26.5; 29.19; 42.5; Zech. 7.12; cf. Ps. 147.15. The construction שלח + דבר is comparable to דבר + יצא, 'to issue a command', without actually implying the notion of a hypostatic word acting independently (Est. 1.19; Isa. 2.3; Dan. 9.23; Mic. 4.2; cf. Isa. 55.11 and Est. 7.8; Jer. 44.17). There is no justification for distinguishing between cases where this construction has God or humans as its subject (*contra* Becker, *Botschaft*, p. 150).

21. See Josh. 21.45; 23.14; 1 Sam. 3.19; etc. דבר + נפל is antithetic to דבר + קום, 'the word is fulfilled' (lit. 'the word stands').

22. Akkadian *awātu* ('word') / *fēmu* ('message, report') + *maqātu* ('to arrive', lit. 'to fall'). Cf. *CAD*, *m* 1, pp. 246b-47a.

23. Note that Ruth 3.18 also has a unique understanding of the construction דבר + נפל, 'the matter turns out'. But this is again difficult to fit into Isa. 9.

24. There are two possible scenarios to explain the Aramaic version: (1) וַתִּתְרַבּוּ, 'and they boasted', may be a freely chosen verb, influenced by the notions 'pride' (גאווה) and 'arrogant heart' (גדל לבב). See the Targum for Ezek. 16.56; Zeph. 2.10 (Heb. גאון); Zeph. 2.8; Pss. 35.26; 38.17; 41.10 (Heb. גדל). (2) It seems more likely, however, that Aramaic וַתִּתְרַבּוּ actually goes back to Hebrew ידע. Two examples may confirm this. In Deut. 32.27, וַתִּתְרַבּוּ renders Hebrew נכר piel / hiphil 'to recognise', a word which is used as a synonym of ידע (cf. Deut. 33.9; Isa. 63.16; the Targ. also renders נכר piel / hiphil with אשתמודע, and נכר hitpael with ידע hitpeel). In Isa. 61.9, a related lexeme ויתרבו (hitpaal of רבי), equates Hebrew ידע niphil (being paralleled by Heb. נכר hiphil / Aram. אשתמודע). At any rate the Targum does not support the Qumranic reading (*contra* Kissane, 'Qumrān', p. 418).

only 1QIsa<sup>a</sup> which deviates here with its variant וירעו.<sup>25</sup> However, given the general character of this evidence, this peculiar reading is hardly sufficient grounds to support the alteration of the MT. This variant is more probably best seen as an attempt to make sense of the difficult vv. 8-9, especially לאמר.<sup>26</sup> In connection with the message sent and received, ידע may probably be rendered here as ‘to take notice of, learn, get to know’ (cf. Exod. 2.25; Job 21.19; Isa. 19.12; Ezek. 38.14; Hos. 7.9; 9.7). The previous verse line reported YHWH as having sent a message and, upon its arrival, the people became aware of that divine word.<sup>27</sup>

This reading of ידע is also well-suited to לאמר in this verse, which has again caused serious problems for interpreters. Some propose to read the infinitive לאמר attributively (as if characterizing גאוה and לבב), but this remains grammatically questionable.<sup>28</sup> Another more frequent suggestion is to insert a supposedly missing *verbum dicendi*;<sup>29</sup> however, this proposal is arbitrary. In the Old Testament, לאמר introducing direct speech appears always as an extension of and in relation to a previous verb, but one that need not necessarily be a *verbum dicendi*.<sup>30</sup> The only possible way to interpret Isa. 9.8 without emendation requires the connection of לאמר and וידעו: ‘all the people took notice of it... by saying’.<sup>31</sup> The direct speech

25. The consonantal form וירעו in 1QIsa<sup>a</sup> could be interpreted in several ways: רעע I qal ‘to be bad’ (וירעו *wayyiqtol*), hiphil ‘to treat badly, oppress; to act badly’ (וירעו *wayyiqtol*): ‘and all the people acted badly’; רוע hiphil ‘to shout’ (וירעו *wayyiqtol*): ‘and all the people shouted’ (so Kissane, ‘Qumrān’, p. 418); רעה II qal (וירעו *wayyiqtol*) / piel (וירעו *wayyiqtol*) ‘to join / unite oneself’: ‘and all the people joined themselves’.

26. 1QIsa<sup>a</sup> also arbitrarily changes ישמח into יחמול in v. 16, again due to exegetical considerations.

27. Cf. Hardmeier, *Geschichtsdivinatorik*, p. 79: ‘zur Kenntnis nehmen’. D.W. Thomas suggested that in Isa. 9.7 ידע may mean ‘to humiliate’ (‘A Note on the Meaning of ידע in Hosea ix. 7 and Isaiah ix. 8’, *JTS* 41 [1940], pp. 43-44), but this presupposition is hardly necessary.

28. So Knobel, *Jesaja*, p. 89; E. König, *Das Buch Jesaja* (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1926), p. 140 (‘die Hoffart mit der sie sprechen’). But in the cases mentioned in E. König, *Historisch-kritisches Lehrgebäude der hebräischen Sprache*. III. *Syntax* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1897), §400c in support of his interpretation of Isa. 9.8, the preposition ל has a different function (cf. Gen. 24.25; Dan. 9.25).

29. Cf. JPS Tanakh 1917; NRSV; Marti, *Jesaja*, p. 96; Procksch, *Jesaja*, p. 103; Vollmer, *Rückblicke*, p. 133; Kaiser, *Jesaja*, p. 210; Wildberger, *Jesaja*, p. 205.

30. See Exod. 5.13; Josh. 4.22; 2 Kgs 5.22; Ezek. 20.5; etc.

31. Duhm, *Jesaja*, pp. 92-93, and Gray, *Isaiah*, p. 184, admit that this connection is syntactically the only possible one. Yet they refuse to implement this observation due to their insistence on rendering נפל and ידע as future tenses. Instead, they presuppose that the text is corrupted in its current form. For ידע + ב, see Josh. 23.14.



following לֵאמֹר is the consequence of the verb to which it refers, in this case יָדַע, both actions having the same subject.

One can hardly overemphasize the significance of this interpretation. For this means that through the verb וידעו the words cited in v. 9 are logically related to v. 7. The דָּבַר sent earlier by YHWH was heard by uttering the words in v. 9. The intriguing question is, however, in what particular sense is this reaction of the audience to be understood? What has the utterance about the falling bricks to do with the דָּבַר sent by YHWH? Insofar as this question is addressed at all, exegetes tend to presuppose that the דָּבַר sent to Jacob was not actually a verbal message but rather an event. Some refer to Isa. 55.11 or Hos. 6.5 to emphasize the intricate relationship between the divine word and its effectiveness manifesting itself through an event.<sup>32</sup> The semantic and theological premises that such an interpretation would imply are, however, debatable. As is well-known, דָּבַר does have a meaning of '(some)thing' or 'matter, affair',<sup>33</sup> but can hardly be rendered concretely as 'event' as Isa. 9.7-9 would imply.<sup>34</sup>

According to the usual meaning of דָּבַר + שָׁלַח, 'to send a message', noted above, v. 9 should be read as the proud reaction of the people to a verbal prophecy sent by YHWH. Along this line of thought, the phrases 'the bricks have fallen' and 'the sycamores have been crushed' are probably rhetorical allusions to the content of that uncited divine message rather than observations based on the actual experiences (events). The formulations are clearly emphatically adversative, as the Hebrew word order highlights 'dressed stone' over against 'bricks' and 'cedars' over against 'sycamores'. In this boastful reaction the people's words are put against the words of a previous warning issued by Isaiah. One may surmise that the message sent to Jacob and Israel contained warnings about falling bricks and crushing houses. That would make good sense of the *qatal* forms נָפְלוּ and גָּדְעוּ as well, which could have originally been

32. Cf. Wildberger, *Jesaja*, p. 213; J.N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapter 1–39* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), pp. 251-52; W.A.M. Beuken, *Jesaja 1–12* (Freiburg: Herder, 2003), p. 264; etc. Blum, 'Jesaja', pp. 78-80, 83, speculatively identifies this דָּבַר with—among others—the earthquake of Isa. 5.25 and Amos 1.1, but also with a book of Amos that foretold this, the book which—in his view—Isa. 9.7 references here. Hardmeier, *Geschichtsdivinatorik*, p. 84, suggests that the דָּבַר may have included the prophecies of Hosea and Amos in general.

33. W.H. Schmidt, דָּבַר, in *ThWAT* II, pp. 112-14.

34. See J. Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (London: SCM Press, 1961), p. 132.

prophetic perfects in the divine prediction of an imminent threat.<sup>35</sup> The sentence in v. 9 can be interpreted as a pair of conditional clauses:<sup>36</sup> ‘If bricks will have fallen (or: should bricks fall), with dressed stones we shall build, // if sycamores will have been crushed, with cedars we shall replace them’.

A few scholars feel tempted to read Isa. 9.9 as a reference to the famous earthquake during the reign of Uzziah, king of Judah.<sup>37</sup> The option that v. 9 predicts judgment by *any* earthquake cannot be excluded, insofar as it speaks about stones fallen and sycamore timbers crushed (גִּדְעָ, not ‘felled’!).<sup>38</sup> However, it is equally possible that the prophecy (דָּבָר) predicted the destruction of houses in battle. Houses built against the city wall could have been destroyed during an assault. We can only speculate that, like Isa. 17.1-3, this previous דָּבָר sent to Jacob foretold the destruction of Damascus and threatened Samaria (cf. the reference to Rezin in v. 10!). While the people did learn about this message, they were unwilling to take it seriously and reacted with arrogance. These verses recall one of the central themes of the book of Isaiah: the unfavourable reception of the prophetic message.

### 3. Isaiah 9.10-11

The second unit of the prophecy elaborates on the earlier section. It pronounces a series of judgments in response to the arrogant reaction to the earlier divine message. The nature of its relationship to the previous section and its logical cogency is obscured, however, by the temporal significance of the verbal forms וַיִּשְׁגְּבּוּ and יִסְכְּדוּ. I render the text as follows:

35. For the *qatal* + *yiqtol* sequence as successive future references, see Deut. 15.6; Isa. 33.1; Hos. 2.19.

36. Cf. E. Meier, *Der Prophet Jesaja* (Pforzheim: Flammer & Hoffmann, 1850), p. 123; Kaiser, *Jesaja*, p. 212. For similar constructions, see Prov. 11.2; Ezek. 11.8; 15.7; Num. 30.13. For expressing condition by juxtaposition, see P. Joüon and T. Muraoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew* (Rome: Editrice Pontificio Instituto Biblico, 1993), §167a.

37. Kissane, ‘Qumrân’, pp. 416-17; Eichrodt, *Der Heilige*, p. 114; Vermeylen, *Isate*, p. 179; Blum, ‘Jesaja’, p. 79. Some would identify this with the event referred to in Isa. 5.25. But since earthquakes often appear in judgment type-scenes (Isa. 2.6-21; 13.13; 24.18; Jer. 4.24; 51.29; etc.), that remains only one of the options.

38. For the antithesis, see 1 Kgs 10.27; 2 Chron. 1.15; 9.27. Cf. G.H. Dalman, *Arbeit und Sitte in Palästina. Band VII: Das Haus, Hühnerzucht, Taubenzucht, Bienenzucht* (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1942), p. 34; Procksch, *Jesaja*, p. 103; Kaiser, *Jesaja*, p. 214; Wildberger, *Jesaja*, pp. 215-16.

- 9.10 a But Y<sup>H</sup>WH will raise the adversaries of Rezin above him,  
 b and his enemies he will stir up,  
 9.11 a —Aram (?) in the front and Philistia in the back—<sup>39</sup>  
 b and they will devour Israel with full mouth.  
 c *In spite of all these, his anger has not turned away,*  
 d *and his hand is outstretched still.*

In the exegetical tradition, two distinctive approaches can be delimited with respect to the temporal interpretation of vv. 10-20. A few exegetes favour reading this prophecy as a predictive text.<sup>40</sup> The majority, however, prefer to see it as a narration of past events.<sup>41</sup> In arguing for Isa. 9.10-20 as recounting the former times, and thus presenting some kind of evaluative overview of Israel's history, two arguments play a crucial role: the *wayyiqtol* verbal forms (אכל / שגב piel) and the retrospective v. 12.

I shall concentrate first on the temporal aspect of the verbs. While some exegetes believe that the *wayyiqtol* forms preclude understanding these verses as predictions,<sup>42</sup> that is clearly problematic in view of our

39. There is a contradiction between 'the adversaries of Rezin' (= Assyria) and 'Aram and Philistia'. The problem was already noticed by the LXX and the Targum. Scholars generally decide to alter the text at צרי רצין. Most often צרי is changed into צריו and רצין is assumed to be a later gloss (cf. Marti, *Jesaja*, p. 97; Stade, '9.7-20', p. 141; Duhm, *Jesaja*, p. 93; Gray, *Isaiah*, pp. 184-85; Schoors, *Jesaja*, p. 85; Wildberger, *Jesaja*, p. 205; etc). However, the suggestion that two subsequent modifications should have been introduced into the text (first changing צריו into צרי and then inserting רצין) seems implausible. I believe the problem is rather with the phrase ארם מקדם ופולשתים מאחור, which from a syntactic point of view is an obvious interruption. The *wayyiqtol* ויאכלו in v. 11b excludes a new subject for the sentence and presupposes a close relationship with v. 10. 'Aram (or אדם?) from the front/east and Philistia from the back/west' is another parenthetical interpolation, formally similar to 'Ephraim and the inhabitant of Samaria' in v. 8, as well as the other concretizing and historicizing allusions of Isaiah, intending to clarify which enemies איביו referred to (cf. Balogh, 'Interpolations', pp. 519-38).

40. Cf. the LXX; Duhm, *Jesaja*, p. 93; Marti, *Jesaja*, p. 96; Gray, *Isaiah*, p. 177; Oswalt, *Isaiah*, pp. 250-51. The NASV and A. Schoors, *Jesaja* (Roermond: Romen & Zonen, 1972), pp. 84-86, consistently translate in the present tense.

41. König, *Jesaja*, p. 141; Fohrer, *Jesaja*, p. 144; Fey, *Amos*, p. 84; Vollmer, *Rückblicke*, pp. 127, 130-44; Kaiser, *Jesaja*, p. 212; Wildberger, *Jesaja*, pp. 204-205; Becker, *Botschaft*, p. 148; Beuken, *Jesaja*, p. 259; Chr. Hardmeier, *Geschichtsdivinatorik in der vorexilischen Schriftprophetie. Studien zu den Primärschriften in Jesaja, Zefanja und Jeremia* (Zurich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 2013), p. 82.

42. Wildberger, *Jesaja*, pp. 209-10; Gray, *Isaiah*, pp. 180-82; Fey, *Amos*, p. 84; Vollmer, *Rückblicke*, pp. 137-39; Barth, *Jesaja-Worte*, p. 31 n. 90; Kruger, 'Another Look', p. 134.

current understanding of Hebrew verbal syntax. It is true that in Hebrew narratives, the *wayyiqtol* generally denotes the past tense.<sup>43</sup> However, in classical grammars, the semantics of Hebrew verbal forms are mostly established based on prosaic contexts. Indeed, as recent grammarians often note, in poetry and prophecy, verbal forms are less concordant with their general prosaic usage. The appearance of perfect forms in predictive prophetic texts is a famous illustration of this. Several studies have shown that in poetic frameworks, the *wayyiqtol* may also be used in non-past situations.<sup>44</sup> Context must be seriously considered in order to reach a firm conclusion in this regard.

On a syntactic level, the *wayyiqtol* of v. 10 (as well as v. 13, see below) elaborates on the previous sentences, vv. 8-9, as this is also underlined by the rhetorical structure. The verb *גב* in the piel, ‘to make high, exalt; to make strong’, is an unusual term to express the idea of summoning the enemy. So why does it appear here? It is interesting to observe that *גב* often refers specifically to high and secure (*city*)walls.<sup>45</sup> One is tempted to

43. At the same time, the *iqtol* is infrequent in past-related prosaic contexts. That is why Stade, ‘9.7-20’, p. 141, proposed to change *סך* *iqtol* into *qatal*.

44. S.R. Driver, *A Treatise on the Use of the Tenses in Hebrew* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1892), §§80-82; W. Gross, *Verbform + Funktion: wayyiqtol für die Gegenwart?* (St. Ottilien: EOS Verlag, 1976), pp. 163-66; Joüon and Muraoka, *Grammar*, §1180-s; B.K. Waltke and M. O’Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), §33.3.1 b, d; Y. Bloch, ‘The Prefixed Perfective and the Dating of Early Hebrew Poetry—A Re-Evaluation’, *VT* 59 (2009), pp. 34-70 (38-39 nn. 15, 17); J. Joosten, ‘Verbal System: Biblical Hebrew’, in G. Khan (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Hebrew Language and Linguistics* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), pp. 921-25 (924). Recent grammatical research argues that temporality is not specifically bound to the semantics of *wayyiqtol* and emphasizes the tenseless character of the Hebrew verbal inflection, as well as the need for information deriving from the context to make decisions in this regard. See already A. Niccacci, *The Syntax of the Verb in Classical Hebrew Prose* (JSOTSup, 86; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990), p. 197, and especially T. Notarius, ‘Temporality and Atemporality in the Language of Biblical Poetry’, *JSS* 56 (2011), pp. 275-305; *idem*, *The Verb in Archaic Biblical Poetry: A Discursive, Typological, and Historical Investigation of the Tense System* (SSLL, 68; Leiden: Brill, 2013), pp. 25-26, 267-68, 281-82.

Various syntactic scenarios can be discerned: (a) *qatal* (referring to present / future) is followed by *wayyiqtol* (Pss. 3.6; 7.13; Job 6.20; Isa. 5.14-16; 9.5; 22.5-12; Jer. 5.22; Nah. 1.5); (b) *iqtol* is followed by *wayyiqtol* (Job 4.5; 5.15; 7.17-18; 12.25; Isa. 44.13.15; Hos. 8.13; Mic. 6.16; Hab. 1.9-10); (c) participle is followed by *wayyiqtol* (Deut. 33.27-28; 1 Sam. 2.6; Job 12.22-24; Isa. 40.24; 57.20; Amos 5.8; Nah. 1.4); (d) nominal sentence is followed by a *wayyiqtol* (Ps. 37.40; Isa. 31.2; 51.12; Jer. 10.13; Hab. 1.3).

45. Cf. Prov. 18.10-11; Isa. 26.5; 30.13. In Isa. 2.11.17 *גב* is used of *Y<sub>HWH</sub>* over against his proud people.

see in this particular verb a deliberate allusion to v. 9. The divine word of v. 10 counters rhetorically the pride and arrogance of the people in wishing to build higher and stronger walls. The idea behind the description of judgment in v. 10 is exactly the opposite of what we find in poems of deliverance, where setting someone's feet on high means saving him from distress (צרה; cf. Pss. 20.2; 59.2).<sup>46</sup> Consequently, the *wayyiqtol*s of vv. 10-11a can be seen as predictive verbal forms, formally connected to the *weqatal* verb וידעו in v. 8, in a sequence interrupted by direct speech.<sup>47</sup> The future judgment comes in response to the recent arrogant refusal of the people to adhere to an earlier prophecy.<sup>48</sup> While not very frequent, such a superimposition of several temporal dimensions as I am arguing for here in Isa. 9.7-11 is not unparalleled in the Hebrew Bible. A syntactically related example, Jer. 15.6-7, illustrates how a past descriptive section can be directly followed by a predictive sentence in a sequence of *qatal*–*wayyiqtol* verbal forms. In Jer. 15.6-7 the prophet references the past with a *qatal*, points to the present with a *yiqtol* and to the future with several *wayyiqtol*s:<sup>49</sup>

You have abandoned me (נטשת), declares YHWH, you keep going (תלכי) backward, but (or: so that)<sup>50</sup> I stretch out (אט) my hand and I shall destroy you (אשחיתך). I am tired (נלאיתי) of relenting, and (or: so that) I shall scatter them (ואזרם) with a winnowing fork at the gates of the land (...)<sup>51</sup>

46. The prophecy could reflect military terminology. Cf. Sargon II's Annals v 7.10-11: *arammu elišu akbusma eli dūrišu ušaqqi*, 'I laid ramps against them and made it higher than his walls'.

47. Duhm, *Jesaja*, p. 93, repointed וישגב as וישגב (*weyiqtol*) but the change is hardly necessary. For series of *wayyiqtol* connections interrupted by direct speech, see Y. Endo, *The Verbal System of Classical Hebrew in the Joseph Story: An Approach from Discourse Analysis* (SSN, 32; Assen: Van Gorcum, 1996), pp. 264-65 (e.g. Gen. 43.28).

48. The *wayyiqtol* can be used to express succession ('and then'), consecution ('so that'), but also antithetic links ('but'). For prosaic texts, see Endo, *Verbal System*, pp. 280, 322.

49. Further examples where the *qatal* / *yiqtol* / participle + *wayyiqtol* alludes to different time schemes appear in Gen. 20.12; Josh. 4.9; Pss. 65.8-9; 119.90; Isa. 31.2; Jer. 38.9. See also the difficult text Isa. 2.6-9.

50. For *wayyiqtol* used with adversative sense, see Endo, *Verbal System*, pp. 274-76; for the explicative sense, see pp. 276-79.

51. McKane translates here with past tense verbs for the sake of consistency in rendering the *qatals* and *wayyiqtol*s. Nonetheless, he maintains that semantically these verbal forms may actually predict the future (prophetic perfects). See W. McKane, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Jeremiah* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1986), I, pp. 342-43.

Therefore, while interpreting the *wayyiqtol*s in Isa. 9.10-11a as referring to the past is possible, grammatically we have at least legitimate reasons to consider these lines as prophetic threats and render them accordingly as predictions for the future. Arguments beyond the verbal forms must be found for deciding in favour of one rendering or the other. In my view, it is the interpretation of v. 12 to be discussed below which provides the ultimate key in this regard.

#### 4. Isaiah 9.12-15

The third pericope, in particular v. 12 and its relation to the previous and following verse lines, touches an essential point in Isa. 9.7-20. Verse 12 is actually the main reason why vv. 10-16 are regarded as describing Israel's past rather than its future. It is therefore important to analyze this verse more closely. This passage is generally translated as follows:

- 9.12 a But the nation did not turn back to the one who had struck him,  
b and YHWH of the hosts they did not seek.
- 9.13 a And YHWH has cut from Israel head and tail,  
b palm branch and reed in one day.
- 9.14 a —Elder and honourable man, he is the head,  
b the prophet teaching lies, he is the tail.—<sup>52</sup>
- 9.15 a And the leaders of this people have become misleaders,  
b and those of it being led confused.

No doubt, v. 12 refers to the past.<sup>53</sup> If this verse is original, the whole poem (including the previous vv. 10-11) becomes a past-descriptive, evaluative text. However, a closer look raises serious doubts regarding this particular point. I would like to call attention to several problems here.

(1) In the first place, the relationship between v. 12 and the preceding refrain in v. 11cd is both syntactically and rhetorically problematic. The rhetorical intention of the refrain will be addressed below in more detail, yet I need to preface this discussion in order to clarify v. 12. Progressing from the beginning of the prophecy, the reason for YHWH's first

52. I concur with the general view that Isa. 9.14 is a gloss. Cf. Knobel, *Jesaja*, p. 90; Duhm, *Jesaja*, p. 94; 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; Vermeylen, *Isaie*, p. 180; etc.

53. With most exegetes, *contra* Knobel, *Jesaja*, p. 90; Duhm, *Jesaja*, p. 93.

intervention in the first refrain (v. 11cd) is the people's arrogant self-positioning against his word. The fact that the hand is 'still' uplifted means that with vv. 10-11b the judgment is not complete, more is to come. This looks like an unconditional proclamation of even more punishment, whatever that might concretely refer to (see below). Such an announcement, however, would be expected to continue with further forms of punishing acts. Yet unexpectedly v. 12 offers an evaluative summary.<sup>54</sup>

Unlike the refrain, v. 12 presupposes that the judgment of YHWH against his arrogant people should have led them to repentance, which was not, however, the case. YHWH's drastic actions did not achieve any result, for Israel failed to turn back to him who had smitten them. Nonetheless, in its current form even this conclusion is somewhat misplaced, as it does not appear immediately after the announcement of judgment (i.e. after v. 11b) as one would expect.

It appears therefore that in v. 11cd (the refrain) and in v. 12 we have *two different* evaluative remarks with respect to the punishment in vv. 10-11b.<sup>55</sup> These two remarks reflect different perspectives. The aim of the refrain is to present Israel's experience as part of a series of judgments, in which repentance played no role whatsoever: in spite of God having punished them, this was still not the end, for this was part of a far larger plan (see below). Verse 12, however, aims to explain the series of judgments with Israel's failure to return to its God. In other words, in the view of the refrains, judgment is somehow unavoidably situated within a larger divine plan, while according to v. 12 judgment has inadequate human response to YHWH's warnings as its cause.

(2) But what about the originality of the summary in v. 12? It is not only the relationship with the previous refrain which raises questions, but also the connection of v. 12 with its context in general. (a) First, v. 12 artificially breaks a coherent list of judgment pronouncements which

54. It is certainly dubious to argue that the uplifting of the hand of YHWH in the refrain would be caused by the refusal of the people to turn back (so Vollmer, *Rückblicke*, p. 137; Blum, *Jesaja*, pp. 83-84). That is against the course of the poem and would require v. 12 to be placed before v. 11cd. On the other hand, v. 12 cannot be a retrospective explanation of v. 11cd, as in that case one would expect a כִּי, 'because', connecting the two verses (rather than a ׀, which is adversative).

55. For suspicions in this regard, see also Bartelt, 'Isaiah 5 and 9', p. 165, and cf. the hesitation of Becker, *Botschaft*, p. 149. According to Brown, 'Refrain', p. 438, v. 12 is completely unaware of the refrain.

begins in vv. 10-11b and continues with vv. 13, 15. The metaphor of Isa. 9.13 can be correlated well with the earlier v. 9. Isaiah 9.9 cited the arrogant words of the prophet's audience referring to building stronger walls from dressed stones. As I noted above, in the first description of the judgment in v. 10, the prophet chose the unusual term שָׁגַב for 'raising' the enemies. This 'raising', as one would raise a city wall, counters the first element of the arrogant speech in v. 9, looking back specifically on the plan of building (בָּנָה) stronger walls. I think that the second part of the people's overconfident speech in v. 9 is countered by the judgment pronouncement of v. 13. The replacement of the 'crushed' (גָּדַע) sycamores with cedars induces here a prophetic prediction about 'cutting' (כָּרַת) from Israel head and tail, palm branch and reed.<sup>56</sup> One may observe here a rhetorical overlap between the double boasting of the people and the double response of YHWH: the people intend to build high and strong walls, but YHWH strengthens and raises the enemies even higher; the people wish to replace the crushed timbers with cedars, but YHWH will cut off the people. This interrelatedness of the divine responses in vv. 10 ('YHWH will raise') and 13 ('YHWH will cut') may extend still further once we notice that v. 10 is followed in v. 11b by the pronouncement on the enemy ravaging (אָכַל) Israel ferociously, and v. 13 is followed (dropping the gloss of v. 14) by a parallel metaphor, בָּלַע, the 'swallowing up' of the people in v. 15. The similarity of the response of vv. 10+11b and 13+15 to the rhetoric of v. 9 suggests that these announcements should be read in close relation to each other, indirectly testifying to v. 12 as a secondary insertion in its current context.

(b) A second reason for querying the originality of v. 12 comes from the subsequent vv. 16-17, to be treated below. While v. 12 implies the past tense understanding of vv. 10-11b, 13, 15, vv. 16-17 should clearly be seen as predictions. When it comes to the temporal significance of the prophecy, these two referential points appear to provide two mutually exclusive hints, suggesting that one of these temporal layers must have been imposed on the poem at a later date. These considerations lead me to believe that v. 12 is a secondary, editorial explanation in the current context.

56. Further connections may also be established between vv. 9 and 13, as Hebrew ראש can refer to both 'head' and 'roof', and palm branch and reed were used in building ancient houses.



This suggestion is supported by another text, very closely related to v. 12, namely Isa. 5.24-25:

- 5.24-25 Because they had rejected the torah of YHWH of the hosts, and they had spurned the saying of the Holy One of Israel, therefore the anger of YHWH was kindled against his nation, and he stretched out his hand above it, and he struck it (ויכרהו) (...)
- 9.12 But the nation did not turn back to the one who had struck him (המכהו), and YHWH of the hosts they did not seek.

Seeking YHWH in Isa. 9.12 is akin to the idea of seeking his instruction, his torah in 5.24 (cf. the focus of Isa. 9.7-9). The idea of YHWH smiting (נכה) his people is rare in Isaiah, appearing in this sense elsewhere only in Isa. 1.5 and 27.7, which makes connecting 5.24-25 and 9.12 all the more important. The fact that Isa. 5.24-25 is considered an evaluative conclusion to an earlier prophecy strengthens our case in thinking analogously about Isa. 9.12 as well.

Treating v. 12 as a later editorial summative comment and connecting the other verses with the previous section would result in the following new interpretation of the pericope:

- 9.12 a —But the nation did not turn back to the one who had struck him,  
b and YHWH of the hosts they did not seek.—
- 9.13 a And YHWH will cut from Israel head and tail,  
b palm branch and reed in one day.
- 9.14 a —Elder and honourable man, he is the head,  
b the prophet teaching lies, he is the tail.—
- 9.15 a And the leaders of this people will become misleaders,  
b and those of it being led [will be] confused.

Once v. 12 is eliminated, the *wayyiqtoles* are treated similarly to vv. 10-11b as a series of predictions responding to the people's arrogant refusal of the earlier divine message. The accomplishment of the judgment in a single day (יום אחד) in v. 13 sounds far better as threat than as a description of reality: YHWH will cut from Israel head and tail one day (that is to come).

Isaiah 9.15 can also be a prediction similar to the previous one in v. 13: the leaders of this people, namely, Israel, mentioned in v. 13, will become confusers.<sup>57</sup> The predicted judgment will materialize in the form of bad

57. Verse 15 is occasionally considered a later interpolation, mainly because of similarities with Isa. 3.12 (Gray, *Isaiah*, p. 186; Löhr, 'Jesaja-Studien', p. 204; Vermeylen, *Isaie*, p. 181; Becker, *Botschaft*, p. 150). The lexical proximity between the two texts

leadership that will ultimately lead to the destruction of the entire society (cf. Isa. 3.1-4; 19.13-14; 29.10).

#### 4. Isaiah 9.16-17

As it was noted above, v. 12 plays a crucial role in interpreting this entire pericope as an account of past events. Verses 16-17, however, obviously counter this view.<sup>58</sup>

- 9.16 a Thus about his young men the Lord is not rejoicing,  
 b and on his orphans and widows he is having no mercy.<sup>59</sup>  
 c Because all of it is defiled and evil,  
 d and every mouth speaks disgracefulness.  
 e *In spite of all these, his anger has not turned away,*  
 f *and his hand is outstretched still.*
- 9.17 a But wickedness will burn like fire,  
 b thorn and thistle it will consume.  
 c It will kindle the thickets of the forest,  
 d and they will swirl up [like] majestic smoke.

In Biblical Hebrew, the semantic correlation of על-כן + *yiqtol* always introduces a clause in the present (durative, iterative, habitual) or future

is obvious (cf. מבלעים | בלעו, מתעים | מתעים, מאשרי | מאשריך), but the question of priority—if any—is not. In both locations the lexemes fit well their context. The vocabulary in Isa. 3.12cd brings the parallelism with 3.12ab to the fore, while in 9.15 the merism of מאשרי העם and מאשריו (this latter is not attested in 3.12!) nicely fits the list of merisms in Isa. 9 (cf. vv. 13, 16, 17). Neither of the two texts is actually a slavish reproduction of the other. One may wonder whether מאשרי in v. 15 is not another ingenious, sublime phonetic allusion to אשר, ‘Assyria’, that is, the ‘adversaries of Rezin’ mentioned in v. 10a.

58. For this reason some consider v. 16 partially secondary (Fey, *Amos*, pp. 84-85; Kruger, ‘Another Look’, p. 129), or rearrange the poem substantially (Eichrodt, Wildberger).

59. Many consider the semantic parallelism problematic. IQIsa<sup>a</sup> replaced יִשְׂמַח with יִחַמֵּל. Most often scholars suggest changing יִשְׂמַח to יִשְׂמַח, from Arabic *samuḥa*, ‘to be kind’ (cf. Löhr, ‘Jesaias-Studien’, p. 204; Vollmer, *Rückblicke*, p. 134). This Arabic connection remains uncertain, however. Eventually יִרְחֵם, יִרְחֵם piel *yiqtol* can be vocalized as יִרְחֵם, i.e. רוח hiphtil *yiqtol* + masc. pl. suffix, ‘to have delight’ (see Isa. 11.3; Amos 5.21; Syriac *rəwāḥā*, ‘joy’): ‘with his orphans and widows he will have no delight (in them)’. Nonetheless, the preposition את is strange with רוח hiphtil and fits well רחם (cf. Exod. 33.19). For the parallelism, see Lam 2.17: וְלֹא חִמֵּל וַיִּשְׂמַח עֲלֵיךְ אֹיִב, ‘he did not spare (חמל ~ רחם), and made the enemy rejoice over you’. Cf. Sir. 2.9; Bar. 4.22; 5.9; 4 Esdr. 12.34.

tense, in both prose and poetry.<sup>60</sup> It is therefore highly unlikely that v. 16 would refer to the past.

The form *על־כֵּן* followed by *כִּי* (v. 16cd) is well-known.<sup>61</sup> This syntax brings the connection of v. 16ab with the earlier list of merisms to the fore: *מֵאֲשֵׁרֵי הָעַם... וּמֵאֲשֵׁרֵי* (v. 15).<sup>62</sup> The construction *בַּחֹרֶר* paralleled by *יְתוּם* and *אֵלְמִנָּה* in v. 16ab is a fourth allusion to the opposing extremities of Israel's society: the valiant and the vulnerable ones.<sup>63</sup>

The numerous merisms in these verses illustrate well that the entire society of Israel will be subject to judgment. In the current structuring, v. 16cd, signifying the cause behind the merisms of vv. 13-16, receives specific emphasis as the explanation for the whole series of judgments (not just v. 16ab): 'because *all of it* is defiled and evil, and *every* mouth speaks disgracefulness'.

It is remarkable that v. 16cd overlaps with the initial verses of this poem. The connection is evident, on the one hand, in the exhaustive references of *כָּלֹו*, 'all of it', also used at the start in Isa. 9.8, and *כָּל־פֶּה*, 'every mouth'. On the other hand, the actual cause of the series of judgments is plainly stated in v. 16: it is what the people *talk* about (*כָּל־פֶּה דִבֵּר נִבְלָה*) that should explain the previous list of divine interventions. This subject is also covered at the beginning of the prophecy. According to vv. 8-9, the reason for the judgment pronouncements from v. 10 onwards was the nation's arrogant *speech* (cf. *לֵאמֹר* in v. 8) countering YHWH's earlier message. Verse 9 cited the overweening words of the people verbatim precisely because this battle of words is *the* key theme of the current prophecy, not just a marginal scenario. Isaiah 9.7-20 is not a generalizing overview of Israel's sins<sup>64</sup> but the topicalization of a

60. *Contra* Meier, *Jesaja*, p. 127. We have numerous examples of this construction: Gen. 2.24; 10.9; 32.33; Num. 21.14, 27; 1 Sam. 5.5; 19.24; 2 Sam. 5.8; 22.50; Job 17.4; 20.21; 23.15; 42.6; Pss. 1.5; 18.50; 25.8; 42.7; 45.18; 46.3; 110.7; 119.104; Prov. 6.15; Eccl. 5.1; Isa. 13.7, 13; 15.4; 16.9, 11; 17.10; 25.3; 27.11; 30.16; 50.7; Jer. 20.51; 48.31, 36; 51.7; Lam. 6.4; Hos. 4.3.13; Amos 3.2; Hab. 1.4, 15-17.

61. Gen. 11.9; 21.31; 32.33; 2 Sam. 7.22; Jer. 5.6; Jon. 4.2; Hab. 1.16.

62. *על־כֵּן* also has an emphatic-explicative nuance (cf. Isa. 13.13; 15.4; Hab. 1.4), similar to the function that the *wayyiqtol* may also fulfil.

63. *בַּחֹרֶר* is also used in other types of merisms (with *בְּתוֹלָה*, Deut. 32.25; 2 Chron. 36.17; Pss. 78.63; 148.12; Isa. 23.4; Jer. 51.22; Amos 8.13; with *זָקָן*, Prov. 20.29; Jer. 31.13; Lam. 5.14).

64. As explicitly stated by Vermeylen, *Isaïe*, p. 183; Becker, *Botschaft*, p. 148, and implied by many others.

very concrete subject, one of Isaiah's frequent themes: the arrogant attitude of the people in refusing the divine word, the prophecy.<sup>65</sup> This observation is very significant, for it suggests that v. 16cd could have a specific rhetorical function within the prophecy as a whole—namely, it functions as an *inclusio*.

In the current form, v. 17 is detached from v. 16 by the refrain, but questions remain with respect to the originality of this construction. Verse 17 also begins with **כי**. This could be rendered as 'for' and related to the preceding refrain in v. 16ef as a specification of how the judgment would reappear after its previous manifestation. Nonetheless, while the connection between v. 16ef and v. 17 could be justified, the relation of the refrain with the previous v. 16ad is more difficult to explain rhetorically and logically. 'In spite of all these' alludes to forms of judgment such as those in vv. 13 and 15 rather than what we find in v. 16ad.<sup>66</sup> I believe this unevenness is to be explained by the fact that the refrain was inserted here secondarily.

Beyond the rhetorical-logical problem noted above, this assumption is indirectly confirmed by the seamless connection between v. 16ad and v. 17. From a syntactical viewpoint, the particle **כי** ahead of v. 17 can be considered as the second element of an adversative clause, one that syntactically requires a previous negation.<sup>67</sup> This negation does in fact appear in v. 16: **כי**: **לא יִשְׂמַח** / **לא יִרְחַם** 'he will not rejoice / he will have no delight...but...' The fire of wickedness in v. 17a (**רִשְׁעָה**) also references the evil (**מַרְעָה**) mentioned in v. 16c. Compared to the other two predictions in v. 13 ('he will cut...') and v. 15 ('they will become...'), v. 16ab is less clear with respect to the concrete realization of the punishment. This judgment is concretized only in v. 17 with supplementary and exceptional rhetorical force in the announcement of the total destruction of the nation in v. 17.

Verse 17 is also functionally related to v. 16ab. Although often overlooked, v. 17 contains the last pair of merisms in the list of judgment pronouncements, so typical for this threatening prophecy: **שְׁמִיר וְשִׁית**,

65. Cf. Isa. 6–8; 28; 30–31. In Isa. 6.5, 'the people of unclean lips' (**עַם-טְמֵא שְׁפִתַּיִם**) may already also anticipate the later arrogant rejection of the Isaianic prophecies, much like the notion of **עַם חֲגוּף**, the defiled people in Isa. 9.16. The terms **חֲגוּף** and **טְמֵא** have cultic connotations in opposition to a *holy* God.

66. Cf. Brown, 'Refrain', p. 438.

67. Cf. Joüon and Muraoka, *Grammar*, §173c: 'After a negation, the notion of *but* is often expressed by **כִּי**'.

'thorn and thistle', on one side, סבכי היער, 'the thicknesses of the forest', on the other. These expressions are often assumed to refer to the devastation of the landscape.<sup>68</sup> Yet in view of the heavily metaphoric context this superficial reading proves to be unsatisfactory. The combined metaphor ושמיר ושית is typically Isaianic. It is noteworthy, however, that this imagery is used with two different connotations. It may denote wanton landscapes deprived of inhabitants. In such cases the appearance of thorn and thistle is itself the sign that judgment has been carried out (Isa. 5.6; 7.23-25; cf. 32.13). Isaiah 9.17, however, is different in the sense that here it is the consumption, that is, the disappearance of thorn and thistle, that is portrayed as the realization of divine punishment. Thorn and thistle are devoured by the flames of iniquity. The parallel metaphor of 'the forest' (היער) is used in Isaiah for the elites of the nation. In Isa. 10.34 the same סבכי היער typifies the presumptuous leaders of 'Lebanon' (a mythological resonance of Zion and Jerusalem; cf. Ps. 48.3).<sup>69</sup> I suggest that 'thorn and thistle' is here (similar to the plant imagery of v. 13) a compound metaphor for the people, more specifically those of lower status. The same merism of worthless 'thorn bush' and glorious 'forest' also appears in Isa. 10.17-18 with a similar sense.<sup>70</sup>

Like v. 16cd, the final line of v. 17d is a sarcastic reference to the beginning of the poem. In Isa. 9.8 the prophet faced an audience characterized as 'proud' (גאוה) and of 'arrogant heart' (גדל לבב). As a result of YHWH's coming judgment, however, the burning 'thorn and thistle' and 'thicket of the forest' leave merely the ironic but grievous spectacle of a majestic (גאוה) column of smoke behind.

Therefore, the syntactic links, the formal and functional similarities between vv. 16ad and 17, as well as the syntactic and rhetorical problems with the embedded refrain in v. 16ef strongly suggest that the refrain was secondarily inserted. Dropping it would result in a clear syntax and a smooth verse structure.

68. Oswalt, *Isaiah*, p. 257; Beuken, *Jesaja*, p. 267.

69. This implies an anti-Judean reading of Isa. 10.34. See already Isa. 11.1 and G.C.I. Wong, 'Deliverance or Destruction? Isaiah x 33-34 and the Final Form of Isaiah x-xi', *JT* 53 (2003), pp. 544-52.

70. For the merism in 9.17 as alluding to the people, see also J. Hirsch, *Das Buch Jesaja* (Frankfurt am Main: J. Kaufmann, 1911), p. 65; C. Balogh, 'Inverted Fates and Inverted Texts: Rationales of Reinterpretation in the Compositional History of the Isaianic Prophecies, with Special Emphasis on Isaiah 10,16-19 and its Context', *ZAW* 128 (2016), pp. 64-82 (71-74).

## 6. Isaiah 9.18-20

On first inspection, the fire motif appears to offer the rationale for connecting these verses with v. 17. Nonetheless, while the fire imagery is common to both pericopes, one may ask whether this similarity extends beyond mere formalities that may have also been exploited by the later editors of the prophecies. Is the fire metaphor understood similarly in the two texts?

- 9.18 a By the anger of YHWH of hosts the land has become disintegrated,<sup>71</sup>  
 b and the nation has become like the prey of fire (or: a fiery knife).  
 c Nobody shows compassion for his brother.
- 9.19 a But it cuts on the right and remains hungry,  
 b and it devours on the left and are [*sic*] not satisfied.  
 c Everybody devours the flesh of his offspring (?).<sup>72</sup>
- 9.20 a —Manasseh Ephraim and Ephraim Manasseh,  
 b together they are (?) against Judah.—<sup>73</sup>  
 c *In spite of all these, his anger has not turned away,*  
 d *and his hand is outstretched still.*

71. For the *hapax legomenon* נִעְתַּם we have variants, but these are insufficient to challenge the MT. Since עֵתַם is unknown in Biblical Hebrew, I would like to call attention to a yet unnoticed Akkadian cognate, *etēmu* (var. *etēnu*): G ‘to be disintegrated’, D/Št ‘to mix up, disintegrate, dissolve’ (*CAD*, e, p. 383b; *AHw* 1, p. 260b). The D form appears as a synonym of *balālu*, ‘to mix’ (cf. Hebrew בָּלַל). Most interestingly, *etēmu* also appears in connection with people. The god Nergal is called *muštātin zāmāni*, ‘the one who confounds the foe’, and Ištar is *muštētinat nakiri*, ‘the one who confounds the enemy’ (*AHw*, I, p. 260b). Cf. the omen text, *šumma bītu etin bītu šū dannatu išabbassu*, ‘if the house is disintegrated (G stative), hardship will befall this house’ (*CAD*, e, p. 383b). This connotation fits well the Isaianic context which imagines the havoc disintegrating even the most intimate social relations. The masculine נִעְתַּם related to the feminine אָרָץ is unusual, but see Gen. 13.6; Ps. 105.30; Isa. 18.1-2.

72. It is not likely that זָרְעוֹ refers literally to one’s arm. זָרַע metaphorically means ‘power’, but with בָּשָׂר this seems too abstract. The expression is used in relation to a powerful one, leader or helper (cf. 1 Sam. 2.31 [זָרַע]; Jer. 48.25 [זָרַע]; see also Knobel, *Jesaja*, p. 93). But this remains uncertain, for a construct state is probably required to convey this idea (cf. אִישׁ זָרְעוֹ in Job 22.8). זָרְעוֹ can also be vocalized as זָרְעוֹ, ‘his offspring’ instead (cf. LXX for 1 Sam. 2.31), which is well suited here (see Meier, *Jesaja*, p. 129). Verse 18c speaks of a merciless attitude in the wider circle (everyone his brother), while v. 19c in the closest circle (everyone his own child; cf. Jer. 19.9).

73. It is likely that v. 20a is yet another explanatory, historicizing interpolation, similar to vv. 8b and 11a. The verse structure suggests that vv. 18ab and 19ab form two pairs of parallelism, while v. 18c has a structural and semantic equivalent in v. 19c (v. 18c

The theme in 9.18-19 is strikingly different from vv. 16-17. The earlier section spoke about iniquity appearing in the form of arrogant speech ultimately leading up to the divine judgment with its effects compared to an all-consuming fire. However, Isa. 9.18-19 focuses on mutual hostility within society, whereby this human manifestation is compared (כּ) to the destruction of fire.

The sense of the phrase *מֵאֲכָלֶת אֵשׁ* in v. 18 is difficult to interpret. *מֵאֲכָלֶת* appears only once more in Isa. 9.4, in exactly the same construction, where it refers to garments fallen prey to fire.<sup>74</sup> With the current vocalization it presupposes a state of being devoured (cf. Hos. 7.4-7).<sup>75</sup> Alternatively, one may revocalise this expression as *בְּמֵאֲכָלֶת אֵשׁ*, 'like a fiery knife', that would make good sense of the otherwise strange verb *גָּדַד*, 'to cut', in v. 19. Whatever standpoint is taken here, it is important to note the difference between it and the divine fire imagery of v. 17.

The consequence of this interpretation is significant for Isaiah's 'refrain poem'. For, on the one hand, the substantially different focus of vv. 7-17 and 18-20 (arrogance against YHWH vs. animosity toward one another) and the dissimilarity in the use of the fire-metaphors in the two contexts suggest that Isa. 9.7-17 and 9.18-20 are unlikely to have been part of the same prophecy originally. This conclusion is in line with the results reached independently in the analysis above regarding the form and function of vv. 16ad + 17 as a closure (*inclusio*). Unlike the previous predictions, vv. 18-19 seem to provide a snapshot of current affairs. Social disintegration is not predicted but observed and critically assessed. The present placement of the prophecy in 9.18-20 after the preceding text is likely to be explained by the familiar catchword principle in which common motifs (notably the idea of devouring fire) served as structuring principles for the later collectors of prophecies.<sup>76</sup> On the other hand, the

focuses on *אֵשׁ* / *אֲחִזִּי*, v. 19c on *אֵשׁ* / *זָרְעוּ*). Poetically and syntactically, v. 20a falls outside this construction and bears the hallmarks of a fragmentary explanatory addition. This has already partially been assumed by Gray, *Isaiah*, p. 187; Löhr, 'Jesaias-Studien', p. 205; Becker, *Botschaft*, p. 148.

74. *מֵאֲכָלֶת* in 1 Kgs 5.25 is probably different (cf. the parallelism, LXX and 2 Chron. 2.9).

75. This *maqtul* form of *אָכַל* can be compared to *מִשְׁפָּרֵת* (Gen. 29.15), *מִתְפַּנֵּת* (Exod. 5.8), *מִתְלַקֵּת* (1 Chron. 27.4). See H. Bauer and P. Leander, *Historische Grammatik der Hebräischen Sprache des Alten Testaments* (Hildesheim: Olms, 1962), §61. The *maqtul* constructions appear to emphasize the passive nuance of the verb (i.e., that which is worked for, measured, divided, consumed, etc.).

76. See the connection between Isa. 1.9 and 1.10; 29.14 and 15; etc.

fact that the thematic change does not coincide with the sections delimited by the refrains raises once again the burning question regarding their provenance and function.

## 7. Once Again: The Refrains

In-depth analysis of the syntax, poetic structure and content of Isa. 9.7-20 suggests that the generally (albeit uncritically) shared axiomatic position that Isa. 9.7-20 forms the core of a large refrain poem can hardly be sustained. This pericope goes back most likely to two different prophecies, vv. 9-17 and 18-20, which were originally focused differently and connected only secondarily. There are indications that the refrain is not original in v. 16ef. Doubts can also be raised with respect to v. 20cd (of course, especially if vv. 9-17 and 18-20 are treated as separate texts).

What is the scope of the refrain? Why and when was it added to these early poems? In general, scholars regard the refrains as rhythmic delimiters of various or increasingly acute partial judgments, but at the same time also anticipations of an ultimate destruction of the people of YHWH.<sup>77</sup> Indeed, this way of reading was the major reason for arguing that Isa. 5.26-30 (now in a different position) may have originally closed this refrain poem. However, within this frame it is difficult to discover any meaningful difference regarding the severity of the judgment in Isa. 9.7-20 that would explain what is predicted in the refrains (cf. the ferocious greed in 9.11, the utter destruction of the population expressed by the merisms on different points) and positively confirm why and how Isa. 5.26-30 would be better suited as the rhetorical closure. The idea that the intention of the refrain was to proclaim the final destruction of Israel is therefore very unlikely.

It is far more convincing to argue with Sweeney that the refrains do not await the (definitive) end of Israel but anticipate the fall of the enemy, Assyria, introduced in the majestic poem of the following Isa. 10.5-15, 24-27.<sup>78</sup> It is in this particular prophecy that the fury of YHWH reaches its culmination. Three considerations may point in this direction. (1) First, Assyria is presented here as the instrument by which the wrath of YHWH

77. Gray, *Isaiah*, p. 179; Vermeylen, *Isaïe*, p. 177; Barth, *Jesaja-Worte*, p. 110; Williamson, *Isaiah*, p. 402.

78. M.A. Sweeney, *Isaiah 1-39* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), p. 191. Barth, *Jesaja-Worte*, pp. 114-15, also mentions this possibility, but he considers it merely a secondary level of reading (cf. also Fey, *Amos*, pp. 83-84).



manifested itself in the world (cf. עברה / זעם / אף in Isa. 10.5, 6, 25). Assyria is par excellence the staff (מטה / שבט) in the hand of YHWH through whom he strikes (10.24, נכה; cf. 9.12) the defiled nation (10.6, גוי חנף; cf. 9.16). (2) Second, the temporal plane is important not only for the refrain ('*still* [עוד] outstretched is his hand') but also for the anti-Assyrian prophecy, reiterated again—just as in the refrains—in connection with the fury of YHWH. The judgment is supposed to happen soon, as Isa. 10.25 states: *בי-עוד מעט מזער וכלה זעם ואפי על-תבליתם*, 'for there is still a very little while, and my indignation will come to an end, and my wrath against the world will be finished'.<sup>79</sup> It seems very likely that the refrains of Isa. 5.25; 9.11, 16, 20 and 10.4 are closely related to this temporal scheme of the anti-Assyrian prophecy. (3) Third, the Assyria-related reference in Isa. 14.26-27 makes a direct connection between the destruction of Assyria and the hand raised (היד הנטויה) above all nations.<sup>80</sup> The plan for the annihilation of Assyria is explained here as the ultimate meaning of the metaphor of the raised hand of YHWH. That is: the refrains point forward to the prophecy against Assyria.

A final comment must be added here with respect to the eventual connection between Isa. 9.7-20 and Amos 4.(4-5)6-12.<sup>81</sup> The poem in Amos 4 highlights various moments implying divine judgment from Israel's past, pointing out by means of recurring refrains his failure to return to God. The structure of this pericope from Amos is often mentioned as a potential parallel that would support reading the Isaianic 'refrain poem' as an assessment of Israel's past, a palimpsest of theological historiography. However, the differences between the two passages are significant and the resemblances rather formal. Amos is prosaic, uniform and more coherent. While both pericopes consistently use refrains, their content and intention is, nonetheless, different. The refrain of Amos reiterates the reluctance of Israel to repent in spite of YHWH's destructive interventions guiding his nation towards this goal.

79. I read the difficult *על-תבל יתם* as *על-תבל יתם*, '(my wrath) against the world will be finished', which makes sense of the parallelism with *קלה* (cf. Isa. 33.1!). For the destruction of Assyria as part of a larger plan concerning the world (תבל), see Isa. 10.7-9; 14.26.

80. On Isa. 14.24-27 and the refrains, see Barth, *Jesaja-Worte*, pp. 113-15.

81. See Fey, *Amos*, pp. 88-104; Vollmer, *Rückblicke*, pp. 140-44; Wildberger, *Jesaja*, p. 209; Blum, 'Jesaja', pp. 84-86. The delimitation of the text in Amos is unclear (cf. Vollmer, *Rückblicke*, pp. 9-20; J. Jeremias, *Der Prophet Amos* [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1995], p. 47).

Yet this aspect is not implied by the refrains in Isaiah, which proclaim more punishment to come irrespective of Israel's repentance, for they have the fall of Assyria in view. The idea of repentance is explicitly stated only in Isa. 9.12,<sup>82</sup> which was argued to derive from a different hand. Depending on one's standpoint with regard to the ideological connection between Amos 4.6-12 and Isa. 9.7-20, one might eventually argue that the editors *reinterpreting* the earlier poem of Isa. 9.7-20\* by inserting the reiterative refrains were familiar with this (deuteronomistic?<sup>83</sup>) theology in one form or another.

This subsequent, editorial addition of the refrains focusing on the larger structure of the Isaianic prophecies (especially Isa. 10.5-15, 24-27) may explain well why the editors' idea was located at various points throughout the Isaianic collection.

## **8. The Addressees of the Original Prophecies and their Historical Background**

Once Isa. 9.7-20 is stripped by the late evaluative v. 12, as well as the editorial refrains which aimed at creating a place for the two prophecies in the current literary context, one should ask whom the prophecies in 9.7-17\* and 9.18-20\* addressed originally: the Northern Kingdom,<sup>84</sup> Judah,<sup>85</sup> or both Samaria and Judah?<sup>86</sup> The identification of vv. 8b, 11a and 20ab as later historicizing explanations of prophetic metaphors renders them irrelevant for the current discussion. Two other references remain to be analyzed here: 'Jacob/Israel' and 'the adversaries of Rezin'.

The designations 'Jacob / Israel' are rather uncertain. Kratz believes they were used for the unified (ideal) Israel, and as such they are late theological creations.<sup>87</sup> However, his conclusions depend on his particular readings of selected texts. For instance, his interpretation of Isa. 9.7-20 as a prophecy of doom against both Samaria and Jerusalem depends on his peculiar interpretation of v. 20ab as proclaiming judgment against both

82. Cf. Becker, *Botschaft*, p. 152.

83. Jeremias, *Amos*, pp. 49-52.

84. Gray, *Isaiah*, p. 183; Fey, *Amos*, pp. 88-89; Sweeney, *Isaiah*, pp. 189, 195.

85. Kissane, 'Qumrân', pp. 413-18.

86. Von Orelli, *Jesaja*, pp. 43, 45; Kissane, 'Qumrân', pp. 414-15; Vermeylen, *Isaie*, pp. 178-79; Becker, *Botschaft*, p. 151; Beuken, *Jesaja*, p. 261.

87. R.G. Kratz, 'Israel in the Book of Isaiah', *JSOT* 31 (2006), pp. 103-28 (115-17, 121-22).

Samaria and Judah.<sup>88</sup> This remains doubtful, however. Even granting that v. 20ab is original, it must be admitted that the role of Judah is rather passive here, namely that of a victim, when compared to the attackers Ephraim and Manasseh.<sup>89</sup> Moreover, if Isa. 8.14 is accepted as contributing to this discussion, one may read this prophecy as an Isaianic judgment against Samaria—termed here as ‘both houses of *Israel*’ (i.e. Ephraim and Manasseh)—and (separately) Jerusalem. This may confirm that Isaiah used the term ‘*Israel*’ for the Northern Kingdom and that the message proclaimed to Jerusalem was not necessarily an uncritical promise of salvation.<sup>90</sup>

Far more important for Isa. 9.7-17 is the reference to צרי רצין, ‘the adversaries of Rezin’, in 9.10.<sup>91</sup> As generally recognized, this allusion places the current prophecy in the context of Rezin’s rebellion against Tiglath-pileser III. This contextualization does offer a hint regarding the approximate historical location of 9.7-17. Of course, Isa. 8.5-8 and 8.14 make clear that Isaiah’s standpoint regarding the fate of Judah during this period was not exclusively and not *per se* anti-*Israel*.<sup>92</sup> Nonetheless, the rhetoric in pronouncing the inflicting of judgment specifically by ‘the adversaries of *Rezin*’ makes most sense with northern *Israel* as the original addressee of the prophecy. This striking way of referring to the enemies makes good sense as an implicit and ominous allusion to the friendship between Samaria and Damascus.<sup>93</sup> Rezin’s walls fell earlier and his timbers were crushed, leaving no serious doubts concerning the fate of those who had bound up their future with the rebellious Damascus (cf. also Isa. 17.1-3!). This reading also fits well with Isa. 9.7 reporting a message that was not merely uttered, but *sent* to ‘*Jacob*’ and ‘*Israel*’, from YHWH of hosts living in Jerusalem (cf. 8.18).

88. Kratz, ‘*Israel*’, p. 114; so also Vermeulen, *Isaïe*, p. 179.

89. So also L. Rost *apud* Wildberger, *Jesaja*, p. 211.

90. In Isa. 8.12-16 this salvation is only promised to the ‘disciples’, i.e. those of Jerusalem who have received Isaiah’s prophecies favourably. Cf. C. Balogh, ‘Isaiah’s Prophetic Instruction and the Disciples in Isaiah 8.16’, *VT* 63 (2013), pp. 1-18 (9-13).

91. See n. 39 above for the originality of this reading.

92. It is ultimately not the destruction of Samaria which is of interest to the prophet. In the biblical tradition, two other eighth-century Judean prophets, Amos and Micah, are also concerned with the fate of *Israel* as the people of YHWH, not as a usual enemy of Judah.

93. Cf. C.L. Hendewerk, *Des Propheten Jesaja Weissagungen* (Königsberg: Verlag der Gebrüder Bornträger, 1838), p. 284. The relation of Samaria and Jerusalem with Rezin (and Assyria!) was obviously dissimilar.

Not much can be said with respect to the second prophecy in Isa. 9.18-19(20), except that the description of the situation correlates well with the scandalous political chaos in northern Israel in the third quarter of the eighth century (2 Kgs 15.8-31).

## 9. Conclusion

Syntactic and semantic analysis of Isa. 9.7-20 shows that this text has become the famous ‘refrain poem’ only as a result of secondary editorial work which has the larger collection of Isaianic prophecies in view. Isaiah 9.7-20 goes back to two distinctive early texts with different concerns: 9.7-17\* and 9.18-20\*. The original prophecy of Isa. 9.7-17 focused on the arrogant refusal of the divine word, one of the frequent themes of Isaiah’s prophecies. Isaiah 9.7-17 is not a historical overview of the past but a threatening prophecy about the future, most probably for northern Israel. Isaiah 9.18-19(20) provides another description of the chaotic social situation in Samaria, possibly sometime towards the end of the third quarter of the eighth century.

The refrains in Isa. 9.11cd, 16ef and 20cd were added at a later stage, like in 5.25 and 10.4. Their insertion postdates the connection of Isa. 9.7-17 and 9.18-20, for the editor seems to be no longer aware of the original textual boundaries between the two texts. Isaiah 9.12, mentioning the failure of the people to respond with repentance to YHWH’s punishment, is probably yet another interpretive comment, but deriving from a different hand than the refrains. Unlike v. 12 (and Amos 4.6-12), the refrains do not have the repentance of the people in view. They see the reiterative judgment as part of a larger divine plan that needs to be fulfilled irrespective of Israel’s attitude. YHWH’s anger will cease only when Assyria has been punished.

The fact that many readers of the book of Isaiah have been—and undoubtedly will continue to be—baffled by a ‘refrain poem’ is the ultimate testimony to the brilliant success of the work that these unknown editors of Isaiah have achieved.