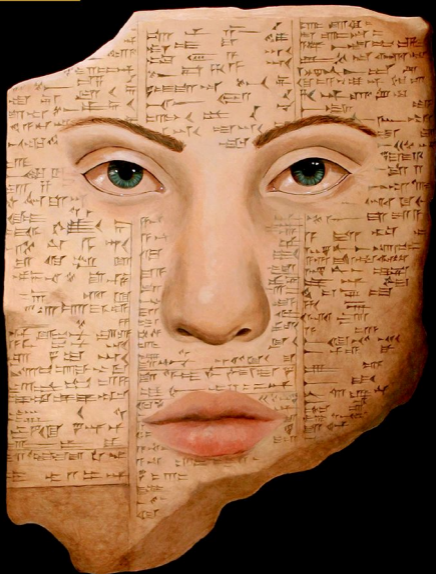


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ANCIENT PROPHECY

Near Eastern, Biblical, and Greek Perspectives

MARTTI NISSINEN

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In memory of my teachers

Ilmari Soisalon-Soininen (1917–2002)

Timo Veijola (1947–2005)

Oswald Loretz (1928–2014)

Heikki Räisänen (1941–2015)

Preface and Acknowledgments

It is a pleasure to write a preface to a book that has been in the making for a long time. Any reader somewhat familiar with my earlier publications will find out that the book at hand is the result of decades of interpretation and reinterpretation, contextualization and recontextualization, redaction and *Fortschreibung*—almost like a biblical prophetic book, with the exception that this book demonstrably has only one author.

Ever since the late 1980s when I was doctoral student in Old Testament studies it has been my conviction that prophecy was a phenomenon common to the ancient Near Eastern cultural sphere. Thanks to Simo Parpola who taught me Neo-Assyrian using prophetic oracles as teaching material, I became acquainted with the Assyrian prophecies which I could use already in my 1991 doctoral thesis. At that time, these texts were still unpublished and had been studied by just a few scholars such as Manfred Weippert and Herbert Huffmon. It was only much later that I began to recognize the Greek side to the picture. It is no secret that I am not a classicist, but the lack of exchange between biblical, Near Eastern, and classical scholarship started to bother me to the extent that I ventured into studying Greek sources myself, hopefully not with all too flawed results.

This book is written in favor of the following ideas resulting from my research over the past decades. First, the word “prophecy” refers to the category of non-inductive kind of divination that can be found in different parts of ancient Eastern Mediterranean. It is always based on the notion of divine-human communication; however, it is organized differently in different historically contingent divinatory systems. Secondly, ancient prophetic performances are unreachable, and knowledge of them is available only through secondary interpretation in written sources which yield only a partial view of the historical phenomenon. Thirdly, prophecy is socio-religious agency, serving the purposes of human communities and their religious and political structures and authorities. Prophets are a class of diviners with patterned public behavior recognizable to the communities witnessing their performances.

My book is divided into three parts, the first of which discusses the theoretical premises of constructing prophetic divination, the second gives an overview of the sources, and the third consists of comparative essays on a few crucial topics. Each of the nine chapters can be read as a self-sustaining unit; I hope the reader will tolerate some overlaps in the content of the chapters caused by this structure.

The presentation of the threefold source materials including biblical, Near Eastern, and Greek texts attempts a comprehensive view of prophetic divination in the ancient Eastern Mediterranean sources. However, this book is still far

from being a full compendium of the subject. The reader will easily notice important sources that my book does not discuss properly, such as apocalyptic writings, the Dead Sea Scrolls, and early Christian sources. I can only apologize for this failure and refer to some earlier publications that may compensate these shortcomings in a small part (Nissinen 2003c, 2008b, 2009b, 2010a, 2015). The book itself contains partially rewritten and expanded text of four articles published earlier: Nissinen 2000b, 2010c, 2012, and 2013a. I thank the publishers of the original articles, Eisenbrauns, Labor et Fides, and the Society of Biblical Literature, for permission to republish this content. In addition, fragments of several prior publications can be found in different parts of the book.

This book is essentially the product of the academic environment of the Faculty of Theology at the University of Helsinki. The inquisitive and open-minded atmosphere of the Department of Biblical Studies, represented by colleagues such as Raija Sollamo, Outi Lehtipuu, Ismo Dunderberg, Risto Uro, Antti Marjanen, and Petri Luomanen, has had a formative influence on my own work. In particular, the Academy of Finland Centre of Excellence “Changes in Sacred Texts and Traditions” (CSTT) has provided an unprejudiced international meeting place for different theoretical approaches and methodologies. It has been a pleasure to work together with the team leaders Anneli Aejmelaeus, Jutta Jokiranta, and Juha Pakkala, members of my own team (Tero Alstola, Izaak de Hulster, Helen Dixon, Sanae Ito, Raz Kletter, Raija Mattila, Katri Saarelainen, Sanna Saari, Jason Silverman, Saana Svärd, Emilia Tapiola, Joanna Töyräänvuori, Tuula Tynjä, Kirsi Valkama), as well as many other CSTT members who have worked on topics related to prophecy (Katri Antin, Reinhard Müller, Urmas Nömmik, Mika Pajunen, Hanna Tervanotko, Elisa Uusimäki, Hanne von Weissenberg).

Another institution I owe a great debt of gratitude to is the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, New Jersey, where I have had the privilege of doing my research in 2008–9, 2011, and 2016. I have greatly enjoyed the scholarly ambiance at the Institute, as well as the support of colleagues in Classics such as Michael Flower (Princeton University), Angelos Chaniotis, Caroline Walker Bynum, and Christopher Jones. I also had the opportunity of visiting the Humboldt University of Berlin in 2015, for which I thank Bernd Ulrich Schipper.

Inspiring scholarly exchange on prophecy with Ehud Ben Zvi, Dominique Charpin, Lester Grabbe, Esther Hamori, Reinhard Kratz, Christoph Levin, Simo Parpola, and Jonathan Stökl has contributed decisively to the development of my own image of prophecy. Some of my colleagues have become close friends with whom I have shared much more than just scholarly ideas: Terje Stordalen, David Carr and Colleen Conway, Mark Smith and Elizabeth Bloch-Smith, Kirsi Stjerna and Brooks Schramm, and Peggy Day.

A significant number of colleagues deserve thanks for their support and critiques. I want to mention the following scholars from whom, among many

others, I have learned over the years: Hans Barstad, Bob Becking, Angelika Berlejung, George Brooke, David Clines, John Collins, Walter Dietrich, Chip Dobbs-Allsopp, Göran Eidevall, Daniel Fleming, Christian Frevel, Erhard Gerstenberger, Jan Gertz, Jean-Georges Heintz, Else Holt, Herbert Huffmon, Axel Knauf, Antti Laato, Armin Lange, Mark Leuchter, Ted Lewis, Peter Machinist, Sara Milstein, Hindy Najman, Herbert Niehr, Beate Pongratz-Leisten, Jack Sasson, Leong Seow, Rudolf Smend, Hermann Spieckermann, Marvin Sweeney, Karel van der Toorn, Josef Tropper, and Manfred Weippert.

Finally, I would like to thank people who have contributed to the production of the volume: Maarit Kolsi for the cover image inspired by one of my source texts (SAA 9 1 rev.); Nina Nikki for preparing the indexes; the anonymous readers and the staff of Oxford University Press: Tom Perridge and Karen Raith; and Gayathri Manoharan, Michael Janes, and Brian North.

The loyal support of my wife Leena has been unfailing, and my daughters Elina and Kaisa have been my source of constant delight.

I offer my heartfelt thanks to everyone mentioned above. I dedicate this book to the memory of my teachers: Ilmari Soisalon-Soininen whose seminar on the historical background of the biblical prophets was the starting point of my occupation with prophecy; Timo Veijola who taught me to take theology and scholarship seriously; Oswald Loretz who always reminded me that every scholar should have a method; and Heikki Räisänen who programmatically transgressed imaginary boundaries, whether those of scholarship or biblical canon.

Note to the reader:

Throughout the text and notes in this volume, reference is made to original sources of Ancient Near Eastern Documents of Prophecy, by the use of a number preceded by * (e.g. *26; **51–3, *118f). A complete catalogue of sources is given in Appendix 2.

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List of Abbreviations

For abbreviations of the Greek and Latin sources, see the Index of Sources

A.	Tablet signature of texts from Mari
AASF	<i>Annales Academiae scientiarum fennicae</i>
AB	Anchor Bible
AbB	F. R. Kraus (ed.), <i>Altbabylonische Briefe in Umschrift und Übersetzung</i> (Leiden 1964)
ABL	R. F. Harper, <i>Assyrian and Babylonian Letters</i> (London & Chicago, 1892–1914)
ABRL	Anchor Bible Reference Library
ABSA	<i>Annual of the British School at Athens</i>
AD	Abraham J. Sachs and Hermann Hunger, <i>Astronomical Diaries and Related Texts from Babylonia</i> . Vols 1–3 (Vienna 1988–96)
ADPV	Abhandlungen Des Deutschen Palastina-Vereins
AfO	<i>Archiv für Orientforschung</i>
AHw	Wolfram von Soden, <i>Akkadisches Handwörterbuch</i> , Vols. 1–3 (Wiesbaden)
<i>AJS Review</i>	<i>Association for Jewish Studies Review</i>
ALASP	Abhandlungen zur Literatur Alt-Syren-Palästinas und Mesopotamiens
ANEM	Ancient Near East Monographs
AOAT	Alter Orient und Altes Testament
AOF	<i>Altorientalische Forschungen</i>
AOS	American Oriental Series
ARM	Archives royales de Mari
ASJ	<i>Acta Sumerologica</i> (Japan)
BASOR	<i>Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research</i>
BCSMS	<i>Bulletin of the Canadian Society for Mesopotamian Studies</i>
BEATAJ	Beiträge zur Erforschung des Alten Testaments und des antiken Judentums
BETL	Bibliotheca ephemeridum theologiarum lovaniensium
<i>Bib</i>	<i>Biblica</i>
BibOr	Biblica et orientalia
BJS	Brown Judaic Studies
BKAT	Biblischer Kommentar, Altes Testament

BO	<i>Bibliotheca orientalis</i>
BZ	<i>Berliner Theologische Zeitschrift</i>
BWANT	Beiträge zur Wissenschaft vom Alten und Neuen Testament
BZ NF	Biblische Zeitschrift Neue Folge
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
CAD	<i>Chicago Assyrian Dictionary</i>
CBET	Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CBR	<i>Currents in Biblical Research</i>
CDA	Jeremy Black, Andrew George, and Nicholas Postgate, <i>A Concise Dictionary of Akkadian</i> (2nd ed., Wiesbaden 2000)
CDOG	Internationales Colloquium der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft
CHANE	Culture and History of the Ancient Near East
CHD	<i>The Chicago Hittite Dictionary</i>
CIG	<i>Corpus Inscriptiorum Graecarum</i> , ed. August Boeckh. 4 vols. Berlin 1828–77
CM	Cuneiform Monographs
CP	<i>Classical Philology</i>
CRRAI	Comptes rendus de la Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale
CT	<i>Cuneiform Texts from Babylonian Tablets in the British Museum</i>
CTH	Catalog der Texte der Hethiter
CW	<i>Classical World</i>
DI	Albert Rehm and Richard Harder, <i>Didyma II: Die Inschriften</i> , Berlin 1958
DDD ²	<i>Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible</i> . Edited by K. van der Toorn, B. Becking, and P. W. van der Horst. Second edition (Leiden 1995)
DMOA	Documenta et Monumenta Orientis Antiqui
DNP	<i>Der neue Pauly: Enzyklopädie der Antike</i> . Edited by H. Cancik and H. Schneider. (Stuttgart 1996–)
DSD	<i>Dead Sea Discoveries</i>
EA	El-Amarna tablets
EPRO	Etudes préliminaires aux religions orientales dans l'empire romain
<i>ErIsr</i>	<i>Eretz-Israel</i>
EVO	<i>Egitto e Vicino Oriente</i>
FAT	Forschungen zum Alten Testament
FD	<i>Fouilles de Delphes</i> , ed. Théophile Homolle et al. 5 vols. Paris 1906–
FLP	Tablets in the collections of the Free Library of Pennsylvania
FM	Florilegium Marianum
FOTL	Forms of the Old Testament Literature

FRLANT	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments
Gilg.	The Epic of Gilgamesh
GMTR	Guides to the Mesopotamian Textual Record
GR	<i>Greece and Rome</i>
HANEM	History of the Ancient Near East Monographs
HeBAI	<i>Hebrew Bible and Ancient Israel</i>
HO	Handbuch der Orientalistik
HR	<i>History of Religions</i>
HSCP	<i>Harvard Studies in Classical Philology</i>
HSM	Harvard Semitic Monographs
HSS	Harvard Semitic Studies
HTKAT	Herders theologischer Kommentar zum Alten Testament
HTR	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
HUCA	<i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i>
ICos	<i>Inscriptions of Cos</i> , edited by W. R. Paton & G. L. Hicks, Oxford 1891
IEJ	<i>Israel Exploration Journal</i>
IG	<i>Inscriptiones Graecae</i> . Many vols. Berlin 1828–
IM	Tablets in the collections of the Iraq Museum
<i>I.Pergamon</i>	<i>Altertümer von Pergamon: Inschriften</i> , 8.2. ed. M. Fränkel, Berlin 1895; 8.3. ed. Christian Habicht, Berlin 1969
<i>Int</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
JAJSup	The Journal of Ancient Judaism Supplements
JANER	<i>Journal for the Study of Ancient Near Eastern Religions</i>
JANESCU	<i>Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society of Columbia University</i>
JAOS	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
JBL	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
JCS	<i>Journal of Cuneiform Studies</i>
JHNES	Johns Hopkins Near Eastern Studies
JHS	<i>Journal of Hellenic Studies</i>
JNES	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>
JNSL	<i>Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages</i>
JR	<i>Journal of Religion</i>
JRA	<i>Journal of Roman Archaeology</i>
JRS	<i>Journal of Roman Studies</i>
JSJSup	Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism
JSOT	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>

JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament: Supplement Series
JSPSup	Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha: Supplement Series
JSS	<i>Journal of Semitic Studies</i>
JSSEA	<i>Journal of the Society for the Study of Egyptian Antiquities</i>
K	Tablets in the collections of the British Museum
KAR	<i>Keilschrifttexte aus Assur religiösen Inhalts</i> . Edited by E. Ebeling (Leipzig 1919–23)
KASKAL	<i>Kaskal, Rivista di storia, ambienti e culture del Vicino Oriente Antico</i>
KBO	<i>Keilschrifttexte aus Bogazköi</i> (Leipzig 1916–)
KTT	Manfred Krebernik, <i>Tall Bi'a/Tuttul II: Die altorientalischen Schriftfunde</i> (Saarbrücken 2001)
Lak	Texts from Lachish in Johannes Renz and Wolfgang Röllig, <i>Handbuch der althebräischen Epigraphik</i> (Darmstadt 1995)
LAPO	Littératures anciennes du Proche-Orient
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
LD	Lectio divina
LHBOTS	The Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies
LKA	Erich Ebeling, <i>Literarische Keilschrifttexte aus Assur</i> (Berlin 1953)
LKU	Adam Falkenstein, <i>Literarische Keilschrifttexte aus Uruk</i> (Berlin 1931)
LSJ	Liddell, H. G., R. Scott, H. S. Jones, <i>A Greek-English Lexicon. 9th ed. with revised supplement</i> (Oxford 1996)
LTBA	<i>Die lexikalischen Tafelserien der Babylonier und Assyrer</i> , Bd. I: L. Matous; Bd. II: W. von Soden (Berlin 1933)
LXX	The Septuagint
M.	Tablet signature of texts from Mari
MARI	<i>Mari: Annales de recherches interdisciplinaires</i>
MdB	Le Monde de la Bible
MDP	Mémoires de la Délégation en Perse
Milet	<i>Milet: Ergebnisse der Ausgrabungen und Untersuchungen</i> , Berlin: de Gruyter 1996–2007
MSL	Materialien zum sumerischen Lexikon/Materials for the Sumerian Lexicon
MT	Masoretic Text
NABU	<i>Nouvelles assyriologiques brèves et utilitaires</i>
NEA	<i>Near Eastern Archaeology</i>
NRSV	The New Revised Standard Version
Numen	<i>Numen: International Review for the History of Religions</i>
OAC	Orientis Antiqui Collectio

OBO	Orbis biblicus et orientalis
OEAGR	<i>Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Greece and Rome</i>
OECT	Oxford Editions of Cuneiform Inscriptions
OIP	Oriental Institute Publications
OLA	Orientalia Iovaniensia Analecta
OPMS	<i>Occasional Publications of the Museum of the Sealand</i>
Or	<i>Orientalia</i>
OTL	Old Testament Library
OTS	Old Testament Studies
PAWB	Potsdamer Altertumswissenschaftliche Beiträge
PFES	Publications of the Finnish Exegetical Society
PIHANS	Publications de l'Institut historique-archéologique néerlandais de Stamboul
PIPOAC	Publications de l'Institut du Proche-Orient Ancien du Collège de France
PSBA	Proceedings of the Society of Biblical Archaeology
PW	<i>A. F. Paulys Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft</i> . New edition edited by G. Wissowa. 49 vols. (Munich)
RA	<i>Revue d'assyriologie et d'archéologie orientale</i>
RAC	<i>Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum</i>
RB	<i>Revue biblique</i>
REA	<i>Revue des études anciennes</i>
RGRW	Religions in the Roman World
RhM	<i>Rheinisches Museum für Philologie</i>
RIBLA	<i>Revista de interpretación bíblica latino-americana</i>
RIMB	The Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia, Babylonian Periods
RIME	The Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia, Early Periods
RINAP	Royal Inscriptions of the Neo-Assyrian Period
RivB	<i>Rivista biblica italiana</i>
RIA	<i>Reallexikon der Assyriologie</i>
RThPh	<i>Revue de théologie et de philosophie</i>
SAA	State Archives of Assyria
SAAB	<i>State Archives of Assyria Bulletin</i>
SAAS	State Archives of Assyria Studies
SAMD	Studies in Ancient Magic and Divination
SANER	Studies in Ancient Near Eastern Records
SAOC	Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilizations
SB	Standard Babylonian

SBAW	Sitzungsberichte der bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften
SBB	Stuttgarter biblische Beiträge
SBLAIL	Society of Biblical Literature Ancient Israel and its Literature
SBLSBS	Society of Biblical Literature Sources for Biblical Study
SBSymS	Society of Biblical Literature Symposium Series
SBLWAW	Society of Biblical Literature Writings from the Ancient World
SEG	<i>Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum</i>
SGDI	<i>Sammlung der griechischen Dialekt-Inschriften</i> , ed. Herman Collitz et al. 4 vols. Göttingen 1884–89
SHCANE	Studies in the History and Culture of the Ancient Near East
SIG	<i>Sylloge Inscriptionum Graecarum</i> , ed. Wilhelm Dittenberger. Third edition. 4 vols. Leipzig 1915–24
SJLA	Studies in Judaism in Late Antiquity
SJOT	<i>Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament</i>
SpTU	Spätbabylonische Texte aus Uruk
STAR	Studies in Theology and Religion
StAT	Studien zu der Assur-Texten
STDJ	Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah
StOr	<i>Studies in Oriental Religions</i>
SVTP	Studia in Veteris Testamenti pseudepigraphica
Syria	<i>Syria. Archéologie, art et histoire</i>
T.	Tablet signature of texts from Mari
TAD	Bezalel Porten and Ada Yardeni, <i>Textbook of Aramaic Documents from Ancient Egypt</i> (Jerusalem 1986–1999)
TCL	Textes cunéiformes. Musée du Louvre
TCS	Texts from Cuneiform Sources
ThB	Theologische Bücherei
ThesCRA	<i>Thesaurus cultus et rituum antiquorum</i>
TLZ	<i>Theologische Literaturzeitung</i>
TS	Texts and Studies
TSAJ	Texte und Studien zum antiken Judentum
TTK	<i>Tidsskrift for Teologi og Kirke</i>
TUAT	<i>Texte aus der Umwelt des Alten Testaments. Edited by Otto Kaiser. Gütersloh, 1984–</i>
TWAT	<i>Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Alten Testament.</i>
UC	Tablets in the collections of University College London
UF	<i>Ugarit-Forschungen</i>

VS	Vorderasiatische Schriftdenkmäler der Königlichen/Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin
VT	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
VTSup	Supplements to Vetus Testamentum
W	Field numbers of tablets excavated at Warka (Uruk)
WAWSup	Writings from the Ancient World Supplement Series
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WiBiLex	<i>Das wissenschaftliche Bibellexikon im Internet</i>
WMANT	Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament
WO	<i>Die Welt des Orients</i>
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
WVDOG	Wissenschaftliche Veröffentlichungen der deutschen Orientgesellschaft
YBC	Yale Babylonian Collection
YOS	Yale Oriental Series, Texts
ZA	<i>Zeitschrift für Assyriologie</i>
ZAR	<i>Zeitschrift für altorientalische und biblische Rechtsgeschichte</i>
ZAW	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
ZPE	<i>Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik</i>
ZTK	<i>Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche</i>
ZTT	Tablets from Ziyaret Tepe

Part I
Theory

Constructing Prophetic Divination

PROPHECY AS A CONSTRUCT

Historical Phenomenon and Scholarly Concept

In January 2016, I attended the concert of the New Jersey Symphony Orchestra performing Richard Danielpour's percussion concerto *The Wounded Healer*, conducted by Jacques Lacombe with Lisa Pegher as the percussion soloist. The work consists of four parts, entitled The Prophet, The Trickster, The Martyr, and The Shaman, "based on different guises and faces that the Wounded Healer might show up as across different cultures," as told by the soloist on her website.¹ Each part introduces a new perspective to the title of the concerto. The concerto begins with austere sound of chimes introducing The Prophet, whose voice, standing clearly out throughout the first part, is followed by The Trickster, a crispy and playful interplay of the marimba with the orchestra. The nearly anguished tone of the xylophone gives expression to the agony of The Martyr, only to give way to the frantic drum solo in the last part, The Shaman.

The respective roles of the four healer characters can be described as the messenger inspired by a higher power (The Prophet), the rule-breaking equalizer (The Trickster), the persecuted advocate of a belief (The Martyr), and the spiritual journeyer having access to the transcendental world (The Shaman). The four characters of Danielpour's concerto are indicative of the role models attributed to people who are believed—at least by some other people—to be able to mediate between the human and superhuman worlds, bringing about a remedial effect in human society while themselves being wounded by their own activity often seen as bizarre by other members of the community. These persons exist historically, but they also represent a cultural image, both as a projection and as a retrojection.

¹ See <http://www.lisapegher.com>; see also the composer's website <http://www.richard-danielpour.com>.

Characters with one or more of the features of Danielpour's healers can regularly be found in textual sources from the ancient Eastern Mediterranean sphere, whether we think of the biblical prophets, the Delphic Pythia, or the Mesopotamian ecstasies, all appreciated in their time as messengers of the divine—however, not without contestation. It is through these characters and their activities in ancient Near Eastern (including the Hebrew Bible) and Greek texts that this book attempts to draw a picture of the ancient phenomenon known as prophecy.

“Prophecy” is a word with many meanings, depending on the context and the user. It may be used in a very broad sense, including all of Danielpour's four characters, or in a more restricted sense referring only to specific kinds of activities. A brief look at a dictionary of any modern language will reveal that the most common meanings of the word “prophecy” are related to the prediction of future, the “prophet” being equivalent to a fortune-teller, a soothsayer, or whatever designations are used for persons who claim, or are believed, to be able to see future events. The predictive meaning of the “prophetic” vocabulary is concomitant of the use of similar terminology in the ancient Mediterranean cultures. However, it is evident that there is more to prophecy than just prediction in ancient sources. In fact, the predictive activity appears not to be the primary function of people usually designated as prophets; rather, prediction is but another aspect of mediation of knowledge that is believed to derive from divine sources.

Who are, then, the people we talk about when we refer to “prophets” in the ancient Eastern Mediterranean, and what kind of sources do we look for when we want to know about these people? This is something the scholarly community has to agree about. As a *scholarly concept*, prophecy is created and maintained by the community of scholars that provides the matrix within which the concept works and the purpose for which it is constructed. As a *historical phenomenon*, the thing we call prophecy is the multifarious product of socially contingent processes that have taken place in different times and contexts. Both ways, prophecy is not something that is just “out there,” inevitably determined by the “nature of things”; rather, it is a *social and intellectual construct* that exists if there is a common understanding about what it means and how it can be recognized.²

Prophecy is not (or, perhaps, not anymore) a matter of course. The historical phenomenon and a corresponding scholarly concept cannot be taken for granted but needs to be defined, constructed, and reconstructed by any community that needs it for historically contingent purposes. Prophets, whether as a concept or as a class of people, exist if there is a community acknowledging their existence and providing certain people and practices with

² See especially Hacking 1999.

such a label.³ The difference between the concept and the people can be seen as one between map and territory: the concept of prophecy is a map attempting to draw a navigable picture of the terrain formed by the sources informing on people and practices we try to interpret.⁴ Like every map, every concept is also the result of an interpretative process, during which decisions are made concerning the features that are highlighted more than others. A map is not a mere description of the terrain, and “a theory, a model, a conceptual category, *cannot be simply the data writ large*.”⁵

To say that prophecy is a construct is not to say it is not true, much less to diminish the value of the phenomenon thus called or the people involved in it. The construct refers to the scholarly idea and matrix, not to historical people and events. Prophets appear as intellectual constructs already in ancient texts, such as the prophetic books of the Hebrew Bible and in their subsequent learned interpretations in, for instance, the Dead Sea Scrolls.⁶ To call prophecy a construct, thus, does not deprive prophecy of its historical significance, let alone its veracity—on the contrary, we can hope that the idea and the matrix can help us to identify social contingencies that make our construct absolutely inseparable from historical factualities and people involved in them. Why should we still call it a construct? There are two reasons: first, because all history-writing is based on sources that themselves present constructs of the realities of their time; and second, because we are ourselves subjects of the social and historical processes, indeed, a part of the matrix within which the construct takes shape.

Moreover, even though we should always be careful to distinguish the ancient native (“emic”) constructs from the modern analytical (“etic”) ones, the scholarly reconstruction of an ancient phenomenon is always to some extent a “mimetic” enterprise⁷ because the modern constructs cannot but rest upon the ancient ones. This does not exclude a critical stance on the ancient constructs, but it certainly makes it difficult to see alternative pictures, unless they are provided by the sources themselves.

Ancient sources always comprise a fragmentary set of different kinds of materials; disconnected pieces of evidence and scattered sets of more or less compatible sources whose relationship we have to establish and reconstruct. This means, figuratively speaking, that we have just a “keyhole” perspective to

³ Wilson 1980: 51: “Intermediaries do not operate in a vacuum. They are integral parts of their societies and cannot exist without social guidance and support.”

⁴ The metaphor of the map and the territory goes back to Jonathan Z. Smith’s classic *Map Is Not Territory* (J. Z. Smith 1978). The same metaphor is used of “religion” by Jensen 2014: 7: “the concept of religion is a kind of map of the ‘thing’ religion, that is, all those human activities which we classify as having to do with ‘religion.’”

⁵ J. Z. Smith 2004: 209 (emphasis original).

⁶ See Jassen 2007, 2008a, 2008b; cf. Stökl 2015b: 286–9; Nissinen 2008b.

⁷ Cf. Bahrani 2008: 71–4.

the past;⁸ that our sole access to the past is through sources that yield only restricted views of the landscape. Sometimes the perspective is wide, but very often it is quite narrow. Sometimes two or three different keyholes show clearly the same landscape, but very often two keyholes show different parts of a landscape offering only a partial view on it; indeed, we have to decide whether the two views show the same landscape at all. The question is how we are able to connect the fragments, combining the views seen through different keyholes in a methodologically sound and historically reliable way.

Our sources present the prophetic phenomenon in “different guises and faces” depending on the historical context, perspective, and textual genre. Even the academic constructs of prophecy necessarily reflect the diversity of the sources, resulting in a variety of scholarly constructs, often organized according to traditional academic disciplines specializing in specific parts of the ancient Eastern Mediterranean source materials. Therefore, our phenomenon, as presented in academic studies and textbooks, always inhabits a setting in a scholarly agenda, be it a “Theology of the Old Testament,” a “History of Greek Religion,” “Ancient Near Eastern Divination,” or another matrix within which the idea of prophecy has a meaning.

Hebrew Bible, Ancient Near East, and Greece

Hitherto, the documentation of ancient Eastern Mediterranean prophecy has been viewed roughly as three distinct groups: *biblical prophecy* and *ancient Near Eastern prophecy*, which have been the subject of comparison since the 1950s, plus the *Greek oracle*, not always designated as “prophecy” and usually not discussed in conjunction with the biblical and Near Eastern sources, even though it could and should be seen as a part of the same landscape in geographical and phenomenological terms. This threefold construction arises from the classification of ancient phenomena according to source materials coming from different times and places, written in different ancient languages, and studied in different academic contexts.

The threefold breakdown of the source material into biblical, Near Eastern, and Greek reflects the current division of academic disciplines and the present state of communication between them. Even the present book is based on this division, however, in awareness of its shortcomings. The canonized biblical text with its long and unbroken history of interpretation has a distinctive literary and historical character very different from the more or less haphazard variety of Near Eastern textual evidence, which, again, shows a picture rather

⁸ I owe the keyhole metaphor to Christoph Levin who used it in his inaugural lecture at the twenty-first congress of the International Organization for the Study of the Old Testament in Munich, August 4, 2013.

distinct from the Greek sources which also represent a great variety of text types. This may be an incentive for scholars to study the three source materials as integrated entities, presuming a straightforward correspondence of the ancient phenomenon to the image given by the source materials, and imagining the “biblical” (or “Israelite”), “ancient Near Eastern,” and “Greek” prophecies as inherently autonomous, if not autochthonous phenomena. Such a construction has the propensity for hiding the variation within each class while at the same time highlighting the gap between them. As the result, one may easily lose sight of simple facts, for instance, that the Hebrew Bible is part of ancient Near Eastern literature, and that Greece is actually not worlds apart from Mesopotamia.

The threefold division of ancient prophecy also reflects different interpretative contexts of the ancient material and, consequently, the history of research. The study of biblical prophecy has a long history as an academic pursuit, preceded by an even longer Jewish and Christian interpretative tradition. As a biblical concept, prophecy is contextualized in Jewish and Christian theology and religion, whereby prophecy is not just an object of study but a significant constituent of cultural memory and provider of identity. The academic study of biblical prophecy, for its part, is deeply rooted in nineteenth-century scholarship whose brilliant representatives, such as Julius Wellhausen and Bernhard Duhm,⁹ were the founding fathers of the scholarly image of what was later to be called the “classical prophecy” of “ancient Israel.”¹⁰

When we turn to the study of the so-called “extra-biblical prophecy”—a term to be abandoned, because it lumps together so much different material with the single common denominator of not being biblical—the situation looks very different. Non-biblical prophecy may still often play the role of “the other” in studies of ancient prophecy, because the texts documenting prophecy in the ancient Eastern Mediterranean are hardly a constituent of any modern scholar’s religious tradition. They do form part of our cultural heritage but not of our cultural memory. This is probably why it has been a commonplace until the very recent years to approach the ancient Near Eastern records of prophecy from the biblical point of view, using them as “context of scripture,” a background against which the special features of biblical prophecy can be highlighted. There is nothing to be wondered at about this. The very concept of prophecy has traditionally belonged primarily to the vocabulary of biblical scholars and theologians. On the other hand, the documentation of the ancient Near Eastern prophecy has until the end of the twentieth century remained meager in quantity and restricted both in terms of geography and chronology.

The Bible-centered approach has the disadvantage of highlighting primarily those features in other sources that are useful in resolving biblical problems and serve the comparative purpose, and neglecting other, perhaps more significant

⁹ Wellhausen 1905; Duhm 1875, 1922.

¹⁰ See, e.g. Smend 2007: 91–117; Schmid 1996.

aspects. Furthermore, a value judgment in favor of biblical prophecy, spoken or unspoken, can be recognized especially when it comes to the ethical proclamation of the biblical prophets which allegedly sets them qualitatively apart from their cognates in the ancient Near East.¹¹ The higher appreciation of the biblical prophecy is closely related to the idea of ethical monotheism found in texts of the “writing prophets” of the Hebrew Bible, who, therefore, have been strictly divorced from their religio-historical environment and elevated to a higher level of spirituality.¹²

Compared to biblical prophecy, the ancient Near Eastern texts related to prophecy have been the object of active study for only a relatively short period. The very category of “ancient Near Eastern prophecy” did not emerge before the last decades of the twentieth century, and it is still sometimes ignored by Assyriologists.¹³

Even though it was still possible in the 1950s to hold the opinion that biblical or Israelite prophecy had no historical counterpart,¹⁴ some historians of religion of the first half of the twentieth century, such as Gustav Hölscher, Johannes Lindblom, and Alfred Haldar, duly recognized sources comparable to biblical prophecy, without, however, having much ancient prophetic material to refer to.¹⁵ Some of the texts from the seventh century BCE now known as Assyrian prophecies were published already in 1875 but were recognized as anything comparable to biblical prophecy by a few scholars only.¹⁶ The comparative work on prophetic sources—or better, the search for parallels to biblical prophecy—was slowly revived only when the eighteenth-century BCE archives of Mari were discovered and several letters with a prophetic content were published from 1948 on,¹⁷ culminating in the 1988 edition of the main bulk of the epistolary material by Jean-Marie Durand.¹⁸ Assyrian prophecy re-entered the scholarly agenda in the early 1970s, but Simo Parpola’s edition of the texts had to wait until the late 1990s,¹⁹ after which the number of studies devoted to

¹¹ For criticism of the Bible-centered perspective, see, e.g. Sasson 1998; Ellis 1989: 132–3.

¹² For the impact of this idea on the study of the biblical prophecy, see Loretz 1992: 198–208.

¹³ For instance, such recent overviews of Mesopotamian cultures as *The Oxford Handbook of Cuneiform Cultures* (Radner and Robson (eds) 2011) and *The Babylonian World* (Leick (ed.) 2009) ignore prophecy altogether. On the other hand, it is duly recognized, e.g. in *Reallexikon der Assyriologie* (Frahm 2006–8) and in the newest overview of Mesopotamian divinatory texts (Koch 2015: 15–24, 291–6); cf. also Schneider 2011: 85–8.

¹⁴ Thus Noth 1956: 232: “Wir kennen zu dieser Erscheinung der ‘Prophetie’ kein wirkliches Gegenstück aus der Geschichte der Menschheit.”

¹⁵ Hölscher 1914; Lindblom 1934, 1973; and Haldar 1945, who, in fact, discusses a substantial amount of Mesopotamian religious and divinatory texts.

¹⁶ The most notable exceptions include Delattre 1889; Großmann 1914; Meissner 1925: 281. For the history of research, see Weippert 2014: 228–30; Parpola 1997: xiii–xiv.

¹⁷ Dossin 1948, 1967, 1978; Lods and Dossin 1950.

¹⁸ Durand 1988.

¹⁹ Parpola 1997. Earlier studies on Neo-Assyrian prophecy were published especially by Manfred Weippert and Herbert B. Huffmon; for a full bibliography until 1997, see Parpola 1997: cix–cxii.

Neo-Assyrian prophecies, often in comparison with their parallels in the Hebrew Bible and in the letters from Mari, has multiplied.²⁰

The publication of the two main corpora of sources has been the prerequisite of recognizing ancient Near Eastern prophecy as a meaningful category. To date, the documentation of prophecy in the ancient Near East, that is, Mesopotamia, Syria, and the Levant, comprises over 170 texts,²¹ which makes it possible to study it in its own right and not just as a parallel phenomenon to biblical prophecy. This by no means excludes comparative studies—on the contrary, it enables the comparison of the textual materials on a broader basis and in a more critical fashion.

While ancient Near Eastern and biblical prophecy are now generally perceived as belonging to the same picture, the discussion on the relationship between ancient Near Eastern prophecy and Greek oracle is still at an initial stage. Even the use of common terminology has taken different routes at some significant points: classicists may use the word “prophecy,” but not quite in the same meaning as biblical scholars who, for their part, use the word “oracle” typically in a more narrow sense than the classicists.

The Greek oracle, the Delphic oracle in particular, has been the object of scholarly study for quite as long a time as biblical prophecy;²² however, the different historical and academic contexts seem to have discouraged a thorough comparison between the sources for Greek oracle and biblical or other Near Eastern texts. As a consequence, Greek oracle and biblical and Near Eastern prophecy have been approached as more or less strictly distinct categories. Classical scholars belonging to older generations would rather flatly deny any relevance of Near Eastern or biblical materials for the study of the Greek oracle.²³ Fortunately, we can today observe an increasing and mutual interest in exploring the Greek, Near Eastern, and biblical materials as belonging to the shared cultural sphere of the ancient Eastern Mediterranean, whatever their mutual connection and influence might be thought of to have been.²⁴

²⁰ Monographs and collections of essays with extensive discussion of the Neo-Assyrian prophetic material include Pongratz-Leisten 1999, 2015; Weippert 2014; Gordon and Barstad (eds) 2013; Stökl 2012a; Mack 2011; de Jong 2007; Hilber 2005; Köckert and Nissinen (eds) 2003; Nissinen (ed.) 2000.

²¹ Society of Biblical Literature Writings from the Ancient World (hereafter SBLWAW) 12, 2nd edn.

²² See Bouché-Leclercq 1879–82, esp. vol. 3 (1880); Myers 1880: 425–92.

²³ e.g. Fontenrose 1978: 229 and Parke 1988: 219. Recently, Kai Trampedach (2015: 20–1) has expressed doubts about the comparability of Greek and Mesopotamian divination, at least when it comes to mutual influences. He discusses Mesopotamian scholarly divination at length and remains open to the possible connection of Mesopotamian omen divination with Etruscan and Roman divinatory practices (Trampedach 2015: 534–49); however: “Anders in Griechenland” (p. 549), where the divination was much less formal and systematic.

²⁴ See the pioneering works of Walter Burkert (1992) and Martin L. West (1997); with regard to prophecy, see the more recent contributions of de Jong 2015; Ustinova 2013; Beerden 2013; Marinatos 2009; M. A. Flower 2008: 228–30; Lange 2006, 2007, 2009; Hagedorn 2007; Huffmon 2007.

Constructing the big picture of ancient Eastern Mediterranean prophecy has long been obstructed by the separate lives of the disciplines of biblical and classical studies, and the late appearance of a larger bulk of pertinent Mesopotamian sources to the scholarly agenda. The picture is still in the making, but a scholarly motivation is emerging for constructing it as big and attractive as the sources enable it to appear.

PROPHECY AS DIVINATION

Why Divination?

Once we have agreed that prophecy is not simply “out there” but is a social and intellectual construct, the existence of which is the matter of mutual agreement of the community who provides the matrix within which the idea of prophecy works, we will also have to contextualize it, defining its relation to other related matrices, first and foremost to the concept and institutions of divination.²⁵

As the starting point for the contextualization, we may first pay attention to the notion of *divine-human communication*—a cross-cultural idea to be found independently in different times and cultures and belonging to the basic architecture of human perception of what is perceived of as superhuman or supernatural. The people living in the ancient Eastern Mediterranean world, as far as our sources enable us to know, did not reckon on an absolute chasm between the natural and the supernatural. Everything that happened was “natural” in the sense that “nature” belonged to the domain of the supreme agency of the divine agents whose capabilities, if not absolutely unlimited in every case, clearly exceeded those of humans. The alleged activity of the divine agents was “superhuman” indeed because of its indefinite capacity, without, therefore, being perceived of as “supernatural.” The difference between humans and deities was recognized and actively maintained in various ways, but it was nevertheless not totally unbridgeable. Communication between the domains was seen as a distinct possibility, and collaboration between human and divine agents was believed to take place.

The idea of communication between human and divine realms implies the idea of the agency and intentionality of divine, or superhuman, agents (gods, spirits, demons, and the like) who are in possession of knowledge that is not

²⁵ For the interface of prophecy and divination, see, e.g. Hamori 2015: 19–35; Stökl 2012a: 7–11, 2015b: 270–80; Anthonioz 2013: 21–33; R. Schmitt 2014: 1–17; de Jong 2007: 313–18, 2015: 125–7; Kitz 2003; Cancik-Kirschbaum 2003; Pongratz-Leisten 2003: 132–68; Barstad 2002: 87–9.

ordinarily available to human beings.²⁶ The *mental idea* of a superhuman becomes practicable in various *public representations* such as practices, institutions, and artifacts, which are needed for the maintenance and elaboration of mental ideas.²⁷ The idea of divine–human mediation can be seen as a universal product of the human mind. The human intuition about gods communicating with humans is a mental representation taking shape either independently or through cultural contacts in different social settings. An institution or a practice, on the other hand, is a public representation based on the mental representation.

Within the cognitive framework involving divine agency, superhuman knowledge is typically perceived of as a secret of gods, which is normally hidden from humans. Socrates, according to Xenophon:

if there was no room for doubt, he advised them to act as they thought best; but if the consequences could not be foreseen, he sent them to the oracle to inquire whether the thing ought to be done.²⁸

The deepest secrets, says Socrates, the gods reserved to themselves, hence:

what is hidden from mortals we should try to find out from the gods by divination for to him that is in their grace the gods grant a sign.²⁹

Divine knowledge may be mediated to humans by means of specific practices and rituals performed by specialists “in the grace” of the gods, authorized by respective institutions (prophets, diviners, shamans, and the like). These *practices* and *institutions* can be seen as “networks of systematic relations, correlations and causations between this and the ‘other world’: things in this world are signs of necessity, knowledge and intentionality.”³⁰ Human communities tend to institutionalize such a communication by appointing specialists who master the specific techniques and skills necessary for its maintenance. In the ancient Eastern Mediterranean world, such specialists were appointed by virtue of their background, education, personal skills, or behavior—not every person was qualified to do that. While gods were typically thought to be free to communicate with anyone by any means, accredited institutions of *divination* were usually regarded as the most reliable interpreters of the “signs of knowledge.”³¹

²⁶ See, e.g. Pyysiäinen 2009; Jensen 2014.

²⁷ Pyysiäinen 2009: 53: “Supernatural agent representations are mental concepts, ideas, images, and beliefs; texts, paintings, works of art, uttered words, and so on, are extramental, public representations expressing mental representations. Public representations also trigger mental representations.”

²⁸ Xenophon, *Memorabilia* [*Mem.*], 1.1.6.

²⁹ Xenophon, *Mem.* 1.1.9; cf. Bowden 2013: 43. ³⁰ Jensen 2014: 81.

³¹ Beerden (2013: 103–5, 224–9) finds the level of institutionalization of divination much higher in Mesopotamia than in Greece. For self-appointed diviners, see Beerden 2013: 55–9.

The rationale behind divination is, thus, (1) the human experience of the lack of full knowledge of things essentially important for running the everyday life; (2) the belief in superhuman full-access agents who possess this strategic information;³² and (3) the availability of this information to humans to a certain extent by way of consulting the full-access agents with the help of divinatory experts. The need for divination is triggered by uncertainty, and its purpose is to become conversant with superhuman knowledge in order to “elicit answers (that is, oracles) to questions beyond the range of ordinary human understanding.”³³ Where the source of the uncertainty is found in human ignorance of divine decrees, divination is there to help both individuals and communities to explain contingency, to reduce anxiety about the uncertainty and insecurity of human life, and to cope with the risk brought about by human ignorance.³⁴

Divination is one of the systems of knowledge and belief that serve the purpose of the maintenance of the symbolic universe.³⁵ The phenomenon of divination is known from all over the world in societies sharing the conviction that things happening on earth are not coincidental but managed by superhuman agents, reflecting decisions made in the world of gods or spirits. In ancient Eastern Mediterranean cultures divination had a fundamental socio-religious significance. In spite of philosophical discussions on the role of chance in human life, “[f]or most Greeks there was no such thing as ‘coincidence,’”³⁶ and the same can be said of ancient Mesopotamians and the Levantine peoples, whose divinatory practices are well documented. In Mesopotamian texts we find the concept of *šimtu*, often translated as “fate,” but better understood as the divinely fixed order of things that is involved “in the most basic levels of human experience; the personal, social, and cosmic, that is to say, in the sphere of man’s relation to the gods.”³⁷ The *šimtu* was decreed by gods, but it was not deterministic and unalterable, since gods were always free to do what they wanted. Even chance, therefore, had a divine agent.

³² For full-access agents as sources of strategic information, see Pyysiäinen 2009: 31–2, referring to Boyer 2001: 155.

³³ Tedlock 2001: 189.

³⁴ See Jensen 2014: 81; for the concept of “risk,” see Eidinow 2007: 13–25. Cf. Beerden 2013: 196–203, who criticizes the use of the term “risk” as being too much influenced by modern probabilistic thinking; however: “What risk assessment does for modern man, was what divination did for ancient man: both risk assessment and divination are thought to reduce uncertainty” (Beerden 2013: 203).

³⁵ For the concepts of “symbolic universe” and “universe-maintenance,” see Berger and Luckmann 1989: 109–12.

³⁶ M. A. Flower 2008: 108.

³⁷ Rochberg 2010a: 22.

Divination and Magic

Divination and magic belong to the same conceptual world. “Magic” can be defined as symbolic ritual activity with the purpose of attaining a specific goal by means of divine–human communication and superhuman assistance, relying on specific skills, actions, and knowledge required from the human agent.³⁸ Magic and divination have much in common. Both are based on collaboration of human and superhuman agents who often are acknowledged as accredited professionals with special skills and capacity of intermediating between divine and human worlds. Diviners and magicians may also be distrusted, either because of their faulty performance or because the superhuman powers represented by them are found either hostile or futile.³⁹

However, there is a difference between magic and divination with regard to their practice and purpose. The function of divination is to acquire and transmit superhuman knowledge. Diviners receive messages and omens that are believed to be of divine origin and transmit the divine knowledge to their audiences, often with an interpretation of the meaning of the messages and omens they have received. The recipients of the message are supposed to draw their own conclusions of how this knowledge should be implemented. Magic, again, attempts to bring about a change in the life of the patient, whether beneficent (healing, warding off evil) or harmful. While the function of divination, hence, is to acquire and transmit divine knowledge, the purpose of magic is to cause a direct effect to the patient in collaboration with the divine powers.⁴⁰

Magic is typically ritual activity, while divinatory acts may or may not be accompanied by a ritual. The divinatory performance depends on the method. While the prophetic performance typically happens in an altered state of consciousness, haruspices perform their divinatory rituals in an ordinary state of mind. The outcome of the prophetic performance is primarily oral, while the outcome of the reading of the entrails of a sacrificial animal is reported in a written document. In both cases, the verbal expression has a narrative function, expressing the divine will in a verbal form. In magical acts, the function of verbal expressions is performative rather than narrative: instead of transferring information, they are performed to fulfill the purpose of the magical act. Both magic and divination may make use of material objects. In divination, the sheep liver or the constellation of stars serve as platforms of the omens to be interpreted. In a magical act, the material

³⁸ R. Schmitt 2004: 92–3: “Magie ist eine rituelsymbolische Handlung, die durchgeführt in einer adäquaten Situation, durch Nutzung bestimmter göttlich enthüllter Medien (Symbol, Wort und Handlung) und kosmischen Wissens, ein bestimmtes Ergebnis vermittels symbolischer Antizipation der göttlichen Intervention erzielt.”

³⁹ Cf. M. A. Flower 2008: 132–52.

⁴⁰ R. Schmitt 2004: 91.

element may represent the patient of the act (for instance, hair), or symbolize the divine protection (for instance, amulet).

Differences in function and performance entail differences in agency. The agency of the diviner is essentially reception and intermediation of superhuman knowledge, while the agency of a magician is rather putting such knowledge into practice. Therefore, the agency of the magician is typically more proactive and goal-oriented than the agency of the diviner. Applying Jesper Sørensen's cognitive model of human action consisting of the conditional space, the action space, and the effect space, we could say that divinatory agency is essentially related to the preconditions of the action and, hence, performed in the conditional space, while magical agency is bound to the effect and, therefore, belongs to the action space.⁴¹

In spite of the differences in function, performance, and agency, the roles of the diviner and the magician may be assumed by one and the same person. Prophets, such as Isaiah or Jeremiah, sometimes perform acts that certainly belong to the effect space of human action (2 Kgs 20:7/Isa. 38:21; Jer. 51:59–64). A prophet's hair and a fringe of a cloth may be used by another diviner to test whether the prophecy is trustworthy.⁴² In the Greek magical papyri from Roman Egypt, divination appears as but one of a variety of magical practices.⁴³ On the conceptual level, magic and divination are, therefore, polythetic categories sharing certain family resemblances.

Two Types of Divination?

Since divination is understood as divine-human communication, the role of the diviner is basically that of an intermediary between the human and superhuman domains. Sources from the ancient Eastern Mediterranean reveal a considerable variety of methods of divination.⁴⁴ These methods are often divided into two broad categories:⁴⁵

- (1) *technical*, or *inductive* methods that involve systematization of signs and omens by observing physical objects (extispicy, astrology, lot-casting, bird divination, fish divination, oil divination, etc.); and

⁴¹ See J. Sørensen 2007: 141–53 and cf. my more detailed analysis in Nissinen forthcoming.

⁴² See Hamori 2012. ⁴³ See Suárez de la Torre 2013.

⁴⁴ See Annus (ed.) 2010; Heintz (ed.) 1997 (Eastern Mediterranean world); Koch 2010, 2011, 2015; Maul 2013; Rochberg 2004, 2010a, 2010b, 2011; Cancik-Kirschbaum 2003; Guinan 2002; Pongratz-Leisten 1999 (Mesopotamia); M. A. Flower 2008; Johnston 2008; Eidinow 2007 (Greece); Dietrich and Loretz 1990 (Ugarit); R. Schmitt 2014; Jeffers 1996; Cryer 1994 (Hebrew Bible); Luijendijk 2014; Aune 2007 (Early Christianity).

⁴⁵ Cf., e.g. Koch 2015: 15–18; Stöckl 2012a: 7–11, 2012b: 54–5; Potter 1994: 15–29. Some definitions of divination exclude the second type, which is another way of reinforcing this division (e.g. J. P. Sørensen 1999: 181), or, in contrast, eradicate the distinction altogether (e.g. Beerden 2013: 20).

- (2) *intuitive*, or *inspired*, or *non-inductive* methods, such as dreams, visions, and prophecy.

The basic difference between the two types is that in the first category, divine knowledge is believed to be acquired by a cognitive process, while in the second category, it is supposedly obtained through inspiration or spirit-possession. Ulla Koch's distinction between *artificial* and *natural* divination amounts essentially to the same, but is based on the divinatory apparatus: "artificial divination relies on signs or messages, which have to be decoded whereas natural divination is perceived as immediately intelligible."⁴⁶ This classification of divinatory methods appears at its clearest in Mesopotamian societies, where diviners were typically educated specialists of one art of divination, and the job descriptions of the *haruspex*, the astrologer, the exorcist, and the prophet did not overlap.⁴⁷

The distinction between artificial and natural derives from Cicero's treatise *De divinatione*, where he recognizes these two types of divination.⁴⁸ Cicero addresses the significance of divination for philosophical inquiry into the relationship of divine and human worlds. For Cicero, the *mantikē* of the Greeks meant the foresight and knowledge of future events (*praesensio et scientia rerum futurarum*) acquired by means of consulting the counsel of the gods (*consilium deorum*). Cicero acknowledges both technical divination, such as Assyrian and Chaldean astrology, and non-technical divination, inspired in two ways, "the one by frenzy and the other by dreams" (*uno furente, altero somniante*).⁴⁹

Cicero was demonstrably aware of the variety of divinatory practices in the ancient Eastern Mediterranean and even Mesopotamia,⁵⁰ and his distinction of artificial and natural divination derives from Plato's discussion on divination in *Phaedrus* (244a–245a), where Socrates notes the difference between divinely inspired knowledge based on *mania* ("madness") and divinatory *tekhnē* based on observation and calculation. Socrates is strongly in favor of the former as a source of divine knowledge: according to his reasoning, *mania* is divinely inspired and therefore superior to a sane mind (*sōphrosynē*), which is only of human origin:

in reality the greatest of blessings comes to us through madness, when it is sent as a gift of the gods. For the prophetess at Delphi and the priestesses at Dodona

⁴⁶ Koch 2015: 16.

⁴⁷ See Koch 2015: 18–24.

⁴⁸ See Trampedach 2015: 519–21. Cicero's Cratippus (*De divinatione* [Div.] 1.71–2) gives "examples of true prophecies through frenzy and dreams" (*exemplis verarum vaticinationum et somniorum*) as different from the methods of divination which are dependent on conjecture, or on deductions from events previously observed and recorded, which are "not natural, but artificial, and include the inspection of entrails, augury, and the interpretation of dreams" (*genera divinandi ut supra dixi non naturalia sed artificiosa dicuntur in quo haruspices augures coniectoresque numerantur*); cf. Div. 2.26–7.

⁴⁹ Cicero, Div. 1.4.

⁵⁰ See Jacobs 2010.

when they have been mad have conferred many splendid benefits upon Greece both in private and in public affairs, but few or none when they have been in their right minds; and if we should speak of the Sibyl and all the others who by prophetic inspiration have foretold many things to many persons and thereby made them fortunate afterwards, anyone can see that we should speak a long time. . . . The ancients, then testify that in proportion as prophecy (*mantikē*) is superior to augury, both in name and in fact, in the same proportion madness, which comes from god, is superior to sanity, which is of human origin.⁵¹

Another type of *mania* is beneficial in curing sicknesses, and yet another the one that comes from the Muses, inspiring songs and poetry.⁵² In his dialogue with Ion, Socrates juxtaposes the diviners with the poets inspired by the Muses while arguing for the divine origin of poetry:

For not by art do they utter these things, but by divine influence; since, if they had fully learned by art to speak on one kind of theme only, they would know how to speak on all. And for this reason God takes away the mind of these men and uses them as his ministers, just as he does soothsayers and godly seers (*khṛēsmōdois kai tois mantesi tois theiois*), in order that we who hear them may know that it is not they who utter these words of great price, when they are out of their wits (*nous mē parestin*), but that it is God himself who speaks and addresses through them.⁵³

In this passage, even the seers (*manteis*), like the poets, are said to speak while “out of their wits.” This is noteworthy as the designation *mantis* was used by inspired and technical diviners alike. This does not neutralize the distinction but relativizes it—and not only on a terminological level, since our sources suggest that the Greek “soothsayers and godly seers” could sometimes divine in both ways. Greek sources describe lot-casting at Dodona and Delphi, whose female prophets are usually thought of to have delivered their oracles in the state of *mania*.⁵⁴ Therefore, while the Platonic distinction should be fully acknowledged,⁵⁵ we should not assume that the Greek divinatory practices over several centuries were necessarily organized according to this divide. Moreover, the distinction should refer to the practices of transmission rather than to Plato’s judgments about the diviners themselves.⁵⁶

⁵¹ Plato, *Phaedrus* [*Phaedr.*] 244a–b, d; translation from Fowler 1953: 464–7.

⁵² Plato, *Phaedr.* 244d–245a; cf. Plato, *Timaeus* [*Tim.*] 71e–72b.

⁵³ Plato, *Ion* 534c–d; translation from Fowler 1952: 423.

⁵⁴ See Johnston 2008: 68–71, 2015: 478–80; Raphals 2013: 152–4; M. A. Flower 2008: 84–91.

⁵⁵ Ustinova 2013: 40–1: “While the ancient dichotomy between direct and indirect prophecy is far from absolute, to discard this distinction altogether would be to strip Greek culture of one of its unique characteristics.”

⁵⁶ Cf. Trampedach 2015: 533: “Sie [scil. die ‘platonische Unterscheidung’] ist auf die griechische Mantik durchaus anwendbar und manchmal hilfreich bei der Beschreibung von mantischen Phänomenen. Die inhärente Bewertung aber, die die Einheit der griechischen Mantik in Frage stellt, führt historisch in die Irre.”

A different, and perhaps more momentous, dichotomy can be found in the Hebrew Bible where forms of divination other than prophecy are generally condemned as belonging to the foreign practices forbidden to the people of Israel:

When you come into the land that the Lord your God is giving you, you must not learn to imitate the abhorrent practices of those nations. No one shall be found among you who makes a son or daughter pass through fire, or who practices divination, or is a soothsayer, or an augur, or a sorcerer, or one who casts spells, or who consults ghosts or spirits, or who seeks oracles from the dead. For whoever does these things is abhorrent to the Lord; it is because of such abhorrent practices that the Lord your God is driving them out before you. You must remain completely loyal to the Lord your God. Although these nations that you are about to dispossess do give heed to soothsayers and diviners, as for you, the Lord your God does not permit you to do so.⁵⁷

In a less polemical mood, a biblical psalm refers to the supreme knowledge of God too wonderful for a human being to understand and too high to be attained, ending with the request:

Search me, O God, and know my heart;
test me and know my thoughts.
See if there is any wicked way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting.⁵⁸

Read against the background of divination, this psalm sounds like the end of it: there is no way to become conversant with divine knowledge. God's thoughts cannot be tested by humans in order to cope with the uncertainty and insecurity of everyday life; instead, God will test "if there is any wicked way" in the psalmist's life.

Prophecy becomes the privileged way of God's communication with humans in the Hebrew Bible. The elevated status of prophecy is not challenged anywhere in the biblical and early Jewish tradition, and biblical prophetic texts become the object of intensive reinterpretation—indeed, omens to be interpreted.⁵⁹ However, even in the Hebrew Bible, divination other than prophecy is not censured altogether.⁶⁰ Dreams may play an important role in revealing the divine will, and cleromancy (lot-casting) performed by notable figures such as Joshua and Samuel is reported with

⁵⁷ Deut. 18:9–14 (*New Revised Standard Version*, henceforth *NRSV*); cf., e.g. Lev. 20:6; 2 Kgs 21:6, 23:24; Isa. 8:19, 44:25. See Anthonioz 2013: 74–87.

⁵⁸ Ps. 139:23–4 (*NRSV*).

⁵⁹ Examples can be taken from, e.g. the Dead Sea Scrolls (Nissinen 2010a). For a written canon as a divinatory apparatus, see J. Z. Smith 1982: 36–52; cf. Davies 1998.

⁶⁰ For different divinatory practices in the Hebrew Bible, see Neuber 2015; Hamori 2015; R. Schmitt 2014; Thelle 2013; Jeffers 1996; Cryer 1994; Schmidt 1994; Loretz 1993a, 1993b; Tropper 1989.

approval (Josh. 7:14–18; 1 Sam. 10:20–1). The oracle devices called ephod as well as urim and thummim are legitimately used by David (1 Sam. 14:41–2, 23:1–13, 30:7–8), and the last mentioned divinatory apparatus is placed prominently in the high priest's sacred breastplate (Exod. 28:30; Lev. 8:8). The narrative about Jehoshaphat's and Ahab's consultation of prophets mixes binary questions typical of technical divination with the rather ecstatic comportment of the prophets (1 Kgs 22). Daniel's divinatory skills were found "ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters" in Babylonia (Dan. 1:20). Daniel's excellence "in every aspect of literature and wisdom" (Dan. 1:17) is noteworthy because there is enough evidence of the use of Babylonian astrology in the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Talmud to demonstrate that certain arts of divination may have been forbidden but still practiced in communities belonging to the biblical stream of tradition.⁶¹

The examples from Plato, Cicero, and the Hebrew Bible show conclusively, albeit in different ways, that while the distinction between technical (inductive) and intuitive (inspired) divination was recognized by the ancient writers, the boundaries between these two basic kinds of divination fluctuate in Greek sources and, to a lesser extent, in biblical texts. Even anthropological evidence of divination points to the same direction: technical, intuitive, and interpretative techniques easily overlap.⁶²

Mesopotamian sources, on the other hand, provide abundant evidence of highly specialized and non-exchangeable divinatory methods with equally specialized practitioners. Extispicy and astrology in particular follow specific procedures of experiment (observing or manipulating specific phenomena), interpretation (applying the divinatory code), and actualization.⁶³ This *modus operandi* differs very much from the non-technical divinatory procedures not involving systematic observation, empirical methodology, and education in these skills, even though the motivation triggering the procedure and the action following it may not be essentially different. Harold Torger Vedeler has recently suggested that the two types of divination represent different cognitive modes. Technical divination, such as extispicy, utilizes a logico-scientific mode in explaining superhuman causality by way of systematized observation. Intuitive divination, such as prophecy, is based on a narrative mode in transmitting divine knowledge to the audience without using any analytical tools.⁶⁴

⁶¹ See, e.g. Geller 2006; Ben-Dov and Horowitz 2005; Albani 1999.

⁶² Tedlock (2001: 193) describes a Zulu diviner who divines through the spirits (intuitive divination), with bones (inductive divination), and with the head (interpretation).

⁶³ See Koch 2011: 455–6; cf. Koch 2015: 24–9.

⁶⁴ Vedeler 2015, deriving the two cognitive modes from Bruner 1986.

All this gives reason to a fourfold conclusion:

- (1) The phenomenon of prophecy should be regarded as another type of divination of the intuitive kind, not an antithesis of divination at large;
- (2) The distinction between technical and intuitive divination makes sense, and both the practices and the practitioners of the two types of divination can usually be distinguished from each other; however,
- (3) The dichotomy of technical and intuitive is not absolute but emerges differently in different cultures and source materials, sometimes allowing overlaps of different divinatory methods;
- (4) Both kinds of divination belong to the same (local) symbolic universe, in whatever way it is articulated, and fulfill the function of helping communities and their individual members to cope with contingency, uncertainty, and insecurity.

As a corollary of this fourfold conclusion, it is now possible to start drawing the image of a diviner called a *prophet* in this book: a person who transmits divine knowledge predominantly, if not exclusively, by non-technical or intuitive means, believed to be inspired by a divine agent.

PROPHETS AS INTERMEDIARIES

What Is Prophecy?

Inspired intermediaries are known by several designations in written sources from the ancient Eastern Mediterranean, whether written in Akkadian, Greek, Hebrew, Aramaic, or even in Egyptian or Luwian. The scholarly concept of “prophecy” does not cover exactly the semantic field of any of the designations known from ancient sources; even the fact that the modern word-family “prophet”—“prophecy”—“prophesy” in different languages is derived from the Greek *prophētēs—prophēteia—prophēteuō* does not entail semantic correspondence. Moreover, as we have seen, the use of the word-family in modern vernacular does not correspond to scholarly needs either. Therefore, we need to define the scholarly field of application of “prophecy” and “prophets.”

As argued above, “prophecy” is a scholarly concept constructed by the community of scholars that provides the matrix within which the concept works. What Jonathan Z. Smith said about “religion” more than three decades ago is, *mutatis mutandis*, true for “prophecy” as well; according to Smith, religion “is solely the creation of the scholar’s study. It is created for the scholar’s analytical purposes by his imaginative acts of comparison and

generalization.”⁶⁵ Hence, whatever is defined as prophecy is not an image of truth but an aid of communication between scholars specializing in different materials.

From the point of view of the sociology of knowledge, the definition of prophecy, like any definition, should be seen as a methodical process that emerges from concrete needs of the scholarly community, not claiming finality but developing along with its application. Moreover, the definition should be an aid, not an impediment, to the study of the sources; it should clarify, not complicate things. An over-exact and monothetic definition is not helpful because it may restrict all too much the scholar’s view which is already narrowed by the nature of the source material. A polythetic definition⁶⁶ allowing variation within the defined entity enables the identification of—to use a Wittgensteinian term—family resemblances⁶⁷ between materials without forcing them into a theoretical and terminological straightjacket.

Keeping this in mind, it is interesting to note that the definition of prophecy first formulated in 1988 by Manfred Weippert, a pioneer of the study of ancient Near Eastern prophecy, has held sway over decades and can still be taken as a point of departure. According to Weippert’s definition, prophecy is in question when a person

- (a) through a cognitive experience (a vision, an auditory experience, an audio-visual appearance, a dream or the like) becomes the subject of the revelation of a deity, or several deities and, in addition,
- (b) is conscious of being commissioned by the deity or deities in question to convey the revelation in a verbal form (as a “prophecy” or a “prophetic speech”), or through nonverbal communicative acts (“symbolic

⁶⁵ J. Z. Smith 1982: xi, the *mutandis* being “prophecy” for “religion,” and “her/his” for “his.”

⁶⁶ I have adopted this vocabulary from Jan Snoek’s discussion on the definition of “ritual” (Snoek 2006: 4–5): “A class is monothetic if and only if (A) each member of the class has all the characteristics defining the class as a whole, and (B) each of those characteristics is possessed by all of those members. A class is polythetic if and only if (A) each member of the class has a large but unspecified number of a set of characteristics occurring in the class as a whole, (B) each of those characteristics is possessed by a large number of those members, and (if fully polythetic) (C) no one of those characteristics is possessed by every member of the class.”

⁶⁷ Wittgenstein 1953: 31–2 (no. 66–7): “(...) Schau z.B. die Brettspiele an, mit ihren mannigfachen Verwandtschaften. Nun geh zu den Kartenspielen über: hier findest du viele Entsprechungen mit jener ersten Klasse, aber viele gemeinsame Züge verschwinden, andere treten auf. Wenn wir nun zu den Ballspielen übergehen, so bleibt manches Gemeinsame erhalten, aber vieles geht verloren. (...) Und das Ergebnis dieser Betrachtung lautet nun: Wir sehen ein kompliziertes Netz von Ähnlichkeiten, die einander übergreifen und kreuzen. Ähnlichkeiten im Großen und Kleinen. 67. Ich kann diese Ähnlichkeiten nicht besser charakterisieren, als durch das Wort ‘Familienähnlichkeit’; denn so übergreifen und kreuzen sich die verschiedenen Ähnlichkeiten, die zwischen den Gliedern der Familie bestehen: Wuchs, Gesichtszüge, Augenfarbe, Gang, Temperament, etc. etc.—Und ich werde sagen: die ‘Spiele’ bilden eine Familie.”

acts”), to a third party who constitutes the actual addressee of the message.⁶⁸

Weippert’s definition has not gone without criticism, especially with regard to the aspect of cognition and consciousness,⁶⁹ but it has the advantage of not being over-exact and focusing on the procedure rather than its paraphernalia. Moreover, an undeniable strength of this definition is the clarity with which it describes the prophetic process of communication as an act of divine-human intermediation consisting of four basic components:

- (1) The *sender* of the message, believed to be a superhuman agent;
- (2) The actual *message* and its verbal or symbolic performance;
- (3) The *prophet*, that is, the diviner who mediates the divine message; and
- (4) The human *recipient(s)* of the divine message.

This divinatory procedure, drawn from ancient Near Eastern sources but applicable even to Greek material,⁷⁰ can be seen as the most important polythetic characteristic of the defined phenomenon. While well compatible with the definition of divination,⁷¹ it is also clearly distinct from the procedure of technical divination based on systematic observation of signs. The relationship of prophecy to other kinds of divination is not part of Weippert’s definition but can be deduced from it by comparison with the procedure of extispicy or astrology, which, as sketched by Ulla Koch, consists of six steps: motivation, experiment, validation, interpretation, actualization, and action.⁷² The second, third, and fourth steps involve skills in observation, manipulation, and classification of specific phenomena and application of authoritative

⁶⁸ My translation of Weippert’s German definition: “Bei religiöser Offenbarungsrede ist dann von Prophetie zu sprechen, wenn eine Person (a) in einem kognitiven Erlebnis (Vision, Audition, audiovisuelle Erscheinung, Traum o.ä.) der Offenbarung einer Gottheit oder mehreren Gottheiten teilhaftig wird und ferner (b) sich durch die betreffende(n) Gottheit(en) beauftragt weiß, das ihr Geoffenbarte in sprachlicher Fassung (als ‘Prophetie’, ‘Prophetenspruch’) oder in averbalen Kommunikationsakten (‘symbolischen’ oder ‘Zeichenhandlungen’) an einen Dritten (oder Dritte), den (die) eigentlichen Adressaten, weiterzuleiten” (Weippert 2014: 231–2); cf. the earlier version in Weippert 1988: 289–90.

⁶⁹ Cf. Petersen 2000. According to Stökl 2012b: 54, it is “difficult to know whether a person must be ‘conscious of being commissioned by the deity’ in order to be a prophet. It would certainly exclude all manner of possession cults from the category ‘prophecy,’ which may not be desirable.”

⁷⁰ Cf. the Greek “chaîne prophétique” sketched by Motte 2013: 16–17.

⁷¹ Cf. the definition of divination (Mantik) by Trampedach 2015: 13: “Die Mantik ist das menschliche Vermögen, Götterbotschaften zu erlangen, zu deuten und daraus die angemessenen praktischen Konsequenzen zu ziehen. Sie beruht auf einer asymmetrischen Kommunikation zwischen Menschen (Individuen oder Gruppen) und Göttern (oder anders vorgestellten höheren Mächten wie Dämonen/Geistern oder Ahnen), die den Menschen auf anderem Wege nicht zugängliche Kenntnisse oder Anweisungen über zukünftige, gegenwärtige oder vergangene Ereignisse vermittelt; sie setzt voraus, daß die Götter bereit und fähig sind, die Menschen durch sprachliche oder symbolische Botschaften an ihrem Wissen teilhaben zu lassen.”

⁷² Koch 2015: 24–9.

written tradition that can only be attained through education. The performance of the prophetic procedure, not requiring the management of such skills and education, is rather more simple and straightforward. Nevertheless, the pre- and post-performance steps, that is, motivation, actualization, and action belong to both types of divinatory procedure and may turn out to be essentially similar.

I would like to develop Weippert's definition of prophecy by complementing it with the following five viewpoints.

First, the prophetic process of communication is a form of social communication, not a one-way street from the deity through the prophet to the addressee, perhaps through one or more go-betweens. The prophetic performance happens within a community that ultimately makes prophecy functional by acknowledging its value, veracity, and applicability.⁷³ The recognition of the performance as prophecy presupposes a shared belief in the superhuman full-access agent(s), that is, the deity or deities whose words are being mediated, and the shared conviction of the community (or at least some part of it) of the capacity of the person in question of acting as a true prophet. This conviction often arises from the patterned public behavior of the prophet, which, however, is too variable to be made part of the definition.

Second, as the written evidence of prophecy demonstrates, the prophetic process of communication does not necessarily end when the message has reached its recipient, but may be prolonged by means of writing. Sometimes the written record, such as a letter, is the way by which the message is conveyed to the addressee, but a written version of the prophetic message may also be prepared for archival purposes, thus becoming part of the scribal tradition that can have a long afterlife. A prophecy once written down can be reinterpreted in a new historical situation and, as in the case of the Hebrew Bible, become the object of a long process of literary interpretation, or *Fortschreibung*.⁷⁴ Following Armin Lange, I make a difference between *written prophecy*, that is, written records of orally delivered prophetic oracles, and *literary prophecy*, which covers both scribal interpretation and recontextualization of earlier written prophecies and inventing entirely new prophetic texts.⁷⁵

Third, because of the implications of the use of the "prophetic" vocabulary in modern vernacular, it may be necessary to say a word on the relationship of prophecy and prediction. Since the uncertainties of life very are often related to the impossibility of seeing around the corner, it is clear that

⁷³ See Wilson 1980: 28–32 and cf., e.g. Hollmann 2011: 100–1; Maurizio 1997.

⁷⁴ The term *Fortschreibung*, first coined by Walther Zimmerli (1969: 104*–14*), refers to a growth of the biblical text by way of piecemeal updates and revisions.

⁷⁵ Lange 2006, 2009. Jeremias 2013: 96 divides written prophecy into two classes: "mündliche Prophetie in schriftlicher Gestalt" (such as letters from Mari) and "schriftlich tradierte Prophetie" (such as Neo-Assyrian prophecies).

Zukunftsbewältigung,⁷⁶ coping with the future, is part and parcel of all divination. This is true even for prophecies which, however, are usually not downright descriptions of what will happen in the future. Prophecies may include predictions as an element of the transmitted divine knowledge, but a predictive text is not *per definitionem* a prophecy.

Fourth, Weippert's definition works best when applied to ancient Near Eastern material but may not be fully applicable to Greek or even biblical texts. This is not to say that there are no persons corresponding to prophets thus defined in these texts; however, it may turn out that the Greek (and to some degree, biblical) prophets do not represent exactly the ideal type of an inspired diviner portrayed by the definition. As we have observed above, the distinction between technical and intuitive divination is nearly absolute in Mesopotamian sources, but less so in Greek ones. This does not invalidate the use of the definition for Greek prophets; we only have to allow for some flexibility with regard to the divinatory method in individual cases.

Fifth, the separate lives of the academic disciplines have resulted in a divergent terminology of Classicists, Assyriologists, and Bible scholars; therefore, whatever terms are used for diviners of different kinds may cause communicational problems. My own predilection for the word "prophecy" is certainly due to my education in biblical studies, the academic domain where this word has been always at home. Today, the word "prophecy" is increasingly becoming part of the Assyriological vocabulary as well;⁷⁷ however, Classical scholars usually prefer the terms "oracle" and "seers" for what biblical and ancient Near Eastern scholars call "prophecy" and "prophets."⁷⁸ In addition, the word "oracle" is not only used for the outcome of the divinatory procedure but also of the person who delivers the divine message and the site where all this takes place.

To reduce the effects of the confusion caused by the divergent terminology, I would like to clarify my own use of it. I use the term "prophet" for a diviner of the intuitive or non-technical type corresponding to Weippert's definition, whether the person in question is found in Near Eastern, Greek, or biblical sources. I have nothing in principle against the term "seer," but I do not use it very often, because the term denotes diviners of both types and may, therefore, be potentially confusing. With the word "oracle" I refer primarily to "verbal communications to humans from the gods or other supernatural beings,"⁷⁹ including prophecies but not excluding other verbal outcomes of divination.

⁷⁶ Cf. Maul 2013.

⁷⁷ See, e.g. Frahm 2006–8: 7–8, who relies on Weippert's definition.

⁷⁸ e.g. M. A. Flower 2008; Kajava (ed.) 2013. ⁷⁹ Bowden 2010: 106.

Who Were the Prophets?

Having now defined a “prophet” as someone who intermediates allegedly divine knowledge by non-technical means, let us now take a look at the sources to find the people at the roots of this definition. Meanings of words in modern languages cannot be determined by their use in ancient times; neither should modern semantics interfere too much with the reading of ancient sources. The word-family “prophecy” is a parade example of shifting sands in semantics. First, the use of this word-family in modern languages owes its use first and foremost to the Bible, which has made some scholars hesitant to use it in non-biblical contexts.⁸⁰ However, if its use is categorically denied outside the biblical tradition, biblical prophecy becomes isolated from related phenomena in the ancient Near East and closed up in its own biblical ghetto, which easily appears as an all too coherent and unproblematic whole in comparison with the variegated hodgepodge of ancient Near Eastern divination. Second, the strongly personalized association of prophecy with a certain kind of a person with the specific idea of the characteristics of a “true prophet” easily leads to the search of similar persons in other languages and cultures, even though the comparative quest should primarily concern functions and phenomena rather than persons.⁸¹ Third, there is no one title or concept for prophets and prophecy in ancient languages, and therefore, the “who’s who” in ancient prophecy must be based on a scholarly construct rather than emic terminology.⁸² I try to keep these problems in mind when looking for the answer to the important and legitimate question of who the prophets were.

Since different languages, the academic terminology included, have inherited the “prophetic” word-family from Classical Greek, it makes sense to start with Greek sources and their divinatory terminology. When the translators of the Septuagint needed a Greek equivalent for the Hebrew word for a prophet, *nābī’*, they quite systematically chose to use the word *prophētēs*, which in their view, rendered an idea that was close enough to what they thought a *nābī’* was. The Greek word-family was thus influenced by a strong semantic input from the biblical tradition, which had effects on its use in early Jewish and Christian parlance and writing.

⁸⁰ See, e.g. Ellis 1989: 132–3, 146–7, who recognizes here the risk that a concept like prophecy is all too closely connected with cultural and religious premises and value judgments of the interpreter: “We must also attempt to avoid imposing on the source the value judgments conditioned by our own religious beliefs or those of our heritage” (p. 132).

⁸¹ According to Dijkstra 2015: 14, “it might be useful when researching extra-biblical texts for prophets and prophetic phenomena first to search for comparable activities and religious practices and only to ask afterwards what kind of practitioner is said to perform them, if he or she is mentioned by his or her vocation at all.”

⁸² Cancik-Kirschbaum 2003: 44–5: “Doch was den Prophetismus angeht, lässt sich den Quellen selbst keine unmittelbare Bewertung entnehmen; ein eigensprachlicher beschreibender oder klassifizierender Oberbegriff ist nicht bekannt.”

For an overview of the Greek semantic field, a quick look at Liddell and Scott's *Greek-English Lexicon*⁸³ will show that *prophēteia* is presented as equivalent to the "gift of interpreting the will of gods" and the verb *prophēteuō* to being an "interpreter of the gods," whereas *prophētēs* (fem. *prophētis*) is "one who speaks for a God and interprets his will to man," or, in a more general sense, an "interpreter." In the New Testament, the word-family has a more specialized meaning, reflecting especially the gift of expounding scripture, speaking and preaching—even predicting future events.

A deeper look at the sources confirms Liddell and Scott's basic semantic fields, but also shows some variance depending on time, place, and literary genre. The most common Greek term for a diviner is *mantis* (pl. *manteis*), a word which Plato derived from *mania*, arguing that the word was the result of the tasteless insertion of the letter "t" to the original word.⁸⁴ Elsewhere, Plato argues that "no man achieves true and inspired divination when in his rational mind, but only when the power of his intelligence is fettered in sleep or when it is distraught by disease or by reason of some divine inspiration." The inspired speech of a *mantis*, then, must be interpreted by other people with sound mind, whom Plato would call *prophētai manteuomenōn*, "prophets of things divined," rather than *manteis*.⁸⁵ Plato's use of the word *prophētēs* focuses here on the mediatory and interpretative quality of the word rather than to the inspired state of the diviner, implying a similar chain of communication as Pindar: "Give your oracle, o Muse, and I will be your prophet!"⁸⁶ Plato also uses *prophētēs* in the sense of prognostication: "And if you liked, we might concede that prophecy (*mantikē*), as the knowledge of what is to be (*epistēmē tou mellontos*), and temperance directing her, will deter the charlatans, and establish the true prophets (*alēthōs manteis*) as our prognosticators (*prophētas tōn mellontōn*)."⁸⁷

In the last quoted passage of Plato, the semantic difference between the *mantis* and the *prophētēs* is minimal, which, however, is not always the case. In Greek texts, the word *mantis* is used for several kinds of male and female diviners from legendary heroes to itinerant diviners without implying a distinction between different technical or non-technical methods of divination.⁸⁸ It is much more frequently used than the word-family *prophētēs* which, despite Plato's above-quoted opinion, more often than not denotes

⁸³ Liddell-Scott-Jones *Greek-English Lexicon* (hereafter *LSJ*) 1539–40: <http://stephanus.tlg.uci.edu/lsg/#eid=1&context=lsj>.

⁸⁴ Plato, *Phaedr.* 244c.

⁸⁵ Plato, *Tim.* 71e–72b; cf. Lampinen 2013: 51.

⁸⁶ Pindar, fragment [fr.] 150: *manteueo Moisa prophateusō d'egō* (originally in Eustathius, *Commentary on Iliad* 1.1.). Cf. Exod. 7:1: "The Lord said to Moses, 'See, I have made you like God to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron shall be your prophet (*nābī*).'"

⁸⁷ Plato, *Charmides* [*Charm.*] 173c.

⁸⁸ For the term *mantis* and people thus designated in Greek sources, see Raphals 2013: 101–10.

inspired divination and transmission of divine words.⁸⁹ This corresponds to the etymology of the word, consisting of the elements *pro-* “before, on behalf of” and *phēmi* “to say, to declare, to make known one’s thoughts,” and enabling a twofold meaning: speaking on behalf of the deity, or speaking before the deity and/or the people. The word *promantis* conveys basically the same idea and is used more or less synonymously with *prophētēs* or *prophētis*.⁹⁰

The word-family *prophētēs* does not appear before the fifth century BCE and is rarely used in texts written between the fifth and the third century.⁹¹ Only a dozen writers use *prophētēs* or *prophētis* before the third century, among them Herodotus, Aeschylus, Euripides, and Plato, and people thus designated include both mythical diviners such as Cassandra and Teiresias,⁹² and historical figures such as the female prophets at Delphi and Dodona.⁹³ The male term also denotes a temple official responsible for the oracular process at Delphi and mediating the words of the Pythia to the consultants—among other duties.⁹⁴ In the Hellenistic period, the use of *prophētēs* and *prophētis* becomes much more common and it is widely used also in inscriptional material from the third century BCE onwards. In the temple of Apollo at Didyma, the female prophet is called *prophētis* or *promantis* (but not *mantis*⁹⁵), whereas the title *prophētēs* does not belong to the inspired seer but to the mediating official responsible for the publicizing of the oracular responses given by the female prophet and administering the oracular process.⁹⁶ At Claros, again, the inspired prophet was a male person, also known as *hypophētēs*; the title is a semantical equivalent of *prophētēs*. There are two theories concerning the identity of the male prophet at Claros. Either he was the *prophētēs*, whose oracular responses were perhaps versified by the poetic chanter *thespiōdos*, who would then deliver them to both the consultants and the *grammateus* who eventually wrote them down;⁹⁷ or according to another theory, the roles

⁸⁹ The fullest overview of the word-family is still van der Kolf 1957; cf. Motte 2013: 13: “le prophète est bien un porte-parole du dieu, celui qui relaie sa parole ou encore celui par qui le dieu parle.”

⁹⁰ e.g. Herodotus uses *promantis* synonymously with *prophētēs/prophētis* (1.182; 6.66; 7.111,141; 8.135); cf. also Thucydides 5.16.

⁹¹ See Motte 2013: 10–11.

⁹² Cassandra: Aeschylus, *Agamemnon* [Ag.] 1099 (indirectly); Teiresias: Pindar, *Nemean* [Nem.] 1, 60.

⁹³ The Delphic Pythia: e.g. Herodotus 6.66; 7.41; 9.93; Plato, *Phaedr.* 244a; Euripides, *Ion* 42, 321; the prophets of Dodona: e.g. Herodotus 2.55; 9.93.

⁹⁴ e.g. Herodotus 8.36–7. The *prophētēs* of Didyma was, for instance, responsible for arranging banquets for the citizens according to ancestral customs; for the case of the *prophētēs* Tiberius Claudius Damas, see Chaniotis 2003: 179–84.

⁹⁵ According to Lampinen 2013: 72, “there is no official designation of the Didymaeen seer as *mantis* to be found among either the epigraphic or literary evidence... the use of the term is mostly a device of categorization employed by modern research.”

⁹⁶ See Lampinen 2013: 73–5.

⁹⁷ Thus, e.g. Lampinen 2013: 64–5, 69, following Parke 1985: 220–1.

of the *prophētēs* and the *thespiōdos* were reversed, the last-mentioned official acting as the inspired speaker.⁹⁸

In sum, the male term *prophētēs* can denote either a male prophet or a mediator of prophetic messages, while *prophētis* is used exclusively for the female prophets. In both cases, the persons thus defined appear to have an affiliation with an oracle site.⁹⁹ The word-family, hence, inhabits a semantic domain of intermediation of divine words in the socio-religious setting of temples where non-technical divination was practiced—in contrast to the word-family *mantis* which covers a larger semantic field and does not as such imply a setting in oracle shrines. Therefore, any prophet may be called *mantis* but not every *mantis* is a prophet.

Since the vocabulary of the Hebrew Bible contributes to the later use and understanding of the Greek prophetic vocabulary through the Septuagint, we discuss it before turning to the Mesopotamian terminology. The “master term” for a prophet is *nābīʾ* (fem. *nēbīʾā*, pl. masc. *nēbīʾīm*). With its 325 occurrences,¹⁰⁰ it is used far more often than any other related designation and becomes the technical term for (mostly) non-technical divination in the Hebrew Bible. This term is used for more than fifty biblical characters who either carry this title or are otherwise acting as a *nābīʾ*. Non-biblical evidence of *nābīʾ* consists of only a couple of occurrences in the letters from Lachish dating to c. 600 BCE.¹⁰¹ The word is usually understood as a nominal *qatīl*-derivative of the Semitic root *nbʾ/nby* to be interpreted in a passive sense as “the one who has been called,” that is, by a divine agent.¹⁰²

The most common image of a *nābīʾ* is that of an oracle-deliverer such as the prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, or Ezekiel or, say, Gad, Ahijah of Shiloh, Huldah, and Shemaiah¹⁰³—even Moses as the mediator of the Torah.¹⁰⁴ The basic occupation of a *nābīʾ* in the Hebrew Bible is clearly the transmission of the

⁹⁸ Thus, e.g. Ferrary 2014a, following Robert 1967: 305.

⁹⁹ This, of course, does not apply to the use of the word in the derived meaning “interpreter” which does not denote a diviner even though this meaning is probably derived from the activity of a *prophētēs* as the interpreter of prophetic oracles; according to van der Kolf, “es ist eine abgeschwächte Bedeutung, die jedoch schon in Delphi, wo der P[rophet] ein Erklärer, wenn auch von dem Gott inspirierter Erklärer, der Worte der Pythia war, vorbereitet ist” (1957: 802).

¹⁰⁰ In the Masoretic text, the Hebrew masculine *nābīʾ* appears 315 times, the feminine *nēbīʾā* six times (Judg. 4:4; Exod. 15:20; 2 Kgs 22:14; Isa. 8:3; Neh. 6:14; 2 Chr. 34:22), and the Aramaic masculine *nēbīʾ* four times (Ezra 5:1 [2x], 2; 6:14); counting according to Even-Shoshan 1979: 1365–7.

¹⁰¹ Lak (6): 1.3 (*139) and Lak (6): 1.16 (*141); in addition, some scholars have reconstructed a broken word in Lak (6): 1.6 (*140), line 5 as *h[nbʾ]* or *h[nbʾm]*. More probably, this word should be read as *hš[rm]* “officials”; see Seow 2003: 217; Stökl 2012a: 168–9.

¹⁰² See H.-P. Müller 1984: 143–4. An active meaning “the one who invokes god” has been suggested by Fleming 1993a.

¹⁰³ Gad: 2 Sam. 24:11–19; Ahijah: 1 Kgs 13:29–39, 14:1–18; Huldah: 2 Kgs 22:14–20; Shemaiah: 2 Chr. 12:5–8.

¹⁰⁴ For Moses as a prophet and as model of prophecy, see, e.g. Stackert 2014: 55–69; T. Römer 2013; Sonnet 2010; Petersen 2006; Veijola 2000: 213–18.

word of God to the person or the people to whom it is addressed, either to an individual—typically a king—or to a community. The substance of the message is often called “word of Yahweh” (*dēbar Yhwh*) that “comes” or “happens” to the prophet,¹⁰⁵ or a “vision” (*hāzôn*) seen by the prophet.¹⁰⁶ The prophet’s reception of the divine message is described by the verb “to see (a vision)” (*hzh*),¹⁰⁷ and the outcome of the prophetic performance may also be called “oracle of Yahweh” (*nē’um Yhwh*) or just “oracle” (*maššā*).¹⁰⁸

The Hebrew verbs denoting prophesying, *nibbā’* and *hitnabbē’*, are derived from the noun *nābī’* and have the meaning “to act as/like a *nābī’*,” the last mentioned form sometimes taking on a demeaning sense of “pretending to be a *nābī’*.”¹⁰⁹ The verbs are used almost exclusively of delivering divine messages,¹¹⁰ and refer many times explicitly to a spirit-possessed ecstatic behavior.¹¹¹ The same vocabulary is also used for persons condemned as false prophets.¹¹²

While the emphasis of the word *nābī’* is clearly on the transmission of divine messages, the biblical text lets people thus designated appear in various other divinatory roles, too. Prophets are never found practicing technical divination that would require a special education, such as extispicy, augury, or astrology. However, some prophets are presented as observing ominous things¹¹³ or even promising an omen or portents,¹¹⁴ and some are found

¹⁰⁵ The so-called *Wortereignisformel* (*hāyā/wayēhī dēbar Yhwh ’el*) has 110 occurrences, about two-thirds of which are to be found in the books of Jeremiah and Ezekiel; see Krispenz 2014.

¹⁰⁶ e.g. Isa. 1:1; Ezek. 7:13, 26; Hos. 12:11; Obad. 1; Nahum 1:1; Hab. 2:2–3; Lam. 2:9; Dan. 1:17; cf. Aram. *hēzū* Dan. 2:19, 28; 4:2, 6, 7, 10; 7:1, 2, 7, 13, 15, 20.

¹⁰⁷ e.g. Num. 24:4, 16; Isa. 1:1; 2:1; 13:1; Ezek. 12:27; Amos 1:1; Míc. 1:1; Hab. 1:1; Lam. 2:14; cf. Aram. *hzh* Dan. 2–7 *passim*.

¹⁰⁸ 2 Kgs 9:25; Isa. 13:1; 14:27; 15:1; 17:1; 19:1; 21:1, 11, 13; 22:1; 23:1; 30:6; Nahum 1:1; Hab. 1:1; Zech. 9:1; 12:1; Mal. 1:1; Prov. 30:1; 31:1; Lam. 2:14; 2 Chr. 24:27.

¹⁰⁹ According to Stökl 2012a: 159, “a meaning such as ‘to act like a prophet/ecstatic’ is equally valid for both stems,” while Adam 2009 highlights the derogatory meaning of *hitnabbē’*.

¹¹⁰ Note that in Chronicles, this role is given to the temple musicians (1 Chr. 25:1). The spirit-possessed ecstasy in the “Saul among the prophets” narratives (1 Sam. 10:9–13 and 19:20–4) does not seem to imply any kind of intermediary activity, and the transmissive connotation is difficult to find also in the case of the female diviners in Ezek. 13:17–23 who “prophesy” (*mitnabbē’ôt*) by sewing bands and making veils, “putting to death those who should not die and keeping alive those who should not live,” which can be described as magical activity; for different explanations, see Hamori 2015: 167–83; Stökl 2013b; Bowen 1999. The only occurrence without any divinatory connotation is when Saul raves in his house haunted by an evil spirit (1 Sam. 18:10).

¹¹¹ Num. 11:25–7; 1 Sam. 10:5, 6, 10, 13; 19:20–4; 1 Kgs 18:29; Jer. 29:26–7 (*hitnabbē’*); 1 Sam. 10:10; 19:20; Joel 3:1; perhaps Zech. 13:2–6 (*nibbā’*); cf. Hos. 9:7: “The prophet is a fool, the man of the spirit is mad!” Ezekiel’s prophesying, expressed by both *nibbā’* and *hitnabbē’*, is regularly inspired by the spirit or the “hand” of God, implying the prophet’s altered state of consciousness.

¹¹² Even prophets of Baal and otherwise false prophets are called *nēbī’im* who *nibbā’* (1 Kgs 18:19–29, 40; 2 Kgs 10:18–28; Jer. 2:8; 5:13, 31; 14:13–16; 20:6; 23:9–40; 27:9–18; 29:8–9, 21, 31–2; 37:19; Ezek. 13:1–16; 14:9–11; 22:25–8). Also the verb *hzh* and the noun *hāzôn* are used for false visions, too (Isa. 30:10; Jer. 14:14; 23:16; Ezek. 12:22–8; 13 *passim*; 21:34; Zech. 10:2; Lam. 2:14).

¹¹³ e.g. Jer. 1:11–19; Ezek. 37:15–23; Amos 7:1–6.

¹¹⁴ Deut 13:2–6; 2 Kgs 20:8–11/Isa 38:7–8; cf. Ps. 74:9.

performing healing rituals.¹¹⁵ Dreams, visions, and prophecies are many times presented as cognate or parallel phenomena.¹¹⁶ Occasionally, the prophet's advice seems to be based on clairvoyance rather than a divine word.¹¹⁷ Some persons like Moses, Miriam, Deborah, and Samuel are divinely inspired leaders or judges rather than prophets in the strict sense.¹¹⁸ Elijah and Elisha function most of the time as miracle-workers rather than mediators of divine messages, and this is also true for Elisha's apprentices called "sons of the prophet" (*bēnē han-nēbī'im*).¹¹⁹ In the books of Chronicles, the prophets also act as scribes, recording the acts of the kings of Judah;¹²⁰ even this can be considered as an act of divination in the context of Chronicles where the written product may be called "prophecy" (*nēbū'ā*) or "visions" (*hāzôt*)¹²¹ as if the history itself was an omen to be interpreted.¹²²

The social status of biblical prophets is often seen as more or less marginalized because of their cultic and social criticism, and there is some truth to this image when we look, for instance, at a figure like Jeremiah who is indeed portrayed as being persecuted by his fellow Judeans.¹²³ On the other hand, many prophets are presented as having easy access to the king and the court (see "Prophets and Kings: Hebrew Bible", Chapter 7 in this volume). Moreover, the compound "priests and prophets,"¹²⁴ often supplemented with rulers, officers, and other leaders of the people,¹²⁵ brings the prophets close to the realm of the priests and makes them appear as a part of the socio-religious establishment of the society, however critical a stance the text takes on it.¹²⁶ A few times prophets appear together with other kinds of diviners, showing that prophecy was indeed regarded as another art of divination even by some biblical writers.¹²⁷

¹¹⁵ Elisha: 2 Kgs 5; Isaiah: 2 Kgs 20:1–7/Isa. 38:21.

¹¹⁶ Dreams, e.g. Num. 12:6; 1 Sam. 28:6, 15; Jer. 23:25–8; 29:9; visions, e.g. Ezek. 12:27; Lam. 2:9, 14; both dreams and visions: Joel 3:1.

¹¹⁷ e.g. 1 Sam. 9:9; 22:5.

¹¹⁸ For the different roles of Miriam (Exod. 15:20, cf. Num. 12), see Tervanotko 2013; Ackerman 2002; I. Fischer 2002; 64–94; Rapp 2002; of Deborah (Judg. 4:4), see Spronk 2001 and, especially compared to the Delphic Pythia, Kupitz and Berthelot 2009; of Samuel, see Hutzli 2014; Leuchter 2013; Sweeney 2011; Frolov 2011; W. Dietrich 2010.

¹¹⁹ The *bēnē han-nēbī'im* occur in 1 Kgs 20:35–43; 2 Kgs 2:1–3; 4:38–41; 6:1–7; 9:1–13. Otherwise, the only occurrence of *ben nābī* is Amos 7:14: "I am no prophet, nor a prophet's son."

¹²⁰ 1 Chr. 29:29; 2 Chr. 9:29; 12:15; 13:22; 26:22; 32:32; 33:19. Prophet Elijah even writes a letter to Jehoram, king of Israel (2 Chr. 21:12). The written product is called a "vision" in 1 Chr. 17:15; 2 Chr. 32:32 (*hāzôn*); 2 Chr. 29:29 (*hāzôt*).

¹²¹ 2 Chr. 9:29. ¹²² Cf. Amit 2006: 90.

¹²³ Cf., e.g. Jer. 15:10–18; 17:14–18; 18:18–23; 20; 38.

¹²⁴ Isa. 28:7; Jer. 4:9; 5:31; 6:13; 8:10; 13:13; 14:18; 18:18; 23:33; 26:7, 8, 11, 16; 32:32; Hos. 4:5; Zech. 7:3; Lam. 2:20; 4:13.

¹²⁵ 2 Kgs 23:2; Isa. 3:2; 9:14; Jer 2:8, 26; Ezek. 7:26; 22:25–8; Mic. 3:11; Zeph. 3:4; Neh. 9:32.

¹²⁶ Cf. de Jong 2007: 335–6.

¹²⁷ Jer. 27:9 itemizes five kinds of diviners translated as prophets (*nēbī'im*), "diviners" (*qōsēmīm*), "dreamers" (*hālōmôt*), "soothsayers" (*ōnēnīm*), and "sorcerers" (*kaššāpīm*); the

Other designations used for persons whose activity more or less corresponds to our definition of prophecy include *rō'ê* ($\sqrt{\text{r'h}}$, “to see”) and *hōzê* ($\sqrt{\text{hzh}}$, “to see, to have a vision”), both translated as “seer,” as well as *'iš hā'ēlōhîm* “man of God.” These words have fewer occurrences, but are used for persons involved in activities similar to those of the *nābî'*. Sometimes more than one of the above designations are parallelized or used for one and the same person, which causes their semantic fields to overlap. The title *rō'ê* has not much of an independent existence, since it is only used for two persons—Samuel, who is also called a *nābî'*, and Hanani¹²⁸—and the plural form occurs once as a poetic parallel of *hōzîm*.¹²⁹ The title *hōzê*, again, appears as a designation of a prophet especially in Chronicles where Gad, Heman, Iddo, Jehu, Asaph, Jedutun, and an anonymous prophet carry this title;¹³⁰ elsewhere, it is used for Gad, David's seer, in 2 Sam. 24:11, and for Amos by the priest Amaziah in Amos 7:12. In addition, *hōzê* occurs several times as a synonymous parallel of *nābî'*.¹³¹

The limited number of occurrences and the close semantic proximity to *nābî'* makes it very difficult to define independent semantic fields for *rō'ê* and *hōzê*.¹³² The “man of God” (*'iš hā'ēlōhîm*) is more common but has a somewhat different character. This title, used even for Moses and David,¹³³ “denotes a close relationship between a human and a deity”¹³⁴ often materializing as the use of superhuman power, but also in speaking on behalf of God. Bearers of this title include Samuel, Shemaiah, Hanan son of Igdaliah, five anonymous characters,¹³⁵ and especially Elijah and Elisha, in whose activity the prophetic transmission of the divine word coexists with miracle-working.¹³⁶

translations (NRSV) are approximations at best, since the semantic fields of diviners other than prophets and dreamers is very difficult to figure out. Cf. Mic. 3:6–7: prophets (*nēbî'im*), seers (*hōzîm*), and diviners (*qōšēmîm*). The strict contrapositioning of the prophet like Moses with other diviners in Deut. 18:9–14 should be interpreted against this background.

¹²⁸ Samuel: 1 Sam. 9:11, 18, 19; 1 Chr. 9:22; 26:28; 29:29; Hanani: 2 Chr. 16:7, 10; 19:2; see Stökl 2012a: 196–9.

¹²⁹ Isa. 30:10.

¹³⁰ Gad: 1 Chr. 21:9; 29:29; 2 Chr. 29:25; Heman: 1 Chr. 25:5; Iddo: 2 Chr. 9:29; 12:15; Jehu: 2 Chr. 19:2 (unless referring to his father Hanani, but see Schniedewind 1995: 37); Asaph: 2 Chr. 29:30; Jedutun: 2 Chr. 35:15 (the title may refer to Asaph, Heman, and Jedutun together); anonymous: 2 Chr. 33:18.

¹³¹ 2 Kgs 17:13; Isa. 29:10; 30:10; Mic. 3:6–7.

¹³² For a cautious attempt, see Stökl 2012a: 199–200.

¹³³ Moses: Deut. 33:1; Josh. 14:6; Ps. 90:1; Ezra 3:2; 1 Chr. 23:14; 2 Chr. 30:16; David: Neh. 12:24, 36; 2 Chr. 8:14.

¹³⁴ Stökl 2012a: 156; see also Lehnart 2003: 131–2.

¹³⁵ Samuel: 1 Sam. 9:6–8, 10; Shemaiah: 1 Kgs 12:22; 2 Chr. 11:2; Hanan son of Igdaliah: Jer. 35:4; anonymous: Judg. 13:6, 8 (angel); 1 Sam. 2:27; 1 Kgs 13 = 2 Kgs 23:16–17; 1 Kgs 20:28; 2 Chr. 25:7–9.

¹³⁶ Elijah: 1 Kgs 17:18, 24; 2 Kgs 1:9–13; Elisha: 2 Kgs 4:9, 16, 21, 22, 25, 27, 40, 42; 5:8, 14, 15, 20; 6:6, 9, 10, 15; 7:2, 17–19; 8:2, 4, 7, 8, 11; 13:19.

The Hebrew Bible consists of material accumulated during several centuries; hence it can be assumed that the meanings of the prophetic vocabulary have undergone transformations which, however, are extremely difficult to track down. This makes it difficult to identify historical developments of the prophetic phenomenon in early Israel and Judah on the basis of terminology. Certain vocabulary is used by some texts more than by others,¹³⁷ and texts deriving from different periods may have different nuances for each term. This is recognized even in the biblical text itself: “Formerly in Israel, anyone who went to inquire of God would say, ‘Come, let us go to the seer’; for the one who is now called a prophet (*nābīʾ*) was formerly called a seer (*rōʾē*)” (1 Sam. 9:9). Knowing this, however, is not especially helpful for the modern reader, who must ask: “If a *nābīʾ* was a *rōʾē*, what then was a *rōʾē*?”,¹³⁸ when was “now,” and who is talking?

All this means that what we can study in the first place is the image of the prophets drawn by a variety of biblical writers—constructions that are very reluctant to let historical developments and circumstances shimmer through. Biblical constructions do not form a unified whole, which probably reflects the multifarious nature of the historical phenomenon.¹³⁹ What they reveal is, first and foremost, that non-technical divination was an integral and important method of divine–human communication in the societies where the texts of the Hebrew Bible emerged, that is, the kingdoms of Israel and Judah and the Persian province of Yehud. According to the biblical constructions, a prophet—mostly called *nābīʾ*, sometimes *hōzē* or *rōʾē*¹⁴⁰—is a diviner whose performance is believed to be inspired by God, whose divinatory methodology is predominantly intuitive and who, therefore, corresponds well to the definition of prophecy presented above. The prophet is recognized as another type of practitioner of divination in the biblical text; however, there is a strong ideological tendency in the historical and prophetic books of the Hebrew Bible to make a sharp distinction between true and false prophets and to prohibit most methods of technical divination, which doubtless existed in ancient Israel and Judah but are very difficult to reconstruct.

The dominance of the term *nābīʾ* over other designations is probably due to a historical development referred to already in 1 Sam. 9:9, and it is possible

¹³⁷ For instance, the book of Jeremiah never uses the verb *hzh*, while the verb *nbʾ* is absent from the book of Isaiah.

¹³⁸ Carroll 1990: 90.

¹³⁹ I agree with Dijkstra 2015: 16, according to whom “the Old Testament does not reflect one culture or religious tradition, let alone one form of prophetic practice. Where in the past theology often claimed a uniform prophetic tradition, a unifying monotheistic movement and a unique message in the Old Testament, comparative religion of Israel has shown a rather great diversity of prophetic personalities, practitioners, genres and practices.” Cf. also Grabbe 1995.

¹⁴⁰ Interestingly, the books of Chronicles use the terms *nābīʾ* (29x), *rōʾē* (5x), and *hōzē* (10x) interchangeably “either because he [the Chronicler] could no longer clearly distinguish between them, or because he wanted to blur the distinctions” (Stökl 2012a: 196).

that this title is attached to some biblical prophets only secondarily.¹⁴¹ One indication of this is the frequency of *nābî'* as the title of Jeremiah in the Masoretic Hebrew text as compared to the much less frequent use of *prophētēs* as his title in the Septuagint translation which is based on a shorter and, as most scholars agree, older *Vorlage*.¹⁴² In later texts, the word *nābî'* clearly becomes the technical term for prophecy, and not only that, but its semantic field broadens towards an honorific title, denoting a special relationship with God or god-given authority and wisdom rather than intermediation in the first place.¹⁴³ The title *nābî'/prophētēs* begins to be used not only of the prophets but also other important forefathers and leading figures. Jesus Sirach uses the title also of Joshua and Job,¹⁴⁴ and the book of Tobit counts even Noah and the patriarchs Abraham, Izaak, and Jacob among the prophets.¹⁴⁵ On the other hand, contemporary persons who would well deserve to be called prophets according to our definitions, such as the Teacher of Righteousness in the Dead Sea Scrolls,¹⁴⁶ never carry this title which seems to have become reserved for the prophets of old. Perhaps for the same reason, Daniel is never called a prophet in the book of Daniel.¹⁴⁷

Turning now to the Mesopotamian colleagues of the Greek and biblical prophets, we may start with the observation that the commonest Mesopotamian prophetic designation is derived from the verb *maḥû* "to become crazy, to go into a frenzy," which, like the Hebrew root *nb'*, denotes ecstatic comportment and especially receiving and transmitting divine words in an altered state of consciousness.¹⁴⁸ The noun derived from this verb appears in both masculine and feminine forms, *muhḥûm* (masc.)/*muhḥûtum* (fem.) in

¹⁴¹ See Stökl 2012a: 184–6.

¹⁴² Thus, e.g. A. Aejmelaeus 2002; Stipp 1994; Bogaert 1994; the reversed order is argued for by G. Fischer 2005.

¹⁴³ Cf. Wisd. 7:27–8 for Wisdom: "in every generation she passes into holy souls and makes them friends of God, and prophets; for God loves nothing so much as the person who lives with wisdom."

¹⁴⁴ Joshua is called "the successor of Moses in the prophetic office" in both the Hebrew original and the Greek translation (Sir. 46:1). In the Hebrew original, Ezekiel "reminded the people of Job, the prophet, who always acted according to justice" (Sir. [Heb.] 49:9).

¹⁴⁵ Tobit instructs his son not to marry a foreign woman, "for we are the descendants of the prophets." In the longer version represented by the majority of Greek textual witnesses (including Codex Alexandrinus and Codex Vaticanus) Tobit continues: "We truly stem from the prophets. Noah was the first among them, and also Abraham, Izaak and Jacob, our ancient forefathers, were prophets" (Tob. 4:12).

¹⁴⁶ See Brooke 2010.

¹⁴⁷ Daniel does have this title once in the Dead Sea Scrolls (4QFlor frag. 1, II, 3, 24, 5:3) and in the New Testament (Matt. 24:15; cf. Mark 13:14 variant reading); see Grabbe 2011.

¹⁴⁸ See **23, 24, 33, 51. The verb is mostly used for prophetic performances, but sometimes also for other people going out of their wits, e.g. *97, lines i 41–2: "Afterwards my brothers went out of their senses (*immaḥû*) doing everything that is displeasing to the gods and mankind."

Old Babylonian texts¹⁴⁹ and *mahḫû* (masc.)/*mahḫûtu* (fem.) in Middle Babylonian,¹⁵⁰ Neo-Assyrian,¹⁵¹ Neo-Babylonian,¹⁵² and Late Babylonian¹⁵³ texts. In Old Babylonian texts, *muhḫûm/muhḫûtum* is the commonest prophetic title, whereas in Assyrian texts, *mahḫû/mahḫûtu* appears only in literary texts, in lexical lists, and in a couple of administrative documents.

Many of the carriers of this title appear as recipients of food or other goods in administrative documents¹⁵⁴ or act as witnesses in legal documents.¹⁵⁵ These texts seldom reveal much of the prophetic capacity of the persons thus designated, but they document their presence in different parts of Mesopotamia and beyond—not only at Mari, but also in Ešnunna, Babylonia, and Syria.¹⁵⁶ It becomes abundantly evident from the sources that, regardless of the time and place, the principal environment of the activity of the *muhḫû/mahḫû* was a temple context. They are often identified by the name of a deity,¹⁵⁷ they may appear as ritual practitioners,¹⁵⁸ the administrative documents present them as part of the temple personnel,¹⁵⁹ and the lexical and omen tradition regularly connects them with other cultic performers, such as lamentation singers and other musicians, men–women (*assinnu* and *kurgarrû*), and other ecstasies.¹⁶⁰

¹⁴⁹ Masc. sing.: **12, 16, 25, 30, 31, 32, 50c, 51, 52, 55, 56, 57, 59, 61, 65a, 120, 135c, 135d, 135e, 135f, 135h, 135i, 135j, 135k; masc. pl.: **35, 46, 49, 50, 67a; fem. sing.: **10, 11, 42, 58, 135g; fem. pl.: 52. Note the Old Akkadian masc. sing. *mahḫûm* in *119.

¹⁵⁰ Masc. sing.: *135l (*muhḫû*); masc. pl. *122.

¹⁵¹ Masc. sing.: **102, 103, 118b, 124, 125, 126, 135m, 135n; masc. pl.: **97, 98, 99, 101, 118, 123, 128, 129; fem. sing.: **120, 125; fem. pl.: **110, 118, 123, 127, 128, 129.

¹⁵² Masc. sing. **130, 131, 132, 135o. ¹⁵³ Masc. sing. *135q.

¹⁵⁴ **53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 65a, 67a, 110, 123, 130, 135c, 135g, 135h, 135i, 135j.

¹⁵⁵ **135d, 135e, 135f.

¹⁵⁶ Ešnunna: *67a; Uruk: **131, 132; Larsa: **135c, 135e, 135g; Dilbat: *135d; Ur: *135f; Sippar: *135h; Chagar Bazar: *135i; Tuttul: **135j, 135k. A *muhḫûm* with the name Ribia is also known from Susa (MDP 18 171 = RA 14 24 r. 4); see the copies of Scheil 1917: 93 and Dossin 1927: 51, both showing the signs *mu-ḫu-um* added between the lines below the sign *a* in the name ^m*Ri-bi-i-a*.

¹⁵⁷ i.e. *muhḫûm* of Dagan (**16[?]; 30, 31); *muhḫûm*'s of Dagan (*46); *muhḫûm*'s of Anu of Ḫubšalum (*49); five *muhḫûm*'s of Adad (*50); Ea-maši, *muhḫûm* of Itur-Mer (*55); Ea-mudammīq, *muhḫûm* of Ninḫursag (*56/57); Annu-tabni, *muhḫûtum* of Annunitum (*58); *muhḫûm* of Adad (*61); *muhḫûtum* of Ištar of Bišra (*50b); *muhḫûtum* of Inanna of Zabala (*135g); *muhḫûm* of Adad of Aleppo (*135i). The identification with one deity does not necessarily imply that the activity of the prophet in question is restricted to one temple only. Ehliip-adal, prophet of Adad of Aleppo, receives a ration of beer in a document from Chagar Bazar, far away from Aleppo, either because he had been sent there from Aleppo or because there was a local temple of Adad of Aleppo (*135i); see Lacambre and Millet Albà 2007: 317; Stöckl 2012a: 56.

¹⁵⁸ **51, 52, 135o. ¹⁵⁹ **67a, 110, 123, 130, 118c (?), 135c, 135h (?), 135j (?), 135o.

¹⁶⁰ **120, 124, 125, 126, 129, 135l, 135m, 135n, 135q.

Many texts do not reveal much of the functions of the *muhhûm/mahhû*, but there is enough evidence to justify the translation of this designation as “prophet.” The ecstatic element of their ritual performance is presupposed in several texts. They are mentioned together with other ecstasies (male *zabbu* and female *zabbatu*) not only in lexical lists but also in one Neo-Assyrian ritual text,¹⁶¹ and their frenzied comportment is alluded to in the Middle Babylonian “Righteous Sufferer” text found at Ugarit: “My brothers bathe in their blood like prophets.”¹⁶² Another poetic text, a Neo-Assyrian prayer to Nabû, also hints at an altered state of consciousness: “I have become affected like a prophet: what I do not know I bring forth.”¹⁶³

The verse from the prayer to Nabû implies what the ecstasy of the *mahhû* is all about: it serves the purpose of bringing forth things unknown in an altered state of mind. The transmissive function is evident virtually always when anything is said about their goings-on. In the letters from Mari, the *muhhûm* or *muhhûtum* regularly conveys a divine message either in the temple of his/her tutelary deity or coming to a person who writes about the divine message to king Zimri-Lim.¹⁶⁴ In Neo-Assyrian inscriptions, prophecies are referred to as *šipir mahhê našparti ilāni u Ištar*, “reports of the prophets, messages from the gods and Ištar.”¹⁶⁵

Only in a couple of cases is the mediatory function of the *mahhû* not immediately evident. It is not quite clear what the prophets and prophetesses, together with other male and female ecstasies, actually perform at the bed of the sick person in the Neo-Assyrian ritual of Ištar and Dumuzi (*118), and the ritual duties of the prophet in the Neo-Babylonian ritual text from Uruk (*135o) include ritual circumambulation and carrying a water-basin, but neither prophesying nor ecstatic behavior is mentioned here. These exceptions, however, hardly justify the conclusion that the prophetic role of the *muhhûm/mahhû* is secondary to their ecstatic function;¹⁶⁶ it is difficult to see what purpose other than prophesying their ecstasy would have served. Intermediation of divine messages is the principal aspect of what the *muhhûm/mahhû* do, whether or not in a state of frenzy, in almost all of the sources that indicate anything at all about their activity.

¹⁶¹ i.e. *118. Lexical lists that place *mahhû* and cognates in close proximity with *zabbu/zabbatu* or other ecstasies include **120, 124, 125, 135l, 135m.

¹⁶² *122, line 11.

¹⁶³ *118b, line 11: *allapit kima mahhê ša lā idu ūbal*. The N-stem of the verb *lapātu* means “to be touched, to become affected”; see *Chicago Assyrian Dictionary [CAD] L: 94*.

¹⁶⁴ **10, 11, 12, 16, 25, 30, 31, 32, 35, 42, 46, 50c.

¹⁶⁵ i.e. *97; *šipir mahhê* also in **98, 99, 101.

¹⁶⁶ Thus, Stökl 2012a: 57; cf. Stökl 2012a: 37: “It is likely that it is during their cultic trances that they occasionally prophesied, but there is no indication that prophetic speech was the primary purpose of these trances.”

In addition to *muḥḥûm*, the texts from Mari use frequently another designation, *âpilum* (fem. *âpiltum*¹⁶⁷) for persons involved in prophetic activities.¹⁶⁸ The word is derived from the root *apālu* “to answer” and is often understood as denoting a transmitter of divine answers to human inquiries. In the available texts, however, the oracles delivered by an *âpilum* do not appear as responses to oracle questions. The etymology allows for better translations such as “interpreter”¹⁶⁹ or “spokesperson.”¹⁷⁰ The *âpilum* typically conveys divine messages in the very same manner as does the *muḥḥûm*. The performance of an *âpilum*, like that of a *muḥḥûm*, may take place in a temple,¹⁷¹ but this is not always the case—one letter reports on the proclamation of an *âpilum* of Marduk at the gate of the royal palace in Babylon,¹⁷² and many times a prophet is said to have “come” to the letter-writer without indicating where this took place. Many times an *âpilum*, like the *muḥḥûm*, is associated with a specific deity,¹⁷³ but it is difficult to know whether this also implies an affiliation with a specific temple.

The titles *âpilum/âpiltum* and *muḥḥûm/muḥḥûtum* are never used for one and the same person in the available documents, hence there must have been a reason for two different prophetic titles at Mari. Serious attempts have been made to figure out a functional difference between these two groups of prophets. It has been suggested that the trance of an *âpilum* was actively provoked, unlike that of the *muḥḥûm* which was passively received and

¹⁶⁷ The feminine *âpiltum* occurs only twice, once as the title of the female prophet Innibana (*14) and once anonymously in conjunction with *âpilum*: “Previously, when I was still residing in Mari, I would convey every word spoken by an *âpilum* or an *âpiltum* to my lord” (*1, lines 34–6).

¹⁶⁸ Elsewhere, the word *âpilu* appears in a lexical list from Ebla as an equivalent of the Sumerian EME.BALA “interpreter” (c. 26th cent. BCE; see Merlo 2004: 324–5), in three administrative texts from the 15th–14th century Nuzi (HSS 13 152:16; 14 149:6; 14 215:16; see Lion 2000: 23–4) and in the apodosis of a Middle Babylonian omen from Assur: *šarru ina ekallišu âpila ul irašši* “the king will have no *âpilu* in his palace” (KAR 460:16; see Lion 2000: 24). These occurrences are separated from the *âpilum* in texts from Mari and given a separate meaning in CAD A/2: 170, for which no clear reason is given. Also the word *apillû* (written either syllabically *a-pil-lu-û* or logographically A.BIL), appearing especially in lexical lists and omen texts and once equated with LÜ.GUB.BA, that is, *mahḥû* (*126, line 135; cf., e.g. *129, line 114; *135q, line 43) should probably be identified with *âpilu*; see Charpin 2006 and cf. Stökl 2012a: 39–42; Freedman 1998: 34–5.

¹⁶⁹ Thus Merlo 2004; van der Toorn 1998: 60.

¹⁷⁰ Stökl 2012a: 43: “A ‘spokesperson’ is sent out by someone—in our case a deity—and works as their emissary.”

¹⁷¹ Thus, at least, *5, *29, perhaps *19; the verb that is used in these cases is typically *tebû* “arise.”

¹⁷² Thus in *48, lines 9–12: “A prophet of Marduk stood at the gate of the palace, proclaiming incessantly: ‘Išme-Dagan will not escape the hand of Marduk (...).’”

¹⁷³ i.e. *âpilum* of Adad, lord of Kallassu (*1) and *âpilum* of Adad, lord of Aleppo (**1, 2); *âpilum* of Šamaš (*4); Lupaḥum, *âpilum* of Dagan (**9, 53, 62); Qišti-Diritim, *âpilum* of Diritum (*18); *âpilum* of Dagan of Tuttl (*19); *âpilum* of Belet-ekallim (*19); *âpilum* of Ninḥursag (*29); *âpilum* of Marduk (*47); Atamrum, *âpilum* of Šamaš (*48); Qišatum, *âpilum* of Dagan (*60); Išḫi-Dagan, *âpilum* of Dagan of Šubatam (*63).

spontaneous,¹⁷⁴ but the evidence is ambiguous at best, since an *āpilum* is never actually caught in the very act of provoking an altered state of consciousness. References to the altered state of mind of an *āpilum/āpiltum* were not available until the publication of the previously unknown passage belonging to the fifth tablet of the Epic of Gilgameš, in which Enkidu and Gilgameš are approaching the cedar forest to kill the demon Humbaba. Enkidu says to Gilgameš:

“My [fr]iend knows what a combat is,
 he who has seen the battle has no fear of death!
 You have been smeared [with blood], you have no fear of death!
 [Be] furious, like a prophet (*āpilum*) g[o into a f]renzy!¹⁷⁵
 Let [your] s[hout] boom loud [lik]e a kettledrum!
 [Le]t stiffness leave your arm, let debility depart [from] your [l]oins!”¹⁷⁶

At the very least, this passage of the Standard Babylonian Epic of Gilgameš, dating to the Neo-Babylonian period, suggests that the altered state of mind belonged to the social memory concerning the *āpilum*.¹⁷⁷

It seems that an *āpilum* was freer to move from one place to another, whereas the activity of a *muhḫūm/muhḫūtum* was more restricted to the temple to which he or she was affiliated.¹⁷⁸ While this is not an absolute rule either, we may notice that the *āpilum*, unlike the *muhḫūm*, may be commissioned by the king to specific tasks, like Lupaḫum, the prophet of Dagan who is sent to Tuttul and Der, and he comes with divine messages from both places.¹⁷⁹ Moreover, an *āpilum*, unlike any of the *muhḫūm*'s known to us, can be found actively involved in writing down the divine message he has received for the king.¹⁸⁰ While this evidence is hardly enough to make the *āpilum* a court official, it may be taken as an indication that the position of the *āpilum*

¹⁷⁴ Thus Durand 1988: 386; cf. Durand 2008a: 420–3, 445–50.

¹⁷⁵ Line 42: [kim]ilma kī āpilimma šun[ni tē]nka; the expression *šanū tēmu* means “changing one’s consciousness”; it is used in the same meaning in *134, line B r. 26. Cf. also Enuma eliš iv 88 (Kämmerer and Metzler 2012: 215): *Tiāmat annīta ina šemēša mahḫūtiš itemi ušanni tēnša* “When Tiamat heard this, she became crazy, she changed her consciousness.” CAD M/2: 177, deriving *mahḫūtiš* from *mahḫūtu*, translates: “she (Tiamat) became like a woman ecstatic, she lost her reason.”

¹⁷⁶ *135p = SB Gilg. V manuscripts H₂ (= K 8591) and ff (= T. 1447), lines 39–44; see Al-Rawi and George 2014: 78–9.

¹⁷⁷ This increases the probability that the *apillū* equated with LÜ.GUB.BA (usually = *mahḫū*) the Neo-Assyrian lexical list Murgud (*126, line 135) and mentioned in the omen series *Šumma ālu* (*129, line i 114) actually means the same as *āpilum*; cf. above, n. 168.

¹⁷⁸ See Durand 1988: 386–90; cf. Durand 2008: 420–3, 445–50.

¹⁷⁹ This is reported by Sammetar, Zimri-Lim’s major-domo, in *9; for interpretation, see Charpin 2002: 19–21; Stökl 2012a: 45–8.

¹⁸⁰ Yasim-El, a military commander at Andarig, writes to Zimri-Lim: “Atamrum, prophet of Šamaš, came to me and spoke to me as follows: ‘Send me a discreet scribe! I will have him write down the message which Šamaš has sent to me for the king!’” (*48, lines 29–33); as Charpin has shown (2002: 14–15; 2015: 16), this is the letter beginning with “S[peak t]o Zimri-L[im]: Thus the prophet of [Ša]maš” and containing three different messages (*4).

was closer to the royal court than that of the more temple-bound *muhhûm*. In general, the activity of both classes is described in a similar way, and there is not enough evidence to make a clear difference between their job descriptions, much less to make a wholesale distinction between the *âpilum/âpiltum* as a professional prophet and the *muhhûm/muhhûtum* as a “lay-prophet.”¹⁸¹ As much as can be seen through the keyholes provided by the preserved sources, both groups show themselves to belong to a prophetic institution which had an established position in the society of Mari.

However professional, the *âpilum/âpiltum* and the *muhhûm/muhhûtum* were not the only ones acting as mouthpieces of deities at Mari. Prophecies can be uttered by private—especially female—individuals, whether a servant girl or a free citizen’s wife.¹⁸² In a number of documents, people belonging to neither of the two groups transmit divine messages. One of them is called anonymously “the *qammatum* of Dagan of Terqa,” whose message was significant enough to be reported independently by two or three different letter-writers.¹⁸³ There is no question of the prophetic role of this female person, but the title is hardly a standard prophetic designation. The word *qammatum* is of unclear derivation. If not a proper name,¹⁸⁴ it may refer to a person with a characteristic hairstyle.¹⁸⁵

Two persons called *assinnu*, translatable as “man-woman” because of their atypical gender characteristics,¹⁸⁶ appear several times prophesying at Mari.¹⁸⁷ While *assinnu* is not a prophetic title as such,¹⁸⁸ their prophetic function is significant with regard to the repeated appearance of prophets grouped with

¹⁸¹ This is where I disagree with Stökl (2012a: 37, 229–32 and *passim*), whose theory, in my view, depends too much on the (as such correct) interpretation of *9 as evidence for the royal commissioning of the *âpilum*, and on the assumption that the prophetic role of the *muhhûm/mahhû* was secondary to their ecstatic role, which in my view runs contrary to the image available from the sources; cf. above, n. 166.

¹⁸² “In the temple of Annunitum in the city, Aḫatum, the servant girl of Dagan-malik, went into trance and spoke (...)” (*24, lines 5–7); “When I sent this tablet to my lord, before the mountains cast their shadow, a woman, spouse of a free man (*awiltum aššat awiltim*), came to me and, concerning Babylon, spoke as follows: ‘Dagan has sent me (...)’” (*20, lines 5–11). For the gender aspect of prophesying, see Chapter 8 in this volume.

¹⁸³ i.e. Inib-šina, the king’s sister (*7) and Sammetar, his major-domo (*9), identify the speaker of the oracle as the *qammatum*, while Kanisan, son of Kibri-Dagan, governor of Terqa, writes about the same incident about which he had heard from his father, referring to the prophet as a *muhhûm* (*12). A [*qa*]mma[tum], whether or not the same person, is mentioned also in *13.

¹⁸⁴ Thus Huffmon 2000: 50.

¹⁸⁵ The word *qammatum* could be derived from the verb *qamâmu* “to dress hair.” The earlier reading *qabbatum*, derived from *qabû* “to speak” (CAD Q: 2) is now excluded; other derivations have been made from the verb *qamû* “to burn” and West Semitic *qwm* “to rise”; see Stökl 2012a: 61–2; Durand 2008a: 389, 452–3.

¹⁸⁶ For the *assinnu*, see “Gender and Human Agency” in Chapter 8 in this volume.

¹⁸⁷ i.e. Šelebum (**7, 8, 23) and Ili-ḫaznaya (*22). Ili-ḫaznaya also appears in the unpublished text M. 11299:13 (see Durand 1988: 399).

¹⁸⁸ See Stökl 2012a: 58–61.

assinnu in lexical and administrative lists.¹⁸⁹ Finally, people called the *nabûm*'s of the Haneans are made to deliver an oracle to the king of Mari.¹⁹⁰ The word *nabûm* may be etymologically related to Hebrew *nābî*.¹⁹¹ The performance of the persons thus designated is broken away, but what is left of the oracle question may suggest a binary form of an answer, hence leaving the door open to interpret their activity as technical divination rather than prophecy.

In Neo-Assyrian sources, the standard word for a prophet is *raggimu* (fem. *raggintu*), a noun derived from the verb *ragāmu* “to shout, to proclaim,” which is used for prophesying.¹⁹² The noun *raggimu/raggintu* is virtually exclusively Neo-Assyrian,¹⁹³ according to Simo Parpola “a specifically Neo-Assyrian designation of prophets replacing the older *maḥḥû*, which was retained as a synonym restricted to literary use.”¹⁹⁴ This assumption is corroborated by the rather genre-specific use of the two terms: *maḥḥû/maḥḥûtu* can be found in royal inscriptions and poems as well as cultic text, omens, and lexical texts from the Neo-Assyrian period,¹⁹⁵ whereas *raggimu/raggintu* is the word used in letters and the colophons of the prophetic oracles which reflect better the Neo-Assyrian vernacular.¹⁹⁶ In administrative documents, both *raggimu* and *maḥḥâte* (fem. pl.) have a single occurrence.¹⁹⁷

¹⁸⁹ According to Stökl 2012a: 61, “prophecy and *assinnû* are only attested together at Mari and at no other point in the cuneiform record” (p. 61). However, male and female prophets and *assinnus* are mentioned together in the Middle-Assyrian food rations list (*123), and *maḥḥû* and *raggimu* do appear regularly in association with *assinnu* and *kurgarrû* in the Middle Babylonian, Neo-Assyrian, and Late Babylonian lexical tradition (see *124, lines 213–16; *126, lines 133–5; *135l, lines 169–72; *135m, lines iii 24–8, vi 41–47; *135q, lines 41–2). That *maḥḥû* and *kurgarrû* are mentioned in one and the same paragraph in a Neo-Babylonian list of temple offerings (*130, lines r. 38–9) suggests that the lexical association had a real-life counterpart in temples.

¹⁹⁰ “Speak to my lord: Thus Tebi-gerišu, your servant: On the d[ay] following the day I arrived in Ašmad’s presence, I assembled the *nabû*’s of the Haneans, and I had them deliver an oracle for the well-being of my lord. This is what I said: ‘Will my lord, when performing [his] ablution rite and [st]aying seven days ou[tside] the city walls, return [safe]ly to the ci[ty]...’” (*26, lines 1–9).

¹⁹¹ See Fleming 1993a; 1993b; Heintz 1997a: 198–202 (= 2015: 77–81); cf. the criticism of Fleming’s theory by Huehnergard 1999 and Stökl 2012a: 63–4 and Fleming’s own appreciative comment to Stökl in Fleming 2015.

¹⁹² See **91, 95, 109, 111, 113.

¹⁹³ Note, however, the Late Babylonian three-column lexical list where *raggimu* is equated with *šabrû* “dreamer” (*135q, line 42); the Sumerian equivalent on the first column is, unfortunately, broken away.

¹⁹⁴ Parpola 1997: xlvi.

¹⁹⁵ i.e. **97, 98, 99, 101 (royal inscriptions); 118b, 118h, 103, 118 (cultic texts); 127, 128, 129 (omen texts); 124, 125, 126, 135m (lexical texts).

¹⁹⁶ The masculine *raggimu* appears in **88, [91 restored], 102, 104, 105, 108, 118c (LÜ.GU[B].B[A]), 126, 135q; and the feminine *raggintu* in **92, 95 (MĪ.GUB.BA), 105, 109, 111; in addition, the verb *ragāmu* is used in *113 in which a female person whose title is broken away delivers a divine message. Stökl 2012a: 114 prefers to transcribe MĪ.GUB.BA as *maḥḥûtu*; note, however, that the following verb is best reconstructable as *ragāmu*: [x x x x x] *ma-a* MĪ.GUB.BA *ša ra-[gi-im x x x x x]* (*95, line s. 2).

¹⁹⁷ In a list of lodgings (*104, line r. i 23), Quqî the *raggimu* is listed among military officers; in a decree of expenditures (*110, line 29), the *maḥḥâte* appear as recipients of barley in the temple of Aššur in the city of Assur.

Only once can the two terms be found in juxtaposition, and this is the case in the Succession Treaty of Esarhaddon: “If you hear an evil, ill, and ugly word that is mendacious and harmful to Assurbanipal (...), may it come from the mouth of (...) a *raggimu*, a *mahḫû*, or an inquirer of divine words, (...) you must not conceal it but come and tell it to Assurbanipal (...).”¹⁹⁸ This has been explained in two ways, either regarding the words as synonyms¹⁹⁹ or as a reference to three different classes of diviners.²⁰⁰ Both explanations have their problems. A cluster of synonyms is suspicious because other people mentioned in the same paragraph (that is, family members) cannot be understood as synonyms; however, this single text gives hardly enough reason to consider *raggimu* and *mahḫû* strictly different coexisting classes of prophets either.²⁰¹ In my view, the sources do not endorse such a dichotomy, since both the *raggimu/raggintu* and the *mahḫû/mahḫûtu* are presented as speakers of oracles to the king²⁰² and both appear in temples and in ritual contexts.²⁰³ The former are presented as communicating with the king more often than the latter, but this is to be expected because the *raggimu/raggintu* appear in oracles and letters addressed to the king. On the other hand, the *mahḫû/mahḫûtu* are more often associated with ecstasy, mainly because of the preference for the word *mahḫû/mahḫûtu* in lexical texts and omens.²⁰⁴ The ecstatic comportment of a *raggimu/raggintu* is not described anywhere, but it would be too hasty to conclude that “there are no indications that the *raggimu* delivered oracles in an ecstatic state,”²⁰⁵ since the verb *ragâmu* may carry this connotation in itself.

¹⁹⁸ *102, lines 108–9, 112, 117, 119–20, 122.

¹⁹⁹ Thus Parpola 1997: xlvii and myself.

²⁰⁰ Thus de Jong 2007: 30; Stökl 2012a: 114–15.

²⁰¹ As in the case of Mari, Stökl 2012a: 111–21 interprets the *raggimu/raggintu* as a professional prophet and *mahḫû/mahḫûtu* as a “lay-prophet.”

²⁰² The *raggimu* or *raggintu* is the speaker of the oracles **88 and 92 (perhaps also **91 and 95, depending on the restoration), a *raggintu* delivers oracles in the letters **109 and 111 (cf. *113 where the verb *ragâmu* is used), and a *raggimu* is expected to do so in the letter *108 but fails because of his lack of a vision (*diḡlu*). In royal inscriptions, again, prophetic oracles to the king are called *šipir mahḫê* (**97, 98, 99, 101—why not *šipir raggimâni*?), referring to prophecies such as the ones collected in SAA 9 1–3 (**68–88). A *mahḫû* performs as a “bringer of news” (*mupassiru*) in the Marduk Ordeal text (*103), and the one who prays to Nabû in *118c is like a *mahḫû* who “brings forth what he does not know.”

²⁰³ A *raggintu* prophecies in a temple in *111 (perhaps also in *113) and in a substitute king ritual in *109, and the oracles included in the collection attributed to a *raggimu* (La-dagil-ili? **84–8) have a ritual context in Esarhaddon’s enthronement ceremonies. The *mahḫûtu* are listed among the personnel of the temple of Aššur in *110, and the cultic performance of the *mahḫû/mahḫûtu* is presupposed by cultic texts (**103, 118) and a poem (*118h). The LÜ.GUB.BA in *118c, however one wants to transcribe the word, probably belongs to the temple context in Tušḫan (see Parpola 2008).

²⁰⁴ i.e. **124, 125, 126, 127, 128, 129, 135m; note also the presence of *mahḫû/mahḫûtu* together with the *zabbu/zabbatu* ecstasies in *118 and the reference to the wailing of a *mahḫû* (if ecstatic) in *118h.

²⁰⁵ de Jong 2007: 30.

For all the above-mentioned reasons, despite serious scholarly efforts to prove the opposite, I cannot interpret the sources in favor of a division of the Neo-Assyrian prophets into the separate groups of professional and “lay” prophets. Instead, I assume that both titles refer to prophets who are recognized by the royal court and the principal temples. The prophets enjoyed a high enough socio-religious status to have been summoned by the king and to have had royal assignments,²⁰⁶ and temple administrators quote their prophecies for their own purposes.²⁰⁷ They could act as mouthpieces of different deities, and they are listed among the personnel of the temple of Aššur in the city of Assur.²⁰⁸ To all appearances, the most important center of prophecy, however, was Egašankalamma, the temple of Ištar in Arbela. Seven out of fifteen Neo-Assyrian prophets known by name are said to be from Arbela, and Ištar of Arbela, sometimes in conjunction with her “big sister” Mullissu (Ištar of Nineveh), is the divine speaker in prophetic oracles more often than any other deity. This makes an affiliation of many prophets with this particular temple probable indeed. Unfortunately, no records from this temple are available for the simple reason that its remains are buried inside the citadel of the modern city of Erbil and have not been excavated.

As the gods were believed to be free to speak through any human being, prophecies are delivered in Neo-Assyrian texts even by people other than the above-mentioned. As at Mari, a divine word may have been mediated by a female servant (*amtu*)²⁰⁹ as well as a votaress affiliated to the temple of Ištar (*šēlūtu*).²¹⁰ Moreover, the dreamer *šabrū*, equated with *raggimu* in lexical lists,²¹¹ reports a dream that could as well be a prophetic oracle and is, in fact, preceded by one in the inscription of Assurbanipal.²¹² These rare occasions show the

²⁰⁶ In the letter *105, the astrologer Bel-ušeziḫ expresses his resentment because the king has summoned male and female prophets (*raggimānu raggimātu*) but not him. In the letter *111, the temple administrator Adad-aḫu-iddina mentions the female prophet Mullissu-abu-ušri as having conveyed the king’s clothes to Akkad, presumably for the purposes of the substitute king ritual where an anonymous female prophet (Mullissu-abu-ušri herself?) prophesied according to the report of Mar-Išsar in the letter *109.

²⁰⁷ In addition to the above-mentioned *111, Nabū-reši-išši refers to the prophecy of a female prophet concerning some temple property given to the Egyptians.

²⁰⁸ Thus in *110; cf. the Middle Assyrian provisions list demonstrating their presence in the temple of Ištar in Kar-Tukulti-Ninurta (*123).

²⁰⁹ Thus in *115, where the *amtu* of Bel-aḫu-ušur is reported to have uttered the word of Nusku in the vicinity of Harran, promising the kingship to a certain Saši and predicting the fall of “the name and seed of Sennacherib” (*115, lines r. 2–5).

²¹⁰ Thus the colophon of *74, line v 10: “From the mouth of Išsar-beli-da”ini, a votaress of the king (*šēlūtu ša šarri*)”; cf. the fragment *114: “[NN], votaress [of] Ištar [of] Arbela [... th]is me[ssag]le (*ši[pir]tu*) for the k[ing ...].”

²¹¹ i.e. *126, line 134 (Neo-Assyrian) and *135q, line 42 (Late Babylonian).

²¹² In the inscription (*101), Assurbanipal who has just heard about the military attack of Teumman, king of Elam, prays to Ištar and receives two responses: first a prophetic oracle (the prophet is not mentioned), and after that, the nocturnal vision of the *šabrū*.

relative flexibility of non-technical divination even in the Neo-Assyrian socio-religious environment.

The sources documenting prophecy from the West Semitic world are not very numerous, but they nevertheless add a few items to the list of prophetic designations. The word *ḥzh* can be found in three documents, the oldest of them deriving from Egypt. The text is the legend of a seal-amulet dating to c. 1700 BCE and reading *lqn ḥz* “Belonging to Qên, the seer.”²¹³ The Aramaic inscription of Zakkur, king of Hamath, from the early eighth century BCE mentions two kinds of diviners, *ḥzyn* and *‘ddn* through whom the god Baalshamayn answers Zakkur’s prayer, sending the besieged king a message of victory.²¹⁴ While there is no doubt that *ḥzh* (pl. *ḥzyn*) is both etymologically and functionally related to the biblical *ḥōzê* “seer,” the second title is more difficult to interpret. The word has been connected with the name of the prophet Oded (*‘ôdêd*) in 2 Chr. 15:1, as well as with the Ugaritic *‘dd* translated by many as “messenger.” The etymology of the word is a matter of debate, but the context makes its semantics quite clear: it must refer to a diviner of some kind, through (*byd*) whom the god communicates.²¹⁵ It is possible that the Egyptian designation *‘dd* ‘3 “great youth” or, as it is often translated, “great seer,” is related to the Aramaic *‘dd*.²¹⁶ This is the title of the man who in the report of Wenamun the Egyptian from the eleventh century BCE prophesies to the king of Byblos in an ecstatic state, thus suggesting the presence of prophecy in the Phoenician city.²¹⁷

Another text employing the word *ḥzh* is the wall inscription of Deir Alla, written probably in late eighth or early seventh century BCE in a language akin to Aramaic or Canaanite.²¹⁸ The text presents itself as a vision of a major upheaval or, if we prefer, a prophecy of doom, understood by many as a compilation of originally independent sources.²¹⁹ The first line presents it as “the teaching/warning of the book of [Balaam, son of Beo]r, who was the seer of the gods.”²²⁰ The meaning of the title *ḥzh ‘lhn* “seer of the gods” becomes immediately clear, because the gods come to him at night and start speaking

²¹³ Hamilton 2009 (*141a).

²¹⁴ *137, lines A 11–12: “I lifted my hands to Baalsha[may]n and Baalshamay[n] answered me. [And] Baashamayin [spoke] to me [thr]ough seers and through visionari[es] ([b]yd ḥzyn wbyd ‘dd[n]).”

²¹⁵ See Barstad 2003, who discusses the different theories, including possible scribal errors in the inscription and concludes: “I believe it is only fair to admit that we do not know at all how *‘dd* in Zakkur A12 should be understood. Notwithstanding this, we may assume, on the basis of the context, that *‘dd* or, possibly, another word, has something to do with divination” (p. 32).

²¹⁶ See Hoch 1994: 86–7.

²¹⁷ For the episode (*142), see Schipper 2005: 183–6.

²¹⁸ For identification of the language as Canaanite, see Pat-El and Wilson-Wright 2015.

²¹⁹ See, e.g. Blum 2008a; 2008b; 2008c; Weippert 1997a: 131–88.

²²⁰ *138 Comb. I:1: *ysr[.]spr[.bl’m br b]r.ʾ ḥzh.ʾlhn*. The name Balaam, son of Beor is fully readable on lines 2–4.

to him “according to the ora[cl]e of El” (*km[š]’ ʾl*), the word for “oracle” corresponding to the Hebrew word *maššā’*.

Our short survey of Greek, Hebrew, Akkadian, and West Semitic designations has brought together a bunch of religious agents who, according to the testimony of the sources, are involved in the transmission of divine knowledge, typically in a non-technical way. The activities of these people share enough characteristics to be called “prophets”; in other words, there is enough family resemblance to justify the use of the title “prophet” for all of them.

The distinction between prophets and other religious specialists is, of course, far from being absolute. As argued above, divinatory and magical agencies may be represented by one and the same person, and therefore, people who transmit divine words in a non-technical way may be involved in other kinds of divinatory or magical activities as well. In addition to the examples mentioned above, such persons may also be found in Egypt, where the evidence of prophetic activity in the above-defined sense is otherwise lacking.²²¹ The class of cultic personnel called *ḥm-ntr* is mostly occupied with the clothing, anointing, and censuring the divine statue, but he also consults the deity on behalf of the king in a ritual called “seeing god,” and he is even allowed to see all the forms of the god.²²² This seems to imply an intermediary function. Another class of Egyptian specialists is called *ḥry-ḥbt*, “the one in charge of festival rolls,” also called the “lector priest.”²²³ These persons formed the primary personnel of the centers of education associated with temples called the House of Life, and their job description included magic, healing, and incantations. They were also in charge of written scrolls and, through them, had access to secret lore and divine knowledge.

Without being “prophets” in the sense of transmission of divine words in an altered state of mind, the magical acts of *ḥry-ḥbt* can be compared to prophetic figures such as Elijah and Elisha who, however, are not associated with any kind of textual lore. At any rate, the *ḥry-ḥbt* were “responsible for creating and transmitting revealed divine knowledge and words of power,”²²⁴ and in this capacity their function can be compared to prophetic agency. It is questionable, however, if they, or any other Egyptian class of religious functionaries, can be called prophets in the meaning proposed in this book.²²⁵

²²¹ See Edelman 2014 and cf. the reservations of Schipper 2014. I am indebted to Johanna Pajuniemi for drawing my attention to these Egyptian specialists.

²²² See Gee 2004.

²²³ See Nunn 1998: 98–9.

²²⁴ Edelman 2014: 110.

²²⁵ Schipper 2014: “Zwar findet man in Ägypten auch Orakel und Traumoffenbarungen, einen vergleichbaren Begriff zum Griechischen *προφήτης* *prophētēs* oder zum Hebräischen *נָבִי* *nāví* gibt es jedoch nicht. Auch ist kein spezifischer Vermittler des göttlichen Willens in Form eines Propheten nachweisbar.”

ON COMPARATIVE STUDIES

Why Do We Compare? Or: What Do We Want to Know?

Constructing a general picture of ancient Eastern Mediterranean prophecy is by necessity a comparative enterprise, since it can only be composed of materials coming from different times, places, and cultures. But why is it necessary anyway? Every comparison has a purpose which usually is not the act of comparison itself but is associated with an interpretive agenda. The question of why we compare always depends on what we want to know. This, again, must be related to what *can* be known and *how* it can be known—that is, what our sources can be expected to reveal and how this information can be processed in a historically responsible way, serving the task defined by the research agenda.

Placing two or more things next to each other for the sake of comparison is normally done under the assumption that they have something in common. This commonness is supposed to help us to understand and interpret the one thing in the light of the other(s). That two things have something in common does not necessarily imply their similarity or historical connection, even though, as Jonathan Z. Smith wrote already in 1982, “*comparison has been chiefly an affair of the recollection of similarity. The chief explanation for the significance of comparison has been contiguity. The procedure is homeopathic. The theory is built on contagion. The issue of difference has been all but forgotten.*”²²⁶ The process of working from a psychological association of similarity to the historical assumption of causality made Smith ask whether comparison is an enterprise of magic or science. Three and a half decades later, Smith’s concern is still quite topical and will always be, because similarity and difference do not exist independently of the researcher’s mind, and the comparative enterprise is always the result of the creative scholarly spirit.

For a long time, comparative studies have been driven by the dichotomy of independent developments versus cultural diffusion, the motivation for comparison typically arising from the will to prove rather than disprove the influence of one party of the comparison on the other. There is nothing wrong in this kind of approach, if there are enough sources to make sense of it and channels of transmission can be at least theoretically reconstructed.²²⁷ However, the comparative agenda does not need to be addicted to the question of influence and causality. In the case of prophecy, the matter of influence is clearly subordinate to the more preliminary question of whether it is possible at all to create a somewhat coherent picture of prophetic divination in the

²²⁶ J. Z. Smith 1982: 21 (emphasis original).

²²⁷ For my own attempt to place the Song of Songs in what I call the Eastern Mediterranean erotic lyric tradition, see Nissinen 2016.

ancient Eastern Mediterranean by way of comparing the scattered and disconnected source materials. That these very lines have been written anyway indicates a certain degree of optimism with regard to this question. Coherence, of course, is also the product of the researcher's mind in the first place, and I do not use this word as a synonym of contagion, similarity, or sameness; what I mean is rather the togetherness of things that can be seen in one historical picture.

There are many reasons for why certain things appear together in the same historical picture, causality being one of them. Causal explanation, however, will not be the master narrative of this book. Given the fact that the points of comparison in my study are texts mostly lacking any demonstrable interdependence, it may be wise not to expect at the outset that the comparison will reveal hidden genealogies or contiguities between them. Therefore, the reconstruction of such dependencies is not on my agenda, even though there is no reason to programmatically deny their existence and every hint at a possible connection between the source materials is welcome. What I do assume is the cultural connectedness of different parts of the ancient Eastern Mediterranean world including Mesopotamia during the two or so millennia covered by the sources discussed in this book. Some degree of contiguity can and should, therefore, be expected, and some room should be left even for causal explanation.

Why, then, am I interested in drawing a big picture of ancient Eastern Mediterranean prophecy? This is related to my own occupation with prophecy over the last three decades, starting from the Hebrew Bible, soon moving to the Mesopotamian side of the fence, publishing a collection of ancient Near Eastern prophetic texts in 2003,²²⁸ and only after that starting to seriously wonder if there is a Greek side to the picture. My own experience has been that if prophecy is studied from the Bible alone, the results pertain to biblical prophecy, while the comparative material not only enables examining biblical prophecy as a part of a larger religio-historical context but also improves our historical interpretation of the prophetic phenomenon. Incorporating Greek sources into the study is but a logical extension of the area of the comparison, adding a few more keyhole views into the ancient Eastern Mediterranean landscape and enabling the change of perspective and the direction of the spotlight.

My personal experience of the widening scope of the study of prophecy roughly corresponds to the development of scholarly interest in general. Prophecy is a concept that for a long time belonged first and foremost to the language of Christian and Jewish theology and the academic field of biblical studies, conceived of as a primarily biblical concept and as a phenomenon typical of ancient Israel with only few parallels elsewhere. The increasing

²²⁸ SBLWAW 12; a second edition of this volume is under preparation.

number of sources from the ancient Near East that were brought to daylight (such as the letters from Mari from the late 1940s on²²⁹ or the inscription of Deir Alla in 1976²³⁰) or newly recognized as prophecies (such as the Assyrian prophecies from the 1970s on²³¹) demonstrated that transmission of divine messages comparable to that known from the Hebrew Bible was found also in Mesopotamia. These texts provided the long-awaited parallel material for the study of biblical prophecy, and soon enough the comparison no longer happened between biblical and “extrabiblical” but between materials in their own right, including the definition of prophecy as one branch of divination.

Despite the intensive study of Greek oracle from the nineteenth century on, it has not been an integral part of comparative studies on prophecy until recently. This is somewhat surprising, since a brief look at the map will reveal that Greece is and was not far away from the Near East, and cultural contact between the Near East and the Aegean is abundantly evidenced from early periods on by archaeological discoveries. Perhaps the Greek sources could not appear on the “prophetic” scene before the concept was released from its biblical captivity and fully applied to Near Eastern sources; perhaps the Classicists once saw the Greek tradition as too “unique and isolated, classical” to be compared with other traditions.²³² Whatever the explanation, the relevance of the ancient Near Eastern texts and tradition for Classical studies has been acknowledged in many important studies demonstrating the knowledge of Near Eastern mythological and historical traditions in the Greek world.²³³ In the wake of the increasing interest in East–West relations, even comparative studies targeted on Near Eastern and biblical prophecy and Greek oracle have started emerging.²³⁴

Enough phenomenological points of convergence—similarities as well as differences—between Greek, Near Eastern, and biblical prophecy have been recognized to make the comparison a meaningful task even without the compulsion of demonstrating common origins and mutual influences. Texts and phenomena always belong to their literary and socio-historical contexts

²²⁹ The first texts with prophetic content were published by Dossin 1948 (*38) and Lods and Dossin 1950 (A. 1121, part of *1).

²³⁰ Hoftijzer and van der Kooij 1976.

²³¹ See Parpola 1997: xiii–xvii and the first comprehensive analysis of the Neo-Assyrian prophecies by Weippert 1981 (= 2014: 9–47).

²³² Quotation from Burkert 2004: 1; see also van Dongen 2008: 233.

²³³ A short bibliography of Greek–Near Eastern issues—especially myth, law, cultural influence, and general issues—would include at least the following: Westbrook 2015; Bremmer 2008, 2015; Haubold 2013; Loudon 2011; Rollinger 1996, 2001, 2011; López Ruiz 2010; van Dongen 2008; Rollinger, Luther, and Wieshöfer (eds) 2007; Hagedorn 2004; Burkert 1983, 1987 (= 2003: 48–72), 1992, 2004; Kuhrt 2002; West 1969, 1997; Penglase 1994; Held 1983; Gresseth 1975.

²³⁴ Nissinen 2010c, 2013a; Marinatos 2009; Kupitz and Berthelot 2009; Lange 2006, 2007, 2009; M. A. Flower 2008: 228–30; Bremmer 2008: 133–51; Hagedorn 2007; Huffmon 2007; Wyatt 2007. For an earlier Greek–biblical comparison of Amos and Hesiod, see Seybold and von Ungern Sternberg 1993.

and can rarely be read simply in terms of one “borrowing” another. We can safely assume that a constant cultural interaction between the Near East and Greece took place during millennia, and we can also be confident that much in our sources result from this this communication. However, whenever cultural “borrowing” takes place, it implies an immediate contextualization.²³⁵ Cultural borrowing is not just literary and structural copying of individual elements, and it can happen without leaving explicit traces in written sources. Therefore, routes of transmission and carriers of traditions and their transfers often remain invisible and unreconstructable, however convinced we may be about their existence.²³⁶

Shared characteristics, hence, may or may not be due to influence, interdependency, and contiguity. If causality is the touchstone of all comparison, we will have to struggle with not clearly definable “borders between the highly plausible, the possible, and the improbable”²³⁷ when looking for cultural connections. Keeping in mind that “[c]ausal explanations of complex cultural phenomena will always remain tentative and one-sided,”²³⁸ we may ask why causality has played such an important role in comparison, and why the comparability of two or three entities has been fully justified only by means of a causal explanation.²³⁹ It must be tolerable to include two or three entities in the same big picture even though the landscape between the keyholes remains invisible and a causal explanation may turn out to be improbable, sometimes even impossible.

The comparative work done so far between biblical, Near Eastern, and Greek prophecy has already changed the scholarly concept of prophecy, and this is the best motivation for continuing doing it. It is to be expected that a comprehensive view on the ancient Eastern Mediterranean material will improve our understanding of the prophetic phenomenon in each individual case, not by way of sweeping generalizations but by way of *identifying a common category*. This requires a detailed analysis of each particular source; however, looking at only one material without a broader context may result in a distorted picture of the material itself. Therefore, it is also necessary to look

²³⁵ This is sometimes seen as an obstacle for comparative study; cf. Trampedach (2015: 21) on eastern influences in Greece: “Ohne die Möglichkeit von ‘Anstößen’ aus dem Osten grundsätzlich zu leugnen, bleibt festzuhalten, daß materielle und technischen Übernahmen nicht viel besagen, wenn man sie nicht in ihrem kulturellen Kontext betrachtet und das Problem ihrer Anwendung ignoriert.”

²³⁶ Cf., e.g. Bremmer 2015: 609–13.

²³⁷ Thus Lambert 1996: 768.

²³⁸ Burkert 2004: 5.

²³⁹ Causal explanation seems to be what Schaper 2013 regards as the purpose of comparison: “Even where so-called ‘similarities’ have been demonstrated beyond reasonable doubt, one wonders what conclusions those who point out the ‘similarities’ are drawing: was there a discernible influence exercised on one tradition by the other, and, if so, what was the direction of that influence? And if there was no ‘organic’ connection between the two traditions, what does that tell us?”

at several materials from a distance, asking “how am I to apply what the one thing shows me to the case of two things?”²⁴⁰ Perhaps we learn to ask new questions when looking at one material in the light of the other, whether or not there is any kind of historical causality between them.

What Do We Compare? Or: What Can Be Known?

First of all, we always primarily compare *sources* (texts, images, artifacts), and only secondarily *realities* that can only be constructed from the evidence provided by the sources. Such a comparison can be done in a cross-cultural and transhistorical way, without assuming any historical contact between the sources.²⁴¹ However, when there is geographical proximity and some chronological continuum can be assumed, even historical and cultural contacts can sensibly be argued for. In the case of Greece and the ancient Near East (including ancient Israel and Judah), cultural contacts are evident and partly well known; however, due to significant geographical and chronological gaps, genealogies between individual sources usually cannot be reconstructed. This is due to the nature of the source material consisting of a rather uneven and partly haphazard collection of texts deriving from the twenty-first century BCE through second century CE.

The extant documentation of the ancient Near Eastern prophecy consists of very different kinds of sources: written oracles, letters reporting prophetic appearances and dreams, legal and administrative documents, word-lists, paraphrases of prophecy in literary contexts, and literary fiction. All written records of oral prophetic messages are, in a way, secondary because of their very writtenness: the words that once came out of the prophets' mouths were necessarily exposed to material restrictions, selection, and memory of the person who wrote them down. However, some texts at our disposal, can be considered (quasi-)primary sources, such as the Mesopotamian letters and prophetic oracles, which are early transcripts of spoken prophecies, taking us as close as we can get to historical prophetic performances. Letters reporting such performances, known from Mari and Assyria, also refer to oral performances witnessed by the letter-writer directly or through a go-between.

²⁴⁰ Wittgenstein 1953: 84 (no. 215): “Aber ist nicht wenigstens gleich: *gleich?* Für die Gleichheit scheinen wir ein unfehlbares Paradigma zu haben in der Gleichheit eines Dinges mit sich selbst. Ich will sagen: ‘Hier kann es doch nicht verschiedene Deutungen geben. Wenn er ein Ding vor sich sieht, so sieht er auch Gleichheit.’ Also sind zwei Dinge gleich, wenn sie so sind, wie *ein* Ding? Und wie soll ich nun das, was mir das *eine* Ding zeigt, auf den Fall der zwei anwenden?” Quoted also by J. Z. Smith 1982: 35.

²⁴¹ See, for instance, the comparison of ancient Greek and early Chinese divination by Raphals 2013, and the anthropological comparisons of prophetic phenomena by Overholt 1986, 1989; and Grabbe 2000, 2010.

Perhaps the most “neutral” records are the legal and administrative texts from different times and all parts of Mesopotamia. They provide us with hard evidence of the presence of prophets in a certain city or temple, but they rarely tell us much about the prophetic performances. Oracle reports and letters in royal archives can be read as reliable accounts of spoken prophetic words; however, even they do not necessarily give a balanced and unbiased picture of prophecy of their time, because certain prophecies were filed away while others were not, and letters were written from the point of view of the writer for her or his own purposes. Therefore, even the (quasi-)primary sources do not represent a full portrait of the prophetic phenomenon at a given time and place, but yield only a partial view of it. What we do not see is due to the accident of discovery, and also to deliberate selection.

The role of intentional construction becomes even more significant in secondary sources such as quotations of prophetic words in Assyrian royal inscriptions or descriptions of prophetic performances in the prophetic and narrative texts of the Hebrew Bible, and the narratives concerning the Delphic oracle and other oracles by Greek writers such as Herodotus, Xenophon, or Plutarch. Testing such narratives for factual authenticity is often difficult if not impossible, but it is always worth asking how a particular writer told the story for particular purposes at a certain point in history.²⁴²

Sources of prophecy are ultimately sources of the *reception* of prophecy; in this sense they are always secondary with regard to the prophetic performance, every source is the result of a process of selection and adaptation in a given context for specific purposes.²⁴³ The purpose and function of prophetic literature is not the same as the purpose and function of the prophetic performance.²⁴⁴ Texts often hide as much as they reveal, and, therefore, our picture of ancient prophecy will always be incomplete and partially distorted.

How Do We Compare? Or: How Can We Know What We Want to Know?

As stated above, every sensible comparison has a purpose, and there cannot be a purpose without an agenda based on an interpretive will. Jonathan Z. Smith recommended the “methodical manipulation of difference playing across the ‘gap’ in the service of some useful end”²⁴⁵—indeed, the comparison makes little sense without an idea of its usefulness. “The *aim* of a comparison

²⁴² Cf. Kindt 2016: 10.

²⁴³ Cf. Hardwick 2003: 5.

²⁴⁴ Weeks 2010: 43: “The function of prophetic literature is not the same as the function of prophecy, and the act even of preserving an oracle verbatim is functionally and qualitatively different from that of delivering an oracle.”

²⁴⁵ J. Z. Smith 1982: 35; cf. 1987: 14.

determines the range.”²⁴⁶ There is no such thing as complete objectivity here,²⁴⁷ since the very question of what we want to know depends on the needs and interests of the one who is asking, already setting an agenda for reading the sources. Comparison is a hermeneutical act which cannot be performed without a certain amount of preliminary knowledge of the subject, which also entails an initial idea of the result of the comparison; hence the one who is involved in such a hermeneutical act must be constantly aware of the danger of entering a hermeneutical circle.²⁴⁸ The interpretive will should not predetermine the results of the comparative analysis, but without it, the comparative enterprise does not have a useful aim.

In this book, I am aiming at a big picture of ancient Eastern Mediterranean prophetic divination, however fragmentary this picture will turn out to be. This picture is expected to be coherent enough to show the same landscape, but the landscape is not expected to be a homogeneous whole. Moreover, we only see the landscape through keyholes that offer only a partial, often very restricted view. Looking through these keyholes, I try to identify elements recognizable as what I have defined as prophecy, remembering that such elements are neither recognizable nor interpretable without a context. In fact, the context provides the prophetic element the reason to be there.

During the history of comparative studies, researchers have struggled with two dichotomies, one between the general and the particular, and the other between similarities and differences, often presented as choices to be made by the researcher.²⁴⁹ At the worst, differences have been highlighted to play down similarities and vice versa; observing general features has happened at the cost of the particulars and vice versa. As Einar Thomassen put it: “On the one extreme we find the meaninglessness of the purely empirical, on the other, the emptiness of the tautological a priori.”²⁵⁰

The general and the particular, however, are not each other’s enemies, and a sense of both is absolutely necessary in constructing the big picture I am aiming at. A common category of prophecy is needed to recognize the prophetic elements in the landscape, and categorization is not possible without some degree of generalization.²⁵¹ Generalization, however, is related first and foremost to categorization, not to the details included in the source material.

²⁴⁶ Segal 2001: 351 (emphasis original).

²⁴⁷ Pace Penglase 1994: 11.

²⁴⁸ Cf. Schaper 2013: 238: “Comparative study is possible and necessary, but there is the danger of entering a hermeneutical circle, of moving back and forth between the Neo-Assyrian material and its supposed biblical counterparts and using one to explain the other, changing directions as one sees fit. This leads to a methodological muddle and falsifies results.”

²⁴⁹ Barstad 2000: 7: “When we do find interesting similarities in closely related cultural systems, the similarities may result from how humans, as mentioned above, behave in similar manners in similar situations.”

²⁵⁰ Thomassen 1999: 251.

²⁵¹ As Segal (2001: 373) writes, “the categorization prompts the quest for an explanation of the similarities or the differences found among cases of the category.”

Therefore, interpretation of the particular should not be determined by the generalization—on the contrary, the details provide the best way of controlling the adequacy of the categorization.

When the points of comparison consist of such a multifarious materials as they do in our comparison between (A) Near Eastern, (B) Greek, and (C) biblical sources, it is essentially important to recognize that A, B, and C as such are not coherent and uniform groups of texts. Therefore, the comparison cannot only happen between these three entities at large but within them ($A_1 A_2 \dots A_x$; $B_1 B_2 \dots B_x$; $C_1 C_2 \dots C_x$); sometimes it may be easier to compare A_1 with B_3 or C_4 than with A_2 .

To compare phenomena is “*necessarily* to find differences as well as similarities.”²⁵² The problem with this dichotomy has traditionally concerned the significance of the one at the cost of the other, often associated with the assumption that similarity signifies contiguity and calls for a causal explanation, while difference works to the opposite effect, indicating disconnection and, perhaps, discouraging the comparative enterprise altogether. However, similarity and difference exist at the same time—there is no similarity without a difference, no difference without similarity. In fact, similarity gives much less to compare than difference, and therefore comparative studies are essentially what Smith calls methodical manipulation of the difference.

Evidently, the recollection of similarity does not entail contiguity, much less identity; and on the other hand, differences do not disprove historical connection, since continuity always entails transformation. How essentially important is it, then, to be able to demonstrate textual dependence and cultural interaction? Is this the only meaningful agenda of comparative studies? This question is extremely relevant when comparison takes place between source materials such as those documenting Greek and Near Eastern prophecy, which do not easily lend themselves to a genealogical approach. Direct dependencies between the texts will probably be impossible to demonstrate; however, with regard to previous knowledge about the interaction between Greek and Near Eastern cultures, a cultural connection cannot be ruled out a priori.

Perhaps the Wittgensteinian term “family resemblance” could, again, best describe what I mean,²⁵³ especially if the word “family” is understood metaphorically (as I understand Wittgenstein to understand it) rather than implying a genetic relationship between the points of comparison. Resemblance implies commonality in difference and difference in commonality. The Near Eastern, Greek, and biblical documents discussed in this book share a critical amount of characteristics that point towards a common classifier or category which I call “prophecy.” No two members of this family are precisely alike, “cousins” may sometimes resemble each other more than “siblings,” and it is

²⁵² Segal 2001: 348–9 (emphasis original).

²⁵³ See above, n. 67.

exactly the differences between them that provide them their own identity, thus making the comparison a meaningful enterprise.

It is here that the common category can serve as an aid of interpretation. When reading one type of sources, other source materials belonging to the same category, whether or not historically connected, may raise questions that would not emerge by focusing on one material only. The comparative perspective may help us to pay attention to things in one source that only become visible in comparison with another thing in another source. What appears as an anomaly in one source material may turn out to be the normal state of affairs in the other; a thing present in one source material may make the researcher wonder why the same thing is missing in the other material. A certain structural or ideological pattern in one source becomes more difficult to take for granted if another source represents the same thing differently patterned. The incompleteness of the historical data provided by one source material may only become evident when compared with the information obtainable from another source.

It is my hope that the comparative perspective will help us to broaden the scope and find new tools for the scholarly construction of prophetic divination. Rudimentary and imprecise as our knowledge of ancient prophecy inevitably is because of the fragmentary nature of the available source material, I can only adhere to John Barton's conclusion of his *Oracles of God*:

It remains to ask whether modern scholarship can do better in establishing what "the old prophets" were really like. I believe that it can, but that it is first necessary to see clearly how great an obstacle to the task the ages that succeeded them have placed in our way.²⁵⁴

SOURCES, GENRE, AND PURPOSE

Everything we know about ancient prophecy is based on written texts. Ancient Near Eastern prophecy is known exclusively through the multifarious body of written sources that have been preserved more or less accidentally, and all we can say we "know" about ancient prophecy is what these sources let us know. Self-evident as this may sound, the awareness of the exclusively written nature of prophetic sources—and our total dependence on them in imagining ancient prophecy—may not yet have shaped enough our image of prophecy.

Biblical prophetic texts, in spite of the general shift of interest from historical personalities to prophetic books, still often tend to be read as achievements of individual thinkers rather than products of societies that used writing and

²⁵⁴ Barton 1986: 273.

written documents for a variety of purposes. A similar idea of “authenticity” may also motivate the quest for ancient prophecy even elsewhere in the Eastern Mediterranean. However, ancient prophecy was not basically scribal but oral activity, and the scribal processes that led to written records of prophecy were always a secondary development with regard to the spoken, “original” prophecies.²⁵⁵ This process necessarily corresponded to the aims and needs of the communities that kept it in progress and involved the requisite scholarly skills to keep, produce, and transmit written documents. Therefore, the question of how and why prophecy became written down and eventually developed into literature is related to the sociology of the scribal culture.²⁵⁶

In recent definitions of prophecy, the central concepts are communication and intermediation. Prophecy is seen as a process of divine–human communication, in which the prophet is the mediator between the divine and human worlds, transmitting divine messages to human recipients.²⁵⁷ The prophetic process of communication should not, however, be understood as a one-way street from the deity through the prophet and eventual go-betweens to the recipients. If this was all, prophecy could never have become a written text, let alone literature that is still read, interpreted, and adapted to the readers’ or hearers’ lives and reality. Rather, prophecy should be considered a form of social communication in which the whole community, a fraction, or an individual member of it participates. The literarization of prophecy presupposes a community that adopts, repeats, interprets, and reinterprets prophetic messages for its own purposes, and individual scribes and authors who, as members of their communities, take care of the written compositions. The process of communication goes no further without an institutional echo that keeps it alive and ultimately makes prophecy functional.²⁵⁸ It is up to the community to decide whether or not a prophecy is worth communicating, which conclusions should be drawn from it and what the criteria of true and false prophecy are. Therefore, the preservation of prophecy for coming generations in the form of a written record stored in a safe place is essentially in the hands of the community.

From the point of view of the communicational process, prophecy does not presuppose any writing at all. Every phase of the communication from the

²⁵⁵ The issue of orality and writtenness in ancient prophecy is discussed in several contributions included in Ben Zvi and Floyd (eds) 2000. For a study on the transition from oral to written prophecy, see also Schmid 2014; van der Toorn 2004.

²⁵⁶ See, e.g. van der Toorn 2007; Carr 2005; cf. also Ben Zvi 2000b and the articles collected in Edelman and Ben Zvi (eds) 2009.

²⁵⁷ Thus the most-quoted definition of prophecy (Weippert 2014: 231–2). For qualifications of this definition, see, e.g. Stökl 2012b: 54; Nissinen 2004; Petersen 2000; Barstad 1993. For a similar understanding of Greek prophecy, see Motte 2013.

²⁵⁸ Cf. Wilson 1980: 28–32.

prophet to the addressee is possible without scribal involvement, even though the use of scribal assistance evidently facilitates the process and is urgently needed in some cases. Unless ancient prophets themselves wrote the records of their performances (and this, as a rule, was not expected to be the case, as I have argued elsewhere²⁵⁹), reports on the prophets and their messages were written down by others. There are many answers to the questions of how and why this happened, depending on the function and the purpose of the act of writing in each case. Nothing ended up in written form by accident, and the purpose of a text principally determined what was and what was not written down.

Recording a prophecy may as such have given the reason for the authoring of a text, especially if the text mainly consists of the words belonging to a divine message or gives an account on what a prophetic character had said or done. In many cases, however, it is evident that the text is not written primarily for the purpose of informing the reader about prophets or prophecies, and the evidence of prophecy comes, rather, as an unintended by-product of a text mainly informing on other matters. Other texts, again, may lay much emphasis on prophecies as part of a narrative context which is a literary construction rather than a report of a prophetic performance that actually took place in real history.

The purpose of any given text is reflected by its genre, which (like “prophecy” or “divination”) is deliberate construct, a tool of communication and an aid to understanding.²⁶⁰ Genre is an abstract conception not existing as an essentialist unit independent from its constructors, hence the taxonomy of genres is not an objective procedure.²⁶¹ Genre should not be understood as a fixed, self-sustaining prescription, because it “is not a set of textual features that can be enumerated; rather, it is an expectation.”²⁶² This concerns both textual production and reception; texts were and still are written and used with an expectation of genre in mind.

The idea of genre is not a modern invention; genres existed before their conceptualization by modern scholarship. However, (emic) genres constructed by ancient writers for their purposes should not be straightforwardly equated with the (etic) genres we construct for our purposes. In other words: the genre expectations of authors and the readers do not necessarily correspond to each other, especially if the production and reception of a text are separated by a historical and cultural gap. “How we define a genre depends on our purposes,”²⁶³ and generic classification is an answer to the question of why *we* need the genre, what makes the categorization meaningful. Our genre

²⁵⁹ Nissinen 2014a.

²⁶⁰ For theoretical discussion on genre with regard to ancient Near Eastern texts, see Knapp 2015: 31–42; Neujahr 2012: 75–81; Mack 2011: 32–5; Sparks 2006: 1–24; Newsom 2005; Dobbs-Allsopp 2000.

²⁶¹ See, e.g. Chandler 1997; Dowd 2006; and the articles included in D. Duff (ed.) 2000.

²⁶² Copley 2006: 41. ²⁶³ Chandler 1997: 3.

expectations are determined by our research questions, but since genre is not only a prescriptive but also a descriptive category, we should be able to recognize the genres constructed by ancient writers, as well as the purposes for which ancient genres were used.

The question of genre is essentially related to the question what *can* be known. The choice of the genre defines what is included and excluded in a given text; hence genre functions as a decisive filter between the reader and the historical reality. Prophets and prophecy feature in different kinds of texts which do not answer the same questions, and the information obtainable from each text is dependent on its purpose and genre. Understanding the purpose of the text by recognizing its genre defines the quality of information obtainable from each text and sets limits to the expectations of what can be known.

Chapter 2 attempts to look at the ancient Eastern Mediterranean prophetic phenomenon through the keyholes provided by the fragmentary collection of the written sources at our disposal. All information we have is based on the interpretation of prophecy by other people in a variety of ways and for a variety of purposes. This inevitably raises questions concerning their reliability and viability when it comes to their use as documents of the phenomenon of prophecy in the ancient Near East and in Greece: Does the available set of sources sufficiently and reliably represent the different forms and manifestations of ancient Eastern Mediterranean prophecy? Why are some aspects of this phenomenon so well documented while others remain obscure? Why have so few prophecies been deposited in archives, and whose interests have thereby been served? Are the prophetic utterances transmitted so that they reflect the actual proclamation in concrete situations? If not, what is the role of the transmitters, interpreters, and editors of the prophetic words? Could it be that in some cases written prophecies are not based on actual prophetic performances at all? Is it possible to reconstruct the very words of the prophets themselves, or is the whole concept of *ipsissima verba* an anachronistic application of the late notions of originality, authorship, and literal inspiration?

It may turn out that the sources documenting ancient Eastern Mediterranean prophecy very often do not give a satisfactory answer to all these questions. Therefore it is doubtful whether writing a comprehensive “history of ancient Eastern Mediterranean prophecy” is a meaningful task at all. As Seth Sanders writes:

If textual production and transmission is inexplicable except when understood in terms of a text’s genres and agents, then there is really no one history of writing and literary production but a history of genres and writers, undertaking often strikingly different projects over the course of centuries.²⁶⁴

²⁶⁴ Sanders 2015: 118.

Part II

Sources

Ancient Near Eastern Sources

The purpose of this chapter is to give an overview of what kind of source materials are available for the study of ancient Eastern Near Eastern prophecy. The following classification is based on what I understand broadly to be ancient genres, but it is nevertheless my own construction, dividing the genres represented by Near Eastern, Greek, and biblical sources into the following six classes:

- (1) lexical lists and omen texts,
- (2) administrative texts,
- (3) ritual texts,
- (4) letters,
- (5) written prophecy,
- (6) literary prophecy.

Classes 1–3 are almost exclusively represented by Mesopotamian sources and consist of texts that do not give an account of prophetic messages but help to locate prophets and their activities in lexical, administrative, and ritual contexts. Classes 4–5 include texts in which divine words transmitted by prophets are quoted and/or the prophets' goings-on are described in (quasi-)primary sources. Class 6 also contains prophetic oracles, references to prophets, and descriptions of their activities in secondary sources such as royal inscriptions, historical narratives, and prophetic books, often with a considerable temporal distance from the described events and phenomena, if not fictitious altogether.

LEXICAL LISTS AND OMEN TEXTS

Lexical Lists

Lexical lists form a well-definable Mesopotamian genre, known from numerous tablets from the earliest times of cuneiform writing through the Hellenistic

period. In the numerous texts representing this genre, lexical items (words and signs) are organized in groups presenting lexical equivalents in two, sometimes in three columns. The socio-historical setting of the lexical lists is to be found in scribal education: they served the purpose of training cuneiform scribes who had to master both Sumerian and Akkadian. The lists were used to teach apprentice scribes the cuneiform script, signs, and words—the basic skills they needed to be able to write texts representing different genres. As such, the lists can be read as ancient tools of construction of knowledge and as a hermeneutical approach of ancient tradition.¹

Some lexical lists are monolingual (either Sumerian or Akkadian), but the majority of them are bilingual Sumerian–Akkadian. The lists typically consist of groups of words with a common semantic denominator: names of people and places, domestic and wild animals, stars and gods, professions, objects made of different raw materials, and so on. The grouping of words in two or three bilingual columns causes the words to be related to each other horizontally, vertically, and diagonally, thus creating a system that does not connote synonymy in the strict sense but, rather, a semantic association between the words.

The organization of the lists is clearly different from modern dictionaries, and the logic of the clusters of words is sometimes difficult to understand, but this does not make them arbitrary accumulations of words without any clear structural and semantic principles. They must have made sense to the teachers and students of cuneiform writing, the words forming a constitutive part of their conceptual and cognitive perception of the world around them. The lists went through a process of standardization between the Old Babylonian and Neo-Assyrian periods, resulting in the attempt towards a fixed form in the post-Old Babylonian lists.² The reliance on the Old Babylonian tradition can be seen throughout the material, even though no extant composition is an exact copy of another.

Prophetic designations can be found in a number of lexical lists deriving from Old Babylonian, Middle and Neo-Assyrian, and Neo- and Late Babylonian periods.³ Throughout the lexical tradition, prophets typically appear in a semantic company similar to the following list dating from the Neo-Assyrian period but going back to the Old Babylonian tradition of *Lú*-lists, that is, lists of professions:

¹ See Veldhuis 2006, 2011, 2014; Taylor 2007.

² See Veldhuis 2014: 390; Taylor 2007: 440.

³ *120, lines 23–4, 32 (Old Babylonian); *135l, line 169 (Middle Assyrian); *124, line 213; *135, lines 116–19; *126, lines 134–5, 147; *135m, lines iii 24, vi 41 (Neo-Assyrian); *135n, line 29 (Neo-Babylonian); *135q, lines 42, 54 (Late Babylonian); cf. the parallels to *135m in Igituh, lines 258–70 (Landsberger and Gurney 1957–8: 83–4) and in CT 18 5 r. ii (Wallis Budge 1964: pl. 5).

sánga-maḥ	šangammāḥu	high priest/exorcist
[maš]-maš	mašmaššu	exorcist
nar-balag	āšipu	exorcist
ka-pirig	ditto	(the same)
muš-DU ^{1a.1a.ab} du	mušlalahḥu	snake-charmer
lú-gi ^š gàm-šu-du ₇	muššipu	exorcist
la-bar	kalû	chanter
gala-maḥ	kalamāḥu	chief chanter
i-lu-di	munambû	lamentation singer
i-lu-a-li	lallaru	wailer
lú-gub-ba	maḥḥû	prophet
lú-ní-zu-ub	zabbu	frenzied one
kur-gar-ra	kurgarrû	kurgarrû
ur-sal	assinnu	assinnu
lú-gi ^š bala-šu-du ₇	nāš pilaqqi	carrier of spindle ⁴

Another example can be extracted from a large Neo-Assyrian lexical compilation, in which the following two Sumerian–Akkadian and Akkadian–Akkadian sequences of designations can be found:

lú-uš-bar	= ušpāru	weaver
lú-ka-šir	= kāširu	tailor
lú-sag-šur	= kāpiru	caulker
lú-muš-laḥ ₄	= mušlahḥu	snake charmer
lú-en-me-li	= šā'ilu	inquirer (of divine words)
lú-gub-ba	= maḥḥû	prophet
lú-[ní-su]-ub	= zabbu	ecstatic
lú-[ur-sal]	= ku[lu]'u	kulu'u
lú-[ur-sal]	= [assin]nu	assinnu
lú-[x-x]	= [kur]garru	kurgarrû
[lú-an-ni-ba-tu]	= eššebû	ecstatic
[lú-x-x]	= naršindu	magician
[lú-kuš]-tag-ga	= ēpiš ipši	magician
(...)		
eššebû	= maḥḥû	ecstatic = prophet
parrû	= ditto	parrû = same
uššuru	= ditto	a released person = same
zabbu	= ditto	ecstatic = same
assinnu	= kulu'u	assinnu = kulu'u
pilpilû	= ditto	pilpilû = same

⁴ *124, lines 203–17. For the Lu-lists, see Veldhuis 2014: 159–66.

<i>kurgarrû</i>	= ditto	<i>kurgarrû</i> = same
<i>ararû</i>	= ditto	<i>ararû</i> = same ⁵

These two examples represent very well the positioning of prophets in the lexical tradition. Almost regardless of the periods the lists come from, the semantic environment of the prophets remains roughly similar. The Akkadian words denoting a prophetic function, *muhhûm/muhhûtum* and *mahhû/mahhûtu*,⁶ are more often than not equated with the Sumerian *lú-gub-ba*, which can be translated as “ecstatic” or, if we prefer, as “prophet.”⁷ Designations of people placed in vertical, horizontal, or diagonal proximity to the prophetic designations virtually always⁸ belong to the sphere of temples, including musicians and lamentation singers, priests, and exorcists, but also craftsmen and artisans. The most common people associated with prophets, either by way of vertical or horizontal juxtaposition or an otherwise close positioning, are other ecstasies (*zabbu*, *eššebû*) and devotees of the goddess *Ištar* whose gender role is non-conventional (*assinnu*, *kurgarrû*, *kulu’u*).⁹ These associations point towards the prophets’ immediate environment in temples, especially those where *Ištar* was worshipped.

The information obtainable from the lexical lists is primarily of semantic nature, and the words in them refer to the lexical tradition in the first place. Therefore, the lists as such cannot be used as a source of exact information about the organization of the society. However, the semantic associations are not without correspondence in real-life circumstances. This can be seen with the help of administrative texts, which we shall discuss in a moment.

Omen Texts

Before turning to the administrative texts, however, it is necessary to discuss the appearance of prophets in a textual genre that is clearly distinct from lexical texts but which sometimes has structural affinities with it, namely the omen collections. Mesopotamian divination was deeply concerned with omens, the interpretation of which was a scholarly enterprise of the first rank.¹⁰ Omens were believed to be signs sent by the gods, and they were taken primarily by means of technical divination, observing the organs of

⁵ *135m, lines iii 19–31 and vi 41–8; see von Soden 1933: pl. 1, 3 (copy).

⁶ The lists also include *šā’ilu* “inquirer of divine words” preceding *mahhû* in *135m iii: 23, and *šabrû* “dreamer,” equated with *raggimu* in *126, line 134 and *135q, line 42.

⁷ So in *120, lines 23–4; *124, line 213; *125, line 117; *135l, line 169; *135m, line iii 24; *135n, line 29. Note that in *126, line 135, *lú-gub-ba* is equated with *apillû*.

⁸ The exception may be the Late Babylonian list *135q, where the pertinent section does not seem to list temple personnel other than the *assinnu*.

⁹ For the debated character of *assinnu* and *kurgarrû*, see Nissinen and Svård forthcoming; Peled 2014, 2016; Zsolnay 2013; Stökl 2013a; Assante 2009.

¹⁰ Cf. the recent and thorough overview of Koch 2015: 67–290; see also the articles published in Annus (ed.) 2010, especially Koch 2010; Rochberg 2010b; Veldhuis 2010.

sacrificial animals, but also interpreting human behavior, birth malformations, and all kinds of everyday phenomena.

Prophecy, as argued in Chapter 1, is a category different from omen interpretation even though some overlaps exist in the sources, hence omen texts as such do not represent prophetic divination. However, prophets may appear in the context of omen texts as a part of the ominous reality. In the series of city omens *Šumma ālu*, a large number of male and female prophets (*mahḥū*, *mahḥātu*) is introduced as an unfavorable omen:

If there are many male prophets in a city, the city will fall.

If there are many female prophets in a city, the city will fall.¹¹

The pertinent section of *Šumma ālu* (lines i: 85–117) is structured in a way akin to the lexical lists. The preserved part of the text itemizes thirty-three classes of people, some of which tend to appear together even in the lexical tradition: diviners of different kinds (male and female prophets, male and female dreamers, performers of incubation,¹² haruspices), cultic performers (musicians, dancers), men-women (*kurgarrū*), and also people with different abnormalities (limping men and women, “crazy” men and women, people with skin diseases, deaf and blind persons, cripples; even thieves). Almost all of these people appear in unfavorable omens—the city is well only if there are many limping people, “crazy” people, red-skinned persons, or dancers.

The hermeneutical principles of the omens in *Šumma ālu* are certainly less arbitrary than they look like at first glance;¹³ however, it is very difficult to understand why the appearance of many wise men in the city is interpreted unfavorably, while the strong presence of crazy people is a good omen. In associating prophets with other diviners and cultic performers, *Šumma ālu* seems to follow a logic similar to that of the lexical lists. What connects the people with (god-caused) abnormalities with diviners may be their liminal position between the human and divine worlds.

Prophets may also appear in the apodosis of an omen, as in two birth omens included in the series *Šumma izbu*:

If an anomaly’s right ear is cropped and inflated with wind: female prophets will seize the land.

If an anomaly’s left ear is cropped and inflated with wind: the same happens to the land of the enemy.¹⁴

¹¹ *129, lines i 101–2; for *Šumma ālu*, see Freedman 1998, 2006; Guinan 1989, 1996b; Koch 2015: 239–56.

¹² This is how CAD M/2: 304 translates the word *mutta’ilu* (< *itūlu* “to lie down, sleep”), whereas the translation of Freedman 1998: 35, “habitual liers-down, lazy-bones” connotes either laziness or excessive sexual activity.

¹³ For the hermeneutical logic behind the omens, see especially Guinan 1989, 1996a.

¹⁴ *127; for *Šumma izbu*, see Leichty 1970; De Zorzi 2011, 2014; Koch 2015: 262–70.

A commentary to these omens¹⁵ specifies the word *maḥḥû/maḥḥātu* to denote possessed or inspired persons (*šēḥu*). Since the left side usually indicates a negative value, the presence of female prophets in the own country would be a favorable omen, while their appearance in the enemy's country would be unfavorable for the own country. Prophets of the land of the enemy are mentioned also in two Neo-Assyrian extispicy reports. In a query concerning Assurbanipal's illness dated to 26th Iyyar (II) 651, three diviners report the results of their liver-reading to the king:

If there is a "foot-mark" in the middle of the middle surface of the "finger," it is the "foot-mark" of a prophet (LÛ.GUB.BA = *maḥḥû*) of the enemy's country.¹⁶

Another report pays attention to the same feature:

If on the left of the "finger" in its wide part there is a "foot-mark," it is the "foot-mark" of a prophet of the enemy's country.¹⁷

The "finger" (*ubānu*) is the caudate lobe of the liver, divided into three surfaces, whereas the "foot-mark" (*šēpu*) is one of the irregular markings that the diviners observed on the liver.¹⁸ In both cases, as is usual in extispicy reports, attention is paid to an anomaly in the liver, and the result of the extispicy is reported by quoting the entire omen deriving from the *bārûtu* omen compendia. The omens are unfavorable, again conveying the noteworthy idea that the prophet of the enemy's country is something harmful for the own country. This seems to reflect the assumption that the prophets would normally deliver positive messages to their kings, and a favorable divine word for the king of the enemy country was to be taken seriously. The significance of such an omen probably lies in the fact that prophecy was used for the purposes of warfare and diplomacy.¹⁹

LEGAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE TEXTS

Archives discovered in Mesopotamia contain a massive amount of legal records and different kinds of administrative documents deriving from palace, temple, and family archives from all historical periods. These texts were produced by temple, city, and palace officers to keep records of legal decisions, economic transactions, consumption of goods, and other bureaucratic purposes. They were

¹⁵ *128; for the commentaries to *Šumma izbu*, see Frahm 2011.

¹⁶ *118i; see Starr 1990: 295. Cf. Robson 2011: 615–16; Heeßel 2012: 30. Heeßel's translation of this particular line seems to have been unintentionally copied from SAA 4 282:7 quoted on the previous page.

¹⁷ *118j; see Starr 1990: 298.

¹⁸ See Starr 1990: xliv–xlv, li–lii.

¹⁹ See Stöckl 2014.

expected to provide exact data for the maintenance of palace and temple administration; hence their writers must have been trusted to do their work meticulously. Even modern scholarship usually trusts the accuracy of these documents which, therefore, are indispensable sources for the economy, administration, and social structure of ancient Mesopotamia. Thanks to the pursuit for bureaucratic realism and accuracy, this genre is usually taken as the one least affected by ideological factors that notoriously make historical realities invisible through the modern scholar's keyhole. This does not mean, of course, that the administrative documents, serving bureaucratic rather than demographic purposes, would give a full and impartial picture of each given society and its members.

Before discussing Mesopotamian legal and administrative texts, one quasi-administrative text is worth mentioning, namely the seal-amulet found at Deir Rifa in Egypt bearing an inscription of five alphabetic letters arranged as a short vertical column. Gordon Hamilton identifies the letters as Proto-Canaanite, dating to c. 1700 BCE. The text indicates the ownership of the seal: *l qn hz* "(Belonging) to Qên, the seer."²⁰ This is by far the oldest occurrence of the otherwise well-known West Semitic word for a seer. If it denotes a similar kind of a diviner as *hzh* in later sources such as the Zakkur inscription, the Deir Alla inscription, or the Hebrew Bible, the seal not only reveals itself as the oldest West Semitic document of prophecy but also hints at the presence of such activity in Egypt.²¹

All legal and administrative texts mentioning prophets come from Mesopotamian archives. Their number is very small—the texts published so far amount to less than thirty, which constitutes but an infinitesimal portion of the huge dossier of cuneiform tablets representing this genre. On the other hand, the documents derive from periods between the Ur III through the Neo-Babylonian, and places where the documents have been written include Mari, Nerebtum, Ur, Larsa, Dilbat, Sippar, Chagar Bazar, and Tuttul (Old Babylonian); Kar-Tukulti-Ninurta (Middle Assyrian); Nineveh, Assur, Tušhan (Neo-Assyrian); and Uruk (Neo-Babylonian). The texts belonging to the legal and administrative genre can be roughly divided into three categories: (1) outlays of goods as a reward for services; (2) decrees of expenditures in temples; and (3) legal and economical documents.

(1) The administrative texts from Mari mention several prophets as receiving rewards for their actions, for instance:

One shekel of silver, according to the market weights, to Lupahum, prophet (*āpilum*) of Dagan, when he went to Tuttul.²²

²⁰ *141a, Hamilton 2009. I am indebted to Niko Porkka for turning my attention to this text.

²¹ Isolated as the text stands, Stökl 2012a: 23 warns against putting "too much weight on this seal unless further evidence is found."

²² *62, lines 1–6; see Durand 1988: 396; Charpin 2002: 20.

A letter of Sammetar, the major-domo of Zimri-Lim, reports the return of Lupaḫum from Tuttul from where he had brought an encouraging divine message to Zimri-Lim,²³ for which he was apparently rewarded with a substantial amount of silver. In another text, Lupaḫum receives a donkey.²⁴ Another *āpilum* of Dagan, Qišatum, receives two lances of bronze, possibly for the divine words he had spoken against Babylon,²⁵ and yet another *āpilum* of Dagan, Išhi-Dagan, is given a silver ring.²⁶ Sometimes a prophet appears together with other people rewarded for delivering messages:

Half a mina of silver belonging to Yaḫmusum for the use of the palace, [to be delivered] to Baby[lon], for making of three *ḫullum* rings of silver, including one *ḫullum* ring of silver for the servant of Ubdalan; one *ḫullum* ring of silver for the servant of Ḫaya-Sumu who brought here good news; one *ḫullum* ring of silver for the prophet (*muḫḫûm*) of Adad, when he delivered an oracle to the king. Total: half a mina of silver, outlay to people who deliver messages (*awilû ša šipri*).²⁷

The most common objects to be donated to prophets in Mari documents are different kinds of garments, for instance:²⁸

One *mardatum* garment²⁹ (and) one set of blinders for the *lagu*-donkey, received by the prophet (*muḫḫûm*), [that] were co[nve]yed.

In Sagar[atun], month of Laḫḫum (III), fourteenth day, [the year of Z]imri-Lim when he took the ce[nsus] in his [land].³⁰

The anonymous prophet in question may be the one who, according to a letter, devoured a raw lamb in front of the gate of Sagaratum in the presence of the elders of the city, and whom the official who writes to the king about the incident says to have clothed with a garment.³¹ Pieces of clothing are also given to the *āpilum* Ili-andulli; to Ea-mudammīq, *muḫḫûm* of Ninḫursag; to

²³ *9, lines 5–15; for this letter, see the new edition in Durand 2012 and cf. Stökl 2012a: 45–8; Charpin 2002: 19–21.

²⁴ *53; see Durand 1988: 396–7.

²⁵ *60, lines 7–9; see Durand 1988: 397. This outlay is under the authority of Mukannišum who writes to the king about the prophecy of an *aplûm* (i.e. *āpilum*) of Dagan and another *aplûm* of Belet-ekallim against Babylon in *19.

²⁶ *63; see Durand 1988: 380.

²⁷ *61, lines 9–17; see Durand 1988: 380–1; Gordon 1993: 75; Charpin 2002: 17.

²⁸ *65a; see Durand 2008b and, with corrected reading, Durand 2009: 323.

²⁹ For the *mardatum* garment, see Durand 2009: 61–5.

³⁰ That is, his sixth year; the regnal years of Zimri-Lim have been named, as was customary in the kingdoms of the Old Babylonian period; on the names of the regnal years of Zimri-Lim, see Charpin and Ziegler 2003: 257–8.

³¹ *16; thus Sasson 2015: 280 n. 126, assuming that the “gate of Sagaratum” means the city gate of Sagaratum and not the Sagaratum gate of the city of Terqa (thus van der Toorn 1998: 62 n. 43). If this is true, the author of the letter whose name is broken away may be Yaqqim-Addu, the governor of Sagaratum.

Annu-tabni, *muḫḫūtum* of Annunitum; and to Ea-maši, *muḫḫûm* of Itur-Mer, mentioned together with a chanter and a “crazy woman” (*lillatum*).³²

The only donation document from a place other than Mari comes from the very last days of the Neo-Assyrian Empire from the city of Tušḫan in northernmost Assyria. A tablet belonging to a small archive dating to the year 611—that is, the year following the fall of Nineveh—records the outlay of a large amount of copper to a prophet and an augur:

6 minas (of copper to) the pro[p]he[t] at the [city] gate.
 1 mina of c[oppe]r (to) the au[gu]r.
 [1 (?)] mina to the house [of the god].
 [2 (?) m]inas to [...].
 T[otal], 10 minas.³³

This substantial donation must be understood to be a reward for the diviners consulted when the city was in dire straits, the Babylonian and Median troops approaching from the south. Why the prophet received six times the amount given to the augur is unknown; perhaps the services of the augur were needed only to double-check the message delivered by the prophet.

(2) Prophets appear several times as recipients of provisions in records from different times and places, mostly related to the expenditure of temples. The oldest of these documents, actually written in the form of a letter, dates to the Ur III period (twenty-first century BCE):

Thus the king: Say to Ur-Lisi:
 Give sixty kor barley to the prophet³⁴ of Inanna of Girsu.³⁵

Several Old Babylonian texts from various places present lists of persons receiving provisions of foodstuffs. A text from the temple of Kititum, the principal temple of the kingdom of Ešnunna in the city Nerebtum (Tell Iščali), lists food rations for the temple meals and for the personnel, including a lamentation singer, female musicians, prophets (*muḫḫû*), hired workers, and harvesters.³⁶ A prophet can be found receiving a ration of oil in Sippar (Tell

³² *54, line 14 (Ili-andulli); *56, line 8 and *57, lines 4–6 (Ea-mudammīq); *58, lines 8–10 (Annu-tabni); *55, line 43 and *59:19 (Ea-maši).

³³ *118c; see Parpola 2008: 98–100.

³⁴ This translation reads LÚ.maḫ-em (*maḫḫêm*), interpreting the sign LÚ as a professional determinative. It could also be read as *lú-maḫ-em*, referring to *lumahḫum*, a purification priest; thus Michalowski 1993: 55, but note the explanation of *lumahḫim* in the glossary (Michalowski 1993: 138): “A high-ranking priest, often translated ‘ecstatic.’” What makes the translation “prophet” more probable is the affiliation of the person to a specific deity, Inanna of Girsu, which is typical of prophetic designations but not of *lumahḫum*.

³⁵ *119; see Sollberger 1966: 90, 191; Michalowski 1993: 55. The king mentioned in the text is Amar-Sin (2046–2038), the third king of the Ur III dynasty.

³⁶ *67a, line r. 12; see Viaggio 2006: 186–8.

ed-Der)³⁷ and a ration of sesame at Tuttul (Tell Bi'a),³⁸ both apparently in a temple context. A text listing expenditures for temple ceremonies at Larsa likewise mentions a prophet (*muḥḥūm*) receiving oil together with temple musicians, priests, and workmen.³⁹ Another text from Larsa presents an outlay of a significant amount of silver to numerous people fulfilling different functions, including a female prophet (*muḥḥūtum*) of Inanna of Zabala.⁴⁰ The following text, contemporary to the documents from Mari, comes from Chagar Bazar:

Five seah of beer of good quality, ration of Ana-Sin-taklaku the fuller.

Five seah of beer of good quality, ration of Ištar-luballit.

Five seah (of beer of good quality, ration of) Eḫlip-adal, prophet (*muḥḥūm*) of Adad of Aleppo.⁴¹

An interesting feature in this text is the presence of the prophet of Adad of Aleppo in Chagar Bazar, possibly reflecting the political influence of Aleppo in that region.⁴²

The only relevant Middle Assyrian administrative text is a provisions list from Kar-Tukulti-Ninurta from the eleventh century BCE, mentioning prophets as recipients of food rations:

Ten homers four seah five liters (of barley) for Aššur-apla-iddina on the second day, for the food rations of the prophets, prophetesses, and the *assinnus* of the Ištar temple.⁴³

This text is noteworthy for many reasons: it is one of the few texts documenting the existence of prophets between the Old Babylonian and Neo-Assyrian/Babylonian periods,⁴⁴ it provides evidence for the presence of both male and female prophets in the same temple of Ištar, and it also mentions the *assinnu* in connection with the prophets.⁴⁵ This makes sense, since the *assinnus* are known as prophets in the Mari letters,⁴⁶ and they function in the worship of Ištar. Female prophets are listed among temple personnel in a Neo-Assyrian decree of expenditures for several ceremonies that took place in Ešarra, the temple of Aššur in the city of Assur in the year 809 BCE:

³⁷ *135h, line r. 2; see Edzard 1970: 134.

³⁸ *135j, line r. 5; see Krebernik 2001: 134–5.

³⁹ *135c, line iii 25; see Westenholz and Westenholz 2006: 44–5.

⁴⁰ *135g, line 11; see Dyckhoff 1999: 39–43.

⁴¹ *135i, lines 1–5; see Lacambre & Millet Albà 2007: 106.

⁴² Cf. Lacambre & Millet Albà 2007: 317; Stökl 2012a: 55–6.

⁴³ *123, lines i 37–9; see Freydank 1974: 58–73; Lion 2000: 23.

⁴⁴ For this evidence, still mostly to be found in unpublished texts, see Lion 2000.

⁴⁵ The (1974: 60) edition of Freydank reads LÚ.X.MEŠ, but the copy in Freydank 1976: pl. 1 shows clear traces of the sign SAL between LÚ and MEŠ.

⁴⁶ **7, 22, 23.

The expenditure for the divine council: [The c]onfectioner tak[es] one seah of honey, five liters of oil, and four seahs [five liters of sesame. The bakers take] ten homers of barley for bread and five homers of wheat for *qa[dūtu]*-bread. The brewers tak[e] one homer five seahs (of barley) for the prophetesses. Total: one seah four liters of honey, five liters of oil, four seahs five liters of sesame, [eleven homers five seahs of barley], five homers of wheat. All this [is the expenditure for the divine council].⁴⁷

The divine council, apparently, was celebrated ceremonially during the festivities which the long decree concerns, the prophets as mouthpieces of the gods forming a natural part of it.

A Neo-Babylonian list of temple offerings distributes the meat and entrails retrieved from offerings of the sacrificed animals to functionaries of the Eanna temple in Uruk. A prophet is mentioned in the same paragraph with the high priest, the temple administrator (*šatammu*), and a *kurgarrū*, a cultic performer with a role concomitant to that of the *assinnu*.⁴⁸

Finally, a different type of a Neo-Assyrian administrative document not related to a temple is a list of the accommodation of about one hundred people, mostly high military officers, probably listing the need for lodgings for participants of some major event in Nineveh. A prophet (*raggimu*) with the name Quqī is listed together with three high-ranking persons coming from Šadikanni: a chariot owner, the cohort commander of the crown prince, and the bodyguard of the queen mother.⁴⁹

(3) Only a handful of legal and economical cuneiform documents published to date mention prophets, and even in these few cases, the prophets are not actually themselves involved in legal or economic transactions. Three such documents come from Old Babylonian sources: Aḫu-waqar the prophet (*muhḫûm*) is one of the witnesses of a land purchase at Dilbat,⁵⁰ Sin-muballit the prophet (*muhḫûm*) witnesses a litigation document concerning an inheritance at Larsa,⁵¹ and Sin-iqišam the prophet (LÜ.GUB.BA) acts as a witness for a legal case concerning the ownership of land.⁵²

In a couple of Neo-Babylonian documents we find persons who are not themselves prophets but who are called “descendants of Prophet” (*mār mahḫê*). In one case, Belšunu, son of Nurê, son of Šamaš-bani-apli, son of Damiq-Bel, descendant of Prophet, owes tax on a field in the Uruk region to another person.⁵³ The other case involves two “prophetic” families: it concerns

⁴⁷ *110, lines 27–31; see Kataja and Whiting 1995: 74.

⁴⁸ *130, lines r. 35–45; for the text, see Holma 1944: 23–33.

⁴⁹ *104, lines r. i 20–4; see Fales and Postgate 1992: 16–19; Nissinen 1998a: 64–5.

⁵⁰ *135d, lines 20–1; see Thureau-Dangin 1910: nr. 57 (copy).

⁵¹ *135e, line 47; see Jean 1926: nr. 34 (copy); for the case, see Rede 2007: 41–2.

⁵² *135f, line 33; see Charpin 1986: 42–4, 201.

⁵³ *132, lines 5–6; see Cocquerillat 1968: 118 (copy).

a redemption of an estate bought from Šamaš-šuma-ukin, son of Nabû-zera-ukin, descendant of Prophet, by Gimillu, against whom Iltar-aḡa-iddina, son of Remut-Bel, descendant of Prophet, made a claim.⁵⁴ These documents do not inform directly about the prophetic phenomenon, but we learn from them the interesting fact that some Neo-Babylonian families traced their origin to an anonymous prophet.

The legal and administrative cuneiform documents in which prophets are mentioned are few and far between; however, their temporal and geographical coverage is large if uneven. The texts are too few to allow for time- and place-specific conclusions concerning the distribution of prophets and impact of prophecy, but they are enough to testify to the long-standing presence of prophets and an established tradition of non-technical divination in different parts of Mesopotamia. The administrative documents mainly connect the prophets with temples, and the provisions given to them indicate that many female and male prophets belonged to the temple personnel. Especially at Mari, the prophets were regularly rewarded for their divinatory services—probably during the king's audiences, which creates a strong link between them and the royal court.⁵⁵ The few legal texts demonstrate that at least in Old Babylonian society, the prophets had a legal capacity of acting as witnesses of official documents.

RITUAL TEXTS

The lexical lists have associated prophets with other cultic performers, and the administrative texts from different times and places confirm that many prophets were indeed connected to temples, whether as a part of their personnel or otherwise. The temple context of Mesopotamian prophecy is comparable to the oracles of Apollo in the Greek world, which functioned exclusively in temples. One could expect to find prophets regularly mentioned in ritual texts describing, or prescribing, cultic actions. Unfortunately, however, this is not the case: the ritual aspects of the Greek oracle are known from texts representing other genres, and only very few ritual texts from Mesopotamia mention prophets. Even these few examples are nevertheless enough to bear witness to the ritual presence and performance of the prophets.

Old Babylonian rituals are poorly known in general, due to the sparsity of sources. Two important texts, however, have been preserved from Mari, pertaining to the ritual of Ištar which was one of the major annual festivals of the kingdom of Mari.⁵⁶ The first tablet describes at length the different

⁵⁴ *131; see San Nicolò 1947: 297–9.

⁵⁵ Cf. Charpin 2015: 32.

⁵⁶ See Durand and Guichard 1997; Lafont 1999: 67–9.

phases of the ritual involving the king, the goddess Ištar and other deities (represented by their statues), and a number of cultic functionaries among whom the lamentation singer (*kalû*) and other musicians play an important role. A male prophet functions in an interplay with musicians:

The *gerseqqû*-courtiers stand on his [i.e. the king's] right and left side. The chanters st[r]ik[e] up the "ú-ru am-ma-da-ru-bi" of the [e]nd of the month.

If by the end of the mo[nth] the prophet maintains his equili[brium] and is not a[ble] t[o] prophes[y] when it is time for [the chant] "mà-e-ú-re-m[én]," the temple officials let the m[usicians] go. If he pr[ophecies, they strike up] "mà-e-ú-re-m[én]."⁵⁷

The prophet's activity is embedded between two canonical lamentation songs performed in the presence of the king. The second one is played only if the prophet is able to reach the altered state of consciousness; if he "maintains his equilibrium" and fails to get into a frenzy, the musicians are sent away. Also the second tablet pertaining to the ritual of Ištar (whether the same ritual as on the first tablet or a different one is unclear), presents prophets and musicians as performing in the same ritual act:

[...] the prophe[t...] who arises [...] When the musicians have entered before her [i.e. Ištar], the female prophets [...] and the musi[cians]. I[f the female prophets] main[tain their equilibrium], two [musicians...enter] the [...]. They sing] and *eršemmakkum* before [the goddess for *Enlil*].⁵⁸

As far as the broken tablet allows us to understand, both female and male prophets' performance happens in interplay with that of the musicians; again, it matters whether the prophets are able to reach the altered state of consciousness, which is interpreted as a sign of divine inspiration. This, apparently, could not be taken for granted. Other than that, nothing is said about the prophetic performance. Perhaps, in the presence of Ištar, the prophet was expected to deliver a message from her or emulate her agony while the musicians played the lament.⁵⁹ The first tablet has a text written on the edge that reads like the comment of an administrator, ordering that containers of water should always be at the disposal of the prophets.⁶⁰

The Assyrian archives are more rewarding in terms of ritual texts than the Old Babylonian ones, but even in them, prophets do not appear often. It is possible that the exhortation to the king or the crown prince in a Middle

⁵⁷ *51, lines ii 21–7; see Durand and Guichard 1997: 52–8; see also Sasson 2015: 243–4. For the prophet's "maintaining his equilibrium" (Gt-stem of the verb *šaḡālum*), see Durand 1988: 386–7; Ziegler 2007: 55–64.

⁵⁸ *52, lines iii 2–13; see Durand and Guichard 1997: 59–63. All restorations according to Durand and Guichard 1997: 59–60.

⁵⁹ Stökl 2012a: 65–6, 99 is careful to not translate the verb *maḥû* here as "prophesying" but as "raving," arguing that the raving does not necessarily imply prophesying. However, even ecstatic behavior must have a purpose, and the sources do not otherwise mention any other purpose for the raving of a *muḥḥû* than prophesying.

⁶⁰ *51, lines s. ii 1–3.

Assyrian ritual text, “Guard the word (*abutu*) and secret (*pirištu*) of Ištar,” actually refers to prophetic oracles.⁶¹ The so-called Marduk Ordeal, which is a cultic commentary rather than a ritual text, commiserates with Marduk whose statue had been expatriated from Babylon—beaten and sent to prison, as the text interprets it. The ritual, probably historically connected with the return of the statue in the beginning of Assurbanipal’s reign, involves a prophet as a “bringer of news” (*mupassiru*) who goes weeping to the Lady of Babylon telling her that her spouse Marduk is being taken into captivity.⁶² Prophets feature together with other ecstasies and a *kaparru*, a person who intercedes on behalf of people, in the ritual of Ištar and Dumuzi to be performed in the month of Tammuz if “a man is seized by a spirit of a dead or a *sanḫulhāzu* demon, or if any evil thing has seized him and afflicts him continually.” The prophets are present in the ritual of the twenty-ninth day:

For the shepherd boys (*kaparru*) of Dumuzi you shall place a confection; for the frenzied men and women (*zabbu, zabbatu*) and for the male and female prophets (*mahḫû, mahḫûtu*) you shall place seven pieces of bread. Then let the sick person recite the following to Ištar: (...)

The text does not reveal what the prophets and the other ecstasies⁶³ were expected do at the sickbed of the person when he starts reciting a prayer to Ištar. Their very presence may fulfill an apotropaic function, and they may also be there to impersonate the goddess and to mediate her answer to the sick person’s prayer.

Another example of a prophet in a ritual interplay with musicians can be found in a Neo-Babylonian ritual text from Uruk:

In the month of Adar, on the first, second, sixth, [...], fourteenth and fifteenth day: duties of the ch[anter and the musician]; the *edûtu* is (ful)filled.

On the second day, on offering [...] kettledrum is played [...] they purify.

On the third day, the Lady of Uruk proceeds and takes a seat between the curtains [...] The prophet goes around it⁶⁴ three times, carries the water basin and proceeds [...] [On the fourth day], the prophet goes around it three times, carries the water basin and proce[eds...] the copper [kettledrum] is played, sacrificial me[als] are offered, the offering [...] kettledrum is played and danc[e...] the censer. The musician takes a seat and shou[ts...].⁶⁵

⁶¹ KAR 139:13; cf. Pongratz-Leisten 2008: 69–73, 2015: 387–40.

⁶² *103; see Livingstone 1989: 82–91; Frymer-Kensky 1983.

⁶³ Next to nothing can be known about the role of the *zabbu/zabbatu*, due to the small number of occurrences. They appear in conjunction with *mahḫû* in lexical texts, and in a literary text, *zabbu* is juxtaposed with a dreamer (*šabrû*) as transmitter of information: “Let the *zabbu* tell you, let the *šabrû* report to you that I spend my nights in tears” (LKA 29d ii 2; see CAD Z: 7).

⁶⁴ The verb *lawû* refers to a ritual circumambulation (see Catagnoti 2015), but it is not clear what the prophet is going around; the most probable candidate would be the seat of the Lady of Uruk.

⁶⁵ *135o, lines r. 26–33; see Beaulieu 2003: 375, 377.

The text makes the prophet appear in close proximity to the goddess, which is perfectly in line with the other ritual texts. It also mentions the ritual movements of the prophet, but gives no further details about his performance, so we learn nothing about the prophet's prophetic functions in this ritual; even the verb *ragāmu* is used for the ritual shouting of the musician, not of the prophet.

The latest ritual text related to prophecy belongs to an *akītu* ritual in Hellenistic Uruk. It contains an oracle of Bel (Marduk) that closely resembles Neo-Assyrian prophetic oracles:

Fear not! [...] what Bel has said [...] Bel [has heard] your prayer [...] He has enlarged your rule [...] He will exalt your kingship [...]! On the day of the *eššēšu* festival, do [...]! Upon the opening of the gate, purify [...] your hands [...]! May [...] day and night! [You], whose city Babylon is, [...], whose temple Esaggil is [...], whose [...] the people of Babylon, the privileged citizens, are: Bel will bless you [...] fo]reve[r]! He will destroy your enemy, he will annihilate your adversary!⁶⁶

This oracle is put in the mouth of the high priest (*šešgallu*) instead of a prophet, hence the text cannot be taken as evidence of an actual prophetic performance during the *akītu* of Uruk. Instead, it testifies to liturgical reuse of prophecies in Hellenistic Babylonia.⁶⁷ The words of Bel sound like prophecy and may go back to written royal prophecies, and the ritual involves a king—that is, the Seleucid king who is first stripped of his royal insignia. The high priest slaps the face of the king who has to assert that he has not neglected or damaged Babylon and its temples. After that, the high priest pronounces the words of Bel to the king, performs offerings and returns the royal insignia to the king, slapping his face once more. The result of the second slapping is ominous: if the king's tears flow, Bel is favourable; if not, Bel is angry and the enemy will cause his downfall. Jonathan Z. Smith understands this *akītu* ritual as a rectification of the foreign king, “a desperate ritual attempt to *influence* events, to set things right” in what he calls an apocalyptic situation, the country being ruled by a foreign king.⁶⁸ Both the oracular pronouncement and the omen procedure are likely to reuse older divinatory patterns. It seems obvious that the prophetic oracle, the wording of which is “printed” in the ritual text to be performed by the high priest is not thought to even pretend to be a spontaneous prophecy. Rather, it testifies to ritual reuse of prophecy in Hellenistic Uruk, indicating that the tradition of prophetic language is still alive, most probably in a written form, to be performed and recontextualized in a ritual context.

The Hittite divinatory tradition is rich, but Hittite sources documenting prophetic divination are extremely sparse. Technical divination was widely

⁶⁶ *133; see Thureau-Dangin 1921: 129–46; J. Z. Smith 1982: 90–5; van der Toorn 1987: 93.

⁶⁷ Cf. van der Toorn 2000a: 77. ⁶⁸ J. Z. Smith 1982: 95 (emphasis original).

practiced by the Hittites especially in the form of extispicy,⁶⁹ whereas non-technical divination tends to happen through dreams. Since Hittite dreams often convey divine messages, their function actually comes very close to that of prophetic divination.⁷⁰ Nevertheless, “[w]hile the Hittites shared an interest in dreams, they did not rely heavily on prophecy as a means of communication with the divine.”⁷¹ That prophetic divination was nevertheless somehow represented is suggested by a ritual text prompted by a plague that broke out during the reign of King Suppiluliuma I who himself fell victim to it, leaving his son Mursili II (c. 1321–1295 BCE) to cope with its consequences. A series of prayers for Mursili II belonging to propitiation rituals were performed on this occasion, and one of these long prayers addressed to the Storm-god ends with the following words:

I am now continuing to plead to the Storm-god of Hatti, my lord. Save my life! [And if] perhaps people have been dying for this reason, then during the time that I set is right, let there be no more deaths among those makers of offering bread and libation pourers to the gods who are still left.

[Or] if people have been dying because of some other reason, then let me either see it in a dream, or let it be established through an oracle, or let a man of god declare it, or, according to what I instructed all the priests, they shall regularly sleep holy.

O storm-god of Hatti, save my life! Let the gods, my lords, show me their divine power! Let someone see it in a dream. Let the reason for which people have been dying be discovered. We shall stroke(?) by means of the pins(?) of a *sarpa*. O storm-god of Hatti, my lord, save my life, and may the plague be removed from Hatti.⁷²

A similar passage appears also in the prayer of Mursili II to the sun-goddess of Arinna:

O gods, whatever sin you perceive, either let a man of god come [and declare it], or let the old women, [the diviners, or the augurs establish it], or let ordinary persons see it in a dream. We shall stroke(?) by means of the thorns(?)/pins(?) of a *sarpa*. O gods, [again] have pity on the land of Hatti.⁷³

The prayer refers to several sources of divine knowledge: dreams, also in form of “sleeping holy,” that is, by way of incubation; oracles, probably technical ones, and augury; and the “man of god.” The Hittite word used here, *šiuiniyant-*, means “one pertaining to a god,” denoting a person through whom the god speaks, in other words, a prophet.⁷⁴ The prayers present the men of god,

⁶⁹ See Beal 2002. ⁷⁰ For the Hittite message-dreams, see Mouton 2007: 30–53.

⁷¹ B. J. Collins 2007: 169.

⁷² CTH 378.II (= SBLWAW 11 11) §§10–11; translation from Singer 2002: 60; cf. Mouton 2007: 122.

⁷³ CTH 376 (= SBLWAW 11 8) §7; translation from Singer 2002: 52; cf. Mouton 2007: 120–1.

⁷⁴ For the word *šiuiniyant-* (^{LU}DINGIR^{LM}-*ni-an-za*), see CHD Š: 506–7 and Ünal 2007: 640, who translates it as “ecstatic prophet, possessed by a deity.” Cf. Weippert 2014: 234: “Da Partizipien

perhaps even the old women, as non-technical diviners whose services were needed by the king and the people in the time of the crisis caused by the plague.

No descriptions on Hittite prophetic divination are available in the extant sources. One ritual text pertaining to the Hisuwat-festival, however, is interesting from the point of view of prophecy.⁷⁵ The festival was performed to honor the Storm-god of Manuzziya, a mountain in Kizzuwatna, and it included a ceremony for the military success of the king. One of the cultic performers of these rituals is the *purapsi*-priest who, upon the horn-blowing by a musician, addresses the king with divine words:

One of the musicians who stands in the gate of the god will blow the horn and one of the *purapsi*-priests who stands on the roof will speak in front of the king to encourage him the following words:

“O king, be not afraid! The storm-god will put for you, o king, the enemies and the lands of the enemy under your feet and you will smash them like empty jars. To you, o king, life, health, future heroism and prosperity of the gods will constantly be given. Do not be afraid of anybody for you will have them defeated.”⁷⁶

Even though the speaker of these words is not a prophet, the words addressed to the king sound in every detail like an oracle of salvation, whether quoted from prophecies from Assyria or Ešnunna, from the Zakkur inscription, or from the Hebrew Bible.⁷⁷ The “Fear not” formula, trampling the enemy underfoot, and promises of prosperity belong to the standard repertoire of ancient Near Eastern prophecy, hence the words uttered by the *purapsi*-priest can be characterized as a quasi-prophetic oracle, whether or not their speaker otherwise assumed the role of prophetic diviner. The Hittite text can also be compared to the above-quoted Hellenistic *akitu* ritual, in which a priest likewise addresses words to the king that sound very much like what is otherwise known as a prophetic oracle of salvation.

LETTERS

Letters constitute a well-definable genre as written communication between people separated by a geographical or a social distance. All writing has a communicative purpose, but in the case of letters, the communication

transitiver Verben im Hethitischen passiv sind, könnte man **šuniyant*- etwa als ‘inspiriert’ (genauer, aber im Deutschen nicht möglich: *‘begottet’, *‘indiviniert’) auffassen.”

⁷⁵ For the festival, see B. J. Collins 2007: 163; Haas 1994: 848–75.

⁷⁶ KBO 15,52++ v 9–22//KBO 20, 60 v 1–11; translation from Dijkstra 2015: 14.

⁷⁷ Cf. Dijkstra 2015: 14.

happens in a personalized manner between two (sometimes more) individuals. Every letter has a sender and an addressee, typically an individual at both ends, and the writing of the letter has always a purpose, whether information, petition, blessing, curse, demand, request, or several of these at the same time. Regardless of the purpose, the addressee is supposed to be somehow influenced by the message of the letter.

Original letters⁷⁸ documenting prophetic divination are, to my knowledge, not known from ancient Greece. Old Babylonian letters⁷⁹ are well-represented by the correspondence from Mari from the eighteenth century BCE, including more than fifty letters in which prophets are quoted or otherwise mentioned,⁸⁰ and the Neo-Assyrian archives from the seventh century include sixteen such letters.⁸¹ In addition, there are two or three letters from Lachish, the only non-biblical documents of the presence of prophets in Judah,⁸² and one letter among the Amarna correspondence sent by King Tušratta of Mitanni to the pharaoh Amehophis III, quoting an oracle of Ištar of Nineveh.⁸³

Letters from Mari

The city of Mari was located on the middle course of the river Euphrates on the western bank of the river. Discovered and excavated since 1934 at Tell Ḥariri in Syria, only a few kilometers from the Iraqi border, the site has revealed temples and the palace of the kings of Mari, together with a substantial archive, containing some 15,000 cuneiform tablets.⁸⁴ Thanks to the abundance of written sources we know that Mari was a major city and the capital of the kingdom with the same name in the second half of the third and the first half of the second millennium BCE. All the texts predate the year when the city was destroyed by Hammurabi, the king of Babylon, around the year 1760 BCE, and

⁷⁸ With “original” letters I refer to first-hand specimens of a letter, as distinct from letters embedded in texts representing other genres, such as the letters referred to in biblical books (cf. Jer. 29; 2 Chr. 21:12–15). For letter-writing in Mesopotamia in the periods contemporary to the sources of prophecy, see Charpin 2007 (Old Babylonian); Radner 2014 (Neo-Assyrian); Jursa 2014 (Neo-Babylonian).

⁷⁹ In addition to the letters from Mari, CAD M: 91 lists VAS 16 144:18 as an occurrence of the word *mahḫû/muḫḫûm*. In this Old Babylonian letter, however, LÜ.GUB.BA probably stands for *manzaz pâni* (LÜ.GUB.BA.JGI) “courtier”; translating it with “prophet” would hardly make any sense. Cf. the translation of lines 15–18 in Frankena 1974: 93: “Wenn du Soldaten brauchst, schicke Nachricht nach Ḥursagkalamma, sodaß man dir 10 *diensttuende* Männer (LÜ.GUB.BA) holt.”

⁸⁰ **1–50 (Mari), **50a–b; note also *135k, fragment of a possible letter from Tuttul.

⁸¹ **105–17, 118d–f. ⁸² **139–41. ⁸³ *121.

⁸⁴ For the archaeology of Mari, see Margueron 2014. The number of 15,000 texts is an approximation by Charpin 2015: 12 n. 4. For the different types of texts in the Mari archives, see Charpin and Ziegler 2003: 8–18.

the overwhelming majority of them belong to the time of the two last kings of Mari, Yasmaḥ-Addu (c. 1785–1775) and Zimri-Lim (c. 1775–1762).⁸⁵ In the time of Zimri-Lim, the kingdom of Mari was one of the principal political actors in the Near East, holding sway over a large area in the middle Euphrates and the river Habur and controlling the trade route between Syria and Babylonia.

The archive of Mari consists mainly of administrative documents and letters together with a smaller number of literary and legal texts. To date, about 9,000 texts have been published in the series *Archives royales de Mari* and *Florilegium Marianum*.⁸⁶ The royal correspondence forms a corpus around 2,500 texts, within which there is a substantial dossier of letters concerning divination. Haruspices maintained a regular correspondence with Zimri-Lim concerning extispicy, and other persons belonging to the king's inner circle—royal women in particular, but also the king's officials and emissaries—reported ominous events, dreams, and prophecies. Over fifty such letters have been published so far, mostly by Jean-Marie Durand, and several texts mentioning prophets are still awaiting their publication.⁸⁷

The letters sent to the king often summarize the contents of the oracle that the letter-writer either had heard from others or experienced her- or himself. A distinction between different kinds of non-technical divination, especially between prophecies and dreams, is difficult, because every dreamer cannot be unequivocally called a prophet. Prophecies, dreams, and exchange of letters with gods are published as separate sections in Durand's edition,⁸⁸ but some letters reporting dreams explicitly mention prophets,⁸⁹ and the distinction

⁸⁵ For the chronology and history of this period, see Charpin 2004: 153–231, 317–30; Charpin and Ziegler 2003: 169–246.

⁸⁶ See also volumes 17 and 18 of the series *Les documents épistolaires du palais de Mari* (LAPO; Durand 1998, 2000).

⁸⁷ The letters **4–48 are published in Durand 1988. Many unpublished texts are mentioned and partly quoted by Charpin 2002, 2012, 2015. The corpus of letters with prophetic content has been translated several times, the newer volumes containing more material than the older ones; see Sasson 2015; Heimpel 2003; Nissinen 2003a; Roberts 2002 (English); Cagni 1995 (Italian); Dietrich 1986; Römer 1971 (German).

⁸⁸ Since the distinction between prophecies and dreams is not significant in respect of the process of communication, no difference is made here between the letters which expressly present the divine messages as delivered by a prophet (*āpilum*, *muhhūm*, etc.) and those which report dreams of persons who do not necessarily qualify as prophets. As regards the definition of the relationship of prophecy with other forms of divination, however, the distinction is relevant, since not all dreamers are prophets, and some Mari dreams, conventionally included in the “prophetic” corpus, may actually turn out to be experienced by people other than prophets. For the difference between prophecies and dreams at Mari, see Nakata 1982 and note the classification of the “prophetic” texts into three categories by Durand 1988: “Exchange of letters with gods” (ARM 26 191–4), “Prophetic texts” (ARM 26 195–223), and “Dreams” (ARM 26 224–40).

⁸⁹ i.e. **35 and 42 (Addu-duri to Zimri-Lim); *50b (Ḥammi-šagiš to Šu-nuḫra-Ḥalu); interestingly, *42 and *50b are the only letters mentioning the goddess Ištar of Bišra.

does not seem to be the concern of writers of the letters to whom it mattered more that the message was believed to be of divine origin.

With the exception of two letters dating from the time of Yasmaḥ-Addu⁹⁰ and one dated to the time of Yaḥdun-Lim (c. 1810–1794),⁹¹ all letters quoting or mentioning prophets are written during the reign of Zimri-Lim who also appears as the addressee in all but three letters that are addressed to Addu-duri, the king's mother,⁹² Dariš-libur, his servant,⁹³ and Šu-nuḥra-Ḥalu, his secretary.⁹⁴ The dominant role of the king as the recipient of both letters and the prophetic messages embedded in them is certainly due to the fact that the texts at our disposal consist mainly of the correspondence of the royal court, eclipsing the private communication that may have happened outside the court. In royal correspondence, evidently, prophecy was quoted when it was found to be relevant to political or cultic issues. Prophecies regarding private issues are mentioned only in two letters,⁹⁵ which are important pieces of evidence indicating that prophecy was not entirely concerned with royal affairs.

The letters with prophetic messages are mostly written in the city of Mari, but a number of letters are posted from elsewhere. Thanks to these letters, we have evidence of prophetic performances in other cities belonging to the kingdom of Mari, such as Terqa, the second-ranking city of the kingdom and the center of the worship of Dagan, whose temple was perhaps the most important source of prophecy in the kingdom of Mari.⁹⁶ Letters from major provincial cities such as Tuttul, Saggaratum, and Qaṭṭunan also give account of prophecies that have been uttered in these cities.⁹⁷ Some letters are sent from outside the borders of the kingdom of Mari, notably from Aleppo and Babylon, capitals of the neighboring kingdoms where local deities—Adad of Aleppo and Marduk of Babylon—are reported to have spoken through prophets.⁹⁸ One letter is sent from the city state of Andarig.⁹⁹

The senders of letters with prophetic content include women belonging to the royal family: Queen Šibtu, Zimri-Lim's spouse;¹⁰⁰ Addu-duri, his mother,¹⁰¹ and Inib-šina, his sister.¹⁰² Letters were also sent regularly by

⁹⁰ i.e. **3 and 34; see Charpin 2002: 33–8. ⁹¹ See Durand 1988: 469 (*36).

⁹² *45; for Addu-duri, see Ziegler 1999: 50–2.

⁹³ *33; the seals of Dariš-libur bear the title “servant” (IR/wardum) (RIMB E4.6.12.2022; Frayne 1990: 640).

⁹⁴ *50b; see Charpin 2014: 32–3.

⁹⁵ i.e. *8 reporting the personal distress of Šelebum the *assinnu*, and *45 written to Addu-duri by one of her servants on a dream concerning Addu-duri herself.

⁹⁶ Letters sent from Terqa or quoting prophets from Terqa include **6, 7, 9, 30, 31, 32, 38, 39, 40.

⁹⁷ Tuttul: **9, 19, 62; cf. **135j, 135k; Saggaratum: *16; Qaṭṭunan: *49.

⁹⁸ **1–2 (Aleppo); *47 (Babylon). ⁹⁹ *48.

¹⁰⁰ Šibtu is the sender of **17, 18, 21, 22, 23, 24, and 41.

¹⁰¹ Addu-duri is the sender of **5, 35, 42, and 43; in addition, she is the recipient of *45.

¹⁰² Letters written by Inib-šina include *7 and *14; she is also mentioned in a letter written by Sammetar (*9, line 53).

Zimri-Lim's officials at the royal court and in provincial cities, officials such as Sammetar, Šamaš-našir, Mukannišum, Tebi-gerišu, Lanasûm, Kibri-Dagan and his son Kanisan; and also by Zimri-Lim's delegates abroad such as Nur-Sîn in Aleppo and Yasim-El in Andarig.¹⁰³ Only one letter introduces a prophet as its sender: "Speak to Zimri-Lim: thus the prophet (*āpilum*) of Šamaš."¹⁰⁴ The introductory formula without the name of the sender is unusual and is due to the scribe who wrote the letter on behalf of the prophet; the writing of this letter is referred to in another letter, naming the prophet as Atamrum.¹⁰⁵

Most commonly, the sender of the letter has been informed of a prophecy or of a dream by the prophet or dreamer him/herself and writes to the king Zimri-Lim about it. In many cases the sender mentions expressly that the prophet or dreamer came to the person in question to tell the message. For example,

On the day I sent this tablet to my lord, Malik-Dagan, a man from Šakkâ came to me and spoke to me as follows.¹⁰⁶

In other letters prophets are said to "arise" (*tebûm*) or "stand up" (*izuzzum*) to deliver the message¹⁰⁷ while some letters just quote the sayings of the prophets or dreamers without any further indications of how they came to the knowledge of the sender.¹⁰⁸ A few letters present the prophets or dreamers themselves as senders,¹⁰⁹ while some are dispatched at the express request of the prophet.¹¹⁰ On the other hand, the sender of the letter may have inquired about the oracles on his or her own initiative.¹¹¹

It is not unusual to find several oracles of one or more prophets combined in a single letter, and in one letter the sender reports on a dream of his own together with one of an oracle of a *muhhûtum*.¹¹² Many letters do not focus on prophecies only, but inform of other matters as well.¹¹³ Some oracles are said

¹⁰³ Sammetar: *9; Šamaš-našir: *6; Mukannišum: *19; Tebi-gerišu: *26; Lanasûm: *25; Kibri-Dagan: **20, 30, 31, 32, 39, 40; Kanisan: *12; Nur-Sîn: **1, 2; Yasim-El: *48.

¹⁰⁴ *4, lines 1–2. ¹⁰⁵ *48, lines 29–42.

¹⁰⁶ *38, lines 5–9. Cf. **1, 2, 6(?), 7, 8, 9; 16, 20, 27(?), 30, 31, 32, 39(?), 46, 48. In *28, queen Šibtu says that the prophet had brought the message to the gate of the palace to be forwarded to her.

¹⁰⁷ **1, 5, 14, 19, 21, 29. ¹⁰⁸ **10, 13(?), 23, 25, 27, 41, 43.

¹⁰⁹ The prophet in *4 (the anonymous *āpilum* of Šamaš); the dreamers in *37 (Zunana) and *44 (Šimatum); possibly also **5 and 28 (the names of the senders destroyed).

¹¹⁰ *20 (an anonymous *aššat awilim* "wife of a free man") and *48 (Atamrum).

¹¹¹ As in *17, according to which queen Šibtu had "given drink to male and female 'signs'" inquiring about the campaign of Zimri-Lim against Išme-Dagan, king of Assyria. The curious expression *ittâtîm zikâram u sinništam ašqi aštâlma* may refer to a practice of giving drink to male and female persons—prophets?—who themselves (whether or not in a state of intoxication) act as "signs." Another case of inquiry is presented by Tebi-gerišu (*26), who assembled the *nabû's* of the Haneans in order to make them deliver an oracle for the sake of the well-being of Zimri-Lim (see Heintz 1997b: 198–9 [= 2015: 77–8]).

¹¹² *42 (Addu-duri).

¹¹³ Cf. **1, 6, 25, 27, 48.

to have been delivered in public; in these cases the sender of the letter is not the only person to have experienced the prophetic performance.¹¹⁴

The vague statements about prophets “arising” with their messages do not necessarily always imply that the senders of the letters are really eyewitnesses of the oral performances. Some letters indeed reveal more complicated chains of communication. Bahdi-Lim delivers to the king a tablet with words of a *muḥḥūtum*, given to him by the priest Aḥum; his own writing is a cover letter void of any reference to the contents of the tablet (*11). Aḥum, himself the sender of one letter (*10), acts as an intermediary in two further dispatches. He reports a prophecy of Aḥamtum, “a slave girl of Dagan-Malik,” to Queen Šibtu who writes about it to the king (*24), and reports a dream of an anonymous man to the official Kibri-Dagan, who writes:

A man [has se]en a dre[am and] Aḥum told (it) [to me]: “The army [of the enemy has entered] the fortif[ied] cities, [Ma]ri, Terqa [and Sa]ggaratum. (If) they (manage to) plun[der any]thing, they will [stay in] the fortifications of [my] lord.” [Aḥum told] me this dream of his and [sh]ifted the responsibility on me (*arnam eliya* [ut]ērma),¹¹⁵ saying: “Write to the ki[ng]!” Therefore, I have written to my l[or]d.¹¹⁶

In an even more tangled case (*12), Kibri-Dagan informs his son Kanisan about oracles he knows to have been spoken in the temple of Dagan, and Kanisan, in turn, repeats the message written by his father in the letter he sends to the king. Finally, Ušareš-hetil writes to his father or superior Dariš-libur about the death of a royal child predicted by the prophet Irra-gamil, asking Dariš-libur to bring this tragedy and the accompanying prophetic word to the king’s knowledge (*33).

The conveyance of a prophecy to its destination in letters may, as we see, constitute a complicated process. The Mari letters present a full range of participants in the chain of communication from the prophet through one or several go-betweens—eyewitnesses and their confidants, scribes and conveyers—to king Zimri-Lim. The one who informs the addressee of the divine message is neither necessarily identical with the person who actually heard and memorized the message nor with the one who writes the tablet.

The strong royal focus of the correspondence has a crucial effect on the subjects dealt with in the letters. Prophecies are quoted because the letter-writers have considered them relevant enough to be forwarded to the king as important divine knowledge. The writers do not necessarily quote the message verbatim but summarize the essential point of the message, the quotation

¹¹⁴ As in *16, delivered before the eyes of the elders at the city gate and accompanied by a “symbolic act” of eating a lamb (see Heintz 1997b: 202–8 [= 2015: 81–6]), and in *47 on oracles spoken at the city gate and “in the assembly of the [whole] cou[ntry]” (*ina puhur m[ātim kališa]*; cf. a similar case in the Assyrian letter *109, lines r. 1–2).

¹¹⁵ For the expression *arnam turrum*, see Durand 1988: 477.

¹¹⁶ *40, lines 7–20.

being already an interpretation of the spoken oracle. Usually the divine word is used to reassert the opinion of the letter-writers, but in some cases they feel themselves compelled to make the king conversant with prophecies that they expect to be less than favorable from the king's point of view; thus Nur-Sin who has repeatedly written to the king about an estate in the vicinity of Aleppo that Zimri-Lim was supposed to give away, and whose frustration is not just between the lines:

Previously, when I was still residing in Mari, I would convey every word spoken by a male (*āpilum*) or a female prophet (*āpiltum*) to my lord. Now, living in another land, would I not communicate to my lord what I hear and they tell me? Should anything ever not be in order, let not my lord say: "Why have you not communicated to me the word which the prophet spoke to you when he was demanding your area?" Herewith I communicate it to my lord. My lord should know this.¹¹⁷

Some letters indeed suggest that the letter-writer informs the king about unfavorable prophecies only when urged to do so by others or when the incident predicted in a prophecy has already taken place.¹¹⁸

One of the recurring topics of the prophecies quoted in the royal correspondence is the well-being of the king, typically in connection with warfare. The royal ladies of Mari, that is, Zimri-Lim's wife, mother, and sister, are concerned about the security of the king:

In the temple of Annunitum, three days ago, Šelebum went into trance and said: "Thus says Annunitum: Zimri-Lim, you will be tested in a revolt! Protect yourself! Let your most favored servants whom you love surround you, and make them stay there to protect you! Do not go around on your own! As regards the people who would tes[t you]: those pe[ople] I deli[ver up] into your hands."¹¹⁹

Here the exhortation to the king to protect himself is part of the prophetic oracle, while in other letters it is expressed as the writer's personal message attached to the prophecy.¹²⁰

Warfare is a recurrent topic of the royal correspondence including the letters with prophetic content, and these are the cases where "our increasingly refined knowledge of the events allows for quite an accurate historical commentary of the prophecies."¹²¹ Prophecies forwarded to the king in the letters

¹¹⁷ *1, lines 34–45; for the incident, see Durand 2002; cf. "Prophets and Kings: Ancient Near East" in Chapter 7 in this volume.

¹¹⁸ Such as the death of a royal infant in *33; for this and other cases (**39, 40, and 50b), see Charpin 2014.

¹¹⁹ *23, lines 5–21.

¹²⁰ See, e.g. **7, lines 21–7; *14, lines 25–6; *26, lines 1–9; *42, lines 27–8; *43, lines 17–19.

¹²¹ Charpin 2015: 22; cf. Durand 2008a: 463–71.

many times proclaim the victory of the king over his enemies, either in general terms¹²² or with a reference to a specific political crisis or an adversary of the king:

Another matter: thus says Šamaš: “Hammurabi, king of Kurdā, has [talked d]eceitfully with you, and he is contriving a scheme. Your hand will [capture him] and in [his] land you will promu[lgate] an edict of restoration. Now, the land in [its entirety] is given to your hand. When you take con[trol] over the city and promulgate the edict of restoration, [it sho]ws that your kingship is etern[al].”¹²³

The Yaminites,¹²⁴ that is, the nomadic groups living on the southern side of the Euphrates, caused constant trouble for the kings of Mari even before the time of Zimri-Lim,¹²⁵ who, himself belonging to a Sim’alite tribe, fought two wars against them.¹²⁶ A priest of Annunitum reported a prophecy concerning the Yaminites to Zimri-Lim:

[Sp]eak [to m]y lord: [Th]us Aḥum, priest of [Annunitum], your [servant]:
 Ḥubatum, the prophetess, delivered the following oracle: “A wind will rise against the la[nd]! I will test its wings and [its] two... [.]—[let] Zimri-Lim and the Sim’[al]ite [do] the harvest[ing]! Zimr[i]-Lim, do not let] the land in i[ts e]ntirety [slip] from [your] ha[nd]!”

Again she [spoke]: “O Yami[ni]tes, why do you cause wor[ry]? I will put you to the proof!”

This is what this prophetess s[aid]. I have now sent the hair and a fringe of the garment of this woman [to] my lord.¹²⁷

The letter of Aḥum is a good example of the different kinds of information obtainable from the letters. The letter not only reports the contents of the two oracles of the goddess Annunitum spoken by the female prophet whose name is given by the letter-writer—we also learn that a priest could approach the king to inform him about divine messages uttered in his temple, and that a hair and a fringe of the garment (*šārtum u sissiktum*) were sometimes attached to the letter to be used as representing the prophet when the words spoken by the prophet were authenticated by another method of divination. The need for

¹²² e.g. *5 (“your adversaries”); *14 (“enemies”); *23 (“people who test you”); *24 (“your enemy; people that steal from me”).

¹²³ *4, lines 32–43; cf *7, 9 (king of Ešnunna); *17, 47 (Išme-Dagan, king of Ekallatum); *18 (Elam); **19, 20, 22 (Babylon); see Durand 1988: 399–402; Charpin 1992.

¹²⁴ Or: Benjaminites; the name (not to be confused with the biblical tribe with the same name) refers to people living on the right bank of the river Euphrates.

¹²⁵ See Charpin and Ziegler 2003: 41–2; Charpin 2004: 140–2.

¹²⁶ The designation “Sim’alite” (Bensim’alite) refers to the people living on the left bank of the Euphrates. For Zimri-Lim’s wars against the Yaminites in his second and third/fourth regnal year, see Charpin and Ziegler 2003: 190–1, 194–5; Charpin 2004: 178–9, 195–6, 205–6.

¹²⁷ *10; see Durand 1988: 429–30 (restorations from here); Barstad 2001: 57–8.

a “countersignature” of another diviner reflects the non-empirical nature of the prophetic method of divination on one hand, and the vulnerability of the chain of communication on the other.¹²⁸

The second revolt of the Yaminites coincided with a conflict against the kingdom of Ešnunna, which was one of the major political issues during the early reign of Zimri-Lim.¹²⁹ In his letter to Zimri-Lim, Sammetar warns the king against peace preliminaries with Ibalpiel II, king of Ešnunna, relying on the words of a male and a female prophet:

To me he (i.e. Lupaḫum, *āpilum* of Dagan) spoke: “Wh[at] if the king, without consulting God, will engage himself with the man of [Eš]nunna! As before, when the Yamin[ite]s came to me and settled in Saggatum, I was the one who spoke to the king: ‘Do not make a treaty with the Yaminites! I shall drive the shepherds of their clans away to Ḫubur and the river will finish them off for you.’ Now then, he should not pledge himself without consulting God.” This is the message Lupaḫum spoke to me.

Afterwards, on the following [da]y, a *qammatum* of Dagan of T[erqa] came and spoke [to me]: “Beneath straw water ru[ns]. They keep on send[ing to you] messages of friendship, they even send their gods [to you], but in their hearts they are planning something else. The king should not take an oath without consulting God.”¹³⁰

The opposition against the peace treaty with Ešnunna is expressed in two other letters quoting independently the four-word catchphrase from the prophecy of the *qammatum* “Beneath straw water runs” (*šapal tibnim mû illakû*).¹³¹ In spite of all these prophecies and the disapproval of people belonging to his inner circle, Zimri-Lim indeed made peace with both the Yaminites and Ešnunna.¹³²

Further enemies mentioned in prophecies quoted in the letters include Elamites against whom Zimri-Lim was at war in his eleventh year,¹³³ Hammurabi of Babylon with whom Zimri-Lim was allied against Elam but who eventually put an end to the kingdom of Mari;¹³⁴ and Išme-Dagan, who was son of Šamši-Adad, king of Assyria, and brother of Yasmaḫ-Addu, Zimri-Lim’s predecessor on the throne of Mari, who appointed him king of Ekallatum.¹³⁵ An oracle against Išme-Dagan was, according to the letter of Yarim-Addu,

¹²⁸ Thus in **2, 8, 10, 11, 13, 14, 22, 24, 27, 29, 36, 38, 39, 42. For the practice, see Stackert 2014: 43–8; Lynch 2013; Hamori 2012; Stökl 2012a: 81–6, 480–1; Malamet 1998: 78–9.

¹²⁹ See Charpin and Ziegler 2003: 194–206; Charpin 2004: 196–210; Guichard 2002.

¹³⁰ *9, lines 29–50; for the letter, see the new edition of Durand 2012.

¹³¹ Inib-šina (*7) refers to these words of the *qammatum*, and Kanisan (*12) quotes it through his father Kibri-Dagan, however, as having been spoken by a *muhḫûm*. See below, p. 84.

¹³² See Charpin and Ziegler 2003: 201–6.

¹³³ *18; see Charpin and Ziegler 2003: 216–27.

¹³⁴ **19, 20, 22; see Charpin and Ziegler 2003: 242–5.

¹³⁵ Cf. *17 and, indirectly, *48.

proclaimed by a prophet of Marduk in Babylon where he dwelt a few months as a refugee under the protection of King Hammurabi.¹³⁶

Another significant group of letters besides those dealing with Zimri-Lim's warfare and politics contains information and instructions concerning the maintenance and worship of temples in different cities of the kingdom. Some prophecies concern the establishment of commemorative rituals, monuments, or divine statues.¹³⁷ Performance of cultic acts, especially those related to the cult of the dead (*kispum*, *pagrā'um*) are demanded in prophecies, as in the following letter of Kibri-Dagan:

Another matter: When I sent this tablet to my lord, a [p]rophet (*muḥḥūm*) of [D]agan ca[m]e and [s]poke to [me]: "The god has sent me, saying: 'Hurry up and deliver a message to the king that a *kispum* offering be performed for the spirit of Yaḥḏun-Lim!'" This is what the prophet spoke to me and I have herewith communicated it to my lord. Let my lord do what he deems appropriate.¹³⁸

Prophecies are also used to remind the king of his duties towards gods and temples. Zimri-Lim can be reproached with neglect or non-compliance with cultic obligations, as, for instance, in the oracle of an unknown deity spoken by a female prophet:

"Since your childhood I have taken care of you, I am constantly taking you where there is safety. However, if I desire something from you, you do not give it to me. Now [se]nd an ex-voto to Naḥur and give me [what I requ]ested from you! [For what] I have bestowed on [your fathers] in the past, I will [now] bes[tow o]n you. [Whatever enemies] there may be, I will pile them up [unde]r your feet. [I will retu]rn your [land] to prosperity and abundance."

This is what this woman said, and I have written her [wor]ds to my lord. I have herewith sent her hair and a fringe of her garment to my lord. My lord should let oracles be taken. Let my lord act according to what the god answers.¹³⁹

Even righteousness and social justice can be presented as a sacred duty, as in the letters of Nur-Sin sent from Aleppo:

[More]over, a prophet (*āpilum*) of Adad, lord of Aleppo, came [with Abu]-ḥalim and spoke to him as follows: "Write to your lord the following: 'Am I not Adad,

¹³⁶ *47; see Charpin 2002: 27–8; Charpin and Ziegler 2003: 208.

¹³⁷ In *1, lines 3–12, Zimri-Lim is reminded of a *zukurum* sacrifice, which probably is a commemorative sacrificial ritual (see Durand 2000: 132–3; Fleming 2000: 120–4). In *28, the king is urged (by a prophet, if the reconstruction of Durand 1988: 447 is correct) to erect a *ḥumūsum* monument, for which see Durand 2005: 93–141. Moreover, Charpin 2015: 22 quotes an unpublished text (A. 3087: 8'–9') saying: "So (speaks) Addu: 'Let my statue be reinstalled in Nahur!'"

¹³⁸ *31, lines 7–23 (cf. *30, lines 13–23); see Durand 1988: 449–50; for the *kispum*, see Tsukimoto 1985; Jacquet 2002; Durand and Guichard 1997: 63–70.

¹³⁹ *27, lines 14–31 (the beginning of the letter is destroyed); see Durand 1988: 445–6. See also **13, 25, and 29.

lord of Aleppo, who raised you in my lap and restored you to your ancestral throne? I do not demand anything from you, When a wronged man or wo[man] cries out to you, be there and judge their case. This only I have demanded from you. If you do what I have written to you and heed my word, I will give you the land from the r[isi]ng of the sun to its setting, [your] land [greatly in]creased!” This is what the pr[ophet of] Adad, lord of Aleppo, said in the presence of Abu-ḫalim. My lord should know this.¹⁴⁰

Finally, some letters report on prophecies concerning individual projects like the repairing of the city gate of Terqa¹⁴¹ or the abandonment of the house of Sammetar after his death.¹⁴² A few letters report even prophecies and dreams related to private affairs, like the personal miseries of Šelebum the *assinnu*¹⁴³ and the servant girl of Zunana,¹⁴⁴ or the death¹⁴⁵ and name-giving¹⁴⁶ of a royal infant.

The quotations of prophetic utterances in Mari letters may be taken as firsthand written records of prophecy. However, when reporting on a prophecy, however faithfully, the sender of the letter provides the addressee with her or his own opinion and interpretation of the prophecy, often placing it in a wider context and making suggestions of how it should be taken heed of. The subjective emphasis of the letter-writers is often recognizable, especially when several letters from a single person can be compared.¹⁴⁷ Prophecies attaching to specific political situations, like Zimri-Lim’s diplomacy with Ešnunna,

¹⁴⁰ *1, lines 48–59; cf. *2, lines 6’–11’. In *2, righteousness is presented as a royal duty in general terms, but in the case of *1, the wronged person is evidently the queen mother Gašura of Aleppo, who claims an estate back from Zimri-Lim; see Durand 2002; Lauinger 2015: 113–32; and cf. “Prophets and Kings: Ancient Near East” in Chapter 7 in this volume.

¹⁴¹ Kibri-Dagan writes in *32, lines 10–17: “[Another matter], concerning the [build]ing of a new city gate, a prophet (*muhḫūm*) [cam]e to me some time ago [full of an]xiety, [sayin]g: “[You shall be]gin [the building of] this [city ga]te!”

¹⁴² An unknown person writes in *46, lines 5–16: “Concerning the house of Samme[ar] that was for some time sa[gg]ing, the prophets of D[agan] keep s[a]y[ing] to m[e]: ‘God has cursed the bricks of that house! Earth should be deposited within its inner r[oo]m and on its bri[ck] foundation.’ This is what the p[rophet]s (*m[u]hḫū*) of D[agan] are saying to me. I have now writ[ten] to my lord.” See Durand 1988: 499–500. Cf. *39, reporting two prophetic dreams of the same person concerning the same matter; see Durand 1988: 476; Malamat 1998: 75–6, 96–101.

¹⁴³ *8; see Durand 1988: 425.

¹⁴⁴ *37; see Durand 1988: 471–2; Butler 1998: 219–20.

¹⁴⁵ *33; see Malamat 1998: 122–4; Charpin 2014: 28–9.

¹⁴⁶ Šimatum, Zimri-Lim’s daughter, writes in *44, lines 4’–14’: “As regards the daughter of Tapa[h]um, in my dream a man stood there, saying: ‘The little daughter of Tapa[h]um shall [be called] Tagid-nawūm.’ This is what he said to me. Now, my lord should let a diviner check on this. If [this dr]eam was really seen, [let] my lord [give] the girl [the name] T[ag]i[d-nawūm], so she shall be called by this name, and may my lord enjoy permanent well-being.” See Durand 1988: 480–1; Pongratz-Leisten 1999: 103–4.

¹⁴⁷ Sasson 1994: 305: “Thus, no matter which divinity is at stake, no matter what prophecy is being communicated, no matter which prophet is chosen as conduit, when transmitted through Aunt Addu-duri, the message will caution the king about treachery or danger (XXVI: 195, 238); via Sister Inibšina, it will warn him about letting down his guard (XXVI: 197, 204); through the Wife Šiptu, it will comfort and cheer him (XXVI: 211; 213; 236).”

appear in letters intertwined with personal views of the writer, the prime example of which is provided by the threefold interpretation of the saying *šapal tibnim mû illakû* “beneath straw runs water” by Inib-šina, the king’s sister, the major-domo Sammetar, and Kanisan, each of whom give their own version of the prophetic word proclaimed by a woman called *qammatum*¹⁴⁸ in the temple of Dagan at Terqa.¹⁴⁹

(1) Speak to my Star: Thus Inib-šina:

Some time ago, Šelebum, the *assinnu*, delivered to me an oracle and I communicated it to you. Now, a *qammatum* of Dagan of Terqa came and spoke to me. She said: “The peacemaking of the man of Ešnunna is false: Beneath straw water runs! I will gather him into the net that I knot. I will destroy his city and I will ruin his wealth, which comes from the time immemorial.”¹⁵⁰

(2) Speak to my lord: Thus Sammetar, your servant: (...)

Afterwards, on the following day, a *qammatum* of Dagan of Terqa came and spoke to me: “Beneath straw water runs! They keep on sending to you messages of friendship, they even send their gods to you, but in their hearts they are planning something else. The king should not take an oath without consulting God.”¹⁵¹

(3) Speak to my lord: Thus Kanisan, your servant:

Kibri-D[agan], my father, [wrote to me] in Mari. [This is what] he wrote: “I heard the words that were uttered in the temple of Dagan. This is what they spoke to me: ‘Beneath straw water runs! The god of my lord has come! He has delivered his enemies in his hands.’ Now, as before, the prophet (*muhhûm*) broke into constant declamation.”¹⁵²

Without being substantially opposed to each other—all are ill-disposed towards a peaceable policy with Ešnunna—the part of the quotation following the uniformly repeated saying is different and obviously freely formulated in all three cases, apart from the saying “beneath straw water runs” repeated verbatim in each letter. This case demonstrates, on the one hand, that the

¹⁴⁸ The word *qammatum* is not as such a prophetic title, and its meaning is not altogether clear; it possibly refers to a specific hairstyle, and it is not excluded that the word should be understood as an anthroponym rather than a title (see Durand 2008a: 452–3; cf. Stökl 2012a: 61–2).

¹⁴⁹ See van der Toorn 1998: 65–8; Sasson 1995; S. B. Parker 1993: 57–60.

¹⁵⁰ *7, lines 4–19.

¹⁵¹ *9, lines 1–4, 41–50; see the new edition of the text in Durand 2012: 253–7.

¹⁵² *12, lines 1–16. Note that Kanisan, after referring to the oracle, continues: “Now, as before, the *muhhûm* has broken out into constant declamation” (*12, lines 14–16). At least according to the idea of Kanisan, then, it is the *muhhûm* and not the *qammatum* that delivered the oracle. Whoever the original proclaimer may have been, the fact that two different persons are credited as the source for the saying speaks for itself.

prophecy reported by three independent writers is very likely to have taken place, and on the other hand, that the letter-writers have constructed the prophetic message independently around the four-word catchphrase.

Another interesting case of the prophetic process of communication is the letter that once accompanied the letter introduced as being sent by the prophet of Šamaš. This letter is actually a collection of oracles containing three or four individual prophecies of Šamaš and ending with the exhortation: “Let Zimri-Lim, governor of Šamaš and Adad, listen to what is written on this tablet . . .” Even though the prophet appears as the sender of the letter, it is not written by him. This becomes evident from another letter, in which the official Yasim-El reports the following to the king:

Another matter: Atamrum, prophet of Šamaš, came to me and spoke to me as follows: “Send me a discreet scribe! I will have him write down the message which Šamaš has sent me for the king.” This is what he said to me. So I sent Utu-kam and he wrote this tablet. This man brought witnesses and said to me as follows: “Send this tablet quickly and let the king act according to its words.” This is what he said to me. I have herewith sent this tablet to my lord.¹⁵³

The letter written by Utu-kam and sent to the king has been shown to be identical with the letter of the prophet of Šamaš,¹⁵⁴ hence these two letters, one accompanying the other, give us a rare but welcome example of how written prophecies could come into being. The prophet Atamrum, as Near Eastern prophets in general, was not able to write himself, so Yasim-El commissioned a professional scribe to record the divine message. This was forwarded to the king together with another letter containing other reports. This letter is the only text from Mari connecting a prophet with any kind of writing and important evidence of the use written media in transmitting the prophetic word to its addressee.

A Letter from Amarna

The Amarna correspondence comprises around 380 letters uncovered at Tell el-Amarna in Egypt, originally sent to the Egyptian kings by other rulers in the Levant, Anatolia, and Mesopotamia in the fourteenth century BCE. Situated chronologically between the two main corpuses of ancient Near Eastern prophecy, the Amarna correspondence includes only one letter in which divine words are quoted in a way that suggests a prophetic oracle as their

¹⁵³ *48, lines 29–42.

¹⁵⁴ Charpin 2002: 14–15; 2012: 36; 2015: 16.

origin. The Hurrian king, Tušratta of Mitanni, writes to his son-in-law Amenophis (Amenhotep) III of Egypt (1390–1352):

Thus says Šauška of Nineveh, the Lady of all countries: “I want to go to Egypt, the country that I love, and then return.” Now I have sent her and she is on her way.

Now, during the reign of my father already, Šauška¹⁵⁵ the Lady went to that country. Just as she was honored when she dwelt there earlier, let my brother now honor her ten times more than before. Let my brother honor her and then joyfully let her go so that she may return.

May Šauška, the Lady of Heaven, protect my brother and me for 100,000 years! May our Lady bestow great joy on both of us! Let us act according to what is good.

Is Šauška goddess for me alone; is she not goddess for my brother, too?¹⁵⁶

Tušratta maintained regular correspondence with Egyptian kings, both his son-in-law Amenophis and his followers.¹⁵⁷ Tušratta’s daughter Tadu-Ḫeba had been married to the pharaoh, as was also his sister Keku-Ḫeba. The above-quoted letter is written just before the death of Amenophis. Šauška (that is, Ištar) of Nineveh appears in the letters of Tušratta as the head of the Hurrian pantheon,¹⁵⁸ and her statue was sent to the Egyptian king during his illness as a sign of the goodwill of the Hurrian king. A renewed travel to Egypt, presumably for a similar purpose, is presented as the will of the goddess herself. Ištar of Nineveh is known as an oracular goddess in the Neo-Assyrian period when she was called Mullissu. A quotation of her oracle in a letter of the Hurrian king indicates that she was known in this role even among the Hurrians.

The means by which the oracle is received is not indicated, but being the goddess of prophecy above all others, Ištar is likely to have thought to express her will through the mouth of a prophet. If this is true, prophecy serves here as an instrument of diplomacy and sign of the goodwill of the Hurrian king, who certainly does not refer to the word of a foreign goddess, but of the one worshipped in his own capital. Compared with the Mari letters, this reference to a divine word is different, not only in advocating peaceful relations towards a foreign nation, but first and foremost as a statement

¹⁵⁵ The signs are broken here; Rainey 2015: 184 reads ^dINANNA (with question marks), which makes perfect sense.

¹⁵⁶ *121; see the 2015 edition of Rainey (184–7) and cf. the translation of Moran 1992: 61–2.

¹⁵⁷ The letters EA 17–29 have been preserved; see Rainey 2015: 134–323.

¹⁵⁸ For this goddess, see Trémouille 2009–11; Wegner 1981.

justifying the action that has already been accomplished by the sender of the letter. There is neither warning nor promise, just a friendly wish that the token of goodwill would be accepted by the pharaoh, and the goddess would be met with all respect and veneration she deserves during her visit to Egypt.

Neo-Assyrian Letters

Among the extensive corpus of Neo-Assyrian royal correspondence, sixteen letters refer to the activities or whereabouts of prophets, some even quoting prophetic words. As in the case of the letters of Mari, everything that is said of prophets and prophecy in these letters is determined by the purpose of the letter and dependent on the agenda and interpretation of the letter-writer. While this inevitably narrows our view to the prophetic phenomenon in Assyria, the letters nevertheless bring valuable evidence of how prophecy was viewed and utilized by other members of the Neo-Assyrian society, especially those close to the royal court. They also provide additional information on prophetic performances and activities to what is obtainable from the actual prophetic oracles, especially with regard to the socio-religious context and position of the prophets.

Only a couple of Neo-Assyrian letters can be considered eye-witness reports. Both of them are written by temple officials who turn to the king quoting prophecies uttered in their own temples. A case well comparable to the prophetic appearances in the letters from Mari is reported by Nabû-reši-išši:

The king's sacrifices [...] have been performed on the [xth] day and the sixteenth, [the xth], the twentieth [...] [break of seven lines] [...] she prophesied:¹⁵⁹ "Why have you given the [...] -wood, the grove and the ... to the Egyptians? Say to the king that they be returned to me, and I will give total abundance [to] his [...]."¹⁶⁰

If the letter is sent by a temple official from Arbela, as it seems,¹⁶¹ it is likely to relate to rituals of the temple of Ištar of Arbela, during which the goddess had made a demand through the mouth of a female prophet concerning some property of hers that has unduly been given to Egyptians. By quoting the oracle, or summarizing its actual message, the writer discreetly looks after the interests of the temple, presenting the return of the temple property as divine will. But prophecies are not always referred to in a positive tone. Another temple

¹⁵⁹ The word *tarrugum* is pf. sg.3.fem. of *ragāmu*; the assimilation r + t is rare but not impossible in Neo-Assyrian, see SAA 5 164:15 *KUR.zi-ki-ti-a* (< Zikirtu); SAA 10 69 r. 5 *tak-pi-ti* (< *takpirtu*) and cf. Parpola 1984: 206 n. 39.

¹⁶⁰ *113, lines 10–s. 1.

¹⁶¹ See Karen Radner's note in Cole and Machinist 1998: 116.

official, Adad-aḫu-iddina, tells about a female prophet who prophesied in Ešarra, the Aššur temple of Assur:

Mullissu-abu-ušri, the female prophet (*raggintu*) who conveyed the king's clothes to the land of Akkad, has prophesied (*tartugum*) [in] the temple: “[The] throne from the te[mp]le [...] [break of five lines]

[L]et the throne go! I will catch the enemies of my king with it.” Now, without the authorization of the king, my lord, I shall not give the throne. We shall act according to what the king, my lord, orders.¹⁶²

Since the prophet is demanding something that the writer is reluctant to deliver, the official shifts the responsibility of the interpretation of the divine message on the king himself. The letter is probably connected with the substitute king ritual reported by Mar-Issar (*109) that took place on occasion of the lunar eclipse in the month of Tebet (X), 671 BCE in Akkad, the ancient Sargonic capital of Babylonia that was restored by Esarhaddon a few years earlier. During the ritual, a female prophet appeared twice assuring the kingship of the substitute and proclaiming to him an oracle of victory in the “assembly of the country” (*ina puḫur ša māti*):

[I] have heard that before these ceremonies a female prophet (*raggintu*) had prophesied, saying to Damqī, the son of the chief administrator: “You will take over the kingship!” [Moreover], the female prophet had spoken to him in the assembly of the country: “I have revealed the thieving polecat of my lord, and placed (it) in your hands.”¹⁶³

Mar-Issar, who in this letter gives an account of the successfully performed ritual, leans on the divine word as the legitimation of the unusual choice of the substitute, who this time was the son of a high Babylonian temple official. The prophetic word is such an important part of this message that Mar-Issar wanted to report it even though he did not experience the performance himself.

Nabû-reši-išši and Adad-aḫu-iddina present the prophetic oracles as clear instructions concerning individual cases and may have heard the message from the mouths of the prophets. Their point of view is practical; the messages transmitted by them, without necessarily being verbatim quotations, probably repeat their substance correctly. In the case of Adad-aḫu-iddina, who reports a message unpleasant from his point of view, this is all the more probable. Mar-Issar, on the other hand, does not present himself as an eyewitness: he tells that he has “heard” about the first appearance of the prophetess. The formulaic saying “You will take over the kingship” (*šarrūti tanašši*) may be Mar-Issar's own two-word summary of the divine message to the substitute. Whether or

¹⁶² *111, lines 7–r. 4. For this letter, see Robert M. Whiting in Cole and Machinist 1998: xvii; Nissinen 1998a: 78–81; Parpola 1983: 329.

¹⁶³ *109, lines 22–r. 4; on Mar-Issar and the event, cf. SAA 10 359:7–8 and see Frame 2007: 73–5, 90–1; Nissinen 1998a: 68–77; Parpola 1983: 270–2; Landsberger 1965: 46–51. For oracles of victory, see van der Toorn 1987.

not he had been present in the “assembly of the country” is not indicated; at least the peculiar metaphor of the oracle is less likely to have been invented by him: “I have revealed the ‘thieving polecat’ of my lord and placed it in your hands.” In all three cases the chain of communication is close to Mari models.

Another, curiously negative case about which the letter-writer had heard from others is reported by Nabû-rehtu-ušur, according to whom a prophecy had been proclaimed near the city of Harran, probably in the cedar temple erected by Esarhaddon on his way to Egypt less than a year earlier (*118f). The word said to have come from the god Nusku says that the Sargonid dynasty will be overturned and a certain Sašî proclaimed the king:

A slave girl of Bel-aḫu-ušur [...] upon [...] on the ou[tski]rts of H[arran]; since Sivan (III) she has been enraptured and speaks a good word about him: “This is the word of Nusku: The kingship is for Sašî! I will destroy the name and seed of Sennacherib!”¹⁶⁴

This prophecy is but one piece of information among others Nabû-rehtu-ušur denounces in this and two further letters (**116 and 117). However, he has not heard the alleged Nusku oracle with his own ears. Compared with other available data concerning the conspiracy in question, which indeed was discovered and quelled in good time at the beginning of the year 670, he turns out to be dependent on partially fallacious sources. He is right about the crucial role of the eunuchs in the conspiracy, but he is not aware of the true role of Sašî: in reality, the man who was proclaimed king by the woman in Harran was probably an undercover agent who kept the king well informed of the moves of the insurrectionists.¹⁶⁵ Nabû-rehtu-ušur quotes the words of the Harranean woman in good faith, showing himself to be a victim of intentionally misleading propaganda. This conspiracy is probably behind the decision of Esarhaddon to execute a large number of his magnates in 670 BCE.¹⁶⁶

Some Neo-Assyrian letters quote prophecies in a rather general way without mentioning the name of the prophet. Nabû-nadin-šumi uses the word of Ištar of Arbela and Nineveh straightforwardly as an argument for banishing a person from Assyria, possibly referring to archival copies of prophecies accessible to the king:

I[f] he turns out to be troublesome, let [the king], my lord, tu[rn] his gracious face away from him. According to what Ištar of N[ineveh] and Ištar of Arbela have said [to me]: “Those who are disloyal to the king our lord, we shall extinguish from Assyria,” he should indeed be banished from Assyria!¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁴ *115, lines r. 2–5.

¹⁶⁵ For arguments supporting this theory, and for the correspondence of Nabû-rehtu-ušur in general, see Nissinen 1998a: 108–53; cf. the further discussion on this letter in Frahm 2010: 110–31; de Jong 2007: 271–4; Holloway 2003: 336–7, 410–14.

¹⁶⁶ According to Esarhaddon’s chronicles, “In the eleventh year the king of Assyria put many of his magnates to the sword” (Grayson 1975a: 86:29; 127:27).

¹⁶⁷ *107, lines r. 1–9; see Parpola 1983: 208, 1993: 220–1; Nissinen 1998a: 102–5.

Due to the damage to the tablet, we do not know the name of the person whose expulsion Esarhaddon's chief exorcist recommends to the king. The prophecy of the two-Ištar-in-one is closely reminiscent of the oracle of the female prophet Urkittu-šarrat from Calah: "I will search out the disloyal ones and deliver them into the hands of my king";¹⁶⁸ it cannot be excluded that Nabû-nadin-šumi is referring to this very prophecy in his letter. If this is the case, it is easy to note how freely he reiterates the oracle, adapting the message for his own purposes.

Another reference of similar kind can be found in a letter of Bel-ušeziḫ, the famous Babylonian astrologer who in his letter concerning Esarhaddon's campaign in Mannea quotes divine words, to all appearances of prophetic origin:

Bel has said: "May Esarhaddon, king of Assyria, be seated on his throne like Marduk-šapik-zeri, and I will deliver all the countries into his hands."¹⁶⁹

The divine statement, the origin of which cannot be demonstrated by any extant source, is situated at the end of the letter which begins with quotations from astrological omen collections. Obviously, Bel-ušeziḫ attempts a scriptural confirmation of the contents of the letter. In addition, there is a pro-Babylonian message embedded in the name of Marduk-šapik-zeri,¹⁷⁰ who once rebuilt and fortified the city of Babylon—an effort to which Esarhaddon committed himself throughout his reign, and was encouraged even by prophets (e.g. *80).

Both of the above quote prophecy without any allusion to actual prophetic appearances. The divine words are not attached to any concrete situations but are used as generally applicable sentences, the prophetic origin of which is not specifically indicated.¹⁷¹ This makes it probable that the quotations are drawn from written sources rather than oral performances; if this is true, the letters of Nabû-nadin-šumi and Bel-ušeziḫ illustrate how archival copies of prophecies were used by contemporaries. One may assume that the medium through which the divine words once had been uttered was immaterial to the writers, who used them as scriptural references belonging to their learned tradition. Their concern, instead of "original" contexts or *ipsissima verba*, was the viability of the tradition in the contemporary situation.

A different kind of reference is made by the chief haruspex Marduk-šumu-ušur in his letter to Assurbanipal, reminding him of Esarhaddon's successful campaign to Egypt in 671 BCE:

¹⁶⁸ *81, lines ii 31–3.

¹⁶⁹ *106, lines r. 23–6. For this letter, see Nissinen 1998a: 99–101; Fales and Lanfranchi 1981: 9–33.

¹⁷⁰ King of Babylon in 1081–1069, known also from a Neo-Assyrian inscription copy concerning the restoration of Ezida, the temple of Nabû, in Borsippa; see Frame 1995: 45–9.

¹⁷¹ Cf. also the letter of Nabû-bel-šumati to Assurbanipal (*118d, lines r. 11–14; see Mattila 1987): "Nabû (and) Marduk, your gods, have tied your [enemies] and placed them [und]er your feet, saying: 'May he govern all the [land]s!'" Another oracle of Bel and Nabû quoted in the same letter, beginning on line r. 18, is broken away.

When the father of the king, my lord, was on his way to Egypt, a temple of cedar was erected on the outskirts of Harran. Sin was seated upon a staff, with two crowns placed on (his) head, (and) Nusku was standing before him. The father of the king, my lord, entered (and) placed [a crown] on (his) head. (It was said to him): “You will go and conquer the countries with it!”; [so he went and conquered Egypt. The king, lord of kings, will conquer the rest of the countries [that] have not (yet) submitted [to] Aššur and Sin.¹⁷²

The reference is made here to words uttered a few years earlier, and it is difficult to know whether it is presented here as a personal recollection of the letter-writer, a quotation from a written source, or—as the terse wording of the oracle suggests—a summary of its essential contents. In any case, the letter makes it probable that a prophetic performance took place as a part of the ceremony organized in the cedar temple. It is also possible that the above-quoted oracle of Nusku proclaimed by the slave girl against Esarhaddon (*115) was uttered at the same location.

An interesting case of prophecy connected to an ominous event is reported in a letter written by three eminent astrologers to Assurbanipal when he attempted to return the statue of Marduk to Babylon in his first regnal year:

Bel-eriba and Nergal-šallim, servants of the palace of the crown prince under the jurisdiction of the governor of (the city of) Šamaš-našir, were in Labbanat attending to a strong horse harnessed in Kushite trappings for the entrance of the city. Nergal-šallim grasped the feet of Bel-eriba and helped him to mount the horse. They saw (this) and seized and questioned him. He said: “Bel and Zar[panitu] have sent a word to me: ‘Babylon (becomes) straightaway the loot of Kurigalzu.’” [NN], the ‘third man’ [of NN] says: “I know (what this means): Those [robbers] are [w]aiting in Kurigalzu!”¹⁷³

This malportentious incident seems to have stopped the progress of the statue, which was successfully brought to Babylon only a year later, on 24th of Iyyar, 668. This, again, is the subject of the letter of Aššur-ḫamatu’a, a temple administrator in Arbela. The structure of this letter is unusual: the greetings that normally introduce a letter are placed at the end of the letter, which begins with an oracle of Bel (Marduk) concerning his reconciliation with Mullissu and, through her intercession, with Assurbanipal: “I am the Lord, I have entered (and) made peace with Mullissu. Assurbanipal, king of Assyria, whom she raised: Fear not!”¹⁷⁴ This text may be originally written as a *šipirtu*, that is, a divine message written without a reference to the transmitter,¹⁷⁵ to

¹⁷² *118f, lines 10–16; see de Jong 2007: 400–2; Parpola 1983: 100–1; 1993: 136–7.

¹⁷³ *118e; see de Jong 2007: 306–7; Parpola 1983: 32–5, 1993: 19; Vera Chamaza 2002: 218–20. The letter is written jointly by Issar-šumu-ereš, Adad-šumu-ušur, and Marduk-šakin-šumi.

¹⁷⁴ *112, lines 1–5; see Nissinen and Parpola 2004; Cole and Machinist 1998: 111; for a different dating of the letter, see de Jong 2007: 279–82.

¹⁷⁵ For the *šipirtu*, see Pongratz-Leisten 1999: 226–7.

which the elements of a letter have been added by the scribe himself. A fragment of such a *šipirtu* sent by a votaress (*šēlūtu*) of Ištar of Arbela has been preserved.¹⁷⁶

The last couple of letters are written from the personal perspective of the letter-writer. The exorcist Urad-Gula, a long-term servant of Esarhaddon, had fallen from grace under the rule of Assurbanipal. In his long letter he tries to regain the sympathy of the king relating his misfortunes and failures, one of which was turning to a prophet (*raggimu*) who could not help him.¹⁷⁷ Bel-ušešib, the above-mentioned astrologer, had different reasons for nursing a grievance towards prophets. He writes to the king soon after his enthronement, wondering why the king “summoned male and female prophets (...) but until now has not summoned me?”¹⁷⁸ The clash between two kinds of diviners is noteworthy, since Esarhaddon seems to have rewarded prophets who transmitted words of Ištar of Arbela concerning his kingship before he granted his favors to the astrologer who also had interpreted decisive signs of kingship to him. Bel-ušešib, however, did not have to wait a long time for his reward, since he was to become one of the trusted scholars of Esarhaddon.

Letters from Lachish

A dozen letters written on ostraca in Hebrew language have been uncovered at Lachish (Tell ed-Duweir). The Lachish ostraca date from the last days of the kingdom of Judah before Jerusalem fell to Nebuchadnezzar II in 586 BCE. The sender of most letters is Hoshaiiah, a Judaeen military officer who wrote to the city from an outpost where he could see the signals sent from Azekah (cf. Jer. 34:7). Three letters have been quoted as referring to prophecy, two of which, however, are too unclear or fragmentary to make sense.¹⁷⁹

In his letter to Yaush written on Ostrakon 3, Hoshaiiah, the commander at Lachish, first defends himself against accusations of illiteracy and then informs his superior of the following:

Now it has been told to your servant: “The commander of the army, Coniah son of Elnathan, has gone down to Egypt. He has sent (orders) to take Hodaviah son of Ahijah and his men from here.” As for the letter of Tobiah the servant of the

¹⁷⁶ *114; see Cole and Machinist 1998: 119.

¹⁷⁷ *108, lines r. 31–2; see Nissinen 1998a: 84–8; van der Toorn 1998; Parpola 1993a: 231–4.

¹⁷⁸ *105, lines 9, 16; see Nissinen 1998a: 89–95; Parpola 1993a: 86–8.

¹⁷⁹ Ostrakon 16 (*141) contains the word “prophet” (*hnb*) but the fragment contains only scattered words. In Ostrakon 6 (*140), the word “prophet” is due to reconstruction: *whnh dbry h[nb] l' t̄bm lrpt ydyk [wlhš] q̄t ydy h[nšm h]yd[m b]hm* “Now the words of the [prophet] are not good, weakening your hands [and slackening] the hands of the m[en who] know [about] them.” The restoration, inspired by Jer. 38:4, is by no means sure.

king, which came to Shallum the son of Jaddua from the prophet (*hnb'*), saying, "Beware!": your servant has sent it to my lord.¹⁸⁰

Since the prophet is referred to anonymously but with a definite article, we may assume that Yaush was supposed to know his identity. Five different persons are involved in the process of communication referred to in the letter. The functions of Hoshaiiah as its sender and Yaush as the addressee are clear, but who was the writer of the letter of Tobiah that came to Shallum "from the prophet"? Perhaps the royal official Tobiah had become aware of the "Beware!" prophecy and written a report of it. The report had then been mediated to Hoshaiiah, the present letter-writer, by Shallum.¹⁸¹ In any case, the letter informs on another letter, the essential contents of which comprises a prophetic oracle. It does not indicate that the prophet—the only anonymous member in this chain of communication¹⁸²—had written the prophecy down himself, but he may have initiated the process of writing in the same way as Atamrum, the prophet of Šamaš at Mari in the case described above (*48). Both letters, separated from each other by more than a millennium, provide evidence of the connection between the prophetic and scribal practices. This evidence does not presuppose the literacy of the prophet but testifies to the occasional need of writing down prophetic words in order to make them reach their addressee.

WRITTEN ORACLES

With written prophecy¹⁸³ I refer to texts recording prophetic oracles¹⁸⁴ either as such or with minimal annotations, not embedding them in a context such as a letter or a narrative. Such texts have not been preserved in significant numbers. The richest documentation of ancient Near Eastern prophecy comes from Assyria, while no single written oracle outside the corpus of letters can be found among the texts from Mari. This does not necessarily mean that

¹⁸⁰ *139; see Seow 2003: 212–15; Renz and Röllig 1995: 416–19.

¹⁸¹ Rütterswörden 2001: 187: "Die einleuchtendste Erklärung besteht darin, dass der ספר von Tōbyāhū stammt, der wesentliche Inhalt aber—vor allem mit dem Kurzzitat—von dem Propheten." Cf. also S. B. Parker 1994.

¹⁸² According to an alternative interpretation, Tobiah himself is the prophet; thus Stöckl 2012a: 170. The definitive article in *hnb'* points to this direction, but the title "servant of the king" sounds somewhat strange as a prophetic title.

¹⁸³ For the distinction of written prophecy and literary prophecy (cf. Lange 2006; 2009). See also "Prophets as Intermediaries" in Chapter 1 of this volume.

¹⁸⁴ With "prophetic oracle" I refer to a text consisting of one or more "verbal communications to humans from the gods or other supernatural beings" (Bowden 2010: 106) transmitted by a prophet via non-technical means. This classicist definition is concordant with the definition of prophecy used by biblical and ancient Near Eastern scholars formulated by Manfred Weippert (see Weippert, 2014: 231–2). See also "Prophets as Intermediaries" in Chapter 1 of this volume.

such texts were not written at all, but may point towards the conclusion that written copies of prophecy were not meant for long-time preservation, and that the sparseness of sources is due to the accident of preservation. Many written prophecies may still be awaiting their uncovering; for instance, the remains of Arbela, the domicile of most Assyrian prophets, still lie untouched within the citadel of the modern city of Erbil. Nevertheless, even in the case of Assyria, written prophecies are remarkably rare in comparison with records of other kinds of divination. Therefore, it seems that even though the prophetic performance was not disconnected from writing altogether, preparing transcripts of prophetic oracles was not the standard procedure but, rather, took place for particular reasons under specific circumstances.

Oracles from Ešnunna

The genre of written prophecy is not represented among the documents from Mari. The letter from the prophet of Šamaš containing three divine messages (*4) comes very close to a transcript of a spoken oracle; however, to judge from another letter (*48), it is not based on the oral performance of the prophet but is written by a scribe according to the dictation of the prophet Atamrum himself.

Important Old Babylonian evidence of written oracles comes from the contemporary kingdom of Ešnunna. Two written oracles of the Ištar-goddess Kititum, whose temple in the city of Nerebtum (Iščali) was the religious center of the kingdom have been preserved.¹⁸⁵ The addressee of the oracles is King Ibalpiel II of Ešnunna, a contemporary and rival of Zimri-Lim, king of Mari. One of the tablets is badly damaged, including only the first three lines (*67), but the other text (*66) is preserved entirely:

O king Ibalpiel, thus says Kititum:

The secrets of the gods are placed before me. Because you constantly pronounce my name with your mouth, I constantly disclose the secrets of the gods to you. On the advice of the gods and by the command of Anu, the country is given you to rule. You will ransom the upper and lower country, you will amass the riches of the upper and lower country. Your commerce will not diminish; there will be a perm[anent] food of peace [for] any country that your hand keeps hold of. I, Kititum, will strengthen the foundations of your throne; I have established a protective spirit for you. May your [e]ar be attentive to me!

¹⁸⁵ **66 and 67; see Ellis 1987; 1989: 138–40 and, for the temple, Viaggio 2006. I thank Dominique Charpin for correcting my earlier imprecise statement of these texts deriving from the “city and state” of Ešnunna (Charpin 2015: 27 n. 85).

As the publisher of the text, Maria deJong Ellis, plausibly suggests, this oracle is likely to have been pronounced to Ibalpiel on occasion of his enthronement.¹⁸⁶ The text is a good example of a *šipirtu*, that is, a letter from a deity to the king containing only divine words without further authorship indications.¹⁸⁷ It does not mention a prophet, but both the style and the language of the oracle has close parallels in the Mari documents¹⁸⁸ and even in the Neo-Assyrian prophecies, suggesting that the tablet is a polished transcript of a prophetic proclamation of *šulmu*, or well-being, to the king.¹⁸⁹ A food rations list from Nerebtum confirms that there actually were prophets (*muhḫû*) in the temple of Kitiium.¹⁹⁰

Oracles from Assyria

The biggest corpus of written prophetic oracles comes from the royal archive of Assyria in Nineveh, the capital of the late Neo-Assyrian empire. With its c. 30,000 clay tablets, this archive, destroyed by the Babylonians and Medes in the year 612 BCE and discovered by Sir Austen Henry Layard in 1848–50, is not only the main source of our knowledge of the Neo-Assyrian empire but the biggest repository of cuneiform documents ever found. All contemporary textual genres are represented in the archive, including prophetic oracles written on eleven cuneiform tablets.

The corpus of Neo-Assyrian prophecy, as established by the edition of Simo Parpola, consists of eleven clay tablets (SAA 9 1–11). Originally belonging to the Neo-Assyrian state archives in Nineveh, they form today part of the Kuyunjik collection of the British Museum.¹⁹¹ The tablets comprise twenty-nine individual oracles,¹⁹² seven of which have been preserved on the original individual tablets,¹⁹³ while the remaining twenty-two belong to tablets containing collections of oracles. In the oracle collections, individual oracles are separated by a dividing line and are, hence, easily identifiable. Judged from the handwriting, all four collections are written by the same scribe.¹⁹⁴ The existence of the collections of prophecies bears witness to the efforts of the Neo-Assyrian kings to collect, copy

¹⁸⁶ Ellis 1987: 250–1. ¹⁸⁷ See Pongratz-Leisten 1999: 204.

¹⁸⁸ For comparison of *66 with Mari documents, see Ellis 1987: 251–6.

¹⁸⁹ Thus Moran 1993: 257. ¹⁹⁰ *67a, line r. 12; see Viaggio 2006: 187.

¹⁹¹ See the detailed description of the tablets in Parpola 1997: liii–lxxi.

¹⁹² The original number of the individual oracles is not absolutely certain because of the level of damage to the tablets. For example, it cannot be known for certain whether there was a dividing line between the third and fourth column of SAA 9 3; if so, *88 (SAA 9 3.5) may consist of two individual oracles.

¹⁹³ **90–6; see Parpola 1997: 34–43.

¹⁹⁴ Parpola 1997: lv, cvii n. 280.

and file away prophetic oracles, even though their number is small and their preparation may have been an exception rather than the rule.¹⁹⁵

Defining the Neo-Assyrian corpus of prophetic oracles follows certain criteria.¹⁹⁶ The attribute “Neo-Assyrian” implies that the texts derive from the period of the Neo-Assyrian empire and are composed in the Neo-Assyrian language.¹⁹⁷ Moreover, the texts share some important characteristics which set them apart from other omen literature. Firstly, they are all composed as direct divine speech to an individual or a larger audience, mediated by a person mentioned by name. Secondly, provided that enough text has been preserved, the prophecies more or less unambiguously refer to specific historical circumstances. Thirdly, they do not present themselves as the outcome of any inductive method of divination, such as extispicy or astrology, but as direct divine speech, naming the main components of the prophetic process of communication: the divine speaker, the human addressee and the prophet who transmits the message. These distinctive features warrant the investigation of the texts as a coherent corpus, which can justifiably be called prophecy.¹⁹⁸

All Neo-Assyrian prophetic oracles derive from the time of two kings of Assyria, Esarhaddon (681–669 BCE) and his son Assurbanipal (668–627 BCE), both of whom received prophecies already as crown princes. All collections and two individual reports (**90–1) have been written in the time of Esarhaddon, while the remaining five reports date to the time of Assurbanipal. The addressee of almost all oracles is either Esarhaddon or Assurbanipal; however, a number of them are addressed to Naqia, Esarhaddon’s mother.¹⁹⁹ One oracle in Collection Three is proclaimed to the people of Assyria as a whole on

¹⁹⁵ See Pongratz-Leisten 2015: 359. It is illustrative of the condition of the source material that, compared to the twenty-nine prophecies, we have no less than 354 extispicy queries from the time of Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal alone (see Starr 1990).

¹⁹⁶ Cf. Weippert 1981: 71–2 (= 2014: 9–10); Parpola 1997: lxxvii. There are a few borderline cases that are closely related to the prophetic corpus, such as the letter from Aššur-ḫamatu’a, a priest of the temple of Ištar in Arbela (*112), which presents a unique and peculiar combination of a letter and an oracle report and may go back to an actual prophetic performance. The Dialogue of Assurbanipal and Nabû (*118a), for its part, is a literary compilation originating from the same scribe and the same historical situation as *94; in addition, it shares many features with the actual prophetic oracles, the language and ideology of which must have been familiar to the scribe. Further representatives of the literarized communication with gods are the divine letters (*šipirtu*) SAA 3 47; SAA 13 43; 148 (see Pongratz-Leisten 1999: 226–7), which share important linguistic and ideological elements with the prophecies but constitute a genre clearly different from them.

¹⁹⁷ For a definition of the Neo-Assyrian language, see Luukko 2004: 2–3. A partial exception to this rule is constituted by *92, which is written in an Assyrianized Neo-Babylonian rather than in proper Neo-Assyrian.

¹⁹⁸ For similar characteristics in the prophetic documents from Mari, see Malamat 1987: 34–5.

¹⁹⁹ *75 and *78; probably also *74 and *83 in which the addressee is referred to with a feminine pronoun or verb.

occasion of Esarhaddon's enthronement.²⁰⁰ As the letters discussed in the previous section demonstrate, prophecies could be delivered to persons other than kings, for example to temple officials and even to private persons, but the oracles deposited in the royal archives have a decidedly royal focus, and there is nothing in the extant evidence to suggest that prophecies were ever written down in a non-royal context.

The main reason for the probably higher-than-ever status of prophecy during the reign of Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal is to be seen in the special devotion of both kings to Ištar of Arbela, who is the foremost oracular deity in Neo-Assyrian prophecies.²⁰¹ She appears as the divine speaker sometimes in conjunction with her "big sister" Mullissu, who in the Neo-Assyrian era was equated with Ištar of Nineveh, but even other Ištar-like goddesses feature in the oracles, such as Banitu, Urkittu, and "the goddesses" (*ištarāti*) of Babylon.²⁰² Prophetic divination was not entirely Ištar's domain, however. The first three oracles included in Collection Three are spoken by Aššur, the supreme god of Assyria,²⁰³ and one oracle has three divine speakers, Bel, Ištar, and Nabû:

Fear not, Esarhaddon! I am Bel, I speak to you! I watch over the supporting beams of your heart. When your mother gave birth to you, sixty Great Gods stood there with me, protecting you. Šin stood at your right side, Šamaš at your left. Sixty Great Gods are still standing around you; they have girded your loins.

Do not trust in humans! Lift up your eyes and focus on me! I am Ištar of Arbela. I have reconciled Aššur to you. I protected you when you were a baby. Fear not; praise me!

Is there an enemy that has attacked you, while I have kept silent? The future shall be like the past! I am Nabû, the Lord of the Stylus. Praise me!²⁰⁴

This prophecy proclaimed by the prophet Bayâ²⁰⁵ is a good representation of the royal theology based on the idea of an intimate relationship of the king with the goddess.²⁰⁶ Like the oracle of Ešnunna discussed above, most Assyrian prophecies are oracles of well-being (*šulmu*), proclaiming the reconciliation of the king with the gods as the precondition of the rule of the

²⁰⁰ *85, line i 27: "Listen carefully, O Assyrians!"

²⁰¹ Cf. Parpola 1997: xxxix–xl.

²⁰² Banitu: *78; Urkittu (that is, Ištar of Uruk): *83; *ištarāti* of Babylon: *78.

²⁰³ **84–6. The reason for this is evident: the oracles included in Collection Three pertain to Esarhaddon's enthronement in Ešarra, the temple of Aššur in the city of Assur.

²⁰⁴ *71. This probably represents an aspectual—rather than "polytheistic"—concept of the divine, that is, a concept according to which the individual deities represent different aspects or functions of one universal divinity; see Parpola 1997: xviii–xxvi; 2000, and cf. the discussion of this theology in S. L. Allen 2015: 21–3 and *passim*; Pongratz-Leisten 2003; Frahm 2000–1; Porter 2000; Cooper 2000; van der Toorn 2000a.

²⁰⁵ For this prophet and the problem of his/her gender, see "Gender and Human Agency" in Chapter 8 in this volume.

²⁰⁶ See Parpola 1997: xxxvi–xlv. For the divine–human familial metaphor, see Pongratz-Leisten 2008.

Assyrian king, mediated by the intercession of the goddess who protects the king and fights for him.

The name of the prophet who transmitted the divine word is indicated in the oracles almost without exception,²⁰⁷ usually also the city in which the prophet is based or the oracle has been pronounced. In the first two collections, each oracle ends with a colophon of the type *ša pi Sinqīša-āmur mar'at Arbail* “From the mouth of Sinqīša-amur, a woman from Arbela”; Collection Three has only one colophon at the end of the collection of five oracles, indicating that all five have been spoken by the same person.

The colophons serve the purpose of demonstrating that the oracles were really spoken and that they have an accredited background. For all their brevity, the colophons add considerably to our knowledge of the prophetic phenomenon in Assyria. First, the names of the prophets are highly theological, such as, *Ilūssa-āmur* “I have seen her divinity”; *Issār-bēli-da'ini* “Ištar, strengthen my lord!”; *Issār-lā-tašiyat* “Do not neglect Ištar!”; *Sinqīša-āmur* “I have seen her distress”; *Lā-dāgil-ili* “One who does not see God.” Carrying a message specific to the worship of Ištar, some names of the prophets are probably not their birth names, but have been assumed to reflect their role as prophets.²⁰⁸ Secondly, thanks to these colophons, we are able to recognize the strong contribution of women to Assyrian prophecy: eight out of thirteen prophets whose names have been preserved in the oracles are women.²⁰⁹ In three cases, the gender of the prophet is not clear due to incongruent personal details.²¹⁰ Thirdly, the position of Arbela as the most important base of Assyrian prophets becomes evident. Seven out of thirteen prophets speaking in the oracles are located in Arbela,²¹¹ which indicates that the temple of Ištar in Arbela called Egašankamma was the cradle of Neo-Assyrian prophecy. In addition to the oracles, two Neo-Assyrian letters report on prophecies pronounced in this temple.²¹² The Lady of Arbela

²⁰⁷ The only oracles that do not mention the prophet's name are *90 and *93. The structure of *93 deviates from the rest of the oracles in other respects, too, consisting of five short divine sayings concerning the Elamites.

²⁰⁸ For the names of the prophets, see Parpola 1997: xlvi–lii.

²⁰⁹ Aḫat-abiša (*75), Dunnaša-amur (**94, 95), Issar-beli-da'ini (*74), Mullissu-kabtat (*92), Remut-Allati (*70), Sinqīša-amur (*69, [*82]), and Urkittu-šarrat (*81). Dunnaša-amur and Sinqīša-amur may be one and the same person (see Parpola 1997: il–l). More female prophets are known from other Neo-Assyrian documents (**105, 109, 110, 111, 113, 114).

²¹⁰ i.e. Issar-la-tašiyat (*68), Bayā (*71), and Ilussa-amur (*72). While in the first case, the scribe has apparently made a mistake and himself corrected the determinative preceding the name from female to male, the two other cases have been explained either as scribal errors (Weippert 2002: 33–4; Stökl 2012a: 122–3) or as indicating that these persons assumed an undefinable gender role, comparable to that of the *assinnu* (Parpola 1997: il–l). See “Gender and Human Agency” in Chapter 8 in this volume.

²¹¹ Aḫat-abiša (*75), Bayā (*71, [*79]); Dunnaša-amur (**94, 95), Issar-la-tašiyat (*68), La-dagil-ili (*77, [*84–8]); Sinqīša-amur (*69, [*82]), and Tašmetu-ereš (*91).

²¹² i.e. the letters of Aššur-ḫamatu'a (*112) and Nabû-reši-išši (*113). This is discernible from the greeting formula typical of writers from Arbela; see Karen Radner's notes in Cole and Machinist 1998: 116–17.

speaks even in oracles pronounced outside of Arbela,²¹³ and her words are quoted in two inscriptions of Assurbanipal.²¹⁴ The prophecies of the third collection belong to festivities that took place in Assur, and other Neo-Assyrian sources document prophetic activities in Babylon, in Akkad, and in the vicinity of Harran.²¹⁵

Two basic formats are used in the design of the prophetic reports: the vertical format designed for letters and documents like treaties, lists and royal decrees (*tuppu*), on the one hand (**68–89, 94–6; also the Ešnunna tablets discussed above), and the horizontal format (*u'iltu*) used for notes, reports and receipts, on the other (**90–3).²¹⁶ This difference is significant insofar as it informs us about the purpose of the writing. The *u'iltu* format is used for disposable documents that are not necessarily meant for long-term preservation, even though they may be neatly written and are well represented in the archives. The *tuppu* format, by contrast, is intentionally designed for archival storage. With regard to the small number of preserved documents, one is tempted to assume that the basic form of a written prophetic document was a report of *u'iltu* type, which in the normal case was thrown away and only sometimes ended up in the archives, maybe because of the special importance of the message in question.²¹⁷ This assumption is corroborated, in a way, by the fact that some of the reports are designed in *tuppu* format, the masterpiece being the especially beautifully written tablet SAA 9 9 (*94).²¹⁸ This prophecy is written by the same scribe who also wrote tablet SAA 3 13 (*118a), a dialogue of Assurbanipal with Nabû, which, without itself being a prophecy, has many affinities with the actual prophetic oracles showing that the language and metaphors used in prophecies are not typical to them only, but in all likelihood draw from a common repertoire.²¹⁹ The use of *tuppu* tablets suggests that library copies were occasionally prepared of prophecy reports that were found to be of extraordinary significance. This

²¹³ i.e. Urkittu-šarrat from Calah (*81) and Remut-Allati from the otherwise unknown place called Dara-aḥuya (*70). Moreover, that last oracle of the third collection (*88), a prophecy of Ištar in Arbela spoken by a prophet from Arbela, belongs to the tablet otherwise consisting of oracles pronounced in Assur.

²¹⁴ i.e. in Assurbanipal's accounts of the campaigns against Mannea (*100) and Elam (*101).

²¹⁵ The Marduk Ordeal ritual (*103) is set in Babylon; the substitute king ritual reported by Mar-Išsar took place in the newly re-established Akkad (*109); a coronation ritual involving a prophecy was arranged in a temple of cedar near Harran when Esarhaddon was on his way to Egypt (*118f); and a slave-girl is said to have spoken a prophecy of Nusku against Esarhaddon in the same place (*115).

²¹⁶ For the difference and purpose of these formats, cf. Parpola 1997: liii; Radner 1995.

²¹⁷ Cf. Cancik-Kirschbaum 2003: 41.

²¹⁸ The highly qualified design of this tablet is visible from the photograph in Parpola 1997: plates XI–XII.

²¹⁹ See Atkinson 2013; Mack 2011: 168–72; cf. de Jong 2007: 412–13, according to whom the text is “reminiscent of oracular language, but composed as a literary text”; and Pongratz-Leisten 1999: 75 who discusses it among “letters from God.”

implies more than a mere act of filing: by making a library copy the oracle is intentionally made part of the corpus of literature to be learned by posterity, thus the process of communication is intended to proceed on a literary level.

That the written oracles have been preserved in two tablet formats is indicative of their archival history and function. The horizontal tablets containing individual oracles may be taken as first-hand transcripts of the orally pronounced divine messages and are, therefore, the most primary evidence of the substance of prophetic performances. Such reports were meant to preserve the divine message only until it had reached its destination, and they may have been produced on a much larger scale than the extant copies suggest; if so, they were probably disposed of soon after their use.

From a tidy library copy of a single oracle, it is not a long way to a collection of several prophecies. The collections of oracles have been compiled by the scribes from among those individual oracles that eventually ended up in the archives. The editorial activity implies the reuse and reinterpretation of the once-spoken prophetic messages in a new historical context; in fact, the new archival context made the prophecies a part of written tradition which could serve as source material for texts representing other genres.

As a matter of fact, some reports give the impression of being combined of more than one oracle. In *92, line 14 the word *šanītu* (“secondly”) may suggest that the present unity is a secondary composition,²²⁰ and *93 evidently gives account of two or more separate oracles:

Words [concerning the Elam]ites:

Thus says [the God]: “I have go[ne, I ha]ve come!”

Five, six times he s[ai]d this. Then (he said): “I have come from the [m]ace. The snake in it I have hauled and cut in pieces.” And (he said): “I have crushed the mace.”

And (he said): “I will crush Elam! Its army shall be leveled to the ground. This is how I will finish off Elam.”

This report dates from one of the Elamite campaigns of Assurbanipal, most probably from that of year 653, providing a good example of the encouraging prophetic messages (*šīpir mahhê*) Assurbanipal claims to have received while attacking Teumman, the king of Elam.²²¹ The oracles belong together, the curious mace and snake metaphor being explained by the promise of vanquishing Elam. The tablet thus reports a series of prophetic performances, possibly in answer to an inquiry, or inquiries, concerning Assurbanipal’s Elamite war.

²²⁰ Weippert 1997b: 153–7 (= 2014: 118–21) explains lines 3–13 as a quotation from an older oracle; cf. the criticism of de Jong 2007: 270.

²²¹ In Prism B v 93–6 (Borger 1996: 104), Assurbanipal tells how Aššur and Marduk had encouraged him with “good omens, dreams, speech omens and prophetic messages” (*ina ittāti damqāti šutti egerrê šīpir mahhê*).

Archival copies of texts intentionally designed as collections of prophetic oracles have only been preserved from the time of Esarhaddon on three multicolumn *tuppu* tablets, which include ten (Collection One, **68–77), six (Collection Two, **78–83) and five (Collection Three, **84–8) individual oracles respectively. In addition, the tiny fragment SAA 9 4 (*89) probably preserves a remnant of a multicolumn tablet, originally about the size of other collections.²²² All tablets refer to historical circumstances surrounding Esarhaddon's ascent to the throne of his father: the victorious civil war of 681 BCE (Collection One), the enthronement (Collection Three), and the beginning of his reign (Collection Two).²²³ All four were likely written by the same scribe.²²⁴

It is beyond doubt that the collections, all beautifully written with skillful layout, are prepared for archival purposes. The individual oracles included in them are probably selected and copied from written prophecy reports which were no longer saved up after the compilation of the collections. The editorial activity is visible in the standardized design of the collections, all of which follow roughly the same format. In Collections One and Two, each individual oracle is followed by an indication of the name of the prophet and place of origin, separated by a dividing line from the following oracle, in Collection One also from the oracle to which it belongs, for example (*69, lines ii 9–10):²²⁵

By the mouth of Sinqiša-amur, a woman from Arbela.

On the other hand, Collection Three has rulings between the oracles, with a concluding authorship indication after a blank space (*88, lines iv 31–5), probably referring to the prophet [La-dagil-i]li as the proclaimer of all five prophecies included in the collection. The collections are likely to have had headings and colophons including other information (date, for example), although there is no absolute proof for this since the beginning is destroyed in every one of them and the end is extant only in Collection Three.²²⁶ In view of the unsystematic design of the extant reports, it is clear that the editor of the collections has attempted a standardized manner of representation which has required at least a slight stylization of the reports.

Collection Three differs from the others in that it contains cultic instructions embedded between prophetic oracles, following a sequence of rituals on the occasion of the enthronement of Esarhaddon, each accompanied by a

²²² See Parpola 1997, lix.

²²³ For the dates, see Parpola 1997: lxviii–lxx.

²²⁴ Parpola 1997: lv.

²²⁵ *ša pi-i m.si-in-qi-ša—a-mur DUMU.MI URU.arba-il*. For variants, see Parpola 1997: lxiii.

²²⁶ Cf. Parpola 1997: lxiii, where it is pointed out that the breaks leave enough room for such notes, and that SAA 9 9, possibly using SAA 9 1 as a model, has a date at the end of the text.

prophetic proclamation. The well-edited structure of the tablet can be outlined as follows (rulings as in the original):

SAA 9 3.1 (*84)

- i 1–13 [heading?] + introductory oracle (*šulmu*)
—theme: cosmic well-being
i 14–26 description of a ritual procession to Ešarra
-

SAA 9 3.2 (*85)

- i 27–ii 7 oracle (*šulmu*) of Aššur to the Assyrians
—theme: victory and global rule of Esarhaddon
ii 8–9 placing of the *šulmu* before the courtyard gods
-

SAA 9 3.3 (*86)

- ii 10–25 oracle (*šulmu*) of Aššur
—theme: historical flashback of preceding events; a demand for praise
ii 26 placing of the *šulmu* before the statue Aššur in the temple
ii 27–32 reading the covenant tablet (*tuppi adê*) before Esarhaddon
-

SAA 9 3.4 (*87)

- ii 33–iii 15 oracle (*abutu*) of Ištar
—theme: meal of covenant
ii 33–4 introductory formula
ii 35ff. oracle
iii 2–6 cultic instructions
iii 7–15 oracle
-

SAA 9 3.5 (*88)

- iii 16–iv 30 oracle (*abutu*) of Ištar
—theme: Esarhaddon's responsibilities to Ištar
iii 16–17 introductory formula
iii 18–iv 30 oracle with cultic demands (iii 32–7)
(blank space)
iv 31–5 colophon (authorship indication)²²⁷

The texts included in this collection fall into two categories, divided from each other by a double ruling. The first part consists of three oracles of salvation

²²⁷ Cf. the outline of E. Otto 1998a: 58–9. For SAA 9 3 see also Mack 2011: 76–89; Laato 1998; Nissinen 1998a: 26–8, 76–7; Weippert 1997b: 157–60 (= 2014: 121–3); Parpola 1997: I, lviii–lix, lxx; T. J. Lewis 1996: 406–8.

and the well-being (*šulmu*) of Aššur,²²⁸ presented without introductory formulae and followed by cultic instructions, whereas the words (*abutu*) of Ištar in the second part are introduced by the formula “The word of Ištar of Arbela to Esarhaddon, king of Assyria,” and the cultic instructions are embedded in the wording of the oracles. This bisection probably reflects different phases of the enthronement ritual, the first three oracles and accompanying instructions following the cultic procession directed towards the statue of Aššur and the throne room in the temple of Ešarra, the following two attaching to the subsequent meal of covenant on the temple terrace.²²⁹

As in Collections One and Two, the oracles in Collection Three were most likely copied from individual reports of oracles proclaimed by the prophet during the enthronement rituals and joined together by the editor, who also provided the collection with brief descriptions of the cultic maneuvers at respective stages of the ritual.²³⁰ All that was said hitherto concerning the role of the scribe in editing and stylizing the oracles is certainly true here as well; however, there is no reason to doubt the actual appearance of the prophet in the ritual.²³¹

The fact that all collections of prophecies available to us derive from the reign of Esarhaddon may not necessarily be a pure coincidence. Until proved otherwise, it may be assumed that Esarhaddon, whose predilection for prophecy is best documented, was the first king to let individual prophecies be compiled in archival collections. He was more emphatic than any other king of Assyria, except his son Assurbanipal, that he was a protégé of Ištar, the goddess whose devotees the prophets were and who, according to their words, had made, raised, and chosen the king.²³² Furthermore, against the background of the turbulences preceding Esarhaddon’s ascent to power, it is clear that any suspicions of the legitimacy of his reign had to be removed and the potential usurpers reminded of the fate of those who contradicted the divine ordinance concerning his kingship.²³³ The use of prophecy for this

²²⁸ Even though only *86 is expressly an oracle of Aššur, it is feasible to conclude that also the two preceding oracles which mention only this god are presented as his words. That Aššur is referred to in the third person in these oracles does not necessarily prevent them from being his words (*94, lines r.1–3).

²²⁹ *87, line iii 2: *ina muhhi [tam]ê*.

²³⁰ Therefore, de Jong 2007: 408 characterizes the collection SAA 9 3 as a literary composition rather than a collection of prophetic oracles. Weippert 1997b: 159–60 (= 2014: 123) suggests that the first part of the oracle proper in *86 (lines ii 10–18) is a quotation from an earlier oracle.

²³¹ Cf. the prophetic performances during the substitute king ritual in the year 671 BCE, reported by Mar-Išsar in *109.

²³² See Parpola 1997: xxxvi–xliv and cf. *71, lines ii 32; *73, lines iii 15–18; *82, lines iii 26–8; *91, lines 12–13, r. 6–11; *93, lines 3–6, r. 1–3. Cf. also SAA 3 3.

²³³ Parpola 1997: xxxix justly stresses that Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal by no means needed to sanction their rule and assert their kingship by prophecies, since they were not usurpers but properly invested as crown princes. On the other hand, the population was divided into

purpose is conceivable even from the inscriptions of Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal, as will be shown below.

The prophecies included in the collections were selected from the archival corpus for a specific reason, showing that written prophecies could be reused in a new historical situation. In the year 672 BCE, that is, a little less than a decade after the prophecies were actually spoken, Esarhaddon designated his younger son Assurbanipal as the crown prince of Assyria, while the elder brother Šamaš-šumu-ukin was given the politically inferior position of the crown prince of Babylonia. Esarhaddon had to remind the citizens of Assyria of the will of the gods concerning his own ascent to the throne which was similarly exceptional and led to a civil war between him and his brothers. For this reason, he not only published the long account of his rise to power, the Nineveh inscription (Nin A),²³⁴ but also collected prophecies proclaiming his kingship which now were read from the perspective of the divine legitimation of Assurbanipal's rule. It can be discerned from the comparison of the texts that some expressions in the Nineveh inscription actually derive from the prophecies; hence the archival copies of the prophecies have been used by the composers of the inscriptions who worked simultaneously with the one who compiled the prophecy collections.²³⁵ Who, then, should be imagined as the audience of the archival texts that were accessible to a very restricted number of contemporaries? Beate Pongratz-Leisten argues that the actual addressees of these texts are gods and future rulers who were the only ones able to evaluate Esarhaddon's conformity with tradition: "the divine voice recorded in the oracles certainly intends to provide cogent evidence that Esarhaddon did conform to the cosmic plan."²³⁶

LITERARY PROPHECY

Literary Descriptions of Prophecy

A small, although important group of sources for prophecy in the ancient Near East is formed by royal inscriptions, narratives, and other kinds of literary texts that in one way or another document prophetic activity. Some of these sources quote or paraphrase divine messages delivered by prophets. These prophecies,

supporters and opponents of Esarhaddon during the civil war in 681, which in the beginning of his reign undoubtedly necessitated an ideological campaign against those who were not convinced of the divine approval of Esarhaddon's rule.

²³⁴ *97; see Pongratz-Leisten 2015: 341–5. For a different interpretation, see Knapp 2015, who concludes that the primary reason for the writing of the inscription was the apology for Esarhaddon's failed campaign to Egypt in 673 BCE; he has noted that the earliest manuscripts of the inscription have been written soon after the campaign.

²³⁵ See Parpola 1997: lxix–lxx, lxxii–lxxiii.

²³⁶ Pongratz-Leisten 2015: 359.

however, form part of a larger literary context, which makes their connection to actual prophetic performances difficult if not impossible to determine.

The Mari documents include one literary reference to prophecy in the so-called Epic of Zimri-Lim, a highly poetical text celebrating Zimri-Lim's military success (lines 137–42):

Zimri-Lim, by Dagan's decree, is the lord,
his protection is Itur-Mer, the warrior.
The prince of the land saw his sign, the prophet (*āpilum*),
the courage of the king grows eminently:
“Adad shall go at his left side,
Erra, the mighty one, at his right side.”
He assembles his contingent by the banks of Habur,
in front of their eyes he will cross it by night.²³⁷

The syntactical position of the word *āpilum* can be interpreted in two ways: either the prophet himself appears as the sign, or the sign comes through the mouth of the prophet.²³⁸ What follows seems like a divine word to Zimri-Lim, spoken by the *āpilum* just before the fourth and last combat described in the poem, which shares many features with Neo-Assyrian oracles, where the gods at the right and the left side of the king can also be found.²³⁹ Even the motif of river-crossing prior to the final and decisive battle finds parallels in prophetic contexts.²⁴⁰

A further literary work in which divine messages are quoted as deriving from the mouth of a prophetic intermediary is the report of Wenamon, the Egyptian who describes his visit to Byblos in the eleventh century. The prince of Byblos repeatedly orders Wenamon to get out of his harbor, but in spite of that, he stays there for twenty-nine days. One day when the prince is offering to his gods, a “great seer” (*ḏd* '3)²⁴¹ utters a message of Amon in an altered state of consciousness:

Now when he offered to his gods, the god (Amon) seized a great seer from among his great seers, and he caused him to be in an ecstatic state, and he (the seer) said

²³⁷ *64. See the edition, translation, and analysis of Guichard 2014a; on the prophet, see also Guichard 2014b. Guichard interprets the word *etellum* “lord” to refer to Dagan, translating: “Zimri-Lim, sur l'ordre de Dagan, le Prince en personne, avait pour aide Itūr-Mēr le vaillant. Dès qu'il vit son signe, (par) un prophète, le Prince de son pays, le courage du roi s'en trouva grandement renforcé” (Guichard 2014a: 21–2; cf. 2014b: 38–42). In my reading, *etellum* and *šarrum* form a parallelism, both referring to Zimri-Lim.

²³⁸ The passage uses an inverted word order: *imurma ittašu āpilam etel māti[m]*, which can be translated either “He saw his sign, the prophet (he saw), the prince of the land”; or “He saw his sign, (through) the prophet, the prince of the land.” Guichard 2014a: 22 translates: “Dès qu'il vit son signe, (par) un prophète, le Prince de son pays” (reading the last word *ma-ti-š[u²]*). For other examples of calling people “signs” (*17; Isa. 8:18), see Durand 1988: 392–3.

²³⁹ *71, line ii 24; *73, lines iv 26–32; *79, line i 21; *90, line 6. In *71, line 19 the “beams of your heart” (*gušūrē ša libbika*) render a similar idea; cf. *94, line 7 [*uša*]škanāšu libbu “[They g]ive him heart” (i.e. the goddesses).

²⁴⁰ Cf. *73, lines iii 30–iv 4; *97, lines ii 84–6; *101 v 93–9; see Nissinen 2014b: 42–6.

²⁴¹ For discussion on the Egyptian *ḏd*, the normal meaning of which is “child,” but which in this case may be related to the Aramaic *ḏdn* “seer,” see Hoch 1994: 86–7.

to him: “Bring up the god! Bring the messenger who bears him! It is Amon who has sent him. He is the one who has caused that he come!”²⁴²

This prophecy made the prince send the harbor master to Wenamon, asking him to stay yet another night.

Provided that Wenamon is reporting a real case and the quotation at least remotely resembles words really spoken, the prophetic authentication of a private person’s credentials is interesting and not quite typical of ancient Near Eastern prophecy as we know it in general. However, it must not be forgotten that the Egyptian author, drawing on his own memory and literary skills, is reporting or inventing events foreign to his own country and culture.²⁴³

The most recently discovered reference to prophecy in an ancient Near Eastern literary context belongs to the Ahmar/Qubbah stele (Tell Ahmar 6) with a Luwian inscription and a relief of the Storm-God Tarhunza. The stele, dating to the late tenth/early ninth century BCE, was found in Syria in the river Euphrates near Tell Ahmar (ancient Masuwari/Til Barsib/Kar Shalmaneser) in 1999, and it was published in 2006.²⁴⁴ The Luwian text²⁴⁵ presents itself as a dedication of Hamiyata, king of Masuwari and a servant of Tarhunza, reporting on victories of his father and his own military success. He also tells about the love of his god and a prophetic demand to erect a statue to him:

This Storm-god of the Army held me in regard, and he *became my own* in ...ness and ...ness. He ran before me, and I extended the frontiers, while I destroyed my enemies.

The one belonging to a god said to me: “Erect the Storm-god of the Army!” And in the year in which I went to ... with the support of the Storm-god with five hundred ... vehicles and with the ... army,—when I came away—in that year I erected this Storm-god of the Army.²⁴⁶

The Luwian word (*masanami-/maššanāmi-*) denoting a person belonging to a god appears also in another inscription from Tell Ahmar.²⁴⁷ It has a semantic and functional equivalent in Hittite *šuniyant-*, which also means “one pertaining to a god.” Both terms, hence, most likely denote a divinely inspired person through whom the gods speak, that is, a prophet.²⁴⁸ The inscription refers to a prophetic message which prompted King Hamiyata to erect a

²⁴² *142, lines 1:38–40 (translation by Ritner 2003). For the text, see Schipper 2005: 183–6.

²⁴³ Schipper 2005: 185: “In jedem Fall läge hier sowohl in der Bezeichnung als auch in der Sache selbst ein dezidiert unägyptisches Detail vor, das deutlich die Verhältnisse im syrisch-palästinischen Raum widerspiegelt.”

²⁴⁴ Bunnens 2006. I thank Herbert Niehr for drawing my attention to this text shortly after it was published.

²⁴⁵ *Editio princeps*: Hawkins 2006 (= pages 11–31 in Bunnens 2006; cf. the copy on p. 147).

²⁴⁶ *143 (Tell Ahmar 6), §§17–26 (translation by H. Craig Melchert).

²⁴⁷ Tell Ahmar 5 §11; see Hawkins 2000: 232–3; 2006: 27–8.

²⁴⁸ See *CHD* š: 506–7; Weippert 2014: 235–6. For the *šuniyant-*, see “Ritual Texts” earlier in this chapter.

commemorative monument to his god. The quotation hardly goes back to spoken words, but it implies the function of prophecy in the maintenance of divine–human communication, the prophet reminding the king of his duties to the god whom he has to thank for his victories.

Neither of the cases discussed above can be valued as a precise report of a prophetic performance. The report of Wenamon, fictitious as it may be to a great extent, can hardly be taken as an accurate account of factual events. Even the Epic of Zimri-Lim is literature in the first place, even though it probably celebrates events that actually happened²⁴⁹ and the poetic paraphrase of prophecy is quite plausibly formulated. The most accurate reference to a historical event may be the prophecy concerning the erection of the monument for the Storm-god in the Ahmar/Qubbah stele, since the monument itself has been found and similar prophetic demands are known already from Mari.²⁵⁰ All three texts, rather than giving access to actual prophetic utterances, provide an example of how non-prophetic authors, according to their own idea of prophecy, paraphrase prophetic oracles.

The same may be said of the inscription of Zakkur, the king of Hamat and Lu'aš, but not without qualifications. Some two centuries later than Wenamon, this king gives an account of a prophetic word delivered to him while he was besieged by his enemies (KAI 202 A 11–15):

I lifted up my hands to Baal-Sha[may]in, and Baal-Shamayi[n] answered me.
 Baal-Shamayin [spoke] to me [by] means of seers (*ḥzyn*) and messengers (*'ddn*).
 Baal-Shamayin [spoke to me]: “Fear not! For I have made [you] ki[ng]. I will sta[nd] by you and I will rescue you from all [these kings who] have laid a siege against you.”

The divine words, the source of which is not indicated, may well be formulated by the scribe who composed the inscription. In all likelihood, however, they are closer to actual prophetic performances than either of the preceding cases. Not only does the inscription indicate the Old Aramaic designations for prophets (*ḥzyn*, *'ddn*), it also repeats the famous “fear not” formula (*'l tzḥl*; cf. Akk. *lā tapallah*, Heb. *'al tîrā*),²⁵¹ describes a situation closely akin to the one referred to in *86 (lines ii 10–13),²⁵¹ and presents an oracle that is in every respect parallel to Mesopotamian and biblical prophecy. The author of the inscription must have had a good impression of the language and repertoire of the “seers” and “messengers.” In view of the mention of a “book” of Balaam in the temporarily, geographically, and linguistically not-so-distant Deir Alla inscription, even the assumption of a written source is not altogether impossible.

²⁴⁹ See Guichard 2014a: 101–31; Charpin and Durand 1985: 326–8.

²⁵⁰ For commemorative monuments at Mari, see Durand 2005; cf. *28 for a (probably) prophetic exhortation to erect a *ḥumūsum* monument.

²⁵¹ “Now these traitors conspired against you, expelled you and surrounded you. You, however, opened your mouth (crying): ‘Hear me, O Aššur!’” Cf. Esarhaddon’s own account of the same situation in *97, lines 53–62.

The inscription of Deir Alla (*138), found in the Eastern Jordan Valley, presents a series of prophetic visions of Balaam, son of Beor, that is, a person whose namesake is familiar from the Hebrew Bible (Num. 22–4).²⁵² The text was once written on white wall plaster with red and black ink, and its fragments were found on the floor of a room, the function of which is not entirely clear but which has often been identified as a small sanctuary. The text is dated to c. 700 BCE, and it is written in a local dialect “with some features akin to Aramaic but other features closer to Hebrew and other ‘Canaanite’ languages.”²⁵³

The plaster text consists of a narrative introduction and more than one originally individual text, usually divided into Combinations I and II following the *editio princeps*. The structure and layout of the text makes it highly probable that it is compiled from pre-existing sources.²⁵⁴ Moreover, the text presents itself as being drawn from the “Book (*spr*) of Balaam, son of Beor” mentioned in the first line,²⁵⁵ and the word *spr* certainly refers to a scroll, not to a text written on a plaster. The readable parts of the text tell about the vision of Balaam, in which the divine council approaches him with an oracle (*mšʿ*, cf. Heb. *mšʿ*) from El, presumably the supreme god. The oracle is difficult to interpret but contains something so terrifying that the next morning Balaam is suffering from physical symptoms, wept continually, and fasted. When people come to him and ask why he is weeping and fasting, he tells them about cataclysmic events turning the world upside down that had been shown to him by the gods, now called Šaddayin (*šdyn*). The relationship of Combination II to Combination I is unclear, and much depends on the interpretation of the difficult text. According to some translations, there may be a hint to Balaam’s speaking to the people and the judgments of the divine council,²⁵⁶ while others make no such connections perceptible.²⁵⁷

²⁵² The *editio princeps* of the text is Hoftijzer and van der Kooij 1976. For translations and studies, see, e.g. Blum 2008a, 2008b: 88–96, 2008c; Weippert 1997a: 131–88; Dijkstra 1995; Lipiński 1994: 103–70; Lemaire 1985; Hackett 1984; Caquot and Lemaire 1977.

²⁵³ Seow 2003: 208. According to Knauf 1988: 64–5 n. 313, the language of the Deir Alla inscription is “auf dem Weg (...), Aramäisch zu werden, ohne es schon ganz geworden zu sein.” Pat-El and Wilson-Wright 2015 have recently classified the language as Canaanite rather than Aramaic. There is one remarkable linguistic feature the language of the Deir Alla text shares with the Zakkur inscription: the consecutive imperfect.

²⁵⁴ Cf. the arguments of Weippert 1997a: 177–8.

²⁵⁵ *138, line I 1: *ysr[x] spr [blʿm br bʿr] ʾl hzh ʾlhn* “Warnings/teachings of the book of [Balaam, son of Be]or, who was the seer of gods.” The name of the seer is preserved on lines 2 and 4.

²⁵⁶ Thus Seow 2003: 210, 212 (*138, line II 17): *ldʿt spr dbr lʿmh ʾl lšn lk nšpt wnlqh ʾmr[...]* “(...) to know the account that he spoke to his people orally. Come let us judge and give verdict. Say [...].” Cf. Hackett 1984: 26, 30: *ldʿt spr dbr lʿmh ʾl lšn lk mšpt wmlqh ʾmr[...]* “‘(...) to make known (lit.: ‘to know’) the account he spoke to his people orally (lit.: ‘by tongue’), your judgment and your punishment.’ (?)”

²⁵⁷ Cf. the transcription and translation of the same passage by Blum 2008c: 38: *lydʿt spr dbr l[š]n[h] ʾl lšn lk mšpt wmlqh ʾmr* “Verstehst du nicht auf die Schreibkunst, vorzusprechen dem,

Being a secondary combination of prophetic texts, the Deir Alla inscription is best classified as literary prophecy rather than a collection of oracles. Rather than a transcription of spoken oracles, it is a narrative introducing a prophetic figure with an awesome message.²⁵⁸ The Deir Alla text is an invaluable specimen of literary prophecy from roughly the time when Amos and Isaiah are believed to have delivered their messages a few dozen miles away. Not only does the inscription mention a prophet known from the Hebrew Bible, it is also closely related to the world of biblical prophecy in terms of geography, language, and imagery. The cataclysmic prophecy in particular, unknown from other Near Eastern sources of prophecy, has been presented as a counterpart of biblical prophecies of doom,²⁵⁹ at the very least supporting “the existence of a *literary* tradition about prophets of doom, which may also have existed in ‘real life.’”²⁶⁰ However, the Deir Alla text does not represent prophecy of doom *à la* Amos or Jeremiah, but is a description of a catastrophe that comes closer to the much later apocalyptic genre.

The inscription of Zakkur is the only royal inscription outside Assyria in which prophecy is cited, and even in the inscriptions of the Assyrian kings such quotations are uncommon. As a matter of fact, there are only two cases classifiable as prophetic examples. The first, the affinity of which to the divine message in the Zakkur inscription is palpable, belongs to Assurbanipal’s account of his Elamite campaign in 653 BCE:

Ištar heard my desperate sighs and said to me: “Fear not!” She made my heart confident (saying): “Because of the ‘hand-lifting’ prayer you said, your eyes being filled with tears, I have mercy upon you.”²⁶¹

The second quotation is to be found in the account of Assurbanipal’s war against Ahšeri, the king of Mannea:

Ištar, who dwells in Arbela, delivered Ahšeri, who did not fear my lordship, up to his servants, according to the word (*amātu*) that she had said in the very beginning: “I will, as I have said, take care of the execution of Ahšeri, the king of Mannea.”²⁶²

der auswendig repetiert? Dir obliegen Rechtsprechung und kunstvolle Rede! [Ich/du/er/sie] sag [. . .]” Blum interprets Combination II as a wisdom dialogue.

²⁵⁸ According to Blum 2008b: 96, the text is “keine aktuelle Prophetenrede an konkrete Adressaten, sondern eine weisheitlich geprägte Erzählung vom Wirken eines ‘geschichtlichen’ Sehers, der im Auftrag eines Gottes Unheil anzusagen hatte. Es ist nicht Gerichtsprophetie ‘im Vollzug’, sondern narrativ vermittelte Reflexion *über* Unheilsprophetie.”

²⁵⁹ Blum 2008b: 95: “Daraus lässt sich zumindest ableiten, dass ihre [i.e. the Deir Alla Text] Verfasser und Tradenten im 9./8. Jh. v.Chr. im engeren Umkreis des alten Israel das Grundmodell eines ‘Gerichtspropheten’ kennen und es in dieser Erzählung geradezu paradigmatisch tradieren.” Cf. Jeremias 2013: 98–9; Williamson 2013: 282–3.

²⁶⁰ Stökl 2012a: 21. ²⁶¹ *101, lines v 46–9 (Borger 1996: 100).

²⁶² *100, lines iii 4–7 (Borger 1996: 35).

The fact that quasi-verbatim quotations of prophecies can be found only twice does not, however, tell the whole truth about the significance of prophecy in the inscriptions of Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal. Contrary to their predecessors, both kings repeatedly claim to have received prophetic messages (*šipir maḥḥê*) that support their rule or give them confidence in war, mostly mentioned along with other means of divination like dreams and omens of different kinds.²⁶³ Prophecy, thus, forms just one, yet distinctive, part of the divinatory apparatus the kings needed to be able to say that they have acted upon the command (*ina qibīt*) or with the help (*ina tukulti*) of the Great Gods.²⁶⁴ When paraphrasing divine messages, the inscriptions do not necessarily specify the source of the message; for this reason, it is sometimes difficult indeed to distinguish between prophecy and other divinatory messages cited or reported in the inscriptions. The prisms of Assurbanipal, for example, describe dreams seen by a *šabrû* (a dream specialist),²⁶⁵ by Gyges, king of Lydia,²⁶⁶ and even by the whole army,²⁶⁷ all of which bear a close resemblance to the language of contemporary prophecies. All this indicates that it was the message rather than the method that was important for the authors of the inscriptions who demonstrated divine determination for royal deeds.

In any case, the very mention of prophecy in the inscriptions proves indisputably the established role of prophecy among other forms of divination in the time of Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal. It is clear that, when commenting on prophecy, they document the view of the king and his scholarly entourage, according to which the wars of the Assyrian kings were waged upon the command of the gods. Fully corresponding to this imperial ideology, the wording of the prophetic oracles and other divine messages cited in the inscriptions may be freely formulated paraphrases invented by the scribes, who certainly mastered the appropriate style and language. The complicated redaction history of the annals of Assurbanipal, in the prisms which date from years between 666 and 639 BCE, clearly demonstrates the creativity of the scribes.²⁶⁸

On the other hand, attention should be paid to the fact that Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal are the only kings to mention prophecies in their inscriptions, which corresponds to the fact that the practice of filing the very copies of

²⁶³ The expression *šipir maḥḥê* appears in *97, line ii 6; *98, line ii 12 (Esarhaddon), and *99, line ii 16 (Assurbanipal); cf. *šipir ilūtika ša tašpura* “your divine message that you sent” in a votive inscription of Assurbanipal (*118g, line 24; for this text, see de Jong 2007: 290; Adalı 2011: 92–3).

²⁶⁴ For these and related expressions indicating divine justification of the kings’ actions, see Fales and Lanfranchi 1997: 104–6.

²⁶⁵ Prism A iii 118–127; B v 49–76 (Borger 1996: 40–1, 100–1).

²⁶⁶ Prism A ii 95–110parr; E-prisms (Borger 1996: 30–1, 181–3).

²⁶⁷ Prism A v 95–103 (Borger 1996: 50).

²⁶⁸ Cf. the dates of the prisms in Grayson 1980: 245, and the case studies by Cogan and Tadmor 1977 and Gerardi 1992.

prophetic reports and collections in royal archives is likewise documented only from the time of these two kings. The royal archives were certainly utilized by the authors of the inscriptions, hence the references to prophecy—whether accurate quotations or free inventions—may also go back to written reports to which the scribes had easy access.

It is important to note that the scribes of Esarhaddon, and probably also those of Assurbanipal, evidently used prophetic oracles included in the state archives. This is conceivable from the inscriptions of Esarhaddon, which not only refer to prophecies but evidently presuppose knowledge of the prophetic oracles, collected in SAA 9 1, 2, and 3 (**68–88).²⁶⁹ Esarhaddon's account of his rise to power (Nin A), written in year 673, can be followed almost step-by-step with SAA 9 1 in hand (**68–77); in fact, it is feasible to conclude that this collection, the oracles of which are delivered eight years earlier, is prepared at the same time and for the same purpose as the inscription: to justify the investiture of Assurbanipal as crown prince and to warn the eventual dissidents against any thoughts of insurrection. Moreover, the account of the beginning of his reign (Ass A) from year 679 corresponds to the oracles in SAA 9 2 (**78–83) from the same year, and the surprising affinity of the pertinent section of the Nin A inscription with the oracle SAA 9 3.3 (*86) suggests that the prophecy has served as a source for the account in the inscription.²⁷⁰ This means that the historical narrative of the inscriptions partially depends on prophecies, hence the view of the prophets, ideologically well in line with that of the scribes, is indirectly represented in the work of the scholars.

Literary Predictive Texts

A well-known group of texts deserves to be discussed briefly in the context of literary prophecies: the Akkadian and Egyptian *literary predictive texts*, sometimes called “prophecies.” They are not, in fact, documents of prophetic divination in the sense of transmission of divine knowledge by a prophetic figure; instead, they are literary compositions with a predictive content.²⁷¹

The group of Akkadian literary predictive texts consists of three texts from the Neo-Assyrian archives known as Text A, Marduk Prophecy, and Šulgi Prophecy,²⁷²

²⁶⁹ On the relationship of the inscriptions and prophecies, see Parpola 1997: lxxviii–lxxv.

²⁷⁰ For the commonalities of these texts, see Parpola 1997: lxxii–lxxiii; Weippert 1981: 94–5 (= 2014: 29). Pace de Jong 2007: 358, I think there is a textual relationship here between the prophecies and the inscription.

²⁷¹ The designation “literary predictive texts” was coined by Ellis 1989.

²⁷² Grayson and Lambert 1964; Marduk Prophecy, and Šulgi Prophecy re-edited in Borger 1971; cf. Neujahr 2012: 14–50. The so-called Text B included in the edition of Grayson and

and two texts from the Hellenistic era, the Uruk Prophecy²⁷³ and the Dynastic Prophecy.²⁷⁴ The texts can be aptly designated as “Akkadian *ex eventu* texts,”²⁷⁵ since they are post-event predictions describing the reigns of successive kings and characterizing them in positive or negative terms. The sequence of kings culminates in an ideal ruler who provides well-being for the land, restores the temples, and destroys the enemies. The kings are anonymous, but the readers are probably supposed to be able to recognize past kings and events described in the composition.

While the historical allusions of the badly damaged Text A remain unclear, those of the Šulgi Prophecy can be interpreted as a reference to the defeat of Babylon caused by the Assyrian king Tukulti-Ninurta I (c.1225 BCE). The contents of the Marduk Prophecy can be identified with three historical episodes: the conquest of Babylon by the Hittite king Mursilis I (c.1595 BCE); the above-mentioned conquest of Babylon by Tukulti-Ninurta I; and a third one by the Elamite king Kudur-naḥḥunte (1150s BCE). The fourth and most important episode concerns the return of the statue of Marduk to Babylon, which was accomplished by Nebuchadnezzar I in 1110s BCE—and also by Assurbanipal in 668 BCE, which makes it understandable why the text has been copied (or written) in the Neo-Assyrian period. The historical references of the Uruk Prophecy and the Dynastic Prophecy belong to later times. The Uruk Prophecy concerns Neo-Babylonian kings, culminating in Nebuchadnezzar II who probably accomplished the return of the protective goddess, *lamassu*, to Uruk. The historical time span alluded to in the Dynastic Prophecy extends from the Neo-Assyrian kings to Alexander the Great—and beyond, which is probably to be seen as an actual prediction.

Quite recently, two further similarly structured, undated, and unprovenanced fragments from private collections have been added to this group.²⁷⁶ These texts follow the same structural pattern as the above-mentioned ones, but their contents are very difficult to relate to any known events, hence the publisher, Seth Richardson, surmises that “the subject matter of these two prophecies apparently belongs to a hitherto unknown tradition of *speculative* historiography, in which actual predictions of future events were attempted.”²⁷⁷

The Akkadian texts do not derive from prophetic activity, not even in the sense of *Fortschreibung*. They do not ensue from oral performances, no prophet

Lambert (see also Biggs 1967; 1987) is no longer considered part of the group, since it, in spite of some similarities, is closer to astrological omens; see Neujahr 2012: 92–5.

²⁷³ Hunger and Kaufman 1975; Hunger 1976; cf. 50–8.

²⁷⁴ Grayson 1975b; cf. Neujahr 2012: 58–71.

²⁷⁵ Thus Neujahr 2012: 110, 114–15, according to whom the term “literary predictive texts” is accurate but not precise enough to distinguish the group of Akkadian texts in question from other works.

²⁷⁶ Richardson 2017.

²⁷⁷ Richardson 2017: 187 (emphasis original).

is involved in the process of communication, and they are not addressed to a particular person or people, hence they do not fit the construction of prophecy based on the idea of communication and intermediation. They do have some affinities with apocalyptic literature: the post-factum prediction, the “king will arise” pattern, the periodization of the past, anonymity and vague historical allusions, and perhaps even an esoteric element. They have been called “Akkadian apocalypses,”²⁷⁸ and they may draw on a reservoir of chronographic and divinatory material also utilized by apocalyptic authors.²⁷⁹ However, they cannot be labeled apocalypses either, if dualistic world view and eschatology involving divine judgment and retribution is considered a fundamental feature of the apocalyptic genre. Being neither prophecies nor apocalypses,²⁸⁰ the Akkadian literary predictive texts share important features with both prophetic and apocalyptic *literature*: they are scribal products oriented towards the future and they build upon earlier prophetic, chronographic, omen and wisdom tradition.

Another group of literary predictive texts comes from Egypt.²⁸¹ These texts are often called “Egyptian prophecies” or “Egyptian apocalypses,” again because of their predictive contents. The oldest text in this group, the *Prophecy of Neferti*,²⁸² derives from the twelfth dynasty pharaoh Amenemhet (1990–1960 BCE). The narrative setting of the events is the time of the fourth dynasty pharaoh Snefru in the twenty-sixth century BCE. Neferti is a priest who predicts (*ex eventu!*) to the pharaoh forthcoming tribulations: natural catastrophes, enemies conquering Egypt, injustice and the upheaval of social hierarchy, to be rectified by a savior king who guarantees the *ma’at*, or the world order.

All other Egyptian predictive texts are much later, dating to the Ptolemaic period. The *Demotic Chronicle* derives from the third century BCE, predicting *ex eventu* a succession of Egyptian kings from the Persian period onwards in a style similar to the above-described Akkadian texts and the book of Daniel. The text culminates in the rise of a king in Herakleopolis who ends the rule of the “foreign and Ionian” kings, perhaps referring to Ptolemaios I.²⁸³ In the *Lamb of Bokchoris*, a lamb predicts a time when the enemy attacks Egypt and Egyptian gods are transported to Nineveh. Finally, however, Egypt rules over Syria and its gods are worshipped there. The text, dated to the year 7 CE, may go back to the time of Antiochos IV Epiphanes and, like the book of Daniel, represent anti-Seleucid propaganda.²⁸⁴

²⁷⁸ Hallo 1966.

²⁷⁹ See, e.g. Collins 1998: 26–9, 96–8. Lambert 1978 reckoned with the dependence of the book of Daniel on this or similar Babylonian material.

²⁸⁰ See Neujahr 2012: 104–10; Nissinen 2003c.

²⁸¹ See the translation and analysis of the relevant texts in the articles published in Blasius and Schipper (eds) 2002; cf. Schipper 2014.

²⁸² See, e.g. Weeks 2010. ²⁸³ Thus Felber 2002.

²⁸⁴ Thus Thissen 2002: 123–5.

The *Oracle of the Potter*, known as two Greek versions, dates to c. 130 BCE from the time of Ptolemaios VIII, and it has many affinities with both the *Prophecy of Neferti* and the *Lamb of Bokchoris*; the latter is even referred to in the text. It follows the same pattern: the anonymous potter predicts to Pharaoh Amenophis the forthcoming cataclysmic period that lasts until a just king arises to return the world order. According to Ludwig Koenen, the text combines elements of Egyptian royal literature and Greek historiography to describe the conflict between cultural and ethnic groups in Egypt.²⁸⁵

Nectanebo's Dream from early second century BCE describes Nectanebo, the last native Egyptian ruler (359–342 BCE). The text has survived in Greek version but four later Demotic fragments demonstrate that it was originally written in Egyptian. The pharaoh has a dream concerning the interruption of construction works of the temple of Isis in Sebennytos; he looks into the matter and finds out that the only thing missing is a hieroglyphic inscription. The king sends the scribe Petesis to accomplish the work, but the text ends unfinished and we do not know what happens to the scribe after he has met the most beautiful woman called Hathyrsepe. In Kim Ryholt's reconstruction, Petesis is unable to accomplish his mission but receives a prediction on a period of tribulations until a new Egyptian king arises to set things in order.²⁸⁶ Also, the six disconnected *fragments from Tebtynis* postdating 332 BCE²⁸⁷ can be reconstructed to form a narrative pattern corresponding to the other Egyptian predictions, including the chaos and social upheaval in Egypt, followed by the destruction of Memphis and Alexandria, the rise of a new king who destroys the evildoers, and the Egyptian conquest of Syria.

The Egyptian predictive texts follow roughly the same narrative pattern, describing the topsy-turvy period when Egypt is ruled by foreigners and the social order is confused, followed by the time of salvation brought about by a new god-sent Egyptian king who restores the *ma'at*. The narrative motifs are probably due to old Egyptian tradition represented already by the *Prophecy of Neferti*, but the Ptolemaic texts seem to derive from the same Hellenistic cultural milieu as the Akkadian literary predictive texts and early apocalypses. Even the Egyptian texts cannot be aptly called prophecies or apocalypses, but they do share "messianic" traits with Akkadian and biblical literary prophecies, and the description of the cataclysmic events is akin to apocalyptic literature.²⁸⁸

Neither the Akkadian nor the Egyptian literary predictive texts can be read as documents of prophetic divination as transmission of divine knowledge by non-technical means. They are purely literary texts which have affinities with

²⁸⁵ Koenen 2002: 186–7. ²⁸⁶ See Ryholt 2002: 232–7.

²⁸⁷ For the Egyptian text, translation, and suggested order of the fragments, see Quack 2002.

²⁸⁸ See Blasius and Schipper 2002: 277–302.

both prophetic and apocalyptic literature, and in this sense they belong to the broader context of scribalization of prophecy, the literary interpretation of divine knowledge, and emergent apocalypticism. As such, Akkadian and Egyptian literary predictive texts deserve to be compared with both prophetic and apocalyptic texts; in the words of Stuart Weeks:

In searching for an understanding of the prophetic books, furthermore, we should avoid presuming that their relationship to the historical phenomenon of prophecy must be a defining, determinative factor, one which links them together and excludes other texts from consideration.²⁸⁹

²⁸⁹ Weeks 2010: 43.

3

Greek Sources

EPIGRAPHIC SOURCES

Oracle reports and oracle collections certainly existed in ancient Greece, but very little evidence of them has been preserved to us. There are hundreds of quotations of oracular responses in literary works, but I am not aware of prophetic quotations in Greek correspondence; neither have any oracle collections survived. The oracular process of the alleged divine–human communication need not have been substantially different in ancient Greece from in the Near East, but it comes to us through a type of textual transmission that is rather different from the Near Eastern oracle reports discussed in Chapter 2.

Writing oracles down is attributed to mythical figures like the daughter of the legendary seer Tiresias called Manto, who is said not only to have prophesied herself, but also to have written oracular responses.¹ Notwithstanding the assumption that “the preservation of oracular utterances was doubtless one of the earliest applications for the art of writing in Greece, which began to spread around 750,”² the evidence for written oracles in the archaic and classical periods is scanty.³ In the archaic period, oracles probably did not involve any writing. The earliest datable oracles recorded in writing date to the sixth century BCE, that is, the oldest lead tablets from Dodona and some inscriptions from Didyma and Miletos to be discussed in this chapter.

No written oracle reports can be found in the sources from archaic and classical Greece; to all appearances, divine messages and interpretation of omens was communicated orally. Ancient Sibylline oracles from Asia Minor, destroyed with the temple of Jupiter Capitolinus in 83 BCE, were allegedly retrieved by a commission sent by the Roman Senate in 76 BCE to Erythrae, their place of origin. The commission is said to have returned with one thousand verses which, however, have not been preserved.⁴ Athenian archives

¹ Thus Diodorus Siculus, 4.66.6; for Manto, see Hagedorn 2013: 114–19.

² Burkert 1985: 117; cf. Harris 1989: 55, 83.

³ For the existing evidence, see Dillery 2005: 225–6.

⁴ This mission is reported in Fenestella F 18; see Graf 1985: 343–4.

of the fourth century BCE may have included oracles written by professional “exegetes” (*exēgētai*), represented only by a few secondary quotations,⁵ and in Sparta there were *pythioi* who were sent to Delphi to bring oracles to be kept by Spartan kings.⁶ No Spartan archives have been found either. The oracle collections maintained by the so-called chresmologues were not archival documents; we shall return to them below.

Among the Greek gods, Apollo was the god of oracles par excellence.⁷ Since the temple of Apollo at Delphi is and was the most famous oracle site in the Greek world, it would be the first place to look for evidence of written prophecy; however, the evidence of the Delphic oracle comes almost entirely from literary sources. Not a single written oracle report from Delphi has been preserved, and there is no evidence that oracles were written there in the classical period.⁸ Some inscriptional evidence is available, not in the form of an oracle report but as a reference of the consultation having taken place at Delphi, such as the following:

Isyllos asked Astylaidas in Delphi to prophesy to him about the paean which he wrote for Apollo and Asklepios, whether it would be better for him to inscribe the paean? And the oracle was given that it would be better both now and in the future if he inscribes the paean.⁹

In this inscription, the message of Apollo is given a prosaic wording, which may not even attempt to imitate the words uttered by the mouth of the Pythia, the prophetess of Apollo. It gives the impression that the question was posed in a way that could simply be answered “yes” or “no,” which, like in Dodona, may have involved lot-casting.¹⁰ The lot oracle, however, was not the only divinatory method used at Delphi; according to literary sources, many of the answers given by the Pythia were not of the binary type but hexameter verses that sometimes constituted a riddle for the interpreter.

Oracles from Dodona

The first textual corpus worth discussing in this context consists of the lead tablets from Dodona, dating to c. 550–167 BCE. Dodona was for centuries one

⁵ Cf. Demosthenes 21.52–3; 43.66; see Trampedach 2015: 234; for the *exēgētai*, see Chaniotis 1998.

⁶ Herodotus 6.57; Xenophon, *Lacedaimonians* [*Lac.*] 15.5; see Trampedach 2015: 240–1; Bremmer 2010: 15–16.

⁷ See, e.g. Bremmer 1996: 99.

⁸ Trampedach 2015: 249.

⁹ Inscription of Epidauros (Fontenrose 1978 H25), translation by Eidinow 2007: 51. Cf. also the Inscription of Halikarnassos (Fontenrose 1978 H3); the Inscription of Delphi (Fontenrose 1978 H3); the Inscription of Anaphe (Fontenrose 1978 H54); and the Inscription of Paros (Fontenrose 1978 H74).

¹⁰ e.g. Plutarch, *Moralia* [*Mor.*] 6.492b.

of the outstanding oracular centers in the Greek world.¹¹ Its female priests are mentioned together with the Pythia of Delphi and the Sibyl by Plato.¹² They were widely acknowledged as intermediators of the oracles of Zeus Naios, the patron deity of Dodona, and his spouse called Dione. Herodotus even names three of them as Promeneia, Timarete, and Nicandra.¹³ Since these women are conceived of as having communicated with the divine by non-inductive means in the state of divine possession,¹⁴ they deserve to be characterized as women prophets.

The Dodona oracle was consulted by individuals in private matters concerning family and marriage, slaves, health, residence, traveling, and so on. The overwhelming majority of the 4216 inscriptions from Dodona¹⁵ contain the question of the consultant, for instance:

Nikomachos asks Zeus Naios whether he will fare better by having moved his registration from Herakleia to Taras.¹⁶

Should I marry another woman?¹⁷

Parmenidas asks Zeus Naios and Diona whether it would be preferable and advantageous to stay at home.¹⁸

Thrasymboulos asks to which god he should bring an offering of appeasement to become healthier with regard to his eye.¹⁹

While private matters clearly prevail in the preserved corpus, communal and international affairs are also dealt with in the tablets:

God. Good fortune. The Kerkyraians ask Zeus Naios and Dione to which god or hero they should sacrifice and pray to be in agreement on a good course of action.²⁰

¹¹ For the oracle of Dodona, see Parker 2015, 2016; Johnston 2008: 60–72; Dieterle 2007; Eidinow 2007; Kowalzig 2007: 331–52; Rosenberger 2001: 61–4, 96–9, 135–7; Parke 1967. Cf. also “Prophets and Temples: Greek Sources” in Chapter 6 in this volume.

¹² Plato, *Phaedr.* 244d. ¹³ Herodotus 2.55.

¹⁴ See “Prophetic Performance in Greek Sources” in Chapter 5 in this volume.

¹⁵ The total number of tablets from Dodona amounts to over 1,300 containing 4,216 inscriptions included in the edition of Dakaris, Vokotopoulou, and Christidis 2013, vols I–II. The previous edition of 167 tablets from Dodona is Lhôte 2006, and they are discussed extensively by Eidinow 2007 and Dieterle 2007: 70–85; cf. also Parker 2016; Piccinini 2013; Eidinow 2013: 32–5; Raphals 2013: 196–203; Martín González 2012; Johnston 2008: 68–71; Rosenberger 2001: 96–8.

¹⁶ Dakaris, Vokotopoulou, and Christidis 2013: I 195 (no. 3111); Lhôte 2006: 275–6 (no. 132); Eidinow 2007: 77 (no. 11).

¹⁷ Dakaris, Vokotopoulou, and Christidis 2013: I 1 (no. 1); Lhôte 2006: 95 (no. 34); Eidinow 2007: 86 (no. 13). One tablet seems to contain an answer to a question similar to this; the question is destroyed except for the name of the consultant (Petalias), but the answer is simply: *allon* “another”; Dakaris, Vokotopoulou, and Christidis 2013: II 410 (nos. 4168A, 4169A).

¹⁸ Dakaris, Vokotopoulou, and Christidis 2013: II 271–2 (no. 3472A); Lhôte 2006: 140–1 (no. 57).

¹⁹ Dakaris, Vokotopoulou, and Christidis 2013: I 344–5 (no. 1393); Lhôte 2006: 162 (no. 72); Eidinow 2007: 107 (no. 10).

²⁰ Lhôte 2006: 33–5 (no. 3); Eidinow 2007: 63.

To the gods. With good fortune. The city of the Tarentines ask Zeus Naios and Dione about their prosperity, and concer[ning the territories] in the hands (?) of [...], and concerning [...].²¹

The vast majority of the tablets include the oracular question only. A handful of cases, however, seem to include even the response written on the other side of the tablet:

[Side A] God. Good luck. Concerning possessions and place to live: whether it is better for him and his children and his wife (to live) in Kroton?

[Side B] In Kroton.²²

[Side A] Shall I serve ashore?

[Side B] Stay on land, absolutely.²³

Some tablets contain one single word interpretable as a response to a question not to be found on the tablet, for instance: *Apollōni* “To Apollo,”²⁴ which seems to answer a question of to which god the consultant should sacrifice. In one case it seems like the answer is placed immediately after the question: *ekhei kalōs ekhei* “All is well? (All) is (well!).”²⁵ Some tablets contain nothing but the name of the consultant in genitive or in dative, for instance: *Kleofanaktos* “Of Cleofanax.”²⁶

The very small number of the written responses, together with the fact that some tablets contain the answer alone without the question, indicates that writing the answer down was not a standard procedure. Furthermore, the heterogeneous appearance and the lack of any systematic pattern with regard to the structure of the questions, answers, or the shape of the tablet raises questions about their function with regard to the consultation. It has usually been thought that the tablets were written by the consultants themselves or by scribes to be given to a temple official for the sake of the consultation. Jessica Piccinini, however, has suggested a different function: the tablets did not play a role in the consultation proper but were written afterwards as a reminder and a testimony that the consultation took place: “They expressed and manifest[ed] visually the desire of the devotees to be remembered there.”²⁷ This would explain why the consultants left the tablets in the sacred precinct, which also enabled their reuse by new consultants. The writing of the tablets was not

²¹ Lhôte 2006: 35–8 (no. 5); Eidinow 2007: 64.

²² Dakaris, Vokotopoulou, and Christidis 2013: I 12–13 (nos. 24A, 25A, 26B); Lhôte 2006: 239–40 (no. 114); Eidinow 2007: 76 (no. 5).

²³ Dakaris, Vokotopoulou, and Christidis 2013: I 45–6 (nos. 107A, 108B); Lhôte 2006: 261–3 (no. 127); Eidinow 2007: 113 (no. 1). The verb *strateuomai* is interpreted as denoting military service; cf. Lhôte 2006: 262–3.

²⁴ Dakaris, Vokotopoulou, and Christidis 2013: I 322–3 (no. 1299B).

²⁵ Dakaris, Vokotopoulou, and Christidis 2013: II 20 (no. 2300).

²⁶ Dakaris, Vokotopoulou, and Christidis 2013: I 263 (no. 1024); Lhôte 2006: 306 (no. 150).

²⁷ Piccinini 2013: 74.

administered by the temple; rather, people wrote on their own initiative as well as they could, hence the rather chaotic appearance of the tablets.

The texts from Dodona differ in every respect from the Near Eastern prophecy reports as written documents of divination; instead, they are functionally (but not structurally) comparable to the Assyrian queries to the sungod Šamaš to be answered by means of extispicy rather than prophecy.²⁸ The binary structure of many of the enquiries in Dodona suggests an answer in the form of a decision between two alternatives—possibly by means of lot-casting as was reported by the historian Callisthenes in the fourth century BCE. According to him, an oracle was given to the ambassadors of the Spartans by collecting lots in a pot and letting the prophetess make the choice.²⁹ Neither Callisthenes nor any other ancient writer mentions the use of written tablets as belonging to the oracular process, except for, perhaps, Sophocles, whose hero Heracles says to have gone to the priests of Dodona and himself written oracles down “at the dictation of the ancestral oak with many voices.”³⁰ This scenario, however, does not exactly call to mind the kind of writing represented on the lead tablets.

What justifies the discussion of the Dodona tablets in the present context is the putatively intuitive method of divine–human communication of the prophetesses of Dodona; this, however, can be deduced from literary sources only, while the lead tablets rather point towards a rather more technical sort of divinatory practice.³¹ The corpus of lead tablets reveals the part of the oracular process that involved writing, whether before or after the consultation; however, we have no knowledge of how the lead tablets relate to the performance of the prophetesses, if at all. The written evidence of the consultation of the Dodona oracle is *sui generis* with regard to material, form, and practice, and unique to this particular site, where the tradition of oracular tablets persisted over several centuries.

Oracles from Didyma

Another major oracle site where inscriptional evidence of oracles has been preserved is the temple of Apollo in Didyma in the vicinity of the city of Miletos.³² It was one of the foremost temples in the Greek world especially in the Hellenistic

²⁸ SAA 4 (Starr 1990).

²⁹ *Fragmente der griechischen Historiker [FGrH]* 124 F 222a and b; the story of Callisthenes is quoted by Cicero, *Div.* 1.34.76 and 2.32.69.

³⁰ Sophocles, *Trachiniae [Trach.]* 1166–8; cf. Piccinini 2013: 68–9.

³¹ It is, admittedly, far from evident how the oracle actually worked; for an overview of different theories, see Johnston 2008: 63–5; Eidinow 2007: 67–71. See “Prophets and Temples: Greek Sources” in Chapter 6 in this volume for a more detailed discussion.

³² For the temple of Apollo and the oracle at Didyma, see, e.g. Lampinen 2013; Oesterheld 2008; Johnston 2008: 82–90; Busine 2005; Fontenrose 1988; Parke 1986. Cf. also “Prophets and Temples: Greek Sources” in Chapter 6 in this volume.

period, but already Herodotus knows that “there was an Oracle long since established, which all the Ionians and Aeolians were wont to consult.”³³

Records of oracular responses from the Didymean Apollo amount to around eighty, deriving from the early sixth century BCE through the early third century CE.³⁴ Roughly half of the responses are to be found in literary sources (see below in this chapter), while the other half are reported in inscriptions, mostly from Didyma and Miletos but also from places like Iasos, Kos, and Crete. The inscriptions from different times are structured in different ways. The earliest inscriptions are mostly prosaic, while the ones written in the Common Era tend to be written in verse. While many inscriptions do not include the oracle question at all, the answers may be quite long and elaborate. Some inscriptions include both the oracular question and the response, for instance:

[Question]: Karpos asks whether it is pleasing to Serapis that he fulfill his vow as he has chosen to do it?

[Answer]: Immortals rejoice in benevolent honors of mortal men.³⁵

[Question]: Comptroller Hermias asks whether it is pleasing to the god that we [celebrate a festival or perform rites] on the customary days annually as formerly?

[Answer]: It is bet[ter] to perform it according to [ancest]ral custom.³⁶

Another interesting question by Alexandra, a priestess of Demeter, concerns such an increase of prophetic appearances of all kinds of people during her priestly office that the priestess has to find out why it happens and whether all this is auspicious. The response, unfortunately, is mostly broken away, but what remains seems like Apollo looked favorably upon this phenomenon:

To good fortune. The priestess of Thesmophoros Demeter, Alexandra, asks:

“Since from the time when she assumed the office of priestess never have the gods been so manifest through their appearances, partly through maidens and women, partly also through men and children, why is this, and is it auspicious?”

The god replied: “Immortals accompany mortal men [...] and make their will known and the honor which [...]”³⁷

Inscriptions from Didyma or elsewhere seldom mention the inspired speakers.³⁸ The most interesting case is the reference to the female prophet

³³ Herodotus 1.157.

³⁴ See the catalogue of Fontenrose 1988: 179–243, including 33 “historical responses,” mostly in inscriptions, 23 “quasi-historical responses,” four “legendary responses,” one “fictional response,” ten fragmentary responses and records without oracular text, and eight texts that may quote or notice Didymaeon responses.

³⁵ *Milet* 1.7.205b; Fontenrose 1988: 196 (no. 21). Date: c. 130 CE.

³⁶ *DI* 499; Fontenrose 1988: 203 (no. 28). Date: early third century CE(?).

³⁷ *DI* 496A.8–10; Fontenrose 1988: 196–7 (no. 22). Date: second century CE.

³⁸ Cf. Parke 1985: 56. A funerary altar by the Sacred Way leading to the Didymeion, however, mentions a female prophet, probably one of those who served at the sanctuary at Didyma (*Milet* VI 2, 546: *eirēnē promanti chaire*); see Lampinen 2013: 71–2.

of Didyma of whom it is said that she was appointed in accordance to an oracle of Apollo:

Hydrophor of Artemis Pythie, Platainis Melas' daughter, called Tryphosa, whose grandmother is the prophetess (*prophētis*) Tryphosa, whom the god appointed in an oracle, when Claudius Charmes the younger was *prophētēs*.³⁹

It seems like Tryphosa's prophetic office was due to divine intervention, which may not have been the standard method of choosing the female prophet and is, therefore, specifically pointed out in the inscription.⁴⁰

Some texts belong to the genre of dedicatory inscriptions, which may include the wording of the oracle⁴¹ but which mostly, instead of quoting the oracle of Apollo, refer to it only indirectly:

To [De]lian Apollo, ruler of Kalymna, ac[cor]ding to an oracle of the Didymaeon (Apollo), Lo[ch]os son of Lochos, by bir[th] son of Xenokrates, [made this dedication . . .]⁴²

Hermias to Ze[us] Hypsistos, a thank-offering according to the oracle.⁴³

The phrase of the type *kata chrēsmon* "according to the oracle"⁴⁴ refers to the dedication as being prompted by an oracle received by the consultant. The dedicatory inscriptions are a widely used genre, representing divine-human communication both horizontally as a self-referential message of the ritual of gift-giving and vertically as an index pointing to the worshipper and reminding the deity of him or her.⁴⁵ The dedications based on an oracle are important in showing that Greek oracular process of communication did not end with the divine response, but continued in the subsequent interpretation and eventual fulfillment of the oracle which then obliged the consultant to perform a thank-offering to the oracular deity.

The inscriptions take us the closest we can get to the oracles of Apollo uttered at his temple at Didyma. In the earlier inscriptions until the end of the second century BCE, the consultants, as far as they are known, always appear as

³⁹ Fontenrose 1988: 192 (no. 17). For Tryphosa and her mother, also called Tryphosa, see L.-M. Günther 2012. Claudius Charmes the younger held the office of prophet c.110–115 CE, hence the great-grandmother must have lived in the early first century CE (see Lampinen 2013: 71). Note that at Didyma, the *prophētēs* was not the inspired speaker but the mediating official; see "Prophets as Intermediaries" in Chapter 1 of this volume.

⁴⁰ According to Lampinen 2013: 72, this is presented as a special circumstance, "unless the formulation of the inscription (ἦν ὁ θεός χρησμώνι κατέστρετε) is simply a conventional form of referring to an election by lot."

⁴¹ Thus *DI* 132 (Fontenrose 1988: 190 [no. 14]), which begins with the oracle introducing the words *theos ekhrēsen* "The god said" (lines 1–7) and continues with a report on the dedications of the consultant.

⁴² *ICos* 60; Fontenrose 1988: 191 (no. 15). Date: c. 100 BCE.

⁴³ *DI* 129; Fontenrose 1988: 202 (no. 26). Date: third century CE(?).

⁴⁴ For different types of dedicatory inscriptions in the oracular context, see Kajava 2009.

⁴⁵ See Gudme 2012: 15.

a collective, often the *dēmos* of the nearby city of Miletos. In the inscriptions written during the first three centuries of the Common Era, the consultants are typically (but not exclusively) private persons. While some questions of the citizens of Miletos concern communal matters such as enrollment of people in the citizen-body,⁴⁶ the majority of the questions concern different ways of honoring gods: offerings, altars, and rituals. Consultations of kings coming from different parts of the Mediterranean concerning warfare and political matters cannot be found in the inscriptional evidence but only in literary contexts. It is noteworthy, however, that references to the Didymaeian oracle are reported not only in inscriptions from Didyma and Miletos but also from elsewhere.

Oracles from Claros

The temple of Apollo at Claros near the city of Colophon flourished alongside Didyma as another principal oracle site of Asia Minor, indeed, of the entire Eastern Mediterranean. Apollo's oracle at Claros is mentioned already in the Homeric Hymns,⁴⁷ and literary sources allow tracing the temple's history back to the eighth century BCE. The archaeological evidence of the temple of Apollo and its oracle begins with the fourth century BCE.⁴⁸ The golden age of the oracle of Claros was the Roman Imperial period, and it maintained its importance until the eclipse of the Roman religion.

Of the Greek oracle sites, Claros is the most abundant with regard to (quasi-) primary sources of prophetic divination. As in the case of Didyma, the inscriptional sources constitute the most important historical source material, while the literary, mostly non-contemporary sources yield indirect information. The largest bulk of inscriptions consists of several hundreds of records of delegations sent by cities not only in Asia Minor but also in Phrygia, Pisidia, Cappadocia, and Macedonia.⁴⁹ These rather formulaic inscriptions typically include the name of the city where the delegation comes from; the name of the *prytanis* (the eponymous magistrate of the city of Colophon) and the

⁴⁶ See *Milet* 1.3.33f.6–14, 33g.1–4 (Fontenrose 1988: 182 [no. 5]); *Milet* 1.3.33g.5–12 (Fontenrose 1988: 182–3 [no. 6]); *Milet* 1.3.36a (Fontenrose 1988: 183 [no. 7]); all 220s BCE.

⁴⁷ *H. Apoll.* 40; *H. Art.* 5.

⁴⁸ For the archaeological records, see Moretti et al. 2014; de La Genière 1998; for the oracle see also Oesterheld 2008; 2014; Busine 2005; 32–40, 59–69; 2014; Lampinen 2013; Johnston 2008: 76–82; Merkelbach and Stauber 1996; Parke 1985.

⁴⁹ See the new edition of Ferrary 2014a; for the cities where the consultants came from, see Ferrary 2014a: 133–82. Some prominent cities in Asia Minor, such as Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamon, and Sardis, are conspicuously absent from inscriptions of the delegations, perhaps because they preferred to consult the oracle of Didyma; see Jones 2016: 935.

personnel of the temple: the priest (*hiereus*), the thespiode (*thespiōdos*), the *prophētēs*, and the secretary (*grammateus*);⁵⁰ and the name of the envoy (*theopropos/theōros*). Sometimes the envoy is accompanied by a children's chorus (*koroi/hymnōdoi*) singing hymns in praise of Apollo, which seems to have formed an important part of the liturgy in the sanctuary of Apollo at Claros.⁵¹

In most inscriptions, there is no mention of the oracle itself, but in some cases, however, even the oracle is briefly referred to:

(Concerning) the people of Cydonia in Crete, represented by Sosos son of D[. . .], who was sent as a sacred envoy for the oracle (*theōros tou chrēs mou*) when Apollo of Claros was the *prytanis* for the 92nd time, when G(aius) J(ulius) Zotikhos was serving as the priest, Ti(berius) Cl(audius) Ardys as the *thespiōdos*, Ti(berius) Cl(audius) Lupus as the *prophētēs*, (and) Ti(berius) Cl(audius) Gnesion as the secretary.⁵²

That the delegation actually received an oracle is reported only once:

(Concerning) the people of Charax in Macedonia, when Apollo of Claros was the *prytanis* for the 74th time, when Julius Zotikhos was serving as the priest, Magnos son of Hermogenes as the *thespiōdos*, Julius Faustus as the *prophētēs*, (and) Critolaos as the secretary, the messenger (*theopropos*) of his fatherland Charax, Aristodemos son of Aristodemos also known as Proclos, received the oracle and was initiated (*elabe chrēs mous kai emyēthē*).⁵³

While the inscriptions of the delegations do not say much of the contents of the Apollonian oracles, they are primary sources regarding the people who visited the oracle, and they also contain some information on its functioning. The standard list of the personnel of the oracular shrine indicates a well-structured organization and distinct roles for the priest, the thespiode, the *prophētēs*, and the secretary. Moreover, it becomes evident that many delegations were not there to receive an oracle but, rather, to fulfill Apollo's earlier orders by way of setting up an offering with a chorus singing a hymn "according to the oracle" (*kata chrēsmon*).⁵⁴ Such a practice of "customer loyalty" evidently increased the amount of visits to the temple and contributed to its prosperity. The temple probably profited from the donations of the

⁵⁰ For the respective roles of the thespiode, the *prophētēs*, and the secretary in the oracular process, see, in this volume, "Prophets as Intermediaries" in Chapter 1 and "Prophets and Temples: Greek Sources" in Chapter 6.

⁵¹ For the choirs, see Ferrary 2014a: 115–22.

⁵² Ferrary 2014a: 496 (no. 212); year 175/176 or 176/177 CE.

⁵³ Ferrary 2014a: 358 (no. 106); year 149/150 CE.

⁵⁴ Cf. Robert 1989: 299. See, e.g. Ferrary 2014a: 223–4 (no. 11; year c.117 CE), an inscription memorizing the hymn-singing "according to the oracle" by the delegation from Perinthos, mentioning the names of the nine choir-members and even of the composer of the hymn, Kointos son of Appatton.

delegations, and, on the other hand, “[b]eing seen at Klaros and Didyma was undoubtedly an important event for members of provincial elite.”⁵⁵

The inscriptions from Klaros do not quote oracles received in the sanctuary, because the Clarian sanctuary does not seem to have had a *chrēsmographeion* comparable to what probably existed in Didyma.⁵⁶ However, a number of inscriptions from other sites quote oracles at length. The Apollonian oracle itself is represented by twenty-eight texts containing or referring to oracle responses from Klaros.⁵⁷ Of these texts, nineteen are inscriptions while the remaining seven belong to literary texts.⁵⁸ The inscriptions have been found in several locations in modern Turkey and Bulgaria and dating (with one Hellenistic exception) to the first through third centuries CE. In addition, variants of the Latin inscription *Diis deabusque secundum interpretationem oraculi Clari Apollonis* “To gods and goddesses according to the interpretation of the oracle of Apollo of Klaros” have been found in eleven different places in England, Sardinia, Dalmatia, Pisidia, Galicia, and the Maghreb.⁵⁹ The dispersal of the Clarian oracles all over the Mediterranean basin and beyond is indicative of the large catchment area of the oracle and its high appreciation in the Roman Imperial period.

The inscriptions usually contain one oracle or a reference to an oracle; however, an ensemble of five texts written in the second century CE on two stone slabs was found from the temple of Apollo at Hierapolis in Phrygia.⁶⁰ The first, best-preserved inscription contains an oracle of Apollo concerning a plague, while the fragmentary state of the other three oracles preserved on the other stone makes it difficult to determine their relationship with the first one. The ensemble begins with an introductory text indicating that a person called [...]lios had had the oracles written at his own expense. These two stone slabs are important sources in providing us with the only extant specimen of a privately sponsored oracle collection from the Greek world.

The oldest of the preserved Clarian oracles, and the only one dating to the Hellenistic period, concerns the refounding of the city of Smyrna; the oracle consisting of two-line hexameter verse preserved on an inscription from

⁵⁵ Busine 2013: 181. ⁵⁶ Oesterheld 2008: 265.

⁵⁷ See Merkelbach and Stauber 1996; cf. Oesterheld 2008: 571–5.

⁵⁸ The literary texts are the following (numbering according to Merkelbach and Stauber 1996): no. 1 (Pausanias 7, 5, 3); no. 21 (Aelius Aristides, *Hieroi logoi* [*Hier. log.*] 3, 12); no. 22 (Eusebius, *Praeparatio evangelica* [*Praep. ev.*] 5, 22–3); no. 23 (Pausanias 8, 29, 3–4); no. 26 (“Tübinger Theosophie” §13); no. 27 (Lactantius, *Institutiones Divinae* [*Inst.*] 1, 7, 1); no. 28 (Macrobius, *Saturnalia* [*Sat.*] 1, 18, 19–21). Note that the Hellenistic oracle no. 1 concerning the re-establishment of the city of Smyrna is also known from an inscription from Smyrna.

⁵⁹ Merkelbach and Stauber 1996: 40–1 (no. 24); see Kajava 2007; Jones 2005, 2006; Birley 1974.

⁶⁰ Pugliese Caratelli 1963/4; Merkelbach and Stauber 1996: 11–16 (nos. 3–7). See the analysis of Oesterheld 2008: 72–128. The first slab has the introduction (no. 3) and the first oracle (no. 4), while the second slab, written on both sides, includes no. 5 on the one side and nos. 6 and 7 on the other; see the photos in Pugliese Caratelli 1963/4: 357–9, 366–8.

Smyrna and quoted by Pausanias as having been received by Alexander the Great in a dream:

Threefold and fourfold blessed are the men
who inhabit Pagos across the holy river Meles.⁶¹

This oracle, according to Pausanias, prompted Alexander to re-establish the city of Smyrna. The latest oracles, dating to about 300 CE, are called “theological oracles” because they deliver Neo-Platonic answers to philosophical-theological questions.⁶²

The majority of the Clarian oracles are addressed to cities, with a few also to individual enquirers. The oracles to cities are always responses to questions regarding an emergency situation (*loimos*), such as a plague, a famine, or a raid; many of the oracles were probably prompted by the Antonine Plague, a pandemic that tormented the Mediterranean people in 160s CE.⁶³ The oracles typically do not instruct how to ward off the plague. Instead, they give cultic commands concerning offerings and praise-singing, which is exactly what the delegations known from the Clarian inscriptions would have been performing. The city of Pergamon, for instance, received the following oracle:

To the offspring of Telephos who, honored by Zeus, son of Kronos, the king, more than others, inhabit the land of Teuthras, and also (honored by) the family of the thundering Zeus (...)

I will accurately announce you a defence with infallible voice, lest the people of Aiakos will all too long have to be wearing out by a painful disease; this will be pleasing to my son. I call on you, the leader of the sacred delegation, to divide into four groups of youths all those who wear the cape (of an epebe) beneath the sacred tower, and to make them follow the four leaders in columns. The first of them (shall sing) of the son of Kronos with a hymn; the next of (Dionysios) Eiraphiotes; the next of (Athena) Tritogeneia, the warlike maiden; and the next of Asklepios, my beloved son.

For seven days they shall offer thigh-bones on the altars, burning to Pallas (those) of a pure, two-year old unwedded calf, (those) of a three-year old ox to Zeus and Zeus Bacchus; likewise, sacrificing to (Asklepios) the son of Koronis the thigh-bones of a domesticated bull, prepare the sacrificial meal—all of you, youths, who wear the cape (of an epebe), not without your fathers. And with each libation as you pour, request a beneficial remedy from the plague from the immortals, so that it will go into a distant land of strangers [...].⁶⁴

⁶¹ Pausanias 7, 5, 3; Merkelbach and Stauber 1996: 4–6 (no. 1).

⁶² i.e. nos. 25–8 in Merkelbach and Stauber 1996: 41–5; for the theological oracles, see, e.g. Busine 2005: 195–208.

⁶³ See Graf 2015: 514–16; Oesterheld 2008: 43–8; Jones 2005.

⁶⁴ *I.Pergamon* 324, v. 1–3, 13–29; see Busine 2013: 178, 193–4; Oesterheld 2008: 51–71; Merkelbach and Stauber 1996: 6–10 (no. 2). Date: second century CE.

The inscription gives the citizens of Pergamon the opportunity of displaying the mythological origins of their city while at the same time demonstrating their Greek identity and their loyalty to the sanctuary at Claros.⁶⁵

Apollo could also order his consultants to raise monuments in their own cities, hence inscriptions concerning the erection of a statue “according to the oracle” (*kata khrēsmon*) can be found even outside of Claros, for instance, in Anchialos (modern Burgas in Bulgaria):

To good fortune [of] the city of Ulpia Anchialos.

The citizens Egeleis, Herois, Bac[chi]s, and Tonz[ei]s erected the divine statues at display here according to the oracle of the Lord Apollo of Colophon, through the commissary Titus Flavius Anicetus who, on the basis of the respective [decis]ion (of the city) undertook the construction [wor]k from his father M[ar]cus Flavius Anic[et]us.⁶⁶

The Clarian oracles, whether in epigraphic or in literary contexts, are written in a highly characteristic, sophisticated language different from any local vernacular.⁶⁷ One can assume the delegations visiting the oracular sanctuary at Claros had returned home carrying the words of the oracle, and that this is how the language was dispersed to the cities of the consultants from the office of the Clarian priest. It is assumed that, like in Didyma, in Claros the word of Apollo was stylized by professional scribes, probably by the *grammateus* of each temple, to meet the requirements of a truly divine language. In both cases, the chain of transmission is long enough not to provide access to the “authentic” words of the Clarian prophet.⁶⁸

LITERARY SOURCES

Literary texts are by far the most abundant sources of our knowledge of the Greek oracle, the reconstruction of which would be rather obstinate if we had only the epigraphic sources discussed in the previous section at our disposal.

⁶⁵ See Busine 2013: 180.

⁶⁶ *I.G.Bulg.* I² 370; Merkelbach and Stauber 1996: 25 (no. 10). Date: second century CE. Cf. Merkelbach and Stauber 1996: 27 (no. 12), a fragment of an inscription from Vasada (modern Bostandere in the province of Konya, Turkey) about a statue of Hygieia according to the oracle of Apollo of Claros.

⁶⁷ Merkelbach and Stauber 1996: 3: “Meistens in Hexametern, wie in den Götterversammlungen bei Homer; gelegentlich auch in den Metren der Tragödie; jedenfalls in Versen und in einem veralteten Griechisch, in dem viele Wörter vorkamen, die nicht mehr in Gebrauch und fast unverständlich waren, mit wunderlichen Wörtern in dorischem und äolischem Dialekt und natürlich mit vielen Composita.” For the “language of gods” in oracles, see Trampedach 2015: 206–12.

⁶⁸ Cf. Busine 2014.

All principal oracle sites—Delphi, Dodona, Didyma, and Claros—are well known from the works of Greek historians and philosophers who refer to the sanctuaries, their personnel and, in particular, their consultants.⁶⁹ The richest dossier concerns the Delphic oracle, which will serve here as a case study of the prophetic process of communication; however, to give an impression of the use of oracular material in literary texts, I will first take some brief examples from literary works referring to the oracles at Didyma and Claros.

Oracles from Didyma and Claros

The oracular sanctuary of Apollo at Didyma is well known from literary sources, which sometimes even quote or refer to prophecies received by the consultants. About half of the known Didymaeian responses are to be found in literary sources beginning with the fifth-century BCE writings of Herodotus and continuing in the works of, for example, Heraclides of Pontus (fourth century BCE), Apollonius of Rhodes (early third century BCE), Diodorus Siculus (first century BCE), Appian of Alexandria, Zenobius of Athos, Aelius Aristides (all second century CE), the Christian writers Lactantius and Eusebius of Caesarea (third to fourth century CE) and, eventually, Julian the Apostate (fourth century CE).⁷⁰ The responses in literary texts are classified by Joseph Fontenrose as “quasi-historical,” “legendary,” or “fictional,” implying that they should not be understood as primary transcripts of the words of the Didymaeian prophetess but, rather, as literary paraphrases, which in some cases may be “genuine” in his terms, that is, going back to a historical consultation.

Unlike the inscriptional evidence of the Didymaeian oracle, the literary texts present on many occasions a foreign ruler or citizens of a city state consulting the oracle on matters of warfare. For instance, the Syrian king Seleukos I Nikator is said to have consulted the Didymaeian oracle both by Diodorus Siculus and by Appian, who in his *Syrian Wars* relates the following:

It is said that while he was still serving under Alexander and following him in the war against the Persians he consulted the Didymaeian oracle to inquire about his return to Macedonia and that he received for answer: “Do not hurry back to Europe; Asia will be much better for you.”⁷¹

⁶⁹ See the convenient list of Greek sources for divination in Raphals 2013: 56–8.

⁷⁰ Herodotus 1.46.2–48.1; 1.158–9; Heraclides, frag. 50; Apollonius, *Argonautica* [*Argon.*] 1.958–60; Diodorus Siculus 19.90.4; Appian, *Syriaca* [*Syr.*] 56, 63; Zenobius 5.80; Aelius Aristides, *Orationes* [*Or.*] 16.237; Lactantius, *De Mortibus Persecutorum* [*Mort.*] 11, 212–13; *Inst.* 4.13.11; 7.13.6; *De Ira Dei* [*Ir.*] 23; Eusebius, *Praeparatio evangelica* [*Praep. ev.*] 5.6–7, 15–16 (quoting Porphyry); Julian, *Epistulae* [*Epist.*] 451ab; *Fragmenta breviora* [*Frag. brev.*] 297cd, 298a. For a full catalogue with references, see Fontenrose 1988: 208–31.

⁷¹ Appian, *Syr.* 56. The oracle is referred to again in *Syr.* 63, followed by another oracle responding to an inquiry of Seleukos about his death and warning against going to Argos.

Appian refers to the time around 334 BCE when Seleukos was serving as infantry general under Alexander the Great, knowing that Seleukos did not enter Europe until he was killed at Lysimacheia in 281 BCE.

To take another example, Herodotus describes the citizens of Kyme who turn to the Didymaeian oracle because they are bidden to surrender Paktyes, the Lydian opponent of Cyrus II, to the Persians (c. 545 BCE), receiving a response according to which they should do so. This response is distrusted by a certain Aristodikos who makes a second inquiry about the same matter and, having received the same response, removes all the sparrows' nests from the temple of Apollo. This leads to the following oracular dialogue between Apollo and Aristodikos:

“Most impious of mortals, how do you dare to do this? Do you destroy the suppliants in my temple?” Aristodikos was not at a loss and replied, “My lord god, how is it that you come to the aid of these suppliants, but bid the Kymaians to give a suppliant up?” And the god replied in turn, “I bid you do it, in order that you may the quicker be destroyed for your impiety, so that you may not in future come to consult my oracle about the surrender of a suppliant.”⁷²

Apollo's final answer implies that the Kymaians should have understood from the first how improper their oracular question was; only Aristodikos was clever enough to detect the divine irony and deception in Apollo's first answer.⁷³ Fontenrose does not exclude the possibility that the first response is, in fact, authentic, introducing the subsequent tale with a moral lesson.⁷⁴

One oracle from Didyma is included in the Greek proverbs collected by Zenobius: “Once upon a time the Milesians were mighty” (*palai pot' ēsan alkimoi Milēsioi*).⁷⁵ This proverb, allegedly a trimeter line of Anakreon and quoted also by Aristophanes as a mere proverb, is known by Aristophanic scholiasts who, like Zenobius and Diodorus Siculus, contextualize it in the Persian wars.⁷⁶ According to Zenobius, this proverb is presented as a response of the Didymaeian oracle to the Carians upon their inquiry about whether they should ally themselves with the Milesians just before the Persian war broke out in Ionia in 499 BCE. Oracular responses in form of a proverb are also known from literary sources of the Delphic oracle, and like the one above, may have been used in non-oracular contexts, such as the proverb “turn every stone” (*panta lithon kinei*) quoted also by Euripides.⁷⁷ Metaphorical and aphoristic as

Diodorus Siculus 19.90.4. describes a Didymaeian oracle, according to which Seleukos should consecrate Daphne to Apollo (Fontenrose 1988: 215–17 [nos. 41–3]).

⁷² Herodotus 1.159. ⁷³ Cf. Trampedach 2015: 412–14.

⁷⁴ Fontenrose 1988: 10–11.

⁷⁵ Zenobius 5.80; Fontenrose 1988: 214 (no. 40), quoting the Bodleian codex 776.

⁷⁶ Aristophanes, *Plutus* 1002, 1075 with scholia on both passages; Diodorus Siculus 10.25.2; cf. Suda H572.

⁷⁷ Euripides, *Heracles* [*Heracl.*] 1002, associated with Delphi by Zenobius 5.63; Suda II222 (Fontenrose 1978 no. Q162). Other proverbs presented as Delphic responses include “Love of money and nothing else will destroy Sparta” (Diodorus Siculus 7.12.5 etc.; Fontenrose 1978

the proverbs are, they have probably contributed to the reputation of the Greek oracles as being ambiguous and obscure, but it is not very probable that they were actually pronounced by the prophetesses of Delphi or Didyma.⁷⁸

Apart from the theological oracles,⁷⁹ just a few references to oracles of Apollo from Claros can be found in Greek literary sources. Eusebius of Caesarea attempts to demonstrate the vanity of pagan oracles by relying on a polemic of the cynic Oinomaïos of Gadara who exposes the oracles of Apollo as priestly delusion.⁸⁰ Pausanias describes an anonymous Roman emperor who digs a canal to be able to sail up the river Orontes all the way to Antioch. When the riverbed dries up, it reveals a huge sarcophagus with a giant human body within it. The Clarian oracle declares that the body is Orontes and is of Indian race.⁸¹ Aelius Aristides in his *Sacred Tales* quotes an oracle pronounced to his adoptive father Zosimus whom he had sent to Claros to consult Apollo about his health during the “holy night” (*nyx hiera*):

When night fell, Zosimus received the following oracle concerning myself:
“Asclepius will heal and make (you) better, (he who) reveres the city of Telephus [Pergamon], not far from the waters of Kaikos.”⁸²

Aelius himself was constantly having dreams of Asclepius, but he had nevertheless found it necessary to consult the oracle at Claros.⁸³ It is possible, that the quotation is taken from the collection of preformulated oracles that were available for sick people who came to consult the prophet at the temple of Apollo,⁸⁴ which probably made it no less useful to the consultant. Apollo’s advice to turn to the sanctuary of Asclepius near Pergamon indicates good relationships between the local cults in Asia minor.⁸⁵

The Delphic Oracle

The Oracle of Apollo at Delphi was by far the most famous and most widely appreciated Greek oracle, consulted for centuries by kings and individuals even from considerable distances. However, as we have seen, written oracle reports from Delphi have not been preserved; instead, our information on the

no. Q10); “Take the top and you will have the middle” (Anaxandrides of Delphi 404.1; Zenobius 1.57; Suda A1011; Fontenrose 1978 no. Q80); “Blessed is Corinth, but I would be a Teneate” (Strabo 8.6.22; Fontenrose 1978 no. Q242).

⁷⁸ Fontenrose 1978: 87: “The mere possibility that it could have happened is outweighed by the trend of historical evidence: no historical response has a proverbial character.”

⁷⁹ Merkelbach and Stauber 1996: 41–5 (nos. 25–8).

⁸⁰ Eusebius, *Praep. ev.* 5.22–3; Merkelbach and Stauber 1996: 36–9 (no. 22).

⁸¹ Pausanias 8.29.3–4; Merkelbach and Stauber 1996: 40 (no. 23).

⁸² Aelius Aristides, *Hier. log.* 3,12; Merkelbach and Stauber 1996: 35–6 (no. 21).

⁸³ See Rosenberger 2013: 155–60; Potter 1994: 39–40.

⁸⁴ Thus Merkelbach and Stauber 1996: 2, 36. ⁸⁵ Cf. Oesterheld 2008: 319–21.

prophecies uttered by the Pythia at the temple of Apollo at Delphi comes almost exclusively from literary sources. Unlike at Didyma and Claros, oracles were not inscribed on public monuments at Delphi, and the lack of inscriptions referring to the Delphic oracle even elsewhere makes it possible indeed that the oracular process at Delphi did not lead to the enquiry or the response being inscribed on a durable material.⁸⁶

Are there, then, any sources that would give immediate access to the oracular process at Delphi—if not to the very oracles spoken by the Pythia, then at least to the reports given to the consultants? The texts of Greek writers such as Herodotus, Thucydides, Xenophon, and Plutarch, as well as tragedists and comedists such as Euripides and Aristophanes, are permeated with references to the Delphic oracle and quotations of responses given to the consultants, hence preserving an abundant tradition of prophetic activity at the temple of Apollo at Delphi. The problem is that the evidence is indirect at best; hence the debate over whether it can be assumed that some of the quotations of Delphic oracles in these texts actually go back to the words spoken by the Pythia or to written documents based on them is extremely difficult to answer. What is clear, though, is that the accounts of oracles differ from each other because they are written by different authors.⁸⁷

It goes without saying that the cornucopia of Delphic responses included in Greek literature⁸⁸ includes a mixture of material with more or less immediate contact with the actual oracular activity at Delphi. Joseph Fontenrose classified the responses into four categories that roughly correspond to the degree of probability that the quotations actually derive from Delphi: (1) the “historical” responses that appear in contemporary sources, implying that the response dates to the writer’s own lifetime (which, however, is not a guarantee of its “genuineness”); (2) the “quasi-historical” responses, allegedly spoken in historical times but first attested by a writer who lived in a later period; (3) the “legendary” responses that belong to a distant past or to timeless folktales and fables; (4) the “fictional” responses invented by poets and dramatists without presupposing that the audience would perceive them as authentic.⁸⁹ Fontenrose’s classification is helpful in pointing out how the type of textual transmission affects both the way prophecy is constructed in Greek sources and the possibility of modern readers to perceive how the oracular process worked at

⁸⁶ Thus Parke and Wormell 1956: vii.

⁸⁷ Parker 2016: 70: “An account of the oracle based on Herodotus will sound quite different from one based on Thucydides, and a satisfactory *via media* has yet to be found.” For the accounts of Delphi in Herodotus, Euripides, Plato, Pausanias, and Athenaeus, see Kindt 2016.

⁸⁸ The material was collected by Parke and Wormell 1956, vol. 2, containing 581 Delphic responses, nine fragments, and twenty-five “dubious and pseudonymous” oracles. The revised catalogue of Fontenrose 1978: 244–416 is shorter, including 535 responses, fifteen of which are not included in Parke and Wormell.

⁸⁹ Fontenrose 1978: 7–10.

Delphi and in ancient Greece in general. He has, however, been criticized for his criteria for judging authenticity based on an anachronistic concept of authorship and circular reasoning.⁹⁰ I shall return to this issue shortly.

In all cases where the Delphic oracle is quoted, the oracular responses are primarily part of their literary context, corresponding to the literary genre and serving the purpose of the work as a whole, be it Aristophanic comedy or Herodotian historiography. Hence, they form part of each writer's construction of the Delphic oracle, more or less commensurate with what factually took place at Delphi in different time periods. We never hear the Pythia's own voice, but always that of her interpreters, however historically accurate their quotations and interpretations might be. If we want to understand the prophetic process of communication at Delphi and in ancient Greece in general,⁹¹ "what actually happened" remains a meaningful question only if both the distance between the ancient writers and the incidents presented by them and the distance between the modern scholar and the written source are fully appreciated.

In some cases, the Greek writers—Plutarch and Herodotus, for instance—had themselves experienced the Delphic oracle working, hence their descriptions of the process may be based on their own familiarity with the oracle, and are in any case presented in a way that would have been regarded as plausible enough by their readers. This, of course, is true only for their descriptions of the oracle in their own lifetime; when, for instance, Plutarch writes on the Delphic oracle in earlier times, he cannot draw on his own experience but is dependent on the constructions of his own sources, which adds another layer of interpretation to the understanding of the oracular process.

In view of the considerable number of Delphic responses it is astonishing how little the sources allow us to make out how the oracles were delivered. Leaving aside the long-cherished but duly abandoned image of the raving Pythia mumbling meaningless claptrap interpreted by a third party, Hugh Bowden has extracted from the sources a reasonable minimum of what can be imagined to happen at the temple of Apollo:

It was quite probably very simple: the petitioner would ask his question, and the Pythia would reply directly to him, speaking clearly and straightforwardly. The petitioner would normally write down the response word-for-word, and then leave the consultation room. The god had spoken.⁹²

⁹⁰ See, especially, Kindt 2016: 8–10; Trampedach 2015: 224–30; Maurizio 1997: 309–12; cf. Johnston 2005: 285–6; Rosenberger 2003: 27. The same criticism applies to Parke and Wormell 1956.

⁹¹ Cf. M. A. Flower 2008: 202 on Xenophon's account of the divinatory incident at Calpe harbor (*Anabasis* [*Anab.*] 6.4.12–5.2.): "Xenophon is a source of great value because he writes on his own personal experiences. Nonetheless, it is his voice that we hear, not that of the seers whose activities he describes; moreover, incidents are narrated from his point of view."

⁹² Bowden 2005: 21.

In all its simplicity, Bowden's reconstruction takes a stand in several issues that have been debated quite recently, and deserve to be discussed here; first, the communication and interpretation of the Pythia's words; second, the way the Pythia expressed herself; and third, the process of transmission.

(1) *The communication and interpretation of the Pythia's words.* It is a common assumption that the oracles of the Pythia, which in any case were verbal, were written down immediately after her performance—either by the consultant, if literate, or by a priest of the temple of Apollo called *hierous*,⁹³ *hosios*,⁹⁴ or *prophētēs*⁹⁵ (this designation implies here intermediation but not the actual pronouncing of the divine word). But was there a direct communication between the consultant and the Pythia, and had her words to be interpreted by a third party to be understandable to the consultant? The sources yield no unambiguous answer to this question, but there is nothing to suggest that the consultant did not see, or at least hear, anything of the Pythia's performance; indeed, some accounts of the Delphic consultations seem to presuppose a direct contact.⁹⁶ Moreover, it is far from certain that the oracles were written down on every occasion. While this was certainly sometimes the case, there is, in fact, not much evidence that writing was used to record the prophetess's responses at Delphi. In Herodotus, for example, there are only three cases of oracles being put down in writing among more than one hundred mentionings of oracular transmissions,⁹⁷ and in each case, the act of writing plays an important role with regard to the narrative context.

The role of the priests is seldom mentioned in the sources; in fact, we hear about them only through Strabo and Plutarch. Strabo writes:

They say that over the opening is set a high tripod on which the Pythia mounts, receives the *pneuma*, and speaks oracles in both verse and prose; and these too are put into verse by certain poets who work for the sanctuary.⁹⁸

Plutarch, himself a priest of Delphi, according to whom the Delphic oracle changed from verse to prose over time, writes about the ancient practice at the temple of Apollo, and is aware of the same tradition:

We used to hear many men say that certain versifiers would sit around the Oracle, listening to and taking in the words, weaving hexameters and meters and rhythms extemporaneously as vessels for the oracles.⁹⁹

⁹³ Plutarch, *Mor.* 5.437a; for inscriptional evidence of two *hierois* at Delphi, see *Sammlung der griechischen Dialekt-Inschriften* [SGDI] 1684–2342.

⁹⁴ Plutarch, *Mor.* 4.292d, 5.365a, 5.437a, 5.438b; inscriptional evidence, e.g.: *FD* 3.2.118; 3.3.297, 300, 302.

⁹⁵ Herodotus 8.36; Euripides, *Ion* 369–72, 413–16; Aelian, *De Natura Animalium* [*Nat. An.*] x 26; Plutarch, *Mor.* 292d, 438b.

⁹⁶ See Maurizio 1995.

⁹⁷ i.e. the “wooden wall” oracle (7.139.5–143), Croesus' test of oracular shrines (1.47–8), and the oracle of Mys the Carian at Ptoium (8.135). See Dillery 2005: 215–17; cf. also Maurizio 1997: 314.

⁹⁸ Strabo 9.3.5.; translation by Fontenrose 1978: 213.

⁹⁹ Plutarch, *Mor.* 407b; translation by Fontenrose 1978: 213.

These men, according to Plutarch, are to be blamed for the obscurities of the oracles which, therefore, had to be changed into prose.¹⁰⁰ It is noteworthy that both Strabo and Plutarch expressly refer to hearsay, not to their own experience; hence they cannot be taken as solid historical evidence.¹⁰¹ The majority of the Greek sources do not presuppose that a third party was necessarily needed to write down the Pythia's words, let alone to make sense of them, immediately after the oracular session. As the Pythia is never thought of as involved in the act of writing, however, someone else must have served to write down the oracle's words, and in this way contribute to their meaning—provided that writing was used at all. It is also possible that the Delphic oracles became a written form only after having been transmitted orally for quite some time.

(2) *The way the Pythia expressed herself.* According to Hugh Bowden, the Pythia was speaking “clearly and straightforwardly” and not mumbling unintelligible sounds. This is the conviction, not only of most contemporary scholars, but, it seems, also of Greek writers giving accounts of the Delphic consultations, in which the prophetess's responses are presented as clear and intelligible messages. Even the possible ambiguity of the oracle did not result from the incomprehensibility of the Pythia's language but from the metaphorical expression. I will discuss the mental constitution of the Pythia in Chapter 4; suffice it to say at this point that an altered state of mind does not inevitably result in unintelligible speech.

A further question is the eventual poetic formulation of the oracles. Among the Delphic repertoire collected from Greek literature, there are both prosaic and hexametric oracles.¹⁰² Much ink has been spilt on the question whether the verse oracle constitutes the older form of speech,¹⁰³ and whether the versification was due to someone else than the Pythia herself. Plutarch, who believed that the Delphic oracles were given in verse in ancient times, found it impossible in his own time “for an unlettered person, and one who has never heard poetry, to talk poetically.”¹⁰⁴ This doubt has been shared by scholars who find it difficult to think that uneducated women could extemporize verses in hexameter.¹⁰⁵

The possibility that the Pythia actually could speak in verse, of course, depends on whether she was exposed to this mode of expression. If she was,

¹⁰⁰ Plutarch, *Mor.* 5.406f–407c.

¹⁰¹ Fontenrose 1978: 215: “They were perhaps solely hypothetical, serving the same purpose as the modern theory of the prophet–Pythia relationship: they were meant to account for the verse form of the oracles, a problem to some ancient as to modern scholars.”

¹⁰² According to the calculation of M. A. Flower 2008: 220, there are 175 hexametric oracles among the 581 Delphic oracles as catalogued by Parke and Wormell 1956 II.

¹⁰³ So already Theopompus of Chios writing in the late fourth century BCE (*FGrH* 115, F 336, quoted by Plutarch, *Mor.* 5.403e–f).

¹⁰⁴ Plutarch, *Mor.* 5.405c–406d.

¹⁰⁵ e.g. Bowden 2005: 33.

as other scholars argue, it is not out of the question that she was able to use it; hexameter certainly belonged to oral performance before the dominance of the written composition, and its spontaneous use was a skill that could be learned by any woman of normal intelligence, especially if it belonged to the tradition of the oracular practice at Delphi.

The possibility that the versification of the Delphic oracles of the classical period need not be the secondary work of their recorders is defended by Lisa Maurizio, who sees a connection between the poetic expression and the altered state of mind, turning upside down the traditional argument that a possessed person cannot speak intelligibly—on the contrary, the divine possession was the source, rather than hindrance, of the Pythia's poetic expression.¹⁰⁶ On the other hand, Michael Flower is inclined to share the belief of the writers of the classical period that the Pythia actually could speak in verse, referring to the presence of epic formulae, as well as to some metric irregularities, best explained as deriving from oral performance.¹⁰⁷ Quite notably (and unlike most Classicists¹⁰⁸), Flower also refers to Neo-Assyrian prophecies as a comparable case of recorded words of spoken prophecy.¹⁰⁹

While it, hence, can be argued that it is not unrealistic to imagine the Pythia, not only speaking intelligibly, but doing so in hexameter, this does not solve the problem of who is actually responsible for the written form of her oracles. That the Pythia *could* speak in verse does not mean that the verse oracles in Greek literature attributed to Delphi preserve her spoken words. As with literature in general, the problem remains, exactly how close to the oral performance our sources allow us to go—and how essential this knowledge is in understanding the function of Greek prophecy.

(3) *The process of transmission.* Whether the oracles of the Pythia were recorded word for word cannot be really known; no first-hand copies have been preserved, and even if they were, it would be impossible to know who composed them. We do not even know how frequently writing was used to record the responses. If the Pythia did not write (and no ancient or modern author thinks she did), then someone else was inevitably responsible for the wording of the written oracles, working under similar constraints of verbal expression and material restrictions that were discussed above with regard to Mesopotamian oracle reports. Even the Assyrian texts are not expected to repeat verbatim the words spoken by the prophet, even though they are considerably closer in time to the oral performance.

¹⁰⁶ Maurizio 1995. ¹⁰⁷ M. A. Flower 2008: 219–22.

¹⁰⁸ They have been acknowledged by Burkert 1992: 80 and West 1997: 50. Previously, many Classicists played down relevance of the Assyrian oracles for the study of the Greek oracle (Parke 1988: 219–20; Graf 1985: 349–50; Fontenrose 1978: 229).

¹⁰⁹ M. A. Flower 2008: 228–30.

The quest for “authenticity,” or *ipsissima verba*, of the Pythia or any other Greek prophet suffers greatly from our insufficient knowledge of what lies between the written records and the oral performance. Not that the whole quest is meaningless, but it has to dig through several (often unidentifiable) layers of transmission, which makes assured results less than probable. Indeed, it may be asked whether it matters more to know what actually came out of the prophet’s mouth than how it was used by her interpreters and their communities. A disproportionate concentration on the Pythia and her performance may overshadow the significance of the different participants of the process of oral and written communication which, after all, is the precondition of our knowledge of ancient prophecy.

Quite the same way as in the Near East, Greek prophecy is not just words spoken by prophets but constitutes a more or less complex chain of transmission from the alleged divine sender of the message to its addressee and beyond. The chain begins with the alleged divine speaker who may have been transmitting a message from other gods, as Apollo was the *prophētēs* of Zeus¹¹⁰ and Ištar the diviner of the gods. The message was pronounced by the inspired prophet and delivered to the addressee, eventually in a written form composed by a scribe. Subsequently, it was conveyed either orally or in a written form through various channels—either the consultants themselves or professional oracle-collectors, the chresmologues (see next section in this chapter)—to the community for whom it had been consulted. The interpretation of the sometimes purposefully enigmatic oracle was debated by the community; specialists may have been consulted, and political conclusions were drawn from the interpretation that was deemed to be the correct one. Later on, the same oracle may have been reused and reinterpreted in a new situation, and authors like Herodotus used, retold, and recontextualized them within their own narrative scheme. All this warrants the question whether knowing the “genuine” words of the prophetess is more important and interesting than comprehending the whole process, which actually reveals why the oracles were needed and how they functioned.

In older literature (much in analogy with older biblical scholarship on prophecy), the history of transmission of the oracle was often seen as subsequent manipulation of the “original” oracle and hence labeled as forgery, whereas in more recent times, the whole process of communication, including oral transmission and literary quotation is seen as an essential part of the oracle’s functioning, not just a source of corruption of the “genuine” words uttered at the temple of Apollo or at other oracle sites. As especially Lisa Maurizio has emphasized, the “authenticity” and authorship of an oracle is not as simple an issue as the *ipsissima verba* of its first utterance or its first written

¹¹⁰ Cf. Aeschylus, *Eumenides* [*Eum.*] 614–19.

record. “Since oracles were accepted (or rejected), interpreted (and during this process re-worded), remembered and recited by a community of believers, their author, properly speaking, was the community itself, not the Pythia, nor the author who recorded them in writing.”¹¹¹ Hence, as is the case in the ancient Near East and in the Hebrew Bible, the evidence of ancient Greek prophecy comes to us through a process of transmission, in which the communal appreciation and interpretation of prophecy plays a crucial role.

In fact, many of the Pythia’s answers reported by the literary sources are not of the binary type but, rather, elaborate hexameter verses full of metaphors that were not always straightforward but constituted a riddle for the interpreter; as Heraclitus put it: “The lord whose oracle is at Delphi neither speaks nor conceals but indicates with signs.”¹¹² This is why the Delphic oracle has become notorious for providing obscure answers. Some of the Delphic responses included in Greek literature are indeed enigmatic, probably purposefully so, while others—the majority, in fact—are not ambiguous at all, hence intentionally ambiguous expression cannot be said to be the main characteristic of the Delphic oracle.¹¹³ The ambiguous cases are also the most famous Delphic oracles, perhaps precisely because of their ambiguity, notably the “wooden wall” oracle and the case of Croesus destroying a great empire.¹¹⁴ These cases are rather the exception but they do highlight the role and position of the responsibility of the interpreters with regard to the use of the oracle—not primarily the literary characters receiving the divine words, but first and foremost the audience for whom the authors actually put the words in the Pythia’s mouth.¹¹⁵

Oracle Collections and Chresmologies

An important factor in the process of transmission of Greek oracles were the oracle collections that were kept at least in Athens and in Sparta. According to Herodotus, the Spartan king appointed officers called *pythioi* to consult the Delphic oracle and bring the responses back to the custody of the king.¹¹⁶

¹¹¹ Maurizio 1997: 313; cf. Maurizio 2013.

¹¹² Heraclitus DK B 93: *hoanax ou to manteion esti to en Delphois oute legei oute kryptei alla sēmaisei*; cf. Hollmann 2011: 105–7. For the lot-oracle and the “conversational” oracle producing riddles, see Johnston 2008: 51–6.

¹¹³ See Bonnechere 2013. For the *ainigma* in oracular language, see Struck 2005. For the alleged ambiguity of the Delphic oracles, see also Trampedach 2015: 425–6 and Maurizio 2013, according to whom the “ambiguity lies in the eyes of the interpreters who may choose to locate and interpret homonyms and metaphors” (p. 74).

¹¹⁴ Herodotus 1.53.3 (Croesus); 7.139.5–143 (wooden wall).

¹¹⁵ Cf. de Jong 2015: 140: “The literary prophecies bear relevance for later readers, instead of the original addressees of the message.”

¹¹⁶ Herodotus 6.57.2–4; cf. Cicero, *Div.* 1.43.95.

Kleomenes of Sparta confiscated an oracle collection from the defeated Peisistratid tyrants of Athens who had kept it on the Acropolis.¹¹⁷ None of these oracle collections have been preserved; the collections of the Sibylline oracles and the Chaldean oracles may be seen as late descendants of the tradition of oracle collections of the classical period.¹¹⁸

The Greek oracle collections, especially in the classical period, are connected with the so-called chresmologues (*chrēsmologoi*), that is, people who were particularly associated with oracles and their interpretation. The chresmologues, often ridiculed in Aristophanic comedies, have been pejoratively called “oracle-mongers” without much respect for their activity which has been seen as contributing to the corruption of original oracles. Only recently have they been given a serious hearing by scholars—and with good reason, since their collections have probably served as a source of information on Greek authors writing on prophecy.¹¹⁹

Chresmologues are mentioned in the works of Herodotus, Thucydides, Xenophon, Aristophanes, and Aristotle, and they are presented as appearing regularly in Athens especially in the fifth century BCE. The most famous chresmologues are known by name: Diopieithes,¹²⁰ Amphilytus of Acarnania,¹²¹ Lysistratus of Athens,¹²² Onomacritus of Athens,¹²³ and Antichares of Eleon.¹²⁴ Their activity is especially associated with the Persian and Peloponnesian wars,¹²⁵ but there is evidence of written collections of oracles even in Roman times. Tiberius, for instance, ordered in the year 19 CE a public inspection of “all the books that contained any prophecies” to find people whose activity stirred up crowds in the streets.¹²⁶

The chresmologues were independent, eventually itinerant, diviners, mostly coming from outside of the community in which they offered their services. They shared many features with the *manteis*, practitioners of technical divination; in fact, the designations *mantis* and *chrēsmologos* sometimes overlap to the extent that a clear distinction between them is sometimes difficult to work out.¹²⁷ There is a clear difference, however, in that while the oracles of the

¹¹⁷ Herodotus 5.90.2.

¹¹⁸ Cf. Lange 2006: 264; 2009: 32. For the Sibylline oracles, see, e.g. Buitenwerf 2003; Potter 1994: 71–93; Parke 1988: 1–22; for the Chaldean oracles, Majercik 1989.

¹¹⁹ For the chresmologues and oracle collections, see especially Dillery 2005; Bowden 2003; cf. Trampedach 2015: 235–8; Fontenrose 1978: 145–65 and, in comparison with ancient Near Eastern and biblical prophecy, cf. Lange 2006, 2009.

¹²⁰ Xenophon, *Hell.* 3.3.3; Plutarch, *Lysander* [*Lys.*] 22.5–6; *Life of Agesilaus* [*Ages.*] 3.3.

¹²¹ Herodotus 1.62.4. ¹²² Herodotus 8.96.2. ¹²³ Herodotus 7.6.3.

¹²⁴ Herodotus 5.43.1. ¹²⁵ See Dillery 2005: 219–20.

¹²⁶ Dio Cassius 57.18.5; cf. Potter 1994: 95–6.

¹²⁷ Their roles are sometimes interchangeable, and some persons are known by both titles (cf. Thucydides 8.1.1; Aristophanes, *Peace* 1046–7; Pausanias 1.34.4, 10.12.1). For discussion, see Bowden 2003: 257–64, who finds no clear distinction between *manteis* and *chrēsmologoi*; and Dillery 2005: 168–71 and M. A. Flower 2008: 60–5, according to whom the two terms were normally thought of as separate.

manteis were normally based on their observing the entrails of sacrificial animals and the flight of birds, the chresmologues specialized in writing, collecting, performing, and interpreting oracles of acknowledged background, usually not of their own. In any case, the word *chrēsmologos* does not imply a fixed job description; the role of the persons thus designated in the divine-human communication varies from text to text.

To all appearances, the chresmologues presided over collections of written oracles and provided their services as oracle specialists in Athens and other cities. While Delphic oracles could be interpreted by the chresmologues, they were especially in charge of oracles of ancient, sometimes legendary, diviners respected by the Athenians, such as Musaeus, Bacis, Orpheus, the Sibyl, Lysistratus, and Epimenides.¹²⁸

Since oracles constituted an important factor in political decisions of Athens,¹²⁹ it is not surprising that the chresmologues played a significant role in the fifth century BCE. Thucydides provides us with an important hint at the performative aspect of the oracles when he writes that when the Spartans invaded Attica in 431 BCE, “chresmologues were chanting oracles of various sorts, which they [i.e. the Athenians] were each inclined to listen to.”¹³⁰ That oracles were recited means they were given a poetic formulation and, thus, made part of the religious literary tradition. However, the chresmologues did not only recite the oracles at their disposal. They are presented as influencing Athenian religious and political life, and some of them seem to have had an established status in the Athenian community in spite of their foreign backgrounds.

The use of the chresmologues’ knowledge of the oracular material and their interpretative skills finds several descriptions in Greek literature. When Herodotus relates the attempt of Pisistratus to establish his rule in Athens, he mentions Amphilytus of Acarnania the “chresmologic man” (*chrēsmologos anēr*) who, “under the influence of divine guidance” (*theiē pompē chreōmenos*) spoke to Pisistratus and uttered the following oracle in hexameter:

The cast has been thrown, the net has been spread out,
The tunny-fish will dart all through the moonlit night.

Pisistratus found the oracle trustworthy enough to lead on his army.¹³¹ It is of note that Amphilytus the “chresmologic man” appears as a prophet who himself prophesies in a divinely possessed state of mind (*entheazōn*); usually,

¹²⁸ See Dillery 2005: 178–83.

¹²⁹ See especially Bowden 2005.

¹³⁰ Thucydides 2.21.3.

¹³¹ Herodotus 1.62.4–63.1. Cf. the oracle of the *qammatum* of Dagan of Terqa to King Zimri-Lim of Mari: “The peacemaking of the man of Ešn[unna] is false: beneath straw water runs! I will gather him into the net I knot” (*7:11–15). By analogy, one might wonder whether the fish in the oracle of Amphilytus means the enemies of the Athenians rather than the Athenians themselves (thus, e.g. Dillery 2005: 186–7).

however, the chresmologues are not presented as being the first receivers of the divine word.

A paradigmatic story involving chresmologues is Herodotus' account on the "wooden wall" oracle concerning the battle against the Persians in Salamis, delivered at Delphi and debated in Athens in 481/480 BCE.¹³² Terrified by the attack of Xerxes, the Athenians consult the oracle at Delphi, and a Pythia called Aristonike utters an oracle extremely unfavorable to them. The Athenian ambassadors, too dismayed to accept such a message, are advised to ask for another oracle, and the Pythia delivers a second, more lenient oracle, according to which the Athenians will be protected by a wooden wall granted by Zeus: "A wooden wall shall be granted to the Triton-born by the all-seeing Zeus, a stronghold for you and your children." This oracle is written down by the ambassadors themselves and taken to Athens, where its meaning is discussed by the city assembly and chresmologues. Some older citizens (*presbyteroi*) are of the opinion that the wooden wall means a palisade around Acropolis, while others, including the anonymous chresmologues, argue that it means the ships equipped by the Athenians to make ready to fight by sea. A further disagreement concerns the last lines beginning with "O divine Salamis."¹³³ While the chresmologues think this refers to the defeat of Athenians and advocate fleeing Athens, a man called Themistocles, a newcomer in the Athenian elite, interprets them as referring to the victory of the Athenian fleet at Salamis. Themistocles' opinion is accepted and his interpretation is confirmed by the success it brought when the Athenians won the naval battle: "The successful interpretation *is* the right interpretation."¹³⁴

However the "historicity" of the wooden wall oracle is defined, Herodotus' account is instructive as a story about the interplay between the Pythia and her consultants, the process of communicating the divine words, the role of the chresmologues, and, above all, the use and appreciation of the Delphic oracle by the Athenian community and by Herodotus himself. It is impossible to know to what extent the two twelve-line hexameter oracles relate to the Pythia's mouth; what matters more is that they are not only appreciated by Herodotus as divine words, but they are also presented as a riddle to be solved by the community itself with the help of those whose interpretative skills it acknowledged. The story shows that, as important as it was considered that the oracles were really pronounced by the inspired prophet, in practical terms their interpretation was authorized by the community who used them. Hence,

¹³² Herodotus 7.139.5–143. For recent discussion on the "wooden wall oracle," see Eidinow 2013: 30–2; Dillery 2005: 210–19; Bowden 2003: 272–4, 2005: 100–7; Maurizio 1997: 316–17, 329–32.

¹³³ "O divine Salamis! It is written that you shall destroy children and women one day in the season of seedtime or harvest."

¹³⁴ Kindt 2016: 168.

the wooden wall oracle is a prime example of the community as the actual authorizer and authenticator of prophetic oracles.¹³⁵

A third well-known story deserves to be referred to because it gives a hint at the chresmologues' editorial activity with their oracle collections. According to Herodotus,¹³⁶ Onomacritus, an Athenian chresmologue in the time of the Pisistrades before 480 BCE, "had set in order" the oracles of Musaeus and, hence, probably was in charge of that oracle collection. He had been expelled by Pisistratus' son Hipparchus because he had been "caught by Lasus of Hermione in the act of inserting (*empoieōn*) into the writings of Musaeus an oracle, according to which the island of Lemnos should disappear into the sea."¹³⁷ Being banished from Athens, Onomacritus was now in Susa reciting favorable oracles to Xerxes (unfavorable ones he left unspoken), who found in them the divine encouragement to march against the Greeks.

The indignation aroused by Onomacritus' tampering with the Musaeian oracles is shared by Herodotus and reflects the ideal that the words of authenticated oracles should not be altered, as Theognis of Megara had written in the sixth century BCE:

It is necessary for the man who is a *theōros*, Kyrnos,
to be straighter than a carpenter's pin or rule or square,
a man for whom the prophesying priestess of the god at Pytho
pours forth her holy voice from the rich adyton.
For neither adding anything would you find a cure,
nor subtracting anything would you avoid erring in the eyes of the gods.¹³⁸

The authenticity of the divine words, therefore, was considered an important issue, although it would have been impossible to prove the source of the wording of any oracle, whether it was transmitted orally or in a written form. The oracles were authentic by virtue of their authentication by the community. The interesting feature in condemning the scribal activity of Onomacritus is that the very act of interpolation is presented as illegitimate, instead of regarding it as an integral part of the work of the chresmologue who allegedly had "set in order" (*diathetēn*) the oracles of Musaeus. Herodotus seems to presuppose that the text inserted by Onomacritus was not a genuine oracle of Musaeus—but who would have been able to control the authenticity of an oracle spoken by a legendary diviner, and how was it even possible for Lasus to recognize that the chresmologue was indeed adding something to the Musaeian corpus? A realistic scenario behind Herodotus' account may be that

¹³⁵ See Maurizio 1997: 317; cf. R. Parker 2000: 80: "Arguments about the interpretation of particular oracles are so common as to suggest that they are not by-product but an essential part of the institution's working."

¹³⁶ Herodotus 7.6. For the Onomacritus episode, see Trampedach 2015: 236–8; Lange 2006: 264–5, 2009: 33–4; Dillery 2005: 189–92.

¹³⁷ Herodotus 7.6.3. ¹³⁸ Theognis 805–10; translation by Maurizio 1997: 315.

Lasus was familiar with the oracles of Musaeus to some extent, and what he heard Onomacritus reciting differed from what he regarded as genuinely Musaeian. John Dillery's suggestion that Lasus, a well-known controversialist in his time,¹³⁹ could have been involved in a public performance in competition with Onomacritus is well worth considering, especially since comparable debates are abundantly depicted by Aristophanes who is the main source of the image of the chresmologues as habitual charlatans pursuing personal gain.

Public reaction to the activity of the chresmologues was not always favorable and, as the wooden wall oracle shows, their interpretations were not routinely accepted by the community. Thucydides writes that the Athenians "were angry both with the *chrēsmologoi* and with *manteis*" because they raised vain hopes about capturing Sicily in 413 BCE.¹⁴⁰ Furthermore, as becomes evident from the example of Onomacritus, the chresmologues not only recited but also interpreted and edited the oracles which was sometimes looked upon with suspicion. The chresmologues with their oracle collections added another, potentially controversial interpretive stage between the divine communication and its interpretation.¹⁴¹ Plato does not like the "begging diviners" (*agyrtai*) and *manteis* who go to rich men's doors and use "a bushel of books of Musaeus and Orpheus" in rituals, making people believe that "there really are remissions of sins and purifications for deeds of injustice" by means of sacrifice.¹⁴²

Aristophanes in particular gives voice to the distrust towards the chresmologues and their collections: "Every time Aristophanes mentions oracle collections, he ridicules them,"¹⁴³ playing the chresmologues off against each other and casting the shadow of suspicion upon their activity. It does not follow from this, however, that the chresmologues were commonly despised, much less that oracles as such were not appreciated as an essential means of divine-human communication. While Herodotus is critical about Onomacritus' editorial activity, he is convinced that Amphilytus was divinely inspired. Even Aristophanes' portrait of diviners as tricksters is not necessarily directed against the institution of divination at large, let alone against the belief that divine-human communication was a worthwhile and necessary pursuit. To be sure, Aristophanes rarely ridicules or even thematizes divination by omens, birds, and dreams; what regularly appears as the target of his mockery is the interpretation of oracles, especially the ones collected by the chresmologues which would easily have lent themselves to abuse.¹⁴⁴

¹³⁹ Cf. Aristophanes, *Wasps* 1410–11; Athenaeus 8.338b–c; see Dillery 2005: 190–1; cf. Trampedach 2015: 237.

¹⁴⁰ Thucydides 8.1.1.

¹⁴¹ Cf. Dillery 2005: 217–18.

¹⁴² Plato, *Respublica* [*Resp.*] 364b–65a.

¹⁴³ Lange 2006: 267, 2009: 37; cf. the examples taken from Aristophanes, *Knights* 110–234, 960–1150; *Birds* 957–95 (Lange 2006: 268–72).

¹⁴⁴ Cf. N. D. Smith 1989: 147–56.

The reactions of disappointment may, in fact, correspond to the great hopes invested in the chresmologues' divinatory skills. On the other hand, they may reflect a certain suspicion towards the use of a written oracle collection in an Athenian society that had learned to rely on oral transmission of divine knowledge and was going through a transition period where a written culture was only emerging.¹⁴⁵ The disappearance of the chresmologues from the Athenian scene after the fifth century BCE may have to do with the growing literacy among the upper class—not necessarily because relying on their services as such implied credulity¹⁴⁶ but because they were no longer the only ones able to consult written oracles.

¹⁴⁵ Cf. Dillery 2005: 218; Thomas 1992.

¹⁴⁶ Thus Fontenrose 1978: 153: "From the late fifth century, it appears, they lost repute among the more educated and less credulous Athenians."

Hebrew Bible

PROPHECY IN THE HEBREW BIBLE

A unique representative of literary prophecy is constituted by the Hebrew Bible, once regarded as the source of prophecy par excellence. The Hebrew Bible is, indeed, a very different kind of a source for the ancient Eastern Mediterranean prophetic phenomenon—not because the phenomenon itself was different but because the scribal transmission of prophecy in Israel and Judah finds a distinctive literary expression in the biblical books.¹ In fact, the lack of primary sources vis-à-vis the abundance of literary sources is comparable to the similar situation regarding the Delphic oracle. While there can be no doubt of the historicity of the phenomenon, its reconstruction on the basis of secondary sources is challenging.

Critical scholarship has for a long time been aware of the exclusively written nature of the evidence of prophecy in the Hebrew Bible, and the scholarly interest has largely shifted from the *prophets* as historical personalities to the biblical *texts* in which the prophets feature.² In spite of this, a biblical prophetic book is still often read as the creation of “the prophet” rather than a scribal product whose actual authors are unknown. The common image of a prophet—a free spirit who preaches in streets and squares, who intrepidly attacks the powers that be, who writes sophisticated poetry, and whose theology can be the subject of academic dissertations, all this without any dependence on institutions like court and temple—is the biblically inspired product of the modern mind.

Even in today’s scholarly literature, the author of a prophetic book is habitually referred to as “the prophet,” but it is often not clear who is being called by this epithet: the implied speaker, the historical author, or both in

¹ As Stökl 2012b: 64 sums up: “Thus, in response to the initial question of whether Israelite prophecy was unique, I have a twofold answer: on the one hand, prophecy in Israel and Judah was probably very similar to prophecy in the ancient Near East. On the other hand, however, the literary traces that biblical and nonbiblical prophecy left are very different indeed.” See also Jeremias 1994.

² See, e.g. Kratz 2015; Ben Zvi 2003, 2009; Becker 2004, 2006.

the same person. The epithet is sometimes used as shorthand for admitting uncertainty about who the author actually was or how many they were. However, the singular form generates the imagination of a single author, and the implied speaker tends to be virtually equated with the character whose name the book bears in its title. Therefore, a designation like “the prophet” should not be used for the sake of convenience without qualifications.

Furthermore, assumptions concerning the historical authorship of the prophetic books should not be based on default positions, such as preferring the prophet for the editor, early datings for late datings, or textual unity for disunity. Such preferences are not often spelled out, but they can easily be found under the surface when the authenticity, early date, and coherence of a prophetic text is defended against the suspicion of anything opposite, as if a prophetic text were more valuable and original if found to be deriving from the prophet without having suffered any later reworking. However, default datings to the alleged lifetimes of biblical prophets should not be applied to biblical or other ancient texts for the following reasons. (1) Even when trying to construct the ancient prophetic phenomenon, the principal object of our study is the source text, not the prophet. (2) Ancient texts were not subject to copyright, and the idea of authorship was not similar to today’s literature. Studying texts, including prophetic ones, is not principally about *intentio auctoris*, but an analysis of the text itself as a material product, together with its background, production, and reception.³ The reception begins immediately when the textual product is created and the product is no longer in the author’s control, but the author becomes part of the background. (3) The unity or coherence of a text can be considered neither a proof of quality nor evidence for its single authorship; disunity does make a text worse, and editorial activity can result in a purposeful and coherent structure. (4) The Masoretic Text has a long prehistory and represents neither the primary nor the “final,” let alone normative form of the text of any prophetic book. (5) The question of whether or not the burden of proof should be on those who attribute texts to the prophet to whom the book is ascribed is not appropriate, since the burden of proof concerns every dating.

The biblical image of prophecy is not necessarily compatible with scholarly or popular images, but it cannot be taken as an accurate description of prophecy in the ancient kingdoms of Israel and Judah either. It rather conforms to the scribes’ idea of prophecy, which may have been something else than what the prophets of their own time represented (cf. Deut. 13:2–6; Zech. 13:2–6; Neh. 6:14).⁴ This makes it necessary to distinguish between *ancient Hebrew prophecy* and *Biblical prophecy*, on the conceptual as well as on the

³ For the “quadralectic” of background, creation, product, and reception, see Silverman 2011: 538–40.

⁴ Cf. Nissinen 2006.

practical level, the former referring to the phenomenon and the latter to literature. With ancient Hebrew prophecy I refer to the actual communication situations and oral performances of the prophets of Israel and Judah, whereas Biblical prophecy means prophecy as it appears in biblical writings. These two concepts should not be confused even though there is a historical continuum between them.

As we have noted earlier in this book, the written prophecies and reports of prophetic activities are never firsthand information but always transmitted through a scribal filter. Therefore, the “original” words of the prophets, the *ipsissima verba*, cannot be retrieved. The scribal process that led to prophecy as a literary genre is a secondary development with regard to the spoken, “authentic” prophecies.⁵ This process necessarily corresponded to the aims and needs of the communities that kept it in progress and involved the requisite scholarly skills to keep, produce, and transmit written documents. Therefore, the question of how prophecy became literature is related to the sociology of the scribal culture,⁶ especially to the function of scribes as the primary diviners.⁷

The Hebrew Bible constitutes a special case in the documentation of ancient Eastern Mediterranean prophecy because it includes the only extant collection of prophetic *books* which now form part of a major section of the tripartite Hebrew canon called Prophets. Hence, in the biblical context in particular, prophecy *is* literature—not *written* prophecy, that is, prophetic oracles recorded in written form, but distinctly *literary* prophecy, that is, a corpus of literary works that, in their present context, are not immediately connected with any flesh-and-blood prophets whose oral performances may or may not loom in the background. Therefore, the prophetic books are “prophetic” in the sense of literary prophecy, not in that of written prophecy.⁸

In recent definitions of prophecy, as we have seen, the central concepts are communication and intermediation. Prophecy is seen as a process of divine–human communication, in which the prophet is the mediator between the divine and human worlds, transmitting divine messages to human recipients.⁹ However, prophecy would never have become literature, that is still read, interpreted, and adapted to the readers’ or hearers’ lives and reality, unless

⁵ de Jong 2011; Mack 2011: 329–39. The issue of orality and writtenness in ancient prophecy is discussed in several contributions included in Ben Zvi and Floyd (eds) 2000. For a study on the transition from oral to written prophecy, see also van der Toorn 2004; for the anonymity of the textual material in prophetic books, see Gerstenberger 2015.

⁶ For the social preconditions of writing and literature in the ancient Near East, in ancient Israel in particular, see van der Toorn 2007; Carr 2005. Cf. also Ben Zvi 2000b.

⁷ See especially Sanders 2017.

⁸ Weeks 2009: 274: “By all means, then, let us continue to use the label ‘prophetic book’ for this [i.e. Jeremiah] and other works; let us not, however, always allow an emphasis on ‘prophetic’ to obscure the importance of the word ‘book.’”

⁹ See “Prophets as Intermediaries” in Chapter 1 in this volume.

there were communities that adopted, repeated, interpreted, and reinterpreted prophetic messages for their own purposes—indeed, created new prophecy by way of scribal interpretation. The institutional echo kept prophecy alive and made it functional. It was up to the community to decide whether or not a prophecy was worth communicating, which conclusions should have been drawn from it and what the criteria of true and false prophecy were. Essentially, the preservation of the prophecy for coming generations in the form of a written record stored up in a safe place was dependent on the interests of the community, especially the literate circles responsible for textual production.

In the Hebrew Bible, the literarization of prophecy has reached a more advanced state than any other source material. The earliest available “hard” text-critical evidence, consisting of the Masoretic text, the Septuagint, and the Dead Sea Scrolls, reflects only the very latest stage of the literary process, most of which can only be reconstructed by internal criteria and sometimes with the help of comparative material. This complicates significantly the reconstruction of the beginnings of the scribal process, let alone the reconstruction of the phenomenon in the Iron Age kingdoms of Israel and Judah and the Persian province of Yehud.

There is no reason to deny the reality of prophecy in the ancient kingdoms of Israel and Judah. The distribution of the prophetic phenomenon in the Eastern Mediterranean, the multiple affinities of the biblical texts with ancient Near Eastern and Greek documents of prophecy, and even the development of the genre of prophetic books as such are compelling reasons to assume that the prophetic phenomenon was represented in the Southern Levant. To be able to say anything specific about the prophets and their activities, we would, all problems notwithstanding, have to identify the substratum in the text of the prophetic books (and even other literature, especially Joshua–Kings and the Psalms) that actually goes back to written records contemporary to the prophets and events they describe. Otherwise, there is a constant danger of anachronism and circular reasoning, for instance, if the book of Amos is used as evidence of prophecy in the society of eighth-century Israel which, again, is reconstructed from the same book.¹⁰ This is true for synchronic and diachronic studies alike and raises the question of proper methodology. The so-called “final form exegesis,” whatever its merits, is less useful here.¹¹ Those

¹⁰ Cf. e.g. McNutt 1999: 3 on reconstructing the social world of ancient Israel: “This has to do both with the question of the degree to which the Bible contains actual historical and social information and with the argument of some scholars that depending too heavily on the biblical texts for social and historical information involves engaging in a kind of circular reasoning—that is, generating a cultural and historical ‘reality’ from a text and then turning around and trying to understand the same text in relation to the background that was reconstructed from it.”

¹¹ For the necessity of the diachronic perspective in the study of the prophetic books, see, from different angles, e.g. Müller, Pakkala, and ter Haar Romeny 2014: 1–17, 219–27; Pohlmann 2012; Carr 2003.

who reject the diachronical methods of historical criticism and refuse to reconstruct the formation process of the prophetic books will have to date the texts as they now stand. This, again, allows only late dates, unless a prophetic book as a whole is believed to be the “authentic” work of “the prophet,” which is really no longer acceptable. The use of extrabiblical sources and archaeology is certainly helpful, but does not remove the risk of *potest, ergo* and circular reasoning.

The difference between the Near Eastern sources and the Hebrew Bible lies mainly in the textual transmission. In the former, the information about prophets and prophecy is embedded in written oracles, letters, administrative documents, and so on, written usually by officials of the king or a temple and filed away in archives found by archaeologists of our times. The Hebrew Bible, again, is a collection of canonized writings that derive from different times and have been selected, edited, collected, and transmitted by several generations of scribes mostly in the time of the Second Temple of Jerusalem, that is, in Persian and Hellenistic periods from the sixth until the second century BCE.

In both cases, all information we can get of prophets and prophecy is dependent on the type of textual transmission. This means that there is no direct access to the prophets as historical personalities, but even the firsthand documents of their appearances come to us only to the extent that the scribal filter between us and them allows us to perceive.

In the Hebrew Bible, texts concerned with prophets and prophecy are included in two different kinds of literature: the narrative and the prophetic books. The prophetic appearances narrated in the books of Samuel and Kings, not to mention the Chronicles, tell a whole lot about prophets in the kingdoms of Israel and Judah, but they are precarious evidence with regard to actual prophetic activities in those kingdoms. This is not only because of the significant chronological gap between the stories and the time they describe, but also because these narratives primarily function within their present literary contexts and may be multi-layered or fictitious altogether, serving the ends of their multiple editors. This makes them more or less informative about the historical factualities. Therefore, our principal inquiry should concern the *constructs* of prophecy in these texts, since it is only through the dark glass of these multiple and often deconstructable constructs that we have access to the eventual historical factualities that may be dimly visible as the building material of these constructs.

If anything, the narratives in the Former Prophets and in Chronicles show what their authors and editors, predominantly living in the Second Temple communities, took for granted with regard to prophets and their activities in the times these literary compositions describe; this is not necessarily compatible with the image they have of the prophets in their own time. It is reasonable to assume that a part of the image of the ancient prophets in these writings are based on older documents and, thus, contain indirect information of the

prophetic goings-on in the ninth to seventh centuries BCE; but it is equally clear that all this material is reread and adapted to a secondary context. In other words, the primary context of, say, the stories about Elijah and Elisha is their present literary context within the composition the scholars call the Deuteronomistic History.¹² Whatever ancient elements they might contain, they are not firsthand evidence of prophecy in Israel in the ninth century BCE, even though they are often used as if they were.

The prophetic books of the Hebrew Bible comprise yet another kind of literature, which presents itself for the most part as divine words transmitted by the prophets to whom each book is subscribed to, that is, the so-called “writing prophets.” However, the prophetic books are not primarily their work but scribal compilations with a long editorial history. The books are likely to contain passages originating from written records based on actual prophetic performances, and there has been a more serious concentration on the “original” writer here than in any other part of the Hebrew Bible. The authors of the prophetic books are personalized to a higher degree than any other books of the Hebrew Bible, hence the whole concept of authorship is discussed differently with regard to the prophetic books. The very issue of *ipsissima verba* concerns exclusively the prophetic books (few would break a lance for the *ipsissima verba* of Solomon or Job!), many of which, in fact, do not show much interest in the person of the prophets they are ascribed to.¹³

In their present contexts, even the passages that might refer to prophetic words once pronounced from the mouths of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos, or Hosea, are completely recontextualized. They are edited from the point of view of communities that have read and reread them according to their own needs and preferences, creating their own constructs of prophets and prophecy.¹⁴ Reading the books of the “classical” prophets as providing direct historical data from the eighth and seventh centuries often means forgetting that “[t]exts are not photographs of social reality but are imaginative creations of their writers.”¹⁵ This easily introduces a procedural error of transferring meanings from texts to a historical reality which may lead to serious misconceptions, not only of the prophets as persons but of prophecy as an ancient phenomenon.

¹² The complicated literary history of these narrative has been analyzed with varying results; for recent contributions, see, e.g. Sauerwein 2014; Pruin 2006; Lehnart 2003; S. Otto 2001; Keinänen 2001.

¹³ See Nogalski 2015, who points out that, especially in the Twelve Prophets, “[t]he prophetic figures disappear behind the function of the collections associated with them whose purpose is to present the message of YHWH” (p. 182); cf. Davies 1998: 117–18.

¹⁴ The emergence of the prophetic books has been the object of intensive study during the last couple of decades; see the review of contemporary scholarship by Kelle 2014 and cf., e.g. Kratz 1997b, 2015; Floyd 2006, 2015; van der Toorn 2007: 173–204; Becker 2004, 2006; Ben Zvi 2003; Davies 1998: 107–25; Jeremias 1994.

¹⁵ Carroll 1989: 207.

Is the situation any different when we move to the evidence of prophecy in non-biblical texts? To a certain extent, yes. Most of the material of archaeological provenance, such as letters and administrative texts, do not usually have a long editorial history behind them and are, therefore, of less interpretive nature than the biblical texts. But the bad news is that even here, we are entirely dependent on the scribal control: the interests of the writers of these texts and the officials who have selected the material to be included in the archives¹⁶—not to mention the accidental nature of archaeological finds. Therefore, the ancient Near Eastern texts are no photographs of social reality either.

All this said, it is also true that every text is written by someone somewhere; hence, not reading them as “photographs of social reality” does not mean that they do not tell us anything at all about history. Texts are not isolated from the world in which they are written and interpreted, even though we have to be careful not to make straightforward moves from text to history and engage in illegitimate transfers of meaning. The point is that the information discernible from a text depends on its writer and on its purpose (as far as these can be known), on its temporal distance from what it describes, on its genre and on the process of transmission.¹⁷

When drawing the picture of prophets and prophecy in the sources we have at our disposal, we should begin by paying attention to the constructs or prophecy within the texts. If we can observe that similar constructs occur in different contexts, we can assume that this particular construct is shared by more than one writer and serves more than one episodic purpose. These observations are like pieces of a puzzle: when they fit together, they contribute to the construction of a bigger picture that, as such, is not a photograph of historical reality but an interpretation of it.

PROPHETIC BOOKS OF THE HEBREW BIBLE

A prophetic book is a genre typical of the Hebrew Bible, unknown from any other source. Its emergence goes hand in hand with the formation of the

¹⁶ Cf., e.g. Charpin 2007; van der Toorn 2000b; Sasson 1994.

¹⁷ Cf. T. J. Lewis 2002: 206: “In textual study, there is no magic wand for evaluating the historical veracity of textual traditions regarding religious belief. All that we have at our disposal is the tedious work of textual criticism, dating through linguistic and orthographic considerations, redaction criticism, traditiohistorical criticism, and the other well-known methodologies that constitute our discipline. In addition, ancient Israel must be understood against its ancient Near Eastern backdrop. We must cease referring to the Bible *and* the ancient Near East, as if the former were not a part of the latter.”

canon of the Hebrew Bible in the period of the Second Temple of Jerusalem.¹⁸ The prophetic books are ascribed to a number of prophets who are mentioned by name and who are believed to have been active mostly in the eighth to the sixth centuries BCE. The books themselves, however, were not written by these prophets; prophets in any part of the ancient Eastern Mediterranean, as far as our sources reveal, were not expected to be able to write. The prophetic books are, rather, the work of scribes whose activity probably took place from the monarchical period over the Persian period until the Hellenistic times. The perspective of the advanced (but not “final”) literary form of all prophetic books includes the destruction of Jerusalem, the subsequent diaspora or “exile,” and the socio-religious developments of the Second Temple period. Seen against this horizon, the prophets appear as paradigmatic figures of the shared past of the Second Temple community which identified itself as the spiritual heir of the fallen kingdoms of Israel and Judah.

What, then, gave the impetus to the writing of prophetic books, and why did their production cease at a certain point?

According to the traditional construct of the history of Israelite prophecy, the “pre-classical” prophets who did not write anything (Elijah and Elisha) were the precursors of the “classical” or “writing prophets” to whom the prophetic books are attributed. These men (*sic!*)—Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos, Hosea, and Micah—represented the climax of prophecy; after them, the lifespan of prophecy declined and finally died out altogether. The destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BCE, according to the traditional view, was the beginning of the end of prophecy: the prophetic spirit never recovered from this catastrophe.

Today, many envision the development of prophecy almost in reverse, seeing the destruction of Jerusalem as the main catalyst for writing the prophetic books. In this perception, the anonymous scribes of the Second Temple period are held in much higher regard than before. They are seen as the fathers of the prophetic books and, thanks to them, we know at least something of prophecy in the kingdoms of Israel and Judah. What we know is not much, though; it is just a matter of a selection of written remains of prophecies proclaimed by a few persons. The existence and activities of male and female prophets other than those mentioned in the Hebrew Bible is virtually unknown and can be discerned only by some vague and tendentious references to “false prophets” in, for example, the books of Jeremiah (6:13–15; 23:9–32), Ezekiel (13:16–23), and Micah (3:11).

Some prophets may well have themselves initiated processes of writing prophecies down. However, the stimuli for the new literary genre of prophetic book rather grew out of the need to overcome socio-religious crises caused by

¹⁸ For prophetic book as a particular genre, see Ben Zvi 2003, 2009; to call it a genre does not entail a fundamental definition of form and content (Weeks 2009: 274). For the prophetic scrolls as a canonical group, see Davies 1998: 122–5.

changes in the public and ideological structure of society. These were caused by the destruction and the rebuilding of Jerusalem, the latter crisis hardly having been easier to handle than the former. The material well-being and symbolic universe of the community of the Judeans remained shattered for a long time. One strategy for restructuring the symbolic universe was to prolong the prophetic process of communication by reusing and interpreting older prophecies, and even creating new ones, for the concerns of the Judean community. At some point, probably because of the gradual growth of the textual body, the number of books considered authoritative was restricted, and this led to the formation of the canon.

It should not be forgotten, however, that the prophetic books hardly ever reached a textual form that could be called “final.” As demonstrated by the oldest text-critical evidence we have at our disposal, that is, the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Septuagint, different versions of prophetic books—the most telling, but not the only example being the book of Jeremiah—coexisted and were used in Jewish communities until the canonization of the proto-Masoretic text, which is increasingly seen as one text among others, not “the original text” superior to everything else.¹⁹ The history of the textual transmission is complicated enough to warn against all too simple constructions of authorship of the prophetic books.

What, then, were the social preconditions for the emergence of the prophetic books? The very concept of a prophetic *book* unavoidably raises the question of who were capable of writing and reading. The recent estimates of the population of the province of Yehud in the Persian period vary from 13,000 to 30,000, while the capital city Jerusalem had, depending on the assessment and the period of time, 1,500–3,000 inhabitants; the city grew somewhat during the Persian period.²⁰ It is impossible to estimate the exact amount of the literati, but in ancient cultures in general, this percentage tends to be well under 10 percent; it is difficult to imagine why Yehud would constitute a significant exception to this rule.²¹ Moreover, not everyone who

¹⁹ See, e.g. Müller, Pakkala, and ter Haar Romeny 2014; Ulrich 2004: 16–18; 2011. For case studies, see, e.g. A. Aejmelaeus 2005 (Jer. 27); 2011 (2 Sam. 24), and von Weissenberg 2011 (Twelve Prophets).

²⁰ See Lipschits 2003; Kessler 2001; Carter 1999: 195–204. According to the appraisal of Carter (1999: 201), the province of Yehud had 13,350 inhabitants in Persian I period (538–450 BCE) and 20,650 in Persian II (450–332 BCE), while Lipschits (2003: 364) estimates the population of Judah (= Yehud) in the Persian period at 30,125. The population of Jerusalem numbers 1,500 according to Carter and 2,750 (with environs), according to Lipschits.

²¹ For education and in ancient Israel, see Rollston 2006, who argues on the basis of careful paleographic scrutiny that it is “simply not feasible to attempt to account for the Old Hebrew epigraphic data without positing some sort of formal, standardized education. After all, the production of formal, standardized, and sophisticated epigraphs necessitates the presence of formally trained scribes” (Rollston 2006: 68). See also Carr 2005: 111–73; Crenshaw 1998; Young 1998; Davies 1998. All these scholars reckon on a very limited degree of literacy in ancient

could read and write to some extent had the skills needed for demanding scribal tasks like writing books. All this means that, in Jerusalem, there were at any given time a very restricted number of professionals who would have mastered the scribal enterprise resulting in the books of the Hebrew Bible. In addition, when Hebrew was replaced by Aramaic as the spoken language of the people of Yehud, the language of the scriptures became a foreign tongue, the reading and writing of which required special education.

In practical terms, the literati in the Second Temple community were scribes, priests, and officials whose social functions presupposed literary skills.²² Professionals in other areas were not supposed to occupy themselves with scriptures, as becomes evident from the book of Jesus Sirach, or Ben Sira (38:24): “A scholar’s wisdom comes of ample leisure; if a man is to be wise he must be relieved of other tasks.”

At this juncture, it is worth keeping in mind that not all scribal activity in Hebrew was restricted to Jerusalem. An outstanding number of the descendants of the learned community of pre-exilic Jerusalem remained in Babylonia. Some of them were probably educated there, and a literary work such as the book of Ezekiel demonstrates that their scholarly enterprises were continued in Babylonia.²³ To what extent this scribal production found its way to the Hebrew Bible remains unclear, but the possibility that substantial parts of the Hebrew canon were actually authored in Babylonia cannot be excluded.

Prophetic books eventually became part of the corpus that was meant to be read and studied. It was the scribes’ duty not only to become versed in scriptures but also to teach others. Again, Ben Sira appears as the paragon of an ideal scribe.²⁴ According to his grandson, who wrote the prologue of the Greek translation of his work, he had “applied himself industriously to the study of the law, the prophets, and the other writings of our ancestors, and had gained a considerable proficiency in them,” so he wanted to “compile a book of his own on the themes of discipline and wisdom, so that, with this further help, scholars might make greater progress in their studies by living as the law directs.”²⁵ I assume the late description of the work of Ben Sira from the second century BCE was valid even in earlier times. The professionals of reading and writing were those people whose leisure time was ample enough, that is, who were relieved from other tasks to learn the scribal arts.

Israelite society, corresponding to the limited literacy in the Graeco-Roman world, for which see Harris 1989. For a much more optimistic view, see Lemaire 1981.

²² For the preconditions of literary activity in the Persian period, see Kessler 2001: 151–6; Ben Zvi 1997. For the increase of education and its anti-Hellenistic motivation in the Hellenistic period, see Carr 2005: 241–72. For the pre-exilic period, see Zwickel 2003.

²³ For the book of Ezekiel as an example of this, see Uehlinger 2015; Stökl 2015a.

²⁴ For a portrait of Ben Sira as scribe, see, e.g. Carr 2005: 206–12; Blenkinsopp 1995: 15–20.

²⁵ Sir. Prol.

If, then, only a small educated elite could produce prophetic literature, who were the readers? In the ancient Near East, texts were not read the way books are consumed today. Only very few people had scrolls at their disposal. Since the texts were mostly read aloud and learned by heart, most people who came into contact with texts were hearers rather than readers.²⁶ Some late texts (Deut. 31:9–13; Neh. 8:1–12) refer to the public reading of authoritative texts,²⁷ presenting the ideal of a society, whose entire membership (that is, its male members of full standing) possessed essential knowledge of its shared authoritative memory, whatever it consisted of at each given time in the Second Temple period.²⁸ To what extent this ideal corresponded to reality is difficult to know, even though one may assume that the audience was larger than the small number of the literati.

Altogether, the production, the reading (aloud) and hearing, and the interpretation of authoritative texts was communication, by means of which the religious and ideological foundation of the community and its appropriate interpretation was conveyed to a certain amount of its members. The scribal interpretation of prophetic texts formed part of this communication, which essentially fulfilled the function of divination. Since most forms of technical divination seem to have been banned, and prophetic divination became an emphatically literary enterprise, the scribes assumed the role of principal diviners in Second Temple society.

From the point of view of the prophetic process of communication, one might ask whether the scribal interpretation of prophecy has anything to do with prophecy centuries after the prophets themselves were dead and buried. Here we come to the point where the Hebrew Bible differs from all other documents of prophecy. The scribes' work was a literary prolongation of the prophetic process. It was not a merely technical procedure of copying and reproducing texts but it was understood as being inspired by God. Ben Sira describes the man who devotes himself to investigating "all the wisdom of the past and spends his time studying the prophecies" (39:1). This man, if it is the will of God, "will be filled with a spirit of intelligence; then he will pour forth wise sayings of his own and give thanks to the lord in prayer" (39:6). The scribe, hence, assumes a role closely related to prophecy: the inspired exercise of wisdom becomes an act of divination: "I will again pour out doctrine like prophecy (*hōs profēteia*) and bequeath it to future generations" (24:33).

²⁶ See Niditch 1996. Carr 2005 also emphasizes the overlap of the oral and the written in learning texts.

²⁷ According to the diachronic analysis of Pakkala 2004: 179, the reading of the Torah is portrayed as a one-time event in the oldest stratum of Neh. 8: "there is no reference to any regularity of the reading, which one would expect from a synagogal service. Nonetheless, an early development towards that direction may be seen in the sense that the act of reading the Torah becomes an increasingly important and solemn occasion. It is fair to assume that the chapter laid the basis for this development by functioning as a model and inspiration for later Jewish authors who used the chapter as an authoritative text."

²⁸ See Ben Zvi 2006, 2012, 2013.

Prophecies appear as a part of learned wisdom, which presupposes the authoritative status of the prophetic writings.²⁹

What makes the Hebrew Bible different from other sources documenting the prophetic phenomenon is its exceptional literary history, during which prophecy became part of a centuries-long formative process of the textual body that is called the Bible—Jewish or Christian. As a consequence, prophecy became a theological concept with the whole corpus of authoritative literature as the sounding board. Literary prophecy, that is, thoroughgoing reinterpretation of the written remains of the traditional prophetic phenomenon, became a powerful method of scribal divination.³⁰

Biblical prophecy is more than prophetic books. In the case of the Bible, the prophetic process of communication is intertwined with another process, the formation of the authoritative corpus of Jewish and Christian scriptures, which became the normative literary context and interpretational framework of prophecy. This development is one of a kind. Nowhere else has the prophetic process of communication been prolonged by means of scribal activity over such a long period and with such authority that the “original” communication situations, that is, the oral performances in the initial stages of this process, fade into the background. They cannot even be recognized in the text; only biblical scholars have considered themselves capable of separating the oldest textual strata from the later textual growth, but their results have turned out to be so variable and uncertain that the whole quest for the “genuine” words of the prophets has been found impracticable. That we are not dealing with prophets but with texts is, of course, true not only for the Bible but also for all sources of ancient prophecy. In the case of the Bible, however, the distance between the prophets and the written records known to us is in a class of its own, both when it comes to the temporal distance and the scribal contribution to the written product.

Despite everything said thus far, prophetic literature cannot be divorced from the ancient Near Eastern socio-religious phenomenon of prophecy, neither can it be seen as completely devoid of historical referentiality.³¹ Biblical prophecy is not entirely the product of the minds of the Second Temple scribes, nor did they work without any predecessors.³² It is impossible

²⁹ Cf. Grabbe 2003: 212: “Inspired interpretation is a concept which arises during the Second Temple period. It is a new concept, coming about when some writings had become authoritative. Once established it takes its place alongside other forms of claims about prophecy.”

³⁰ See Kratz 2003b.

³¹ Floyd 2015: 36: “Prophetic literature is not historical in the way that earlier form critics assumed, as they attempted to segment the text and date each segment in relation to a specific event. We must think, not in terms of pieces of text referring to separate events, but in terms of the text as a whole referring to a historical process happening over a span of time.”

³² This has been emphasized especially by critics of the idea that prophetic literature and other writings of the Hebrew Bible have nothing to do whatsoever with the pre-exilic prophetic

to think that the production of the prophetic books could ever have begun without written sources, the editing of which triggered off the literary enterprise. This brings us a few steps closer to the initial stages of the process.

Few scholars would deny that the prophetic books are the result of a long editorial process which went on until the canonization of the variant of the Hebrew text that was later handed down by the Masoretes. “Hard” text-critical evidence of the formation of the books—that is, the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Septuagint together with other early translations—is available only from the latest phases of this process. This evidence demonstrates clearly enough that the formation process was not yet finished by the turn of the Common Era. Trying to answer the question of *how* written prophecy was turned into literary prophecy, we will have to reconstruct the earlier phases with the help of diachronic methodology and comparative studies, whatever theoretical and ideological problems may be found in them in recent scholarship.

The prophetic books themselves do not give too many hints about how they were produced, obviously because each book presents itself as a single unit transmitting the word of God through the mouth of the prophet to whom the book is attributed. Despite the common idea of “writing prophets,” the Hebrew Bible does not really present prophets as such; in fact, “the Bible’s narrative descriptions of prophets hardly ever involve written documents.”³³ Prophets did not seem to belong to the class of literati anywhere in the ancient Near East: not a single prophet from the entire Near Eastern documentation is found writing a text her- or himself. Therefore, the very concept of prophetic authorship of a text is problematic, and the connection between oral prophetic performances and the emergence of prophetic literature cannot be explained by a simple model involving the author-prophet and his textual product. It is probable that some of the prophetic books are not at all based on spoken prophecies but have undergone a process of “prophetization” as a secondary development.³⁴

Sometimes a prophet receives the divine command to write short inscriptions carved on stone (Isa. 8:1) or a piece of wood (Ezek. 37:16). In these cases, the act of writing, together with the text itself, fulfills a primarily symbolic and magical function rather than that of a prophetic oracle.³⁵ A few times a prophet is commanded to write the divine words down, for instance in Isaiah

phenomenon in Judah and Israel; see, e.g. Jeremias 2013; Hilber 2012; Blum 2008b; Heintz 1997b (= 2015: 75–92); Barstad 1993.

³³ Floyd 2000: 103.

³⁴ This has been suggested, for instance, in the case of Zephaniah by Levin 2011. Cf. Gerstenberger 2015, who replaces the traditional author–reader paradigm by a community–ritual model, suggesting that the biographical information in the Book of the Twelve has been added redactionally to anonymous assemblages of texts.

³⁵ Cf. Kratz 2011: 24 (= 2004: 30): “Es handelt sich um eine Symbolhandlung, die Öffentlichkeit herstellt und zugleich magische Bedeutung hat.”

30:8: “Now come and write it on a tablet, inscribe it in a scroll before their eyes, that it may be there in future days, a testimony for all time.” The emphasis in this and other similar cases (Isa. 8:16; Hab. 2:2) is clearly on the readers of the text who are supposed to see the correctness of the prophecy from their own point of view; the divine commands to write form part of the literary structure of the oracles themselves, hence it is very difficult to know whether they can be read as reports of something that was actually done.³⁶ These verses rather refer to the concerns of the readers instead of the actual beginnings of the text,³⁷ and they do not prove that the prophets were capable of writing. The only biblical books in which the prophets indeed seem to be actively involved in textual production are the books of Chronicles, in which prophets appear as annalists and record-keepers of the kings of Judah, indeed, inspired interpreters of the past.³⁸ It goes without saying that the presentation of the literary activity of the Chronicler’s prophets does not help us to reconstruct the earliest historical phases of the prophetic process of communication in ancient Israel and Judah/Yehud.

An interesting perspective to the early phases of the emergence of prophetic books is provided by chapter 36 of the book of Jeremiah—not in the sense that the case it reports actually ever took place in Jerusalem, or that Jeremiah himself was a “writing prophet.” Rather, it can be read as a paradigmatic story about the literarization of prophecy, written at the time when prophetic literature had already begun to emerge, possibly in order to legitimize the *Fortschreibung* of prophetic texts.³⁹ God tells Jeremiah to write a scroll including “every word that I have spoken to you about Jerusalem and Judah and all the nations, from the day I first spoke to you in the reign of Josiah, down to the present day” (Jer. 36:2). Jeremiah assigns the writing to Baruch the scribe (the reader gets the impression that he did not possess the scribal skills himself), who writes the scroll and reads it aloud to the people gathered in the temple. Eventually, the scroll ends up in the brazier of the freezing king Jehoiakim where it is thrown column by column, while Jeremiah and Baruch have to find themselves a safe

³⁶ This is presupposed by Floyd, 1993: 471 who reads Hab. 2:1–5 as “the report of an oracular inquiry,” that “reflects a complex underlying course of events.” It is possible, however, that neither Hab. 2:1–5 nor Isa. 8:16 and 30:8 are transcriptions of an actual order received by the prophets, but, rather, literary imaginations based on a common practice of textual production; thus de Jong 2007: 56 and Blenkinsopp 2000: 415.

³⁷ Cf. Zwickel 2003: 115–16.

³⁸ See Beentjes 2011: 37–8; Knoppers 2010: 402; Amit 2006: 90; Schniedewind 1995: 213–30.

³⁹ Stipp 2002: 168: “Die Ätiologie der Redaktion erwuchs aus dem Empfinden, daß apologetische Fortschreibungstätigkeit der hier geschriebenen Art selbst den Legitimitätsdefiziten unterlag, die sie beheben sollte, weshalb sie sich durch eigene Legitimitätsnachweise absichern mußte. Entgegen dem vordergrundigen Eindruck bietet Jer 36 also keine historisch verwertbaren Auskünfte zur Genese der Schriftprophetie und der Prophetenbuchredaktion, wohl aber zu deren Praxis [...]” Cf. van der Toorn 2004: 201: “The fiction of Jeremiah as a writer-prophet created the reality of the writer-prophet.”

hideaway. God, however, commands Jeremiah to have a new scroll composed, one containing everything that had been written in the burnt scroll; “and much else was added to the same effect” (36:32).

The story is illuminating in many respects. First, it puts forth a reason why prophecies were written: “Perhaps the house of Judah will be warned of the calamity that I am planning to bring on them, and every man will abandon his evil course” (36:3). The driving force behind writing prophecies down was neither the need to record every prophecy nor the desire for historical knowledge, but it was motivated by a religio-political, perhaps apologetic objective.⁴⁰ Second, it gives an impression of what might have happened to a prophecy that was judged “false” from the point of view of the authorities—and raises the vexatious question of how, where, and by whom prophecies like this could ever have been preserved for posterity. Third, it makes clear that the prophets did not write their words down themselves but that the written form was created by professional scribes. Fourth, it gives an unmistakable hint at the editorial process of the prophetic books.

Irrespective of whether the events told in Jeremiah 36 ever took place, the story as such seems to reflect the experience of the emergence and legitimation of the prophetic books. In addition, it even lends some support to the assumption that the scholars who designed the prophetic books of the Hebrew Bible had something in front of them, probably collections of prophecies in archives and libraries that served as the basic source material from which the prophetic books started to grow. As we have seen, such edited collections of prophetic words were prepared in the ancient Near East and in Greece. The inscription of Deir Alla, the Neo-Assyrian collections of prophetic oracles, and the references to activity of the chresmologues in Greek sources indicate a certain temporal and geographical spread of the practice of preparing compilations of prophecies, even though it cannot be said to have been a standard procedure anywhere in the ancient Eastern Mediterranean. The Assyrian collections in particular can serve as a heuristic model of how the earliest written collections of Hebrew prophecies might have been put together. At least in the time of Esarhaddon (681–669 BCE), prophecies formed part of the literary corpus that was copied, collected, edited, deposited in the royal archives, and utilized by the scholars who worked in the archives. The prophecies included in the collections were selected from the archival corpus of individual prophecy reports to be reused in a new historical situation, that is, the designation of Assurbanipal as the crown prince of Assyria in 672 BCE.⁴¹

⁴⁰ According to Stipp 2015: 333–47, the *Grundschrift* of Jeremiah 36 is contemporary to the events it records in order to provide Jeremiah’s followers with an account of the incidents that stressed YHWH’s support for him and not for his opponents. This story, however, was incorporated to the book of Jeremiah only by post-Deuteronomistic editors. Cf. Jeremias 2013: 102, who points out that the written text already presupposes the rejection of the earlier oral prophecy.

⁴¹ See “Written Oracles” in Chapter 2 in this volume.

The evidence from Deir Alla and Assyria shows that the reuse of written prophetic words, or the scribal prolongation of the prophetic process of communication, was not the invention of the Second Temple scribes. Their innovation is rather the development of this practice into a new genre of literature unheard of anywhere else in the ancient Near East: the prophetic book. Like the Assyrian scholars, they probably compiled their material from written sources they had at their disposal. But what happened in the pre-literary stage? Is it possible at all to reach the early stages of the prophetic process of communication, the actual oral performances of a prophet and its first recording? Keeping in mind all methodological difficulties discussed above, the reconstruction of the early stages of the prophetic process of communication may appear rather desperate as an enterprise. I venture into it only by analogy, however hazardous, to an Assyrian document.

Hans Walter Wolff compared the prophetic books with a film consisting of momentary excerpts of prophetic speeches (*Momentaufnahmen*); according to him, the prophetic books were compiled of sketches of prophetic appearances (*Auftrittskizzen*).⁴² Wolff's idea has been justly rejected as too simplistic to be true; however, the very notion of a scribe recording a prophetic performance is not totally unreasonable with respect to the extrabiblical evidence. The prophecies quoted in the letters from Mari often go back to the witness of those who heard the prophets speaking, even though some of them seem to be based on written records.⁴³ The Assyrian prophecy reports are without doubt scribal summaries of actual proclamation situations.

An illustration of this is provided by an Assyrian letter written by Aššur-ḥamatu'a, a priest or an official of the temple of Ištar in Arbela, to King Assurbanipal in the year 668 BCE (*112).⁴⁴ The historical situation behind this letter is the repatriation of Marduk, the supreme god of Babylonia, to Babylon, after his exile following the destruction of Babylon by Sennacherib two decades earlier. The letter begins with a prophetic oracle in which Marduk says he has entered the city of Babylon and made peace with the goddess Mullissu and, through her, with Assurbanipal. The prophetic words are followed by some notes concerning the dispatch of the letter, and the name of the sender, together with the usual blessings, is placed at the end of the tablet. This kind of structure is unique in the whole corpus of Assyrian letters, which always *begin* with the sender's name and the blessings. Aššur-ḥamatu'a probably wrote or dictated the text immediately after hearing the prophetic speech and added his own remarks in the same tablet. The result is an odd

⁴² Wolff 1987: 129: "Als Vorwurf hat man notiert, ich dramatisiere die Texte. Aber sind sie in Wahrheit etwas anderes als Momentaufnahmen eines Films, in dem die Bilder laufen lernen, zumeist auf verschiedenen Schauplätzen?"

⁴³ Cf. van der Toorn 2000b: 219–34.

⁴⁴ For an analysis of this letter, see Nissinen and Parpola 2004. Cf. de Jong 2007: 279–82, who dates the text to the aftermath of the Šamaš-šumu-ukin war.

mixture of an oracle report and a letter, which may indicate an urgent writing situation. It is noteworthy, however, that the text itself is anything but a hasty scribble. On the contrary, it is carefully written and conveys a sophisticated theological message. To what extent it goes back to what the prophet actually said, cannot be known, but it is evident that whatever Aššur-ḥamatu'a heard him or her speaking, it came up to his expectations.

Interesting as it is, the letter of Aššur-ḥamatu'a is the only one of its kind and does not warrant far-reaching conclusions. How often prophecies were written down in general is beyond our knowledge; the sparse evidence suggests either that this did not happen very often or that it was not standard procedure to keep written prophecies after they had been read to the recipients. Moreover, according to the usual laws of communication, interpretation began immediately when the word came out of the prophet's mouth. In any case, the letter of Aššur-ḥamatu'a may serve as a heuristic example of how a prophetic performance was turned into writing in an urgent situation.

The literary continuation of the prophetic process of communication was the exception rather than the rule in the ancient Near East; however, even the meager evidence is enough to show that it was not unknown. In some cases, as the available documentation demonstrates, there was a need to write a prophecy down and store the copy, which was a prerequisite for its further use and reinterpretation. Exploring how prophecy became literature would require knowledge about why and by whom the prophecies were written and kept, where they were stored, and who curated such archives. No text ended up in a safe place by accident. There must have been a reason behind every prophecy that was kept, people who considered it important, and an archivist who held the same opinion. The study of the archives of ancient Israel and Judah suffers greatly from the fact that we simply do not have them at our disposal, and one of the crucial questions is what happened to them when Jerusalem was destroyed. We may assume, however, that some texts survived the destruction somewhere, and they were taken care of by persons who were otherwise dealing with texts in the homeland and/or in Babylonia.

"It would be nice to know which circles transmitted and reworked the prophetic writings. Unfortunately, nothing is known about them directly, and so we have to rely upon conjecture."⁴⁵ This true statement of an experienced scholar of prophecy reveals how little can actually be *known* of the early phases of the prophetic process of communication and, consequently, of the prophetic phenomenon, in ancient Israel and Judah. There is no single answer to the question of who actually produced the prophetic books—it depends on what stage of the process we are trying to reconstruct. The later phases of the interpretation and reuse of prophetic texts are documented by the

⁴⁵ Kratz 2015: 33.

“apocryphal” books of the Old Testament (such as Baruch or Ben Sira), the Dead Sea Scrolls, and the New Testament, and the earlier phases can be identified by detecting the editorial techniques of the editors active in the time before the extant manuscripts were written.

Having only the Hebrew Bible at hand, the socio-religious setting of the emergence of the prophetic literature remains an enigma. By way of comparison with the material from the Near East and from Greece, one would easily imagine two significant institutions sponsoring written and literary prophecy: the royal court and the temple. These were probably the main employers of scribes and the sites of scribal schools even in ancient Israel and Judah, and it is by no means excluded that the initial impetus for writing down prophetic oracles came from these institutions around the same time when the Zakkur and Deir Alla inscriptions were written in other parts of the Levant. Some of the earliest contents of the prophetic books can well be imagined stemming from the scribal activity of the court and/or the temple. The prophetic books we know, however, cannot have their origin entirely in these institutions, since many parts of their texts presuppose a situation when either one or both of them was not in existence, or if they were, the text is outspokenly critical towards them. Hence, the prophetic books “stem from neither of the aforementioned institutions but rather from the crisis that overtook both.”⁴⁶

But what if a written document was not needed at all to preserve a prophetic message for posterity? The low level of literacy in ancient Israelite or Judahite society may lead thoughts to an oral, rather than written, transmission of prophetic words by circles of disciples.⁴⁷ I do not wish to play down the importance of the oral transmission of tradition across generations as a cultural phenomenon; as has been argued by many scholars, there is a significant oral aspect even to the transmission of written texts.⁴⁸ However, the nature of the prophetic books of the Hebrew Bible as literature testifies to a constant textual growth that can hardly be explained without intensive scribal manipulation of textual material.

On the other hand, as I have argued before, there is no direct evidence of the disciples of the prophets in the Hebrew Bible.⁴⁹ It is difficult to maintain the image of an ancient Israelite prophet as a holy man surrounded by faithful followers cherishing an established oral tradition across several centuries. There is little, if any, historical evidence of prophetic disciples of this kind in the Hebrew Bible or in the entire Near East. The only biblical prophets who are said to have had disciples (*bēnê han-nēbî'im*) are Elijah and Elisha in 1–2

⁴⁶ Kratz 2015: 33.

⁴⁷ See, e.g. Crenshaw 2000: 41–3; cf. the favorable assessment of his theory in Wilson 2004: 38–46. The disciples of prophets play an important role also in the theory of Jörg Jeremias; cf. e.g. Jeremias 2013: 110; 1996.

⁴⁸ Especially Carr 2005; Niditch 1996.

⁴⁹ Nissinen 2008a.

Kings,⁵⁰ but nothing in the description of their activities suggests the transmission of oral teaching to have been their main occupation. The famous (redactional) statement of Amos, “I am not a prophet, nor am I a prophet’s son” does not help much further without preconceived ideas about such prophetic guilds;⁵¹ if the writer of this text had a prophetic community in mind, we learn nothing about its supposed activities. The *limmūdîm* of Isaiah 8:16 could be taken as a reference to prophetic disciples,⁵² but even here we may have to reckon with scribal, rather than prophetic, apprenticeship. The generic group of “prophets” and the idea of a succession of prophets, again, is most probably a construction of the post-monarchic period, emerging side by side with the literarization of the prophetic tradition.⁵³

HISTORICAL NARRATIVE OF THE HEBREW BIBLE

Prophetic books are not the only source of literary prophecy in the Hebrew Bible. Prophecy is given a significant role in the historical narratives, both in the so-called Deuteronomistic History (Joshua–Kings) and the books of Chronicles. Whereas major parts of the prophetic books present themselves *as* prophecy, the narrative sources embed stories of prophets in larger literary frameworks, within which they play a significant role. Prophets belong firmly to the literary and ideological structure of both the Deuteronomistic History⁵⁴ and Chronicles, demonstrating that the prophetic phenomenon provided a helpful and acceptable divinatory framework for the theological message of their authors. The prophetic literature has traditionally been seen as arising from the proclamation of the prophets more directly than the historical narrative, and it is indeed possible that the textual fragments deriving from primary sources of prophetic performances are to be found in the prophetic books rather than the narratives. This, however, does not make the image of the prophets in the prophetic books historically more accurate than in the narrative; both genres are scribal products, representing their authors’ reality-based imaginations of the prophets and their activities. Both genres appear as scribal continuation of the function of prophetic divination.

⁵⁰ 1 Kgs 20:35; 2 Kgs 2:5, 7, 15; 4:1, 38; 5:22; 6:1; 9:1.

⁵¹ Amos 7:14.

⁵² Thus Blenkinsopp 2000: 243–4; cf. Carr 2005: 143–5.

⁵³ For the generic group of prophets as a construction of the post-monarchic period, see Ben Zvi 2004a.

⁵⁴ The prophetic stories were identified as a specific redactional layer (DtrP) by W. Dietrich 1972; cf. Jepsen 1956 who had already labeled the redaction of the work as “prophetic.” The existence of the DtrP redaction is not universally accepted, but it has been assumed by many scholars, e.g. Veijola 1975. In this book, I recognize the multi-layered nature of Joshua–Kings without adhering to any specific redactional theory.

Prophecy appears as the primary divinatory technique in both Joshua–Kings and Chronicles, which may reflect the general condemnation of divinatory practices as expressed in Deuteronomy 18:9–14, where the only diviner to be listened to is a prophet like Moses, while a long list of divinatory practitioners is presented as an abomination to Yahweh.⁵⁵ In fact, however, while divination other than prophecy is virtually absent from Chronicles, it is actually practiced in Joshua–Kings, where “asking” (*drš*) direction from Yahweh is many times referred to with approval.⁵⁶ For instance, lot-casting is practiced by Joshua and Saul (Josh. 7:14–18 and chapters 13–21; 1 Sam. 10:20–1), and devices of technical oracle such as the ephod as well as the urim and thummim appear as legitimate means of consulting God (1 Sam. 14:41–2; 23:1–13; cf. 30:7–8).

Prophecy is even more actively sought for in Samuel–Kings especially by the kings of Judah and Israel, but the division between technical and prophetic divination does not appear as absolute. When Saul fails in his attempt to receive an answer from Yahweh by means of dreams, urim, and prophets (1 Sam. 28:6), he goes to the female necromancer in En-Dor, which “may be portrayed as one step further removed from YHWH, but this is a matter of degree, not of kind.”⁵⁷ A prophetic revelation may be confirmed by another divinatory act, such as the election of Saul that is first revealed to Samuel by the direct word of God (1 Sam. 9:15–17) and subsequently confirmed by lot-casting (1 Sam. 10:20–4).⁵⁸ Technical methods of divination, such as the ephod or the urim and thummim, are used to answer a binary question which can only be replied to “yes” or “no.” Sometimes, however, the oracular question to God resembles technical inquiries, but the answer is not necessarily of the binary type:

After this David inquired of the Lord, “Shall I go up into any of the cities of Judah?” The Lord said to him, “Go up.” David said, “To which shall I go up?” He said, “To Hebron.” (2 Sam. 2:1)

Structurally similar questions and answers are known from Greek oracle sites discussed above. Even in the case of the consultation of Jehoshaphat of Judah

⁵⁵ It is difficult to concretize the activities of the diviners itemized in Deut. 18:10–11. For an overview, see, e.g. Anthonioz 2013: 76–9; Blenkinsopp 1995: 123–9.

⁵⁶ See Thelle 2002. For divinatory practices in Joshua–Kings, see also Anthonioz 2013: 87–92.

⁵⁷ Hamori 2013: 843.

⁵⁸ See Cooley 2011. Note that the two passages may derive from different redactions, in which case it is the later redaction that takes the confirmation of revelation for granted. The practice of mantic confirmation is well known from Near Eastern sources; cf. Cooley 2011: 250–6 and the practice at Mari to take the prophet’s “hair and hem” (*šārtum u sissiktum*) to cross-check prophecy through another method of divination (see Stackert 2014: 43–8; Lynch 2013; Hamori 2012; Durand 2008a: 514–18). In Greek texts, oracles can be consulted in different sanctuaries, and there is also evidence for a second consultation in the same sanctuary where the first oracle was given (see Bonnechere 2013).

and Ahab of Israel, the question is formulated exactly the same way as inquiries addressed to a technical oracle, for instance: “Shall I go to battle against Ramoth-Gilead, or shall I refrain?” resulting in the yes-answer: “Go up; for the Lord will give it into the hand of the king” (1 Kgs 22:6, 15). This makes the prophets (*nēbī'im*) consulted by the kings to look like technical diviners which, however, is difficult to reconcile with the prophets’ “prophesying” (*mitnabbē'im*) by symbolic gestures and shouting which, rather, points toward ecstatic behavior (1 Kgs 22:10–12). The result is an interesting mixture of features of technical and non-technical divination difficult to find in Near Eastern sources of prophecy⁵⁹ but more common in Greek sources. As we have seen, the inquiries addressed to Apollo at Delphi and Didyma, or to Zeus at Dodona are often formulated in a binary manner, and both the Delphic Pythia and the women prophets of Dodona are associated with lot-casting.⁶⁰ Indeed, Micaiah ben Jimla’s assertion, “whatever the Lord says to me, that I will speak” (1 Kgs 22:14), is almost the same as that of the Pythia in Aeschylus’ *Eumenides*: “For as the god doth lead, so do I prophesy.”⁶¹ Even Deborah, who bears the title *nēbī'â*, has many commonalities with the Delphic Pythia. Besides transmitting divine words to Barak (Judg. 4:6–9), she also acts as a judge for the Israelites. Such a combination of roles may imply the idea of a divine judgment by means of technical divination performed under the palm tree named after her (Judg. 4:4–5).⁶²

The fluidity of the boundary between prophecy and technical divination in the narrative world of Joshua–Kings may indicate that even in the writers’ real world, the socio-religious boundary of technical/non-technical divination was not so strict as at Mari or in Assyria. Rather, the image one gets from the biblical narrative is closer to that of Greek divination, probably reflecting a society in which divination was practiced within a framework less differentiated than in

⁵⁹ The activity of the group of *nabûs* of the Haneans in *26 may actually refer to technical divination; this is suggested by the form of the question posed to them: “Will my lord, when performing [his] ablution rite and [st]aying seven days ou[tside the city walls], [return] safe[ly to the ci]ty [...]?”

⁶⁰ For Delphi, see Plutarch, *Mor.* 5.492b. As to Dodona, Callisthenes relates that an oracle was given to the ambassadors of the Spartans by collecting lots in a pot and letting the prophetess make the choice (*FGrH* 124 F 222a and b); the story of Callisthenes is quoted by Cicero, *Div.* 1.34.76 and 2.32.69.

⁶¹ Aeschylus, *Eum.* 29–33. The prophecy of Micaiah has also been compared with the oracle of the Pythia to Croesus, king of Lydia (Herodotus 1.46–9) by Oswald 2008a: 8–9: “Beide, Ahab und Krösus, erhalten je ein zweideutiges Orakel, das sie jeweils in ihrem Sinne interpretieren, dessen tatsächlicher Sinn aber eine Unheilsankündigung ist. In beiden Fällen ist es im Übrigen so, dass die Interpretation der Könige ohne Zweifel die nächstliegende ist. Krösus’ Annahme, das Orakel müsse das Reich des Kyros meinen, ist ebenso verständlich wie die des Ahab, dass Jhwh ihm Ramot-Gilead in die Hand geben werde.”

⁶² Intriguing similarities in the figures of Deborah and the Pythia of Delphi have been detected by Kupitz and Berthelot 2009. Spronk 2001 surmises that the figure of Deborah was originally that of a necromancer similar to the woman of En-Dor in 1 Sam. 28.

Mesopotamia; such highly developed methods of divination as extispicy and astrology are not practiced in Joshua–Kings at all. On the other hand, what the textual world in Joshua–Kings does have in common with Near Eastern divination is the royal focus of prophecy as *Herrschaftswissen*, necessary for the biblical kings (or their predecessors) to have their (quasi-)royal functions fulfilled. The inextricable link between prophets and kings in Joshua–Kings, and also in Chronicles, constitutes a cultural and ideological link also between these biblical texts and the Near Eastern prophetic phenomenon.

Prophecy appears in Joshua–Kings in a predominantly royal setting. Prophecies are typically addressed to kings or to persons to whom kingship has been promised; the few prophets talking to persons other than kings belong to pre-monarchical contexts. The book of Joshua mentions no prophets, and it seems like Joshua as the successor of Moses does not need prophetic mediation to receive the divine word but plays himself the roles of the king, the priest, and the diviner at the same time.⁶³ In the book of Judges the prophets are rarely mentioned,⁶⁴ but once the kingship is established, prophets are found communicating with virtually most kings of Israel and Judah from Saul to Zedekiah.

The prophets communicate different kinds of divine messages to the kings: words of support, instruction, and warning, and also those of judgment. Categorical judgments of kings themselves rarely surface in the Near Eastern prophecy,⁶⁵ but are a conspicuous feature in biblical prophecy, whether in prophetic books or in narratives. The prophetic judgment plays a crucial role in the narrative of Kings concerning the kingdom of Israel,⁶⁶ corresponding to the narrative strategies of the writers of Joshua–Kings, for whom the destruction of the Northern Kingdom was a constituent of their collective memory. The judgment, however, is not an overwhelming feature of the narrative construct of prophecy in Joshua–Kings, since the communication of the prophets with kings and other leaders of people can also be supportive, such as the divine promise to deliver enemies into the king's hands, ubiquitous in ancient Near Eastern prophecy but also known by biblical writers,⁶⁷ or the prophetic participation in anointing kings.⁶⁸

⁶³ Cf. Josh. 5:2–9; 7:14–18; 8:30–1; chapters 13–21.

⁶⁴ i.e. Deborah in Judg. 4:4 and the anonymous prophet speaking to the Israelites in Judg. 6:7–10.

⁶⁵ For the prophecy proclaimed in the vicinity of Harran as the word of the god Nusku, according to which the name and seed of Sennacherib will be destroyed (*115), see “Prophets and Kings: Ancient Near East” in Chapter 7 in this volume.

⁶⁶ 1 Kgs 12:15; 14:10–14; 16:1–3; 21:20–4; 22:37–8; 2 Kgs 9:9–10, 30–7; 15:29; 17:21–3.

⁶⁷ 1 Kgs 20:13; 2 Kgs 3:18; 19:6–7; cf. the similar promises in pre-monarchical contexts in Josh. 6:2; 8:1, 18; 10:8; Judg. 4:4; 6:16; 7:9.

⁶⁸ 1 Sam. 10:1; 16:13; 1 Kgs 1:32–53; 2 Kgs 9:6–10.

The books of Chronicles, dependent as they are on the texts in Samuel-Kings, report a significant number of prophetic appearances, most of which are unique to Chronicles and not derived from their source texts. Even in Chronicles, prophets mainly communicate with kings, but their function in the divine-human communication is constructed differently from Samuel-Kings. Many of the Chronicler's prophets appear as annalists and record-keepers of the kings of Judah.⁶⁹ Writing history in Chronicles, however, is not merely about keeping archives but, rather, inspired interpretation of the past. This task is understood as specifically prophetic, in fact the sole method of divination, interpreting the past events as such as omens.⁷⁰

Analogous as the image of the prophets in biblical narratives is to the portrait of prophets obtainable from ancient Near Eastern and Greek sources, it combines more overlapping features than its cultural counterparts. Prophets can be found as "healers, tricksters, martyrs, and shamans";⁷¹ the functions of a prophet may be combined with those of a priest (Samuel), judge (Samuel, Deborah), miracle-worker (Elijah, Elisha), or scribe (Chronicles). The range of divinatory activities performed by prophets in biblical narratives, hence, is broader from what can be found in the Near East or, for that matter, in biblical prophetic books. Such an amalgamation of divinatory practices may be partly explained by the societal structure of Israel, Judah, and Yehud, where an individual may have been able to assume a broader cluster of social roles than in the more differentiated societies of ancient Mesopotamia or even Greece. For a significant part, however, the portrayal of the prophets in the narrative works of the Hebrew Bible is due to the specific ideological structures and narrative strategies of these texts. The narratives including prophetic performances in Joshua-Kings⁷² and in Chronicles⁷³ primarily function within the literary contexts of these multi-layered compositions, serving the narrative and ideological purposes of their multiple and editors. The narratives in the biblical narratives show how scribes living in the Second Temple communities constructed prophetic divination in the shared past of the community. As far as this construction is based on older documents, it is reinterpreted and reconstructed by adapting the old data to a secondary context. The function of prophetic divination as transmitting the *Herrschaftswissen* to the king remains the same

⁶⁹ See Beentjes 2011: 37–8; Schniedewind 1995: 213–30.

⁷⁰ Cf. Knoppers 2010: 402; Amit 2006: 90.

⁷¹ These titles refer to Richard Danielpour's percussion concerto *The Wounded Healer*: see p. 1 in this volume.

⁷² For recent studies on prophets and prophecy in the Deuteronomistic History, see the articles collected in Jacobs and Person (eds) 2013; Boda and Beal (eds) 2013; Kelle and Moore (eds) 2006; de Moor and van Rooy (eds) 2000; cf., e.g. Schmitz 2008; Heller 2006; Ben Zvi 2004a; W. Dietrich 2000.

⁷³ Prophets and prophecy in Chronicles have been studied intensively in recent years; see, e.g. Ben Zvi 2013; Person 2013; Beentjes 2011; Jonker 2008, 2011; Knoppers 2010; Amit 2006; Schniedewind 1995; Kegler 1993.

everywhere in the Near East, but the contents of the message are informed by the post-586 BCE view of the past kingdoms of Israel and Judah, having the destruction of Jerusalem as a key event in the shared memory, which causes much of the prophetic communication to appear as post-event prediction of the end of monarchy.⁷⁴

⁷⁴ Kratz 2015: 23: “All this reminds us of the ancient Near Eastern models, except that the relationship between prophets and kingship according to the biblical tradition is troubled from the beginning, and the end of the monarchy appears to be inevitable.” See also R. Müller 2015; de Jong 2011.

Part III

Comparative Essays

Prophecy and Ecstasy

PROPHECY AND POSSESSION

It is the shared conviction of most of today's historians of religion, anthropologists, and biblical and Near Eastern scholars, that the prophetic performance is typically associated with a specific state of mind variably called ecstasy, trance, or possession. That prophetic activity involved ecstatic behavior in ancient Israel was already suggested by, for example, Bernhard Duhm¹ and Gustav Hölscher, who began his comprehensive book of Old Testament prophets, *Die Profeten*, with a chapter on ecstasy and visions as the common feature of seers and prophets of all times and all peoples.² Only a few texts concerning ancient non-Yahwistic prophets could be referred to a century ago, such as the Egyptian narrative of Wenamun, who gives an account of a "great seer" who becomes ecstatic and delivers an oracle of the god Amon on his behalf to the prince of Byblos (*142); and the story of Elijah and the ecstatic prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel (1 Kgs 18), which Hölscher compared with later evidence of the ecstatic worship of the Syrian goddess.³ The Assyrian prophecies were partly published at the time Hölscher and Duhm wrote, but their prophetic nature was not acknowledged.⁴

Thanks to the much-increased number of pertinent sources, today's scholars are in a much better position to survey the ecstatic element in the

¹ See Duhm 1922: 95–6, for whom the prophetic ecstasy was first and foremost an aesthetic experience and the source of poetry: "Die poetische Sprache ist die *Sprache der Götter*, diese reden durch die Poeten und Propheten. In der Ekstase des Sehers, der Begeisterung des Dichters, erkennt man etwas, was nicht der gewöhnlichen Stimmung, Art, Fähigkeit des Menschen entstammt, sondern von höheren Wesen bewirkt wird."

² Hölscher 1914: 1: "Die Seher und Profeten aller Zeiten und Völker, haben sich stets eigentümlicher seelischer Erfahrungen gerühmt, durch die sie vor anderen Sterblichen im Besitze übernatürlichen Wissens, göttlicher Offenbarungen waren, und eben dies hat von jeher als das eigentliche Wesen des Seher- und Profetentums gegolten. Es ist herkömmlich, diese seelischen Erlebnisse unter den Begriffen Ekstase und Vision zusammenzufassen."

³ Hölscher 1914: 132–9.

⁴ Cf. Hölscher 1914: 139–40. Some scholars, however, recognized the comparability of the Assyrian oracles with biblical texts; see especially Greßmann 1914.

ancient Near East, and even the Greek sources should no longer be disregarded. First, however, it is necessary to explain briefly the result of the last three decades of clarification of scholarly vocabulary.

The characteristic features of the prophetic performance can be described from the point of view of the one who performs, indicating the specific state of her or his body and mind during the performance. The words *trance* and *ecstasy*, the meanings of which largely overlap in scholarly language, refer to “forms of behavior deviating from what is normal in the wakeful state and possessing specific cultural significance, typical features being an altered grasp of reality and the self-concept, with the intensity of change ranging from slight modifications to a complete loss of consciousness.”⁵ Of the same behavior, also the word *possession* can be used, but whereas *trance/ecstasy* refers to the psycho-physiological state of the performer, *possession* is a “cultural theory that explains how contact takes place between the supernatural and natural worlds”;⁶ that is, an explanation of the *ecstasy* as a state of being possessed by an external, usually superhuman, agent. This presupposes the audience’s interpretation of the ecstatic behavior as being due to divine intervention, such an interpretation belonging to a cross-cultural cognitive architecture of human mind.⁷ Some scholars would use the related word *inspiration* as a form of possession implying the belief that “the god/spirit/power remains outside the human body, being satisfied with resting upon it while seizing and subduing the soul of the personality without taking its place.”⁸

Ecstasy/trance and *possession/inspiration* are not always equivalent, because not all allegedly possessed behavior is ecstatic, and not all *ecstasy* is explained as *possession*. However, “‘trance’ and ‘possession’ regularly occur in the same cultural contexts, blending together to form a single, composite phenomenon—sometimes not.”⁹ A widely-used category that describes the characteristic behavior is the *altered state of consciousness*, which can be used for both the psycho-physiological state of the performer and its cultural interpretation.¹⁰

⁵ Siikala 1992: 26–7; cf. Trampedach 2015: 180: “Der Mensch, der als Medium fungiert, befindet sich in einem besonderen Zustand, der sich von einem ‘normalen’ und wachen Bewußtsein unterscheidet.” For related definitions, see Lindblom 1973: 33–6; Holm 1982; I. M. Lewis 1989: 33–4.

⁶ Wilson 1980: 33–4.

⁷ See Cohen 2008, who makes a distinction between pathogenic possession in which the presence of the external agent manifests itself in illness and misfortune, and executive possession, in which the external, intentional agent takes over the host’s executive control. In this distinction, prophecy clearly belongs to the realm of executive possession.

⁸ Michaelsen 1989: 47.

⁹ I. M. Lewis 1989: 9; for their non-equivalence, see I. M. Lewis 1989: 39–40. Cf. also Wilson 1996: 325–6.

¹⁰ Klass 2003: 109–25 would rather talk about dissociation than altered state of consciousness, suggesting the term “Patterned Dissociative Identity” for spirit possession.

On the one hand, the prophetic performance can also be described from the point of view of the audience, in front of which the performer authenticates his or her role corresponding to cultural expectations of what kind of behavior is required of a person who claims to intermeditate between human and divine spheres. A useful term to describe this is *patterned public performance*¹¹ which, regardless of the degree of ecstasy or possession, is a culture-specific signifier of a culturally accepted behavior, considered as appropriate for the specific role of the performer and serving as his or her identity-marker. By its very function as transmissive activity, the prophetic performance needs an audience, and there is no prophecy without interplay between the prophet and the audience. Therefore, the performance needs to be not only patterned but also controlled: contrary to a common presupposition, ecstatic and possessed behavior, however eccentric it may appear, is not entirely idiosyncratic and random but one that can be recognized and appreciated by the audience.¹² This is probably one of the reasons why the established ritual lends authority to the performance and is seen as its appropriate context.

Terminological clarity is needed first and foremost to enable scholarly communication and to avoid arbitrary use of scholarly language. However, terms like “ecstasy” or “possession” (or “prophecy,” for that matter) are not established entities that exist in their own right; rather, they reflect the ongoing scholarly process of understanding. Moreover, when applied to ancient texts whose way of expression is only partially understood by us, and to which the scholarly conceptualization is fundamentally alien, we cannot expect them to yield easily to our classifications.¹³ Therefore, we have to be careful about not knowing too much about ancient prophets who are no longer available to anthropological observation. This should not discourage us from attempting to understand prophetic performance in the ancient world; on the contrary, the cornucopia of bits and pieces that we have at our disposal should egg us on to put the puzzle together and see what kind of picture will emerge.

PROPHETIC PERFORMANCE IN ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN SOURCES

The standard prophetic designations in the Akkadian language, *muhhûm/muhhûtum* (masc./fem., Old Babylonian) and *mahhû/mahhûtum* (masc./fem., Neo-Assyrian), are derived from the Akkadian verb *mahû* “to become crazy,

¹¹ Cf. Nelson 2004: 115–17; Wilson 1996: 324–6; Maurizio 1995: 73–6; Overholt 1986: 13–16. Klass 2003: 117–19 makes a distinction between disorders and patterned dissociative phenomena.

¹² Cf. Siikala 1992: 32–4; cf. Sonne 1982, who emphasizes the collective nature of the ecstatic ritual.

¹³ Grabbe 1995: 110: “The texts of concern to us were neither written by psychologists nor even written in an idiom always comprehensible to us whose knowledge of ancient culture is quite incomplete.”

to go into a frenzy.”¹⁴ This verb is used for people who go out of their wits, or, at least, behave in unexpected ways,¹⁵ and it is also used for a highly emotional performance.¹⁶ The reflexive N-stem of *maḥû* repeatedly refers to prophetic performances, presumably indicating the condition in which the prophets received and transmitted divine words and suggesting that the characteristic behavior associated with the prophets appeared as a kind of “madness” in the eyes of those who witnessed them.

It may be asked, of course, whether etymologies, notoriously treacherous as they are in defining actual meanings of words, tell anything about the real comportment of the prophets. Moreover, one might argue that the use of the verb *maḥû* represents nothing more than a customary introduction to prophetic speech that has lost its original reference to their characteristic behavior; a similar argument could be made of the noun *maḥḥû*. That this is not the case, however, is evident, for instance, in the newly published fragment of the fifth tablet of the Epic of Gilgameš, dating to the Neo-Babylonian period. In a previously unknown scene, Enkidu and Gilgameš are on their way to the cedar forest where they are supposed to kill the demon Humbaba. While standing and marveling at the forest, Gilgameš becomes horror-stricken:

As the cedar [cast] its shadow,
 [terror] fell on Gilgameš.
 [Stiffness took] a grip of his arms,
 and feebleness beset his legs.
 [Enkidu] opened his mouth to speak, saying to Gilgameš:
 “[Let us go] into the midst of the forest,
 [set] to it and let us raise (our battle) cry!”
 [Gilgameš] opened his mouth to speak, saying to Enkidu:
 “[Why], my friend, are we trembling like weaklings,
 [we] who came across all the mountains?
 [Shall . . .] . . . before us
 [. . .] shall we see the light?”
 “My [fr]iend knows what a combat is,
 he who has seen the battle has no fear of death!
 You have been smeared [with blood], you have no fear of death!
 [Be] furious, like a prophet (*āpilum*) g[lo into f]renzy!¹⁷
 Let [your] s[hout] boom loud [lik]e a kettledrum!
 [Le]t stiffness leave your arm, let debility depart [from] your [!]oins!”¹⁸

¹⁴ CAD M/1 115–16.

¹⁵ Cf. *97, lines i 41–2: “Afterwards my brothers went out of their senses (*immaḥûma*) doing everything that is displeasing to the gods and mankind”; IV R 28:59: “the small and the great alike go into a frenzy” (*šeḥru imahḥi rabû imahḥi*; cf. Joel 3:1); BWL 38:21: “Like one who has gone mad and forgotten his lord” (*ana ša imḥû belšu imšû*).

¹⁶ Cf. SBP 72:5–6: “the city raves in lamentations” (*ālu immaḥḥû ina lallarāti*).

¹⁷ Line 42: [*kim*]ilma kī āpilimma šun[ni ṭē]nka.

¹⁸ *135p = SB Gilg. V manuscripts H₂ (= K 8591) and ff. (= T. 1447), lines 39–44; see Al-Rawi and George 2014: 78–9.

This passage suggests that the altered state of consciousness of a prophet (*āpilum*) was taken for granted, and since the ecstasy of the prophet was interpreted as being due to a divine intervention, the same connotation may be heard here, especially since Gilgameš a little later turns to Šamaš, receiving the divine answer: “Fear not, stand against him!”¹⁹

The expression denoting the altered state of consciousness is *šanû tēmu*, which means “to change one’s consciousness.” This phrase is used in a prophetic context in a Hellenistic text to be discussed later in this section,²⁰ but it is also known from *Enuma eliš*, where its subject is Tiamat who is being compared to a prophet: “She became like a prophet, she changed her consciousness.”²¹ The word *tēmu* means, among other things, “reason” and “intelligence,” and with the verb *šanû* it either denotes changing one’s mind or becoming mad;²² hence, the expression *šanû tēmu* offers a semantic equivalent to the verb *maḥû*, giving an even better idea of what is thought to happen when a prophet acquires the proper state of mind: his consciousness is changed.

Gilgameš and *Enuma eliš* are not the only texts associating prophets with ecstatic behavior. In a prayer to Nabû, an acrostic poem well comparable with biblical psalms, the humble speaker describes his life:

I invoked you, Nabû—accept me, o mighty one!
 I have humbled myself among the people, I have abased myself to the ground.
 I became affected like a prophet, what I do not know I bring forth
 (*allapit kīma maḥḥê ša lā īdu ūbal*).
 I have invoked gods, (being) thoroughly pious.²³

The speaker describes himself as being “hit,” or “struck,” or “affected” (*lapātu*), as the result of which he brings forth things that are not emerging from his own consciousness. The prayer captures in a nutshell what prophecy is all about, combining the altered state of consciousness with the prophet’s role as an inspired intermediary. The speaker’s “prophetic” state of mind is positioned liminally between the gods invoked and other people among whom he has humbled himself, which may reflect something of the prophets’ social position in the surrounding community.

In the Neo-Assyrian commentary on *Šumma izbu*, a series of birth omens, the prophets are equated with “possessed men”:

Prophetesses (*maḥḥiātum*) will seize the land = possessed people (*šēḥu*) will seize the land.
 Prophets (*maḥḥû*) = possessed men (*šēḥānu*).²⁴

¹⁹ Al-Rawi and George 2014: line 97: *ē taplaḥ izizzaššu*.

²⁰ *134, line B r. 26.

²¹ *Enuma eliš* iv 88: *maḥḥūtiš itemi ušanni tēnša*.

²² See CAD T 95–6 sub *tēmu* 5c–d. ²³ *118b; cf. Haldar 1945: 25.

²⁴ *128. The word *šēḥu* means “wind,” also referring to a spirit possessing someone; see CAD Š/2: 266 and cf. Haldar 1945: 23; De Zorzi 2014: 383, 640.

Similar equations are made by several Old Babylonian and Neo-Assyrian lexical lists, repeatedly associating prophets with people like *zabbu* “frenzied,” *kalû* “chanter,” *munambû* “lamentation singer,” *lallaru* “wailer,” *assinnu* and *kurgarrû* “man-woman”—all devotees of Ištar with appearance and conduct noticeably different from the average citizen; for example:

la-bar	=	<i>kalû</i>	“chanter”
gala.maḥ	=	<i>kalamāḥu</i> (šU-ḥu)	“chief chanter”
i-lu-di	=	<i>munambû</i>	“lamentation singer”
i-lu-a-li	=	<i>lallaru</i>	“wailer”
lú.gub-ba	=	<i>maḥḥû</i>	“prophet”
lú.ní-zu-ub	=	<i>zabbu</i>	“frenzied”
kur-gar-ra	=	<i>kurgarrû</i> (šU-u)	“man-woman”
ur-sal	=	<i>assinnu</i>	“man-woman”
lú.giš.bala-šu-du ₇	=	<i>nāš pilaqqi</i>	“carrier of spindle” ²⁵

Thanks to these and other similar²⁶ documents, we are not dependent on etymology alone when tracing the image of the Mesopotamian prophets. The etymological and lexical examination makes the prophets appear as proclaimers of divine words associated with cult performers, practitioners of non-inductive divination, and people whose more or less non-standard behavior, perhaps perceived as “queer” by the majority of the population, corresponded to their roles in the religious community.

The way the lexical lists associate the prophets with other people performing in the context of worship can be taken as indicative of their socio-religious setting. This is also strongly supported by most tangible evidence provided by ritual texts from Mari, belonging to the ritual of Ištar which was the annual highpoint of the ritual calendar.²⁷ According to two texts describing this royal ceremony,²⁸ even prophets and prophetesses feature prominently in it, together with musicians. According to one of these texts, when the king enters the temple and takes his position, the musicians first strike up “ú-ru am-ma-da-ru-bi,” a Sumerian canonical city lamentation.²⁹ After this, the prophet is supposed

²⁵ *124. The designation *nāš pilaqqi* is equal to *assinnu* and *kurgarrû*.

²⁶ Similar lists include **120, 125, 126, 135l, 135m, 135n, 135q. Cf. the decree of expenditures from Mari (*55/59): “1 ordinary garment for Yadida ‘the crazy woman’ (*lillatum*), 1 ordinary garment for Ea-maši, prophet of Itur-Mer, 1 ordinary garment for Šarrum-dari, the chanter.” Note that the prophet is mentioned in association with a woman, whose title *lillatum* probably designates ecstatic behavior, and with a chanter comparable to *kalû*.

²⁷ See Lafont 1999: 67.

²⁸ **51, 52; see Durand and Guichard 1997; Ziegler 2007: 55–64.

²⁹ Probably identical with the canonical lamentation “ú-ru àm-ma-ir-ra-bi” (cf. Civil 1974: 95), for which see Wasserman and Gabbay 2006: 69–84; Groneberg 1997: 291–303.

to prophesy and, if he is able to fulfill his task, another canonical lamentation, “mà-e ú-re-mén,”³⁰ is sung. However:

If by the end of the mo[nth] the prophet (*muḥḥûm*) maintains his equili[brium] (*ištaqa[lma]*) and is not a[ble] t[o] prophes[y] when it is time for [the chant] “mà-e ú-re-m[én],” the temple officials let the m[usicians] go. If he pro[phesies] (*im[mahḥima]*), [they strike up] “mà-e ú-re-m[én].”³¹

To all appearances, the verb *šaḳālum* denotes an unaltered state of mind, a “sober” condition that does not allow for a proper prophetic performance.³² If the prophet “maintains his equilibrium” (*ištaqa*), that is, fails to achieve the altered state of mind necessary for prophesying, when it is time for another lamentation, the music is not performed and the musicians can go. In the other text, the female prophets and the musicians come before the goddess, and there is, again, interplay between prophesying and lamentation, but the text is too poorly preserved to yield a clear idea of what actually is supposed to happen.³³ According to a possible reading, if the women prophets are not able to prophesy, the musicians cover for them by singing a lamentation; in any case, they are not sent away as in the previous case.

The two texts allow several implications concerning the prophetic performance. (1) Prophets, male and female alike, are supposed to prophesy during a ritual celebration. However, (2) it is taken for granted that they are not necessarily able to do so. This can be interpreted as a kind of “randomizing” feature in the prophetic performance, indicating that the required state of consciousness is not a matter of course but depends on something that is not in the performers’ own control.³⁴ Furthermore, (3) the temporal modifier “by the end of the month” is too imprecise to point at the very moment allotted to the prophet’s performance in the ritual, and rather suggests that the prophetic state of consciousness was expected to last in some form for a certain period of time—if not as an enduring state of ecstasy, then at least as some kind of a “standby” position that precludes the actual ecstatic performance.³⁵ (4) The

³⁰ The *mà-e ú-re-mén* is probably identical with the Sumerian canonical lamentation *me-e ur-re-mèn*; see Durand and Guichard 1997: 50.

³¹ *51, lines 21–7; for the restoration and translation, see Durand and Guichard 1997: 54, 58.

³² See Durand 1988: 386–7.

³³ *52, lines 4–13: “When the musicians have entered before her, the prophetesses [. . .] and the mu[sicians]. Whe[n the prophetesses] main[tain their equilibrium], two m[usicians . . . enter] the [. . .]. [They sing] an *eršemmakum* before [the goddess for Enlil?].” This translation is based on the restorations of Durand and Guichard 1997: 60.

³⁴ For “randomizing” features, see Maurizio 1995: 81–3. The term “resistance” has also been used in a similar meaning (see R. Parker 2000: 78–9).

³⁵ I. M. Lewis 1989: 39 notes that “in many cultures where possession by a spirit is the main or sole interpretation of trance, possession may be diagnosed long before the actual state of trance has been reached.”

prophets are not themselves introduced as musicians but perform in interplay with them. That their performance is preceded by music may suggest that the music was supposed to trigger or intensify the state of mind necessary for uttering a prophecy.³⁶ Alternatively, the prophecy and the music may together have formed a kind of liturgical *alternatim*, the music responding to the divine word uttered by the prophet and becoming useless without it. (5) Prophecy coincides with lamentation, which may be taken both as an indication of the specific quality of the laments as triggers of the prophetic utterance, and of its presumed contents.³⁷ It is noteworthy in this ritual context that the “*úru àm-ma-ir-ra-bi*” (also known in an Akkadian translation) is a lament cried out by the goddess Inanna/Ištar who is distressed over her destroyed city.³⁸ As mouthpieces of the goddess, the prophets are probably supposed to commiserate with her agony—something that also belonged to the role of other personnel listed in the above-mentioned word-lists, such as the lamentation singers and the persons with unconventional gender roles.³⁹

Further evidence suggesting that the associations made in the lexical lists are not coincidental can be found in a Neo-Assyrian ritual text where prophets and prophetesses feature together with ecstasies:

[For the s]hepherd boys of Dumuzi you shall place a confection; for the frenzied men and women (*ana zabbī zabbāti*) and for the male and female prophets (*maḥḥê u maḥḥūti*) you shall place seven pieces of bread. Then let the sick person recite the following to Ištar: (...).⁴⁰

The context of this passage is a ritual that takes place on the twenty-ninth day of the month of Tammuz, “when Ištar makes the people of the land wail over Dumuzi, her beloved,” to be performed for a person seized by the spirit of a dead person, a demon, or any other evil thing.⁴¹ The ritual involves substantial food offerings, and also some music, to judge from the wind instruments dedicated to Dumuzi. The only thing that is said about the role of the prophets in this ritual is that they are there together with “shepherd boys of Dumuzi”—that is, cult functionaries who intercede on behalf of the sick one—and frenzied men and women (*zabbu* and *zabbatu*). The prophets receive their

³⁶ Cf. the case of Elisha in the Hebrew Bible (2 Kgs 3:12–19); for comparable examples in Greece, see Johnston 2008: 49–50; among shamans, see Jakobsen 1999: 12.

³⁷ Note that in a Neo-Assyrian lament over a king, someone “wail[ed] like a prophet” (*akī maḥḥê idm[umu]*), which gives the impression that prophets could have been seen as uttering lamentations themselves (*118h, line 5; see Livingstone 1989: 52–3). Supposing that the wailing should be considered a musical performance, we might have here a Neo-Assyrian case in which music and prophecy are linked (cf. Stöckl 2012a: 214 for the absence of evidence).

³⁸ See Charpin 1986: 451; Wasserman and Gabbay 2006: 70, 77.

³⁹ Cf. Parpola 1997: xxxiv.

⁴⁰ *118, lines 30–2; cf. Farber 1977: 142:59; cf. 140:31.

⁴¹ See Farber 1977: 128–62.

share of the offerings and are present when the sick person begins to recite his prayer to Ištar. The performative role of the prophets and ecstasies must be extracted by reading between the lines, but it is probably to mediate the healing power of the goddess and to intercede on behalf of the sick person. The ritual context also suggests that the prophets' performance interplays with that of musicians and has to do with Ištar's wailing over Tammuz. Transmission of divine words by the prophets and other ecstasies is not mentioned here.

Actual reports on prophetic performances can be found in letters to King Zimri-Lim of Mari referring to prophetic proclamation situations:

In the temple of Annunitum, on the 3rd day, Šelebum went to frenzy (*immaḥḥu*) and said: "Thus says Annunitum: (...)"⁴²

In the temple of Annunitum in the city, Ahatum, a servant girl (*šuḥartu*) of Dagan-Malik went into frenzy (*immaḥḥima*) and spoke: (...)"⁴³

[On that day] Irra-gamil [went into fr]enzy ([*imma*]ḥēm). [This is what] he said: (...)"⁴⁴

As demonstrated by these examples, the verb *maḥû* introduces a direct divine speech which indicates that it semantically encompasses both aspects of the oral performance of the prophet, that is, the distinct behavior and the act of speech. As such, it implies more than the more usual introductory formula "a prophet(ess) (NN) arose (*itbi*) and spoke."⁴⁵ The verbs *maḥû* and *tebû* never coincide, which raises the question whether they denote different kinds of prophetic performance; however, there is nothing in the texts to suggest that this is the case. The oracles introduced with *maḥû* are no more "frantic" than those with *tebû*, neither is there any indication of a different behavior of the prophet in the proclamation situation. Hence the two verbs may simply be taken as two different ways of expressing the same thing. At any rate, it is noteworthy that in two of the three cases, the performance is said to have taken place in the temple context, and one of the prophets is Šelebum, well known as a gender-neutral person, an *assinnu*.

An analogous Neo-Assyrian case may be found in the letter of Nabû-reḥtu-ušur to Esarhaddon, reporting an intriguing case from the Western part of the Assyrian empire:

A slave girl (*amtu*) of Bel-aḥu-ušur [...] upon [...] on the ou[tski]rts of H[arran]; since the month of Sivan she is enraptured (?) (*sarḥat*) and speaks a good word about him: "This is the word of Nusku: The kingship is for Saš! I will destroy the name and seed of Sennacherib!" Let your squadron commander question the

⁴² *23, lines 5–7.

⁴³ *24, lines 6–7.

⁴⁴ *33, lines 12–14.

⁴⁵ *3, line 6; *5, line 7; *14, line 5; *19, line 7; *25, lines 15–21; *29, line 5; *42, line 23.

household of Bel-aḫu-uṣur under the main gate of the Nabû-temple. Let the *ša šēpi* guards who brought the slave girl into the house of Sasî bring her here, and let the king [...] perform a(n extispicy) ritual on her account. Let them bring Bel-aḫu-uṣur from Harran and [...] Nusku. May the name and seed of Sasî, Bel-aḫu-uṣur and their accomplices perish. May Bel and Nabû establish the name and seed of the king, my lord, until far-off days!⁴⁶

This text is more difficult to interpret, especially because the word *sarḫat* is otherwise unknown in the Akkadian language. If it can be interpreted as a feminine stative form of a verb corresponding to the Syriac *šrh* “to rage,” the Aph’el form of which has the meanings “to ravish, enrapture, fascinate, captivate,”⁴⁷ it can be understood as referring to the altered state of consciousness of the woman speaking on behalf of the god Nusku, hence providing an Aramaic-based equivalent for the Akkadian *maḫû*. That the behavior thus designated had gone on “since the month of Sivan” indicates that she had been seen in the respective state of mind for quite some time, not only on one single occasion. Furthermore, it is reasonable to assume that the place where she delivered her “good word” is the temple of cedar erected by Esarhaddon “on the outskirts of Harran” when he was on his way to conquer Egypt.⁴⁸ If these assumptions are correct, the presentation of the performance of the Syrian slave girl is closely reminiscent of that of her cognates at Mari, the difference being that from the point of view of the informer, her performance was to be judged as a pseudo-prophecy.

Our last cuneiform example derives from a much later period. The astronomical diary concerning events that happened in Babylonia in the month of Tishri of the year 133 BCE gives an account of a prophetic performance that adds important aspects to what is discernible from the texts discussed above. The pertinent passage of the diary begins as follows:

In that month, a man belonging to the Boatman family became posse[sse]d and changed his consciousness (*ittasb[atamm]a tēnzu išnima*). [...] A dais that lies between the temple of Sin, Egišnugal, and the gate [of *Marduk*...] He placed a food offering upon it and delivered a good message to the people: “Bel has entered Babylon!” The [people], men and women alike, came and placed food offerings on that dais and, opposite to that dais, ate, drank, rejoiced and made merry.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ *115, lines r. 2–10. For discussion of this text, see “Prophets and Kings: Ancient Near East” in Chapter 7 in this volume.

⁴⁷ See Payne Smith 1998: 598.

⁴⁸ *118f; see Parpola 1983: 100–1; Uehlinger 1997: 316–18; Nissinen 1998a: 123–4; de Jong 2007: 183, 400–2.

⁴⁹ *134, lines B r. 25–9; AD 3–132 B r. 25–7; see Nissinen 2002b; del Monte 1997: 126–7; Sachs and Hunger 1996: 216–19.

Again, we are told about a prophet—Mr Boatman presents himself as a “messenger (*mār šipri*) of Nanaya”⁵⁰—who makes a public appearance in the context of worship, first in the city of Babylon, and later on in Borsippa. Unlike the documents discussed above that never refer to the origin of the prophets’ characteristic behavior, this text states unambiguously that the prophet was possessed (*šabātu*)—by what or by whom is not indicated, but Nanaya as the oracular deity suggests herself as the most probable candidate. As a result of the possession, his state of consciousness is said to have been changed; the phrase *ṭēnzu išni*⁵¹ is the same that was used already in Gilgamesh and Enuma eliš discussed earlier in this section. That the religious authorities call the prophet a “hothead” (*šābibannu*),⁵² certainly insinuating how he was appreciated by those who were less convinced by him than the people of Babylon and Borsippa, is probably indicative of his comportment.

Moving from Mesopotamia to the West Semitic milieu, we can return to the long-known event that Wenamon the Egyptian reported to have happened to him in the Phoenician city of Byblos. In this assumed *locus classicus* of the “Canaanite” background of the “Israelite” prophecy, Wenamon relates that when the ruler of Byblos, who had repelled him and told him to leave the harbor, was offering to his gods,

the god (Amon) seized a great seer from among his great seers, and he caused him to be in an ecstatic state, and he said to him: “Bring up the god! Bring the messenger who bears him! It is Amon who has sent him. He is the one who has caused that he come.”⁵³

In the light of the cuneiform evidence we have at our disposal today, Wenamon’s report makes perfect sense, although there is nothing specifically “Canaanite” about the prophetic performance experienced by him. A prophet, that is, a mediator of the divine word, becomes seized by the deity and delivers the divine message to a ruler in the context of worship in a temple—all this is familiar to us from cuneiform sources.⁵⁴ That such an episode is said by an Egyptian to have happened to him in Phoenicia is an important piece of evidence, and not only because it is written in the eleventh century BCE, an otherwise dimly visible corner in the historical landscape of prophecy. Whatever “really” happened in Byblos, Wenamon’s report tells us how an Egyptian writer would have interpreted a prophetic performance, and the way he does it is

⁵⁰ *134, lines l.e. 1, 3.

⁵¹ The word *ṭēnzu* is a Late Babylonian phonetic variant of *tēmšu*.

⁵² *134, line l.e. 4: “Do not listen to the words of that hothead.”

⁵³ *142, lines 1:38–40; Translation by Robert K. Ritner in Nissinen 2003a: 220. For a translation of the whole report, see Wente 2003; for a study of the text, see Schipper 2005.

⁵⁴ Cf. already Jepsen 1934: 144: “Bedeutsam ist einmal, daß das Gotteswort dem Jüngling während eines (ekstatischen?) Tanzes zuteil wird; zweitens, daß es während eines Opfers erfolgt und endlich, daß der Prophet sich an einem Königshofe befindet.”

compatible in every respect with the cuneiform evidence he could not possibly have been familiar with. This speaks for a common, long-term Near Eastern understanding of divine–human communication by means of prophetic activity.

While the texts discussed so far demonstrate that prophetic performances were commonly associated with a characteristic behavior in different parts of the ancient Near East, there are virtually no descriptions in the above-mentioned sources to indicate how the required state of mind was achieved and what actually happened when the prophets prophesied. An intriguing hint at the prophets' behavior is given by the Middle Babylonian "Righteous Sufferer" text found at Ugarit (*122) and dating roughly to the same period as the Report of Wenamon. In this text, the distressed speaker says that his brothers "bathe in their blood like prophets (*kīma maḥḥê*)."⁵⁵ This brings into mind the association of the prophets with people like *assinnu* and *kurgarrû*, "carriers of spindle" and other specialists of ritual lamentation in the lexical lists discussed above, placing the prophets on a par with the devotees of Ištar whose ritual performances included battle scenes⁵⁶ and has also been interpreted as involving self-mutilation.⁵⁷ There were demonstrably *assinnus* among the prophets of Mari,⁵⁸ which makes their participation in such kind of bloody performances possible—whether always, everywhere, and by every prophet, is another question.

A further indication of a possible method of achieving the state of mind required for prophesying in a completely different context can be found in the letter of Queen Šibtu of Mari to her husband:

Concerning the campaign my lord is planning, I gave drink to male and female persons to inquire about signs.⁵⁹ The oracle is extremely favorable to my lord. Likewise, I inquired of male and female about Išme-Dagan. The oracle is unfavorable to him.⁶⁰

...

⁵⁵ *122; cf. Roberts 1970 (= 2002: 102–3).

⁵⁶ For the battle scenes and the martial role of the *assinnu*, see Zsolnay 2013.

⁵⁷ Self-mutilation as another way of emulating Ištar's suffering has been suggested by Parpola 1997: xxxiv, xcvi–xcvii.

⁵⁸ i.e. the *assinnus* Šelebum (**7, 8, and 23) and Ili-ḥaznaya (*22); see Huffmon 2004. There are also three Assyrian prophets whose gender is somehow unclear: Issar-la-tašiyat (SAA 9 1.1 i 28 = *68), Bayâ (SAA 9 1.4 ii 40 = *71), and Ilussa-amur (SAA 9 1.5 iii 5–6 = *72); see "Gender and Human Agency" in Chapter 8 in this volume.

⁵⁹ Lit. "The signs, male and female, I gave to drink, making an inquiry." The two verbs *ašqi aštalma* constitute an asyndetic construction, indicating that the inquiry is made by giving drink to the persons in question (Wilcke 1983). It is not quite clear to whom the drink is given. Durand 1982: 43–4 takes *ittâtim zikâram u sinništam* as the object, thus interpreting the male and female persons as signs. Sasson 1994: 308 reckons with a double accusative: "I gave male and female the signs to drink," thus assuming that the drink itself contains the signs to be rendered into understandable oracles by the ones who drink it (cf. *18, lines 11–25).

⁶⁰ *17, lines 3–10. Išme-Dagan was the king of Ekallatum in Assyria and an enemy of Zimri-Lim.

Perhaps my lord would s[ay] this: “She has [made them speak] by fraudulent means.” But [I did] not make [them] speak anything. They speak voluntarily—they could resi[st] as well!⁶¹

The same divinatory technique is mentioned also in another letter of Šibtu.⁶² Well imaginable as it would be, it is not certain whether the drink is alcoholic⁶³ or otherwise intoxicating; in any case, the men and women in question are affected by it (or by the hospitality of Šibtu⁶⁴) to the extent that they utter the inquired oracles. Interestingly, however, Šibtu is prepared to be accused that she had obtained the oracle in an inappropriate way; this gives the impression that her method of soliciting divine words was unusual and therefore under suspicion.

Unspecific as the sources are about the particulars of the characteristic behavior of the prophets, one should beware of sweeping generalizations concerning the nature of prophetic performances.⁶⁵ What matters more is that, in whatever way the altered state of consciousness manifested itself to those who witnessed it, it was recognized as such and was given an interpretation compatible with the common understanding of divine–human communication. Expressions denoting the characteristic behavior of the prophets like the verb *maḥû* imply the “change of consciousness” in the first place, allowing only a faint idea of the particular method of acquiring the required state of mind. The texts seem to presuppose that the persons in question, whether servant girls or cultic functionaries, assumed a specific role in which they were acknowledged as capable of becoming mouthpieces of the divine; as says Richard D. Nelson on biblical prophets: “The audience of a biblical prophet would need to be convinced of the authenticity of that prophet’s divine communication and encouraged to listen to and act on it.”⁶⁶ This leads us to the question of ecstasy in the prophetic performance as it appears in the Hebrew Bible.

PROPHETIC ECSTASY IN THE HEBREW BIBLE

Gustav Hölscher and Bernhard Duhm have argued already that the Hebrew prophets gave their oracles in an ecstatic state and subsequently wrote them

⁶¹ *17, lines 35–8, reading *imtaḥa[sū]*; cf. Durand 1988: 435: “Certains parlent, d’autres résistent.” Moran 1969: 47 reads *imtaḥa[rū]*: “On their own they speak, on their [own] they agre[e].”

⁶² *22, lines 1–2: “[Concern]ing Babyl[on] I inquired about the matter by giving signs to drink (*ašqi aštalma*).”

⁶³ Thus Durand 1982: 48–9.

⁶⁴ Thus Wilcke 1983.

⁶⁵ Adam 2009: 34, having discussed most of the material presented above, finds only a “very limited” testimony of prophetic ecstasy in them; in my own estimation, the evidence is rather comprehensive. However, I share Adam’s criticism against lumping Biblical prophecy too easily together with what is imagined as “ecstatic prophecy” in the ancient Near East.

⁶⁶ Nelson 2004: 116.

down. The conviction that ecstatic behavior formed an essential part of the performance of the prophets was shared by a number of scholars,⁶⁷ and it could be corroborated with further evidence, both from the cultural environment of the biblical writings and from historical analogies in different cultures. A Canaanite origin of ecstatic prophecy, or “Nabutum,” in Israel was suggested by Alfred Jepsen;⁶⁸ Alfred Haldar was well ahead of his time in investigating impressive comparative evidence from Mesopotamia, including the texts later known as Assyrian prophecies;⁶⁹ and another Swedish scholar, Johannes Lindblom, discussed prophecy in ancient Israel extensively from the perspective of supernatural experiences, drawing on ancient Near Eastern as well as on more modern analogies.⁷⁰ Many biblical scholars have ever since viewed the biblical prophets’ performance, in all its variability, against the backdrop of the ancient Near Eastern texts and modern anthropological evidence,⁷¹ even though not all of them have been willing to see the “classical” Hebrew prophets involved in ecstatic behavior.⁷²

The possessive aspect of prophetic activity is strongly suggested by the Hebrew Bible, and there is no need to view this kind of prophecy as an early phenomenon influenced by the so-called “Canaanites.”⁷³ Attempts to make a distinction between the “sober” ecstasy of the biblical prophets and the more frantic, or “orgiastic,” ecstasy elsewhere are arbitrary at best.⁷⁴ Different types of ecstasy can certainly be recognized and differences between biblical and other accounts can be shown, but no general dividing line between biblical and extrabiblical prophets can be drawn in this respect.

Many prophets of Yahweh, in fact, engage in ecstatic behavior in the Hebrew Bible, making spirit journeys and seeing heavenly things (2 Kgs 5:26; 6:17; Ezek 3:12–15; 8; 11; 37:1–14; 40–8; cf. Paul in 2 Cor. 12:1–5). Just like in the Near East, presence in the divine council—hardly typical of the regular state of mind—or at least knowledge of its decisions is required of a true prophet in several biblical texts (1 Kgs 22:19–23; Isa. 6; Jer. 23:16–22; Amos 3:7).⁷⁵ Seeing visions, which

⁶⁷ See, e.g. Robinson 1923; cf. the critical review of Rowley 1945.

⁶⁸ Jepsen 1934: 144–8. ⁶⁹ Haldar 1945: 21–9 and *passim*.

⁷⁰ Lindblom 1934; 1973. Lindblom discusses “primitive prophecy” (shamanism and the Arab *kahins*), Mohammed, the sleeping preachers in Finland, and St Birgitta of Sweden.

⁷¹ For more recent treatments of the subject, see Fenton 1997, 2001; Grabbe 1995, 2000; Wilson 1996; Blenkinsopp 1995: 134–8; Michaelsen 1989.

⁷² A decidedly non-ecstatic interpretation of the biblical prophets’ revelatory experiences was presented by Seierstad 1965: 70–81, 156–83; cf., from different angles, André 1982; S. B. Parker 1978.

⁷³ Thus Hölscher 1914 and Jepsen 1934; cf. Lindblom 1958.

⁷⁴ I agree with Lester Grabbe (1995: 110), according to whom such distinctions “seem nothing but willful attempts to bolster a partisan view of the ‘classical’ Israelite”; Grabbe hereby criticizes the views of André 1982 and S. B. Parker 1978.

⁷⁵ The divine council plays a role in the Deir Alla inscription (*138), in some letters from Mari (**6, 18), in the oracle from Ešnunna (*66), and in several Neo-Assyrian texts (**94, 101, 110, 112, 118a).

is one of the basic methods of obtaining a prophetic message (cf. Ezek. 1; 10; Amos 7:1–9; 8:1–3; 9:1–4; Zech. 1–6), certainly requires an altered state of mind; for instance, the communication of Zechariah with the Interpreting Angel can hardly be explained otherwise.⁷⁶ No qualitative difference can be made between biblical and extrabiblical, or Israelite and non-Israelite, prophets: “[i]f Ezekiel does not have ecstatic experiences, then we have no criteria to judge that *anyone* of antiquity had such experiences.”⁷⁷ Ezekiel’s ecstasy is repeatedly expressed by the phrase “the hand of Yahweh was upon me/him,” introducing the prophet’s visions and spirit journeys.⁷⁸ The same expression is used of Elisha when he prophesies while a musician is playing in 2 Kings 3:15.

Another aspect of the divine possession of the prophets can be seen in their God-given privilege to indulge in extravagant behavior like Isaiah’s going naked for three years (Isa. 20:1–6) or Ezekiel’s unusual carryings-on (Ezek. 4–6; 12; 24:15–27). Even Jeremiah’s celibacy (Jer. 16:1–9) and Hosea’s marriage with the woman of bad reputation (Hos. 1), even though not implying an element of ecstasy, can be viewed as a kind of enduring state of living under God’s “hand.” Symbolic acts like these are not so well known from ancient Near Eastern documents—what comes to mind is the prophet eating raw lamb in front of the city gate in a letter from Mari⁷⁹—and they have usually not been classified as instances of ecstasy. In modern times, such performances might cause the person in question to be sent to a lunatic asylum; for contemporaries, however, they were meant to signify divine possession.

The Hebrew root *nbʾ*, which derives from the noun *nābīʾ*, is not etymologically related to an altered state of consciousness but corresponds to the Semitic root *nby* that denotes calling or naming.⁸⁰ While the noun denotes a person who has been called by God and/or speaks on God’s behalf, the denominative verb, attested only in the reflexive verbal stems Niphʾal (*nibbāʾ*) and Hithpaʾel (*hitnabbēʾ*), primarily means acting as a *nābīʾ*, that is, prophesying. The majority of occurrences of the verb, especially in the Niphʾal form, refer to the prophetic performance of, for example, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Amos, at least seemingly without specifically ecstatic implications.⁸¹ The same verb in both forms can also be used negatively for prophesying or other

⁷⁶ See Tiemeyer 2015: 45–57. ⁷⁷ Grabbe 1995: 110; cf. Anthonioz 2013: 204–8.

⁷⁸ Ezek. 1:3; 3:14, 22; 8:1; 33:22; 37:1; 40:1.

⁷⁹ *16, lines 5–24; for this text, see, e.g. Heintz 1997b: 202–12 (= 2015: 81–9).

⁸⁰ For the etymology and grammatical analysis of Hebrew *nābīʾ* and Akkadian *nabûm*, see H.-P. Müller 1998: 130–5 (passive/ergative verbal adjective: “one who is called”); Fenton 1997: 34–6 (“speaker”); Fleming 1993a (“one who invokes god”).

⁸¹ e.g. Jer. 11:21; 19:14; 20:1; 25:13, 30; 26:9, 12, 18, 20; 28:8–9; 32:3; Ezek. 6:2; 12:27; 21:2, 7, 14, 19, 33; 25:2; 28:21; 29:2; 30:2; 34:2; 35:2; 36:1, 3, 6; 37:4, 9, 10, 12; 38:14, 17; 39:1; Amos 2:12; 3:8; 7:12–16 (*nibbāʾ*); 2 Chr. 20:37; Jer. 26:20 (*hitnabbēʾ*).

divinatory performances presented in a negative but not necessarily ecstatic light by the text's implied author or protagonists.⁸²

On the other hand, the use of the root *nb'* is quite often related to performances implying ecstatic behavior and an altered state of mind.⁸³ When Samuel prepares Saul for him to meet the prophets of Gebah, he says: "The Spirit of Yahweh (*rûāḥ YHWH*) will come upon you, and you will prophesy (*hitnabbîṭā*) with them; and you will be changed into a different person" (1 Sam. 10:6). And so it happens: on his way to Gibeah, Saul meets a band of prophets, the spirit of God (*rûāḥ 'ēlohim*) falls upon him and he "prophesies" (*yitnabbē*) together with them (v. 10); this gives rise to the saying: "Is Saul also among the prophets?" (v. 12). Later on, when Saul sends his men to Ramah to look for David who has escaped Saul's aggression, they encounter a band of prophets led by Samuel, falling into a prophetic frenzy (*yitnabbē'û*) with them. The same happens to two further commandos sent by Saul, until he himself goes to Ramah and the spirit of God comes upon him and he, once again, "prophesies" before Samuel, strips off his clothes and lies naked all that day and the following night (1 Sam. 19:19–24). The verb *hitnabbē*' does not seem to imply any kind of transmission of divine words, but is used for Saul's ecstatic comportment,⁸⁴ which is nevertheless enough for the audience to identify Saul among the prophets.

While the editors of the Deuteronomistic History incorporate an account of such prophets in their composition without hesitation, it may be debated to what extent Saul's frantic behavior and his association with the prophetic groups reflects an appreciation of such activity, or rather instigates the prelude of his ultimate failure.⁸⁵ Regardless of their attitudes, however, the origin of the prophetic ecstasy is seen in the spirit of God which affects the people's minds; it can be even an evil spirit sent by God, as the one tormenting Saul when David was playing the lyre to sooth his mind and almost got killed (1 Sam. 18:10–11). In this context, *hitnabbē*' does certainly not imply any kind of transmission of divine messages or other intermediary functions but expressly indicates unusual behavior, leaving the reader

⁸² Jer. 2:8; 5:31; 14:14, 16; 20:6; 23:16, 21, 26–8, 32; 27:10, 14–16; 28:6; 29:9, 21, 31; 37:19; Ezek. 13:2, 16, 17; Zech. 13:3–4 (*nibbā*); Jer. 14:14; Ezek. 13:17 (*hitnabbē*).

⁸³ Cf. Num. 11:24–30; 1 Sam. 10:5–6, 10, 13; 18:10; 19:20, 21, 23–4; 1 Kgs 18:29; 22:10; cf. also the designation *mēšugga*' "mad" in 2 Kgs 9:11; Jer. 29:26; Hos. 9:7.

⁸⁴ See W. Dietrich 2015: 21.

⁸⁵ It is commonly assumed that the story places Saul in a favorable light; see, however, Adam 2009, according to whom *nb'* Hitp. is not primarily an expression of ecstatic behavior but refers to "behaving like a prophet" or even "pretending to prophesy." On the other hand, Nihan 2006 interprets 1 Sam. 10:5–6, 11–12(13a) as a post-Deuteronomistic Midrash legitimating the practices of such charismatic circles, while 1 Sam. 19:18–24 is a negative reaction to this; similarly, but with an earlier dating, W. Dietrich 2015: 22.

struggling with the semantic problem of how to relate this kind of “prophesying” to prophesying in general.

If possessive behavior associated with prophecy in the stories on Saul has a somewhat suspicious connotation, this does not mean that it is meant to be understood in negative terms in general. Quite the contrary, the state of being possessed by the spirit (*in-spiratio*) is presented as the precondition for prophesying even elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible: in Third Isaiah (Isa. 61:1), Ezekiel (Ezek. 2:2 etc.), and Micha (Mic. 3:8)—and beyond: Jesus quotes Isaiah referring to himself in Luke 4:14–20, and in the great Psalms scroll from Qumran, King David the musician (cf. 11Q5 XXVIII 4 [= Ps. 151:2]) is said to have composed his works “through prophecy” (*nēbū’ā*) under the influence of “a discerning and enlightened spirit” from God (11Q5 XXVII 4, 11; cf. 2 Sam 23:2).⁸⁶

In Numbers 11:24–30, Moses complains to God about his heavy burden of leadership, and God promises to take some of the spirit he had given to Moses and put it on seventy elders chosen from among the people. The elders gather at the tent, and while the spirit rests upon them, they prophesy (*yitnabbē’ū*). Two men called Eldad and Medad who had remained in the camp continue prophesying even after the other elders have ceased to do so. The elders’ performance is not described as the same kind of rapturous prophetic frenzy Saul fell into; rather, “the prophesying of the elders laconically told in Numbers 11 was believed to have consisted of a vision, the contents of which are no longer accessible to us, which enabled the elders to stand alongside Moses, to receive revelation in concert with him, and to bear with him the burden of governing the Israelites.”⁸⁷ Unlike Saul’s frenzy, the elders’ “prophesying” has an intermediary function; however, it is presented as something unusual and exasperating as is suggested by Joshua’s request to Moses to make Eldad and Medad stop prophesying, provoking the answer: “Would that all Yahweh’s people were prophets, and that Yahweh would put his spirit on them!” (v. 28–9). However ironically this comment of Moses may be understood, this is exactly what is promised in the eschatological prophecy in Joel 3:1–2: “Then afterwards I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions.”

Saul’s frenzy in 1 Samuel 10 is accompanied by music, perhaps the same way as we have seen musicians of Mari responding to the performances of the prophets. Music, in fact, is several times associated with prophecy in the

⁸⁶ For David as a prophet in the Dead Sea Scrolls, see Flint 2005; Lim 2010. For the biblical (Neh. 6:12; 2 Chr. 9:29; Sir. 46:1; Ezra 6:14 [Aram.]), and post-biblical occurrences of the word *nēbū’ā* “prophecy,” see Hurvitz 2014: 176–8.

⁸⁷ Levison 2003: 518.

Hebrew Bible. These few instances do not turn the prophets into musicians, but they are not purely coincidental either, and they have not gone unnoticed by scholars.⁸⁸

Two of the five biblical prophetesses are said to strike up a song. Miriam, explicitly designated as a *nēbī'ā*, takes a drum and, followed by women who dance and beat the drums, she performs the song: “Sing to the Lord, for he is highly exalted; The horse and his rider he has hurled into the sea” (Exod. 15:20–1). Deborah sings her famous song together with Barak son of Abinoam (Judg. 5:2–31), although she is not called a prophet here but in another context (Judg. 4:4). Two prophets are associated with love songs: Isaiah sings one himself (Isa. 5:1–2), and Ezekiel’s caricature among his people is “no more than one who sings love songs with a beautiful voice and plays an instrument well” (Ezek. 33:32).⁸⁹ Elisha calls for a lyre player, and when the musician is playing his instrument, the hand of God comes upon Elisha (that is, he goes into a trance)—and he gives a prophecy sought by the kings of Israel and Judah (2 Kgs 3:13–20).

In Chronicles, the descendants of the Levites, Asaph, Heman, and Jedutun, are commissioned to prophesy (*hannibbē'im* Q), that is, to sing (*šir*), with lyres, harps, and cymbals while performing the temple service; men who had learned this skill are said to be no fewer in number than 288 (1 Chr. 25:1–7). It is most noteworthy that the Levitical singers’ songs of praise to God accompanied by musical instruments are equated to prophesying.⁹⁰ While the case of Saul seems to be presented by the narrator as something no longer belonging to the implied reader’s world (cf. 1 Sam. 9:12), the Chronicler’s association of music, prophecy, and temple cult not only corresponds to the Near Eastern evidence but suggests that prophetic inspiration was seen as part and parcel of the cultic performance in the Second Temple of Jerusalem.⁹¹

Divine possession seems not to be appreciated by all biblical writers, though. This is indicated by a few defamatory statements about prophets, implying a dubious attitude towards the traditional image, social role, and performative culture of the prophets, including ecstatic or otherwise extraordinary comportment. Frantic behavior is described with the root *nb'* in the case of the self-lacerating prophets of Baal subsequently massacred by Elijah (1 Kgs 18:28; cf. *122⁹²); this image of prophets may partly have triggered the

⁸⁸ Cf., e.g. Blenkinsopp 1995: 131; Schniedewind 1995: 173; cf. the comparative material presented in Haldar 1945: 118–20.

⁸⁹ For the passages of Isaiah and Ezekiel in the context of love poetry, see Dobbs-Allsopp 2015: 223–4.

⁹⁰ Note also Neh. 12:24, where the Levites are organized “to praise and to give thanks, according to the commandment of David the man of God” (*lē-ḥallel lē-hôdôt bē-mišwat Dāwīd 'iš hā'ēlōhīm*). This prophetic title for David is used only in Neh. 12:24, 36.

⁹¹ For prophecy, music, and inspiration in Chronicles, see Schniedewind 1995: 170–88.

⁹² Cf. Roberts 1970 (= 2002: 102–3).

rather disparaging description in Zechariah 13:2–6 of the prophet who is ashamed of his prophesying, claiming that he received the wounds on his chest in his friends' house. A deprecating attitude towards the prophets' ecstatic behavior is, furthermore, implied by the word *mēšugga'* ("madman") used for Jeremiah by the priest Shemaiah of Nehelam (Jer. 29:26–7) and of an anonymous prophet in Hosea 9:7. While the prophetic performance is thus described as mad, even here the prophet is called "the man of spirit" (*ʾiš hā-rūāh*).⁹³

It seems that the ecstatic element of prophecy became problematic along with the scribalization of prophecy and the prophetic ideal during the Second Temple period at the latest.⁹⁴ When the authoritative prophetic role was taken over by scribes and wisdom teachers, this happened greatly at the expense of traditional performative culture, which was more or less driven into the margins of society. The word of God was now written down, and the primary prophetic tasks were its study and interpretation. But even this was not done without the inspiration coming from God.

As prophecy became more and more equated with the study and interpretation of the Scriptures, this became a spirit-driven enterprise: "I will again pour out doctrine like prophecy, and bequeath it to future generations," says Ben Sira (Sir. 24:33),⁹⁵ who understood the task of the wise man to be the study of the Law, the prophecies, and the sayings of famous men (39:1–3). "If it is the will of the great Lord, he will be filled with a spirit of intelligence; then he will pour out wise sayings of his own and give thanks to the Lord in prayer" (39:6). This, too, is spirit possession, now happening in the *bēt midrāš* of the scribe rather than as a part of a cultic performance. Hence, we arrive at inspiration by learning, teaching, and research, which even for today's audience may be more acceptable, or at least more familiar, than the traditional type of prophetic frenzy.

Philo of Alexandria, on the other hand, describes his work in unequivocally ecstatic terms. Philo writes:

A prophet possessed by God (*theophorētos*) will suddenly appear and give prophetic oracles (*prophēteusei*). Nothing of what he says will be his own, for he that is truly under the control of divine inspiration has no power of apprehension when he speaks but serves as the channel for the insistent words of another's prompting (*dieleusetai kathaper hypoballontos heterou*). For prophets

⁹³ For Hos. 9:7 and Zech. 13:2–6, see Nissinen 2006.

⁹⁴ Fenton 2001 reckons with a "new prophecy" in Israel and Judah that distances itself from the "old" prophetic frenzy: "The new prophets transform the role of the ancient Near Eastern prophet, modifying or reacting against his traditional function and behaviour" (p. 139); cf. also Blenkinsopp 1995: 138–54. The question is whether such transformations of prophecy can really be traced back all the way to pre-exilic prophetic figures or whether it is essentially a later development.

⁹⁵ Ben Sira's view of prophecy has been analyzed by Beentjes 2006; cf. B. G. Wright 2012.

are the interpreters (*hermēneis*) of God, who makes full use of their organs of speech to set forth what he wills.⁹⁶

Philo's description of prophecy reads like a learned commentary to the line of the above-quoted prayer to Nabû (*118b) in which the speaker is "affected like a prophet," bringing forth what he does not know himself. In another context, Philo says that a prophet "has no utterance of his own, but all his utterance came from elsewhere, the echoes of another's voice." The human light is replaced by God's light, "ecstasy (*ekstasis*) and divine possession (*entheos*) and madness (*mania*) fall upon us," and only when the divine spirit departs does the human mind return to its tenancy.⁹⁷ This title only befits the wise, such as Noah, Isaac, Jacob, and Moses, and Philo explains even his own writing happening under the influence of divine possession (*hypo katokhēs entheou*), which makes him filled with "corybantic frenzy" (*korybantia*) so that he becomes unconscious of anything, even of the lines written by himself.⁹⁸

Philo would hardly have spoken of prophets possessed by God, let alone described his own work as *korybantia* without having been familiar with the tradition of prophetic spirit possession, whether through Plato (for whom see the next section of this chapter), or his Jewish education, or both.⁹⁹ Philo's description of his experience shows, among other things, that there is no reason to make a sharp universal distinction between ecstatic experience and being filled with the spirit of wisdom.

A different trajectory of traditional prophetic tradition can be seen in the strong prophetic-charismatic element in the activity of John the Baptist (Mark 1:6; cf. Zech. 13:4), and prophetic ecstasy was far from alien to early Christian communities.¹⁰⁰ Even music is not absent from the picture: Paul associates music with glossolalia and prophetic revelation (1 Cor. 14:7, 15, 26), and according to the Letter to the Ephesians, Christians should not be intoxicated by wine but filled by the Spirit, singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs (Eph. 5:18–20; cf. Col. 3:16). Without being explicitly about prophecy, this passage is reminiscent of the Levite singers prophesying by means of music and singing "thanks and praise to the Lord" in 1 Chronicles 25:1–7.

That prophetic ecstasy was appreciated already in the earliest Christian communities can be seen in the letters of Paul, especially in 1 Corinthians 12–14, where he prefers prophecy for glossolalia. Paul does not condemn either of the two ecstatic phenomena, but argues that prophecy as immediately understandable speech was more constructive for the life of the community.¹⁰¹

⁹⁶ *Spec.* 1:65; translation from Colson 1937: 137.

⁹⁷ *Her.* 259, 264; translation from Colson and Whitaker 1932: 417, 419.

⁹⁸ Philo, *On the Migration of Abraham* [*Migr.*] 34–5; see *Migr.* 151.

⁹⁹ See Levison 2006: 197–202. ¹⁰⁰ See, e.g. Aune 1983; Humm 2009.

¹⁰¹ L. Aejmelaeus 1981: 146: "Since for Paul, ecstasy was not of intrinsic value, and since his main concern in everything was the benefit and construction of the congregation, Paul obviously

However, the ecstatic component of prophecy seems to have become a problem for some early Christian writers who saw it happening in a religious environment they deemed as heretic or pagan. For instance, for Origen and Lactantius, a true biblical or Christian prophet was strictly controlled and non-ecstatic even under divine inspiration.¹⁰² This was also argued by Epiphanius, who makes a difference between two kinds of ecstasy: a sober one which does not cloud one's reason, and the other, false one that does cloud the mind and was practiced by the Montanist female prophets.¹⁰³

PROPHETIC PERFORMANCE IN GREEK SOURCES

The divinatory performance is a common topic in Greek literature. The impressive body of Greek sources on the oracle of Apollo at Delphi yields more elements than the ancient Near Eastern evidence to reconstruct the enactment of a prophetic oracle. Moreover, while Delphi was the oracular site par excellence for the Greeks,¹⁰⁴ and much of our image of Greek divination is extrapolated from that of Delphi, the oracular activity of the Pythia was not the only type of prophetic performance in the Greek world. In particular, the temple of Apollo at Didyma, in many ways comparable to that of Delphi, enjoyed a high status in the seventh and sixth centuries BCE,¹⁰⁵ and that of Zeus in Dodona, Delphi's greatest rival at times,¹⁰⁶ deserve to be mentioned as principal sites of Greek prophecy.¹⁰⁷

attempted to direct the expressions of the divine spirit away from glossolalia towards an unambiguous proclamation, likewise carried by the spirit, that he in Chapter 14 designates as 'prophecy' (my translation).

¹⁰² Origen, *On First Principles* [*Princ.*] 3.3.4–5; Lactantius, *Inst.* 1.4.2–3; see Kaltio 2013: 210–13.

¹⁰³ Epiphanius, *Panarion* [*Pan.*] 48.3.1; see Marjanen 2013: 142.

¹⁰⁴ For Delphi and the Delphic oracle, see Kindt 2016; Hoffmann 2015: 226–33; Friese 2010: 128–35, 363–5; 2012: 20–34; Johnston 2008: 33–60; Bowden 2005; Burkert, Suárez de la Torre, and Graf 2005: 16–31; Curnow 2004: 55–8; Rosenberger 2001: 48–64; Maurizio 1995, 1997; Price 1985; Fontenrose 1978; Lloyd-Jones 1976; Parke and Wormell 1956; Amandry 1950.

¹⁰⁵ For the temple of Apollo and the oracle at Didyma, see Hoffmann 2015: 235–7; Lampinen 2013: 56–60; Friese 2010: 167–71, 387–8; 2012: 39–42; Johnston 2008: 82–90; Oesterheld 2008: 232–66; Busine 2005: 28–32, 47–86; Curnow 2004: 133–4; Tuchelt 1991; Fontenrose 1988; Parke 1985: 1–111; 1986.

¹⁰⁶ For the oracle of Dodona, see Hoffmann 2015: 233–5; Friese 2010: 136–41, 365–7; 2012: 50–4; Johnston 2008: 60–72; Dieterle 2007; Kowalzig 2007: 331–52; Eidinow 2007; Rosenberger 2001: 61–4, 96–9, 135–7; Gartzziou-Tatti 1990; Parke 1967.

¹⁰⁷ As discussed in "Prophets as Intermediaries" in Chapter 1 in this volume, the word "prophecy" denoting non-technical transmission of divine knowledge is not unambiguous with regard to Greek literature; it is well applicable to Greek inspired speakers like the Pythia of Delphi, but less so with regard to Greek seers who were diviners using different techniques. See M. A. Flower 2008: 84–91; Lange 2006, 2007, 2009.

The earliest Greek evidence of prophetic performances may be found in Minoan Crete. Although the Minoan culture does not provide us with applicable textual sources, Nanno Marinatos has recently turned attention to four Minoan images from the sixteenth century BCE showing men who shake branches of a tree and kick their legs, women who seem to be in a twirling movement, and also women leaning on a stone.¹⁰⁸ According to her interpretation, the positions of the persons illustrate ecstatic behavior, and the images depict oracular scenes in an open air sanctuary: “shaking the branch leads to understanding of the language of the tree, and leaning over a stone leads to understanding the whisper of the stone or dreaming a vision.”¹⁰⁹ Marinatos interprets the female figure in the images to be the Minoan queen personally involved in a prophecy ritual. Her office as the high priestess thus included the role of an intermediary akin to that of the later female prophets of Apollo.¹¹⁰ This is reminiscent, not only of the roughly contemporaneous Ugaritic epic of Keret that mentions “a word of tree and whisper of stone,” possibly referring to a royal oracle,¹¹¹ but also of the tree oracle at Dodona¹¹² and Hesiod’s claim of his own Muse-inspired poetic gift: “But what do I care about these things concerning a tree or a stone?”¹¹³ In all these cases, trees and stones “appear together as part of a religious scenario linked to divine knowledge that is normally beyond the reach of simple mortals.”¹¹⁴

The Minoan iconography compares well with the Near Eastern sources mentioned above—both when it comes to the prophets’ characteristic behavior and the lack of any theoretical explication of its communal interpretation. The last mentioned aspect is, however, amply discussed in Greek literature from later times. The most famous Greek discussion on different forms of the divinatory art is the speech of Socrates in Plato’s *Phaedrus* (244a–45a) concerning different forms of *mania*, “madness,” as opposed to *sōphrosynē*, the “sane” kind of reasoning. Socrates defends the divine origin of *mania* by referring to ancient sages who defined it as the art of divination; the letter “t” in *mantikē* is but a tasteless addition of the moderns who think that the divinely inspired knowledge should be replaced by human reasoning, that is, the divinatory techniques (*tekhnē*) based on observation and calculation.¹¹⁵

¹⁰⁸ Marinatos 2009. ¹⁰⁹ Marinatos 2009: 90–1.

¹¹⁰ Perhaps also male ones in the case of Claros where, according to Iamblichus (*De mysteriis* 3.11), a male *prophētēs* prophesied after having drunk water from the holy spring. In the preserved oracles from Claros from the first through fourth centuries CE, one fragmentary strophe in the oracle for Kallipolis (Merkelbach and Stauber 1996: 21 [no. 9]) has been interpreted in terms of prophetic ecstasy; see Oesterheld 2008: 162, 165–6: “Wie mir in Eingeweiden [...] des Mundes [...] eine kleine [...] den Kampf [...] bedrückt ist das Herz.”

¹¹¹ *KTU* 1.3. iii 19–31; see Wyatt 2007.

¹¹² Plato, *Phaedr.* 275; see Johnston 2008: 63–5.

¹¹³ Hesiod, *Theogony* [*Theog.*] 35; see López Ruiz 2010: 56–83.

¹¹⁴ López Ruiz 2010: 69, who discusses even Jer. 2:26–7 in this context (pp. 60–1, 69–71).

¹¹⁵ Cf. Griswold 1986: 76–8; cf. M. A. Flower 2008: 84–8.

(...) and in proportion as prophecy (*mantikē*) is more perfect and august than augury, both in name and fact, in the same proportion, as the ancients testify, is madness (*mania*) superior to a sane mind (*sōphrosynē*), for the one is only of human, but the other of divine, origin.¹¹⁶

The first traditional type of *mania* is the gift of foretelling the future as practiced by the prophetess at Delphi, the priestesses at Dodona, the Sibyl, and other inspired persons who conferred great benefits on Hellas while being out of their senses (*manēsai*) but less so while in their senses (*sōphronousai*). The second type of *mania* is beneficial in curing sicknesses, and the third type is the one that comes from the Muses, inspiring songs and poetry. Plato equates the divine inspiration of the poets and the diviners even elsewhere,¹¹⁷ and it is interesting to note that all three types of divine inspiration can be found both in the ancient Near Eastern documents of prophecy and in the Hebrew Bible.

At first sight, Plato's typology seems to correspond perfectly to the distinction between inspired and technical divination familiar to us from ancient Near Eastern sources and scholarship. It must be borne in mind, however, that in the rhetorical framework of the passage, constituted by the relationship of the "mad" lover and the "sane" non-lover, all three traditional types of *mania* are presented as an introduction to a "divine erotic madness" superior to all of them. Hence, the speech of Socrates is not primarily about ranking different kinds of divination but about the necessity of *mania* in the self-knowledge which is essentially love. Indeed, "divine erotic madness and divine sophrosyne are to be united in the successful experience of love."¹¹⁸

To be sure, Plato does acknowledge the inspiration of the diviners (*manteis*) who are not inspired speakers such as the Pythia and the priestesses of Dodona but utilize inductive methods of divination. In his dialogue with Ion, Socrates juxtaposes the diviners with the poets inspired by the Muses while arguing for the divine origin of poetry:

For not by art does the poet sing, but by power divine; had he learned by rules of art, he would have known how to speak not of one theme only, but of all; and therefore God takes away reason from poets, and uses them as his ministers, as he also uses the pronouncers of oracles and holy prophets (*khṛēsmodois kai tois mantesi tois theiois*), in order that we who hear them may know them to be speaking not of themselves, who utter these priceless words while bereft of reason (*nous mē parestin*), but that God himself is the speaker, and that through them he is addressing us.¹¹⁹

No trace of the distinction between inspired and technical diviners can be found here; on the contrary, even the seers (*manteis*) are said to speak "while

¹¹⁶ Plato, *Phaedr.* 244d; translation from Jowett 1953b: 150.

¹¹⁷ Plato, *Ion* 533d–35a.

¹¹⁸ Griswold 1986: 75.

¹¹⁹ Plato, *Ion* 534c–d; translation from Jowett 1953a: 108.

bereft of reason” like the poets. The *manteis* were not prophets exactly in the sense that ancient Near Eastern and biblical scholars understand the word, that is, transmitters of divine word by non-technical means. Greek seers practiced divination using *technai* such as observing entrails of sacrificial animals and watching the flight of birds, but it is noteworthy that even in their case, a successful divination was believed to be based on a god-given insight without which the *technai* would have remained unfulfilled.¹²⁰ On the other hand, even the Pythia-type divination was understood as a *technē*, that is, a god-given skill that Zeus, according to Aeschylus, inspired in the mind of Apollo, who was the spokesman (*prophētēs*) of his father,¹²¹ while Pythia, for her part, was the spokesperson (*prophētis*) of Apollo.¹²²

The prophetic “madness” finds a mythological prototype in the honey-induced frenzy of the bee maidens in the Homeric *Hymn to Hermes* (sixth century BCE): these semi-divine nymphs had the gift of prophesying but could not prophesy unless having partaken of *meli chlōron*, which probably stands for an intoxicating mead.¹²³ Greek sources sometimes mention diviners in a way that suggests a characteristic behavior, such as Theoclymenus in the *Odyssey* (20.351–62), who is said to be “out of his senses” (*aphrainēi*) by the suitors of Penelope because of his interpretations of portents;¹²⁴ Plato’s seer Euthyphro who complains: “when I speak in the assembly about divine things, and foretell the future to them, they laugh at me and think me a madman (*mainomenos*)”;¹²⁵ and Cassandra in Aeschylus’ *Agamemnon*,¹²⁶ who claims to be appointed by Apollo to her office, utters an oracle of woe and is seen by others as frenzied (*phrenomanēs*) and god-possessed (*theophorētos*).¹²⁷ Perhaps the most important legendary figure portrayed as an ecstatic prophet is the “Sibyl with raving mouth (*Sibylla mainomenōi stomati*)” who, according to Heraclitus, “utters mirthless things.”¹²⁸ The ecstatic character of the figure of the Sibyl may be modified according to the model of the Delphic Pythia.¹²⁹

¹²⁰ See M. A. Flower 2008: 84–91.

¹²¹ Aeschylus, *Eum.* 17–19.

¹²² Thus Euripides, *Ion* 321, 1322 and Plato, *Phaedr.* 244b.

¹²³ See Scheinberg 1979.

¹²⁴ See Lange 2007: 571; Burkert 1992: 195 n. 1; cf. Scheinberg 1979: 16: “The words are flung as an insult, but they reflect the belief that practitioners of the mantic art are possessed by a god and hence *ekphrones*.” Burkert 1992: 79 also mentions the diviner mentioned by Herodotus (8.135) called Mys, who gave an oracle in a foreign language in the temple of Apollo at Ptoum. I fail to see the ecstatic aspect in the behavior of this diviner: the words of Mys are not presented as frantic speech but as spoken in the Carian language and written down by himself immediately after the performance.

¹²⁵ Plato, *Euthyphro* 3c; translation from Jowett 1953a: 310.

¹²⁶ Aeschylus, *Ag.* 1072–1340; cf. Trampedach 2015: 197–9; Jansen 1969.

¹²⁷ Aeschylus, *Ag.* 1140.

¹²⁸ Heraclitus 92 (frag. 75), quoted by Plutarch, *Mor.* 5.397; see Marcovich 1967: 403–6.

¹²⁹ Thus Graf 1985: 346–9, who regards the figure of the Sibyl as a later construction but does not deny the possibility that it is based on historical oracular activity in the archaic period. According to him, the fact that the Sibylline “I” is always the Sibyl herself speaks against the ecstatic character of the original oracle: “In den Sibyllinen redet immer die Sibylle” (p. 347).

It is difficult, if not impossible, to judge exactly what kind of “mad” behavior the readers of each of the above-mentioned texts were supposed to imagine. Without an oracular content, the words of Theoclymenus or Euthyphro could be interpreted as quite ordinary speech that for some reason sounded ridiculous to their opponents; at any rate, as far as their words are quoted, they are presented in an intelligible language. But as the example of the poets in Plato’s *Ion* shows, incomprehensibility can hardly be said to be the main characteristic of a divinely inspired speech in Greek literature. Not only the poets sing by power divine; even a diviner can utter a prophecy in hexameter verse, as does Amphilytus the chresmologue (that is, a collector of oracles) before the battle of Pallese in 546 BCE to Pisistratus, allegedly under divine inspiration (*entheazōn*).¹³⁰

The Greek vocabulary certainly suggests a specific state of consciousness of the divinely inspired speakers, but it does not necessarily refer to an uncontrolled behavior, even though this sometimes may indeed be the case. What matters is that the people thus characterized are given a role that sets them apart from other people, and the words they speak are given a meaning that implies a divine–human communication. Whether prophets in the Near Eastern sense or practitioners of inductive divination, “both the inspired prophet and the learned diviner fulfill the same role in society as intermediaries in the process of communication between the human and divine spheres.”¹³¹ The essential prerequisite of this role was that the prophet and the diviner could convince the audience of his or her legitimacy, which was always open to contradictory assessments, as the examples of Theoclymenus and Euthyphro demonstrate.

All this should be kept in mind when we turn to the Pythia of Delphi, whose legitimacy was beyond question in the Greek world for centuries, and this is reflected by the host of sources dealing with the oracle of Apollo at Delphi. While not the only available example of Greek prophetic performance, the Pythia constitutes the most thoroughly analyzed case also in modern scholarship.¹³² However, as one might expect, the reliability (so-called) of each source is a much-debated issue, and, as abundant as the references are, substantial gaps remain in our knowledge of what actually happened at Delphi. These gaps cover, among other things, the alleged divine possession of the Pythia. Another debated issue is the authenticity of the Pythia’s oracles

¹³⁰ Herodotus 1.62.4–1.63.1.; cf. Lange 2007: 471–2; M. A. Flower 2008: 79.

¹³¹ M. A. Flower 2008: 86; cf. Johnston 2008: 72.

¹³² For treatments of the oracle of Apollo at Delphi, in addition to those mentioned above in n. 104, see Kupitz and Berthelot 2009; Huffmon 2007; Eidinow 2007: 32–45; B. C. Dietrich 1990. See the catalogue of the Delphic responses in Fontenrose 1978: 240–429, and the list of Delphic consultations in Attic tragedy in Bowden 2005: 160–9.

in verse and the nature of her speech. Here, if anywhere, we encounter constructions, ancient and modern, between the extremes of the “raving” Pythia entirely possessed by the god and the “cool, collected Pythia, mildly inspired by a distant Apollo.”¹³³

The traditional construction of the Pythia’s performance, represented by older scholarship, mostly presents the image of a virgin who,

robed in white, enters a darkened room at the back of a temple. She sits on a tripod, which is positioned over a chasm in the earth. From the chasm pour forth intoxicating vapors, and as they fill her body, she becomes possessed by Apollo. She speaks for the god in an incoherent voice, and her gibbering message is translated by priests into poetic verse that enquirers will be able to understand.¹³⁴

Among ancient writers, the construction of the raving Pythia uttering unintelligible sounds can only be found in Lucan (39–65 CE), who depicts her raging madly about the cave:¹³⁵

... first the wild frenzy overflowed through her foaming lips; she groaned and uttered loud inarticulate cries with panting breath; next, a dismal wailing filled the vast cave; and at last, when she was mastered, came the sound of articulate speech (...).¹³⁶

This once popular image of the Pythia has been largely abandoned by more recent scholarship because it differs from that of other ancient authors.¹³⁷

Plutarch (c. 46–120 CE), who himself was a priest of Delphi and probably witnessed the Delphic oracle working in his time, does not portray Pythia’s behavior in such a way. To be sure, Plutarch does relate a case of a Pythia who went into the oracular chamber unwillingly, failed to perform in an appropriate way, and finally became hysterical.¹³⁸ In this case, evidently, the prophetic performance was a failure and did not meet usual expectations; otherwise, Plutarch’s presentation of the Pythia is void of references to her frenzy or incoherent speech.

While Plutarch, to whom we owe much of our image, if not knowledge, of the Delphic oracle,¹³⁹ lived in the period of Delphic decline, his testimony can be said to be valid for his own time but anachronistic with regard to the mantic session at Delphi in older periods. However, Herodotus, who lived half a millennium earlier (c. 484–425 BCE) when the oracle of Delphi was at its height, makes dozens of references to the Delphic oracle throughout his work,

¹³³ Compton 1994: 217.

¹³⁴ Characterization of the traditional view by Johnston 2008: 33; for the “gabble” of the Pythia, cf. Parke and Wormell 1956: 22, 39; Lloyd-Jones 1976.

¹³⁵ Lucan 5.161–74. ¹³⁶ Lucan 5.190–3; translation from J. D. Duff 1928: 253.

¹³⁷ Trampedach 2015: 188: “Die Hypothese ist eine anachronistische Kombination, die jeglicher Unterstützung durch die zeitgenössische Überlieferung ermangelt.” See also Graf 2009.

¹³⁸ Plutarch, *Mor.* 5.438b.

¹³⁹ e.g. *The Oracles at Delphi No Longer Given in Verse* = Plutarch, *Mor.* 394d–409d.

constructing the image of the Pythia in a way that is not essentially different from that of Plutarch, at least when it comes to her comportment. Herodotus' Pythia is not raving, speaks completely intelligible words usually in hexameter, and communicates directly with the consultants.¹⁴⁰ Herodotus' contemporary Euripides (480–406 BCE) depicts the Pythia “singing to Hellenes cries that Apollo sounds,”¹⁴¹ without any clear references to her wild behavior or unintelligible speech; the “cries” do not need to be understood as such.¹⁴² The same can be said of the oldest known presentation of the Pythia in Greek literature, that of Aeschylus (c. 525–456 BCE), who in the opening scene of his *Eumenides* portrays her as entering the temple of Apollo, taking her seat as seer (*mantis*) and doing what had to be done: “For as the god doth lead, so do I prophesy.”¹⁴³

The image of the “raving” Pythia, hence, finds little support in ancient constructions of the Delphic oracle, and the idea of extravagant behavior of a prophet seems to derive only from Roman times.¹⁴⁴ Nevertheless, it is clear that the ancient authors without exception, beginning with Aeschylus, saw her as speaking on behalf of Apollo and under his inspiration. Herodotus clearly sees her as impersonating Apollo when he refers to the Pythia straightforwardly as “the god,”¹⁴⁵ and Plato, as we have seen, attributes the Pythia's *mania* to divine inspiration. Lucan's raving Pythia is entirely possessed by Apollo: “he forced his way into her body, driving out her former thoughts and bidding the human nature to come forth and leave her heart at his disposal.”¹⁴⁶ Plutarch, from the mouth of his brother Lamprias, claims the opposite in his *The Obsolescence of Oracles*: “Certainly it is foolish and childish in the extreme to imagine that the god himself after the manner of ventriloquists (. . .) enters into the bodies of his prophets (*prophētōn*) and prompts their utterances, employing their mouths and voices as instruments.”¹⁴⁷ Nevertheless, even Plutarch attributes the Pythia's inspiration to a divine source explained in different ways in his dialogues. One explanation is that Apollo does not actually enter her body but gives an impulse to her soul which, combined with the impulse coming from Pythia's own soul, results as prophetic speech.¹⁴⁸ Alternatively, impulse was given by a *daimōn*, a disembodied intermediary conveying the divine inspiration.¹⁴⁹ Yet another theory is that

¹⁴⁰ See the evidence collected by Compton 1994.

¹⁴¹ Euripides, *Ion* 91–3.

¹⁴² Cf. Fontenrose 1978: 206.

¹⁴³ Aeschylus, *Eum.* 29–33; translation from Smyth 1952: 275.

¹⁴⁴ Cf. Virgil's description of the Sibyl's Bacchic frenzy (*bacchatur vates*; *Aeneid* [*Aen.*] 6:78); see Graf 2009: 597.

¹⁴⁵ Herodotus 6.86; 8.36.

¹⁴⁶ Lucan 5.168–9; translation from J. D. Duff 1928: 251. John Chrysostom would identify the being entering the Pythia's body as an evil spirit (*pneuma ponēron*; *Homilies* [*Hom.*] 1 Cor. 29:1).

¹⁴⁷ Plutarch, *Mor.* 5.414e; translation from Rabbitt 1936: 377. For Plutarch's theory of inspiration, see Vernière 1990: 359–66.

¹⁴⁸ Plutarch, *Mor.* 5.404e–f.

¹⁴⁹ Cf. Plutarch, *Mor.* 5.414f–415c.

“the earth sends forth for men streams of many other potencies,” one of them being the “prophetic current and thread” which is most divine and holy (*mantikon rheuma kai pneuma theiotaton esti kai hosiōtaton*).¹⁵⁰

The *pneuma* from the earth is identified by many ancient writers as the source of the Pythia’s inspiration,¹⁵¹ and not only hers, but also of the prophetesses of Apollo at Didyma who, according to Iamblichus, were inspired by the spirit rising from the holy spring. For Iamblichus, ecstasy was not as such the defining characteristic but a mere symptom of the divine possession: “they themselves are wholly possessed by the divine, the consequence of which is ecstasy.”¹⁵²

The *pneuma* inspiring the Pythia is often associated with the vapors coming out of a chasm in the ground, above which the Pythia’s tripod was located. While the existence of the chasm and its vapors used to be routinely dismissed by scholars as a legend,¹⁵³ recent geological investigations have suggested that the temple of Apollo actually stood above an intersection of two fault lines along which three different gases indeed came up, among them ethylene that may cause an altered state of consciousness.¹⁵⁴ While it may be doubted that the chasm kept producing its vapors for centuries, always at an appropriate time, it is thinkable that its existence is one of the reasons for the emergence of the Delphic oracle, and the very tradition of the existence of these earth-exhalations, perhaps together with their eventual appearance, may have triggered the *mania* necessary for prophesying.¹⁵⁵

A comparable trigger is provided by the sounds caused by bronze cauldrons, doves, and trees that allegedly inspired the priestesses of Dodona¹⁵⁶ and may find an iconographical expression in the above-mentioned Minoan images. Furthermore, the mantic session at Didyma may have been accompanied by music.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁰ Plutarch, *Mor.* 5.432d; cf. Johnston 2008: 45–7.

¹⁵¹ Cf. the discussion on the powers of the earth in Plutarch, *Mor.* 5.433a–434f. Cf. Strabo 9.3.5. (*pneuma enthousiastikon*); Diodorus Siculus 16.26; Iamblichus, *Theurgia or On the Mysteries of Egypt* [*Myst.*] 3.11.

¹⁵² Iamblichus, *Myst.* 3.7. See Addey 2014: 220–1.

¹⁵³ e.g. Fontenrose 1978: 197–203.

¹⁵⁴ Spiller, Hale, and De Boer 2002; De Boer, Hale, and Chanton 2001; Piccardi 2001. The claim that the Pythia entered a mantic state because of ethylene intoxication is refuted by Foster and Lehoux 2007; cf. Lehoux 2007; Etiopie et al. 2006. For discussion, see Trampedach 2015: 190–1; Graf 2009: 599–601; M. A. Flower 2008: 226 with n. 49; Johnston 2008: 47–50; Bowden 2005.

¹⁵⁵ Johnston 2008: 49: “Iamblichus [*Myst.* 3.11] may not have been far off the mark when he suggested that the *pneuma* coming out of the chasm *prepared* the Pythia to receive divine prophecy rather than *caused* the prophecy itself”; see the analysis of Addey 2014: 215–37 of the receptivity of the possessed, the simultaneous descent of god and the rise of the human soul, and the different stages of participation, communion, and union between the soul and god.

¹⁵⁶ See Johnston 2008: 71–2; cf. the cautionary judgment of Eidinow 2007: 71 concerning the method of consultation at Dodona.

¹⁵⁷ So Fontenrose 1988: 79–80, 111.

It would be all too rational to explain the prophetic performance at Delphi, or anywhere, simply as a hallucinatory session of drug-addicted or otherwise stunned persons, whose twaddle was then given an interpretation by others.¹⁵⁸ However, this is how scholars have often imagined “ecstasy” or “possession,” that is, as a state of mind which deprived the prophet of her or his intellectual capacity, disallowing intelligible and coherent speech. This understanding of divine possession has also affected scholars’ constructions of the Pythia. If the wild, uncontrolled, and raving image of her is to be rejected, what is the alternative? Joseph Fontenrose agrees that she was believed to be inspired by Apollo; however, he vehemently denies any traces of what he considers symptoms of possessive behavior: “The Pythia experiences enthusiasm, but not an uncontrolled and irrational frenzy.”¹⁵⁹ This construction of the “cool, collected Pythia, mildly inspired by a distant Apollo” presupposes that a god-possessed person is unable to attain any intellectual achievement, such as coherent speech. Michael Flower, again, presents the Pythia as the prime example of someone experiencing spirit possession as the mouthpiece of a deity and indeed entering into an altered state of consciousness—and spontaneously composing hexameter verse.¹⁶⁰

So was the Pythia raving or cool? Probably the most honest answer is that we do not really know. A detailed historical vision of the Pythia and other inspired mouthpieces of gods in Greece remains elusive and we are left with constructions and reconstructions dependent on the ideological, conceptual, and literary contexts in which they are created. As has been discussed in Chapter 3, the received wording of the Delphic and other Greek prophets cannot be taken as their *ipsissima verba*.¹⁶¹ The texts available to us are the result of a substantial process of communication,¹⁶² the reversal of which is, to put it mildly, a highly demanding task.

One thing is beyond doubt however: regardless of the writer, the Pythia and her colleagues were believed to be inspired by Apollo or Zeus and to transmit divine knowledge to their consultants.¹⁶³ What they said mattered more than how this knowledge was achieved and what kind of characteristic behavior accompanied the oracular event; *that* they were divinely inspired was crucial, not *how* the inspiration manifested itself.¹⁶⁴ To all appearances, (1) these

¹⁵⁸ For example, Parke and Wormell 1956: 36–40 explain the Pythia’s behavior as a self-induced hypnosis which produces only confused and disjointed words to be interpreted by the priests.

¹⁵⁹ Fontenrose 1978: 211; cf. B. C. Dietrich 1990: 160 and the similar judgment on the prophetess of Apollo in Didyma in Fontenrose 1988: 84.

¹⁶⁰ M. A. Flower 2008: 88–91, 226; cf. Maurizio 1995: 83–6.

¹⁶¹ See, e.g. Maurizio 1997.

¹⁶² Cf. Johnston 2008: 50–1.

¹⁶³ Cf. Price 1985: 141: “There were different ancient explanations, but we cannot go behind them to discover ‘real facts.’ These various accounts of the procedure themselves formed the context in which those involved in the oracle understood it.”

¹⁶⁴ Cf. M. A. Flower 2008: 89: “The means by which the various types of possession occurred was less important to most Greeks than the fact that they did occur.”

women had an acknowledged role as transmitters of divine knowledge, especially because (2) “*place mattered*”:¹⁶⁵ the divine word received in an established oracle site such as Delphi, Didyma, or Dodona was appreciated by virtue of the authority of the temple; and (3) the behavior of the inspired speakers was patterned in the way that it came up to the audience’s expectations.¹⁶⁶ In whatever way the inspired speaker’s *mania* became noticeable, its existence seems to have been believed by all those who contributed to the construction of her image. It was a god-given skill (*technē*) to be the mouth-piece of the divine, and persons with such a skill were not expected to behave like anyone else, and certainly not while transmitting divine knowledge.

¹⁶⁵ Johnston 2008: 72; emphasis original. Cf. Rosenberger 2001: 58: “Was zählte, war ein Spruch aus Delphi.” For the significance of place, see also J. Z. Smith 1987.

¹⁶⁶ For ecstasy (“Halluzination”) as a culturally and temporally contingent phenomenon, see Reichardt 1999, who analyzes Paul’s vision on the road to Damascus.

Prophets and Temples

PROPHETS AND TEMPLES: PRELIMINARY ISSUES

Prophecy, by any definition, is a religious institution; hence an investigation into prophets connected with other religious institutions, such as temples, is most necessary. In the tradition of biblical studies, however, juxtaposing prophets and temples easily evokes antagonisms characteristic of biblical studies throughout the twentieth century, such as prophets versus cult, prophets versus priests, cultic versus independent prophets, true versus false prophets, and so on. The sharp distinction between the pro-establishment professional prophets dependent on religious institutions on the one hand, and anti-cultic, independent, and oppositional prophets on the other hand, belongs firmly to the construct of prophecy developed in the late nineteenth century and has ever since been daily bread for anyone involved in biblical studies.¹

The contraposition between cultic and anti-cultic prophets has seldom, if ever, been value-free: the sympathies of scholars have usually been with the latter group that has been held in higher estimation with regard to religious and social innovation, spirituality, and morals. While recognizing the affiliation of prophets with sanctuaries as a common state of affairs in ancient Israel, as in the ancient Near East in general, a special group often coined as “classical” prophets such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos, and Hosea, has traditionally been granted an elevated position. In the words of J. Philip Hyatt written in 1963:

Some [prophets] were ecstasies, and hardly more than dervishes or shamans; others were men of great stature, probably not subject to ecstatic possession. Some were members of organized societies or attached to sanctuaries, while others were solitary individuals. Some were closely associated with the royal court, while others engaged in revolutionary activities that led to the change of dynasties. The very small group of men whose books have been preserved as

¹ See the classic expressions of this idea by Wellhausen 1905: 23–7, 56–8, 397–8 and Duhm 1922. For the subsequent debate over prophetic attitudes toward cult and worship, see Eidevall 2012: 5–30.

the Prophets in the Bible represent only a tiny minority. They were free, independent-minded, charismatic individuals.²

This common attitude was criticized in the very same year by Peter L. Berger who saw “the notion of the prophets as brave individualists defying the religious authorities of their time” growing from the nineteenth-century German Protestant atmosphere: “In this way, the prophets are made to appear as proto-Protestants of an earlier dispensation.”³ Reviewing biblical studies of his time as a sociologist, and modifying Max Weber’s theory of charisma⁴ which had contributed much to the distinction at issue, he would suggest that the social location of *all* Israelite prophets should be sought in cultic institutions, not isolating the charismatic innovation from established religion. Building on earlier studies to the same effect, especially those of Sigmund Mowinckel and Aubrey Johnson,⁵ Berger also referred to the study of prophecy and related phenomena in the ancient Near East, initiated by Gustav Hölscher’s *Die Profeten* (1914):⁶

For it is precisely the turning point marked by Hoelscher’s work—the re-interpretation of Israelite prophecy in the light of the increasingly rich material available to scholars concerning the culture and religion of the societies surrounding Palestine. And it is the steady and impressive expansion of this general knowledge of the ancient Near East, aided by massive new data unearthed by the archaeologists, that furnishes the background of the re-interpretation.⁷

When Berger wrote the above-quoted words, the extrabiblical evidence of prophecy was not really very large; today, however, the corpus of some 175 individual texts documenting ancient Near Eastern prophecy makes the “re-interpretation of Israelite prophecy” a whole lot easier. Complementing the Near Eastern and biblical sources with Greek material enables a new overview of prophetic divination in an ancient Eastern Mediterranean religious context.

To avoid the shortcomings of the word “cult,” often burdened with negative and sometimes misleading connotations, I prefer to talk about prophets and temples, thus referring to institutions of religious worship. For the sake of convenience, the word “temple” is used in this chapter in a very broad sense as an environment for worship, as an alleged dwelling-place of the divine presence whether it was thought to be permanent or temporary, and as the domicile of religious institutions and their employees, be it a huge temple complex or a small outdoor sanctuary. It goes without saying that the function

² Hyatt 1963: 7.

³ Berger 1963: 943. For similar criticism in more recent times, see Zevit 2004; Levenson 1984.

⁴ The work quoted by Berger is Weber 1952; for a more recent assessment of Weber’s view of prophecy, see Blenkinsopp 1995: 115–18.

⁵ Mowinckel 1923 (cf. Mowinckel 2002: 100–21); Johnson 1944 (repr. 1962). Other acknowledged predecessors of Berger’s view include Haldar 1945; Würthwein 1949–50; Gunneweg 1959.

⁶ Hölscher 1914.

⁷ Berger 1963: 942.

and significance of temples and cult places varied according to their size, location, wealth, and status. Not all kinds of sanctuaries can be called temples in strictly archaeological terms;⁸ for the needs of the present article, however, this one term will suffice as shorthand.

To form a meaningful and integral part of a society, any institutional order must have legitimacy; to quote Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann: “Legitimation ‘explains’ the institutional order by ascribing cognitive validity to its objectivated meanings. Legitimation justifies the institutional order by giving a normative dignity to its practical imperatives.”⁹ According to Berger and Luckmann, the highest level of legitimation is constituted by symbolic universes that “integrate different provinces of meaning and encompass the institutional order in a symbolic totality.”¹⁰ Temples are prime examples of such an institutional order. In the ancient Near East, temples were centers of the mythological universe,¹¹ sacred environments where the objective and subjective aspects of reality come face to face, and the community of worshipers is expected to experience the presence of and encounter the divine.¹² The worshipers went to temples to participate in the divine presence and to approach the divine by various means such as offerings, prayers, and other ritual celebrations, performed on the occasion of public festivities as well as during individual visits. One can easily imagine that, whenever these approaches were expected to inspire the experience of receiving a response from a deity, the response was received within the same sacred environment.

The more prominent status the temple had in the mental map of the members of the community, the more important symbolic significance it had for the identity of the community in the maintenance of their symbolic universe¹³ as the dwelling place of their patron deities. A divine response received in the temple could, therefore, have social and political dimensions transcending the very time, place, and addressee(s) of its reception. This is especially true with regard to different institutions of rulership: the closer the ties between temples and rulers, typically kings, whose rule was divinely sanctioned everywhere in the ancient Near East, the weightier the divine resolutions proclaimed to them in the temples. The royal inscriptions and other sources from all over the ancient Near East testify to the importance of the meticulous care of temples and their worship as one of the principal duties of the king. Building and restoring temples were pious works to which the kings were exhorted by prophets and other diviners. On the other hand, they could also be reproached for disregarding the temples and their worship.

⁸ For criteria of what kind of a structure can be called a temple, see Zwickel 1994: 8–16.

⁹ Berger and Luckmann 1989: 93.

¹⁰ Berger and Luckmann 1989: 95.

¹¹ See Pongratz-Leisten 1994: 20, 36.

¹² Cf. Bonnet 2008.

¹³ For the “conceptual machineries of universe-maintenance” and the role of mythology and theology in them, see Berger and Luckmann 1989: 109–12.

Not all divine responses were received in temples, however. Divinatory acts, that is, different ways of receiving allegedly divine responses and becoming conversant with divine knowledge, were not confined to the temple environment. Practitioners of technical divination did not typically belong to the personnel of the temples; at Mari and Assyria, for instance, they were rather employed by the royal court.¹⁴ Nevertheless, the very act of divination was a ritual in itself, requiring certain qualifications of the diviner like a sufficient degree of ritual purity, appropriate divinatory skills, and an acknowledged social role. The ritual aspect of the divinatory act was related to temple activities; extispicy, for instance, was preceded by the sacrifice of animals whose intestines were then interpreted by the diviners (*bārû*). The livers of sacrificed sheep were certainly not regarded as leftovers recycled for secondary purposes; on the contrary, the properly performed sacrifice was considered a prerequisite of successful divination.¹⁵

Prophecy was another characteristic representative of the ancient art of divination. Unlike in sacrificial divination, the Near Eastern prophetic performance did not presuppose a ritual; prophetic messages could be uttered in a variety of environments, whether in a ritual setting in the temple or outside the temple context. Notwithstanding this, the sacred space of the temple was an ideal venue for communication with the divine by means of prophecy.¹⁶ The prophetic appearances, again, had to be performed by persons acknowledged as prophets and controlled by appropriate authorities. It is my purpose to demonstrate with the help of ample evidence discernible from ancient Near Eastern written documentation that this indeed was the case.

ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN SOURCES: SECOND MILLENNIUM BCE

Temples as Venues of Prophetic Performances

Temples appear as typical venues for prophetic appearances in the texts from Mari. In Chapter 5, I discussed the two texts pertaining to the ritual of Ištar at Mari, in which prophets, if able to reach the altered state of consciousness, prophesy in the presence of the king in interplay with lamentation song performed by musicians. The two tablets are written by different scribes and

¹⁴ For Mari, see Sasson 1998: 116–18; for Assyria, Parpola 1993: xxv–xxvii.

¹⁵ See Koch 2015: 122–5; Steinkeller 2005; Starr 1983. For Greek sacrificial divination, see Trampedach 2015: 146–57; M. A. Flower 2008: 159–65.

¹⁶ Cf. Bonnet 2008: 680.

may describe two separate ritual occasions;¹⁷ at any event, they provide conclusive evidence of prophetic performances in a most prominent ritual context in the kingdom of Mari. The texts are not at all specific about what the prophets were expected to prophesy, but the ritual context suggests a message from the goddess related to the lamentations that the musicians are supposed to perform. The musical performance would make sense only if the prophet is able to act as the mouthpiece of the goddess, who is also the subject of the lamentation the musicians are supposed to perform.¹⁸ The presence of the prophets in the temple is concretized by the instructions written on the side of one of the tablets, according to which “water in a container and four *mešsû*-jars are installed; they are always at the disposal of the prophets.”¹⁹

In the correspondence of Mari deriving from the Old Babylonian period, the authors of the letters repeatedly report how prophets “arise” (*tebû*) in temples to deliver a divine message, the essential contents of which are then summarized in the letter; for example:

Another matter: a female prophet arose in the temple of Annunitum and spoke: “Zimri-Lim, do not go on campaign! Stay in Mari, and I shall continue to answer.”²⁰

In this and two other cases²¹ it is explicitly mentioned that the “arising” had happened in a temple, while in others, this is indicated by other expressions, such as “arising before Dagan”:

Also, a prophet arose before Dagan and spoke: “How much longer will I not drink pure water? Write to your lord that he may provide me with pure water!”²²

Since this is mentioned by the letter-writer immediately after his report on offerings for Dagan and a subsequent sacrificial meal, there can be no doubt that even the oracle is presented as taking place in the same venue. Indeed, this evidence points to the conclusion that the use of the verb *tebû*²³ in itself suggests that the prophetic appearance took place in the temple context,²⁴ whereas different expressions are used to indicate that the prophet spoke elsewhere. The letters very commonly report that a prophet had “come and

¹⁷ **51 and 52; see “Prophetic Performance in Ancient Near Eastern Sources” in Chapter 5 in this volume; cf. Ziegler 2007: 63. Elizabeth Knott argued for the separate setting of the two texts in her paper “The Scribal Setting of Mari’s Eštar Rituals,” read at the 126th Meeting of the American Oriental Society, Boston, March 19, 2016.

¹⁸ Hence, *pace* Stökl 2012a: 213, I think there is a strong link between music and prophecy here, whether or not the music is used to induce prophetic trance. See Durand and Guichard 1997: 50, according to whom the song *mà-e ú-re-mèn* in *51 is identical to the Sumerian canonical lament *me-e ur-re-mèn* in which the singer is the goddess herself.

¹⁹ *51, lines s. ii 1–3. ²⁰ *42, lines 21–6.

²¹ *29, lines 4–5; *5, lines 5–6. ²² *25, lines 15–21.

²³ Further occurrences include *3, line 6; *5, line 7; *14, line 5; *19, line 7; *29, line 5.

²⁴ Cf. van der Toorn 2000a: 82.

spoken” to the writer; the verbs used here are *alāku* and *iqbū*.²⁵ The place of the encounter is disclosed only once,²⁶ but even in other cases, the temple environment seldom plays a role, and the verb *alāku* itself implies the movement of the prophet to the letter-writer rather than vice versa. Hence, it seems like the choice of the verb indicates whether the prophet was performing in the temple or delivered her/his words elsewhere.²⁷

Yet another expression used for a prophetic performance is the verb *maḥû*, “to be crazy, to go into frenzy,” which implies that prophecies were delivered in an altered state of mind. This is said to have happened in the temple of Annunitum, a local Ištar goddess,²⁸ on two occasions, involving two different prophets:

In the temple of Annunitum, three days ago, Šelebum went into trance and said: “Thus says Annunitum: (. . .).”²⁹

In the temple of Annunitum in the city, Aḥatum, a servant girl of Dagan-Malik, went into trance and spoke: “Zimri-Lim (. . .).”³⁰

In some cases, prophetic messages are transmitted by the Aḥum, the priest of the temple of Annunitum, presumably reporting what had happened in this temple,³¹ and thus fulfilling the responsibility of keeping the king informed of oracles delivered in the temples of Mari, especially during his absence:

When my lord decided to undertake the campaign, he gave me the following instructions: “You reside in the city of God. Write to me whatever oracle is de[live]red in the temple of God and which you hear.”³²

The demand to report every oracle that is delivered in “the house of God,” implied by another writer as well,³³ suggests that in the world of the Mari letters, temples were places where the prophetic oracle was expected to take place and where full attention was paid to it—at least in the time of King Zimri-Lim. The letters mention nothing about the audience of the prophecies,

²⁵ *2, line 4; *7, lines 8–9; *8, lines 3–4; *16, line 6; *20, lines 8–10; *31, lines 10–11; *32, line 13 (without *qabû*); *3, line 5 (broken); *48, line 30; *50b, lines 12–13 (*alāku* + *dabābu*).

²⁶ *18, line 7: the gate of the royal palace.

²⁷ There is one case where this division is not quite absolute, though: Inib-šina the high priestess writes that the *qammatum* “came” to her (*7, line 8), while another letter reveals that she was in the temple at that time (*9, line 53).

²⁸ For Annunitum, see S. L. Allen 2015: 192–7, who classifies Annunitum among “Ištar goddesses who are not Ištar.”

²⁹ *23, lines 5–7. ³⁰ *24, lines 5–8.

³¹ *10 and *11. ³² *6, lines 5–9.

³³ *1, lines 34–45: “Previously, when I was still residing in Mari, I would convey every word spoken by a prophet or a prophetess to my lord. Now, living in another land, would I not communicate to my lord what I hear and they tell me? Should anything ever not be in order, let not my lord say: ‘Why have you not communicated to me the word which the prophet spoke to you when he was demanding your area?’ Herewith I communicate it to my lord. My lord should know this.”

but rather give the impression that not many people except for the temple personnel were witnessing the performance. This makes the role of the priest crucial in transmitting the prophecy to its royal addressee.³⁴

One of the rare prophetic texts from second-millennium Babylonia presents itself as a first-person narrative of an anonymous prophet. The text describes a dialogue between the prophet and the goddess Nanaya, whose words are directed to an anonymous king, who apparently has just been established:

The legitimate shepherd, whose name is good, whose protective spirit is everlasting, has entered the temple Eanna. From now on, he is surrounded by health and well-being, from the day when Nanaya entered and had me sit down in the gate of Sin, her father. She said: “Until I establish a legitimate shepherd and revive dead Uruk, you shall grind the *sūtu* of Uruk.³⁵ Great Uruk will look to me, (and) I will exempt the city and the temple (from it).”³⁶

The continuation of the dialogue is difficult to translate; what is clear, however, is that the concluding lines of the tablet present the words (*awātum*) of the goddess as prophecy: “(These are) the words the goddess³⁷ spoke to me. Let my lord listen to what I say, let him retain my words, that he may attain the god’s desire.” Whether the text is a transcript of an actually spoken oracle is doubtful because of the narrative frame, but it is nevertheless presented as a divine word transmitted by the prophet, to be taken seriously by the king. The dialogue takes place at the gate of the temple of Sin, the Moon-god, where the goddess had made the prophet sit, thus localizing the prophecy in a temple context.

Prophets among the Temple Personnel

The texts discussed above leave little doubt of the temples as being prominent venues for prophetic performances at Mari; however, they are not at all informative about the role of the prophets in the actual functioning of the temples where the prophets are said to have spoken. The above-mentioned

³⁴ Charpin 2015: 29–30: “We should note that when a prophet uttered a message of the god before the cult statue dedicated to him, the audience of that prophecy was limited to those who had access to the heart of the temple; this probably explains the crucial role of the *šangūm* in the transmission of the prophecy.”

³⁵ “Grinding the *sūtu*” is a metaphor for taxing the country (see Westenholz 2007: 320). The divine message is that Uruk will pay the tax but will be exempted from it when the legitimate ruler is established.

³⁶ *135a, lines 1–14; see Dalley 2010: 86–92; Westenholz 2007; cf. Charpin 2015: 44–5; Pongratz-Leisten 2003: 155–7.

³⁷ The sign U.DAR may stand for Ištar either as a proper name or as an appellative for a goddess.

texts pertaining to the prophets' performances in the ritual of Ištar provide striking evidence of prophesying in a prominent ritual setting; however, if a prophet participates in a ritual, we still "do not know that he lived in the temple or took even a majority of his income from service there."³⁸

Some indirect evidence can be quoted, such as the letter of Nur-Sin to Zimri-Lim quoting a prophecy, which may be explained as originally belonging to his enthronement ceremony and secondarily quoted in the letter.³⁹ This is well in line with the roughly contemporaneous oracles of Kititum to King Ibalpiel II of Ešnunna, also interpreted as connected to his coronation.⁴⁰ Thanks to a food rations list from the temple of Kititum at Nerebtum we know that there were indeed prophets (*muḫḫû*) provided for by this temple. According to this document, the allowance of the temple of Kititum consists of a huge amount of barley and beer to be delivered, among others, to female musicians, prophets, hired workers, and harvesters, that is, both to cultic and maintenance personnel of the temple.⁴¹ Again, the juxtaposition of musicians and prophets strikes the eye.

Further references to prophets in the context of temples can be found in a number of Old Babylonian administrative texts from different cities. A decree of expenditures records the outlays for rites performed during ten days from the fifteenth until the twenty-fourth of the month of Shebat (XI) at the capital city of Larsa in the time of Rim-Sin in the late nineteenth century BCE.⁴² In the section of the text relating to the ceremony of the evening of the eighteenth day, the recipients of one liter of oil include the singers, the lamentation priests, the groom, the prophet, the brewer, the messenger of the *en*-priestess, the builder, and the purification priest⁴³ with his assistant; the list makes the prophet appear in a company rather similar to that in lexical texts. Another decree of disbursement of oil from Sippar (Tell ed-Der) mentions a prophet together with a temple administrator, an overseer of the temple women, a miller, a groom, a steward, and a potter, suggesting a temple context for the recipients.⁴⁴ The same may be said of the document from the Syrian city of Tuttul, in which a prophet is mentioned as recipient of sesame immediately after mentioning the temple of Dagan.⁴⁵ Taken together,

³⁸ Fleming 2004: 54.

³⁹ i.e. *2; see Bauks 2001: 449; Wyatt 1998: 841; Heintz 1997: 146–50 (= 2015: 111–15); cf. the cautious remarks of Töyräänvuori 2016: 181; 2012: 154.

⁴⁰ **66, 67; see Ellis 1987.

⁴¹ *67a, lines r. 12–13; see Viaggio 2006 and Charpin 2015: 28 n. 89.

⁴² For the text, previously published by Kingsbury 1963, see Westenholz and Westenholz 2006: 3–8.

⁴³ *135c, lines iii 21–30. The title ŠITA-EŠ is translated here as "purification priest" following Westenholz and Westenholz 2006: 31; according to Charpin 1986: 214–15, it denotes an administrator.

⁴⁴ *135h; see Edzard 1970: 134.

⁴⁵ *135j, lines r. 4–5; see Krebernik 2001: 134–5.

these four⁴⁶ texts leave no doubt that prophets were part of the infrastructure of Old Babylonian temples. Even though the texts are not very numerous, they come from different cities, suggesting that Mari with its numerous prophets was no exception in Near Eastern cities of that period; what makes Mari a special case is rather the discovery of its substantial archive, thanks to which we are better informed of many things in that city, including prophetic divination.⁴⁷

Prophets as Advocates of Worship

Further evidence of the close affiliation of prophets with temples at Mari can be found in letters reporting prophetic words that give orders to the king concerning ritual performances. The following two examples are quoted from letters written by Kibri-Dagan, the governor of the city of Terqa that housed the temple of Dagan, which was one of the principal sites of prophetic divination in the kingdom of Mari:

Send to your lord the following message: The new month has now begun, and on the fourteenth day, the *pagrā'um* offerings should be executed. Not a single offering may be neglected.⁴⁸

Another matter: When I sent this tablet to my lord, a [p]rophet of [D]agan ca[m] and [s]poke to [me]: "The god has sent me, saying: 'Hurry up and deliver a message to the king that a *kispum* offering be performed for the spirit of Yaḥdun-Lim.'"⁴⁹

Both offerings, *pagrā'um* and *kispum*, belong to mortuary rituals, as is made plain in the second example referring to the spirit (*eṭemmu*) of the deceased king.⁵⁰ The prophets, apparently in tandem with the temple of Dagan at Terqa,⁵¹ remind the king about communal events significant for the social memory of the community, the royal house in particular.

⁴⁶ Prophets are mentioned also as recipients of goods or food rations also in other Old Babylonian documents (*135 from Larsa; *135i from Ašnakum/Chagar Bazar), but in these cases, the temple context is not evident. The same can be said of the legal documents in which prophets appear as witnesses (*135d from Dilbat; *135e from Larsa; 135f from Ur).

⁴⁷ Charpin 2015: 44: "It is hence by pure chance that the sources in our possession do not contain any record of their prophecies [i.e. those of other Old Babylonian cities]. There are no archives comparable to those of the palace of Mari for the whole of the Old Babylonian period."

⁴⁸ *30, lines 20–23. ⁴⁹ *31, lines 7–18.

⁵⁰ For these rituals, see, e.g. Tsukimoto 1985; Schmidt 1994: 28–39; Durand and Guichard 1997; Jacquet 2002; Feliu 2003: 65–73. According to Schmidt, *pagrā'um*, unlike *kispum*, was not a funerary ritual, while Durand and Guichard argue that it formed part of the *kispum* ritual.

⁵¹ For this temple and its worship, see Feliu 2003: 95–107.

An important ritual activity at Mari was the erection of sacred stelae and commemorative monuments.⁵² In one of the Mari letters, Zimri-Lim is urged to erect such a monument:

[...the god DN spo]ke [as follows: “Let Zimri-Lim erect] a commemorative monument (*ḥumūsum*) in [...], and I will es[tab]lish his name for e[ver].” However, the sacrifice for this commemorative monument has not been offered, and my lord has said to me as follows: “In Mari I shall deliver to you a *casting net*.⁵³ Place it in this commemorative monument.” [No]w my lord has ar[rived] in Mari, but has not deliv[ered] the *casting net*.⁵⁴

Because of the damage to the text, we do not know the sender of this letter, and even a prophet is not mentioned in the preserved text. However, what is left of the first eight lines of the tablet is clearly a quotation of a divine demand and promise. The *ḥumūsum*, perhaps a cairn rather than a stele, seems to have been assembled to commemorate the site of an event, usually of a political nature.⁵⁵ In the case of this letter it seems that the monument is already there; however, the paraphernalia necessary for performing a ritual (a casting net symbolizing the defeat of an enemy?⁵⁶) have still not been delivered. Because their delivery seems to be dependent on the king himself, nothing less than a divine word is enough to have the ritual performed appropriately.

Another prophetic demand to erect a commemorative monument is worth mentioning in this connection, even though it is an early first millennium text. The late tenth/early ninth-century BCE stele discovered in the vicinity of Tell Ahmar (Til Barsib) in Northern Syria was erected by Hamiyata, king of Masuwari, for the Storm-god Tarhunza to commemorate Hamiyata’s and his royal father’s victories over their enemies. The Luwian text of the stele specifically mentions that its erection was prompted by a prophecy:

The one belonging to a god said to me: “Erect the Storm-god of the Army!” And in the year in which I went to ... with the support of the Storm-god with five hundred ... vehicles and with the ... army,—when I came away—in that year I erected this Storm-god of the Army.⁵⁷

⁵² For commemorative monuments in the texts from Mari, see Durand 2005.

⁵³ The meaning of the Akkadian word is unclear; it can be read as *saparrum* “cart, chariot” (Durand 1988: 447) or *sapārum* “casting net” (see Steinkeller 1985; thus Heimpel 2003: 262). If any of these alternatives is correct, the latter one makes better sense as being placed “in” (or, perhaps, “on”) the monument.

⁵⁴ *28, lines 5–15; restorations according to Durand 1988: 447.

⁵⁵ Durand 2008a: 352: “Le *ḥumūsum*, lorsqu’il est constitué de pierres, peut avoir été un ‘cairn’, c’est-à-dire un tas de pierres, plus ou moins arrangé, destiné à marquer un emplacement et le souvenir de ce qui s’y est fait ou dit.” For the evidence of *ḥumūsum*, see Durand 2005: 95–129.

⁵⁶ Cf. *7, lines 11–19: “The peacemaking of the man of Ešnunna is false: beneath straw water runs! I will gather him into the net (*šētum*) I knot. I will destroy his city and I will ruin his wealth, which comes from the time immemorial.”

⁵⁷ *143 (Tell Ahmar 6), §§22–6 (translation of H. Craig Melchert in SBLWAW 12, second edition); cf. Hawkins 2006. See “Literary Prophecy” in Chapter 2 in this volume.

The “one who belongs to the god” is clearly a prophetic figure,⁵⁸ transmitting the divine command concerning the monument. The Luwian king demonstrates his piety by presenting the establishment of the monument as something that did not happen at his own initiative. As a by-product, he also provides important information on his use of prophetic divination.

The correspondence of the king of Mari includes several letters suggesting that the welfare of the temples and the people dependent on them was an important concern for the prophets in the kingdom of Mari. The king is not only reminded of his cultic duties but also reprimanded for his negligence in cultic matters; the temple authorities remind the king of his nonchalant attitude towards the worship of particular deities or neglected or insufficient offerings to them, authorizing their demands with divine words uttered by prophets. In some of prophecies reported in the letters from Mari, the king is reprimanded for his insufficient attention to temples and negligence towards gods:

On the day of the sacri[fi]ce i]n the temple of [N]inḫur[sag], a prophet o[f Nin-] ḫursag ar[ose] and spo[ke] as follows: “Once, twice, even three [times] have I ex[pr]essed my request before Zim[ri-Lim], but he did not give [me any]th[ing...]”
(break)

This is what the pr[ophet] said. I have now s[ent] the h[air and a fringe of a garment] of the prophet to my lord. My lord may do what he deems best.⁵⁹

The rebuke is tough and outspoken, and the damaged part of the tablet seems to have included further criticism. Nevertheless, the attitude of the unknown author of the letter strikes the eye. He or she follows the usual practice of sending the hair and the garment fringe of the prophet, but does not add any comments on the prophet’s message but, rather, distances him- or herself from it, letting the king draw whatever consequences he considers appropriate. Presumably, the author is neither personally responsible for the concerns of the temple of Ninḫursag, nor able to keep silent about the threefold demand of the goddess.

Sometimes the blame is interwoven with an assurance which makes the criticism sound like a promise:

Speak to my lord: Thus Šibtu, your servant:

In the temple of Annunitum in the city,⁶⁰ Aḫatum, a servant girl of Dagan-Malik went into trance and spoke: “Zimri-Lim: Even though you are neglectful about

⁵⁸ See Melchert 2014: 9; Weippert 2014: 235–6. The Luwian word *masanami-/maššanāmi-* denotes a person belonging to a god, and appears also in another inscription from the same site (Tell Ahmar 5 §11).

⁵⁹ *29, lines 4–9.

⁶⁰ Another temple of Annunitum was outside the city walls; see *36, line 6 mentioning the gate of Annunitum-beyond-the-walls (*bāb Annunītim ša kawātim*). Cf. Durand 1987: 91.

me, I will massacre on your behalf.⁶¹ Your enemy I will deliver up into your hand. The people that steal from me I will catch, and I will gather them into the camp of Belet-ekallim.” On the day following, Aḫum the priest delivered to me this message together with the hair and the fringe of the garment. I have now written to my lord. I have sealed the hair and the fringe of the garment and sent them to my lord.⁶²

Queen Šibtu, Zimri-Lim’s spouse, is heaping coals of fire on the king’s head by quoting the prophetic words of the servant girl. She proclaims an oracle of salvation concerning the king’s victory over his enemies, but at the same time she makes it plain that something has been “stolen” from the temple of Annunitum, and this reminds the king of a failure in looking after the interests of that temple. Some prophecies include even direct demands:

Speak to my lord: Thus Lanasûm, your servant:

My lord has written to me: “I have just consigned an offering for Dagan. [Bri]ng one bull and six sheep!” Now, the offering of my lord has arrived safely into the city and was performed before Dagan. The land ate the sacrificial meal and the whole city was very pleased by the offering of my lord.

Also, a *muḥḥûm* arose before Dagan and spoke: “How much longer will I not drink pure water? Write to your lord that he would provide me with pure water!”⁶³

Here the writer begins with good news about the sacrificial meal with which the whole city was “very pleased.” Why was that so? Probably because the offering of the king was abundant enough for the large amount of people involved. This hints at the social importance of the offerings: they were not just meant for gods and priests but also for the worshippers who on this occasion all had enough to eat.

Noteworthy also is the demand for pure water. It is spoken by a prophet, but it is a word of god, not of the prophet: the prophet’s “rising before Dagan” means that the prophet stood before the statue of Dagan, acting as the god’s mouthpiece.⁶⁴ Thus, the prophet does not claim the water for himself but for the god, which in concrete terms would mean the community of the temple of Dagan which, obviously, suffers from a shortage of pure water. The role of the author of the letter should be recognized. Even though he mitigates the criticism of the king’s deficient offerings with a more pleasant account of the successful sacrificial meal, he makes it clear that the king had not quite done his duty for the temple of Dagan in Tuttul. Lanasûm not only sends the usual verification equipment but also makes a

⁶¹ Thus Durand 1988: 443, reading *aḫabbuṣ* (< *ḫabāṣu* “to smite down”) based on a collation. Sasson 1994: 305, following the first edition of Dossin 1978, reads *aḫabbub* (< *ḫabābu* “to caress”; cf. *CAD* Ḫ: 2–3) and translates: “I will hover over you”; cf. Heimpel 2003: 260: “I will caress you.”

⁶² *24.

⁶³ *25, lines 1–21.

⁶⁴ See van der Toorn 2000a: 82.

demand of his own that a purification offering be performed.⁶⁵ On this occasion, pure water was certainly needed.

Prophecies like these are usually transmitted by temple authorities whose concern for the gods is highly motivated: they were responsible for the prosperity of their temples—not just the well-being of gods but also of the people who were dependent on the temples' income. This refers even to those prophets who belonged to the personnel of temples, and there is reason to believe that defective offerings could have nasty consequences for their daily life; I quote some evidence to this effect from a letter from Mari.⁶⁶

Šelebu[m came to me] and said: “Idatum-beer [has been taken] from Annu-[nitum]. When [I desired flo]ur to be thrown to the fire,⁶⁷ [they] gave [me] por-[ridge](?) in a jar in lieu of flour. [Thus,] I had to depend on myself.⁶⁸ Twice after I got into the (territory of) the ene[my], and now the thir[d time], she dwells in a temple, whereas I live amidst an abundance of shit and piss, eating reed of *timinum*.”⁶⁹

In spite of some difficulties in understanding and translating this letter it becomes clear that Šelebum, the *assinnu* who is well-known among the prophets of Mari, has got off the hook. Obviously he obtains his livelihood from the income of the temple of Annunitum, and suffers very concretely the consequences of the cut in offerings to the goddess. And not only that, but he has been sent away from the temple to somewhere where he has met with an unendurable situation.

This plea for a prophet illustrates that royal provisions for the temples were not just meant for the deities but also for the people who lived under the aegis of these deities in the temple communities. Therefore, the maintenance of the temples was not exclusively a matter of ritual practices. The temple was an economic factor and a symbol of social identity. Some temples provided shelter for underprivileged people whose social role was liminal.⁷⁰ For instance, the *assinnus* like Šelebum belonged to people whose social and sexual role was acceptable only as devotees of the goddess, and whose living for this reason was entirely dependent on the temples. This letter shows that the so-called cultic criticism may have social dimensions that are seldom spoken of but are perhaps more important that we realize, belonging to the “larger hinterland of ethical concern in Mesopotamian literature.”⁷¹

⁶⁵ Cf. Sasson 1994: 311. ⁶⁶ *8, lines 3–14. ⁶⁷ i.e. to bake the bread.

⁶⁸ A free translation of the phrase *ina pāni natālum* is “to see in front of oneself.”

⁶⁹ The word *timinum* is unclear; Heimpel 2003: 252 translates it as “the reed of a foundation” with the comment: “Probably a bulrush is meant. The plant is commonly found on low ground and in abandoned excavations. The lower part of its stalk is edible.”

⁷⁰ Cf. Postgate 1992: 135–6.

⁷¹ Gordon 2013: 48.

ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN SOURCES:
FIRST MILLENNIUM BCE

Temples as Venues of Prophetic Performances

The first-millennium documentation provided by the Neo-Assyrian archives yields essentially a similar picture as the cuneiform sources from the second millennium, although explicit mentions of prophets performing in temples are fewer and expressed more indirectly. This is partly due to the textual genre: instead of being embedded in letters, the Neo-Assyrian oracles are recorded as they were written down, without much information on their proclamation situations; the colophons following each oracle would only give the name and domicile of the prophet in question. Even this is informative, though, since the domicile of the prophet—which more often than not is Arbela, a prominent center of the worship of Ištar—is also indicative of the temple the prophet is affiliated with. The remarkable concentration of prophets from Arbela strongly suggests their affiliation with Egašankamma, the famous temple of Ištar in Arbela. When the colophon says, “Tašmetu-ereš, the p[rophet], prop[hesied this i]n Arbela,”⁷² or when Ištar exhorts King Esarhaddon to “take to heart these words of mine from Arbela,”⁷³ this most likely refers to prophetic oracles uttered in that particular temple.⁷⁴ Compare this to the following:

Peace to Esarhaddon, king of Assyria! Ištar of Arbela has left for the steppe. She has sent an oracle of peace to her calf in the city.⁷⁵

In this case, we know that the “steppe” refers to Ištar’s “Palace of the Steppe,”⁷⁶ that is, a shrine in Milqia, an otherwise unknown locality outside the city of Arbela, where the goddess dwelled during the absence of Esarhaddon during the civil war preceding his rise to the throne.⁷⁷ The oracle only makes sense as being spoken in this sanctuary.

Some Neo-Assyrian oracles read like responses to prayers of their addressees, presuming that these have been pronounced in temples. The prayer–response model is clearly to be found in the prophecy where Ištar responds to the appeal of the queen mother Naqia for her son:

⁷² *91, lines r. 11–12. ⁷³ *80, lines ii 22–3.

⁷⁴ *Pace van der Toorn* 2000a: 82–3. ⁷⁵ *76, lines v 27–30.

⁷⁶ *90, line 8.

⁷⁷ For the evidence, see Nissinen 2001: 183–6. For the shrine of Milqia (later Melqi, the venue of the Christian feast of the martyr Mar Qardagh), see Menzel 1981: 113; Pongratz-Leisten 1994: 79–83; 1997: 249–50; for the Christian feast, see Walker 2006: 249–54.

I am the Lady of Arbela! To the king's mother, since you implored me, saying: "The one on the right and the one on the left⁷⁸ you have placed in your lap. My own offspring you expelled to roam the steppe!"⁷⁹

Now, king, fear not! Yours is the kingdom, yours is the power!⁸⁰

A similar situation can be found in other Neo-Assyrian texts as well: both Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal relate in their inscriptions about how they implore the gods and the prophetic or otherwise divinatory responses to their prayers that they receive.⁸¹ These cases are strongly reminiscent of the somewhat earlier inscription of Zakkur, the king of the Syrian city Hamath, who receives an encouraging oracle "through seers and through visionaries" from Baalshamayn, his god.⁸² The ritual setting of these prayers is evident even without a mention of specific temples as their venues.

The indirect evidence of the Neo-Assyrian oracles of prophetic appearances in temples is supplemented by a few letters that give more exact accounts. The temple official Adad-aḫu-iddina in his letter to Esarhaddon mentions explicitly a female prophet who prophesied "[in] the temple" about matters related to a substitute king ritual.⁸³ Another temple official called Nabû-reši-išši quotes the critical words spoken by a female prophet, concerning some property that had been given away, probably uttered on occasion of the king's sacrifices mentioned earlier in the letter.⁸⁴ An indirect allusion to a prophecy spoken in a sanctuary may be hidden in the letter of Nabû-reḫtu-ušur, who reports the word of Nusku uttered by a slave girl against Esarhaddon "on the outskirts of Harran."⁸⁵ This calls to mind the temple of cedar that was erected "on the outskirts of Harran" when Esarhaddon was on his way to conquer Egypt. In his letter to Assurbanipal, Marduk-šumu-ušur reminds him how Esarhaddon was symbolically crowned in the presence of the gods Sin and Nusku, and a prophetic word was pronounced to him: "You will go and conquer the countries with it!" It seems plausible that the prophecy of Nusku pronounced by the slave girl to the opposite effect took place at the same site.⁸⁶

⁷⁸ This refers to the rebelling brothers of Esarhaddon, who at the time of the proclamation of this oracle had the upper hand; see Parpola 1980: 175. For later references to the position of the crown princes on the right and left side of the king, cf. SAA 10 185: 12–13: "You have placed the first on your right and the second on your left side," and the reliefs on the Zincirli stele of Esarhaddon, which has the two princes on the each side of the monument (see, e.g. Parpola and Watanabe 1988, 20).

⁷⁹ This not only alludes to Gilgames' roaming the steppe after the death of Enkidu (*The Epic of Gilgames' [Gilg.]* ix 2–5; cf. Halton 2009: 57–8; Parpola 1997: 41 ad loc.; Weippert 2002: 52–3; Zimmern 1910), but also refers to the expatriation of Esarhaddon during the rebellion of his brothers, as alluded to in the Nineveh A inscription (cf. *97, lines i 38–9).

⁸⁰ *75, lines v 12–23.

⁸¹ Esarhaddon: *97, lines i 59–62; Assurbanipal: *101, lines v 25–76; cf. *118a.

⁸² *137, lines A 10ff. ⁸³ *111, lines 7ff. ⁸⁴ *113, lines r. 7–s. 1.

⁸⁵ *115, lines r. 2–5.

⁸⁶ *118f, lines 12–14; see de Jong 2007: 400–2; Uehlinger 1997: 316–18.

The scattered first millennium BCE cuneiform sources from locations other than Assyria do not contain too much information about prophetic performances in temples. One Neo-Babylonian ritual text pertaining to a major cultic event, the ritual of the Lady of Uruk, mentions a prophet performing in rituals on the third and fourth day of the month of Adar:

In the month of Adar, on the first, second, sixth, [...], fourteenth and fifteenth day: duties of the ch[anter and the musician]; the *edūtu* is (ful)filled.

On the second day, on offering [...] kettledrum is played [...] the purify.

On the third day, the Lady of Uruk proceeds and takes a seat between the curtains [...] The prophet goes around it three times, carries the water basin and proceeds [...] [On the fourth day], the prophet goes around it three times, carries the water basin and proce[eds...] the copper [kettledrum] is played, sacrificial me[als] are offered, the offering [...] kettledrum is played and danc[e...] the censer. The musician takes a seat and shou[ts...].⁸⁷

Interestingly, the prophet acts in interplay with musicians, as was the case in the ritual of Ištar at Mari discussed above; in fact, the prophet's performance is listed under the "duties of the ch[anter and the musician]," which, once again, shows that the often-made associations between prophets and cultic functionaries in lexical lists and omen texts actually reflect real circumstances in Mesopotamian temples. What strikes the eye in this particular text is the job description of the prophet. He circumambulates something—probably the cubiculum surrounded by curtains where the goddess is seated⁸⁸—carrying a water basin used for the ritual washing of hands,⁸⁹ but nothing is mentioned of the usual functions of a *mahḫû*, such as going into a frenzy and prophesying. This is quite exceptional, since the intermediary function of the *mahḫû* is virtually always referred to in texts where they are mentioned. This is not enough to deprive the *mahḫû* of their primarily prophetic function,⁹⁰ but the text shows that the prophets' cultic performance was not restricted to raving and prophesying.

A most baffling text connecting a prophet with cult places is the very latest cuneiform document of prophecy. The Late Babylonian chronographic texts reporting events of the year 133 BCE⁹¹ include an account of a certain "man belonging to the Boatman family" (*iltēn mār mallāḫi*) who appeared in the

⁸⁷ *135o, lines r. 26–33; see Beaulieu 2003: 375, 377.

⁸⁸ The verb *lawû* refers to a ritual circumambulation, for which see Catagnoti 2015. The correlate of the sg. 3. m. suffix *-šu* is not clear.

⁸⁹ The water basin is elsewhere accompanied with a linen towel; see Beaulieu 2003: 140.

⁹⁰ In *118, which is a text pertaining to a healing ritual, male and female *mahḫû* are mentioned as being present with (other) male and female ecstasies, but nothing more is said about their activity. Stökl 2012a: 57 interprets *118 and *135o as indicating that the prophetic role of the *mahḫû* is secondary to their ecstatic function; however, not even ecstasy is mentioned in either of these texts.

⁹¹ **134–5; see del Monte 1997: 124–7; Nissinen 2002b.

sanctuaries of Babylon and Borsippa and spoke something that won the favor of the citizens but was condemned as a heretic by the temple authorities:

That Boatman [...] in Babylon and Borsippa and [...] he ap]peared, on the streets and squares they listened to his proclamation [...] “[I am] a mes[senger] of Nanaya! I have been sent on behalf of the strong, hitting god, your God.” The council of that temple responded to [that] Boatman [*and to the people with him*], saying: “Retreat back, return to your cities! Do not deliver up the city to loot and plunder! Do not let the gods like the city be carried off as spoils! [...]”

[*Boatman*] responded to them, saying: “I am a [mes]senger of Nanaya; I will not deliver up the city to loot and plunder! As the hand of the strong, hitting God [...] s] to Ezida [...]” The council of that temple responded to the people who were wi[th] that [Boatman]: “Do not listen to the words of that fanatic! [*Save*] your lives, [*protect*] yourselves! [...]” The other people did not take up their words but said: “[...]”.

The texts inform that this prophetic figure chose prominent cult places in the two major Babylonian cities to proclaim his controversial message as “a messenger of Nanaya,” that is, a prophet of the most important goddess of Hellenistic Babylonia. What exactly was so scandalous about his message is not quite clear for the reader of the present day, but it seems like the “the strong, hitting god, your God”—in fact, your *gods* in plural (*ilikunu*), indicating a totality of gods in one divine person—was something the temple authorities could not digest. The text indicates that this message brought about a riot in Babylonia where some people may even have been killed.⁹²

Prophets among the Temple Personnel

The affiliation of the Assyrian prophets with the temples of Ištar becomes all the more evident when we take a look at some texts that actually present the prophets as belonging to the temple personnel. This is already suggested by Neo-Assyrian lexical lists that itemize prophets (*maḥḥû*) among of cultic functionaries,⁹³ but there is evidence showing that the association between prophets and temple activities is not merely lexical.

The outlay of copper from Tušḥan from the year 611 BCE may indicate that the prophet and the augur receiving rewards for their services were affiliated with the temple that is also given its share in the document (*118c).⁹⁴ A Middle-Assyrian provisions list from Kar-Tukulti-Ninurta (*123; c. eleventh

⁹² The fragmentary section *135, lines 30–3 says: “[...]s the people from the city [...] they killed in their midst and [...] in Babylon and Borsippa [...] the mes]sage that [was to be sent] t[o ...].

⁹³ **124, 125, 126, 135m; cf. *120 (Old Babylonian); *135l (Middle Assyrian); *135n (Neo-Babylonian); *135q (Late Babylonian).

⁹⁴ Thus Parpola 2008.

century BCE) lists male and female prophets together with the *assinnus* of the Ištar temple as recipients of a ration of barley. A similar text, dating from the year 809 BCE (*110), is a decree of expenditures for ceremonies in Ešarra, the temple of the god Aššur in the city of Assur, which enjoyed the highest status among Assyrian temples in the Neo-Assyrian period. The paragraph concerning the expenditure for the divine council mentions female prophets as recipients of barley. In yet another document of similar kind, a Neo-Babylonian list of temple offerings, the prophet is listed among the temple servants as a recipient of different parts of the sacrificial animals, the prophet's share being the hearts (*130). These administrative documents, comparable with the case of Šelebum, who had been left without his food rations at Mari (see "Prophets as Advocates of Worship" above), provide the most direct evidence we can get of prophets as members of temple communities.

Some seventh-century Neo-Assyrian texts from the state archives of Nineveh testify to the role of members of temple communities as prophets. One of the prophecies is spoken by Issar-beli-da"ini who is said to be a votaress (*šēlūtu*) of the king, that is, a person who had been donated by the king to the temple (*74). A poorly preserved fragment of a text sent by another votaress to the king may also be a remnant of a prophetic oracle (*114). Female votaries of Ištar of Arbela, some of them of Egyptian origin, are known from Neo-Assyrian sources.⁹⁵ They could be married or divorced and have children, which indicates that they were not secluded, but they nevertheless lived under the aegis of the temple of Ištar of Arbela, a context which probably endorsed the prophetic activity of some of them.

There is not much evidence to reveal how the prophets actually functioned in the worship of the temples; nevertheless, we are a little better equipped with the Neo-Assyrian texts than was the case at Mari. The above-mentioned text associating the female prophets with the divine council (*110) is a strong indication of their presence in the ritual celebration of the assembly of gods, which makes perfect sense with regard to the prophets' position as the mediators of divine words. Another hint can be found in the so-called Marduk Ordeal text, which is a ritual commentary probably associated with the return of the statue of Marduk to Babylon at the beginning of the reign of King Assurbanipal (early 660s BCE). A prophet (*maḥḥū*) features once in this dramatic scenario (*103):

The prophet who goes before the Lady of Babylon is a bringer of news; weeping he goes toward her: "They are taking him [i.e. Marduk] to the *ḥursān!*"⁹⁶ She sends (the prophet) away, saying: "My brother, my brother!"

⁹⁵ See SAA 14 443 (Mattila 2002: 282); StAT 2 164; 184 (Donbaz and Parpola 2001: 119, 131).

⁹⁶ The *ḥursān* probably means the place where Marduk is held captive; cf. Frymer-Kensky 1983: 138–9.

The role of the prophet in the ritual is indeed a prophetic one, since he is functioning as an intermediary of gods, bringing the sad news to the Lady of Babylon that her husband Marduk had been sent to captivity; this refers to the destruction of Babylon and the expatriation of the statue of Marduk to Assyria.

The most impressive document of the prophets' ritual role is provided by the collection of five prophecies, all deriving from the enthronement ceremony of Esarhaddon in the Ešarra temple and reflecting different phases of the ritual (SAA 9 3). The structure of this oracle collection differs from other collections in that the text includes not only the actual oracles but also cultic commentaries indicating the ritual setting of each prophecy. The ritual begins with a procession (*84), that proceeds to the temple gate (*85) and finally to the inner sanctum, arriving at the statue of Aššur (*86). The next phase is a meal served to the vassal kings on the temple terrace on occasion of their covenant with Esarhaddon (*87), and the last oracle is to be located in the temple of Ištar (*88). The written prophetic oracles follow this cultic procedure from station to station, and there is little reason to doubt that they are based on on-site oral proclamation, whether or not they repeat the exact wording of the spoken oracles.

Prophets as Advocates of Worship

Building and restoration of temples was one of the principal duties of an ancient Near Eastern king. Since the prophets were there to remind the king of his duties as mouthpieces of deities who were believed to dwell in the temples, it can be expected that the welfare of the temples was among the foremost issues the prophetic oracles dealt with, all the more because it seems that the prophets' personal welfare was at least partly dependent on it.

We have already seen officials reporting prophetic words concerning the care of gods and their offerings at Mari, and the king could even be reprimanded by prophets for neglecting his duties. It appears that their Assyrian colleagues a millennium later had similar concerns. The letters of two Assyrian temple officials Adad-aḫu-iddina and Nabû-reši-išši, deal with temple property. Nabû-reši-išši gives an account of a prophetic performance in the temple:

[...] she prophesied: "Why have you given the [...] -tree, the grove and ...⁹⁷ to the Egyptians? Say to the king that they be returned to me, and I will give total abundance [to] his [...]."⁹⁸

The deity speaking here is probably Ištar of Arbela, who claims ownership of her property. The proclamation situation may have been indicated in the

⁹⁷ The cuneiform signs *li-du-x* (line r. 9) are unintelligible.

⁹⁸ *113, lines r. 7–s. 1.

broken part of the text; in any case, one gets the impression that the prophecy was spoken in the presence of Nabû-reši-išši. The oracle may even have been proclaimed on his own inquiry. His role as the author of the letter should not be overlooked: the letter is about the property of the temple, for which he is responsible. The prophecy gives him the opportunity to place the demand of returning the property in the mouth of the goddess, disguising his own critical attitude to the real estate policy of the king.

The case of Adad-aḫu-iddina is different, since he does *not* want to act according to the prophecy, according to which he should send the royal throne of the temple to Akkad, probably to be used in a substitute king ritual:

Mullissu-abu-ušri, the female prophet who conveyed the king's clothes to the land of Akkad, prophesied [in] the temple: "[The] throne from the te[mpl]e [. . .]

(break)

Let the throne go! I will catch the enemies of my king with it!" Now, without the authorization of the king, my lord, I shall not give the throne. We shall act according to what the king, my lord, orders.⁹⁹

In this case, the prophet and the temple administrator have different ideas about the appropriate ritual procedure: the former advocates the royal ritual in Akkad while the latter is more concerned about the proper use of the temple's most precious assets he is responsible for. Interestingly, as it seems, the temple official prefers to rely on the royal command rather than on the divine word.

Unlike the documents from Mari, the Neo-Assyrian records do not include ritual demands spoken by the prophets, except for one case, where Ištar requires offerings from the newly enthroned Esarhaddon.¹⁰⁰ Considering the general importance of the temples to the identity of the community and to the royal ideology, one would expect to find more prophecies of this kind; if there were more, they have not been preserved. In any case, it is important that Assurbanipal in his inscription mentions dreams and prophetic oracles as the source of divine orders to renovate the temple of the Lady of Kidmuri, that is, Ištar of Calah. These prophecies, corroborated by the "firm positive answer" from Šamaš and Adad (this refers to extispicy), are presented as the initial impetus the king needed to re-establish the rites of this particular temple.¹⁰¹

The fifth and last oracle of the Neo-Assyrian tablet SAA 9 3, which is a collection of prophecies on the occasion of Esarhaddon's coronation, presents an angry goddess.¹⁰² The tone of this prophecy is very different from the preceding oracles of salvation (*šulmu*), in which Esarhaddon is given the "four regions" of the world (*85), a covenant is made between him and the Assyrian

⁹⁹ *111, lines 7–r. 14. I have analyzed this letter in Nissinen 1998a: 78–81. The substitute king ritual, referred to in *109, took place in 671 BCE in Akkad, the old Sargonid capital where the cults of Ištar and other gods had been re-established in 674 BCE; see Parpola 1983: 270–2.

¹⁰⁰ *88.

¹⁰¹ *99, lines ii 16–17.

¹⁰² Cf. Perroudon 1993.

supreme god Aššur (*86), and a meal of covenant is served by Ištar to his vassals and their gods (*87). Now, however, Esarhaddon is given a severe reprimand for neglecting the worship of Ištar:

Word of Ištar of Arbela to Esarhaddon, king of Assyria.

As if I had not done or given to you anything! Did I not bend and give to you the four doorjambs of Assyria? Did I not vanquish your enemy? Did I not gather your foes and adversaries [like but]terflies?

What have [yo]u, in turn, given to me? The [fo]od of the banquet is no[t there], as if there were no temple at all! My food is wi[th]he]ld from me, my drink is wi[th]he]ld from me! I am longing for them, I have fixed my eyes upon them.

Verily, see to it that there is a bowl of one seah of food and a pitcher of one seah of best beer! Then I will take and put vegetables and soup in my mouth, fill the cup and drink from it. I want to restore my charms!¹⁰³

The goddess is being quite blunt with the new king about whom he should thank and praise for his ascending to the throne. It was she who gave him the “four doorjambs of Assyria,” that is, the cities of Assur, Nineveh, Calah, and Arbela, symbolizing the land of Assyria as a whole.¹⁰⁴ She had vanquished his enemies and captured the rebels (*88, lines iv 22–30), and in the previous oracle (*87), she is the hostess of the meal of covenant. Now, after all this, she wants to restore her charms that have been ravaged because of Esarhaddon, but she has been left alone, without food and drink.

The “charms” of the goddess have a parallel in a later prophecy to Assurbani-pal, in which Ištar tells how she was disfigured by droughts and showers while roaming the steppe and mountains because of him.¹⁰⁵ This allusion to the *Epic of Gilgames*¹⁰⁶ has a concrete point of reference in Esarhaddon’s expatriation and his speedy march through the desert towards his rebelling brothers. According to the Nin A inscription of Esarhaddon, Ištar stood at his side and led him to victory.¹⁰⁷ Her participation in Esarhaddon’s struggle was symbolized by her sojourning in an *akitu* chapel in Milqia, outside of Arbela, during Esarhaddon’s absence, and by her triumphal return from there after his victory.¹⁰⁸ Now, recovering from all this trouble, she is expecting something from Esarhaddon in return.

¹⁰³ *88, lines iii 16–37. ¹⁰⁴ Cf. Parpola 1997: 26 ad loc.; Nissinen 2001: 186–95.

¹⁰⁵ *94, lines 5–15.

¹⁰⁶ See the early work of Zimmern 1910; cf. Halton 2009: 57–8; Parpola 1997: 41 ad loc.; Weippert 2002: 52–3.

¹⁰⁷ *97, lines i 74–9: “The goddess Ištar, the lady of war and battle, who loves my priestly duties, stood at my side, broke their bows, (and) she split open their tight battle ranks. In their assembly, they said thus: ‘This is our king!’ Through her sublime command began coming over to my side (and) marching behind me. They were gamboling like lambs (and) begging my sovereignty.”

¹⁰⁸ For the *akitu* chapel and festival in Milqia, see Menzel 1981: 113; Pongratz-Leisten 1994: 79–83; 1997: 249–50.

If this oracle was really pronounced on the occasion of Esarhaddon's coronation (and its connection with the rest of the oracles is not purely redactional), Esarhaddon receives a tough rebuke for shirking his duties right on the first day of his rule. One is tempted to ask whether this can refer to anything that he could really have done or failed to do. Rather, to be on the safe side, the newly enthroned king is reproached for flaws he cannot yet possibly be guilty of, that he may never forget his duties as the king to the goddess who "loves his priesthood."

The prophecy from the angry goddess illustrates how deeply interwoven the two primary contexts of the prophetic activity, temple and kingship, were. At least in Assyria, the ritual duties of the king belonged to his role as a priest, or the high priest (*šangû*),¹⁰⁹ which he assumed when ascending the throne, taking supreme responsibility for the worship of gods in his kingdom. Therefore, the so-called "cultic criticism" cannot always be separated from political and societal criticism, a topic to be discussed in Chapter 7.

Taken together, the cuneiform sources yield a surprisingly uniform picture of the relationship of the prophets with temples. In particular, the huge time-span covering the Old-Babylonian, Middle-Assyrian, Neo-Assyrian, Neo-Babylonian, and Seleucid periods speaks volumes about the persistence of the presence of the prophets in Mesopotamian temples. Most of the evidence necessarily derives from the two main sources of information, Mari and Assyria; however, there are enough texts from other periods to warrant the conviction, not only that there were prophets, but also that they were involved in temples and their worship. According to the picture discernible from the documents at hand, the prophets proclaim their oracles in temples; they belong to temple communities; they advocate ritual practices and sometimes take part in them; temple officials inform the kings about their sayings. This does not mean that the activity of the prophets was confined to the temples, since prophecies are demonstrably delivered elsewhere, and "prophets also took to the streets if their addressees were located there."¹¹⁰

To this should be added that, first, there is a significant number of women among the prophets (see "Gender of Prophets: Taxonomy" in Chapter 8 in this volume), and second, the prophets are never presented as occupying the highest ladders of social or religious hierarchy, but seem rather to be supervised and controlled by priests and temple administrators. This does not mean, however, that the prophets were a peripheral and socially marginalized group; on the contrary, they were employed by central temples, they

¹⁰⁹ For the cultic role of the Assyrian king and his relationship with the priests, see Menzel 1981: 157–74.

¹¹⁰ Stökl 2012c: 89–90, referring to the performance of the prophet of Marduk at the palace gate of Babylon (*47).

communicated with temple authorities who took their prophecies seriously, and their sayings were not indifferent to the politics of the royal court.

Finally, the question must be asked to what extent this picture concurs with historical factuality. This must be judged with regard to the nature of the sources, their purposes, and their eventual biases. The purpose of food rations lists is primarily administrative, for example, to keep a record of how much barley had been delivered to whom. If misleading records were given, they would probably have been detected before filing them in the archives. Again, when a temple official gives an account of a prophecy he has either witnessed or otherwise become aware of, he can, of course, manipulate the contents of the prophecy to correspond with his own purposes of citing it, but he would have little reason to make the prophetic performance happen elsewhere than it did (if he made a prophecy take place in a temple when, in reality, it occurred in another place, this would only contribute to the general picture that prophecies were expected to occur in temples). The problem is rather that the fragmentary condition and uneven distribution of the sources prevents us from seeing the whole picture.

While we can be rather confident that the above-sketched general picture of prophets and temples in Mesopotamia is not very far from historical reality, it is also possible that the picture is disproportional and local variations are not visible at all. Details that we happen to know may not be the most important details we *should* know.¹¹¹

In comparison with the biblical texts, it is important to note that the cuneiform sources do not inform us about major conflicts or rivalries between prophets and temples, or prophets and priests; the constructs of prophecy in texts from Mari and Assyria rather present the prophets as sharing the symbolic worlds of both the temple communities and the (implied) authors of the texts. Especially in Assyria, the collections of prophetic oracles can be seen as a part of the social organization for maintenance of the symbolic universe¹¹² constituted by royal ideology and worship of Ištar.¹¹³ This, of course, does not mean a total and fundamental absence of dissonance between prophets and the institutional order; a few individual discordant voices, such as the telling case reported by Nabû-rehtu-ušur (*115), testify to the contrary. Evidently, we are dependent on a textual transmission that does not give the dissident voices a hearing but make the prophets appear in roles representing, rather than opposing, the institutional order.

¹¹¹ Cf. Blum 2008b: 88: "Bedenkt man die realen Bedingungen für nachhaltige Archivierung prophetischer Orakel, so kann das übernommene Material weder für Mesopotamien noch gar für den gesamten Alten Orient ohne weiteres als repräsentativ gelten."

¹¹² For the machinery and social organization of "universe-maintenance," see Berger and Luckmann 1989: 104–28.

¹¹³ For the ideological background of the Neo-Assyrian prophetic texts, see Parpola 1997: xviii–xlvi.

PROPHETS AND TEMPLES: GREEK SOURCES

Temples as Venues of Prophetic Performances

The cuneiform evidence, as we have seen, leaves little room for doubt that temples indeed were places where prophetic performances were expected to take place, and where they were actively sought after. This picture gets even sharper when we move westwards, to the ancient Greek world, encountering broad evidence of sanctuaries where all kinds of divinatory oracles, including those of prophetic type, were delivered.¹¹⁴ These included local shrines, serving the needs of the citizens of individual cities, as well as temples which boasted a centuries-long tradition and were visited by kings and citizens from the Eastern Mediterranean area from Syria and Asia Minor to Etruria. The most important oracular sites were the temples of Apollo, the Greek oracular deity par excellence. His oracles were uttered in his sanctuaries all over mainland Greece, the island of Delos (Apollo's mythical birthplace), Peloponnesus, and Asia Minor.¹¹⁵ The most important and best documented temples of Apollo with an established oracular tradition are those at Delphi, Didyma, and Claros—the “big three” of Apollonian prophecy. Another important oracular deity was Zeus, Apollo's father, whose sanctuary in Dodona counts among the major Greek oracular sites.

The Greek sources are somewhat more rewarding than the Mesopotamian ones when it comes to the question of what actually happened in the temples when oracles were taken. While the Mesopotamian texts are nearly mute as a grave about the procedure of prophetic performances, apart from references to prophets going into a frenzy (*maḥû*), the Greek sources sometimes give an inkling of the ritual practices related to the oracles. Archaeology has brought to light what is left of the above-mentioned temples together with items that can be associated with oracular practices,¹¹⁶ but the main source of information on the oracles remains the huge body of written sources from different times. Even here it must not be forgotten that the sources are not eye-witness reports but appear in secondary sources partly dependent on each other—for instance, Iamblichus' accounts of the oracle of Didyma are dependent on Porphyry.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴ For a convenient overview of Greek temples, their activities and significance, see Pedley 2005; for oracular sites, see Hoffmann 2015: 222–48; Stoneman 2011; Friese 2010; Burkert, Suárez de la Torre, and Graf 2005; Curnow 2004.

¹¹⁵ See Walter Burkert in Burkert, Suárez de la Torre, and Graf 2005: 31–7; Rosenberger 2001: 22–8; Parke 1985.

¹¹⁶ e.g. the lead tablets including oracular queries and the oracular tripod-cauldrons at Dodona; see Dieterle 2007: 70–85, 170–81; and the remnants of the oracular temples at Claros (see Moretti et al. 2014) and Didyma (see Tuchelt 1991; Greaves 2002: 111–17).

¹¹⁷ See, e.g. Struck 2002. For Iamblichus' *De mysteriis*, see Addey 2010; 2014: 239–82; Athanassiadi 1993.

Plutarch, on the other hand, himself a priest of the temple at Delphi,¹¹⁸ probably knows what he is talking about when he relates the goings-on in the temple of Apollo in his own time, but when referring to ancient practices even he must have drawn on written sources.

The temple of Apollo at Delphi was, according to Plutarch, “the most ancient in time and the most famous in repute”;¹¹⁹ indeed, Delphi is doubtless the most acknowledged oracular site in Greek literature and, even historically, the first-ranking among the Greek oracular sanctuaries and the longest enduring in the whole ancient Eastern Mediterranean.¹²⁰ According to the myth, it was originally the sanctuary of Gaia, the earth goddess, who was guarded by the snake monster Python, and only became the oracle of Apollo when he killed the snake with his arrow.¹²¹

The Delphic oracle was consulted by clients coming from all around the Mediterranean including, of course, the citizens of Delphi and other Greek cities.¹²² Attested archaeologically at the end of the ninth century BCE and mentioned twice by Homer,¹²³ it gained Panhellenic status especially in the seventh century BCE, and probably did not decline even after the Persian wars in the fifth century BCE, as has often been thought.¹²⁴ The oracle flourished in the Hellenistic period; however, the fame of Delphi began to decline along with the extension of Roman power, giving reason to Plutarch to write his treatises on the Delphic oracle’s magnificent past compared to its less-than-glorious state in his own time. The oracular institution at Delphi was eventually closed down by Theodosius I in 390/1 CE.¹²⁵

The sanctuary of Apollo at Delphi was a magnificent wall-bounded complex with the temple at its heart.¹²⁶ The temple, again, was built around what was called the *omphalos*, “navel of the earth,”¹²⁷ located at a spot where there was

¹¹⁸ For Plutarch’s priesthood, see Lamberton 2001: 52–9. ¹¹⁹ Plutarch, *Mor.* 5.414a.

¹²⁰ For Delphi and the Delphic oracle, see, e.g. Kindt 2016; Hoffmann 2015: 226–33; Friese 2010: 128–35, 363–5; 2012: 20–34; Johnston 2008: 33–60; Bowden 2005; Burkert, Suárez de la Torre, and Graf 2005: 16–31; Curnow 2004: 55–8; Rosenberger 2001: 48–64; Maurizio 1997; Price 1985; Fontenrose 1978; Parke and Wormell 1956; Amandry 1950.

¹²¹ For the mythological origins of the Delphic oracle, see Sourvinou-Inwood 1988 (= 1991: 217–43).

¹²² See Rosenberger 2003: 29–33; 2008: 94–5.

¹²³ Homer, *Iliad* 9.404–5; *Odyssey* 8.79–82; cf. also the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo*, which is not Homeric but composed in early sixth century BCE.

¹²⁴ Cf. Bowden 2005: 38–9, according to whom the idea that there was a general increase in skepticism towards oracles is unsupported by the evidence. The reason for this view is rather that the post-Herodotian historiographers, Thucydides and Xenophon, rarely mention Delphi which, then, influenced Plutarch’s view on history of the oracle (cf. also pp. 86–7).

¹²⁵ The fullest presentation of the history of the Delphic oracle remains Parke and Wormell 1956: 49–291.

¹²⁶ See the plan of the temple complex in, e.g. Fontenrose 1978: 2–3; Bowden 2005: 15, or Johnston 2008: 37. For an assessment of the archaeological information regarding the interior of the temple, see Rougemont 2013.

¹²⁷ See Kindt 2013.

believed to be a chasm producing vapors emerging from the ground. While the existence of the chasm and the toxic vapors remains a matter of dispute,¹²⁸ this tradition was the basis for the placement of the inner sanctum (*adyton*), furnished with a tripod exactly above the spot where the chasm was believed to be situated. During the oracular session the female prophet, who was called the Pythia, sat on the tripod and uttered the oracles of Apollo.

The information on fifth-century Delphi in this period derives mostly from Herodotus who regularly refers to consultations of the Delphic oracle and the responses given by the Pythia. Together with other sources, the number of oracle responses from Delphi in Greek texts from different times amounts to several hundreds.¹²⁹ Herodotus does not, however, describe the oracular process at Delphi. It can only be reconstructed from the information given by Plutarch who wrote half a millennium later,¹³⁰ in addition to some passages in Greek tragedy (Aeschylus, Euripides, and Sophocles) that may reflect the Delphic practices at the time when they were written. Thus, when reconstructing what actually happened at Delphi, it is important to keep in mind that it is drawn from sources from different periods, fulfilling different literary purposes depending on the writer, and leaving many details unmentioned.

The second-ranking oracular site in the Greek world was Didyma, the temple of Apollo close to the city of Miletos.¹³¹ It is first mentioned in the Homeric *Hymn to Apollo* and several inscriptions from the sixth century BCE, but Pausanias says the sanctuary was founded before the Ionian settlement (eleventh century BCE),¹³² and the foundation myth traces its origin back to Branchos, the forefather of the Branchidae priests serving at the temple; there is no archaeological record, however, predating the late eighth century BCE.¹³³ Herodotus, according to whom “there was an Oracle long since established, which all the Ionians and Aeolians were wont to consult,” makes recurrent references to the oracle at Didyma in connection with the Persian wars,¹³⁴ in the wake of which the temple was destroyed in 494 BCE and the Branchidae family left the site. The oracle was silent for 160 years and re-established

¹²⁸ See “Prophetic Performance in Greek Sources” in Chapter 5 in this volume.

¹²⁹ The catalogue of Fontenrose 1978 includes 535 responses.

¹³⁰ Plutarch’s three works, *The Obsolescence of Oracles* (*Mor.* 5.409e–438e), *The Oracles at Delphi No Longer Given in Verse* (*Mor.* 5.394d–409d), and *The E at Delphi* (*Mor.* 5.384d–394c) are the main sources of the functioning of the Delphic oracle.

¹³¹ For the temple of Apollo and the oracle at Didyma, see Hoffmann 2015: 235–7; Lampinen 2013: 56–60; Friese 2010: 167–71, 387–8; 2012: 39–42; Johnston 2008: 82–90; Oesterheld 2008: 232–66; Busine 2005: 28–32, 47–86; Curnow 2004: 133–4; Tuchelt 1991; Fontenrose 1988; Parke 1985: 1–111; 1986.

¹³² Pausanias 5.13.11; 7.2.6.

¹³³ Callimachus, *Branchos* 194.28–31; 229.12–13 Pf.; Conon, *FGrH* 26 F 1, 33; Statius, *Thebaid* [*Theb.*] 8.198, etc.; see Fontenrose 1988: 106–9. Morgan 1989: 23 holds it unlikely that the oracle would predate the establishment of the sanctuary.

¹³⁴ Quotation from Herodotus 1.157; see also 1.46, 92, 141, 157–9; 5.36; 6.19.

in 334/331 BCE, after which it, again, enjoyed a considerable prestige until the fourth century CE. The restoration of the temple is connected with Alexander the Great, and the oracle was consulted also by Seleukos Nikator; even Diocletian received an anti-Christian oracle from the Apollo of Didyma in 303 CE.¹³⁵ First and foremost, however, it served as the civic oracle of Miletus, the patron city of the temple of Apollo, and its population.¹³⁶

The temple at Didyma was the third largest in the Greek world after Ephesus and Samos, reflecting the wealth and mutual rivalry of the Ionian cities.¹³⁷ At the heart of it was a large *adyton*, the inner sanctum, within which there was the sacred spring, probably a natural water source around which the sanctuary was constructed. The water of the spring had an important function in the oracular session which, therefore, took place in the *adyton*.¹³⁸ The oracles may have been spoken by male members of the Branchidae family until the destruction of the temple; in the re-established Hellenistic temple, perhaps following the Delphic model, the oracle-speaker seems always to have been a woman.

The third member of the “Big Three” of Apollonian prophecy is the temple of Claros near the ancient city of Colophon.¹³⁹ According to the myth, the foundation of the sanctuary goes back to the legend of the divinatory contest between two seers, Calchas and Mopsus, probably “intended to supply heroic credentials for the founder of the oracle at Clarus.”¹⁴⁰ Calchas had received an oracle that he would have to die when meeting a seer greater than himself. This greater seer turned out to be Mopsus who was the son of the female seer Manto and grandson of the blind seer Tiresias, and hence, having such a familial background, was an ideal person to establish the oracle at Claros.

Historically, there is no evidence of the Clarian oracle before the Hellenistic age, the earliest response being connected with Alexander the Great.¹⁴¹ The archaeological record at the site begins already in the eighth century BCE, but the monumental architecture, less influenced by Delphi,¹⁴² dates likewise to Hellenistic times.¹⁴³ A multitude of contemporary sources testify to the prosperity and significance of the sanctuary and its oracle through the Hellenistic

¹³⁵ Alexander: Callisthenes in Strabo 17.1.43; Seleukos: *DI* 424; 479; 480; Pausanias 1.16.3; 8.46.3; Diocletian: Lactantius, *Mort.* 11.212–13 (no. 33 in Fontenrose, *Didyma*, 206–7); for Hellenistic and Roman Didyma, see Fontenrose 1988: 15–25.

¹³⁶ Cf. Rosenberger 2003: 40–2; Morgan 1989: 26–7.

¹³⁷ Cf. Morgan 1989: 18.

¹³⁸ For the architecture of the temple at Didyma, see Johnston 2008: 86–8; Greaves 2002: 111–17; Tuchelt 1991; Fontenrose 1988: 28–44.

¹³⁹ For the sanctuary and the oracle at Claros, see Hoffmann 2015: 237–9; Ferrary 2014a; Lampinen 2013: 53–6; Friese 2010: 175–9, 390–2; 2012: 43–7; Oesterheld 2008: 267–322; Johnston 2008: 76–82; Busine 2005: 32–40, 59–69; Parke 1985: 112–70.

¹⁴⁰ M. A. Flower 2008: 45; cf. Hesiod fr. 278 (MW) and Parke 1985: 114–15.

¹⁴¹ Pausanias 7.5.1. ¹⁴² See Jacquemin 2014.

¹⁴³ For the archaeology of Claros, see Moretti et al. 2014; de La Genière 1998.

times and again, after a period of decline, in the late imperial age.¹⁴⁴ The catchment area of the Clarian oracle covered, in addition to Asia Minor, Anatolia, Syria, mainland Greece, Macedonia, and Thracia, giving it a truly international character.¹⁴⁵

In addition to the three major temples of Apollo, the sanctuary of Zeus at Dodona in northwestern Greece is another example of an outstanding oracular center in the ancient Greek world.¹⁴⁶ The lead tablets from Dodona, dating to c. 550–167 BCE, constitute the biggest body of primary oracular sources, comprising some 1,300 examples.¹⁴⁷ The literary evidence suggests that the temple had a Panhellenic standing comparable to that of Delphi,¹⁴⁸ although the geographical area represented by the tablets rather suggests the status of a regional cult center with consultations from other parts of the Greek mainland, especially from Sparta and Athens.¹⁴⁹

It is impossible to determine when the oracle at Dodona was established. The oldest archaeological remains located in the plain of Molossia in Epirus date back to the eighth century BCE, and the first literary reference is to be found in Homer.¹⁵⁰ The oracle is, in any case, older than the temple of Zeus constructed in the late fifth century BCE, and it functioned throughout the Hellenistic period until the turn of Common Era, when Strabo reports it to be “virtually extinct.”¹⁵¹ The significant elements of the sanctuary at Dodona were the oracular oak, attested already in Homer, the dove with which the prophetesses of the sanctuary were identified, and the bronze tripods dedicated to Zeus.

Prophets among the Temple Personnel

In the Greek world, the oracles of the intuitive type were typically spoken by women often called *prophētis* or *promantis*, who had a permanent, perhaps

¹⁴⁴ See Ferrary 2014a; Parke 1985: 125–70.

¹⁴⁵ For the geographical distribution of the delegations sent to Claros, see Ferrary 2014a: 133–82; 2014b; Busine 2005: 59–69.

¹⁴⁶ For the oracle of Dodona, see R. Parker 2016; Hoffmann 2015: 233–5; Friese 2010: 136–41, 365–7; 2012: 50–4; Johnston 2008: 60–72; Dieterle 2007; Kowalzig 2007: 331–52; Eidinow 2007; Rosenberger 2001: 61–4, 96–9, 135–7; Gartzou-Tatti 1990; Parke 1967.

¹⁴⁷ The fullest compilation of the tablets from Dodona (Dakaris, Vokotopoulou, and Christidis 2013, 2 vols), contains 4,216 inscriptions; the edition of Lhôte 2006 includes 167 tablets. For the tablets, see also Piccinini 2013; Martín González 2012; Eidinow 2007; Dieterle 2007: 70–85.

¹⁴⁸ For example, Xenophon (*Ways and Means* 6.2) pairs Delphi and Dodona together as oracle sites where the Athenians should go to seek advice from the god about their plans to develop the city; for further evidence, see Eidinow 2007: 272–3 n. 37.

¹⁴⁹ Thus Kowalzig 2007: 336–41; cf. Rosenberger 2003: 33–8, 2008: 95–8.

¹⁵⁰ Homer, *Iliad* 16.230–46; *Odyssey* 14.327 = 19.296; for the archaeology of Dodona, see Dieterle 2007.

¹⁵¹ Strabo 7.7.9.

life-long affiliation with a specific temple. The most famous of them is and was the Pythia of Delphi, but the female prophets of Apollo at Didyma, as well as those at the temple of Zeus at Dodona, have also left traces in Classical literature. At the temple of Apollo at Claros, the prophets were not women but men.

The Delphic oracle worked for centuries; hence its practices were based on a time-honored tradition. It also must have had a well-established organization, the structure of which, however, remains somewhat obscure. The office of the female prophet, the Pythia, is, in any case, attested incontestably—without her the oracle could not function; in fact, she *was* the oracle, the mouthpiece of Apollo, placed exactly where the center of the earth was believed to be found, sitting on her tripod and uttering the oracles of Apollo. Plutarch's writings give the impression that, at least at his time, there was one Pythia at the time,¹⁵² who was an unmarried woman over fifty years old who lived a cloistered and chaste life, “inexperienced, unlearned about almost everything and truly virginal with respect to her soul.”¹⁵³ However idealized this image of Pythia may be, it indicates that the female person, serving for life as the mouthpiece of Apollo in the divinatory ritual, had to be “virginal” in the sense that she was as free as possible from bodily pollution. Therefore, she had to be unmarried while serving as Apollo's bride, but not necessarily before that.¹⁵⁴ Plutarch also takes it for granted that the (ideal) Pythia, “because she grew up in the home of poor farmers, she carries with her nothing in the way of skill or expertise or ability when she goes down into the oracular shrine”;¹⁵⁵ to whatever extent this corresponds to historical fact, this characterization probably reflects the idea of the correct enactment of the divinatory ritual at Delphi, at least in Plutarch's time.

The oracular process at Delphi¹⁵⁶ has been reconstructed mainly from Plutarch's writings, supplemented by several passages in Greek tragedy¹⁵⁷

¹⁵² In the heyday of oracle, says Plutarch (*Mor.* 5.414b), there were two Pythias acting in turns, one being held in reserve while the other one was prophesying.

¹⁵³ Plutarch, *Mor.* 5.405d; cf. *Mor.* 5.438c. The “old” age of the Pythia is taken for granted also by Aeschylus, *Eum.* 38. Diodorus Siculus narrates that the Pythias were originally young maidens, but after one of them had been kidnapped and raped, the Delphians decreed that the Pythia should be a woman of fifty years, “adorned in virginal clothing in memory of the former prophetesses” (16.26.6).

¹⁵⁴ For the Pythia's sexual abstinence as a matter of ritual purity, see M. A. Flower 2008: 224–5; Johnston 2008: 42–3; Parke and Wormell 1956: 35.

¹⁵⁵ Plutarch, *Mor.* 5.405c.

¹⁵⁶ For reconstructions of the oracular process, see, e.g. Trampedach 2015: 184–93; Huffmon 2007; Bowden 2005: 17–38; Maurizio 1995; Parke and Wormell 1956: 30–4.

¹⁵⁷ See the convenient appendix in Bowden 2005: 161–7, containing a list of consultations of the Delphic oracle in Aeschylus (*Choephoroi* [*Cho.*] 270–96, 1038–9; *Eum.* 78–84, 799; *Prometheus Bound* [*Prom.*] 659–68; *Septem contra Thebas* [*Sept.*] 617–18, 748–9); Euripides (*Andromache* [*Andr.*] 50–3, 999–1003, 1103–8; *Electra* [*El.*] 33–4, 973; *Ion* 66–71, 304, 345–6, 534–6, 1548–60; *Iphigeneia at Tauris* [*Iph. taur.*] 82–3, 85–90, 974–8, 943–4; *Orestes* [*Orest.*]

that usually do not essentially contradict Plutarch's information. One should be cautious, however, in extrapolating information from one source to another. The rites of Delphi may have had a considerably *longue durée*, but even conservative institutions change over time, modifying their structures and procedures.¹⁵⁸ Therefore, we have to admit that our reconstructions, inevitably based on the uneven set of sources from different ages, reflecting traditions that may or may not be based on historical facticity, remain what they are: reconstructions.

The Delphic oracle was not available all the time—according to Plutarch, it functioned only nine days a year, on the seventh day of each month, except the three winter months.¹⁵⁹ There was a strict precedence for consultation. The first right to consult the oracle was given to the citizens of Delphi, followed by consultants from other cities with the privilege of *promanteia*, such as Athens and Sparta. After that came delegations from other cities and, if there was still time left for them, individuals other than Delphians.

Consulting the oracle at Delphi was as such a ritual act, and the sources suggest that both the enquirers and the Pythia herself had to undergo ritual preparations before the actual inquiry could take place. After dawn, the Pythia first took a ceremonial bath in the Castalian spring and purified herself.¹⁶⁰ Meanwhile the inquirers, too, who at least in Athens were carefully selected from among the citizens,¹⁶¹ first had to be ritually purified before entering the sanctuary, while the priests ensured that the day was auspicious for the consultation by presenting a goat to Apollo, sprinkling it with water, and if the goat nodded its head which indicated that the sign was positive, sacrificing the goat. Only after these preparations would the Pythia enter the sanctuary, mount the tripod, and wait for the enquirer to be brought before her.¹⁶²

Different theories have been presented as to how the inquiry was presented and how the Pythia replied; whether she spoke clearly or uttered incomprehensible mutterings; whether she spoke poetry or prose; whether the help of a *prophētēs* (who was a cultic functionary, not an inspired speaker) was needed to clarify her utterings; and what the Pythia's behavior and mental disposition

28–30, 416, 1657; *Phoenissae* [*Phoen.*] 15–20, 34–7, 411, 1043–5, 1705–7; *Medea* [*Med.*] 669–81; *Supplices* [*Suppl.*] 6–7, 140); and Sophocles (*Oedipus coloneus* [*Oed. col.*] 88–95, 389–412, 603–5, 970, 1331–2; *Oedipus tyrannus* [*Oed. tyr.*] 71–111, 713–14, 789–93).

¹⁵⁸ Bowden 2005: 18, writes that Greek ritual practices tended to be conservative, carrying out activities in the way they had always been done, and believes that even the procedures at Delphi remained constant over centuries; see, however, the criticism of M. A. Flower 2008: 223.

¹⁵⁹ See Bowden 2005:17 and cf. Plutarch, *Mor.* 4.292d–f.

¹⁶⁰ Thus scholia on Euripides' *Phoenician Maidens*.

¹⁶¹ For the *Sacred Orgas Degree* describing the election process, which itself was a divinatory act involving lot-casting, see Rhodes and Osborne 2003: 58 (= *IG II²* 204); cf. Huffmon 2007: 454–5.

¹⁶² This reconstruction is based on Euripides, *Ion* 93, 419; *Phoen.* 224; Plutarch, *Mor.* 5.384d–438e.

were during the consultation. I have discussed these issues in detail in previous chapters, arguing that she probably prophesied in an altered state of consciousness, which need not have resulted in unintelligible gibberish or excessively wild behavior, both unsupported by the sources. Most probably the procedure was quite as simple as Hugh Bowden reconstructs it: “the petitioner would ask his question, and the Pythia would reply directly to him, speaking clearly and straightforwardly.”¹⁶³ Interpreting the responses is another matter, even if they were quite clear-cut and not intentionally obscure, as sometimes seems to have been the case. Making sense of the oracle was neither the Pythia’s nor the priests’ but ultimately the responsibility of the enquirers—or, rather, their communities whose purposes were served by the inquiries.

Apart from the oral prophecies uttered by the Pythia, several late sources refer to lot divination at Delphi, that is, a method of answering a binary question of the form “yes or no?” using beans, pebbles, tin tablets, or the like.¹⁶⁴ Even older texts sometimes refer to inquiries to Apollo formulated in a binary manner. In spite of the fact that archaeological evidence of lot-drawing at Delphi (unlike Claros and Dodona, discussed below) is missing, the practice is rather well supported by written sources and usually taken for granted by scholars. There is scholarly disagreement, however, about whether the lot-drawing was a divinatory act distinct from the prophetic session or, rather, formed part of it.¹⁶⁵ What speaks for the first-mentioned alternative is the infrequency of the prophetic sessions, if it indeed took place only nine times a year. The lot oracle would have made it possible to consult the oracle whenever there was a need for it—and when the temple was less crowded and the fees were lower.¹⁶⁶

The presence of the oracle at Didyma is attested in the pre-Persian era, but little is known of the oracular process. The actual speaker of the oracles of Apollo at Didyma was the female prophet (*prophētis/promantis/gynē chrēsmodos*) of whose presence at the sanctuary there is inscriptional evidence; one prophetess, Tryphosa, is even known by her name.¹⁶⁷ The best, even though

¹⁶³ Bowden 2005: 21.

¹⁶⁴ e.g. IG II² 204; Plutarch, *Mor.* 6.492b; Callimachus, *Hymns* 2.45; Zenobius 5.75. Cf. Johnston 2008: 52–6; Fontenrose 1978: 219–24; Amandry 1950: 29–36, 84–5, 232–3.

¹⁶⁵ According to Fontenrose 1978: 223, “there was only one kind of mantic rite and session at Delphi. The Pythia gave her answer directly and orally to the consultant without any intermediaries or interpreters, unless she was called upon to draw a lot or to point to an urn, when she probably accompanied her act with speech.” This is directed against the theory of Amandry 1950: 29–36, according to whom there were two kinds of oracles at Delphi, of which the lot oracle was used more frequently; this theory is approved by Johnston 2008: 54–5.

¹⁶⁶ Cf. Nollé 2007: 12: “So war—was oft vergessen wird—die Inspirationsmantik eher eine Ausnahmeerscheinung, ein Feiertagsphänomen, das den Bedarf an Orakeln nicht befriedigen konnte. Für den Alltag war der Rückgriff auf Losorakel unabdingbar.”

¹⁶⁷ The inscription from the first century AD reads: “Hydrophor of Artemis Pythie, Platainis Melas’ daughter, called Tryphosa, whose grandmother is the prophetess (*prophētis*) Tryphosa,

historically not unproblematic, source of information of the functioning of the oracle at Didyma is Iamblichus, who discusses it at some length in his *De mysteriis*, drawing essentially from Porphyry.¹⁶⁸ According to Iamblichus' account, the prophetess prepared herself for the oracular session by fasting and bathing in the sacred precinct, thus making herself ready for the reception of the god. The preparations also included holding a staff, sitting on an axle, wetting her feet in the water (that is, of the sacred spring rising within the *adyton*), and inhaling its vapors. It is not clear whether all these actions belonged to every oracular session,¹⁶⁹ but the function of these actions, in Iamblichus' terms, was to "partake" (*metambanei*) of the god, that is, to become possessed by him and become his instrument.¹⁷⁰ How the actual oracles were uttered and memorized is not described anywhere.

We know that the personnel of the sanctuary, in Hellenistic and Roman times, included a *prophētēs* who, in fact, was the highest official of the sanctuary rather than an oracle-speaker, presiding over all rites performed in the sanctuary and chosen by lot every year. The existence of this office is confirmed by inscriptions written by its very holders; these inscriptions do not include prophecies of any kind but accounts of their careers.¹⁷¹ The role of the *prophētēs* in the oracular process remains unknown; filling the gaps in the existing sources and, partly, by analogy to Delphi, it is commonly surmised that he was present at the session, and may have delivered the response in written form to the consultant who was not witnessing the prophetic performance, eventually preserving a copy in the *chrēsmographion*, the oracle-writing house of the temple.¹⁷²

Interestingly, the Didyma inscriptions include references even to prophets who, by all appearances, did not serve as functionaries at the temple of Apollo. In two inscriptions, the enquirer is himself a prophet (*prophētēs*),¹⁷³ which does not necessarily indicate an oracle-speaker at Didyma; however, one third-century CE inscription, if reconstructed correctly, indicates that a "prophet

whom the god appointed as an oracle, when Claudius Charmus the younger was prophet" (no. 17 in Fontenrose 1988: 192). Cf. also *DI* 235b; 273.

¹⁶⁸ Iamblichus, *Myst.* 3.11; further literary references to the prophetess can be found in Lucian, *Bis accusatus sive tribunalia* [*Bis acc.*] 1; Porphyry, *Anebo.* 14; Origen, *Contra Celsum* [*Cels.*] 1.70, 384; and Pseudo-Eusebius, *Vita Constantini* [*Vit. Const.*] 2.50.

¹⁶⁹ As suggested by Fontenrose 1988: 82, who believes that these actions were acts of the session itself and not preliminaries of it. Johnston 2008: 85, argues that the god was actually not in these things but took hold of the prophetess from outside the human world.

¹⁷⁰ This corresponds to Iamblichus' Neoplatonic philosophy of inspired divination, for which see Addey 2010; 2014: 215–82. For the prophet's instrumental agency, see also Keller 2002 and cf. "Gender and Human Agency" in Chapter 8 in this volume.

¹⁷¹ *DI* 202–306. For the *prophētēs* of Didyma, see Lampinen 2013: 73–6; Oesterheld 2008: 340–8.

¹⁷² See especially W. Günther 1971: 119–23; for reconstructions of the oracular process; see also Lampinen 2013: 84–7; Fontenrose 1988: 79–80; Parke 1985: 210–19; 1986.

¹⁷³ *DI* 504.15–16 and 29–31; Fontenrose 1988, responses 30 and 31.

self-called, pious Titus Flavius Ulpianus [...] to whom the god also bore witness often in divine pronouncements, speaking to him in vision and now in an oracle,” had himself reported his vision to the temple of Apollo.¹⁷⁴

At Claros, there was also a sacred spring at the site where the oracles were taken. Iamblichus who, as in the case of Didyma, is our main source of information, writes:

The oracle at Colophon is agreed by all to function by means of water. For there is a spring in an underground building, and it is from that the prophet drinks. On certain appointed nights, when many religious rites have previously been performed, he drinks and utters the oracle, while he is no longer seen by the ambassadors who are present.¹⁷⁵

Pliny also knows that in the cave of Apollo at Claros “there is a pool a draught from which causes marvelous oracular utterances to be produced, though the life of the drinkers is shortened.”¹⁷⁶ Tacitus, in his *Annales*, points out that the oracle-speaker is not female, as at Delphi, but male, describing him as ignorant of writing and meter but still, having descended into a cavern, uttering oracular responses in set verses without knowing the actual questions.¹⁷⁷

Taken together, these sources make it probable not only that the oracle-speaker was of male gender, but also that water played a role in the Clarian oracle; for Iamblichus, the water allowed the prophet to receive divine inspiration, even though the primary source of the divinatory power was Apollo himself.¹⁷⁸ In addition, the structures of the underground *adyton* have been preserved, consisting of two rooms, one for the oracle and the other for the consultants, connected by a narrow corridor.¹⁷⁹

The main functionaries of the temple of Apollo are always mentioned in the inscriptions from the second and third centuries CE¹⁸⁰ reporting visits to the site and naming the functionaries active at the sanctuary during the visit: the *prytanis* (administrator), the *hiereus* (priest), the *thespiōdos* (singer of oracles), the *prophētēs* and the *grammateus* (secretary/scribe). The role division of these persons is usually understood the following way: “the priest was responsible for the performance of sacrifices and probably presided over all the ceremonies. The prophet drank the water and uttered the oracle. The *thespiōdos* reproduced it in verse which he sang, while the secretaries kept a written record.”¹⁸¹ A certain degree of speculation notwithstanding, this distribution of functions makes good sense, although some scholars have reversed the roles of the *prophētēs* and the *thespiōdos*, doubting the ability of

¹⁷⁴ *DI* 277; Fontenrose 1988, response 29; cf. Oesterheld 2008: 334–9.

¹⁷⁵ Iamblichus, *Myst.* 3.11. ¹⁷⁶ Pliny, *Natural History* [*Nat.*] 2.232.

¹⁷⁷ Tacitus, *Annals* [*Ann.*] 2.54. ¹⁷⁸ Cf. Addey 2014: 256–9.

¹⁷⁹ See Moretti et al. 2014.

¹⁸⁰ See Ferrary 2014a and cf. “Epigraphic Sources” in Chapter 3 in this volume.

¹⁸¹ Parke 1985: 220–1; similarly Lampinen 2013: 60–7.

the annually selected *prophētēs* to be able to achieve the required inspiration.¹⁸² The written sources do not mention any form of technical divination; however, excavations have revealed bronze astragals which indicate that even in Claros, intuitive and technical divination (lot-casting with astragals) were practiced side by side.¹⁸³

The priestesses of Dodona, also called prophetesses (*prophētis*),¹⁸⁴ are mentioned together with the Pythia of Delphi and the Sibyl by Plato¹⁸⁵ and were widely acknowledged as intermediators of the oracles of Zeus, the patron deity of Dodona, and his spouse called Dione. Herodotus even names three of them as Promeneia, Timarete, and Nicandra.¹⁸⁶ Since they are conceived of by ancient writers as having communicated with the divine by non-inductive means in the state of divine possession,¹⁸⁷ they well deserve to be characterized as women prophets.

It is far from evident how the oracle actually worked.¹⁸⁸ The binary structure of the enquiries in the Dodona tablets suggests an answer in the form of a decision between two alternatives—possibly by means of lot-casting as was reported by the historian Callisthenes in the fourth century BCE. According to him, an oracle was given to the ambassadors of the Spartans by collecting lots in a pot and letting the prophetess make the choice with the help of a pet monkey.¹⁸⁹ The use of lots at Dodona is now confirmed by a few newly published lead tablets bearing the formula “pick this one” (*tautan anele/touton aneletōn*); however, the small number of such tablets may indicate that lot-casting was not the standard procedure at Dodona.¹⁹⁰

The explanation is often derived from the well-known symbols of the Dodona oracle, the sacred oak and the dove.¹⁹¹ The “sign in the oak” is mentioned in one of the oracle tablets.¹⁹² Homer relates how Odysseus travels to Dodona to hear from “the god’s divine, high-leafed oak tree” the will of Zeus,¹⁹³ as if the tree itself was thought to communicate; Hesiod seems to

¹⁸² Thus Robert 1967: 305; similarly Ferrary 2014a: 88; Potter 1994: 43.

¹⁸³ de La Genière 1998: 252. For astragal oracles in Asia Minor, see Nollé 2007.

¹⁸⁴ Ephoros, *FGrH* 70 F 119 = Strabo 9.2.4: *tas hiereias tautas de einai tas prophētidas* (cf. Proklos in Phot. *Bibl.* 239.321b–322a).

¹⁸⁵ Plato, *Phaedr.* 244d. ¹⁸⁶ Herodotus 2.55.

¹⁸⁷ See, e.g. Plato, *Phaedr.* 244a; Pausanias 10.12.10; cf. “Prophetic Performance in Greek Sources” in Chapter 5 in this volume.

¹⁸⁸ For an overview of different theories, see Johnston 2008: 63–5; Eidinow 2007: 67–71.

¹⁸⁹ *FGrH* 124 F 222a and b; the story of Callisthenes is quoted by Cicero, *Div.* 1.34.76 and 2.32.69.

¹⁹⁰ Dakaris, Vokotopoulou, and Christidis 2013, vols 1–2: nos. 1170, 1410, 2222, 2229, and 3128; see R. Parker 2016.

¹⁹¹ For the oak and the dove, see Parke 1967: 20–45.

¹⁹² “[G]od. Good fortune. the Dodoneans ask Zeus Naios and D[ion]e [whether] there is a sign [i]n the oak?”; see Dakaris, Vokotopoulou, and Christidis 2013 II: 70 (no. 2519B); cf. Eidinow 2007: 346 (no. 6).

¹⁹³ Homer, *Odyssey* 14.327–30 = 19.296–99.

think that the oracular deity was somehow present in the tree.¹⁹⁴ How exactly the oak functioned in the oracular process is not known. According to some ancient authors, the rustling of the tree's branches and leaves were interpreted by priests called *selloi*¹⁹⁵ who, according to Homer,¹⁹⁶ had unwashed feet and who slept on the ground. In late sources, it is rather the spring flowing from under the roots of the oak, the "murmuring" of which inspired the priestesses to prophesy.¹⁹⁷

As to the dove, Herodotus tells about two kidnapped Egyptian female priests to whom doves speak the divine command to establish an oracle, one in Libya and the other in Dodona.¹⁹⁸ The female prophets of Dodona were identified with doves, and the word *peleiai* is used for both doves and the prophets in late sources. According to Herodotus, the association of the female prophets with doves was because "they were foreigners and when they spoke they sounded like birds."¹⁹⁹ Yet another (late) explanation involves the sounds of Dodona's famous bronze objects, the bronze statue²⁰⁰ and the cauldrons associated with the prophets' activity by Clement of Alexandria and by Lucan.²⁰¹ All this provides a picture completely different from that of Callisthenes' lot-casting, not involving the sacred oak, the dove, or any other emblem of Dodona.

The variety of explanations suggests that the ancient writers were no less puzzled than their modern readers about the source of Dodona's prophetesses' method of communicating with the divine. "Talking doves and rustling oaks, erratic springs and men with dirty feet, women who may or may not twitter like birds, echoing vessels and croeing demons, and finally tokens picked from a jar, possibly guided by dreams: in the end, (...) all that we know for certain is that consultants wrote their question down on lead tablets, which they then rolled up."²⁰² There is, however, a common denominator of ancient theories concerning the source of divine revelation: with the exception Callisthenes, the ancient authors seem to agree that it was based on some kind of a sound, which triggered the required state of the prophetesses' consciousness.²⁰³

¹⁹⁴ Hesiod fr. 240. 1 (MW).

¹⁹⁵ Ovid, *Metamorphoses* [*Metam.*] 7.614ff.; Suda s.v. Δωδώνη.

¹⁹⁶ Homer, *Iliad* 16.233–5: "High Zeus, lord of Dodona, Pelasgian, living afar off, Brooding over wintry Dodona, your prophets (*hypophētai*) about you living, the Selloi who sleep on the ground with feet unwashed."

¹⁹⁷ Servius, *Commentary in the Aeneid of Vergil* [*Comm. in Verg. Aen.*] 3.466; cf. Pliny, *Nat.* 2.228.

¹⁹⁸ Herodotus 2.55. ¹⁹⁹ Herodotus 2.57. ²⁰⁰ Strabo 7, fr. 3.

²⁰¹ Clement of Alexandria, *Protrepticus* [*Protr.*] 2.11; Lucan 6.425. For the bronze objects at Dodona, see Johnston 2008: 66–8; Dieterle 2007: 170–81; for the Boeotians' habit of introducing them annually to Zeus Dodonaïos, see Kowalzig 2007: 333–52.

²⁰² Eidinow 2007: 71.

²⁰³ See Johnston 2008: 71–2.

Prophets as Advocates of Worship

Building and restoring temples and sacrificing to gods were pious works which could be done only with the consent and encouragement of the gods, and to which kings and other rulers were exhorted by prophets and other diviners. Rulers could also be reproached for disregarding or destroying temples and their worship. For example, Alyattes, king of Lydia and the father of Croesus, sent messages to inquire of the Delphic oracle concerning his sickness. When his envoys arrived at Delphi, however,

the Pythian prophetess said that she would give them no answer, until they should restore the temple of Athene which they had burnt at Assesos in the land of Miletos.²⁰⁴

Alyattes, as related by Herodotus, had continued the war against Miletos begun by his father for eleven years until in the twelfth year, when the Lydian army were burning standing grain, the fire was driven by a heavy wind, setting fire to the temple of Athene. Soon after this incident, Alyattes fell sick, and even though the burning of the temple was due to an accident, this was the reason why he was denied an answer from Delphi, as if the inquiry itself was found impious. In fact, the denial implied an answer in itself: when the war was finally over, Alyattes would build two temples of Athene at Assesos in place of one, recovering from his illness;²⁰⁵ he is also said to have dedicated a votive-offering at Delphi, “a great mixing-bowl of silver with a welded iron stand, a sight worth seeing above all the offerings at Delphi.”²⁰⁶ In the context of Herodotus’ *Histories*, this passage highlights the authority of the Delphic (that is, Greek) oracle above foreign kings and the supreme moral judgment it represented in his pattern of the rise and fall of earthly powers.

The example taken from literary sources highlights how important it was for the rulers and citizens to maintain good relationships with temples. In Greece, too, taking care of temples and public sacrifice served the purposes of maintaining a symbolic universe and binding the community together.²⁰⁷ For those who were wealthy enough to pay a visit to major Greek oracle sites it was important to be seen there and to donate money for the sanctuaries. In the Roman imperial period, the functions of prestigious oracle sites such as Claros and Didyma were even used to integrate local elites into the imperial political context.²⁰⁸

Greek oracular sites share a feature poorly attested in ancient Near Eastern sources: dedications to the gods in response to oracles as a gesture to express gratitude to the deities, and as demonstrations of the wealth and divine favor enjoyed by the donor.²⁰⁹ Oracular shrines, Delphi in particular, “were bursting

²⁰⁴ Herodotus 1.19.

²⁰⁶ Herodotus 1.25.

²⁰⁸ See Busine 2013.

²⁰⁵ Herodotus 1.20; cf. Harrison 2000: 155.

²⁰⁷ See Potter 1994: 7.

²⁰⁹ See Kajava 2009; Rosenberger 2008: 91–3.

at the seams with votive offerings of all kinds,”²¹⁰ such as statues and vessels with inscriptions indicating the donor’s name, mostly visible to every visitor. The dedications reflect the Greek oracular process based on the sequence of question and response, demonstrating that (1) the prophetic process of communication did not end with the divine response, but (2) continued in the subsequent interpretation and eventual fulfillment of the oracle. This (3) prompted the consultant to address a votive offering to the oracular deity which, then, (4) served as a monument to the piety and wealth of the donor as well as of the prestige of the temple and its oracle.

The dedications demonstrate the central role of the temples in the functioning of the oracular process. Essentially, however, they were visible carriers of the significance of the prophetic institution as such; as Plutarch wrote: “Those dedications have movement and significance in sympathy with the god’s foreknowledge, and no part of them is void or insensible, but all are filled with the divine significance.”²¹¹ The actual subject of the dedications, in fact, was not the donor but the deity; they were not spontaneous expressions of the donor’s emotions but were based on the instructions pronounced by the oracle itself; for instance, an inscription of Didyma states simply: “Hermias to Zeus Hypsistos, a thank-offering in accordance with an oracle (*kata chrēsmon eucharistēron*).”²¹²

In addition to the dedications, the significance of the temple context of Greek prophecy is reflected in the contents of the oracular responses, which very often deal with cultic matters. According to the revealing statistics of Joseph Fontenrose concerning the Delphic oracle, nearly three-fourths (73 percent) of what he calls “historical responses” fall in the category of *res divinae*, whereas only less than one third of the so-called “legendary responses” can be so classified.²¹³ In other words, the responses which are recorded in primary sources, mainly inscriptions, or which otherwise, according to his criteria, derive from historically reliable informants, are overwhelmingly of a religious nature. On the other hand, about half (55 percent) of the “legendary responses” in secondary sources deal with private matters, which, again, are much rarer (8 percent) in the historical group of responses. Whether or not we agree with Fontenrose about the “historicity” of each individual case, these statistics nevertheless suggest that the closer the source is to the actual performance of the oracle, the more probably its topic is related to cult and religion. This ratio also correlates with the type of transmission: the

²¹⁰ Rosenberger 2008: 91.

²¹¹ Plutarch, *Mor.* 5.398a–b.

²¹² *DI* 129; Fontenrose 1988, response 26 (third century CE?). In fact, the formula *kata chrēsmon* is not very common in the dedicatory inscriptions from Delphi, Didyma, and Claros, probably because it was the normal state of affairs that the dedication was based on the divine order; see Kajava 2009: 212–13; for several examples of inscriptions with this formula, see Kajava 2009: 215–20. For the Clarian examples, see “Epigraphic Sources” in Chapter 3 in this volume.

²¹³ Fontenrose 1978: 26–7.

inscriptional evidence is much more focused on religious matters than the literary sources. The inscriptional responses tend to be addressed to public bodies rather than individuals, and this may distort the result somewhat, assuming that the responses to individuals would be more focused on private matters; but as Fontenrose says: “all we can rely on is what we have, responses attested to contemporaries, and most of these are inscriptional.”²¹⁴

The picture remains very similar when we look at the responses from Didyma: according to my own calculations, some twenty out of the thirty-five responses defined by Fontenrose as “historical” have a religious focus,²¹⁵ while only a few of those labeled by him as “not genuine” deal with cultic matters. In a similar vein, many of the preserved Clarian oracles give cultic instructions, often related to setting up divine images or altars.²¹⁶

A different picture is given by the lead tablets from Dodona, the great majority of which do not have a ritual emphasis.²¹⁷ This may reflect the nature of the sources: the Dodona tablets typically carry enquiries of private persons on their own behalf, mostly relating to matters like traveling, marriage, health, and property. However, questions asked by communities may concern the deity to which it would be best to sacrifice.²¹⁸

The cult-related oracular responses typically give the enquirer instructions concerning sacrifices to gods; for example, the Cycizenes are told to sacrifice to Poseidon, Gaia, and some other gods whose names have not been preserved.²¹⁹ The enquirer may also ask who would be the appropriate god to receive his sacrifices; for example, the delegation of the Parians from Pharos want to know to what god or goddess they should sacrifice to in order to keep the city and the country from harm.²²⁰ The cities of Hierapolis and Callipolis, both afflicted by pestilence, received thorough instructions from Apollo on the sacrifices necessary to remove the plague.²²¹ Even one of the very few Dodona tablets with ritual content contains the simple question: *hē trithytikon* “Whether to make the triple sacrifice?”²²²

²¹⁴ Fontenrose 1988: 96 in response to the criticism of Thomas L. Robinson, “Theological Oracles and the Sanctuaries of Claros and Didyma” (PhD dissertation, Harvard University, 1981).

²¹⁵ i.e. Fontenrose 1988: nos. 3, 10, 13, 14, 15, 17, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, and 35.

²¹⁶ Cf. Merkelbach and Stauber 1996: nos. 4, 9, 10, 11, 12, 19.

²¹⁷ See Eidinow 2007: 112–13.

²¹⁸ e.g.: “Regarding possessions, the Bylliones (ask) by sacrificing to which god will they fare best”; see Dakaris, Vokotopoulou, and Christidis 2013 II: 34 (no. 2364A); cf. Eidinow 2007: 346 (no. 7); Lhôte 2006: 44–6 (no. 7).

²¹⁹ *FD* 3.3.343 = *SDGI* 2970: 3–7; Fontenrose 1978: H39 (second century BCE).

²²⁰ *IG* 12, suppl. 200 = *CIG* 1837b; Fontenrose 1978: H56 (c. 180 BCE).

²²¹ Merkelbach and Stauber 1996, nos. 4 and 9; cf. Graf 2015: 514–15.

²²² Dakaris, Vokotopoulou, and Christidis 2013 I: 38–9 (no. 87B); Eidinow 2007: 113; Lhôte 2006: 288–9 (no. 138).

Sometimes the seemingly cult-related question may have political intentions. Xenophon wanted to accompany his friend Proxenus in order to make the acquaintance of Cyrus the Younger and to participate in his military expedition against Artaxerxes II. Socrates advised him to consult the Delphic oracle on the matter, so Xenophon asked the Delphic oracle to what god he should sacrifice and pray to make his intended journey successful, receiving the response that he should sacrifice to Zeus Basileus. When Socrates heard about this, he said Xenophon should instead have asked whether it was better to go or to stay, but told him nevertheless to act according to the oracle. Xenophon took part in Cyrus' expedition, the real purpose of which became clear to him only later.²²³

While these oracles are primarily related to the concerns of the enquirer and only indirectly about advocating the worship of certain temples, there are plenty of oracular responses urging the enquirers to erect statues of gods or to furnish the sanctuaries with altars or other cultic paraphernalia. Several inscriptions report on statues in different cities erected according to the oracle of Apollo at Claros or at Didyma,²²⁴ and many responses relate to the establishment of altars. The Acharnians and Athenians, for example, are advised by the Delphic oracle to construct altars for Ares and Athena Areia;²²⁵ Damianos, the *prophētēs* of Didyma, is given permission to establish an altar for Soteira Kore in the temenos of Apollo at Didyma;²²⁶ Symmachos the Phrygian is told by Apollo of Claros to build an altar for Apollo Helios;²²⁷ and the four tribes of the city of Anchialos in Trache had set up statues of gods according to oracles of "the Lord Apollo of Colophon," that is, Claros.²²⁸ Sometimes the enquirers ask Apollo's permission to construct new temples; for example, that of Timotheos of Anaphe concerning the temple of Aphrodite in the sanctuary of Apollo in Anaphe.²²⁹ An inscription indicates that the Didymean priests had consulted the oracle in order to speed up the completion of the construction works of their temple.²³⁰

Two individual cases from Didyma deserve to be mentioned as examples of the oracle serving the special interests of a temple and a city, whether economic or political. The *dēmos* of the Milesians consulted Apollo probably

²²³ Xenophon, *Anab.* 3.1.5–8; 6.1.22; Fontenrose 1978: H11 (401 BCE). For Xenophon's consultation, see Zaidman 2013: 61–3 and R. Parker 2000: 81 who notes that "Xenophon's original form of question was in fact very common."

²²⁴ Merkelbach and Stauber 1996, nos. 10 (Anchialos in modern Bulgaria), 11 (Hermos in Lydia or Phrygia), and 12 (Vasada in Isauria); Fontenrose 1988, no. 32 (= *SEG* 1.427; Miletus, c. 300 CE)

²²⁵ Inscription of Acharnai; Fontenrose 1978: H27 (fourth century BCE).

²²⁶ *DI* 504.15–16; Fontenrose 1988, no. 30 (285–305 CE); see Bowden 2013: 41–2.

²²⁷ Merkelbach and Stauber 1996, no. 19. ²²⁸ Merkelbach and Stauber 1996, no. 10.

²²⁹ Inscription from Anaphe; *IG* 12.3.248 = *SIG* 977: 29–32; Fontenrose 1978: H54 (c. 110–100 BCE).

²³⁰ *DI* 47 = *SEG* 4.452; Fontenrose 1988, no. 13 (after 130 BCE).

several times by the turn of the second century BCE in order to “make the games of the Didymeia crowned games and invite Hellenes to these, the benefactions made by the god being common to all of them,” that is, to convert the Didymeian festival into an athletic contest. The Milesians received firm support from the god for their plans to establish a Panhellenic event, doubtless designed to increase the wealth and international fame of the temple of Apollo and the city of Miletus in competition with well-known festivals in other cities such as Delphi and Magnesia.²³¹

Another interesting oracle is the one concerning the appointment of Satorneila as the priestess of Athena Polias, quoted in a monument erected in her honor by her sons sometime in the third century CE.²³² The long, hexametric oracle of Apollo of Didyma highlights the position of Athena as the patroness of Miletus, giving the impression that her cult had become obsolete until Satorneila, a member of a prominent Milesian family who, although a married woman, was appointed the high priestess (*archiereia*) for the rest of her life. The oracle not only endorses the cult of Athena Polias but also underscores the personal achievement of Satorneila in its maintenance—and, indirectly, the high social standing of her family within the Milesian community.²³³ Both cases from different times highlight the function of prophecy in underpinning the institutions and the social hierarchy of the city of Miletus.

Taken together, the Greek sources leave no doubt that throughout the period of several centuries that they cover, inspired prophecy was practiced in sanctuaries. The three major oracles of Apollo at Delphi, Didyma, and Claros shared a considerable number of common characteristics, probably because Delphi as the oldest and most venerable Greek oracle site, served as a model to the others. Features common to the three oracles of Apollo include a special chamber (*adyton*) in which the prophetic performance took place and which was not accessible to the consultants, purification of the prophet and/or the consultants with water, and the use of mediating personnel in the transmission of the divine message to the consultants. The procedures and role-castings were not identical, however. At Didyma and Claros, the oracles were also written down, whereas at Delphi this is doubtful. The inspired prophet was always a woman at Delphi and Didyma, while in Claros, the *hypophētēs*—whether he was identical to the *prophētēs* or the *thespiōdos*—was of male

²³¹ Inscription of Kos, SIG 590; Fontenrose 1988, no. 10 (c. 205–200 BCE); cf. Morgan 1989: 38.

²³² *I.Milet* 1142; Fontenrose 1988, no. 25 (third century CE); see the new edition in Hermann, Günther, and Ehrhardt 2006: 94–5.

²³³ See the thorough analysis of this text by Oesterheld 2008: 323–94. This case provides a good example of the combination of a ruler cult and city oracle, which “may have been a common solution to the problem of establishing civic identity with an empire” (Morgan 1989: 30).

gender. Lot-casting as a divinatory method appears in sources concerning Delphi and Claros, but it is not known from Didyma.

What the sources tell us about Dodona is indicative of the independent roots of the oracle. The Molossians inhabiting the area, considered barbarians by Thucydides,²³⁴ lived on the fringes of the Greek world and had traditions different from the Athenians; on the other hand, they derived their own genealogy from Greek heroes, avowing themselves Panhellenic identity.²³⁵ The few things that can be reconstructed of the oracular process at Dodona suggest that its functioning did not follow the model of the oracles of Apollo. However, there are common features as well. The divine message was mediated by women at Dodona probably quite as consistently as in Delphi and Didyma, and some evidence suggests lot-casting as a method of divination at Dodona as at Delphi and at Claros. Technical divination such as lot-casting may also have been practiced because the inspired prophet was available only at designated times.²³⁶

All four oracles were consulted by communities and private people alike, even though, from the available sources, private consultations form the clear majority of cases at Dodona, while at Claros, delegations coming from different cities dominate the written evidence. In general, “oracles were not really in the business of foretelling the future. They were there to give advice, and to ratify decisions.”²³⁷ The function of giving advice addresses uncertainty, the basic need of divination, while the function of ratifying decisions rather serves the purpose of bestowing authority to the consultant. Hugh Bowden has recently demonstrated a change of focus in Greek oracle: while the earlier oracles in the fifth and fourth centuries BCE are motivated by true uncertainty, those delivered in the Roman period were more concerned with the individual status of the enquirer.²³⁸

Much of what is said above is basically true for ancient Near Eastern prophecy as well. However, the sources available to us suggest a marked difference between Greek and Near Eastern types of prophecy, since the Near Eastern sources almost nowhere describe private people consulting prophets, while in Greece, this is taken for granted everywhere. While this may partly derive from the accident of preservation of sources, the Near Eastern ones coming primarily from royal archives, it may also relate to a different distribution of divinatory functions in Greece and the Near East. We have seen that in Greece, there was no such clear-cut boundary between prophecy and technical divination as in Mesopotamia, and the oracle sites could employ simultaneously different methods of divination. As a rule, however, the venue of inspired divination was the sanctuary, and it was clearly the preferred method at least in the three major oracles of Apollo. Technical

²³⁴ Thucydides 2.80.5–6.

²³⁵ See Kittelä 2013: 34–5.

²³⁶ Nollé 2007: 12.

²³⁷ Pedley 2005: 89.

²³⁸ Bowden 2013.

divination was considerably less dependent on the temple context, as the existence of itinerant diviners demonstrates.²³⁹

PROPHETS AND TEMPLES: HEBREW BIBLE

Does the general picture of prophets and temples drawn from Mesopotamian and Greek sources change when we move to the Hebrew Bible?

Yes, and no. As I attempt to show in the following survey of biblical texts related to the subject, prophets are frequently enough associated with temples and worship in the Hebrew Bible to suggest that there was more than a merely occasional connection between these religious institutions, and that the biblical texts supplement the general picture constructed so far from Mesopotamian sources instead of replacing it with a totally different picture. On the other hand, the perspective taken on prophetic activities and their method of presentation changes drastically. This, as indicated above, is largely due to the nature of the Bible as a source material. In the Bible, we have nothing to compare with the Mesopotamian or Greek primary sources bearing an (almost) first-hand witness of prophets and temples.

In what follows, I will classify the biblical material according to the same scheme I used with the Mesopotamian and Greek texts; this, I hope, will help to identify the family resemblances—both commonalities and differences—between these textual corpora.

Temples as Venues of Prophetic Performances

Biblical texts, in general, are not very informative about the details concerning the realia of prophetic *performances*, at least in proportion to the immense importance of the prophetic *word* for the overall ideology of the Hebrew canon. The narrative sections of the Hebrew Bible, notably the books of Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles, include many descriptions of the prophet's appearances, but even these cases are often lacking details that would satisfy a historian, mostly because the narrative frame of the prophetic appearances serves compositional rather than historical purposes. In the prophetic books of the Hebrew Bible, mostly being compilations of prophetic words without any specific scenery, such narratives are fewer still. In both cases, it was essential from the point of view of the authors and editors of these texts to write what

²³⁹ For itinerant diviners, see Burkert 1983 and, with regard to the more legendary figures of the Greek Mopsus, Melampus, and the biblical/Near Eastern Balaam, see Bremmer 2008: 133–51.

the prophets said rather than give details about when, where, and how their messages were thought to have been delivered.

Fortunately, when it comes to the prophets' appearances in the context of worship, the texts are not entirely mute. In fact, the books of Samuel and Kings include quite a number of narratives in which a place of worship is presented as the venue of the prophetic performances. The encounter of the "man of God" with Eli (1 Sam. 2:27–36) only makes sense within the context the temple of Shiloh, all the more because the explicit concern of the prophecy is the proper execution of the priestly office. This is also the temple where the future prophet Samuel was given as a little boy to be dedicated to God (1 Sam. 1:24–8)—which reminds one of the female votaries (*šēlūtu*) uttering prophecies in Assyrian temples. Later on, the legacy of this temple is carried forward by the prophet Ahijah the Shilonite (1 Kgs 11:29–39), who continually lived in Shiloh and was consulted there by King Jeroboam as if the ancient temple were still standing (1 Kgs 14:1–18). The same king is also found in dispute with another "man of God" at Bethel, the place where he had erected the notorious "golden calves" (1 Kgs 13:1–5). These texts illustrate how the prophetic appearances serve the ends of the narrative context and the editors' preferences. While the prophecy of the "man of God" to Eli reads much like an addition to the stories on Samuel legitimizing the Zadokite priesthood,²⁴⁰ the prophecies to Jeroboam appear in decisive turning points of the Deuteronomistic narrative on the disintegration of the Solomonic kingdom, first legitimating the kingship of Jeroboam but later condemning the cultic innovations of this *Unheilsherrscher*.²⁴¹

Especially noteworthy is the company of ecstatic prophets related to the cult place in Gebah, who come down from the high place with harps, tambourines, flutes, and lyres, prophesying so powerfully that even the freshly anointed king Saul becomes enraptured by the spirit of God and is "changed into another man" (1 Sam. 10:5–6). These prophets have often been seen as the biblical counterparts of the Near Eastern ecstatic prophets,²⁴² and not without reason. When read as a part of its present context, it is interesting that the editors of the Deuteronomistic History do not hesitate to incorporate an account of such prophets in their composition. Similar performances are met with little understanding in the Second Temple period (Hos. 9:7; Zech. 13:2–6). It may be that, while taking the cultic context of prophetic activity for granted, the text, at the same time, distances itself from it.

²⁴⁰ A Deuteronomistic authorship of 1 Sam. 2:27–36, in one way or another, is widely accepted; see, e.g. Leuchter 2003; Brettler 1997: 610–11; Veijola 1975: 35–7. Cf. Frolov 2006, who reads it as a post- and anti-Deuteronomistic addition.

²⁴¹ See Holder 1988. On the role-play between prophets and the king in 1 Kgs 13, see Schmitz 2008: 117–225.

²⁴² See, e.g. Wilson 1996: 415–18.

The prophetic books of the Hebrew Bible do not often indicate whether or not the words of the prophets are imagined to be spoken within a temple context. This is consistent with the idea of a prophetic book as a collection of divine words that transcends the bounds of time and space, which leads to a dehistoricizing strategy that makes the search of the historical context of the texts an extremely difficult task.²⁴³ Nevertheless, there are a few narrative sections in the prophetic books that repeatedly make the prophets appear in temples.

In the book of Isaiah (that hardly mentions prophets at all) the most important text in this respect is the so-called calling vision of the prophet that initiates his prophetic career in Isaiah 6. This text is often, and with good reason, understood to take place in the temple of Jerusalem.²⁴⁴ What is particularly interesting about it in comparison with the Mesopotamian texts is the element of the divine council that has been found in God's words: "Whom will I send? Who will go on our behalf?" (Isa. 6:8). If this passage actually derives from the eighth century BCE, as most commentators believe,²⁴⁵ it suggests a similar affiliation of the prophet Isaiah with the temple of Jerusalem as is known to us from all over the Near East. Other than that, the book, even in its narrative sections, does not tell anything about Isaiah's relationship to the temple of Jerusalem, save the possible indirect hint in the narrative on King Hezekiah consulting Isaiah when facing the threat from Assyria (Isa. 37:1-7; 2 Kgs 19:1-7): the king goes to the temple wearing sackcloth and sends his representatives, also clothed in sackcloth, to Isaiah, as if the prophet was to be found there.²⁴⁶

The book of Jeremiah is the most explicit of the prophetic books in locating prophetic activity in the temple of Jerusalem; this is because of the lengthy narrative sections that read like passages of the prophet's biography. Here, if anywhere, we encounter a construct of prophet and prophecy, which turns Jeremiah into a multi-layered legend reflecting different, not always entirely compatible, ideologies of the Second Temple period.²⁴⁷

In fact, Jeremiah is connected with the temple in the very first verse of the book where he is given a priestly lineage (Jer. 1:1). The narratives of the book are careful not to present him as belonging to the actual temple personnel; but

²⁴³ Cf. Ben Zvi 2006. ²⁴⁴ So, e.g. Williamson 2008: 29.

²⁴⁵ Even scholars who opt for a later date for the majority of the material in Isa. 1-39, usually include chapter 6 among the oldest material; cf., e.g. Becker 1997: 61-123, according to whom verses 1-8* belong to the oldest layer (Grundbestand) of the book of Isaiah.

²⁴⁶ According to Wildberger 2002: 400, "the situation is purely political; the ministers . . . are sent to Isaiah, who is certainly not a temple prophet and is clearly not held in very high regard by the priestly circles at the temple." This is consistent with Wildberger's image of the prophet Isaiah as closely related to the court but not to the temple (cf. Wildberger 2002: 569-72), but not necessarily with Isa. 37:1-7/2 Kgs 19:1-7, where the prophet seems to be consulted in the context of a mourning ritual.

²⁴⁷ See, e.g. Patton 2004.

the mannered juxtaposition of priests and prophets all over the book suggests that this is the place where prophets should normally be looked for.²⁴⁸ Even Jeremiah is brought to the temple over and over again. This is the place where he gives two sermons to priests, prophets, and the people of Judah predicting its destruction (Jer. 7:1–15; 26:1–19); where he is arrested by Pashhur, the temple overseer, because of his performance in the temple (Jer. 19:14–20:6) that causes the temple authorities to consider him a lunatic (Jer. 29:26–7); where he meets prophet Hananiah, his rival, in front of the priests and people (Jer. 28); and where King Zedekiah asks him to prophesy and has a private conversation with him (Jer. 38:14). When Jeremiah himself is no longer allowed to enter the temple, he sends Baruch the scribe to read out loud what was written on the scroll containing his prophecies (Jer. 36:1–10).

Not all, if anything, of this can be taken as accurate historical information on the whereabouts of Jeremiah the prophet; for example, the Deuteronomistic, if not post-Deuteronomistic, nature of the temple sermons is generally recognized.²⁴⁹ What matters is that the book of Jeremiah as such shows that the temple—which in the minds of the book’s readership would have been virtually identified with the second rather than the first temple of Jerusalem—remained a most natural venue of prophetic performances to take place. While the contents of Jeremiah’s prophecies of doom are often difficult to compare with any Near Eastern counterpart known to us (this seems not to have been the kind of prophecy that ended up in Near Eastern archives), the scenery showing prophets proclaiming in temples, officials supervising them, and kings utilizing their services, is something to be found all over the ancient Eastern Mediterranean. The multi-layered construct of prophecy in the book of Jeremiah, then, is based on a well-known model suggesting institutional support of the prophets in the temple of Jerusalem.²⁵⁰

When moving to other prophetic books, the prophets frequenting temples become few. The most telling case is doubtless Amos confronting the priest Amaziah in the royal temple of Bethel (Amos 7:10–17). While vehemently denying that he is a “prophet or a prophet’s son,” this is what Amos is in every respect regarding the venue and contents of his proclamation. The scenery is in many ways comparable to Jeremiah’s performances in the temple of Jerusalem, including the later-than-Amos origin of the text²⁵¹ and role of the priest as an overseer—again, a model well known from the Near Eastern cultural milieu.²⁵²

²⁴⁸ Jer. 2:8; 4:9–10; 5:31; 6:13–15; 8:1, 10–12; 23:11, 33; 26:7–8, 16; 29:1; cf. 2 Kgs 23:2; Hos. 4:4; Zeph. 3:4.

²⁴⁹ Thus already Thiel 1973: 105–19; cf., e.g. Maier 2002; cf. the summary in Maier 2008.

²⁵⁰ Cf. Hilber 2005: 29. ²⁵¹ See, e.g. Werlitz 2000.

²⁵² See Couey 2008. Cf. Zsengellér 2015, who regards the passage as an elaboration or adaptation of a supposed letter sent by Amaziah to Jeroboam II on the appearance of Amos in Bethel, comparable to ancient Near Eastern letters reporting on prophecies.

That Ezekiel, the exiled priest and prophet, never appears in the temple of Jerusalem is self-evident and does not diminish the overall concern of the book of Ezekiel for the temple; the same can be said of Haggai. Unless we take it for granted that some part of the texts in the books of, say, Joel, Nahum, or Habakkuk, originate from the temple context, scanning the text of the Twelve Prophets results in very few passages where the prophets and their words are actually located in temples. Among such passages are one in Hosea (Hos. 9:7–9) indicating that the prophet, considered a madman, is persecuted “in the temple of his God” (which I understand to refer to the temple of Jerusalem rather than some eighth-century shrine in the Northern Kingdom²⁵³), and another in the book of Zechariah (Zech. 8:9) referring to the words of the prophets who were there at the founding of the temple (the first or the second?). Both of these stray finds are remarkable as such, the first as a possible glimpse at the marginal status of traditional prophecy in the Second Temple period, and the second as reflecting the Near Eastern understanding that temple-building had to be based on divine initiative.

Prophets among the Temple Personnel

Looking for explicit evidence of prophets as belonging to the permanent staff of the temple of Jerusalem or some other cult place in the prophetic books of the Hebrew Bible leaves one at first virtually empty-handed, especially if we do not accept the criticism of “false” prophets, such as those rebuked in Micah 3:5–7, to be evidence of their status as “cult prophets.” However, it would be all too hasty to conclude from this that no prophets in Israel, Judah, and Yehud were ever employed by the temple. To be sure, several biblical prophets are presented as descendants of priestly families: Jeremiah (Jer. 1:1), Ezekiel (Ezek. 1:3), and Zechariah (Zech. 1:1; cf. Neh. 12:16);²⁵⁴ and a figure like Haggai, even though not presented as a priest, cannot be located far from the priestly circles either.²⁵⁵ Moreover, Joel, Obadiah, Nahum, and Habakkuk, even Amos and Jeremiah, have been labeled as “cult prophets”;²⁵⁶ whether or not the existence of such a class of prophets can be proved, the implication that the temple was the principal framework of their activity is derived from the biblical texts. Moreover, the psalms that bear a conspicuous resemblance to prophecies—biblical as well as extrabiblical—are quite plausibly taken as evidence of the presence of such prophets in the temple.²⁵⁷

²⁵³ Nissinen 2006: 38–41.

²⁵⁴ See Pola 2003: 39–49.

²⁵⁵ Cf. Pola 2003: 50–61.

²⁵⁶ See n. 5 in this chapter and cf. Reventlow 1962, 1963; Jeremias 1970 (Habakkuk); for Joel, see Barton 2001: 21–2.

²⁵⁷ Cf. Johnson 1944 and, with a substantial reference to Neo-Assyrian prophecy, Hilber 2005.

In the historiographic books of the Hebrew Bible, only a few interesting but enigmatic cases can be listed. As already indicated, the young Samuel is presented as a votary of the temple of Shiloh (1 Sam. 1–3), which immediately brings to mind the Assyrian votaresses delivering prophecies in the temples of Ištar.²⁵⁸ Of the multiple roles of Samuel, that of the prophet may be due to a secondary textual development,²⁵⁹ but the overlap of his priestly and prophetic roles is nevertheless noteworthy. We can only speculate whether the readers are supposed to think that the ecstatic prophets of Gebah belong to the permanent staff of that cult place, or whether, for instance, the prophetic band around Elisha should be understood to have an affiliation with the sanctuary of Bethel or Gilgal (cf. 2 Kgs 2:2–3).²⁶⁰ The role of Huldah the prophetess as the wife of a temple functionary begs interesting questions regarding her relationship with the temple and its worship (2 Kgs 22:14),²⁶¹ as does the institutional position of the prophetess Noadiah and the “rest of the prophets” who stood against Nehemiah in fifth-century BCE Jerusalem.²⁶²

A most intriguing combination of prophecy and ritual performance is to be found in Chronicles, where David appoints the sons of Asaph, Heman, and Jeduthun to “prophesy with lyres, harps, and cymbals” (1 Chr. 25:1). These men were “trained in singing to the Lord,” and they numbered no less than 288 (1 Chr. 25:7). The association of prophecy and music calls to mind the ritual of Ištar at Mari (**51, 52) where, however, prophets and musicians were different groups of performers, and the Neo-Babylonian ritual text (*135o), where prophets are mentioned in the section concerning the duties of musicians.²⁶³ Whether the Levitical singers should be called prophets in the usual sense of the word is debatable, but it should be noted that the Chronicler does call Heman the “seer of the king” (1 Chr. 25:5), hence associating the temple musicians’ task with prophetic activity.²⁶⁴ Rather than turning musicians into prophets, the Chronicles highlight the divinely inspired origin of their music, thus creating a positive association between ritual and prophetic inspiration. It can be observed that in Chronicles, the roles of the priests (Levites in particular) and prophets are blurred in a way that makes also the priests transmitters of the divinely inspired word.²⁶⁵

All in all, while the temples in general are presented as natural environments of prophetic activity, and the close Near Eastern analogy suggests this to be probable in historical terms as well, the status and position of biblical prophets within religious institutions remains surprisingly obscure—perhaps

²⁵⁸ See “Ancient Near Eastern Sources: First Millennium BCE” earlier in this chapter.

²⁵⁹ See W. Dietrich 2010. ²⁶⁰ Cf. Lehnart 2003: 450.

²⁶¹ Cf., e.g. Edelman 1994. ²⁶² Cf. e.g. Carroll 1992.

²⁶³ See “Ritual Texts” in Chapter 2 of this volume.

²⁶⁴ For the inspired but not strictly prophetic role of the Levitical singers in 1 Chr. 25, see Schniedewind 1995: 163–88.

²⁶⁵ Cf. Jonker 2008: 714–17.

because it was unclear even to the editors of the texts, or, preferably, because the scribes in charge of prophetic literature wanted to present the “true” prophets as independent of the temples. This, however, does not turn temple and worship into marginal issues in the Hebrew Bible—quite the contrary.

Prophets as Advocates of Worship

The abundance of biblical texts surveyed above demonstrates that, whatever the prophets’ affiliation to the cultic institutions might have been in socio-historical terms, the temples are not presented as alien or indifferent to the prophets. On the contrary, the prophets’ concern for worship is a recurrent topic; in fact, it is one of the most urgent issues of the biblical prophetic discourse altogether. Again, we are talking primarily about texts, not the historical prophets.

The prophetic advocacy of the temple of Jerusalem begins already with the prophet Nathan who, as a part of his promise to David of his eternal dynasty also pronounces the foundational oracle of Solomon’s temple: “He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever” (2 Sam. 7:13; cf. 1 Chr. 17:12). There is, however, an interesting tension between this oracle and the beginning of the chapter where God makes it clear that he does not need to dwell in a temple.²⁶⁶

Josiah’s cultic reform is said to have been prompted by the newly found book of the law and by the oracle of Huldah that obliges the king to enforce it (2 Kgs 22:3–20).²⁶⁷ Likewise, the earlier reform by King Asa of Judah, as narrated in Chronicles, was inspired by the prophecy of Azariah son of Oded (2 Chr. 15). In Second Isaiah, the role of the royal temple-builder is given to the King Cyrus of Persia, the “good shepherd” who, upon the word of the God of Israel, presides over the re-establishment of the temple of Jerusalem (Isa. 44:28).²⁶⁸ It is noteworthy that all these texts recapitulate the common ancient Near Eastern triangle of kings, prophets, and temples, representing the building of temples and cultic reforms as a royal achievement initiated by divine word proclaimed by a prophet.²⁶⁹

²⁶⁶ Cf. Oswald 2008b. According to recent diachronical analyses of 2 Sam. 7, verse 13 belongs to a layer secondary to the dynastic promise in verses 12 and 14; see Rudnig 2011; Kasari 2009; Pietsch 2003.

²⁶⁷ For Josiah’s Law Book as a divine oracle, see Ben-Dov 2008. For the historicity of the event, see Uehlinger 2005, who argues for a “well-grounded minimum” of historicity of the Josianic reform and Pakkala 2010, who is skeptical about its historicity altogether.

²⁶⁸ According to Kratz 1991: 84–92, Isa. 44:28 dates back to the time of the building of the Second Temple, postdating Hag. 2:18 and Zech. 8:9.

²⁶⁹ Cf. e.g. Laato 1997. The cultic reforms of ancient Near Eastern kings (Akhenaten of Egypt, Mutawalli II of Hatti, Tudhaliya IV of Hatti, Nebuchadnezzar I of Babylonia, Sennacherib of Assyria, and Nabonidus of Babylon) are discussed by Na’aman 2006.

Apart from Noadiah in Nehemiah 6:14, the only prophets mentioned in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah are Haggai and Zechariah who prophesied “in the name of the God of Israel,” encouraging the rebuilding of the temple of Jerusalem (Ezra 5:1; 6:14). This is roughly in accord with what is written in the books bearing the names of these prophets.²⁷⁰ The two chapters of the book of Haggai focus entirely on the rebuilding of the temple, and the visions written in the book of Zechariah predict, not only the building of the temple (Zech. 1:16), but also the coronation of Joshua the high priest (Zech. 6:9–15).

In the book of Ezekiel, the temple of Jerusalem is an indispensable element of the prophet’s visionary world. Living in physical separation from the temple, the prophet is shown in visions how the Glory of the Lord leaves the temple (Ezek. 10), defiled with idolatry and desecrated by foreigners (Ezek. 8), and how the Glory of the Lord eventually returns to the renewed temple (Ezek. 43:1–5), described in detail in the prophet’s vision (Ezek. 40–8). This structure of the book of Ezekiel can be seen as the biblical version of the divine alienation—a divine reconciliation pattern that can be found in several Mesopotamian texts: the destruction of temples is caused by the anger of the gods who abandon their temples, whereas their reconstruction is a sign of reconciliation between gods and their worshippers.²⁷¹ Similarly in Ezekiel, the temple is the symbol of the eternal covenant of peace between Israel and God, who dwells in the midst of his people (Ezek. 37:26–8).

The idealized vision of the temple of Jerusalem as the dwelling of God and the focal point of the identity of Israel and even other nations can be found in other prophetic books as well. The temple is the *condition sine qua non* of the eschatological vision of the book of Isaiah: “In days to come the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised above the hills; all the nations shall stream to it . . . For out of Zion shall go forth instruction, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem” (Isa. 2:2–4; cf. Mic. 4:1–4). In the visions of Third Isaiah, the temple is a house of prayer for all peoples (Isa. 56:3–8), and offerings are brought to the temple by nations from afar (Isa. 60:4–16; 66:18–21; cf. Zech. 8:18–22). In these texts, the temple of Jerusalem is the navel of the universe, fully corresponding to the mythological location of Near Eastern temples, the monotheistic ideology notwithstanding. The central position of Jerusalem “rests fully on its association with the (ideologically) sole legitimate temple for the one and only existing deity in the universe. In other words, Jerusalem is important and unique because of the temple, rather than vice versa.”²⁷²

²⁷⁰ Even though Ezra 5 is not fully compatible with the content of Haggai and Zech. 1–8, and specific oracles of the prophets are not quoted, there is no question about the identity of the prophets; see Grabbe 1998: 19–20.

²⁷¹ For this pattern in Mesopotamian royal inscriptions, see Brinkman 1983: 40–2; in Ezekiel, see Block 2000.

²⁷² Ben Zvi 2004b: 23.

While these idealistic and eschatological visions hardly reflect any actual practices of the temple of Jerusalem, prophetic concern for the temple can also be expressed in more tangible terms. This is most clearly the case in texts that reprimand the community for ritual negligence and improper offerings. Especially in the book of Malachi, the priests are given a severe scolding for faulty offerings (Mal. 1:6–14), and the people for “robbing” God by not bringing the full tithe to the temple (Mal. 3:6–9).²⁷³ In the book of Malachi, the prophetic advocacy of the temple becomes its clearest formulation within the Hebrew Bible, including the interplay between ritual observance and the constraints of everyday life.²⁷⁴ Malachi’s concern for proper worship is probably rooted in the temple itself; it has been plausibly suggested that the text derives from Levitical circles.²⁷⁵ Malachi’s message is akin to prophetic advocacy of worship in Mari letters; what sets Malachi apart from them is its nature as an extremely learned literary product relying on earlier written traditions.²⁷⁶

If Malachi can be seen as an advocate of the temple, demanding that the people worship their God in an adequate way, what should we say about those prophetic texts in the Hebrew Bible that, at least seemingly, invalidate the people’s offerings altogether and accuse them of downright idolatry? Are such texts to be interpreted as another way of advocating appropriate worship or, rather, as reflecting a complete alienation from a ritualistic religion?

Cultic Criticism in Biblical Prophecy

We have seen that the ancient Near Eastern documents of prophecy are not void of critical voices concerning the fulfilling of ritual duties. On the contrary, as we have seen, “cultic criticism” in the sense of Malachi can be found in Mari letters as well as in Neo-Assyrian oracles, and that critical prophetic words are quoted in the letters from Mari to address important socio-political issues. However, no counterpart can be found to those biblical texts that despise the worship of the Israelites or Judahites altogether. In particular, the biblical discourse of idolatry presupposes a distinction between the in-group and the out-group, that is, Israel and the nations, or God of Israel and other gods, that is not viable in any other Near Eastern socio-religious environment.

²⁷³ For an attempt to understand the addressees of Malachi’s polemic (assuming that their description is realistic enough to make the attempt possible), see Tiemeyer 2005.

²⁷⁴ See, e.g. Schart 2016. Much earlier von Bulmerincq 1926: 272–3 wrote: “Für Ezeziel ist Religion gleichbedeutend mit Kultus, kultischer Verfassung oder verfassungsmäßig geübtem Kultus... Ganz ähnlich Maleachi: auch für ihn ist Religion in allererster Linie Kultus, und zwar vorschrittmäßig korrekt geübter Kultus.... Daher das bestreben, auch alle Erscheinungen des öffentlichen und sozialen Lebens zu dem Kultus in Beziehung zu setzen bzw. die sittlichen Verfehlungen wie die Mischehen auch als kultische Versündigungen hinzustellen.”

²⁷⁵ Thus Weyde 2000: 401–2.

²⁷⁶ See Weyde 2000.

More than any other feature, this distinction, fundamental to all parts of the Hebrew Bible where the prophets feature, sets the biblical texts ideologically apart from all other Near Eastern texts.

Much of the polemical speech of the biblical prophets against ritual practices is a corollary to this distinction, whether it should be attributed to the ancient prophets or the editors of the biblical texts. In the books of Jeremiah and Ezekiel, Israel and Judah are compared to unfaithful women and their religious behavior is described with more or less explicit sexual metaphors (Jer. 2–3; Ezek. 16; 22).²⁷⁷ In Jeremiah, the worship of the Queen of Heaven is explicitly mentioned as being practiced by the women of Jerusalem (Jer. 7:18; 44:15–19); there is no unanimity so far as to which goddess this title is given.²⁷⁸ In the overarching design of the book of Ezekiel described above, the divine alienation from the temple is caused by its defilement with what is vaguely referred to as “detestable things” and “abominations” (Ezek. 5:11), “all kinds of creeping things, and loathsome animals, and all the idols of the house of Israel” (Ezek. 8:10),²⁷⁹ or more specifically as worship of Tammuz or the sun (Ezek. 8:14, 16). Similarly, in the book of Hosea, the people of Israel are accused of sacrificing to Baal or Baalim (Hos. 2:10; 11:2; 13:1) and worshipping statues (Hos. 8:4–6; 10:1–2, 5; 12:12; 13:2; 14:4); this is why God does not accept their sacrifices (Hos. 5:6; 8:13).²⁸⁰ The book of Zephaniah is somewhat more specific in itemizing Baal and the host of the heavens as the idols of the people of Jerusalem (Zeph. 1:4–5).²⁸¹

While all these passages refer to worship of deities other than Yahweh, or a worship of Yahweh considered idolatrous by the authors of the texts, there are very few specific features to indicate what kind of rituals are being attacked. The alleged “Canaanite” practices often constructed as the target of the polemics of Hosea and Jeremiah in particular are scholarly constructs that can no longer be substantiated by conclusive evidence.²⁸² This alone

²⁷⁷ It is important to emphasize that these texts comprise metaphorical speech, not a description of actual cultic performances; see Day 2000.

²⁷⁸ See, e.g. Ackerman 1999, who sees in the Queen of Heaven characteristics of both Astarte and Ištar; cf. also Houtman 1999.

²⁷⁹ For an attempt to identify Ezekiel’s “creeping things” in ancient Syro-Palestinian iconography, see Odell 2009. Some scholars regard this polemics as dependent on Deuteronomy; e.g. L. C. Allen 1994: 143.

²⁸⁰ Whether this polemic can be attributed to the prophet Hosea or otherwise dated to the eighth century BCE is, not surprisingly, a heavily debated issue; a gradual, secondary development of the cultic polemics in the book of Hosea is argued for by Kratz 1997a and Pfeiffer 1999. The Hoseanic origin is defended by H.-C. Schmitt 2006, whereas Krispenz 2016 reads the texts synchronically without dating them to a specific period.

²⁸¹ In addition, the Lucianic Greek translation, the Peshitta, and the Vulgate read the name of the god Milcom for MT *bē-malkām* “by their king.” The verses are often read as reflecting a syncretistic worship of Yahweh in the time of Josiah; see, e.g. Irsigler 2002a: 118–20; Sweeney 2003: 67–8.

²⁸² For criticism of the idea of the alleged “sexual depravity” of the Canaanite religion, see T. J. Lewis 2006: xxxv–xxxvii. See also M. S. Smith 2007: 3–5, 2008: 93–113; Frevel 1995: 735–7.

distances the texts from whatever can be surmised to be their historical environment. At any rate, these texts cannot to be taken as general criticism of ritual activity, but are outspokenly directed against religious practices that the texts denounce as idolatry.

Even the book of Amos, clearly the most polemical among the prophetic books in terms of worship, is somewhat unspecific about the targets of its attacks. Apart from Sikkuth and Kiyun, names denoting astral deities (Amos 5:26), the book only mentions cult places: Bethel (3:14; 7:13), Bethel and Gilgal (4:4), Bethel, Gilgal, and Beersheba (5:5), Samaria, Dan, and Beersheba (8:14), “high places of Isaac” and “sanctuaries of Israel” (7:9). This raises the question whether the book targets worship in general or only as performed in these places. It is true that the book does not give an explicit alternative where the appropriate worship should take place; but in view of the divine word, “The end has come upon my people Israel” (Amos 8:2), this would be superfluous anyway.²⁸³ “Fallen, no more to rise, is maiden Israel” (Amos 5:2), and there is nothing that can change God’s mind—or maybe there is, after all: “Seek good and not evil, that you may live; and so the Lord, the God of hosts, will be with you, just as you have said” (Amos 5:14).

This verse of Amos serves as a reminder that not all critical voices against ritual practices are explicitly concerned with idolatry. There are a few texts in which rituals, and the sacrifices in particular, are disvalued as compared to justice—not only the *locus classicus*, Amos 5:21–4 (“I hate, I despise your festivals, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies . . .”),²⁸⁴ but also, for instance, Isaiah 1:11–17:

What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices? says the Lord; I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed beasts . . .

Your new moons and your appointed festivals my soul hates; they have become a burden to me, I am weary of bearing them . . .

Learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow.

Related sayings can be found in the books of Hosea (Hos. 6:4–6), Micah (Mic. 6:6–8), and Zechariah (Zech. 7:5–10), and a similar idea may be echoed in Jeremiah 7:22, where God tells the people to eat up the meat meant to be sacrificed and claims—contrary to the testimony of the Pentateuch!—not to have commanded their fathers concerning sacrifices when bringing them out of the land of Egypt.²⁸⁵ Importantly, further passages with a similar message include Isaiah 58, ridiculing the people who, while fasting, serve their own

²⁸³ Cf. Kratz 1998, who reads the polemic in Amos as motivated by the destruction of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah.

²⁸⁴ This passage is often dated to the time of the prophet Amos; for a later dating, assuming dependence on Isa. 1:10–17, see Kratz 1998: 110–11; cf. Kratz 2003a: 72–3.

²⁸⁵ For a recent discussion of all relevant passages, see Eidevall 2012.

interests and oppress their workers, and Isaiah 66, where God prefers the humble and contrite in spirit for the temple and sacrifices.

These passages are the ones that lend the strongest support to the idea of the anti-ritualism of the “classical” prophets and give rise to the idea of a cult-critical current in the prophetic tradition extending from Hosea to Third Isaiah.²⁸⁶ The problem remains, whether these few expressions against the sacrificial rituals really constitute a *cantus firmus* that gives the deepest level of meaning to the prophetic literature, sustaining the image of the “classical” prophets such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, Hosea, and Amos as sworn anti-ritualists, and whether such an image is historically sound.

My own answer would be rather to the negative for several reasons. First, the evidence is based on only a small selection of biblical passages representing a tiny proportion of the text of the prophetic books, which raises the question of whether the strong emphasis on them corresponds to the ideological preferences of the scholars rather than their prominence within the biblical text. Secondly, the significant dating problems make the reconstruction of a pre-exilic prophetic criticism of the cult extremely difficult; each dating must be argued for, and indeed, a later origin has been suggested for every one of the above-mentioned texts. Thirdly, the image of the anti-ritualist prophets tends to form a hermeneutical circle with the traditional idea of irreconcilable antagonism between (“true”) prophets and cult, or (“true”) prophets and priests. In fact, some prophetic books may turn out to be much more positively disposed towards cult and ritual than the traditional image of the “anti-cultic” prophet allows us to imagine.²⁸⁷

This said, there is no need to invalidate the condemnatory message of the texts, whatever their dating and religio-historical background. Their aggravated tone is difficult to miss, whereupon it has been suggested that these passages actually give voice to the prophets’ antagonistic attitude towards sacrificial cult or to an anti-ritualistic faction in the community.²⁸⁸ Many would argue that even these passages do not propagate the rejection of sacrificial rituals altogether but present it as of lesser importance than social justice; or that the targets of criticism are to be found in the wrong beliefs and practices of the worshipers rather than the rituals per se;²⁸⁹ or that

²⁸⁶ Thus Krüger 2006: 49–50: “Die diskutierten Texte belegen exemplarisch eine Strömung kultkritischen Denkens innerhalb der prophetischen Tradition von ihren Anfängen bei Hosea und Amos bis zu ihren späten textproduktiven Phasen in Jes 66 und steht zu anderen prophetischen Haltungen zum Kult, wie sie etwa in Ez 40ff., Hag oder Mal dokumentiert sind, im Widerspruch.”

²⁸⁷ For the case of Jeremiah, see Tiemeyer 2009; for Amos, Eidevall 2016.

²⁸⁸ Cf. Barton 2005; Hendel 2012; cf. also Krispenz 2016.

²⁸⁹ e.g. according to Klingbeil 2007: 77–8, “the prophetic critique of religious realities in ancient Israel is not aimed at ritual per se. The prophets still consider the temple an important enough element of Israelite religion on which to focus their messages.”; cf. Nidhani de Andrado 2016: 67 on Hosea: “neither is Hosea anti-ritualistic nor does he prioritize ethics over ritual... when it comes to cultic sacrifice, ritual and ethics are interconnected”; G. Fischer 2005: 312 on

condemnation of the cult is a necessary part of the proclamation of the end of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah.²⁹⁰ Furthermore, it may also be that this rhetoric “is intended to shock and dismay, not to lobby for a world without cultic practice,”²⁹¹ which would be difficult to imagine anyway.

Whatever historical and socio-religious explanation can be given in each individual case (one universal explanation is probably not enough), what the texts have in common is the troubled relationship between the symbolic universes of their implied authors and audiences. In these texts, the position of the temple as the center of the mythological universe is seriously at issue. The prophets are given a role, not representing the institutional order but questioning the legitimacy of the order represented by those responsible for the temple. Rather than an ideological anti-ritualism, the texts reflect a severe disruption in the symbolic universe of the implied authors (i.e. the “prophets”) with regard to the central position of the temple and the legitimacy of its management. These texts express a deep mistrust in the capability of the religious order to provide people with trust and security—either because the temple is no longer there or because it is wrongly maintained; hence its position is challenged and, consequently, the symbolic universe reinterpreted.²⁹²

Instead of expressions of a universally anti-ritualistic ideology, the texts can be read as reflecting a post-traumatic stress. They cope with the trauma caused by social and cultural upheavals, whether the end of the Northern Kingdom, the destruction of Jerusalem, or the troublesome restoration of the post-monarchical temple community. Normally, the institutions legitimized by the shared symbolic world of the members of a given society should be able to furnish them with a trust and identity necessary for overcoming the uncertain times following such catastrophes and to supply a shared vision of

Jer. 7:21–2: “Angezielt ist also eine Ausrichtung auf das Wesentliche an der Bundesbeziehung”; Asurmendi 2004: 155–6 on Isa. 1:10–17: “Il est difficile d’imaginer une société religieuse sans expression publique de sa foi. En revanche ce qu’Isaïe comme les autres prophètes demande c’est un renversement des valeurs”; Ben Zvi 2000a: 152 on Mic. 6:6–8: “this primacy [of morality over sacrificial worship] was not understood as meaning that sacrifices had no important role; rather, it meant that the sacrifices of the sinners had no efficacy”; Brueggemann 1998: 18 on Isa. 1:10–17: “It is not a particular, priestly practice that is rejected by Yahweh. It is rather every effort at communion that is rooted in pretense, dishonesty, and disobedience.”

²⁹⁰ Kratz 1998: 108–9: “Verurteilt wird auch hier [i.e. in Isa. 1:10–15] nicht der Kult an sich, sondern der durch das Gericht Jhwhs hinfällig gewordene und erst darum als verkehrt, hier besonders als übertrieben diffamierte Kult.... Nicht der Kult, nicht die Opfer haben einen Makel, sondern... die Opfer darbringen, sie haben sich Gott und den Menschen gegenüber falsch verhalten und damit ihr eigenes und das Ende des Kults heraufbeschworen.” In the case of Amos, Eidevall 2016 argues that “[t]he topic of rejected sacrifice serves... as an integral part of the theological explanation of the downfall of the Northern kingdom provided by this book” (p. 114).

²⁹¹ Bibb 2004: 43.

²⁹² For the concept of “trust,” see Seligman 1997; for “ontological security,” Giddens 1986. Cf. also ter Borg, 2004: 439–41.

the future;²⁹³ for example, the communal laments reflected by the prophetic books (cf. Hos. 10:5–8; Zech. 7:1–10; 8:16–22) and Lamentations have doubtless served as a cultural organization of grief. The “cult-critical” passages, as the biblical prophecy of doom in general, present the contemporary institutional order as failing to provide the identity, security, and protection required of it, deny its role as the identity giver, and proclaim an alternative vision of the future.²⁹⁴

The biblical prophetic books certainly reflect conflicts in monarchic and post-monarchic communities—between whom and because of what remains to be explained from case to case. Identifying the historical proponents of the conflicts reflected by the texts has become increasingly complicated, because the texts can be placed against a variety of historical backdrops. The traditional appreciation of the eighth to seventh century BCE as the normative period of Israelite prophecy easily leads to reconstructions of social settings for the “classical prophets”; however, when looking for the societal background of the *texts* advocating or criticizing temples or rituals within a prophetic discourse, it may turn out that they rather reflect the circumstances of Second Temple communities.²⁹⁵ Problems regarding the possibility of reaching the sociological reality behind the texts calls for caution against knowing all too much about it;²⁹⁶ suffice it to say that the texts unquestionably reflect clashes and rivalries “between some prophets and some priests.”²⁹⁷

We can now return to the question of the contraposition between “cultic” and “anti-cultic” prophets, or between prophets and priests. While this antagonism still has its proponents, at least in some form, it is also clear that it has given way to other kinds of understanding of the relationship between prophets and worship.²⁹⁸ The above analysis concurs with the results of

²⁹³ Cf. deVries 1996: 400–1. For an interpretation of biblical texts from the perspective of post-traumatic stress, see Carr 2014; Morrow 2004.

²⁹⁴ Eidevall 2012: 217 makes the correct observation that in the prophetic books of the Hebrew Bible, sacrificial worship performed before the catastrophes of 722 and 586 BCE is often rejected, while the cult of the Second Temple is consistently accepted and actively promoted.

²⁹⁵ Even texts included in the books attributed to the “classical” prophets may make sense when transferred to another historical period; cf. the attempt of Levin 2005: 129–33, to read the book of Hosea as reflecting the conflict between the proto-Samaritan community.

²⁹⁶ See especially Carroll 1989.

²⁹⁷ Hyatt 1963: 18. Cf., in a context of the Persian period, Tiemeyer 2006: 287: “The kernel of the critique concerns the priests’ worship of YHWH: the prophetic texts claim that the priests’ unorthodox worship had brought about the defilement of the cult and the inability of the people to attain ritual purity. In addition, the prophets raged against the priests’ failure to perform the existing cult of YHWH in a satisfactory manner, their failure to teach the people, and finally, their failure to be the champions of social justice. . . . The prophetic critique of the priests should, however, not be understood as an expression of a dichotomy between the priests and the prophets.”

²⁹⁸ Cf., e.g. Schramm 2005, according to whom the post-exilic conflict reflected by Isaiah 56–66 is not between prophetic and priestly traditions; rather, what is at stake here is a “battle

current research as summarized by Lester Grabbe in his introduction to a collection of essays related to the topic (presented here in an abridged form):²⁹⁹

1. There was no natural opposition between prophets and priests.
2. The temple was seen as an essential part of society.
3. This acceptance did not prevent clashes between different groups affiliated with the temple.
4. While there is little conclusive evidence for a class of “cult prophets,” many prophetic activities took place in the temple.
5. The roles of prophets and priests may have overlapped.

These points can be reached by reading the biblical text without too much historical speculation, and the same points can be made of the ancient Near Eastern and Greek material surveyed above (perhaps with the exception of point 5, not much endorsed by Mesopotamian and Greek records). This makes the prophets appearing in Greek and Near Eastern texts not just a heuristic analogy to biblical prophets, but fragments of a patterned cultural background, against which the biblical texts can be placed in spite of their different history of textual transmission. As Dominique Charpin puts it: “the essential difference between Mari prophecies and biblical prophecies lies in their reception.”³⁰⁰

with the traditional, syncretistic cult of YHWH, a battle in which the priestly, Pentateuchal tradition and the prophetic tradition fought on the same side” (p. 177).

²⁹⁹ Grabbe 2004: 16.

³⁰⁰ Charpin 2015: 58.

Prophets and Kings

HERRSCHAFTSWISSEN AND PROPHETIC DIVINATION

Divination, in its different forms, is one of the key constituents of what Walter Burkert calls the “Near Eastern-Mediterranean *koinê* of forms and traditions—with local variants, intercultural infiltrations, and some continuous change of trends and fashions.”¹ Even prophets should be seen as further representatives of the institution of divination, the purpose of which is to make the people, kings, and other rulers in particular, conversant with divine knowledge in a variety of ways.² Throughout the ancient Eastern Mediterranean, political leadership was divinely sanctioned; all important decisions had to be subjected to the divine will, and the diviners were the professionals who were believed to be able to find it out.

In prophecy, the divine word is allegedly received intuitively, typically in an altered state of consciousness, and this is clearly sets prophecy apart from astrology or extispicy, which are based on observations of physical objects and their scholarly interpretation. This difference is visible also in the social location of diviners of different kind. In Assyria and Babylonia, “academics” such as haruspices, astrologers, and exorcists assumed social roles different from prophets who were not affiliated with literary and scribal education but rather belonged to the context of worship.³ Also in Greece, diviners appeared in various social roles and positions. There is a marked difference between the seer performing divinatory rites before battle, the chresmologue sharing his knowledge of oracles in a Greek city, and the Delphic Pythia living a cloistered life under the aegis of Apollo.⁴

¹ Burkert 2004: 14; cf. Burkert 2005: 29 (= 2011: 140).

² See “Prophecy and Divination” in Chapter 1 in this volume. For the interface of prophecy and divination, see, e.g. Hamori 2015: 19–35; Stökl 2012a: 7–11; 2015b: 270–80; R. Schmitt 2014; Anthonioz 2013: 21–33; de Jong 2007: 313–18; Kitz 2003; Cancik-Kirschbaum 2003; Pongratz-Leisten 2003: 132–68; Barstad 2002: 87–9.

³ Cf. Parpola 1997: xlvii–xlvi.

⁴ See, e.g. M. A. Flower 2008: 58–65 (chresmologues; cf. also Bowden 2003); 153–87 (seers in warfare); 215–26 (the Pythia).

What unites different divinatory practices is their function in guiding decision-making in the society by means of revealing the divine will. Michael Flower's statement concerning Greek diviners can well be generalized: "if looked at from the point of view of their social function, both the inspired prophet and the learned diviner fulfill the same role in society as intermediaries in the process of communication between the human and divine spheres. Both diviner and prophet are recognized by others in their community as individuals who are qualified to perform this particular social function."⁵ This function implies much more than mere fortune-telling or predicting the future. Prophets, like other diviners, acted as instruments of divine encouragement and warning, and they were typically consulted in situations of war and crises. Two random examples from less-discussed but important text materials will suffice to demonstrate this.

A telling example of a divinatory consultation at war involving a prophet is the most recently found document of prophecy, an outlay of copper found among the clay tablets recently discovered at Ziyaret Tepe (ancient Tuşhan) and dating from the year 611 BCE, that is, from the very last days of the Assyrian empire after the fall of Nineveh.⁶ Just before the battle against the invading Babylonian army, both an augur (*dāgil iššūri*) and a prophet (*maḥḥū*) have been paid for their services. The substantial amount of six minas of copper given to the prophet is noteworthy regardless of whether he ever survived the fall of the city to be able to enjoy his riches. Furthermore, the use of two distinctive methods of divination deserves attention: the city in distress needed every divine instruction they could get, and augury may have been used to verify the message delivered by the prophet.⁷

Another example of the use of prophecy in a different kind of crisis situation can be taken from Claros. Several cities hit by the so-called Antonine Plague that broke out in Asia Minor in 166 CE enquired of the oracle of Claros about the divine will concerning this disastrous disease.⁸ Among them was Pergamon that, "according to the resolution of the council and the people of the metropolis of Asia" had sent a delegation to Claros and received an oracle that, while referring extensively to Pergamon's local mythology, gives detailed instructions of the rituals with the help of which the pestilence would withdraw from Pergamon "to the land of strangers." This oracle was then engraved on stone plates and put on display in market places and sanctuaries of Pergamon.⁹

⁵ M. A. Flower 2008: 86. ⁶ *118c; editio princeps: Parpola 2008.

⁷ For this text, see also Nissinen 2013b.

⁸ Several oracles of Claros have been connected with this event; see Merkelbach and Stauber 1996, nos. 2 (Pergamon); 4 (Hierapolis); 8 (Caesarea Troketta); 9 (Kallipolis); 11 (a city of Lydia); probably also no. 24, for which see Jones 2005.

⁹ Merkelbach and Stauber 1996: 6–10; cf. Oesterheld 2008: 51–71.

Neither of these two examples presents a case where a king appears as the recipient of the divine word; in Tušhan, the Assyrian power structures had already collapsed, and in Claros, the enquirer is the city of Pergamon. However, the imperial background of divination is evident in both cases, prophecy at Tušhan continuing the Neo-Assyrian tradition of royal worship of Ištar, and Pergamon boasting about recognition as the first city ever to have been elevated to the status of *neōkoros* (“the custodian of the temple”), a title firmly belonging to the Roman imperial cult.¹⁰ Even though the king, hence, was not the only employer of diviners and prophets, the societal function of divination is fundamentally associated with the prevailing power structure, whether the institution of kingship as especially in the ancient Near East, or the city state structure of the Greek world. Both in Greece and the Near East, it can be amply demonstrated that what was believed to be divine knowledge actually influenced the decision-making by virtue of the supreme authority assigned to the divine world; on the other hand, however, it was ultimately the power structure itself that defined and authorized the acceptable sources of divine knowledge.¹¹

The model according to which the divinatory process of communication was understood depends on the underlying theological and political structures. In Greece where the oracular god, especially in the case of inspired prophecy, more often than not was Apollo transmitting divine knowledge from Zeus through the prophet to the enquirers, the position of the addressee—whether a king, a city council, or a private individual—was less marked than in the Near East where the idea of (semi-)divine kingship was a widespread tradition. In the Mesopotamian setting, the king was “the hub between the social and the cosmic order, and the ideal king was charged with implementing the requirements of civil society as well as securing the cult of and communication with the gods.”¹² The position of the Near Eastern king as the link between the divine and human worlds made him the prime recipient of prophetic and other oracles; the prophetic word was “only one element in the mix that resulted in particular royal decisions.”¹³ Divination in general was the medium through which the king was kept informed of the divine favors and obligations and the origin and legitimacy of his rule; this is what Beate

¹⁰ *LSJ* 1172: “title assumed by Asiatic cities in Imperial times, when they had built a temple in honour of their patron-god or the Emperor.”

¹¹ Cf. Oesterheld 2008: 551: “Das Orakel ist eine Außeninstanz, die in der Welt der politischen Institutionen nicht aufgeht und eben darum, versehen mit autonomer Autorität, auf sie Einfluß zu nehmen vermag. Zugleich kann die religiöse Institution diese Funktion nur ausüben, weil sie von den Protagonisten der Polis in Anspruch genommen und als Teil des eigenen Referenzsystems angesehen wird, das sich aus kultischen *und* politischen Elementen zusammensetzt. Die Orakel stehen der Polis mit eigener Legitimation gegenüber und gehören doch zu ihr.”

¹² Pongratz-Leisten 2014: 39; cf. Machinist 2011.

¹³ Roberts 2003: 346.

Pongratz-Leisten aptly calls by the German term *Herrschaftswissen* (perhaps translatable in English as “sovereign knowledge,” or “knowledge as a means of control”).¹⁴ It is through prophets especially that the king becomes conversant with “the secrets of the gods,”¹⁵ that is, the decisions of the heavenly council usually proclaimed by the goddess Ištar.

The prophets function as intermediaries and channels of communication for the divine knowledge necessary for the king and country to live in safety and receive divine advice in times of crisis and uncertainty. Different political structures notwithstanding, the same is true for Greek divination, even though the institution of kingship in Greece played a different and less central role in the divine–human communication.

Much of this is easily observable also in the Hebrew Bible where prophets appear as proclaiming the word of Yahweh to kings and authorities, often in political or religious crises; if not more, this shows that the authors and editors of the prophetic and historical books of the Hebrew Bible were well aware of the function of prophecy as *Herrschaftswissen*. A telling example of this is the decisive role of the prophetess Huldah in introducing the “Book of the Law” (*sefer hat-tôrâ*) as the constitution of the religious reform of King Josiah as reported by the Deuteronomists in 2 Kings 22:14–20.¹⁶ Moreover, prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah, as well as several prophets mentioned in the Deuteronomistic History, not to forget the Chronicles, are repeatedly brought to a direct contact with the kings—more, in fact, than is observable in any prophetic document from Mesopotamia. Whether we in each individual case have to make do with a historical description of actual events or, as in most cases, a late reconstruction, all this points to the conclusion, first, that prophecy as an institution had an important divinatory function in the politics of the Judaeen kings when the kingdom still existed, and secondly, that this function of prophecy was remembered long after the collapse of the institution of kingship in Jerusalem. For ideological reasons, and in contrast to Mesopotamian and Greek sources, the Hebrew Bible is relatively silent about the significance of other kinds of divination, such as, extispicy, lot-casting, exorcism, or necromancy, but what we have is enough to demonstrate that these, too, were practiced in the kingdoms of Israel and Judah.¹⁷ Indeed, the biblical

¹⁴ Pongratz-Leisten 1999.

¹⁵ See Lenzi 2008; 2014 and cf. the oracle from Ešnunna (*66): “O king Ibalpiel, thus says Kitium: The secrets of the gods (*nišrētum ša ili*) are placed before me. Because you constantly pronounce my name with your mouth, I constantly disclose the secrets of the gods to you.”

¹⁶ For the original function of the newly found book as a divine oracle and its redactional reinterpretation as a law-book, see Ben-Dov 2008; 2011.

¹⁷ For different divinatory practices in the Hebrew Bible, see Neuber 2015; Hamori 2015; R. Schmitt 2014; Thelle 2013; Jeffers 1996; Cryer 1994; Schmidt 1994; Loretz 1993a; 1993b; Tropper 1989.

elevation of prophecy is the flip-side of the condemnation of other forms of divination associated with idolatry by most biblical writers.

The clearest difference between the biblical and non-biblical prophecy has often been seen in the minor role or total lack of prophetic criticism in the Near Eastern world (Greece has not played any significant part in this discussion). The prophets in Mari and Assyria, so goes the argument, never proclaim against king and country; unlike the biblical prophets, they are not found making common cause with the poor and underprivileged on ethical and theological grounds. To demonstrate this view, I quote a paragraph from one of the contemporary introductions to the Hebrew Bible, in which the historical connection between the ancient Near Eastern and Israelite prophecy is duly acknowledged, but a fundamental difference is also found:

Against the background of the ancient Near Eastern prophecy, the profile of the individual Israelite opposition prophets becomes high. Comparable radical conflicts between the prophets and the king or the kingdom have not been found so far. The few cases of explicit criticism aim at cultic matters, not at societal or ethical concerns. The massive proclamation of doom, which is distinctive of the pre-exilic (writing) prophets of Israel, is likewise absent. The prophets in the ancient Near East, unlike in Israel, never demonstrate their concern for the *people*.¹⁸

This view is not without foundation, and it is based on recent studies on ancient Near Eastern prophecy, first and foremost on those written by Manfred Weippert and myself.¹⁹ However, in the light of the present knowledge of prophetic sources from the ancient Near East, this image of prophecy is no longer fully acceptable. It is true that the plain and direct criticism of Amos and his ilk has few parallels in non-biblical prophetic sources. The social dimensions of the prophecies related to temples, their worship and personnel, notwithstanding, outspoken demands for social justice are rather a rarity in the ancient Near Eastern prophetic documents. Therefore, the role of social criticism in non-biblical prophecy has been considered marginal at the best.²⁰ Nevertheless, there is enough evidence of the critical potential of prophecy in the available documentation throughout the ancient Eastern Mediterranean.

¹⁸ My translation of Erich Zenger in Zenger et al. 2012: 518: “Vor dem Hintergrund der altorientalischen Prophetie erhalten die oppositionellen Einzelpropheten Israels ein noch schärferes Profil. Vergleichbare radikale Konflikte zwischen Propheten und König bzw. Staat gibt es in altorientalischen Texten bislang nicht. In den wenigen Fällen, in denen dort Kritik geäußert wird, bezieht diese sich auf den Kult, aber nicht auf gesellschaftliche und ethische Fragestellungen. Ebenso fehlt die massive Gerichtsansage, die das Proprium der vorexilischen (Schrift-)Propheten Israels ist. Daß den altorientalischen Propheten das Schicksal des *Volkes* am Herzen lag, wie dies in Israel der Fall war, ist nirgends zu erkennen.”

¹⁹ Especially Weippert 1988 (= 2014: 87–103); Nissinen 1993.

²⁰ Cf. Loretz 2003.

As we have seen above, the Assyrian king had ritual duties belonging to his role as a priest (*šangû*). By the same token, he was the “perfect man” (*etlu gitmālu*),²¹ who represented the people under his dominion, if not all mankind, in front of the gods. As the guarantor of the world order, he had to be the first one to comply with divine ordinances. Any imperfection in this respect inflamed divine anger, about which he had to be warned in good time. This was one of the foremost reasons why prophets and other diviners were at the king’s disposal.²² The prophets—at least in principle—had no personal authority and their eventual criticism did not express their personal opinions. As members of the divinatory apparatus, and especially as mouthpieces of gods, the prophets were able to exhort, warn, and even criticize the king and make direct demands on him—something that an Assyrian citizen, or even the king’s nearest advisor, could not even begin to imagine. In this position, if the prophets did their service for the king (or for the temple) properly, they could not just deliver oracles of salvation. The Assyrian prophets were in a better position than other diviners to criticize the king also because they were probably not directly employed by the palace but rather by temples of Ištār highly respected by the kings. Moreover, prophets could perform in public, while the results of technical divination were highly classified information.²³

In Chapter 6 on prophets and temples we have seen that cultic matters can be the subject of critical prophetic voices, and this chapter will give examples of socio-political criticism. In fact, the critical potential can be found not only in biblical but also in Near Eastern prophecy, and it may have found more prophetic expressions in reality that the scanty evidence at our disposal is able to demonstrate. Thanks to the increasing amount of source material available to us today, we are now in a better position than before to demonstrate how this critical potential is materialized in prophetic sources from both Mari and Assyria.²⁴

The existing evidence of prophetic criticism may appear to us less significant from social and religious points of view. In general, however, the observance of the ritual and social duties cannot be separated from the king’s

²¹ For the king as the “perfect man,” see Parpola 1993b: 168.

²² For the position of the king between the human and the divine world, see Parpola 1993a: xv–xvi, 2000: 190–2; Maul 1999.

²³ See J. L. Wright 2014; Lenzi 2014.

²⁴ Grabbe 1995: 89 draws the following consequence from several texts from Mari: “The OT prophets are not alone in criticizing and admonishing the ruler and even bringing bad news” (cf. Grabbe 1995: 92); cf. Barstad 2001: 62–3; Huffmon 1997: 17–18, 2000: 54–5; Gordon 1993: 76–8. Already Wilson 1980: 110, had made the following observation of the prophets of Mari on the basis of the evidence available then: “Their utterances were intended to bring about changes in the social and religious establishments, particularly by improving the lot of the gods and cults which the intermediaries represented. Most of their messages were innovative and designed to bring about changes in existing conditions.”

righteousness in other matters.²⁵ Both at Mari and in Assyria, the prophetic demands for cultic perfection and social justice were theologically based on the divinely sanctioned position of the king between the gods and his people. Therefore, the criticism of the prophets should not be bagatellized, even though it may appear to us as pedantic or indifferent from the ethical point of view.²⁶ Seemingly minor demands may reflect bigger concerns.

PROPHETS AND KINGS: ANCIENT NEAR EAST

Ideological Foundation

The elementary affiliation between the institutions of prophecy and kingship is amply documented in the Near Eastern sources available to us. Prophets evidently belonged to the divinatory apparatus consulted by ancient Near Eastern rulers, not necessarily forming a part of the court personnel but rather associated with temples and other cult places. Almost all ancient Near Eastern prophetic oracles are addressed to a king, dealing with royal issues and concerns. Three kings appear as the recipients of prophetic messages in the majority of the extant texts: Zimri-Lim of Mari and Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal of Assyria. Other kings to whom prophecies are addressed include Ibalpiel of Ešnunna,²⁷ Išme-Dagan of Ekallatum,²⁸ Hammurabi of Babylon,²⁹ Zakkur of Hamath,³⁰ Hamiyata of Masuwari (Til Barsip),³¹ and an anonymous ruler of Byblos.³²

The fragmentary set of ancient Near Eastern sources available provides us only with a rather short list of kings receiving prophetic messages. This may give the impression that the prophets, for most of the time, did not play a significant role, at least when it comes to royal issues. There may be some truth in this impression, but it must be balanced against the provenance of the extant oracles, the lion's share of which comes from two major archives, Mari and Nineveh. Taken together, the bits and pieces of our documentation attest to a geographically and chronologically widespread institution that was readily

²⁵ Cf. Kaiser 1998: 413–14: “In der Regel ging man davon aus, daß die Bedingungen für die Annahme eines Opfers erfüllt waren, wenn die Opfervorschriften eingehalten wurden. . . . Andererseits war die Lauterkeit der das Opfer Darbringenden (Ps. 15; 24,3–5) und der das Opfer Vollziehenden (Mal. 1,6–2,9) die stillschweigende Voraussetzung für seine göttliche Annahme.”

²⁶ Jeremias 1994: 487 exaggerates the contrast of the Mari prophecy and the biblical prophecy in this respect (“Hier—in Mari—geht es um ein Paar Opfertiere mehr oder die Abgabe eines Stückes Land, dort—in Alten Testament—geht es um den Gehorsam des Königs gegenüber dem überlieferten Willen Gottes und seinen aktuellen Willenskundgebungen durch den Propheten”); however, he does not attribute this alleged contrast to the superiority of the biblical image of God but explains it from the point of view of the history of tradition.

²⁷ **66–7; cf. *7.

²⁸ *47.

²⁹ *19.

³⁰ *137.

³¹ *143.

³² *142.

available to kings in Mesopotamia and in the West Semitic world. In the Old Babylonian period, for instance, Zimri-Lim of Mari was not the only king to be addressed by prophets. A couple of letters quoting prophecies from the time of his predecessor, Yasmaḥ-Addu, have been preserved.³³ His rival and ally Ibalpiel of Ešnunna received prophetic oracles,³⁴ and the letters from Mari inform us of prophecies uttered in different places, from Aleppo to Babylon.³⁵ In one of the letters, Zimri-Lim is informed about a prophet proclaiming at the gate of the palace of Hammurabi, king of Babylon, an oracle of doom addressed to Išme-Dagan, brother of Yasmaḥ-Addu and king of Ekallatum who was in asylum with Hammurabi.³⁶ Of the few West Semitic prophetic documents, only the Zakkur stele says explicitly that the king of Hamath had received prophetic oracles, but even other texts, such as the Meshā stele³⁷ and the Amman citadel inscription,³⁸ may be quoted as indirect evidence of the kings of Moab and Ammon receiving prophetic oracles.³⁹

The institutional affiliation between prophecy and kingship is quite natural when seen in the context of kingship and divination in general: they were one of the media through which the king was kept informed of the divine favors and obligations and the origin and legitimacy of his rule. This was the ideological foundation of the activity of the diviners and the basis of their acknowledgment by the royal court. Not every prophet was regarded as mouthpiece of the god, but the words pronounced by those prophets who enjoyed such a status were appreciated accordingly.

Since the prophets did not address the king as themselves but in the name of the deity, they spoke to the king as the gods do, unencumbered by the courtly phraseology that other diviners were obliged to use in their letters. Prophetic messages begin with formulas like the “Word of Ištar of Arbela” (*abat Issār ša Arbail*).⁴⁰ That the word for “word,” *amatu* (Neo-Assyrian *abutu*), also means an “order” or “decision”⁴¹ is no semantical coincidence but carries the idea that the word of Ištar goes back to the ordinance of the divine council. From this position, the prophets were entitled to address the king in different ways—not always favorably, as is most often the case, but also in a critical tone, as we shall see below. To use traditional forms of critical categories, the ancient Near Eastern prophecies do not just include *Heilsworte* (“oracles of

³³ i.e. **3, 34; for an edition and the dating of these texts, see Charpin 2002: 34–7.

³⁴ **66, 67.

³⁵ In addition to cities within Zimri-Lim’s reign, such as Terqa, Tuttul, Saggartum, and Qatṭunan, there are letters containing prophetic oracles from Aleppo (**1, 2), Babylon (*47), and Andarig (*48).

³⁶ *47. ³⁷ KAI 181; thus Lemaire 1987: 210–14.

³⁸ *136; see Aufrecht 1989: 154–63 (*59); Lemaire 1997: 180–1.

³⁹ Thus Lemaire 2001: 101–11; cf. Anthonioz 2013: 45–54.

⁴⁰ e.g. *81, lines ii 30; *87, lines ii 33; *88, lines iii 16; *90, line 1; *92, line 2.

⁴¹ See CAD A/2: 35–8 sub *amatu* 4.

salvation”) but also *Mahnworte* (“oracles of admonition”) and *Gerichtsworte* (“oracles of doom”); in other words, the prophecies communicate words of support and instruction as well as those of warning, indictment, and judgment.⁴² Even though only a relatively small number of Near Eastern sources represent the categories of indictment and judgment, they should not be overlooked. The distribution of these categories in the extant documents does not necessarily reflect the actual variety of prophetic proclamation.

Communication between Prophets and Kings

As important as the prophets were regarded by the ancient Near Eastern kings, or at least some of them, there are only a few records of direct contact between kings and prophets. We may assume that Esarhaddon was there when the prophecies concerning his kingship were spoken on the occasion of his own enthronement ritual.⁴³ One Neo-Assyrian letter in particular gives a hint at royal-prophetic encounters, namely the letter of the well-known Babylonian astrologer Bel-ušeziḫ to King Esarhaddon. Bel-ušeziḫ, who belonged to Esarhaddon’s inner circle of scholars, wonders why the king, immediately following his enthronement, has summoned “male and female prophets” (*raggimānu raggimātu*) instead of him, in spite of all the services he has done for Esarhaddon during the civil war preceding his rise to power.⁴⁴

This reference is unique in the ancient Near Eastern sources, and the tone in which Bel-ušeziḫ writes about the matter expresses his astonishment and professional jealousy, as if it was exceptional indeed for prophets to be honored with the king’s summons. It is not entirely certain that we have to do with a face to face rendezvous of the prophets with the king. The “summoning” (*rēšu našū*) primarily means employing: the life of a scholar was dependent on the king’s use of his services and Bel-ušeziḫ is furious because Esarhaddon, right at the beginning of his rule, has made use of the prophets’ services before consulting the skilled and loyal Babylonian astrologer.

The Mari archives do not report face-to-face encounters of prophets and the king; at best, the prophet may proclaim at the gate of the palace, as does the anonymous prophet of Marduk in Babylon, delivering a message to the Išme-Dagan, king of Ekallatum who was in asylum with Hammurapi, king of Babylon.⁴⁵ From the existing sources one gets the impression that while King Zimri-Lim maintained close contact with practitioners of extispicy,⁴⁶

⁴² See de Jong 2011: 48–51; cf. the useful table in Walton 2006: 245–7.

⁴³ See the five prophecies included in SAA 9 3 (**84–8).

⁴⁴ *105. For Bel-ušeziḫ and his correspondence, see M. Dietrich 1970: 62–8.

⁴⁵ *47; see Charpin 1992: 28–9. ⁴⁶ See Pongratz-Leisten 1999: 137–54.

he was informed about prophecies mostly by go-betweens.⁴⁷ This may not be the whole truth, however, since the gratuities received by prophets and documented in several administrative texts may have involved an audience in the palace.⁴⁸ Moreover, the king was supposed to attend the ritual of Ištar, including the prophetic performances that belonged to the ritual procedure.⁴⁹ The evidence is too meager to allow conclusions about how often direct encounters between the prophets and the king took place at Mari, but they should not be excluded either. The lack of direct evidence may be partly due to the nature of the encounter: face-to-face encounters between the king and the prophets have probably not left any written traces.⁵⁰

That the kings heard prophets speaking, perhaps on a regular basis, does not, however, mean that they had personal contacts with prophets in the same way they communicated with their trusted astrologers, haruspices, and exorcists. The available documentation makes it clear that prophets delivered messages from deities to kings and prophecies were appreciated as divine words. However, the kings are not found in direct consultations with them, nor do the prophets feature as advisors to the king in the same way as the scholars, whose relationship with the king is often a personal one, and many of whom—unlike the prophets—are familiar to us as persons, thanks to their intensive correspondence with the kings.⁵¹ Among the Near Eastern prophets, there is no one who would stand out as a personality of whom we know anything but some basic data like the name, the domicile, and the title.

The words of the prophets were usually conveyed to Zimri-Lim by the priests of the temples where the prophets were active, by officials from different parts of the kingdom, and by the women of the court, especially by Queen Šibtu and other royal ladies such as Inib-šina, Zimri-Lim's sister, and Addu-duri, his mother.⁵² The role of royal women in the prophetic process of communication at Mari and in Assyria was significant, and they seem to have served as an important link between non-male prophets and the king. Three out of four personal names of female prophets and the *assinnus* at Mari known

⁴⁷ See Sasson 1994; Durand 1988: 381–3.

⁴⁸ Cf. *53, 54, 55, 56, 58, 60, 61, 62, 63; cf Charpin 2002: 18; 2015: 32.

⁴⁹ According to *51, lines ii 8–10, the king, “dressed in the *lullumtum*-cloak, (walks) after the chanters and sits down on the shipper's chair.” When the king and his servants have taken their places, the musicians strike up a lamentation, after which the prophet will prophesy, provided that he is able to reach the altered state of consciousness.

⁵⁰ Cf. Stökl 2012a: 75.

⁵¹ Cf., however, Charpin 2001: 34–7, who interprets a part of the evidence in favor of more direct contacts between prophets and the king than, e.g. Sasson 1994. For a case study of the relationship between the king (Zimri-Lim) and a diviner (Asqudum), see Charpin 2011.

⁵² For the transmission of prophecies at Mari, see Charpin 2015: 27–32; van der Toorn 1998; Sasson 1994.

to us are transmitted by female writers.⁵³ Even in Assyria, oracles to Naqia, Queen Mother of Assyria, in which the name of the prophet is extant, are spoken by female prophets.⁵⁴ All this indicates that the royal women were in closer contact with non-male prophets than the male persons of the court.

Also in Assyria, the kings carried on intensive correspondence with technical diviners and priests⁵⁵ but not with prophets. The process of the transmission of prophetic messages was different from Mari, however. In Assyria, prophecies were apparently not so often reported in letters of court officials; rather, they were transmitted to the king in reports limited to the oracle proper. In some cases, these reports were deposited in the royal archives.⁵⁶ This implies a high esteem of prophecies which seem to have been considered to be on par with astrological and extispicy reports.⁵⁷

Both the oracles proper and the references to them in the royal inscriptions make it plain that the Assyrian kings, at least Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal, like Zimri-Lim, received prophecies during their military campaigns. There may have been prophets even at the front,⁵⁸ but prophecies uttered elsewhere and transmitted to the king by a third party are better documented. The best examples of this are the pertinent letters of Queen Šibtu of Mari⁵⁹ and the Assyrian prophecies formally addressed to Naqia, the king's mother.⁶⁰

The fact that Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal were the only Neo-Assyrian kings not only to record prophetic oracles in their archives but to even mention them in their inscriptions, is probably indicative of their special predilection for prophecy.⁶¹ That these kings seem to have been more inclined than their predecessors to lend their ears to prophets does not, however, warrant the conclusion that prophecy was a West Semitic import that only sporadically reached Mesopotamian courts.⁶² The available source material clearly demonstrates that there were prophets all the time in different parts

⁵³ i.e. Aḫatum the slave girl (*24: Šibtu), Kakka-lidi (*41: Šibtu) and Innibana the *āpiltum* (*14: Inib-šina); only the name of Ḫubatum the *muḫḫūtum* is reported by a male writer (*10: Aḫum). Note also that the names of the *assinnus* Šelebum (*7: Inib-šina; *23: Šibtu) and Ili-ḫaznaja (*22: Šibtu) are mentioned by women only (the writer of *8 is unknown).

⁵⁴ i.e. *74 (Issar-beli-da"ini) and *75 (Aḫat-abiša); in *90 the name, if ever indicated, is destroyed. In addition, the king's mother is mentioned in *78, line i 13 and *83, line iv 28(?).

⁵⁵ See Parpola 1993; Cole and Machinist 1998.

⁵⁶ For the report format, see Radner 1995: 72–4.

⁵⁷ Cf. Esztári and Vér 2015: 27–9.

⁵⁸ This is suggested by the accounts of kings in the royal inscriptions having received prophecies during the battles, as well as by the lodging list of mostly high officials that also includes the prophet Quqī (*104). One might even ask whether the prophecy of Remut-Allati, spoken in a locality "in the middle of the mountains" (*70), has been uttered on the battlefield.

⁵⁹ **17, 18, 21, 22, 23, 24, 41; for the correspondence of Šibtu, see Römer 1971; Artzi and Malamet 1971 (reprinted in Malamet 1998: 175–91); Sasson 1994: 303–8.

⁶⁰ **74, 75, 90.

⁶¹ Cf. my earlier deliberations in Nissinen 2001: 180–3.

⁶² The Western provenance of prophecy has been assumed by Malamet 1997, and it was considered one of the "borrowed institutions" in the course of the aramaization of Assyria in Neo-Assyrian times by Tadmor 1987.

of the Near East, but it is not enough to indicate how much their political relevance and their role among the diviners varied depending on the king, country, and period of time. In any case, the question arises whether Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal really were the only ones to promote prophecy to the extent that their words were not only filed in the archives but also quoted by the scribes who authored the inscriptions of these two kings.⁶³

The existing sources indeed give the impression that the activity of prophets, while certainly not restricted to this period only, enjoyed a higher social esteem during the reign of Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal than ever before in Assyria. The extant documents from the time of the previous Sargonid kings include no mention of prophets, neither do any documents from earlier periods provide us with information about their existence, save a couple of Middle and Neo-Assyrian decrees of expenditures in which prophets are listed among recipients of food rations.⁶⁴ If this argument from silence is consistent with the reality, it may be assumed that while the prophets were there all the time, the kings valued them differently in different times.

However, there is more than one side to the matter. The overwhelming majority of the material in the Assyrian archives derives from the reigns of Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal, while the percentage of the sources from the time of earlier Sargonid kings is modest indeed. In fact, the archives of Nineveh and Mari are by far the most abundant Mesopotamian archives altogether, and it may not be a pure coincidence that it is precisely in these two sets of sources that the extant Mesopotamian prophecies are to be found. The fact that these huge archives include just a few prophetic documents from the decades prior to their destruction, indicates that if prophetic reports were written and even stored up, they were normally not meant for long-time preservation.⁶⁵ Hence, the small quantity of prophecy in the existing sources is not an accurate indicator of the significance of prophecy any more than the total lack of letters addressed to Sennacherib implies that he had no correspondence.⁶⁶

While the relative silence of the sources yields only ambiguous interpretations, two arguments remain in favor of the special appreciation of prophecy by the kings Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal. First, only Esarhaddon apparently

⁶³ It is conceivable that the prophecies of SAA 9 1 and 3 were actually used by the author(s) of Esarhaddon's Nin A inscription (cf. Weippert 1981: 93–5 = 2014: 27–9; Parpola 1997: lxviii–lxi). I have also argued earlier that at least some of the prophetic quotations in the inscriptions of Assurbanipal may be cited from written sources (Nissinen 1998a: 58–61).

⁶⁴ **110 (809 BCE), 123 (Middle-Assyrian).

⁶⁵ Tablets with a single prophetic oracle are attested from Ešnunna (**66, 67) and Assyria (SAA 9 7–11), but not from Mari; archival copies of collections of oracles are only known from Assyria.

⁶⁶ Cf. M. Dietrich 2003: xix–xx. Among the extant Neo-Assyrian royal correspondence, there is not a single letter explicitly addressed to Sennacherib; Dietrich, however, dates c. 65 letters to the time of Sennacherib.

had prophecies recopied and compiled in collections, preserving them consciously for posterity. Second, the inscriptions of Tiglath-Pileser III, Sargon II, and Sennacherib in all their comprehensiveness make no mention of the prophets. While the Sargonid kings in general—and not only Esarhaddon, traditionally regarded as especially “superstitious”—showed a remarkable interest in omens of different kinds,⁶⁷ it is clearly observable that Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal refer to divination, including prophecy, more than any of their predecessors in their inscriptions. But even under their rule, the scholars—haruspices, astrologers, exorcists—are better represented in the sources than the prophets.

Critical Issues

The ancient Near Eastern texts provide us with a few examples demonstrating that the king could be addressed in an outspokenly critical tone in prophetic messages. Letters concerning the failure of the king to fulfill his cultic duties have been already discussed in Chapter 6. In this chapter, I shall discuss texts dealing with the duty of the king to bring about a rightful order (*mīšarum*) in the country.

The Mesopotamian kings could demonstrate their righteousness by promulgating an exemption, (*an*)*durārum*.⁶⁸ This is what Zimri-Lim is urged to do at Mari by a prophet (*āpilum*) of the god Šamaš, who proclaims several demands to the king in the name of the god.⁶⁹ It is implied in the letter that Zimri-Lim has recently defeated some enemies. Now the god orders the king to send a throne as well as his daughter to the temple of Šamaš at Sippar. He should also deliver the *asakkum*, a portion consecrated to Adad of Aleppo, and give Dagan a present about which another prophet has already spoken. The presents to the principal deities of Mari, Aleppo, and the Babylonian Sippar not only demonstrate the “wide geographical range of the cultic activity,”⁷⁰ they also symbolize Zimri-Lim’s divinely sanctioned claim for power “from the rising of the sun to its setting.” Furthermore, Zimri-Lim should send a sword of bronze, and whatever else he has vowed, to King Nergal von Ḫubšalum, who stood at his side. All these items are presented as favors Zimri-Lim should return after a victorious war to those who have provided him help, human or divine.

⁶⁷ See Fales and Lanfranchi 1997. Note also the “anti-divinatory” attitude of one of the editions (E) of Esarhaddon’s Babylon inscription; see Cogan 1983.

⁶⁸ For *mīšarum* and *andurārum*, see E. Otto 1998b; Weinfeld 1990, 39–62; 1995, 75–96. With regard to Mari, see Durand 2008a: 569–72; Charpin 1990.

⁶⁹ For the historical background of this letter (*4), see Charpin and Durand 1985: 332–3.

⁷⁰ Huffmon 1997: 13.

Šamaš has different plans with King Hammurabi of Kurdâ, who has not shown loyalty:⁷¹

Another matter: thus says Šamaš: “Hammurabi, king Kurdâ, has [talked d]eceitfully with you, and he is contriving a scheme. Your hand will [capture him] and in [his] land you will promulg[ate] an exemption. Now, the land in [its entirety] is given to your hand. When you take con[trol] over the city and promulgate the exemption, [it sho]ws that your kingship is etern[al].”

Hammurabi of Kurdâ is not yet defeated; hence we have to do with a genuine prophetic promise, according to which Zimri-Lim will dethrone him. The motivation for the *andurârum* would have been that Zimri-Lim, at the outset of his reign in Kurdâ, establishes justice and order, proving himself a righteous king. Moreover, the prophecy reflects the political hopes for an expansion of Zimri-Lim’s rule. These hopes turned out to be forlorn, however, since Zimri-Lim was never able to occupy Kurdâ.⁷²

A similar demand, combined with a critical attitude towards the king, can be found in the two letters of Nur-Sin. The longer and probably younger of the letters (*1) is one of the first documents from Mari, in which prophecy was discovered. It was published in 1950⁷³ and completed in 1984;⁷⁴ an up-to-date edition was provided by Jean-Marie Durand in 2002.⁷⁵

Nur-Sin was the representative of Zimri-Lim in Alaḥtum, a city that Durand has identified with Alalakh.⁷⁶ Alaḥtum was situated inside the kingdom of Yamḥad, the capital of which was Aleppo, but it had been given into the possession of Zimri-Lim by King Hammurabi of Yamḥad, the son of his father-in-law.⁷⁷ The subject matter of the letter is a sacrificial gift (*zukurum*)⁷⁸ to be given to the god Adad of Aleppo, and the delivery of an estate (*niḥlatum*)⁷⁹ to Adad of Kallassu, a place in the vicinity of Alaḥtum. Nur-Sin claims to have written to the king about this matter five times already, obviously without

⁷¹ *4, lines 32–43.

⁷² Charpin 1990: 268.

⁷³ Lods and Dossin 1950.

⁷⁴ Lafont 1984 joined the fragments A. 1121 and A. 2731. The fragment A. 2731 was already published by Dossin 1966: 78.

⁷⁵ Durand 2002: 137–40 (FM 7 39).

⁷⁶ Durand 2002: 60–6.

⁷⁷ Zimri-Lim’s acquisition of Alaḥtum is the topic of the letters FM 7 25–40, all published in Durand 2002. For the history of Zimri-Lim’s administration in Alaḥtum, see the profound analysis of the relevant sources in Durand 2002: 59–97; cf. Lauinger 2015: 113–32.

⁷⁸ This is the only occurrence of the word *zukurum* translated as “pasture-land (?)” in CAD Z 153 and as “männliches Gesinde” in AHw 1536; cf. CDA 449: “male personnel.” Since the word, however, is paralleled by *liätum* (line 9) “livestock” (CAD L 218; AHw 557–8 sub *litu*), it is often translated accordingly; so, e.g. Dossin 1966: 78; Lafont 1984: 11; M. Dietrich 1986: 85; and Malamat 1998: 108. The use of *zukurum* at Emar, however, suggests that it refers to an offering ritual; see Fleming 2000: 120–4; Durand 2002: 135–6.

⁷⁹ The word *niḥlatum* is translated as “estate” with Malamat 1998: 109, assuming a verb *naḥālum* “to inherit” in the Akkadian of Mari; cf. Ug. *nḥl* and Heb. *naḥālā* (see AHw 712 and cf. CDA 253: “transferred property”). See also Loretz 2002.

result. Now he tries to convince the king with an oracle (*têrtum*) of Adad, lord of Kallassu, proclaimed by prophets (*âpilû*). Adad reminds the king that it was he who had restored Zimri-Lim to his ancestral throne, threatening to take away what he had given, if the king fails to deliver the estate. If Zimri-Lim, however, will fulfill his desire, he will give him the land from the rising of the sun to its setting. Nur-Sin adds to this that the estate in question was identified by a prophet with Alaḥtum.

Apparently, Nur-Sin is uneasy about quoting such an uncompromising demand to Zimri-Lim, but he does it on the plea that when he still resided in Mari, he would communicate to the king every prophetic oracle that had come to his knowledge. Even now in Alaḥtum, he will not give any reason to the king to blame him for neglecting this duty. At last, he pleads an oracle of Adad of Aleppo:

[More]over, a prophet of Adad, lord of Aleppo, came [with Abu]-ḥalim and spoke to me as follows: “Write to your lord the following: ‘Am I not Adad, lord of Aleppo, who raised you in my lap and restored you to your ancestral throne? I do not demand anything from you. When a wronged man or wo[man] cries out to you, be there and judge their case. This only I have demanded from you. If you do what I have written to you and heed my word, I will give you the land from the r[isi]ng of the sun to its setting, [your] land [greatly in]creased!” This is what the pr[o]phet of Adad, lord of Aleppo, said in the presence of Abu-ḥalim. My lord should know this.⁸⁰

Adad of Aleppo presents himself here as Zimri-Lim’s father, who helped him to recapture the throne of his earthly father Yaḥdun-Lim after the interregnum of Yasmaḥ-Adad, a puppet of Šamši-Adad, the Amorite king of Assyria. This may sound peculiar in the mouth of Adad of Aleppo, who was not one of the domestic gods at Mari. However, Adad’s self-presentation is well-founded with regard to the historical circumstances and the political ties between Mari and Yamḥad.⁸¹ Yarim-Lim, king of Yamḥad and Zimri-Lim’s father-in-law, had assisted him in coming to power at Mari,⁸² and Hammurabi, Yarim-Lim’s successor, had given him the city of Alaḥtum, which the god now lays claim to.

The contents of the oracles of the both manifestations of Adad (*1, lines 14–28 and 49–59), the biblical parallels of which are generally acknowledged,⁸³ are essentially similar. They allegedly derive from several prophets,

⁸⁰ *1, lines 46–62.

⁸¹ For the historical circumstances, see Durand 2002: 59–60, 66–71; cf. Malamat 1998: 112–14; Klengel 1990; Lafont 1984: 14–18.

⁸² In ARM 28 16:8–10, Zimri-Lim puts the following words in the mouth of Yarim-Lim: “Am I not the one who has restored Zimri-Lim to his throne, established his power and strengthened the foundations of his throne?”; see Charpin 1991: 158; Dossin 1973: 180–3.

⁸³ e.g. 2 Sam. 7 (Malamat 1998: 106–21); Jer. 22:1–5 (Anbar 1975).

but may have been formulated by Nur-Sin himself. The main difference between the two oracles is the special emphasis of the latter on the fair judgment of the case of the wronged ones.⁸⁴ Since Nur-Sin does not specify who the wronged people might be in concrete terms, this oracle has often been interpreted as a general demand for justice. Recently, however, Jean-Marie Durand has been able to demonstrate with new evidence that when Zimri-Lim gained possession of Alaḥtum, the landowners had to leave the city, whereas the “working class” (lit. *mārē ālim* “people of the city”) stayed in the service of the new landlord.⁸⁵ One can only imagine what kind of a catastrophe this had been for the landowners of Alaḥtum, even though it is not criticized elsewhere in the correspondence of Nur-Sin. On the other hand, Gašera, the queen mother Aleppo, had raised objections against Zimri-Lim’s misuse of power in Alaḥtum. Even though Nur-Sin and other representatives of Zimri-Lim repudiate her accusations, it seems that all this caused dissatisfaction with Zimri-Lim’s management in Alaḥtum.⁸⁶

Finding himself between the devil and the deep blue sea, Nur-Sin makes his sixth attempt to convince the king, this time with a moral argument of prophetic origin. He is, however, careful enough not to make any suggestions of his own; he just quotes the prophetic words and shifts the responsibility of interpretation to the king himself, who has to read between lines who the wronged people are.

The basic ideology of the demand transmitted by Nur-Sin becomes conceivable in comparison with another letter of his.⁸⁷ This letter is already acknowledged as the oldest attestation of the ancient Near Eastern chaos motif,⁸⁸ but it also illustrates the royal ideology as the context of prophecy. Nur-Sin quotes here a prophetic oracle, which is not only the subject matter of the letter, but also the reason for its writing:

Speak to my lord: Thus Nur-Sin, your servant:

Abiya, prophet of Adad, the Lord of Alep[po], came to me and said: “Thus says Adad: ‘I have given the whole country to Yaḥdun-Lim. Thanks to my weapons, he did not meet his equal. He, however, abandoned my cause, so I g[av]e to Šamši-Adad the land I had given to him. [...] Šamši-Adad [...]’

(Break)

⁸⁴ Scharf 1995: 83 suggests that Nur-Sin, instead of using here the uncompromising *šumma* sentences of the previous oracle, tries to smooth the conclusion of his letter with indicative forms.

⁸⁵ See Durand 2002: 77–9 and the letters of Nur-Sin FM 7 26 (Durand 2002: 99–102) and FM 7 36 (Durand 2002: 128–32).

⁸⁶ For the conflict with Gašera, see Durand 2002: 79–80; Lauinger 2015: 118–26.

⁸⁷ *2, see Durand 1993; 2002: 134–5.

⁸⁸ See Ballentine 2015: 111–16; Töyräänvuori 2012; 2016: 148–256; Bauks 2001: 437–8; Wyatt 1998: 841–4.

... let me re[st]ore you! I restored you to the th[rone of your father's house], and the weapon[s] with which I fought with Sea I handed you. I anointed you with the oil of my luminosity, nobody will offer resistance to you.

Now hear a single word of mine: If anyone who cries out to you for judgment, saying: "I have been wr[ong]ed," be there to decide his case, an[swer him fai]rly. [Th]is is what I desire from you.

If you go [off] to the war, never do so [wi]thout consulting an oracle. [W]hen [I] become manifest in [my] oracle, go to the war. If it does [not] happen, do [not] go out of the city gate.'"

This is what the prophet said to me. No[w I have sent the hair of the prophet] and a fri[n]ge of his garment to my lord].

Jack M. Sasson has argued convincingly⁸⁹ that the oracle quoted here, presumably going back to an actual prophetic performance, served as a model for Nur-Sin when he formulated the oracle of Adad of Aleppo in the letter *1. The oracle has a well-balanced structure, based on the chronological scheme before—now—after.⁹⁰ It first reminds him of how he became the king of Mari and underlines that this could only have happened with the help of Adad, who was the city god of Aleppo. In concrete terms this refers to the historical fact that Zimri-Lim could not have replaced Šamši-Adad on the throne of Mari without the help of his father-in-law, King Yarim-Lim of Aleppo. Now he is the anointed king,⁹¹ and the mythical weapons used in the combat against the powers of chaos⁹² are given to him as a token of the legitimacy of his rule.⁹³ The god now demands from him the fair judgment of the people under his jurisdiction on the one hand, and consulting oracles as a sign of his allegiance to the divine world on the other. In other words, he was under the double obligation to do justice on earth and to be observant to the divine word. The relation of the earthly kingship to the divine and the position of the king between the human and the divine worlds as the protector of the cosmic order could not be expressed more clearly.⁹⁴ Even the role of prophecy in the propagation of this ideology becomes obvious.

⁸⁹ Sasson 1994: 314–16; cf. 1998: 119–20.

⁹⁰ For the structure, see Heintz 1997a: 138–9 (= 2015: 104–5); cf. Bauks 2001: 437.

⁹¹ This is probably the only non-biblical reference to the anointing of a king; cf. Wyatt 1998: 843: "This most distinctive of Israelite and Judahite Rites is now given a pedigree going back a millennium."

⁹² For the battle of the weather god Adad and its ancient Near Eastern and biblical parallels, see Schwemer 2001: 226–37; Köckert 2001; Fronzaroli 1997; Heintz 1997a; Bordreuil and Pardee 1993.

⁹³ The letter A. 1858 demonstrates that these weapons were represented by concrete objects (Durand 1993: 53; 2002: 15): "Speak to my lord: Thus Sumu-ila, your servant: The weapons of Adad von Aleppo have arrived. I will keep them in the temple of Dagan in Terqa until my lord will write to me, what should be done (with them)." Cf. Wyatt 1998: 843–4.

⁹⁴ Cf. Bauks 2001: 460–1; Maul 1999.

The prophecy of Abiya seems like a coronation oracle,⁹⁵ even though the letter is certainly written later; all letters of Nur-Sin that we have at our disposal are written from Aleppo, and even earlier when Nur-Sin still resided in Mari, Zimri-Lim was already the king. In addition, the attached hair and the garment fringe indicate that Nur-Sin quotes a recently delivered oracle rather than an old prophecy, perhaps drawn from written sources. Nevertheless, it is clear that the oracle refers to the basic duties Zimri-Lim was burdened with when he ascended the throne. As such, the prophecy is a purebred specimen of an oracle of salvation. However, its ideological and moralistic overtones include a potential for criticism. A prophecy like this enables even the king's official to remind him of his royal duties and, implicitly, also of his negligence in this respect.

In addition, as Herbert B. Huffmon has emphasized, the royal obligation to do justice to the oppressed is expressed in the oracle of Adad in a way similar to the slightly younger epilogue of the Code of Hammurabi.⁹⁶ The same ideal can be found already in the Laws of Ur-Nammu (2111–2094 BCE);⁹⁷ in fact, it is one of the most prominent duties of the Mesopotamian kings altogether. The prophecy of Abiya demonstrates that the correspondence between prophecy and law is not a purely biblical idea.

The two letters of Nur-Sin, written in the eighteenth century BCE, are the only ancient Near Eastern prophetic documents that are quite explicit about the demand for social justice. The ideological motivation for this kind of prophetic proclamation is, however, by no means restricted to Mari but reflects the Mesopotamian royal ideology in general. The extant Assyrian prophecies, admittedly, do not include respective demands, but from this it cannot be concluded that social justice was indifferent to the prophets or even to the Assyrian king himself. The beau ideal of the king all over Mesopotamia

⁹⁵ Cf. Bauks 2001: 449; Wyatt 1998: 841; Heintz 1997a: 146–50 (= 2015: 111–15).

⁹⁶ Huffmon 2000: 54–5; cf. The Code of Hammurabi, Epilogue, lines xlvi 59–78, xlviii 3–47: “In order that the mighty not wrong the weak, to provide just ways for the waif and the widow, I have inscribed my precious pronouncements upon my stela and set it up before the statue of me, the king of justice, in the city of Babylon, the city which the gods Anu and Enlil have elevated, within the Esagil, the temple whose foundations are fixed as are heaven and earth, in order to render the judgments of the land, to give the verdicts of the land, and to provide just ways for the wronged” (...) “Let any wronged man who has a lawsuit come before the statue of me, the king of justice, and let him have my inscribed stela read aloud to him, thus he may hear my precious pronouncements and let my stela reveal the lawsuit for him; may he examine his case, may he calm his (troubled) heart, (and may he praise me), saying: ‘Hammurabi, the lord, who is like a father and begetter to his people, submitted himself to the command of the god Marduk, his lord, and achieved victory for the god Marduk everywhere. He gladdened the heart of the god Marduk, his lord, and he secured the eternal well-being of the people and provided just ways for the land.’ May he say thus, and may he pray for me with his whole heart before the gods Marduk, my lord, and Zarpanitu, my lady.” (Translation from Roth 1995: 134–5.)

⁹⁷ Prologue, lines 162–8: “I did not deliver the orphan to the rich. I did not deliver the widow to the mighty. I did not deliver the man with but one shekel to the man with one mina. I did not deliver the man with one sheep to the man with one ox.” (Translation from Roth 1995: 16.)

was that of *šar kitti u mišari* “king of justice and righteousness,” and to live up this ideal, the king must have a special concern for the poor and disenfranchised.⁹⁸ This is amply demonstrated from the Laws of Ur-Nammu and the Code of Hammurapi through the Neo-Babylonian *Advice to a Prince*⁹⁹ down to the literary predictive texts from the Hellenistic period.¹⁰⁰ The Neo-Assyrian kings were certainly no exception to this rule, and there is no reason why the Neo-Assyrian prophets would not have reminded the king of his royal obligations and his eventual indifference to them, all the more since no sharp distinction should be made between the “cultic” and the social obligations of the king. That this kind of criticism is not attested in the Neo-Assyrian prophecies preserved to us may be due to the reason why they were filed in the archives, that is, the legitimacy of Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal as chosen kings, who had a special relationship with the goddess Ištar—and with her prophets.¹⁰¹ The eventual manifestations of prophetic criticism cannot be expected to have served this purpose.

Even the sparse and somewhat uneven evidence of prophetic criticism from Mari and Assyria demonstrates that the prophets indeed were in the position to criticize the king and to reproach him for neglecting his duties. The prophetic criticism that has found its way to the written documents often rises from concrete concerns of the temples and the king’s officials. Nevertheless, it is motivated by the theology of kingship, according to which every king was obliged to fulfill the beau ideal of the just and righteous king. Consequently, the criticism is usually aimed at the king’s comportment and decisions in individual cases, but not against his person or legitimacy.¹⁰² In the documents available to us, the critical potential of prophecy is never materialized as an all-encompassing prophecy of doom against kingship as an institution or the own society as a whole; rather, prophecy of doom is proclaimed only to foreign kings and people.¹⁰³

Prophecy of doom is not unheard of in the ancient Near East. The overwhelming biblical evidence notwithstanding, it is represented by the prophetic vision of a cosmic catastrophe in the plaster text of Deir ‘Alla, which bears a

⁹⁸ See Weinfeld 1995: 45–74. For the same concern in Ugaritic texts, see Loretz 2003: 348–72.

⁹⁹ Lambert 1960: 112–15. The text begins with the following words (lines 1–3): “If the king does not heed justice, his people will be thrown into chaos, and his land will be devastated. If he does not heed the justice of his land, Ea, king of destinies, will alter his destiny and will not cease from hostilely pursuing him.”

¹⁰⁰ i.e. the “literary predictive texts,” also called Akkadian prophecies or Akkadian apocalypses; see Neujahr 2012: 13–118; de Jong 2007: 420–33; Nissinen 2003c; Ellis 1989.

¹⁰¹ See Parpola 1997: xxxvi–xliv.

¹⁰² “Autrement dit: les prophéties étaient toujours favorables au roi, mais pas nécessairement à sa politique du moment” (Charpin 2001: 49).

¹⁰³ See, e.g. Barstad 2006: 34–41, who also quotes two examples from Mari (**40, 42) as words of doom against the own king; I would read the prophetic messages quoted in these letters as warnings rather than prophecies of doom.

notable resemblance to the biblical prophecy of doom.¹⁰⁴ In general, however, this kind of prophecy is not spoken to the own king or people but to the enemies and foreign powers. At Mari, prophecies were uttered against the kings and people of Ešnunna,¹⁰⁵ Elam,¹⁰⁶ Ekallatum,¹⁰⁷ and Babylon,¹⁰⁸ as well as the Yaminite tribes,¹⁰⁹ and in Assyria, against Elam,¹¹⁰ Ellipi,¹¹¹ and the Cimmerians.¹¹²

Prophecies against the ruling king of the own country are rare in the extrabiblical sources, although there are two Neo-Assyrian texts demonstrating that prophecy against the king was indeed possible and sometimes uttered quite explicitly. Since I have discussed these texts in depth previously elsewhere,¹¹³ a brief reference to them will do in this context.

The so called Succession Treaty of Esarhaddon concerning the succession of his son Assurbanipal and concluded in 672 BCE (*102) includes elaborate lists of people that may be suspected of intrigues against the king. From our point of view it is significant that it mentions also professionals of divination among those who may say an “evil, improper, ugly word which is not seemly nor good to Assurbanipal, the great crown prince designate.” Not only the technical diviners are pointed out (§6:79), but also people called *raggimu*, *mahhû* and *šā’ilu amat ili*, that is, specialists in non-technical divinatory methods.¹¹⁴

The Succession Treaty of Esarhaddon takes it for granted that prophecy could also be used against him by his adversaries. This not only speaks for the political relevance of prophecy, it also becomes obvious that all the prophets were neither in the king’s service nor under his immediate control so that the king needed to be informed by others about their sayings in order to uproot any sign of disloyalty among his subjects. This can be evidenced by the three letters of Nabû-reḫtu-ušur to Esarhaddon (**115–17), in which the writer is doing exactly what the treaty obliges him to do, that is, to announce the disloyal people. He tries to convince the king about a conspiracy that was being planned by people “who have sinned against your father’s goodness and your father’s and your own treaty,” and quotes an oracle against Esarhaddon that had allegedly been spoken near the city of Harran¹¹⁵ by a slave girl of Bel-aḫu-ušur. In this oracle, the god Nusku says he will destroy the name and seed of Sennacherib and give the kingship to a person called Sasî.¹¹⁶ Nabû-reḫtu-ušur is upset because the king does not seem to take his warnings seriously.

¹⁰⁴ See Blum 2008a, 2008b; Weippert 1997a. ¹⁰⁵ **6, 7, 9.

¹⁰⁶ *18; cf. *50a and the dream report ARM 26 228.

¹⁰⁷ **17, 47; vgl. *4, line r. 9. ¹⁰⁸ **19, 20, 22, 47. ¹⁰⁹ **9, 10, 38.

¹¹⁰ *92, line 14; *93. ¹¹¹ *85, line ii 2. ¹¹² *85, line ii 1; *92, line 14.

¹¹³ For the following, see Nissinen 1996; 1998a; 1998c.

¹¹⁴ *102 §10, lines 108–22.

¹¹⁵ This probably means the temple of cedar erected “on the outskirts of Harran,” where Esarhaddon was crowned on his way to Egypt; cf. *118f, lines 10–16.

¹¹⁶ *115, lines r. 4–5.

In reality, the king probably was well informed about the conspiracy, because it seems that the plot was led by the chief eunuch, and Sasî, in fact, was the king's own man who had infiltrated the conspiracy and kept the king informed about it all the time. We know that Esarhaddon killed many of his high officials in the year 670—probably the conspirators Nabû-rehtu-uşur wrote about—and there are good reasons to conclude that Sasî was not among them.¹¹⁷

From Mari, no prophecies against the own king have been preserved to us. Nevertheless, there are prophets who take a stand on, and sometimes even a distance from, Zimri-Lim's policy. Therefore, a brief look at some well-known texts concerning prophetic discontent with Zimri-Lim suggests itself.

The letter of the governor Itur-Asdu is the first document discovered at Mari in which prophecy was recognized.¹¹⁸ In his letter, Itur-Asdu gives an account of a dream of a man called Malik-Dagan,¹¹⁹ who, according to him, had experienced a dream revelation of Dagan on his way from Sagaratum to Mari. The god had asked him whether the troops of the Yaminites¹²⁰ had made peace with the troops of Zimri-Lim who confronted them in the upper district of Mari. Upon the negative answer from Malik-Dagan, Dagan had wondered why he had not been given a full account (*ṭēmum gamrum*)¹²¹ from Zimri-Lim of his undertakings; had it been otherwise, he would have delivered the Yaminites into the hands of Zimri-Lim a long time ago. Dagan had sent the man to Zimri-Lim with the message that he should send his messengers with a full account to Dagan, who would then make the Yaminites “flounder in a fisherman's chest.” Even this divine word, like the above quoted prophecy of Abiya (*2), is structured according to the chronological scheme before—now—after.¹²²

The questions of Dagan are best understood as rhetorical.¹²³ It seems that Dagan did not follow the king to the battlefield, so his words were not spoken on the field but rather in his temple at Terqa.¹²⁴ However, the god knows pretty well that the Yaminites have made no peace with Zimri-Lim's troops. The king is given a retrospective reminder of his failure to deliver the report,

¹¹⁷ For this incident, see Nissinen 1998a: 108–53; cf. de Jong 2007: 271–4; Holloway 2003: 336–7, 410–14. See also Frahm 2010: 110–31, who has published yet another piece of evidence related to Sasî's activities, a letter from Nabû-uşallim to the king (YBC 11382).

¹¹⁸ *38; the text was first published by Dossin 1948.

¹¹⁹ Malik-Dagan is not called a prophet, hence his dream cannot be straightforwardly called a prophecy. However, he is charged with a prophetic mission to transmit the word of Dagan to Zimri-Lim; cf. Durand 2008a: 436–7.

¹²⁰ The Yaminites (“Sons of the Right Bank”) lived to the southwest of Mari, while the Sim'alites (“Sons of the Left Bank”), to whom even Zimri-Lim belonged, came from the other side of the Euphrates. See Charpin and Durand 1986.

¹²¹ The expression *ṭēmum gamrum* means here a detailed interim report on the ongoing war; see Pongratz-Leisten 1999: 204–7.

¹²² Cf. A. Schmitt 1982: 22–3.

¹²³ Cf. Sasson 1983: 290–1.

¹²⁴ Cf. van der Toorn 2000a: 80–2.

which is now presented as a prerequisite of the fulfillment of the promise proclaimed at the end of the oracle; there is no criticism of the warfare as such. Obviously, Zimri-Lim had not been obedient enough to consult an oracle of the god in a proper way, including the full account of the confrontation. In concrete terms this would mean that the temple and provincial government was not sufficiently informed about the current political situation, which caused uncertainty about the future. During his first regnal years, Zimri-Lim had to fight on several fronts, and his rule was everything else than established.

A couple of years later, the major-domo Sammetar writes to the king about the following words of Lupaḫum, a prophet (*āpilum*) of Dagan:

Wh[at] if the king, without consulting God, will engage himself with the man of [Eš]nunna!¹²⁵ As before, when the Yamin[ite]s came to me and settled in Saggartum, I was the one who spoke to the king: “Do not make a treaty with the Yaminites! I shall drive the shepherds of their clans away to Ḫubur,¹²⁶ and the river will finish them off for you.” Now then, he should not pledge himself without consulting God.¹²⁷

On the following day, says Sammetar, a *qammatum* of Dagan of Terqa came to him and said:

Beneath straw water ru[ns]! They keep on send[ing to you] messages of friendship, they even send their gods [to you], but in their hearts they are planning something else. The king should not take an oath without consulting God!¹²⁸

Having been rewarded with a garment and a nose-ring, the prophetess had gone and delivered her “instructions” (*wu’urtum*) to Inib-šina, the king’s sister and high-priestess of the temple of Belet-ekallim.

Lupaḫum compares the current situation with the state of affairs at the time when Itur-Asdu wrote his letter. The Yaminites had progressed as far as to Saggartum, but Zimri-Lim made no peace with them; instead, he defeated them and killed their leaders.¹²⁹ According to Lupaḫum, the victory of Zimri-Lim over the Yaminites was ascertained by consulting an oracle, and this is what he suggests the king should do even now when King Ibalpiel II of Ešnunna, the former ally of the Yaminites, is willing to conclude a treaty with him. Zimri-Lim fought against Ibalpiel a long time, but in his sixth regnal year (1770) he started to contemplate the possibility of concluding a peace treaty with him.¹³⁰ However, he had to confront the stern opposition of prophets and

¹²⁵ The expression *napištam lapātum* (lit.: “touch the throat”) probably refers to a symbolic act of validating a treaty.

¹²⁶ For this reading, see Charpin 2002: 25 n. 149. ¹²⁷ *9, lines 30–9.

¹²⁸ *9, lines 44–50.

¹²⁹ This happened in the third year of Zimri-Lim in 1773 (ZL 1’); the following year (ZL 2’) was named after this event. For the chronology of Mari, see Charpin and Ziegler 2003: 247–9.

¹³⁰ For the historical circumstances, see Charpin and Ziegler 2003: 194–205.

some influential people who transmitted their words against the treaty with Ibalpiel—not only Sammetar the “prime minister,” but also Inib-šina, the sister and political advisor of the king. She also quotes in her own letter to his brother the oracle of the *qammatum* who, according to Sammetar, went to her in person. Inib-šina’s version of the oracle renders essentially the same message as Sammetar’s, even though expressed with different words:

She said: “The peacemaking of the man of Ešn[unna] is false: Beneath straw water runs! I will gather into the net that I knot. I will destroy his city and I will ruin his wealth, which comes from the time immemorial.” This is what she said to me. Now, protect yourself! Without consulting an oracle do not enter the city!¹³¹

The proverbial saying “Beneath straw water runs” is quoted even in a third letter, written by Kanisan who tells the king what he had heard from his father. According to his version, however, the oracle had been spoken by a male prophet (*muhhûm*):

Kibri-D[agan], my father, [wrote to me] in Mari. [This is what] he wrote: “[I heard] the words [that] were uttered [in the temple of Dagan. Th]is is what [they] sp[oke] to me: ‘Be[neath straw] water [runs]! The god of my lord has come! He has delivered his enemies in his hands.’ Now, as before, the prophet broke out into constant declamation.”

This is what Kib[ri-Dag]an wrote [to me]. My lord [should not be negligent in] letting [ora]cles be delivered for his [own] goo[d. . .].¹³²

Even though this letter does not mention Ešnunna, it is probable that one and the same prophecy is dealt with in all three letters,¹³³ although Kanisan had heard about it only indirectly and did not know by whom it was actually spoken. “Beneath straw water runs” (*šapal tibnim mû illakû*) is quoted verbatim in all three letters, but interpreted with different words. This implies that the prophecy is otherwise formulated by each of the authors, who all agree about the point that no treaty should be made with Ešnunna. Moreover, all three authors emphasize the importance of consulting the oracles—not necessarily prophetic ones but also other kinds of divination.

The prophecies against the treaty with Ešnunna are, of course, cited in the letters because their authors need a divine confirmation for their own political views. The pacific intentions of Zimri-Lim are criticized by the authors discreetly but clearly, appealing to the will of the gods expressed in prophecies. In the case of Lupaḥum, Sammetar even refers to the personal view of the prophet, which makes his letter a unique case among the non-biblical documents of prophecy.¹³⁴

¹³¹ *7, lines 11–24.

¹³² *12.

¹³³ See Sasson 1995; S. B. Parker 1993: 57–60.

¹³⁴ Cf. Sasson 1995: 603.

The political responsibility is shifted by the letter-writers to Zimri-Lim himself, and we know that he did not follow the prophetically corroborated counsel of his inner circle, but indeed concluded a treaty with Ibalpiel. The text of the treaty has been preserved and is supplemented by the correspondence of Zimri-Lim's agent Išḫi-Dagan. These documents show that Zimri-Lim was the lesser party in this treaty; he calls Ibalpiel his "father."¹³⁵ The correspondence concerning the issue of Ešnunna demonstrates that Zimri-Lim not always listened to criticism against his activities—not even the divine word proclaimed by the prophets. In the case in question, he might have been politically wiser than his critics, however: within a few years (ZL 9' = 1765 BCE) he vassalized several cities, thereby substantially diminishing the political significance of Ešnunna.¹³⁶ That Hammurabi of Babylon soon came and put an end to Zimri-Lim and his state, is another story.

The precondition for the prophetic criticism was a certain distance between the prophet and the king,¹³⁷ and this was constituted by the role of the prophet as the mouthpiece of the gods. As representatives of the *Herrschaftswissen*, which was the decisive function of the divinatory apparatus as a whole,¹³⁸ the prophets formed an integral part of the ancient Near Eastern society, constituted by the palace, the temples and the domestic sphere.¹³⁹ They were there to proclaim the favorable relationship (*šulmu*) between the king and the gods, manifest in the equilibrium of cosmic and social structures. In this role, they were certainly part of the system within which their capacity for transmitting divine words was recognized, but it was precisely this capacity that entitled the prophets also to exhort, warn, and even criticize the king. Unlike other diviners, they could do this in plain terms, because the prophets were expected to transmit the divine word rather than express their personal opinions.

Hence, the *Herrschaftswissen* enabled the *Herrschaftskritik*. The critical potential was built in the ideological structure of the Mesopotamian society, and even the patchy evidence at hand demonstrates that it found prophetic expressions, even though our fragmentary knowledge prevents us from understanding the prophetic criticism in the ancient Near East in all its ramifications.

PROPHETS AND KINGS: GREECE

Rulers and Oracle Sites

While the institutions of divination and kingship appear as inseparable in the ancient Near Eastern sources, the Greek texts yield a different picture of the

¹³⁵ For the sources, see Charpin 1991. ¹³⁶ See Anbar 1991: 65–8.

¹³⁷ Cf. de Jong 2007: 308–13; Cancik-Kirschbaum 2003: 51–3.

¹³⁸ Pongratz-Leisten 1999: 47–127.

¹³⁹ For the structure of Mesopotamian society, see, e.g. Postgate 1992: 73–154.

relationship of royal and divinatory institutions. Whereas in Mesopotamia, and the Near East in general, diviners were typically scholars educated for the service of kings and/or major temples, Greek (technical) diviners were usually not bound to a specific ruler. This is not to say that the Greek seers did not communicate with kings and other rulers; however, the Greek seer appears as “an itinerant specialist, whose body of knowledge was oral, not written, and who was not required to serve a single employer whose fortunes were bound to his own.”¹⁴⁰ The case of female and male inspired prophets is different from that of itinerant diviners in that they did have a permanent institutional affiliation—not to a royal court or another political organization, however, but to the oracular sanctuary to which the consultants, including kings, came to receive divine messages through their mouths.

In Homeric works, kings often consult seers or even appear as seers themselves.¹⁴¹ The typical enquirers of oracles in the major Greek oracle sites, however, were not kings but, rather, the citizens of a city state (Athenians, Spartans, Milesians, and so on), as a collective or as private individuals. This may cause kings to seem less significant as agents of divine–human communication in the Greek world (or at least in our source material), but it does not deprive prophecy of its political and socio-religious function as the source of divine knowledge necessary for the appropriate maintenance of society, whether a monarchy or a democracy as in the case Athens.¹⁴²

It is far from exceptional to find kings as addressees of prophetic oracles even in Greek sources, whether themselves inquiring of the oracle at the site or sending envoys to do it on their behalf. The Delphic oracle in particular is said to have been consulted not only by kings of Greek states such as Iphitos of Elis,¹⁴³ Lykurgos and Agesipolis of Sparta,¹⁴⁴ Aristodemos of Messenia,¹⁴⁵ and Damagetos of Ialysos,¹⁴⁶ but also kings of more remote lands such as Gyges, Alyattes, and Croesus, kings of Lydia,¹⁴⁷ Arkesilaos II and III of Cyrene,¹⁴⁸ Tarquin of Rome,¹⁴⁹ Ptolemy of Egypt,¹⁵⁰ Philip II of Macedonia,¹⁵¹ and the Roman emperors, Augustus, Nero, and Julian.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁰ M. A. Flower 2008: 31; cf. 2015: 279–98. For connections between seers and kings, see Bremmer 1993: 151–9; for different cases of political oracle queries, see R. Parker 2000: 85–101.

¹⁴¹ e.g. Helenus, the son of the Trojan king Priam “by far the best of the ornithomacers”; Merops of Percote, “who beyond all men knew predictions” (*Iliad* 2.831); Nausithous, the king of Phaeacians (*Iliad* 8.546–71; 13.172–3); and Melampus who became the king of Argos (*Odyssey* 15.238–9). See Bremmer 1996: 100–1; for Melampus, Bremmer 2008: 144–6.

¹⁴² For the role of the Delphic oracle in Athenian democracy, see Bowden 2005; on Athenian democracy, see also Raaflaub 2007.

¹⁴³ Fontenrose 1978, responses Q1, Q2, and Q6.

¹⁴⁴ Fontenrose 1978, responses H13 (Agesipolis); Q2, Q3, Q7, Q8, Q9 (Lykurgos).

¹⁴⁵ Fontenrose 1978, response Q16. ¹⁴⁶ Fontenrose 1978, response Q21.

¹⁴⁷ Fontenrose 1978, responses Q96–7 (Gyges); Q98 (Alyattes); Q99–105 (Croesus).

¹⁴⁸ Fontenrose 1978, responses Q119, Q120. ¹⁴⁹ Fontenrose 1978, response Q138.

¹⁵⁰ Fontenrose 1978, response Q227. ¹⁵¹ Fontenrose 1978, responses H19; Q211–15.

¹⁵² Fontenrose 1978, responses Q250 (Augustus); Q251 (Nero); Q262 (Julian). For Roman aristocracy and emperors consulting diviners, see Randén 2013 (with a convenient table of recorded consultations, pp. 195–7); Potter 1994: 146–82.

Reasons for turning to the Delphic oracle included warfare (Agesipolis, Aristodemos, Philip, Alexander, Julian), plague or sickness (Lykurgos, Tarquin), legislation (Lykurgos), and marriage (Damagetos). Philip of Macedonia is encouraged by the Delphic oracle to conclude a political alliance with Chalkidike: "It is better that they become friends and allies according to the terms agreed upon."¹⁵³

A typically royal concern is, of course, royal succession, consulted at Delphi, for example, by the Cyreneans¹⁵⁴ and King Gyges of Lydia who, according to Herodotus, was promised the kingship of Lydia but was also warned that the vengeance of his rivals, the Heraclidai would follow upon his descendants in the fifth generation.¹⁵⁵ Philip of Macedonia, as related by the *Alexander Romance* of Pseudo-Callisthenes, was told at Delphi that his successor, mounting the horse Bukephalos, would rule the whole world;¹⁵⁶ Philip's son Alexander is identified here by the name of his famous horse, which is indicative of the legendary nature of the narrative. Alexander the Great himself is presented as especially active in seeking advice from oracles, including Delphi where he received encouraging oracles concerning his expedition against the Persians¹⁵⁷ and was warned about plots against him in Macedonia;¹⁵⁸ and Didyma, whose oracle was revived after a long period of decay "to play a part in supporting Alexander's cause."¹⁵⁹

The oracle of Didyma is also reported to have been consulted by, for example, Croesus of Lydia, Alyattes' son, who, according to Herodotus, tested several oracles to find out how reliable they were (see the next section of this chapter);¹⁶⁰ Seleukos Nicator who was advised not to go to Macedonia but to stay in Asia;¹⁶¹ and the Roman emperors Diocletian who is said to have been prompted by Apollo to persecute Christians,¹⁶² and Julian who, according to Theodoret of Cyrrhus' *Church History*, sent to "Delphi, Dodona and the other Oracles" to find out whether he should take the field to invade Persia, receiving a positive answer.¹⁶³

The Clarian oracles known to us are predominantly proclaimed to cities and individuals. Sources recording the oracle of Claros having been consulted by a Roman emperor have not been preserved; however, there is one inscription found on Hadrian's Wall in Britain, reading *Diis deabusque secundum*

¹⁵³ Tod 1946 no. 158, lines 12–16.

¹⁵⁴ Fontenrose 1978, responses Q118–20

¹⁵⁵ Fontenrose 1978, response Q96.

¹⁵⁶ Fontenrose 1978, response Q212.

¹⁵⁷ Fontenrose 1978, responses Q216–17.

¹⁵⁸ Fontenrose 1978, response Q219.

¹⁵⁹ Parke 1985: 36.

¹⁶⁰ Fontenrose 1988, response 37 (Herodotus 1.46.2–48.1).

¹⁶¹ Fontenrose 1988, response 41; cf. responses 42–3.

¹⁶² Fontenrose 1988, response 33.

¹⁶³ Fontenrose 1988, response 56. Cf. Fontenrose 1988, pp. 227–8: "In view of Julian's office of prophet at Didyma (Jul. *Epist.* 451bc) it must surely have been one of the other Oracles that he consulted. We may suspect that *Dôdônên* is a copyist's mistake for *Didyma*, since otherwise Dodona is not mentioned as operative after 200 B.C."

interpretationem oraculi Clari Apollonis coh(ors) I Tungrorum “To the gods and goddesses, in accordance with the interpretation of the oracle of Apollo at Claros, the first Tungrian cohort.”¹⁶⁴ The same text has been found in no less than ten other inscriptions from Dalmatia, Pisidia, Sardinia, Galicia, and North Africa.¹⁶⁵ The Clarian oracle referred to in these inscriptions has been interpreted as having been received by Caracalla as a reply to his inquiries concerning his illness in 213 CE;¹⁶⁶ however, Christopher Jones has argued that all eleven inscriptions are connected with the Antonine Plague in 160s CE, causing Apollo of Claros to issue an oracle concerning the plague, probably upon the consultation of Marcus Aurelius. The remarkable feature of this inscription, besides its wide distribution, is the dedication to “gods and goddesses,” that is, to any deity worshipped in different parts of the Roman empire, “in accordance with the interpretation of the oracle of Apollo at Claros,” implying an exegesis that made the royal oracle pronounced at Claros applicable to local circumstances. As such, the inscription provides important evidence of secondary use of prophecy in the Roman imperial setting.¹⁶⁷

In view of the references mentioned above, the issue of prophecy and kingship is relevant with regard to Greek sources; however, restricting the perspective to kings consulting the prophetic type of oracles reveals only one corner of the use, function, and significance of oracles of different types—indeed, the significance of religion—for Greek writers and societies, which has recently been the object of extensive study.¹⁶⁸ In the context of the present work, it makes sense to view the Greek evidence against the background of the Mesopotamian sources, paying attention to some palpable differences between the Mesopotamian and the Greek sources with regard to prophets and kingship.

First, while the documentation of prophecy in the sources from Mari and Assyria presents the *ruling king* as the primary addressee of divine messages and the main protagonist in the prophetic process of communication, the Greek sources lay more stress on the *oracle sites* visited and consulted by private individuals, delegations from Greek cities and, at times, also by kings from different parts of the Mediterranean world. This is probably due to differences in the historical development and functioning of the oracle sites.

¹⁶⁴ CIL 7.633 = RIB 1579; Merkelbach and Stauber 1996, no. 24.

¹⁶⁵ See Jones 2005 and 2006, with source references to all eleven inscriptions.

¹⁶⁶ Birley 1974: 511–13 (= 1988, 365–7). The dating is based on the fact that there was no Tungrian cohort at the site before the third century, and that “no person less eminent than the emperor himself could have been responsible for taking steps to have the oracle’s instructions complied with so widely, and in so many different parts of the empire, and by a unit of a Roman army too.” Caracalla is known to have consulted oracles because of his sickness in 213 CE (Dio Cassius 77.15.5–6; Herodian 4.12.3). This interpretation is followed by Merkelbach and Stauber 1996: 40.

¹⁶⁷ Jones 2005; see also Kajava 2007; Busine 2005: 184–9.

¹⁶⁸ See, e.g. Kindt 2016; Bonnechere 2013; Zaidman 2013; M. A. Flower 2008; Johnston 2008; Harrison 2000: 122–57.

The Mesopotamian and West Semitic centers of prophecy, such as the temples of Ištar at Arbela and of Dagan in Terqa, had an emphatically national function and seem not to have even attempted to provide services to foreign kings.¹⁶⁹ The Greek world boasted a significant number of oracle sites throughout its history, most of which had a local character and, therefore, have left little traces in written documentation.¹⁷⁰ However, a few oracles such as Delphi, Didyma, Claros, and Dodona developed into internationally renowned sources of divine knowledge. This is manifest not only in literature but also in archaeologically attested dedications from foreign countries to the respective temples.¹⁷¹

Secondly, the sources reflect differences in political structures: Assyria was an empire, while Greece comprised a patchwork of city states, and this positioned prophecy differently on the political and ideological map of the Assyrian empire compared to that of Classical and Hellenistic Greek world. The written documents of Assyrian prophecy present the prophetic kind of divination not only as an essential part of the universe-maintenance of the Assyrian empire but also as a herald of the state ideology.¹⁷² In contrast, the famous Greek oracles, at least in theory, had an authority and legitimacy independent of the kings and city states using their services.¹⁷³ Greek prophecy never became a royal institution comparable to its Mesopotamian and West Semitic counterparts.

This is not to say that strong socio-religious and economical bonds did not exist between oracles and their patron cities, at Delphi as well as at Didyma (Miletos) and Claros (Colophon). The fates of the city and the oracle were bound together: when, for example, Miletos lost its independence when Xerxes conquered the city in 494 BCE removing the cult statue and transporting the Branchidae priests to Persia, it also lost its oracle.¹⁷⁴ Similarly, the functioning of the Delphic oracle was closely connected with the Greek political structure consisting of autonomous *poleis*, and it began to decline when the nature of political power changed in the wake of Alexander the Great.¹⁷⁵

The third difference concerns the way the sources present the process of obtaining oracles. At Delphi and Didyma, prophecy seems to have operated the same way as divination in general, that is, prophecies are presented as answers to questions posed by the consultants. Cases of spontaneous,

¹⁶⁹ For instance, King Gyges of Lydia does not receive a prophetic message concerning his submission to Assurbanipal but has a dream that (in later editions of the narrative) is brought to Assurbanipal's attention by a messenger; see Cogan and Tadmor 1977: 65–85.

¹⁷⁰ For an overview of Greek oracles and oracle sites, see Hoffmann 2015: 211–70; Burkert, Suárez de la Torre, and Graf 2005; Curnow 2004: 44–97.

¹⁷¹ For the dedications in oracular context, see Kajava 2009.

¹⁷² See, e.g. Pongratz-Leisten 1999: 286–320. ¹⁷³ See Trampedach 2015: 216–21.

¹⁷⁴ See Morgan 1989: 28. ¹⁷⁵ See Morgan 1989, 36.

non-solicited prophecy are rather the exception.¹⁷⁶ Even oracular responses seemingly irrelevant to any question are usually responses to a person who has inquired of the oracle.¹⁷⁷

In Mesopotamian sources, the case is quite the opposite: the vast majority of the texts at our disposal give the impression that prophecies brought to the king's notice were not triggered by a question but pronounced spontaneously, mostly in the absence of the addressee. That this is not the whole truth becomes evident from the few texts suggesting that prophetic oracles were indeed solicited by private persons as well as by court members.¹⁷⁸ The very meager evidence of such consultations may be due to the simple fact that they left no written documents. It is important to note that the kings, both at Mari and in Assyria, regularly inquired oracles of the binary type by means of extispicy and astrology, and these queries were written down.¹⁷⁹ On the other hand, there are not many Mesopotamian records to date in which such a binary question is presented to a prophet,¹⁸⁰ neither are the words of the prophets formulated accordingly in any extant source. The existing evidence warrants the conclusion that even in Mesopotamia, prophecies were probably solicited but, unlike in Greece, the prophets were not expected to give answers to binary questions. This, in fact, is one of the reasons why the division between technical and intuitive divination makes sense with regard to Mesopotamian sources, while in the case of Greece, an absolute division of this kind cannot be upheld.¹⁸¹ The historical reasons for this conspicuous difference between Greek and Mesopotamian (or even biblical) divination can only be speculated. If the Greek divinatory techniques formed part of the "orientalizing revolution" in the Greek world in the Early Archaic Age, as Walter Burkert surmises,¹⁸² it is thinkable that the adaptation of elements of eastern divinatory culture did not result in exactly similar structures.

Fourthly, and perhaps most importantly, there is a difference concerning the origin and genre of the source material. The Mesopotamian texts are for the most part primary sources deriving from royal archives, which explains a

¹⁷⁶ Cf. the case of Titus Flavius Ulpianus at Didyma: "The prophet self-called, pious Titus Flavius Ulpianus [...] to whom the god also bore witness often in divine pronouncements, speaking to him in vision and now in an oracle because of his piety as follows: '(...)' (DI 277: 13–20; Fontenrose 1988, response 29).

¹⁷⁷ For such cases, see Harrison 2000: 125.

¹⁷⁸ Naqia, the Assyrian queen mother, appears to have consulted prophets in *75. Likewise, the scholar Urad-Gula says that he turned to a prophet in his distress (*108).

¹⁷⁹ The Assyrian queries have been published in Starr 1990.

¹⁸⁰ The following letter from Mari could perhaps imply such a case (*26): "On the d[ay] following the day I arrived in Ašmad's presence, I asse[mbl]ed the *nabûs* of the Haneans, and I had them deliver an oracle for the well-being of my lord. This is what I said: 'Will my lord, when performing [his] ablution rite and [st]aying seven days ou[t]side the city walls return] safe[ly] to the ci[ty] [...].'"

¹⁸¹ See especially M. A. Flower 2008: 84–91.

¹⁸² See Burkert 1983; 1992; cf. also Lange 2007: 482.

great deal of their royal focus. Whether we read oracle reports, royal inscriptions, or letters addressed to the king, we find prophecy representing the voice and the interests of the king and the court. In the Greek sources, the kings communicating with oracles are typically to be found in what Joseph Fontenrose calls “quasi-historical responses,” that is, reports of oracular consultations in secondary sources that are not contemporary to the event but may still contain historical information depending on the reliability on the sources used by, say, Herodotus, Thucydides, Plutarch, Diodorus Siculus, or Pausanias. It is, indeed, quite possible to find historical events recorded in these sources, but what is even more important is that the kings in these texts appear as protagonists serving the needs of the writers’ narrative strategies. The voice to be heard here is that of the narrator and his ideology, not that of the historical kings or their ideologists, hence the texts “may say more about a history of narrative modes than a history of divination.”¹⁸³

Prophecy and Narrative Strategies

In Greek literary sources, the narrator’s voice is typically distinct from that of the protagonists. This does not mean neutrality or disengagement from the point of view of the narrator, who has the power of defining the ideologies and intentions of his protagonists. An eminently pro-protagonist example can be taken from Callisthenes’ account on the massacre of the Branchidae priests and the revival of the oracle at Didyma by Alexander the Great.¹⁸⁴ Callisthenes is the most contemporary source concerning Alexander’s deeds which he chronicled as they unfolded, and much of what he relates is probably based on events that actually took place. The primary objective of his narrative, however, was not to write a disengaged description of events as they happened but, rather, to construct Alexander’s image as a divinely sanctioned ruler of the world, hence “the tale of the revival of Didyma tells us more about the creation of Alexander’s image than about the oracle itself.”¹⁸⁵ In this case, unlike in Herodotus’ account on the Persian wars, there is neither chronological nor ideological distance between the narrator and the protagonist, but the narrator’s voice is firmly on the protagonist’s side and in his service.

Herodotus takes clearly more distance from his protagonists, providing a prime example of a secondary use of prophecy in a literary setting created by himself: “in his skillful collage of the omniscient voice of oracles, the voice of the similarly omniscient narrator, and the limited perspective of the protagonist, Herodotus manages to build a complex picture of why empires can fall.”¹⁸⁶

¹⁸³ Raphals 2013: 22–3.

¹⁸⁴ *FGrH* 124 F 14.

¹⁸⁵ Morgan 1989: 34; see also O’Sullivan 2015.

¹⁸⁶ Kindt 2006: 45.

Herodotus' recurrent use of oracles reflects a conviction that they were trustworthy sources of divine knowledge and tended to be fulfilled unless they were misinterpreted, corrupt, or consulted in a faulty manner.¹⁸⁷ This, of course, does not mean that Herodotus would only refer to historically "authentic" prophecies in our sense of the word. Rather, prophecy forms an integral element in his symbolic world, necessary for keeping the Greek societies and their policies on the right track; moreover, he used it as the voice of greater authority that he himself could represent with moral or political judgments of his own. This, I believe, can be said whether we prefer to view Herodotus as a "pious sceptic" or a "pious believer."¹⁸⁸ References to oracles are too many and too important in Herodotus to make him an utmost skeptic, but his use of oracles is much more subtle than a straightforward prediction-fulfillment pattern.

Herodotus refers to oracles especially in his accounts on the Persian wars,¹⁸⁹ which he wrote distinctively from the point of view of Greek self-perception vis-à-vis foreign peoples, whether Persians or others; indeed, the primary motivation for his history-writing has been seen in the idea of a common Greek identity consolidated in the Persian wars.¹⁹⁰ This makes his history-writing much more than just an exercise in describing the past; rather, by writing about the past, Herodotus at the same time wrote to his contemporaries. He not only collected oral traditions circulating among his contemporaries,¹⁹¹ he also fashioned his narrative "in order to give his own particular perspective on the past and hence express his political views."¹⁹² This can be demonstrated by his account on King Croesus' testing of oracles.¹⁹³

Herodotus' account of the rise and fall of Croesus in the first book of his *Histories* can be read as an extended oracle report, in which his consultations of the Delphic oracle not only mark decisive turns of his career but serve as a prelude and model to the fate of many other rulers who appear later in his work.¹⁹⁴ Croesus was at the height of his power but worried about the increasing power of Cyrus' Persia. Therefore, he sent envoys to the most famous oracle sites, including Delphi, Dodona, Didyma, and even

¹⁸⁷ Cf. Mikalson 2003: 152–3; Harrison 2000: 122–57.

¹⁸⁸ This is how Scullion 2006: 204–5 characterizes two contemporary views on Herodotus, the "pious believer" meaning that he mostly endorses the premises of the religious matters he narrates (the view of, e.g. Harrison 2000 and Mikalson 2003), and the "pious sceptic" presenting him as aligning himself with the tradition of scepticism (the view of Scullion himself and, e.g. Burkert 1990 [= 2007: 140–60]).

¹⁸⁹ See Mikalson 2003: 54–8, 85–6.

¹⁹⁰ Thus Harrison 2003: 254–5. For Herodotus' view of Greeks and non-Greeks (Scythians in particular), see especially Hartog 1988. See also the articles published in Nenci and Reverdin (eds) 1990.

¹⁹¹ Cf. Maurizio 2013: 63.

¹⁹² Forsdyke 2006: 227. See also Raaflaub 1987; 2002.

¹⁹³ For the following, see especially the analysis of Kindt 2006; cf. Kindt 2016: 20–8.

¹⁹⁴ See H. I. Flower 1991: 60.

the sanctuary of Ammon in Libya, asking the same question of what he was going to do in the hundredth day after the departure of the envoys. Herodotus cannot tell what the other oracles answered, but the Delphic Pythia gave the following answer in hexameter:

I know the number of the grains of sand and the extent of the sea,
 And understand the mute and hear the voiceless.
 The smell has come to my senses of a strong-shelled tortoise
 Boiling in a cauldron together with a lamb's flesh,
 Under which is bronze and over which is bronze.¹⁹⁵

Of all oracles brought to him in a written form, Croesus was only pleased with this Delphic response, especially because he had boiled a tortoise and a lamb in a bronze cauldron after having sent his envoys, and the Delphic Apollo appeared to know that. He did not understand, however, what the readers of Herodotus are supposed to understand: by testing oracles to obtain a propitious answer he himself found pleasing, he did not acknowledge the difference between human and divine spheres and misunderstood the omniscience of Apollo by interpreting the oracle credulously in his own favor. Blinded by his own error, he then misinterpreted the judgment of each of the two oracles that if he should send an army against the Persians he would destroy a great empire¹⁹⁶ as referring to Cyrus' defeat and not that of his own. The third inquiry to the Delphic oracle as to how long his monarchy would endure was answered by the Pythia as follows:

When the Medes have a mule as king,
 Just then, tender-footed Lydian, by the stone-strewn Hermus
 Flee and do not stay, and do not be ashamed to be a coward.¹⁹⁷

Again, Croesus misinterpreted the oracle by reading it literally and not recognizing that the "mule" actually referred to Cyrus who was the progeny of a Persian father and a Median mother. His march to Cappadocia, intended to overthrow Cyrus, led to his own disaster, for which he blamed Apollo and his misleading oracles. He was answered once more by the Pythia who would teach him how the previous oracles should have been correctly understood, and how the end of the reign of his family and the fifth generation was revealed already to his predecessor Gyges—again something that the reader of Herodotus knows better than the protagonist of the story.

Herodotus, thus, presents Croesus as a king whose *hubris* makes him forget his place, not appreciating the dividing line between the human and divine worlds; at the same time, he speaks to his audience about understanding and interpreting oracular language and about the fallible nature of human

¹⁹⁵ Herodotus 1.47.3.

¹⁹⁶ Herodotus 1.53.3.

¹⁹⁷ Herodotus 1.55.2.

power.¹⁹⁸ And not only that, but the Croesus narrative can also be read as another example of his making “use of the past to encourage his audience to think to contemporary political realities.”¹⁹⁹ It is probably no coincidence that, immediately after telling about Croesus’ misreading of the “mule” oracle, Herodotus mentions his inquiry to “discover who the mightiest of the Greeks were, whom he should make his friends,”²⁰⁰ with the result that Lacedaemonians and the Athenians were the most powerful. This can be read as a telltale sign to the Athenian audience of Herodotus to look at itself in a mirror, not repeating Croesus’ misreadings but understanding the whole account on Croesus as a lesson about the disastrous consequences of *hubris*.

PROPHETS AND KINGS: HEBREW BIBLE

Communication between Prophets and Kings

Turning now to the Hebrew Bible, it is easy to notice that the communication between prophets and kings is taken as a matter of course. Kings of Israel and Judah, from the first to the last, regularly receive divine words spoken by people designated as prophets. Before the establishment of kingship, prophecy is rarely mentioned in the biblical historical narrative.²⁰¹ Apart from Deborah in Judges 4:4 and the anonymous prophets in Judges 6:8–10 and in Judges 13:6, where the “man of God” is actually an angel, prophets are not mentioned in the premonarchical settings of Joshua–Judges, unless prophetic features are found in the activity of characters carrying different titles.²⁰²

Many times in the Hebrew Bible kings consult prophets on their own initiative. Kings who actively seek the services of prophets include Saul who looked after Samuel (1 Sam. 9), himself joined a prophetic band (1 Sam. 10:9–12), and

¹⁹⁸ See Raphals 2013: 284–6; Kindt 2006: 39–49.

¹⁹⁹ Forsdyke 2006: 228. This is not typical for Herodotus only, but for Greek writers’ descriptions of the oracles in general; for Plutarch, cf. Stadter 2015: 84: “His treatment of oracles will be one aspect of his overall purpose to instruct contemporaries by presenting for their consideration examples of political behaviour.”

²⁰⁰ Herodotus 1.56.1.

²⁰¹ The title *nābī*’ is given to characters like Abraham (Gen. 15:1, 4; 20:7) and Aaron (Exod. 7:1), and, of course Moses who is presented as the paragon of true prophecy in Deuteronomy (Deut. 18:15; cf. Deut. 33:1, 34:10; Josh. 14:6; Ps. 90:1; Ezra 3:2; 1 Chr. 23:14, 30:16; also Hos. 12:13; Wisd. 11:1).

²⁰² Thus Levin 2015, who finds the prophetic aspect attached to the figures of Deborah, Othniel, Ehud, Gideon, Jephtah, and Samson as the result of a “prophetic edition” of the book of Judges; cf. the “prophet-like” role of Joshua as figured out by Oeste 2013, and the divine intermediary figures in Judges recognized by Boda 2013.

later turned to prophets, albeit to no avail (1 Sam. 28:6); Jeroboam on the occasions of the destruction of the altar at Bethel and the sickness of his son (1 Kgs 13:6–10; 14:1–18); Ahab who needs an oracle concerning his joint campaign with Josaphath against Ramoth-Gilead (1 Kgs 22; 2 Chr. 18); Ahasiah, having fallen through a window in his upper chamber (2 Kgs 1); Jehoram, Jehoshaphat, and the king of Edom, planning a campaign against Moab (2 Kgs 3:9–20); Ben-Hadad, the sick king of Damascus (2 Kgs 8:7–15); Joash at the deathbed of the prophet Elisha (2 Kgs 13:14–19); Hezekiah, intimidated by Sennacherib (2 Kgs 19:1–34; Isa. 37:1–35; cf. 2 Chr. 32:20); Josiah, scandalized by the newly found law book (2 Kgs 22:3–20; 2 Chr. 34:19–28); and Zedekiah, facing the threat of Nebuchadnezzar (Jer. 21:1–10; 37:3–10; 38:14–26). When there was no longer a king, the elders of Israel approached Ezekiel (Ezek. 8:1; 14:1; 20:1).

Equally as often, the biblical prophets deliver unsolicited oracles to kings, addressing them directly or indirectly: Nathan (2 Sam. 7:4–17, 12:1–14; 1 Chr. 17:3–15) and Gad (1 Sam. 22:5; 2 Sam. 24:11–19; 1 Chr. 21:9–19) to David; Ahiah to Jeroboam (1 Kgs 11:29–39); Shemaiah to Rehoboam (1 Kgs 12:22–4; 2 Chr. 12:5–8); Azariah son of Oded (2 Chr. 15:1–7) and Hanani (2 Chr. 16:7–10) to Asa; Jehu son of Hanani to Baasha (1 Kgs 16:1–7) and to Jehoshaphath (2 Chr. 19:1–3); Jahaziel son of Zechariah (2 Chr. 20:14–17) and Eliezer son of Dodavah (2 Chr. 20:37) to Jehoshaphath; Elijah to Ahab (1 Kgs 18; 21:17–29) and to Jehoram of Israel (in a letter; 2 Chr. 21:12–15); anonymous prophets to Ahab (1 Kgs 20:13–14, 22, 39–43); the anonymous “son of a prophet” to Jehu (2 Kgs 9:1–13); two anonymous prophets to Amaziah (2 Chr. 25:7–10, 15–16); Oded to Ahaz (2 Chr. 28:9–11); Isaiah to Ahaz (Isa. 7:10–25) and to Hezekiah (2 Kgs 20:1–11), not to mention Cyrus (Isa. 45:1–7); Jeremiah to the kings of neighboring kingdoms (Jer. 27:2–11), to Joash, Jehoiachim, and Jehoiachin (Jer. 22:10–19, 24–30), and to Zedekiah (Jer. 32:3–5; 34:1–7); Hosea to the royal house (Hos. 5:1); Amos to Jeroboam (Amos 7:10–11)—and, by analogy, Haggai to Zerubbabel (Hag. 2:20–3) and, possibly, Noadiah to Nehemiah (Neh. 6:14).

Viewed from the Near Eastern perspective, the patterns of communication between prophets and kings seem rather familiar. Irrespective of the historicity of each encounter, which in many—if not most—cases is doubtful, the array of kings receiving prophetic messages demonstrates that the biblical writers regarded the communication between prophets and kings as a standard procedure. Like the kings of Mari and Assyria, the biblical kings turn to prophets in critical situations, and the prophets deliver oracles of support, instruction, warning, indictment, and judgment to the kings. The sayings of the prophets relate to political, cultic, and private matters, their activity is intensified in times of crises, and they proclaim judgment over foreign nations. Prophets in the biblical narrative, just like ancient Near Eastern prophets, are involved in the investiture of new kings (1 Sam. 9–10, 16:1–13; 1 Kgs 1:32–40,

19:15–16; 2 Kgs 8:13, 9:1–13; cf. Hag. 2:20–3),²⁰³ and they keep the kings informed of their duties, legitimacy, and the ideological and theological basis of their power. By and large, the function of prophets as specialists in the *Herrschaftswissen* in the Hebrew Bible, Joshua–Kings in particular, corresponds to that in the ancient Near East in general.

All these fundamental similarities between the images of prophets and kings in the Hebrew Bible and other Near Eastern sources should be appreciated at their full value, but some significant differences must also be noted. The relationship between kings and prophets seems rather more immediate in the Hebrew Bible. The list of encounters between prophets and kings, to which even Daniel’s communication with Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar, and Darius (Dan. 1–6) should be added, is much longer than can be assembled from the entire Near Eastern documentation. Sometimes biblical kings, like the king of Mari, are only indirectly informed of prophecies (Josiah in 2 Kgs 22; Jehojachim in Jer. 36; the king of Nineveh in Jonah 3), but much more often the communication between prophets and kings in the Hebrew Bible is direct and personal. Jeremiah, with his antagonistic messages, faces some problems at times in this respect, but there are prophets—Elijah, for instance (1 Kgs 21:17–24)—who seem to have no difficulties in approaching the king personally in spite of their aggressive proclamation against him. Indeed, prophets like Nathan (2 Sam. 7:4–17, 12:1–14) and Isaiah (Isa. 7) conform to the conventional picture of “court prophets” better than their Near Eastern colleagues of whom this term is (often derogatorily) used.

Actually, the role of some prophets comes closer to that of the Mesopotamian scholars: not only do they perform divinatory acts that in Mesopotamia would belong to the realm of the exorcists (2 Kgs 20:1–11; Isa. 38:1–8, 21–2), but they also appear as active agents in political decision-making, having direct access to the king (1 Kgs 1:11–31; 2 Kgs 19:1–7; Isa. 37:1–7; Isa. 7; Jer. 38:14–28). In these cases, the practice and function of the prophet resembles even that of the Greek seers more than Near Eastern prophets.²⁰⁴

All this makes the role of biblical prophets vis-à-vis the kings more prominent and independent than can be deduced from any Near Eastern source. Moreover, while the portrait of some of the biblical prophets remains quite as faint as that of the Near Eastern prophets in general, many prophets in the

²⁰³ The Assyrian cases of prophetic involvement in the investiture of kings include the enthronement of Esarhaddon (SAA 9 3, **84–8) and the substitute king ritual reported in *109. At Mari, the letter *2 may refer to an original enthronement oracle; see Heintz 1997a: 146–50 (= 2015: 111–15). Lemaire 2001: 86–93, points out the similarity between lines 4–5 of the Tel Dan stela where Hasael, the son of Ben Hadad says: “[and] Hadad made [m]e king,” and 2 Kgs 8:13, where Elisha the prophet proclaims that the God of Israel will make him king of Aram.

²⁰⁴ Lange 2007: 481 rightly states: “the employment of deductive divination by intuitive *manteis* seems to be quite common while it is the exception to the prophetic rule in Israel”; the exceptions may be looked for in the cases just mentioned.

Hebrew Bible stand out as the main characters in the stories written about them. The Hebrew Bible does not provide us with too many details of the life and deeds of Obadiah, Nahum, Habakkuk, or Zephaniah, but a great deal more is said about figures like Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Hosea, whose personalities, theologies, biographies, and psychopathologies have, therefore, once been the subject of intensive research.

However, the increasing awareness of the difficulties in reaching historical persons behind the texts has turned scholarly attention away from the prophets as historical personalities to the prophetic books as scribal works and the development of the prophetic tradition in the Second Temple period when the scribal enterprise, for the most part, took place, even though it is probable that written prophecies existed already in the monarchical period.²⁰⁵ This highlights the difference between the Hebrew Bible and the Near Eastern documents, which include several reports on prophetic performances; these, however, are to be found in letters written to the king, not in literary compositions like the stories about prophets included in biblical books.

Prophecy in a Secondary Setting

In general, the Near Eastern documentation consists of mostly contemporary reports on prophecies delivered to the king himself, while the Hebrew Bible tells stories about the encounters of kings and prophets in a secondary literary setting. In this respect, the biblical evidence of prophecy is well comparable to the Greek evidence discussed above: the voice to be heard is primarily that of the authors of the secondary sources.

Moreover, and partly because of this difference in documentation, the ideological junctures of prophecy and kingship are much more complex in the Hebrew Bible than in other Near Eastern documents. Ideological neutrality can hardly be said to have belonged to prophecy anywhere; in a way, prophets mostly appear as stern supporters of the dominant ideology of each textual corpus, whether biblical or non-biblical. The difference is that, while the Near Eastern sources, as a rule, themselves represent the royal ideology of the kingdom they come from, whether Mari, Assyria, or Hamath, the biblical texts present a more tangled case, again well comparable to Greek literature as a secondary source.

There are enough traces of the “classical” Near Eastern royal ideology in the Hebrew Bible to make it probable that the type of royal prophecy amply documented in Near Eastern sources also existed in Jerusalem. These include

²⁰⁵ See from different angles, e.g. Kratz 2015; Edelman and Ben Zvi (eds) 2009; van der Toorn 2007: 173–204; Floyd 2006, 2015; Becker 2004; Ben Zvi 2003.

the oracle of Nathan in 2 Samuel 7²⁰⁶ and Haggai's oracle to Zerubbabel (Hag. 2:21–3),²⁰⁷ as well as royal psalms that may have their background in prophetic activity (Pss. 2, 21, 45, 110).²⁰⁸ Especially in Second Isaiah, many passages resemble the Neo-Assyrian oracles and are likely to utilize language and ideas inherited from traditional royal prophecy.²⁰⁹

On the other hand, the harsh antagonism of many biblical prophets towards kings and kingship is virtually unparalleled in Near Eastern sources, where the king can certainly be criticized, as we shall see later in this chapter, but where the criticism never goes as far as to declare the end of the ruling dynasty of the country (cf. 1 Kgs 14:10–11, 16:2–4; Jer. 22:30; Amos 7:9, 17)—except for one case, reported by Nabû-rehtu-ušur to Esarhaddon as a pseudo-prophecy proclaiming the destruction of the seed of Sennacherib (*115).²¹⁰ This important piece of evidence shows that even in Assyria, prophecy could be used by oppositional circles against the ruling king, which is not surprising as such. What is noteworthy is that such a document, thanks to the solicitous servant of the king, has been preserved in the Assyrian state archives, where the point of view of the adversaries of the kings is otherwise poorly represented. This raises the question about the origin and motivation of the prophetic opposition against biblical kings.

It is evident that the lion's share of biblical texts dealing with kings and prophets do not grow out of the official royal ideology of the kingdoms of Judah and Israel, but from a distinct ideological soil, fertilized by oppositional, sometimes theocratic–anti-monarchical—and, to a great extent, *post*-monarchical ideas. The perspective of the biblical books is neither that of the kings nor that of the prophets, but that of a third party not directly involved in the encounters of kings and prophets but looking at them, and manufacturing them, from a distance, for purposes nourished by other than royal or prophetic concerns.²¹¹

²⁰⁶ For the Near Eastern background and literary development of theological ideas in 2 Sam. 7, see Weippert 2014: 104–13; Rudnig 2011; Kasari 2009; Avioz 2005; Laato 1997.

²⁰⁷ These verses, in my view, reflect the tradition of Near Eastern royal prophecy irrespective of whether Zerubbabel was actually designated here as a king or even a messiah. Being supportive of the ruling elite under the leadership of Zerubbabel, “[i]t advocates the perpetuation of Israelite institutions and traditions within the context of accommodation to the realities of Persian rule” (Kessler 2002: 279), hence being functionally equivalent with ancient Near Eastern prophecy in general.

²⁰⁸ For traces of prophetic activity in the Psalms, see Hilber 2005: 76–217.

²⁰⁹ See Weippert 2001 (= 2014: 132–58). For a possible afterlife of Neo-Assyrian prophetic tradition in Babylonia in later times, see Launderville 2015.

²¹⁰ For an analysis, see Nissinen 1998a: 108–53; cf. Frahm 2010: 110–31; Holloway 2003: 336–7, 410–14.

²¹¹ Cf. e.g. Anthonioz 2013: 109: “L’opposition des figures construites de Samuel et de Saül, ainsi que l’intervention systématique des prophètes d’Israël, de contradiction et de malédiction, quand la royauté est en faillite, montrent bien en définitive que l’idéal prophétique est littéraire et idéologique: c’est effectivement l’agencement littéraire qui rend compte de l’idéologie à l’œuvre et la rétribution finale est en réalité le point de départ de ce prophétisme.”

This is not to say that no historical evidence of such encounters can be deduced from the Hebrew Bible; a careful diachronic scrutiny may well be able to reveal some authentic cases that actually took place in the kingdoms of Israel and Judah, and the comparative evidence may be helpful in recognizing them. Nevertheless, it remains a problem whether the fragmentary evidence found in the biblical texts, edited by the scribes of the Second Temple period according to their ideological preferences, is enough to enable a reliable historical reconstruction of the relationship between the prophets and the kings. The case of biblical writers is comparable to that of Herodotus discussed above: the authors of the texts, while referring to the past, actually speak to contemporary audiences.

From a historical point of view, the fierce opposition to kings and kingship in the Hebrew Bible may be quite as disproportional as the virtual lack of it in other Near Eastern documents. For the editors of the biblical books, the end of the monarchy was as much a reality as was the monarchy's endurance for the scribes of Assyria and Mari, and this certainly had an effect on the general tone of the documents we have at our disposal.²¹² On both sides, we are dependent on incomplete evidence representing biased views, and this makes the comparison a cumbersome task.

All difficulties notwithstanding, there is enough evidence to warrant the conviction that, in the kingdoms of Judah and Israel, the institutions of prophecy and kingship were affiliated in more or less the same way as is documented by texts from other parts of the Near East. The historical and ideological role of prophets as specialists in the *Herrschaftswissen* and, thus, an essential part of the royal divinatory apparatus is presupposed by the biblical texts regardless of their dating. This is true especially for the narrative works that describe the kings and their activities, that is, Joshua-Kings²¹³ and, in particular, the Chronicles,²¹⁴ where the communication between prophets and kings is depicted as more intensive than anywhere else, not to mention the book of Daniel. It is noteworthy that even texts of late origin follow the ancient Near Eastern pattern in reinforcing the fundamental affinity of the institutions of prophecy and kingship.

However, there are also intriguing differences between the images of prophets and kings in biblical and non-biblical texts—first and foremost the active and, at times, aggressive engagement of the biblical prophets on the one hand, and their divinatory (and even non-divinatory) functions atypical of

²¹² See Kratz 2015: 36–50 and cf. de Jong 2011: 42: “In the Near East disastrous events were commonly explained as being the result of divine punishment. . . . This kind of reflection or explanation always *followed* the event which it aimed to explain.”

²¹³ For the significance of prophets and prophecy in the Deuteronomistic History, see, e.g. W. Dietrich 2000; cf. also Ben Zvi 2004a.

²¹⁴ For prophets and prophecy in Chronicles, see, e.g. Ben Zvi 2013; Beentjes 2011; Jonker 2008, 2011; Knoppers 2010; Amit 2006; Schniedewind 1995; Kegler 1993.

other Near Eastern prophets on the other. The roles of biblical prophets are manifold and should not be forced into a harmonized image. There may be historical and sociological reasons for the variety of the roles of biblical prophets. In Mesopotamia, there was a clear division between scholars and prophets, but an overlap of roles is more likely in less differentiated societies like those of Judah and Israel; for example, the priestly lineages of Jeremiah (Jer. 1:1) and Ezekiel (Ezek. 1:3), if historical, probably had implications for their social role and educational background. To a great extent, however, this diversity is without doubt the product of the creativity of the authors and editors of the biblical texts, and some part of it may be due to a secondary “prophetization” of characters like Samuel²¹⁵ or, in a different vein, “men of God” like Elijah or Elisha. It must be borne in mind that most methods of divination other than prophecy are condemned by the biblical writers, especially the Deuteronomists to whom we owe many of the biblical encounters between prophets and kings. While the existence of the diviners is acknowledged, kings turning to them appear in a dubious light, and the word of God never comes through their activities. In terms of this ideology, there is little room for diviners other than prophets who make the king conversant with the divine will.

In comparison with other ancient Eastern Mediterranean sources, the question arises why the critique of kings is so prominently represented in biblical prophetic literature. It may be, in fact, that scholars have emphasized the social critical aspect to such an extent that many other aspects of the biblical prophecy have been overshadowed. It cannot be denied that in the Hebrew Bible, the prophetic criticism is more abundant and uncompromising than in any extrabiblical source, especially when it comes to the prophecy of doom. Nevertheless, the Mesopotamian sources discussed above demonstrate that no fundamental distinction should be made between cultic and social criticism, which require one another like the two sides of a coin. Moreover, the “radical conflicts between the prophets and the king” need to be examined from the perspective of the relationship of *Herrschaftswissen* and *Herrschaftskritik*, paying attention to the development of the image of a prophet and the concept of prophecy during the long history of the emergence of prophetic literature in the Hebrew Bible.

The critical profile of the biblical prophecy can be traced back to the development of prophecy as a phenomenon in ancient Israel on the one hand, and to the redactional process of the prophetic books of the Hebrew Bible on the other. In principle, the critical elements of prophecy could be seen

²¹⁵ Cf. W. Dietrich 2010, who finds no less than seven facets in the biblical image of Samuel: priest (which probably was the office of the historical Samuel), prophet, military liberator, tribal leader, kingmaker, advisor of kings, and opponent to kings; cf. Hutzli 2014; Leuchter 2013; Sweeney 2011; Frolov 2011.

as an original feature of the political and religious culture of ancient Israel and Judah. However, given the nature of the biblical prophetic literature, it is difficult to determine which part of this criticism was expressed in the pre-exilic period, and to what extent it should be attributed to the subsequent designers of the biblical image of prophecy.²¹⁶

On the basis of the Hebrew Bible, the sole source of the ancient Israelite prophecy, the particularly rigid protest made by the most prominent biblical representatives of social and religious criticism—Amos, Hosea, Micah, and Isaiah—is viewed as a herald of a new kind of intellectual leadership that subsequently served as a model for the later, mainly Deuteronomistic construction of prophecy.²¹⁷ Since, however, the biblical prophecy, ultimately being a scribal phenomenon, is a very selective and fragmentary document of the ancient Hebrew prophecy, the role of these prophetic personalities in their historical environment remains unclear. Therefore, the prophetic criticism in the Hebrew Bible should not only be examined against the background of the pre-exilic societies of Israel and Judah, but also with an emphatic reference to the post-monarchic circumstances that certainly gave no less grounds for it.²¹⁸ The ancient Near Eastern prophetic sources maintain their relevance to the matter as documents of the interplay of *Herrschaftswissen* and *Herrschaftskritik* which undoubtedly concerns even the changing power structures of the Second Temple community. Wherever power is exercised, outspoken criticism is risky;²¹⁹ even so, there were scribes and prophets, male and female,²²⁰ who were not afraid to take chances.

²¹⁶ See de Jong 2011 and cf. Loretz 2003: 378: “Im Gegensatz zu vorexilischen Texten (Ps. 72*) scheint der König in diesem Zusammenhang in nachexilischen keine Rolle mehr zu spielen. Durch diese Differenz wird klar, daß die Sozialanklage in den vorexilischen Texten eine andere Funktion ausübt als in den nachexilischen Prophetenbüchern. Wir haben folglich zwischen einer ursprünglichen und einer sekundären Rolle derselben zu unterscheiden: Die vorexilische Sozialkritik zielt auf eine unmittelbare Beseitigung der Mißstände, für die der König und die Oberschicht verantwortlich sind, die nachexilische dient dagegen dem Nachweis, daß die Verletzung sozialer Gerechtigkeit zur nationalen Katastrophe geführt habe.”

²¹⁷ Thus Blenkinsopp 1995: 141–54; cf. Fenton 2001. This question is related to the problem of whether the pre-exilic “writing prophets” belonged to the *nēbī’im* at all, or whether this designation has been attributed to them later; for discussion, see Gonçalves 2001; Fenton 1997; Vawter 1985; Carroll 1983.

²¹⁸ See Anthonioz 2013: 95–110; de Jong 2011; Loretz 2003: 378–80, 384–5; Levin 1997. For the problem in general, see Carroll 1989.

²¹⁹ Cf. Stadter 2015: 96: “Consulting an oracle is risky for the powerful—and for the sanctuary, even more so. . . . As the stories of the *Lives* [i.e. Plutarch’s] demonstrate, it is not easy to speak the truth to power, not least because power often is not listening”; Kaiser 1998: 414: “. . . der Mut, die Dinge bei Namen zu nennen, [ist] in einer notwendigerweise durch Herrschaft und also auch Gewalt bestimmten Welt riskant und daher zu allen Zeiten einfacher prinzipiell als konkret anzutreffen.”

²²⁰ Cf. the case of the female prophet Noadiah with Nehemia (Neh. 6:14), for which see Carroll 1992.

Prophecy and Gender

Prophecy is a gendered phenomenon. The very idea of intermediation implies the “notion of penetration of a human by a divine agent, and casts the prophet into the role of the passive, penetrated, god-possessed female.”¹ In the ancient Eastern Mediterranean sources, the agency mediating between the human and superhuman realms is gendered: both the deities and the human intermediaries appear as both male and female. Women can be found practicing both technical and non-technical kinds of divination in the Hebrew Bible and in Greek sources,² whereas in Mesopotamia, the practitioners of extispicy, astrology, augury, and exorcism are always male.

Among different types of divination, prophecy stands out as the one in which non-male persons feature most strongly. The last three decades have seen a profusion of literature on female prophets and on prophecy and gender in the Hebrew Bible. The purpose of this chapter is to approach the issue of gender and prophetic divination from a comparative perspective. I first present a taxonomy of gender of the prophets and deities in the ancient Eastern Mediterranean, and then discuss the agency of the prophets from the gender point of view. I conclude the chapter by analyzing the gendered representations of deities and their alleged agency, that of the goddess Ištar in particular.

GENDER OF PROPHETS: TAXONOMY

My statistical survey of the gender of prophets and deities (see Appendix 1) is based on the corpus of texts included in the SBLWAW volume *Prophets and Prophecy in the Ancient Near East*.³ The references to the texts in this paper

¹ Kraemer 2013: 291.

² For the Hebrew Bible, see Hamori 2015; for the Greek sources, see M. A. Flower 2008: 211–39.

³ Nissinen 2003a. The numbering of the texts in Appendix 1 corresponds to the forthcoming second edition of this volume.

follow the numbering of this volume consisting of 175 texts mostly written in Akkadian and coming from Mari (sixty-eight texts), Assyria (sixty-one texts), and other places in Mesopotamia, but also a few West Semitic sources, one Egyptian text reporting on events that happened in the Phoenician city of Byblos, and a Luwian stela from northern Syria. In these texts, prophets are referred to in a variety of ways. In the letters and administrative documents from Mari, as well as in Assyrian prophetic oracles, prophets are often mentioned by name, but quite as often we encounter references to anonymous individuals, or to a collective of prophets.

The gender of the prophets known by name is consistently indicated, but this is not always the case with anonymous prophets, especially in cases where the prophecy is quoted without a reference to the person of the prophet in question. Prophets whose names are mentioned are referred to in fifty-nine texts, including thirty-three references to twenty-eight male individuals⁴ and eighteen references to sixteen female individuals.⁵ In addition, there are eight texts referring to five individual prophets whose gender is not clear, either because the prophet bears the title *assinnu* indicating an unconventional gender role,⁶ or because the reference to the prophet's gender is otherwise ambiguous; this is the case three times in the colophons of Assyrian prophecies⁷ to which I will return later. Altogether, forty-eight individual prophets are known by their names.

Anonymous prophets whose gender is indicated are mentioned forty-nine times; of these, thirty-five are male⁸ and fourteen female.⁹ There is no way of knowing whether the same individuals are mentioned several times in these texts. When prophets are mentioned as a group, the prophets are sometimes referred to as "prophets" without gender specification (ten times),¹⁰ as "male and female prophets" (five times, one of which also mentions the *assinnus*);¹¹

⁴ Mari: Abiya (*2), Iši-aḫu (*5), Luḫaḫum (**9, 53, 62), Qišti-diritim (*18), Irra-gamil (*33), Ḫadnu-El (*35), Iddin-kubi (*35), Iddin-ili (*43), Timlū (*45), Atamrum (*48), Ili-andulli (*54), Ea-maši (*55/59), Irra-gamil (**55/59, 65), Ea-mudammīq (*56/57), Qišatum (*60), Išhi-Dagan (*63); Assyria: La-dagil-ili (**77, 80, 88), Nabū-ḫussanni (*78), Tašmetu-ereš (*91), Quqī (*104), Nergal-šallim (*118e?); other texts from Mesopotamia: "Boatman" (*134), Aḫu-waqar (*135d), Sin-muballit (*135e), Sin-iqīšam (*135f), Eḫlip-Adad (*135i); West Semitic texts: Balaam (*138), Qēn (*141a).

⁵ Mari: Ḫubatam (*10), Innibana (*14), Aḫatum (*24), Ayala (*36), Zunana (*37), Kakka-lidi (*41), Šimatam (*44), Annu-tabni (*58); Assyria: Sinqīša-amur (**69, 82), Remut-Allati (*70), Issar-beli-da"ini (*74), Aḫat-abiša (*75), Urkittu-šarrat (*81), Mullissu-kabtat (*92), Dunnaša-amur (**94, 95), Mullissu-abu-ušri (*111).

⁶ Selebum (**7, 8, 23), Ili-ḫaznaya (*22).

⁷ Issar-la-tašiyat (*68), Bayā (**71, 79), Ilussa-amur (*72).

⁸ **1 (2x), 3, 4, 16, 19 (2x), 25, 29, 30, 31, 32, 34, 38, 39, 40, 47, 51, 61, 64, 65a, 108, 118c, 119, 130, 135a, 135c, 135h, 135j, 135k, 135o, 139, 141, 142, 143.

⁹ **7, 9, 11, 12, 13, 20, 27, 42, 50b, 109, 113, 114, 115, 135g.

¹⁰ **26, 46, 49, 50, 97, 98, 99, 122, 137.

¹¹ **1, 17, 105, 118, 123.

or twice as “female prophets” in a ritual text from Mari, and in an administrative list from Assyria.¹²

When one compares the sources from Mari to those from Assyria, there is a perceptible difference between the gender profiles of prophets: the male/female ratio of mentionings of individual prophets with known gender is forty to seventeen at Mari and nine to fourteen in Assyria. If these figures tell anything at all about the historical factuality, this would mean that at Mari, about sixty percent of the prophets were male, whereas in Assyria, about sixty percent were female.

When it comes to the very meager documentation of West Semitic prophecy, we can observe that two prophets—not only Balaam in the Deir Alla inscription¹³ but also a person called Qên in the seal-amulet from Deir Rifa¹⁴—have male names, and the three others, appearing in the Lachish letters¹⁵ and in the Egyptian Wenamon narrative,¹⁶ are likewise of male gender. Whether this refers to the preference of male prophets in West Semitic cultures is difficult to judge on the basis of five attestations only. However, the Hebrew Bible, with its five or so female prophets¹⁷ compared to the fifty or so male prophets,¹⁸ seems to point in the same direction.

¹² **52, 110. ¹³ *138.

¹⁴ *141a. The name is interpreted as a cognate of the Hebrew proper name *qayin* (Gen. 4:1) and the tribal name *qayin/haq-qêni*. The lack of the letter *y* indicates that the name on the seal appears in a contracted form *qên* (see Hamilton 2009: 71–3).

¹⁵ **139, 141. ¹⁶ *142.

¹⁷ The following women carry the title *nēbī'ā* in the Hebrew Bible: Miriam (Exod. 15:20); Deborah (Judg. 4:4), Huldah (2 Kgs 22:14–20), Noadiah (Neh. 6:14), and the anonymous woman in Isa. 8:3. For most recent treatments of these women, see, e.g. Hamori 2015; Grabbe 2013; Tervanotko 2013; Williamson 2010; Gafney 2008; Dias Marianno 2008; I. Fischer 2002; Ackerman 2002.

¹⁸ In addition to the fifteen male prophets to whom the prophetic books of the Hebrew Bible are attributed, the following thirty-four male persons are attested in the Hebrew Bible as prophesying or carrying a prophetic title: Aaron (Exod. 7:1), Abraham (Gen. 15:1, 4; 20:7), Ahijah the Shilonite (1 Kgs 11:29; 14:2, 18), Asaph (2 Chr. 29:30), Azariah son of Oded (2 Chr. 15:8), Balaam (Num. 23–4), Daniel (Dan.), David (2 Sam. 23:1; Neh. 12:24, 36; 1 Chr. 22:8; 2 Chr. 8:14), Eldad (Num. 11:27), Eliezer son of Dodavahu (2 Chr. 20:37), Elijah (1 Kgs 17–19; 2 Kgs 1; Mal. 3:23; 2 Chr. 21:12; Sir. 48:1–3), Elisha (1 Kgs 19:16; 2 Kgs 3–9; 13:19), Gad (1 Sam. 22:5; 2 Sam. 24:11; 1 Chr. 21:9, 29:29; 2 Chr. 29:25), Hanan son of Igdaliah (Jer. 35:4), Hanani (2 Chr. 16:7–10), Hananiah (Jer. 28), Heman (1 Chr. 25:5), Iddo (2 Chr. 9:29, 12:15, 13:22), Jeduthun (2 Chr. 35:15), Jehu son of Hanani (1 Kgs 16:7, 12; 2 Chr. 19:2), Medad (Num. 11:27), Micaiah son of Imlah (1 Kgs 22; 2 Chr. 18), Moses (Deut. 33:1, 34:10; Josh. 14:6; Ps. 90:1; Ezra 3:2; 1 Chr. 23:14, 30:16; cf. Hos. 12:13; Wisd. 11:1), Nathan (2 Sam. 7:2–4, 12:25; 1 Kgs 1; Ps 51:21; 1 Chr. 17:1, 15; 29:29; 2 Chr. 9:29, 29:25; Sir. 47:1), Oded (2 Chr. 28:9), Samuel (1 Sam. 3, 9, 15:10; 1 Chr. 9:22, 26:28, 29:29; 2 Chr. 35:18; Sir. 46:13–20), Shemaiah (1 Kgs 12:22; 2 Chr. 11:2; 12:5, 7, 15), Shemaiah of Nehelam (Jer. 29:31), Uriah son of Shemaiah (Jer. 26:20), and Gedaliah, Zeri, Jeshaiiah, Hashabiah, and Mattithiah, sons of Jeduthun (1 Chr. 25:3). Note also the several anonymous male prophets (*nābī'*, *bēnē ha-nēbī'im*, or *īš hā-ēlohim*) in Judg. 6:8, 13:6–10; 1 Sam. 2:27; 1 Kgs 13 (two prophets), 20; 2 Kgs 2; 4:1, 38; 5:22; 6:1; 9:1, 4; 23:16–18; 2 Chr. 25: 7–9, 14–16.

The gender difference also plays a role when it comes to deities whose words the prophets are said to transmit or whose temples they are affiliated with. Of the 126 Near Eastern cases in which the gender of the deity is evident, a male deity is mentioned fifty-nine times and a female deity sixty-seven times. Again, there are divergences between the sources. In texts from Mari, a male deity is mentioned almost twice as many times (thirty-six)¹⁹ as a female deity (twenty),²⁰ while in the case of Assyria, the thirty-three occurrences of a female deity²¹ (always one of the manifestations of Ištar) drastically outnumber the thirteen cases of male deities mentioned in the texts.²² In the four West Semitic sources in which the divine gender is revealed, the deity is always a male one: Baalshamayin in the Zakkur inscription, Amon in the report of Wenamon, and, presumably, Yahweh in the Lachish letters;²³ note also the male god Tarhunza in the prophecy quoted in the Luwian stele of Hamiyata.²⁴

Is there a correspondence, then, between the gender of the prophets and that of the deities?²⁵ According to my statistics, in the cases where the gender of both the prophet and the deity can be detected, male prophets are associated thirty times with male deities and eighteen times with female deities.²⁶ Female prophets are affiliated seventeen times with a female deity and seven times with a male one,²⁷ and the people with ambiguous or undetermined gender exclusively appear as prophets of a female deity, except for one Assyrian text (*71) where Bayâ speaks in the voice of three different gods.

Leaving the statistics based on the text corpus published in *Prophets and Prophecy in the Ancient Near East*, it is worth noting that the pivotal role of women in prophecy is not restricted to the ancient Near East, but can also be observed in Greek literature.²⁸ Greek seers (*manteis*) who practice divination involving observation of the livers of sacrificial animals and the flight of birds were, as a rule, male. However, unlike in Mesopotamia where technical divination seems to have been a quasi-exclusively male profession,²⁹ there

¹⁹ **1 (3x), 2, 3, 4, 7, 9 (2x), 12, 15, 16, 19, 20, 25, 30, 31, 34, 37, 38, 39, 41, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 50a, 53, 55/59 (2x), 60, 61, 62, 63, 65a.

²⁰ **5, 7, 8, 10, 18, 19, 21, 22, 23, 24, 29, 42, 43, 45, 50a, 50b, 51, 52, 56/57, 58.

²¹ **68, 69, 70, 71, 72, 73, 74, 75, 76, 77, 78, 79, 80, 81, 82, 83, 87, 88, 90, 91, 92, 94, 95, 97, 99, 100, 101, 107, 113, 114, 118, 118c, 118e.

²² **71 (2x), 84, 85, 86, 106, 112, 115, 118d (2x), 118e, 118f, 118g.

²³ **137, 139, 141, 142. ²⁴ *143.

²⁵ So Stökl 2009 on the basis of Assyrian and biblical texts.

²⁶ Male prophet, male deity: **1 (2x), 2, 3, 4, 9, 16, 19, 25, 30, 31, 34, 38, 39, 47, 48, 53, 55/59 (2x), 60, 61, 62, 63, 65a, 135i, 135j, 139, 141, 142, 143; male prophet, female deity: **5, 18, 19, 29, 43, 45, 51, 56/57, 77, 78, 80, 88, 91, 118c, 119, 134, 135a, 135o.

²⁷ Female prophet, female deity: **10, 24, 42, 50b, 58, 69, 70, 74, 75, 81, 82, 92, 94, 95, 113, 114, 135g; female prophet, male deity: **7, 9, 12, 20, 37, 41, 115.

²⁸ See Hagedorn 2013.

²⁹ Note that in two Neo-Assyrian oracular queries (SAA 4 321 and 322), the enquirer appears to be an unidentified female writer. The last lines of both queries present a unique formula: "disregard that a woman has written it and placed it before you." I am indebted to Saana Svärd for this reference.

are a few hints at women involved in it in Greek sources.³⁰ An epitaph with the inscription “Satyra the seer” (*Satyra ha mantis*);³¹ an epigram attributable to Poseidippus of Pella, mentioning “Asterie the seer” interpreting bird signs;³² and a grave stela from Mantinea depicting a woman holding a liver in her left hand.³³ All this proves is that the predominantly male domain of divination was not altogether inaccessible to women; in fact, female seers may be under-represented in Greek literature that mostly report the activity of the seers in connection with warfare, in which women did not participate.

While the female seers remain the exception to the general rule, the picture changes when it comes to the delivery of divine messages by non-technical means. As we have already seen, the historically attested Greek prophets who are likely to have acted in an altered state of consciousness are almost exclusively female.³⁴ The Pythias of Delphi, who constituted one of the most highly appreciated and long-lived divinatory institutions in the Eastern Mediterranean, could only be women. A likewise strictly gender-specific role was assumed by the prophetesses of the temple of Apollo at Didyma after the re-establishment of the temple in the 330s BCE, as well as “the priestesses, who were also the prophetesses”³⁵ of the temple of Zeus at Dodona.

The only major oracle site where the prophets seem to have been consistently of male gender was the temple of Apollo at Claros, where, according to Iamblichus, a male prophet prophesied after having drunk water from the holy spring.³⁶ Tacitus calls specific attention to the fact that it is not a woman, as at Delphi, but a male person who delivers the oracular response at Claros, as if this were something unexpected.³⁷ It is noteworthy, moreover, that in mythical sources, the prophets at Dodona appear as male (the *helloi* or *selloi*),³⁸ while the historical practice knows only female prophets. In an etiological story recorded by both Ephoros and Proklos, a parallel office of male and female prophets is taken for granted, as if at some point a change from male to

³⁰ See M. A. Flower 2008: 212–15; Bremmer 2008: 149–50.

³¹ SEG 35.626. This epitaph, found in Larissa in Thessaly, dates to the third century BCE.

³² Poem 6 in Acosta-Hughes, Kosmetatou, and Baumbach (eds) 2004, also dated to the third century BCE.

³³ For this late fifth-century BCE stela, see Möbius; see also the image in M. A. Flower 2008: 213 (fig. 18).

³⁴ See “Prophets as Intermediaries” in Chapter 1 in this volume.

³⁵ Ephoros, *FGrH* 70 F 119 = Strabo 9.2.4: *tas hiereias tautas d'einai tas prophētidas* (cf. Proklos in Photius, *Bibliotheca* 239.321b–322a).

³⁶ Iamblichus, *De mysteriis* 3.11; cf. Pliny, *Nat.* 2.232. See “Prophetic Performance in Greek Sources” in Chapter 5 and “Prophets and Temples: Greek Sources” in Chapter 6, both in this volume, and cf. Busine 2005: 48–52. Even though there are no direct references to ecstatic practices in the extant oracles from Claros from the first through fourth centuries CE, one fragmentary strophe in the oracle for Kallipolis (*9 in Merkelbach and Stauber 1996: 21) has been interpreted in terms of prophetic ecstasy; see Oesterheld 2008: 162, 165–6: “Wie mir in Eingeweiden [...] des Mundes [...] eine kleine [...] den Kampf [...] bedrückt ist das Herz.”

³⁷ Tacitus, *Ann.* 2.54.

³⁸ e.g. Homer, *Iliad* 16.122–35.

female prophets took place at Dodona.³⁹ Also at Didyma, the speakers of the oracles were male members of the Branchidae family until the destruction of the temple in 494 BCE.⁴⁰ Generally speaking, while the technical *manteis* were mostly of male gender, only very few male persons can be found practicing the prophetic kind of divination in Greek sources; according to Armin Lange, “[p]rophetic *manteis* occur only in archaic legend. And even there, they are exception to the rule.”⁴¹ Such an exception may appear in a third-century CE inscription from Didyma, in which a person called Titus Flavius Ulpianus seems to report a vision of his own.⁴²

Female gender is typical of even other, non-historical prophetic figures in Greek literature, such as the women prophesying the oracles of Loxias (Apollo) in the temple of Phoibos;⁴³ Cassandra in Aeschylus’ *Agamemnon* and in other sources;⁴⁴ and Manto, daughter of the seer Teiresias and mother of the seer Mopsus, who not only spoke but also wrote oracles.⁴⁵ A famous case of a legendary female prophetic figure is the Sibyl, who was considered daughter of a nymph and a man called Theodoros. Like Cassandra, she was seen as Apollo’s priest and bride.⁴⁶ The Sibyl’s original home is Erythrae in Asia Minor, where traces of her cult have been preserved. Local Sibyls start appearing from the late fourth century on. Varro, a Roman writer of the first century BCE knows about no less than ten Sibyls in Persia, Libya, Delphi, Cimmeria (Italy), Erythrae, Samos, Cumea, Hellespontos (Troy), Phrygia, and Tibur;⁴⁷ of these, especially the tradition of the Cumaeian Sibyl is well

³⁹ Thus Kowalzig 2007: 347, who connects the arrival of the female prophets historically with the move of the sanctuary from Thessaly to Dodona; it is written that “most women, whose descendants are now the prophetesses” accompanied the shrine, subsequently acting as priestesses for it (Suidas in Strabo 7.7.12). It should be noted that while Sophokles (*Trach.* 1164–72, cf. *Od. Akanth.* 456) knows both male and female prophets, Herodotos (2.55) is completely silent about the *selloi*.

⁴⁰ They are always referred to as “the Branchidae of the Milesians” by Herodotus (1.46, 92, 141, 157; 2.159; 5.36; 6.19), which, admittedly, does not indicate the gender of the speakers of oracles with certainty; cf. Morgan 1989: 27.

⁴¹ Lange 2007: 480. Lange’s examples include Helenus (*Il.* 7.44–53), Theoclymenus (*Od.* 17.160–1; 20.350–7), Amphilytus (Herodotus 1.62–3), and Teiresias (*Od.* 10.494–5; 11.150–1; Sophocles, *Ant.* 998–1014; *Oed. tyr.* 297–9, 300–4). For the technical *manteis* in archaic legend, see Bremmer 1996.

⁴² *DI* 277.13–20; see Fontenrose 1988: 203–4.

⁴³ Euripides, *Melanippe Desmotis* fr. 494; cf. Hagedorn 2013: 104–5.

⁴⁴ Aeschylus, *Ag.* 1072–1340; cf. Pindar, *Pyth.* 11.33 where she is called *mantis*, and the narrative of the Hellenistic historian Antikleides who tells about how she received the gift of prophecy while being left in a sanctuary as a child together with her brother (Antikleides, *FGrH* 140, fr. 17). According to Bremmer 1996: 103, she is “clearly a relatively late, poetical creation and not a reflection of an existing type of prophetess.” For Cassandra, see also Tervanotko forthcoming; Trampedach 2015: 197–9; Hagedorn 2013: 106–14; Neblung 1997; Schein 1982.

⁴⁵ Diodorus Siculus 4.66.6. Her name literally means “prophetess”; cf. Hagedorn 2013: 114–19.

⁴⁶ For the Sibyl(s), see Parke 1988; Graf 1985: 335–50.

⁴⁷ Thus according to Lactantius, *Inst.* 1.6.8–12.

known.⁴⁸ The Sibylline oracles were considered significant enough to be collected in the temple of Apollo in Rome,⁴⁹ and they were adopted by even the Jews and Christians.⁵⁰ Whether the tradition of the Sibyl is based on a historical figure is unknown. Only one piece of information exists to suggest historical prophetic activity in Erythrae: Callisthenes reports on Athenais, a female prophet who came from there to confirm the divine origin of Alexander the Great.⁵¹

Outside the realm of cuneiform literature, female deities seem to disappear as oracular deities. The few West Semitic prophets we know are all male, associated with male deities. In Greek literature, again, female prophets are presented as mouthpieces of male deities, Zeus or Apollo (in fact, Apollo can be called *mantis*⁵² or the *prophētēs* of Zeus⁵³), while female deities do not appear as sources of prophetic oracles. The Hebrew Bible endorses only one god, Yahweh, whose image is predominantly male, and whose prophets likewise tend to be men rather than women, despite the few well-known cases demonstrating that the biblical writers did not consider the idea of a female prophet of Yahweh impossible.

These statistics show that there was no universal gender correspondence between prophets and deities in the ancient Eastern Mediterranean. Nonetheless, some patterns can be tentatively outlined according to the provenance of the texts. The biblical and West Semitic sources seem to favor the male god/male prophet pattern, while in Greece, the male god/female prophet model prevails. In the texts from Mari, the prophets, regardless of their gender, more often appear as prophets of male than of female deities, and there is a majority of male prophets among them. In Assyrian sources, again irrespective of the gender of the prophet, the deity speaking in prophetic oracles is virtually always female, and female prophets clearly outnumber the male ones.

This variation may well go back to differences in socio-religious contexts and traditions, but it should always be borne in mind that our dependence on written sources impedes a direct access to historical circumstances, and that our image of ancient prophecy is decisively informed by the nature of source materials. Biblical prophecy, for example, cannot be straightforwardly equated with the prophetic phenomenon in the ancient kingdoms of Israel and Judah, even when it comes to the gender ratio of biblical prophets, because biblical prophecy is, ultimately, the construct of biblical writers, reflecting their ideologies. In a similar vein, the Assyrian construct of prophecy clearly favors the state ideology as propagated in temples of Ištar. Hence, both the biblical

⁴⁸ See Parke 1988: 71–99.

⁴⁹ e.g. Suetonius, *Aug.* 31.1.

⁵⁰ For the Sibylline oracles, see, e.g. Buitenwerf 2003; Parke 1988: 1–22; Graf 1985: 343–5.

⁵¹ Callisthenes in *FGH* 124 F 14.

⁵² Aeschylus, *Ag.*, 1203.

⁵³ Aeschylus, *Eum.*, 614–19.

paucity of women prophets and the Assyrian prevalence of Ištar may at least partly go back to an intended construct.

GENDER AND HUMAN AGENCY

It is well known from anthropology and the history of religion that, virtually regardless of time and place, women and other non-male individuals occupy important positions related to their alleged receptiveness to divine inspiration and the ability to mediate between the divine and human worlds.⁵⁴ The prophetic action as such is not gender-specific. Anyone can achieve an altered state of consciousness required for prophesying, and there is no difference between men and women in this respect. The above statistics point in the same direction: in the ancient Eastern Mediterranean, prophecy was open to both, or should we say, all genders.

Whatever local variations there might have been in the relative status of prophets representing different genders, it appears as a continuing pattern that in the ancient Eastern Mediterranean, the prophetic role—like that of a magician⁵⁵—could be assumed by women and men alike. This cannot be said of most professions; at least in Mesopotamia, femininity and masculinity “were considered two of the divinely-ordained organizing principles by which society was thought to be governed,”⁵⁶ and this was reflected in gendered professional roles. Technical divination in particular (astrology, extispicy, augury, and the like) was a male domain in which women seem not to have been involved in Mesopotamia. A few female seers (*manteis*) are known from Greek sources (as discussed above), and some branches of divination are said to have been practiced by women in the Hebrew Bible that mentions the necromancer of En-Dor (1 Sam. 28) and the women who “prophesy” (*mit-nabbē’ôt*) in some rather technical way in Ezekiel 13:17–23.⁵⁷ In general, however, the prophetic role appears to be clearly less dependent on gender than other methods of divination. There must be features in the prophetic and/or magical *agency* that explain the gender flexibility which makes prophecy a special case of divinatory agency, enabling a socio-religious role that was not gender-specific.

At this juncture, it is necessary to explain the meaning of the concept of agency. As prophecy, by any definition, is a religious activity and is practiced within a religious framework, the *prophetic agency* should be understood as a

⁵⁴ See, e.g. Grabbe 2013.

⁵⁵ For male and female sorcerers (*kaššāpu/kaššāptu*), see Sefati and Klein 2002.

⁵⁶ Zsolnay 2009: 107; see also Asher-Greve 2002.

⁵⁷ See Hamori 2013; 2015; cf. Stökl 2013b; Bowen 1999.

subspecies of the *religious agency*, which the sociologist Laura M. Leming understands

as a personal and collective claiming and enacting of dynamic religious identity. As *religious* identity, it may include, but is not limited to, a received or an acquired identity, whether passed on by family, religious group, or other social entity such as an educational community, or actively sought. To constitute *religious agency*, this identity is claimed and lived as one's own, with an insistence on active ownership.⁵⁸

Although Leming's definition rises from the modern world (her case study is about woman-conscious Catholic women in America), she underlines that agency "is not practiced in a vacuum but is enacted within specific social contexts," which, in my view, makes her idea of religious agency equally applicable to other contexts, including ancient sources. Importantly, this definition encompasses both the received tradition and an "active ownership," thus making it possible to understand religious agency in terms of both transmission and transformation.⁵⁹

Prophetic agency, therefore, can be understood as *instrumental* (silenced subjectivity: prophets as passive intermediaries) as well as *independent* (endorsed subjectivity: prophets as active agents).⁶⁰ These types of agency are neither gender-specific nor mutually exclusive, because the prophetic agency is ultimately defined by the audience. The agency of one and the same prophet can be regarded simultaneously as instrumental from the point of view of contemporary religious authorities, and independent from that of contemporary critics or modern scholars. When interpreted as passive intermediaries, the actual agency is ascribed to the divinity, whose authority the transmissive action of the human prophet does not threaten. When seen as active agents, the prophets, both male and non-male, are not merely regarded as instruments of the divine agent but also as acting on their own.

Prophecy aims to influence the audience by way of referring to the divine authorization behind the word spoken by the human prophet. Therefore, it has *both* the transmissive function as reflecting the religious framework known to the audience, *and* the transformative function, urging the addressees to heed the potentially unexpected divine ordinances. These two functions are characteristic of ancient divination in general; Walter Burkert speaks of a paradox of divination "between establishment and crisis or even revolt, between the integration of divination's proceedings and representatives into

⁵⁸ Leming 2007: 74. ⁵⁹ Cf. Leming 2007, 88.

⁶⁰ I owe these two aspects of agency to Hovi 2011: 199: "1) Agency as transmission, effectuation, representation: rhetorically silenced subjectivity, 'working as God's instrument,' 2) Agency as subjectivity, independent action, decision-making: implicit accent on subjectivity, 'the authority of a Christian as an independent individual'" (my translation).

the social-political system and divination as a disruptive, revolutionary, sometimes uncontrollable power.”⁶¹

The gender aspect of religious, or prophetic, agency is fundamentally dependent on the prevailing gender matrix in the given social context of prophetic activity; in other words, gender matrix precedes prophetic agency, not vice versa. Therefore, whatever observations are made concerning the significance of gender in prophetic goings-on, they must always be measured against the gendered structure of the given (usually patriarchal) society, paying attention to features in prophetic agency that deviate from the standard expectations of gender roles and their enacting.

One conspicuous and potentially significant contextual factor that sets prophets apart from technical diviners is their education or—as our sources suggest—the lack thereof. Extispicy, astrology, and other methods of omen interpretation were impossible to practice without skills that were only obtainable by means of long education in omen literature and in techniques. While female scribes existed in Mesopotamia,⁶² only male persons are known as practitioners of scholarly divination. There is no indication that any such skills were required of prophets regardless of their gender, whether we look at Mari, Assyria, Greece, or the Hebrew Bible.

Particular techniques were probably needed in prophecy as well, but these could have been learned in temple communities. On the other hand, prophecy was not always a permanent role confined to temples and based on a systematic education but could be assumed by anyone whose divine possession, however transient, was acknowledged by the audience. Anyone could achieve an altered state of consciousness required for prophesying, and there was no difference between men and women in this respect. This may partly explain the gender flexibility of prophecy. The image of prophecy obtainable from Mesopotamian, biblical, and Greek texts alike tolerates individuals who occasionally speak divine words without carrying a prophetic title or otherwise acknowledged prophetic role. At Mari in particular, women report prophetic dreams. Wives, servants and slave-girls are acting as mediators of allegedly divine words in texts from both Mari and Assyria.⁶³

In these cases, the idea of the divine possession as a way for women to act out their otherwise underprivileged agency may suggest itself. The prophetic role enabled women to open their mouths in public because they were expected to talk divine words—not as themselves but as mere instruments of

⁶¹ Burkert 2005: 43 (= 2011: 153).

⁶² See, e.g. Lion 2001; for Neo-Assyrian evidence, see, e.g. SAA 7 24 r. 2 mentioning six female *Ar[amean]* scribes.

⁶³ e.g. the “spouse of a free man” in *20; Aḫatum, the servant girl of Dagan-malik in *24; the slave girl of Bel-aḫu-uṣur in *115.

gods speaking through them.⁶⁴ I will soon return to the question whether this deprived them of their own agency altogether.

In the majority of cases, the appreciation of male and female prophets and their sayings is due to their affiliation with temples that provide them with an accredited background. It indeed seems to have mattered where the oracles were spoken: the temples of Apollo at Delphi, Didyma, and Claros, the temples of Annunitum at Mari and Dagan in Terqa, as well as the temple of Ištar in Arbela were acknowledged as sources of reliable prophecy. This is not to say that prophetic agency would never have been acknowledged without such background, but it deserves attention that temples, along with the royal palace, were institutions where women actually had an acknowledged agency as priests, prophets, and in other roles, as members of communities that communicated with other parts of the society.⁶⁵

Especially in Mesopotamian sources, there are several implications of communication between palace women and women affiliated with temples, and it would be worth investigating to what extent the personal ties between the women in palaces and temples actually contributed to the public role of the prophets, women prophets in particular, in the society at large. Palace women, such as Queen Šibtu and the royal ladies Addu-duri and Inib-šina at Mari,⁶⁶ and Queen Mother Naqia of Assyria,⁶⁷ seem to have maintained close contact with temples where prophecies were uttered, and they turn out to have been decisive vehicles, not only of the reception of prophecy in their own times, but also of the political use of prophecy and preservation of prophetic oracles for posterity.

The prophetic role could be assumed continuously. This was most likely the case in the temple of Apollo at Delphi, where the Pythias held a permanent post involving sexual abstinence as a guarantee of their ritual purity.⁶⁸ Whether lifelong commitments or chastity were required of Mesopotamian prophets escapes our knowledge. However, as we have seen, several administrative documents from different periods use “prophets” (male and female) as classifications that define their place within the temple community in a way that suggests a fixed role and position.⁶⁹

⁶⁴ For the possessed women’s “instrumental agency,” see Keller 2002; for a critical review of her theory, see Stöckl 2008; 2011.

⁶⁵ For the royal women’s position and agency, see Teppo 2007a, 2007b; Svärd 2008, 2015; Melville 2004.

⁶⁶ See, e.g. Dalley 2002: 97–111; Malamat 1998: 175–91; Batto 1974: 8–21.

⁶⁷ See Melville 1999; Svärd 2008: 31–3; Šašková 2010: 153–4, 170–1.

⁶⁸ Rather than implying an imagined sexual relationship with the god Apollo (thus Sissa 1990; cf. Trampedach 2015: 203), the “virginity” of the Pythia has to do with her need to be free of bodily pollution. “The best way to accomplish this would have been to forbid the Pythia from engaging in sex at all during her term of office” (Johnston 2008: 42; cf. M. A. Flower 2008: 224–5).

⁶⁹ i.e. *67a (Old Babylonian), *110 (Neo-Assyrian), *119 (Ur III), *123 (Middle Assyrian), *130 (Neo-Babylonian), *135c, *135h, *135j (Old Babylonian), *135o (Neo-Babylonian); see “Legal and Administrative Texts” in Chapter 2 in this volume.

At Mari, some palace women actually seem to have assumed the prophetic role themselves.⁷⁰ This, among other things, suggests that the prophetic role was not always understood as a permanent function or profession; rather, it was a role that could be assumed according to personal qualifications. This may have been the case with the famous woman with the title *qammatum* at Mari,⁷¹ or the female votaries (*šēlūtu*), that is, women dedicated to a temple, who are attested as prophets in two Assyrian texts.⁷² Acting as a prophet was probably not a fixed part of their job description, but some votaries transmitted divine words because of their acknowledged personal ability to achieve the required state of consciousness.

The same could apply to sexually ambivalent or intersex people; indeed, the representation of non-male persons other than women deserves full attention. The Greek sources include, to my knowledge, only one reference to the androgynous Scythian prophets, *Enarees hoi androgynoi* who received their divinatory power from Aphrodite,⁷³ but we should not forget Teiresias, the mythical blind diviner who was endowed with both sexes and who mastered both intuitive and technical types of divination.⁷⁴

In Mesopotamia, devotees of Ištar called *assinnu*, *kurgarrū*, *sinnišānu*, sometimes also *kalū* and *kulu'u* are mentioned in several texts from different periods featuring in different roles including cross-dressing, ritual dance, battle-scenes, healing, lament, and prophecy. The gender performance of these people is unconventional, combining male and female features.⁷⁵ Two *assinnus*, Šelebum and Ili-ḥaznaya, are known to have prophesied at Mari, while in Assyrian sources, the gender ambiguity is suggested by three unclear gender specifications in three colophons of the tablet SAA 9 1 containing ten oracles: “Issar-la-tašiyaṭ, a man from Arbela,”⁷⁶ “the woman Bayâ, a man from

⁷⁰ Thus Addu-duri, King Zimri-Lim's mother (*42), Zunana, an otherwise unknown servant of the king (*37), and Šimatum, Zimri-Lim's daughter (*44).

⁷¹ **7, 9, 13. ⁷² **74, 114. For the *šēlūtu*, see Svärd 2008: 70–80.

⁷³ Herodotus 4.67.1–2.

⁷⁴ For Teiresias, see Lange 2007: 473–5, 477–80; Brisson 1976, 2002: 116–30; Ugolini 1995.

⁷⁵ The sexual status and religious function of the *assinnu* and the *kurgarrū* has been a matter of debate for a long time. In the most recent discussion, some scholars emphasize their “third gender” role (Peled 2014; 2016) while others disregard the sexual aspect in favor of the martial role they play in cultic performances (Zsolnay 2013; cf. Stökl 2013a). Yet others regard them as ecstatic devotees of Ištar participating rituals, the purpose of which was salvation for the initiates (Parpola 1997: xxxi–xxxvi; Lapinkivi 2004: 155–66), or, with more modest theological connotations, representatives of liminal sexuality under the aegis of Ištar (Esztári and Vér 2015: 11–21; Assante 2009: 34–49; Teppo 2008; Nissinen 1998b). Saana Svärd and I argue that the primary context of the performance of the *assinnu* was the worship of Ištar, and the liminal gender was but an aspect of his performance as a member of the worshipping community. Other aspects, such as the martial and prophetic roles, belonged to the status of the *assinnu* as well. See Svärd and Nissinen, forthcoming.

⁷⁶ *68 i 28–9 (m^{ld}15—*la—ta-ši-ia-at* DUMU URU.arba-il); the masculine determinative preceding the name is written over an erased feminine determinative.

Arbela,⁷⁷ and “the woman Ilussa-am[ur], a m[an] from Assur.”⁷⁸ Some scholars have expressed their doubts about these colophons as reflecting a real gender ambivalence, suggesting scribal errors as the reason for the ambiguity,⁷⁹ but I find it improbable that the otherwise very competent and meticulous scribe had managed to create more than one mistake on one and the same tablet, hence I follow Simo Parpola’s readings which to me make a perfect sense.⁸⁰

The *assinnus* and their colleagues are impossible to classify in modern gender categories. The sources do not inform us about their sexual orientation or bodily appearance. In recent scholarship, their sexual otherness has been both emphasized⁸¹ and disregarded.⁸² They have traditionally been called “transvestites,” “bisexuals,” even “cult homosexuals,” but these designations are all misleading since they all derive from the modern understanding of “sexuality.” Perhaps the best word to describe them is “queer,” because that is what they were even in the eyes of their contemporaries.⁸³ Their unconventional non-gender or third-gender role was probably not considered “normal” in the sense of the average; nevertheless, their marked difference from other people was divinely sanctioned. They were what they were by divine ordinance, and their very appearance conveyed a message to the people. Their existence had a mythological explanation, and their role was institutionalized because they “existed between myth and reality and embodied the divine Otherness.”⁸⁴ This was also the justification of their manifest transgression of conventional sexual roles: being neither men nor women, they were not expected to engage in ordinary family life or to conform to the dominant and active sexual role of a male citizen. Rather, they reflected Ištar’s alterity, emulating her power to transgress sexual boundaries, thus highlighting acceptable gender roles by way of manifestly violating them.⁸⁵

Even though the documentation of the prophetic involvement of the queer people is not very extensive, it nevertheless demonstrates the gender flexibility of prophecy. It also tells about their affiliation with temples of Ištar and their intimacy with the worship of the goddess. They were appreciated as flesh-and-blood manifestations of the alterity of Ištar, hence their social status was due to

⁷⁷ *71 ii 40 (MÍ.ba-ia-a DUMU URU.arba-il); the discrepancy here is between the feminine determinative MÍ and the attribute DUMU “son/man.”

⁷⁸ *72 iii 5–6 (ML.DINGIR-ša—a-m[ur] URU.ŠA—URU-a-[a]); here the nisbe form indicating the domicile of the prophet can only be reconstructed as masculine, hence it contradicts the feminine determinative.

⁷⁹ See Stöckl 2009: 96–8; 2010: 55–6; 2012a: 122–3; 2013a; Weippert 2002: 33–4.

⁸⁰ Parpola 1997: 5, 6, 7; cf. pp. il–l. Note that the scribe, in fact, has himself corrected the determinative in the case of Issar-la-tašiyat.

⁸¹ Thus Peled 2014; 2016.

⁸² Thus Zsolnay 2013.

⁸³ For the concept of “queer,” see Hornsby and Stone (eds) 2011; Stone 2001; Jagose 1996.

⁸⁴ Teppo 2008: 87.

⁸⁵ For Ištar’s alterity, see especially Bahrani 2001: 141–60. Cf. Esztári and Vér 2015: 7–17.

their otherness with respect to gender. The prophetic role (probably unlike their queer role) is not likely to have been their permanent occupation, but as members of temple communities, they could assume this role if they, like the female members of the same communities, fulfilled its requirements.

However fixed and permanent, the prophetic role constituted a specific agency through which the people acknowledged as prophets enjoyed whatever appreciation belonged to that role in their societies. An essential constituent of this role was the idea of the prophets as intermediaries of divine words which, from the point of view of agency, raises the question of whose agency is, in fact, at issue. The cultural theory of divine possession makes the prophets mouth-pieces of deities who do not express their own opinions or even use words of their own, but through whom the deities speak.⁸⁶ According to this theory, the authority behind them was that of the temple and the deity, which, at least theoretically, deprived the prophets of their personal agency altogether. If the prophets were not thought of as representing themselves (or their gender, for that matter), does it make any sense at all to talk about agency in their case, and is there a difference between male and non-male prophets in this respect? A few cases from much later periods may, by analogy, be used to clarify this question.

The Montanist movement in late second- and third-century CE Phrygia is named after its first prophet and leader Montanus, but it is one of the few early Christian movements in which women assumed a prominent position. Characteristic to Montanism is prophecy, and especially the female prophets, who are best known from the texts of Christian heresiologists but for whom there is also some inscriptional evidence.⁸⁷ Three female prophets, Maximilla, Priscilla, and Quintilla, are well-known leaders of the Montanist movement, but they were not the only women who assumed leadership of the movement. The Montanist prophets are refuted by the heresiologists, not only because of the (wrong kind of) ecstatic behavior of the prophets and their claim to new revelation, but also because of the prominent position of the female prophets who prophesied in public and even tried to lead men.⁸⁸ Hence the prophetic agency of the Montanist women was not seen as purely instrumental but all too independent by contemporaries.

In the late Middle Ages, there was a heightened interest in prophecy and mysticism, and female visionaries such as Teresa of Ávila, Hildegard of Bingen, Julian of Norwich, Caterina da Siena, and Birgitta of Sweden enjoyed a considerable spiritual authority based on their visionary experiences and

⁸⁶ e.g. Keller 2002.

⁸⁷ See Marjanen 2013; Humm 2009: 152–81. The Montanists are mentioned, among others, by Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* 5.15–19; Hippolytus, *Haer.* 8.19; Epiphanius, *Pan.* 48–9; and Tertullianus (e.g. *Jejun.* 1) who differs from other heresiologists by his more favorable attitude towards Montanism; for the inscriptions, see Tabbernee 1997.

⁸⁸ e.g. Origen in *Fr. 1 Cor.* 14:36; see Marjanen 2013: 141–3.

prophetic agency rather than hierarchical authority. In their case, the prophetic activity was socially sanctioned in a way that the women were “excused” their gender because of their divine vocation;⁸⁹ in this sense, their agency was perceived and acknowledged as that of “the hammer and the flute,” but this neither means the gender did not matter, nor that these women had no agency of their own—quite to the contrary.

The prophetic and visionary powers of women, acknowledged and appreciated as they were and are in many cultures, were sometimes also perceived as threatening to the male religious authority, which may have led to a decline of women’s mediatory roles. In the tenth- to the twelfth-century CE church, some women even exercised roles belonging to the clerical sphere, but from the early fourteenth century on, women’s quasi-clerical roles faded out.⁹⁰ This demonstrates not only that gender indeed mattered, but also that the women were perceived of as having an independent agency, contrasting the ecclesiastical authority.⁹¹

Even in the wake of the emergent Protestantism which generally disapproved of mystics and prophets regardless of their gender, and deprived women of their prophetic roles, there were some who actually prophesied, such as the Anabaptist Ursula Jost who wished to be a prophet, actively sought prophetic visions, and even had them published by her patroness Margaretha Prüss in Strasbourg in the 1520s.⁹² Ursula presents herself as a prime example of the coexistence of instrumental and independent agency: as the mediator of divine visions, she appeared as the “hammer and the flute” of the divine word, but as an employer of cutting-edge media technology, her agency was emphatically independent.

Female prophecy flourished temporarily also in the British Atlantic dissenter communities in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. The position of women prophets and the function of genre varied: among the Quakers female prophets were recognized due to the belief that there was neither male nor female in Christ and they did not attract a following, while some women influenced by Behmenism⁹³ such as Jane Lead (1624–1704) and Ann Bathurst (c. 1638–1704) rose to leadership positions as millenarian reformers. However marginal in the larger society, these women were considered by many as female

⁸⁹ See Stjerna 2009: 12–13; cf. Snyder 2007: 282.

⁹⁰ See especially Macy 2008; cf. Bynum 1982: 9–21, 250–4; 1987: 21–3.

⁹¹ Bynum 1987: 23: “The period was one of deep hostility to visionary and mystical males as well. But the ambivalence of church authorities and theologians about women mystics also reflected virulent misogyny. . . . Woman’s religious role as inspired vessel had come to seem utterly different from man’s role as priest, preacher, and leader by virtue of clerical office.”

⁹² For her, see Stjerna 2009: 17–22.

⁹³ Behmenism was a movement inspired by the teachings of Jacob Böhme (1575–1624), a German theosopher and theologian, according to whom the divine gender included a female aspect, the Divine Wisdom. For Behmenism in England, see Gibbons 1996.

representatives of the Divine Wisdom, and their acknowledged instrumental agency gave them the opportunity to execute their independent agency as well.⁹⁴

A general downplaying of women's mediatory roles seems not to have taken place in the ancient Near East, where the female contribution to the realm of worship was, by and large, well established. Even the Hebrew Bible, while not recognizing female priesthood, acknowledges female prophets, some of them assuming important roles, such as Huldah in the initial phase of the Josianic reform (2 Kgs 22:14–20), or Noadiah as the primary opponent of Nehemiah (Neh. 6:14). That their number is considerably smaller than that of male prophets, however, makes women prophets look like an exception rather than the rule. To what extent the paucity of women prophets conforms to the historical reality, or reflects a patriarchal bias of the editors of the biblical texts, remains a matter of dispute.⁹⁵ At any rate, it is evident that in the Hebrew Bible, the agency of the female prophets is consistent with the ideology of the literary construction within which they appear. This can be seen, for instance, in the profoundly Deuteronomistic presentation of Huldah in 2 Kings 22.⁹⁶

More tangible information of women's divinatory role as potentially inferior to that of male persons may be drawn from the Mari letters. Esther Hamori has paid attention to the references to the enclosure of the prophet's "hair and fringe" (*šārtum u sissiktum*) in letters reporting the prophet's performance, which are twice as common if the prophet is a woman or an *assinnu* than if the prophet is a male person. Since these items were used for a ritual verification of the prophecy, this evidence suggests that prophecies uttered by women and the *assinnus* were thought of as less reliable, hence implying a lower status of non-male prophets.⁹⁷ Both at Mari and in Assyria, the social standing of women prophets was probably related to their association with influential palace women on the one hand, and to the prestige of their home temples on the other hand.

Even in Greek literature, the legendary female prophet Cassandra is not believed but is accused of being mentally ill, and in early Jewish texts, female

⁹⁴ For the seventeenth- to eighteenth-century female prophets in the British Atlantic world, see Bouldin 2015. According to her, "prophecy always remained most useful to those on the fringes of the society because it allowed them to make the claim that their message should be heard since it came from God. This was especially true of female prophecy, which gave women the opportunity to travel, speak publicly, and publish writings in a time when entrance into the public sphere was difficult" (Bouldin 2015: 190).

⁹⁵ e.g. I. Fischer 2002 believes that the impact of women prophets in ancient Israel was much more significant than the editors of the biblical texts want to admit. Stöckl 2009, on the other hand, thinks that the prevalence of male prophets in the Hebrew Bible corresponds to the male gender of Yahweh and is, therefore, not the construction of the editors.

⁹⁶ For Huldah, see, e.g. Scheuer 2015; Ilan 2010; Weems 2003.

⁹⁷ Hamori 2012. The texts in question are **10, 11, 13, 14, 24, 27, 36, 42 (woman), 8, 23 (*assinnu*), 2, 25, 29, 39 and ARM 26 226 (man).

prophets are often considered unreliable.⁹⁸ Sometimes, as in the case of the Delphic Pythia, influential positions of women as mediators are well-established and based on a long-term tradition, but this did not necessarily spare them from male criticism.⁹⁹ Moreover, the oracular process in the sanctuaries of Apollo was managed by the *prophētēs* and other male temple officials who mediated and, perhaps, interpreted the divine words pronounced by the female prophet to the consultants. The management of the oracles by male personnel probably reduced significantly the independent agency of the Pythia and other Greek female prophets,¹⁰⁰ but did not necessarily make them merely passive players.¹⁰¹

Very often the prophetic authority of women dependent on the personal appreciation and qualifications of individual characters, such as the above-mentioned Teresa, Hildegard, Julian, Caterina, and Birgitta, or, to take examples from my home country, some early leaders of Finnish eighteenth-century revival movements like Liisa Eerikintytär,¹⁰² and the famous sleeping preachers of late nineteenth-century Finland, Karoliina Utriainen and Helena Konttinen.¹⁰³ These women were typically individuals who were highly appreciated in their role as mediators, but who did not establish an enduring tradition of female religious leadership. The revival movements were taken over by men, and the preaching while asleep was not continued by subsequent generations of women. This, I think, highlights both the independent and the instrumental aspect of the prophetic agency of these women.

Examples of this kind could be multiplied, and they show how universal a phenomenon women's involvement in prophetic and related activities is; even in today's world, the gender dynamics of prophetic agency can be structured along similar lines, for instance, in neo-charismatic movements.¹⁰⁴ I am

⁹⁸ e.g. Aeschylus, *Ag.* 1202–14 and Apollodorus, *Epitome* [*Ep.*] 3.7.5 on Cassandra; *Sibylline Oracles* [*Sib. Or.*] 3.814b–816a on the Sibyl; *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum* (Pseudo-Philo) 9:9–10 on Miriam; *Jub.* 27:1–7; 35:6–9 on Rebecca; see Tervanotko forthcoming.

⁹⁹ Cf. the rather slanderous downplaying of the Delphic Pythia in the 2nd century CE by Aelius Aristides, who claims the Pythian *promanteis* cannot even remember what they prophesied (*Or.* 34–5).

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Raphals 2013: 275; Graf 2009: 590. Cf. Ustinova 2013: 40: “While most ancient Mediterranean cultures tolerated ecstatic prophecy as a marginal phenomenon only, in Greece its institutionalization in oracular sanctuaries was the utmost the polis society could do to regulate the mysterious sphere of the prophetic *mania*.”

¹⁰¹ Cf. M. A. Flower 2015: 299; Maurizio 1997: 75.

¹⁰² See Sulkunen 1999; I have found no references to her in literature written in English. Liisa Eerikintytär (Eerontytär/Eriksdotter) was a shepherd whose powerful religious experience in 1756 while reading Arthur Dent's *The Plain Man's Pathway to Heaven* (translated into Finnish) made her a leader of an ecstatic movement in southwestern Finland. The movement, whose leadership was soon taken over by men, is still alive in a much less ecstatic form, known as “rukoilevaisuus” (the “Prayerful”).

¹⁰³ See Stjerna 2001; Lindblom 1973: 13–18; Voipio 1951; Puukko 1935.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. Hovi 2011: 193 (English abstract): “Even when gender roles are defined as per fundamentalist Christianity, attitudes to personal experience and the impact of the individual spiritual gift overridingly govern actorship.”

tempted to think that religious agency is not merely about culturally determined contingencies in each individual case but something that the cognitive scientists of religion would explain as a universal feature produced by the human mind.¹⁰⁵ The chicken-and-the-egg question is, of course, whether the non-gender-specificity of the prophetic role is due to a universal idea of the aptitude of non-male people to divine-human communication, or vice versa.

Whose agency is it, then, that these women are executing? It can certainly be said from the emic point of view, that since the prophets were regarded as mouthpieces of the divine, their own personality was indifferent. The speaker, after all, is the deity, hence the person of the prophet, whether gendered or otherwise, did not matter, and, therefore, speaking with divine voice enabled women and other non-male people to raise their own voice as well. The instrumental understanding of prophetic agency, however, does not sufficiently explain the recurrent appreciation of individual women whose impact was quite evidently bound to their highly personal qualifications, which sometimes provided them with a considerable authority. There is enough evidence from ancient Near Eastern sources, too, that prophets, whether male or female, did not just passively repeat divine words, barely aware of what they said, but really did *act* as independent individuals.

Both ways, we should not forget the social context within which the prophetic agency was enacted. The instrumental aspect is emphasized in a male-dominated environment where the non-male voice is acknowledged and authorized only as an echo of the divine speech. Even the independent agency, while occasionally intruding into the hierarchical structures of the society, is ultimately dependent on the same structures which in due course harness the prophetic agency to serve its purposes. This can be seen, for instance, in the Assyrian oracles which, as a whole, preach the Assyrian state ideology, hiding the personal input of the prophets, whether female or male.

The prophetic action as such is not gender-specific, hence it is not necessarily, and primarily, *women's* agency the female prophets execute but, rather, *prophetic* agency in so far as the action is presented as part of the prophetic activity. This notwithstanding, gender does matter because prophecy appears as one of the few public, socially appreciated roles that were not inextricably linked with male gender and, therefore, could be assumed by non-males even in a patriarchal society. The female contribution to different kinds of divine-human communication is of remarkable significance in the history of religion. This may be understood as implying the gender neutrality of the religious agency but, on the other hand, it also exhibits specific domains where non-males are allowed to transgress the socially sanctioned gender-based boundaries.

¹⁰⁵ For a cognitive view on divination, see, e.g. Pyysiäinen 2009; J. Sørensen 2007.

GENDER AND DIVINE AGENCY

As much as the human agency, more or less gendered, can be seen by today's scholars as the driving force behind the prophetic phenomenon and institution, the ancient audiences of prophecy perceived of it as based entirely on a superhuman, or divine agency. As one of the branches of the art of divination, prophecy was one of the channels of an alleged divine-human communication, in which the human prophet's action, whether male or non-male, was indeed understood in an instrumental manner. Divine agency, of course, is something that can only be believed; however, if divine agency is taken for granted, as was and is done everywhere where the concept of divination has a meaning, agency can be attributed to divine beings on the basis of the humans' own experience of agency.¹⁰⁶

The gendered theological model that prevailed everywhere in the ancient Eastern Mediterranean (which is not primarily a matter of "polytheism" but of a gendered image of the divine),¹⁰⁷ raises the question of the role of gender in the divine prophetic agency. As we have seen, both male and female deities can be found as divine speakers of prophetic oracles. The following deities are mentioned by their names in the extant Near Eastern texts as the source of prophecy or as the tutelary deity of the prophets:¹⁰⁸

Male:

- Adad (**50, 61)
- Adad of Aleppo (**2, 135i)
- Adad of Kallassu (*1)
- Amon (*142)
- Amu of Ḫubšalum (*49)
- Aššur (**84, 85, 86)
- Baalshamayn (*137)
- Dagan (**3, 9, 12, 15, 16, 20, 25, 30, 31, 34, 37, 46, 53, 60, 62, 65a)
- Dagan of Šubatūm (*63)
- Dagan of Terqa (**7, 9, 38, 39)
- Dagan of Tuttul (**19, 135j)
- Enlil (*135b)
- Itur-Mer (**41, 55/59)

¹⁰⁶ Pyysiäinen 2009: 41–2: "Humans have immediate experience of their own agency and also attribute agency to others whose behavior shows regular patterns. . . . Agency can also be (counterintuitively) transferred to natural objects and artifacts"—and, of course, to divine beings. For God as supernatural agent, mainly from the Christian point of view, see *ibid.*, 95–136.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. Stökl 2009: 99. Even in Simo Parpola's "monotheistic" model of the Assyrian religion (see Parpola 2000) the image of the divine is gendered, since different manifestations of the one God Aššur are both male and female, Ištar among the foremost of them.

¹⁰⁸ The list includes also the cases where the name of the deity is not mentioned but the deity is otherwise recognizable to a high degree of probability; see Appendix 1.

- Marduk/Bel (**47, 71, 106, 112, 118d, 118e, 118g)
- Milcom (*136)
- Nabû (**71, 118d)
- Nergal (*55/59)
- Nusku (**115, 118f)
- Šamaš (**4, 48, 50a)
- Sin (*118f)
- Tarhunza (*143)
- Yahweh (**139, 141)

Female:

- Annunitum (**7, 8, 10, 22, 23, 24, 42, 58)
- Banitu (*78)
- Belet-biri (*43)
- Belet-ekallim (**19, 21, 45)
- Diritum (*18)
- Hīšamitum (*5)
- Inanna (**135a, 135b)
- Inanna of Girsu (*119)
- Inanna of Zabala (*135g)
- Ištar (**51, 52, 97, 118, 123, 118c, 135b)
- Ištar of Arbela (**68, 69, 70, 71, 73, 75, 76, 77, 80, 81, 87, 88, 90, 91, 94, 100, 101, 107, 113, 114)
- Ištar of Bišra (*50b)
- Ištar of Nineveh (**50a, 107)
- Kītītum (**66, 67, 67a)
- Lady of Kidmuri (*99)
- Mullissu (**72, 81, 92, 94)
- Nanaya (**134, 135a)
- Ninḫursag (**29, 56/57)
- Šauška of Nineveh (*121)
- Urkittu/Lady of Uruk (**83, 135o)
- Zababa (*135b)
- Zarpanitu (*118e)

This list immediately reveals that, according to the available sources, one god and one goddess stand out as principal Near Eastern deities of prophecy: Dagan, who appears in twenty-three of the fifty-seven cases where a male deity is involved, and Ištar in one form or another, who is the goddess of prophecy in no less than fifty-five out of sixty-six occurrences of female deities. At Mari, Dagan is the deity in almost two-thirds of the cases involving a male god (23/36). In Assyria, Ištar is the sole female deity of prophecy, appearing in her different local manifestations, such as Mullissu (Ištar of Nineveh), Lady of

Kidmuri (Ištar of Calah), and Urkittu (Ištar of Uruk). Also at Mari (Annunitum), Ešnunna (Kititum), and Babylonia (Inanna, Nanaya), the most important female oracular deity is an Ištar goddess.¹⁰⁹

The two main corpora of prophetic texts, hence, give the impression that prophetic activity was centered in the temples of Dagan and Ištar without, however, having been restricted to them. The evidence coming from other sources is too meager to warrant similar conclusions regarding other Near Eastern societies. It deserves attention, however, that in the few West Semitic cases from Ammon, Hamath, and (probably) Judah, the oracular god is always the state god, which corresponds to the “henotheistic” or “monolatric” pattern of worship in these societies.

In Greece, as has been noted above, the principal oracular gods are Apollo and Zeus. Locally, a few other gods and ancient heroes are mentioned as giving oracles,¹¹⁰ but it is quite exceptional to find female deities in this function. The Greek sources only know of an oracle of Hera Akraia in Perachora,¹¹¹ another of Gaia in Aegira,¹¹² and yet another of Nyx in Megara.¹¹³ None of these counted among major oracle sites. Only Perachora is archaeologically attested, and only Aegira involves a female prophet, but the reference seems to be inspired by the analogy to the Delphic Pythia rather than historical circumstances. The prevalence of male gods as Greek oracular deities, hence, also appears as an established and gendered cultural pattern.

We have seen that, even though there is no universal gender correspondence between prophets and deities, the female deity/non-male prophet pattern clearly prevails in Assyria, and male deity/male prophet pattern seems to be the standard pattern in the West Semitic world, as far as the small number of sources yields a realistic picture of the historical phenomenon they reflect. What difference does it make, then, whether the speaking deity is male or female, and is the gender of the prophet significant in any way with regard to what the gods say?

Only the prophetic corpora of Mari and Assyria allow comparisons between the utterances of male and female oracular deities. The foremost topic of prophetic oracles in both corpora is the reign of the ruling king. The divine support for the king is affirmed by gods and goddesses alike and conveyed by

¹⁰⁹ I will not delve deeper into the question of whether these designations of female deities denote separate but related deities (S. L. Allen 2015) or aspects and manifestations of Ištar (Parpola 1997), although my own analysis gravitates towards the latter alternative.

¹¹⁰ These include, e.g. Amphiloachus in Mallos (Pausanias 1.34); Dionysos (Pausanias 10.33), Heracles in Bura and in Hyettos (*SEG* 26.524), and Tiresias, whose oracle site, according to Plutarch, was abandoned (Plutarch, *Mor.* 5.434c).

¹¹¹ Strabo 8.6.22; see Friese 2010: 380–1; Menadier 2002; Dunbabin 1951.

¹¹² Pliny, *Nat.* 28.147 mentions the oracle of Gaia at Aegira, located in a cave where a priestess, having drunk bull’s blood, descended to utter prophecy; see Friese 2010: 372; Ustinova 2009: 88.

¹¹³ The only reference to this is Pausanias 1.40.6; see Friese 2010: 377.

both male and non-male prophets, at Mari as well as in Assyria. The god Adad of Aleppo claims to have restored Zimri-Lim to his father's throne,¹¹⁴ while the goddess Diritum declares that the Upper Country is given to him.¹¹⁵ The establishment of the rule of Esarhaddon is incessantly asserted by Ištar¹¹⁶ and, on the occasion of his enthronement, also by Aššur;¹¹⁷ the proclamation of Assurbanipal's kingship has been preserved only as words of Ištar.¹¹⁸ Another principal theme of prophecies, the destruction of enemies, is similarly non-gender-specific, abundantly proclaimed by male and female gods and prophets.¹¹⁹ Cultic instructions and criticism, too, can be found in different gender configurations,¹²⁰ and the same is true for political advice.¹²¹ So far, thus, the divine prophetic agency does not show any clear traces of gender-specificity of any kind.

This, however, is not the whole truth about gender and divine agency in ancient Near Eastern prophecy. What really makes difference in this respect is the gender-specific language attached to the goddess Ištar especially in the Assyrian sources. Belligerent language and warlike appearance, usually perceived of as markers of masculinity, may seem ill fitting for a female deity, but in the case of Ištar, "the most warlike among the gods,"¹²² they form an indispensable part of her image. As a liminal figure, Ištar—who without doubt was identified as female and not as a hermaphrodite¹²³—was "the place of all extremes"¹²⁴ with formidable destructive powers but also with great sexual allure and excessive femininity.

The Assyrian Ištar is not particularly well known as executing motherly care or other parental functions; however, this is the role she has been given often enough in the Neo-Assyrian prophetic oracles to make it one of the central metaphors used of her in this material.¹²⁵ In Neo-Assyrian oracles, the Ištars

¹¹⁴ **1 (male and female prophets), *2 (male prophet).

¹¹⁵ *18 (male prophet); cf. *21 (Belet-ekallim, unknown prophet).

¹¹⁶ e.g. *71 (genderwise ambiguous prophet), *73 (unknown prophet), *75 (female prophet), *77 (male prophet), *80 (male prophet).

¹¹⁷ **85, 86 (male prophet); cf. Bel *106 (unknown prophet).

¹¹⁸ **92, 94 (Mullissu and Ištar of Arbela; female prophets).

¹¹⁹ Cf. Mari: **19, 38, 47 (male god, male prophet); **5, 18 (female god, male prophet); *22 (female god, *assinnu*); Assyria: **85, 86 (male god, male prophet), **88, 101 (female god, male prophet); **69, 74, 81, 82, 94 (female god, female prophet); **68, 79 (female god, genderwise ambiguous prophet); *100 (female god, unknown prophet); *118g (male god, unknown prophet); *135b (female gods, unknown prophet).

¹²⁰ Mari: **4, 25, 30, 31 (male god, male prophet); *29 (female god, male prophet); Assyria: **80, 88 (female god, male prophet); *99 (female god, unknown prophet); **111, 113 (unknown god, female prophet).

¹²¹ Mari: *4 (male god, male prophet); **7, 9 (female god, female prophet); Assyria: *107 (female god; unknown prophet); *115 (male informant on the alleged word of a male god by a female prophet).

¹²² *101 v 44.

¹²³ See Groneberg 1986.

¹²⁴ Bahrani 2001: 159; for the paradoxical character of Ištar, see Bahrani 2001: 141–60.

¹²⁵ See Parpola 1997: xxxvi–xli; Weippert 1985: 62–4 (= 2014: 65–7).

of Arbela and Nineveh present the Assyrian king as the “creation of their hands” (*binūt qātīšīna*).¹²⁶ Esarhaddon, as the legitimate heir of the Assyrian throne, is called “son of Mullissu” (Mullissu is another name of Ištar of Nineveh),¹²⁷ and Assurbanipal receives the message: “You whose mother is Mullissu, fear not! You whose nurse is the Lady of Arbela, fear not!”¹²⁸ Ištar declares herself as the father and mother of Esarhaddon, whom she raised between her wings,¹²⁹ while Assurbanipal, in another context, claims he knew no father and mother but grew up in the lap of the goddesses. He even calls Mullissu his mother who gave birth to him.¹³⁰ Sometimes the deity’s motherly function is mixed with that of a midwife or wet nurse who carries the king on her hip, breastfeeds him, and hushes him like a baby.¹³¹ This imagery reflects the Assyrian royal theology especially in Neo-Assyrian times and is not restricted to prophetic texts;¹³² however, the motherly imagery is especially common in prophecy, probably because it gives the best possible expression for the prophetic agency of Ištar combined with the extraordinary relationship between the goddess and the king.

Of the various manifestations of the goddess, Ištar of Arbela appears as the goddess of prophecy par excellence. This reflects the significance of the temples of Ištar and the temple communities in Arbela.¹³³ Especially during the reigns of Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal, “the Lady of Arbela” or “Ištar who dwells in Arbela”—often together with her *alter ego*, Ištar of Nineveh, also known as Mullissu—is one of the most frequently mentioned deities in letters, inscriptions, and prophecies.¹³⁴ The temple of Ištar of Arbela, Egašan-kalama, was one of the major temples in Assyria,¹³⁵ not only the abode of traditional secret lore¹³⁶ and awesome festivities,¹³⁷ but also of prophecy.

¹²⁶ *94:5, r. 2. ¹²⁷ *73 iv 2, 21. ¹²⁸ *92 r. 6.

¹²⁹ *82 iii 26–7. ¹³⁰ SAA 3 3:13, r. 14.

¹³¹ “I am your great midwife, I am your excellent wet nurse” (*72 iii 15–18); “Like a nurse I will carry you on my hip. I will put you, a pomegranate, between my breasts. At night I will be awake and guard you; throughout the day I will give you milk, at dawn I will hush you” (*92 r. 7–10).

¹³² Cf. the references in Parpola 1997: c n. 177–86. ¹³³ See Nissinen 2001.

¹³⁴ Ištar of Nineveh and Ištar of Arbela are two distinct manifestations of the goddess who sometimes, nevertheless, seem to virtually merge together; cf. S. L. Allen 2015: 141–99 and Porter 2005 who emphasize the distinctiveness of the two goddesses. The identities of the two Ištars may originally have been more separate, but seem to move towards a shared agency in the time of Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal at the latest, when they seem to have been regarded as manifestations of one Ištar (Parpola 1997).

¹³⁵ See Menzel 1981: 6–33; George 1993: 90 (no. 351). No traces of the temples of Arbela have been discovered, because the site has not been excavated and the center of the modern city of Erbil is built above the 30-meter accumulation of settlement layers. For recent excavations at Erbil, see Nováček 2010: 179–85. Cf. also Ur et al. 2013.

¹³⁶ The text SAA 3 38, “The Rites of Egašan-kalama,” is a further representative of the genre of mystical texts deriving from the Babylonian tradition (SAA 3 34–40), for which see Livingstone 1986.

¹³⁷ Cf. the Hymn to the City of Arbela (SAA 3 8) and the reference to a *qarītu* banquet of Ištar in SAA 13 147.

Seven out of fifteen Neo-Assyrian prophets known by their names come from Arbela,¹³⁸ and two prophets who come from outside of Arbela speak the words of Ištār of Arbela.¹³⁹ Her words are paraphrased also in the inscriptions of Assurbanipal.¹⁴⁰ All this indicates that Ištār of Arbela at this time was a national deity, not just one of the many local manifestations of the goddess. The most specific feature of her portrait is her being the primary god of prophecy.

Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal had without any doubt a distinctive relationship with Ištār of Arbela and her worship. Her temple Egašankamma was the object of both kings' special devotion.¹⁴¹ The prophetic scene described by Assurbanipal in his inscription on the war against Elam (*101) serves as a good illustration of the ideology of prophecy and the theology of Ištār, presenting her as the creator and mother of the king in a language reminiscent of the above-quoted prophecies.

According to Simo Parpola, the prophecies presenting Ištār as the wet nurse or the mother of the king¹⁴² should be understood, not merely as metaphors, but as referring to their upbringing as royal infants in the temples of Ištār in Nineveh and Arbela.¹⁴³ This practice may have begun only with Esarhaddon whose mother Naqia seems to have maintained a close contact with the prophets of Arbela.¹⁴⁴ If this theory is correct, it explains much of the special significance of the goddess Ištār, the outstanding religious position of the city of Arbela, and the special appreciation of prophecy during the rule of these two kings. In the case of Arbela, the (assumed) prophetic agency of the goddess was successfully administered by women of the palace and temple—queens, prophets, and other devotees of Ištār. Measured against the observation of Sarah Melville that “[n]ot only do the Assyrians refer officially to the king's women with intentionally impersonal language, but they also tend to ignore the relationship between royal mothers and their children,”¹⁴⁵ one is tempted to ask how much the backstage agency of these women actually influenced the structures of Assyrian religion and royal ideology.

¹³⁸ Aḫat-abiša (*75), Bayâ (**71, [79]), Dunnaša-amur (*94), Issar-la-tašiyat (*68), La-dagil-ili (**77, 83, 88), Sinqiša-amur (*69), Tašmetu-ereš (*91); note that Dunnaša-amur and Sinqiša-amur may be one and the same person (Parpola 1997: il-1). In addition, the letter *113 reports a prophecy delivered by a woman in a temple probably located in Arbela.

¹³⁹ Urkittu-šarrat from Calah (*81) and Remutti-Allati from Dara-aḫuya (*70).

¹⁴⁰ i.e. in his accounts of the campaigns against Mannea (*100) and Elam (*101).

¹⁴¹ Esarhaddon: RINAP 4 77:8–11 (Leichty 2011: 155); Assurbanipal: Borger 1996: 140 ii 7–8. Esarhaddon visualized his enduring presence in this temple by letting his doubled image be placed on the right and left sides of Ištār; see SAA 13 140 and 141.

¹⁴² Cf. **73, 82, 92; *118a, etc. In his hymn to the Ištars of Arbela and Nineveh, Assurbanipal calls himself “product of Emašmaš and Egašankamma” (SAA 3 3:10).

¹⁴³ Parpola 1997: xxxix–xl.

¹⁴⁴ She is addressed several times in the prophetic oracles (**74, 75, 78, [83], 90); cf. Nissinen 1998a: 22–4; Melville 1999: 27–9.

¹⁴⁵ Melville 2004: 54.

The exclusive relationship between the Ištar and the Assyrian king (or crown prince) has its roots in the ancient Mesopotamian tradition of alliances between female deities and kings. Within this framework, as Beate Pongratz-Leisten has demonstrated, the goddess may assume the role of the beloved of the king in the sacred marriage, as well as the roles of divine mother, wet nurse, and midwife.¹⁴⁶ All these roles are emphatically and inevitably gendered and can be assumed by female deities only; however, they imply more than just the aspect of motherliness and fertility. While in the sacred marriage, the love between the goddess and the king (or even between a divine couple) bestows the king with the divine love and an intimate relationship with the divine world,¹⁴⁷ the role of the goddess as the (adoptive) mother of the king creates a familial tie between the king and the gods, and that of the midwife presents her as supervising the birth of the king and being its first witness.¹⁴⁸ In all these functions, the goddess is the mediatrix between the divine and human worlds, the one who transfers divine knowledge and favors to the people through the person of the king. This is the gendered divine agency of Ištar even in the case of prophecy.

The function of the female deity as mediatrix of the divine knowledge also belongs firmly to the concept of the divine council (Akk. *puḫur ilāni*) known all over the ancient Near East. Within this concept, the goddess often appears as the “diviner of the gods,” that is, the divine figure who mediates the decisions of the council of gods to humans, and this makes the concept of the divine council significant also with regard to the gendered divine agency in prophecy.¹⁴⁹ The following quotation is not from Neo-Assyrian prophecies but from the oracles of Kititum (Ištar) to Ibalpiel II, king of Ešnunna:

O king Ibalpiel, thus says Kititum: The secrets of the gods are placed before me. Because you constantly pronounce my name with your mouth, I keep disclosing the secrets of the gods for you.¹⁵⁰

The message of this oracle, probably pronounced on the occasion of Ibalpiel’s accession to the throne,¹⁵¹ is that the divine council has decided that the throne of Ešnunna belongs to Ibalpiel. The goddess Kititum, informed of the “secrets (*niširtu*) of the gods,”¹⁵² functions as the divine intermediary, who constantly communicates the arbitrations of the council of gods to the king. The same pattern is attested a full millennium later in Neo-Assyrian prophecy, where the goddess in her two manifestations as Ištar of Arbela and Mullissu

¹⁴⁶ Pongratz-Leisten 2003: 132–6.

¹⁴⁷ See Pongratz-Leisten 2008; Lapinkivi 2008.

¹⁴⁸ Cf. Pongratz-Leisten 2003: 150–5.

¹⁴⁹ See, with more evidence, Nissinen 2002a. For prophecy and the divine council in the Hebrew Bible, see also Lenzi 2008: 233–71.

¹⁵⁰ *66:1–8.

¹⁵¹ For this text, see Ellis 1987.

¹⁵² For the “secrets of the gods” in this text, and in prophecy and divination in general, see Lenzi 2008: 55–62; 2014: 68–77.

makes the following statement to Assurbanipal by the mouth of the female prophet Dunnaša-amur:

In the assembly of all the gods (*ina puḥur ilāni kalāmi*) I have spoken for your life. My arms are strong and will not cast you off before the gods. My shoulders are always ready to carry you, you in particular. I keep desiring your life with my l[ip]s [...] your life, you increase life.... [In the assembly] of all the gods I incessantly speak for your good.¹⁵³

In this text, the role of the goddess as mediatrix is combined with her maternal aspect: Assurbanipal is described as the “creation of their [i.e. both Ištars’] hands” (*binūt qātīšina*), and the oracle is replete with the goddesses’ compassion towards Assurbanipal.¹⁵⁴ Again, it is the intimate relationship between the king and the goddess that ultimately counts before the divine council.

The idea of the female deity’s intimacy with the world of the humans, as well as her prophetic agency within the divine council, is not restricted to Mesopotamian sources but, interestingly and importantly, finds a clearly recognizable echo in the figure of Lady Wisdom in early Judaism.¹⁵⁵ Lady Wisdom’s lovers, like those of Inanna/Ištar, are both divine and human.¹⁵⁶ The language used of her in Proverbs 8:22–31 subtly suggests an intimate relationship with God, something that Philo of Alexandria develops further in his description of the cosmogonic union between Wisdom and the creator, as the result of which Wisdom receives the seed of God and becomes the mother and the wet nurse of the universe.¹⁵⁷ In Wisdom of Solomon, too, Wisdom and God are presented in terms of a divine marriage: Wisdom is called God’s *paredros* (Wisd. 9:4), who lives in a *symbiōsis* with him, her function being the *mystis* of God’s knowledge (8:3–4).¹⁵⁸ But she is also the companion of her student, King Solomon, who is engaged in a love relationship with her (6:12–25; 7:7–14; 8:2–21); this compares well to the virtual equation of Wisdom with a wife in Proverbs 8:35 and 18:22.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵³ *94:16–24.

¹⁵⁴ Cf. Dialogue of Assurbanipal and Nabû (*118a), a text written by the same scribe and deriving from the same historical situation (Assurbanipal’s war against his brother Šamaš-šumu-ukin) as *94. In this text, Assurbanipal pleads with Nabû not to leave him “in the assembly of those who wish him ill” (*ina puḥur ḥaddānūtīšu* line r. 3; cf. lines 6, 22, r. 4) and Nabû asserts: “My pleasant mouth shall ever bless you in the assembly of great gods” (*ina puḥur ilāni rabūti* line 26; cf. line r. 11). The reason for Nabû’s intercession is that Assurbanipal, who in his childhood “sat in the lap of the Queen of Nineveh” (line r. 7), “grasps the feet of the Queen of Nineveh” and “sits next to Urkittu” (lines r. 2–3). For this text, see Atkinson 2013; de Jong 2007: 412–13; Pongratz-Leisten 1999: 249–60.

¹⁵⁵ For the figure and functions of Lady Wisdom, see, e.g. Schroer 2000; Lang 1975.

¹⁵⁶ For the following, see Zimmermann 2008.

¹⁵⁷ Philo, *Ebr.* 30–6: *mētēr kai tithēnē tōn holōn* (31).

¹⁵⁸ Wisd. 8:4: *mystis gar estin tēs tou theou epistēmēs*.

¹⁵⁹ Cf. also Prov. 4:5–8 and 4Q185 2:8–15. For Lady Wisdom in the Dead Sea Scrolls, see Crawford 1998.

Ben Sira (Sir. 51:13–30 = 11QPs^a XXI 11–17) also describes the young man’s burning desire for Lady Wisdom; especially the original Hebrew text uses euphemisms that do not even try to veil the sexual connotations of the relationship between the two. Even God is involved in this love affair, because “Those who serve her serve the Holy One; God loves those who love her” (4:14). By virtue of this love, the divine knowledge will be revealed to the lover by Wisdom herself: “When his heart is fully with me, I will set him again upon the straight path and will reveal to him my secrets (*mstry*)” (4:17–18 Heb.). Lady Wisdom’s key position in revealing divine secrets¹⁶⁰ is so closely reminiscent to Ištar-Kititum’s role in the oracles to Kings Ibalpiel of Ešnunna and Assurbanipal of Assyria that it cannot be coincidental but must belong to the same ancient Near Eastern tradition.

What, then, has all this divine–human intimacy to do with divine *prophetic* agency? In Mesopotamia, both prophecy and the sacred marriage were vehicles for conferring divine knowledge and creating a close relationship between gods and the king, and through him, the people.¹⁶¹ Even in Jewish sources, the ultimate purpose of the intimate liaison between God and the wise man is to become acquainted with divine knowledge (often read: Torah); the love affair with Wisdom symbolizes the closest possible proximity to God himself. According to Alan Lenzi, Wisdom in Proverbs 8:22–31 “is implicitly a messenger sent by Yahweh to humanity and therefore can communicate to mortals her unique cosmological knowledge”; dwelling among humanity she is a “uniquely qualified prophetic-like messenger from Yahweh bearing his wisdom to them.”¹⁶²

The prophetic aspect comes into play with the position of Lady Wisdom in the heavens, blatantly similar to that of Ištar in the Assyrian divine council. That Lady Wisdom’s dwelling was with (other) divine beings is well known from various sources, such as the Aramaic Book of Ahiqar where she is said to be set in heaven and exalted by the Lord of the holy ones (that is, of the divine council),¹⁶³ and, possibly, in the putative source texts of one of the Dead Sea Scrolls, 4Q491c, where an anonymous speaker claims to be “in the assembly of gods” (*b’dt ’lym*), “with gods” (*’m ’lym*) and “in the congregation of the holy ones” (*b’dt qdws*).¹⁶⁴

¹⁶⁰ See Beentjes 2012; B. G. Wright 2012.

¹⁶¹ Cf. Pongratz-Leisten 2008: 68–9.

¹⁶² Lenzi 2008: 361.

¹⁶³ TAD C 1.1:1 (Porten and Yardeni 1993: 36–7): “To gods, moreover, she is pre[c]ious; Wi[th her . . .] kingdoms. In heav[e]n she is set, for the Lord of the holy ones exalted [her]” (*’p l’lhn yq[y]rh hy/’m[. . .]l [. . .] mlkw’t/bšm[y]n šymh hy/ky b’l qdšn nš[h]*). For the passage, see Weigl 2010: 73–9, who reconstructs the second sentence ‘*m[h] lm[r]hm mlkw’t*’ “Ge[meinsam mit ihrem Herr ist ihr] die Herrschaft” after Kottsieper 1990: 12, 20.

¹⁶⁴ 4Q491c 1 5–8. The speaker is, actually, a male character. Since, however, the passage in the so-called “Self-Glorification Hymn” here and similar passages in 1QH^a XXVI, 4Q427, 4Q471b +4Q431 probably go back to an earlier source, it is possible that the speaker has been masculinized in the course of transmission; see my arguments in Nissinen 2015a: 173–6.

The clearest evidence, however, is provided by the book of Ben Sira,¹⁶⁵ where the self-praise of Lady Wisdom is introduced as follows: “In the assembly of the Most High (*ekklēsia hypsistou*) she opens her mouth, in the presence of his host she declares her worth” (24:2). The source of this idea can hardly be anything else than the common Near Eastern concept of the divine council, and it is easy to see how similar the position of Wisdom is to that of Ištar in the Mesopotamian divine council—especially because it is the divine knowledge, that is, Torah, that Wisdom transfers to the people: “All this is the book of the covenant of God Most High, the law which Moses imposed upon us as inheritance of the assemblies of Jacob” (24:23). In the scenario of Sirach 24, prophetic agency is enacted in both forms, as divine agency in the activity of Lady Wisdom, and as human agency executed by Ben Sira himself who identifies himself as “a rivulet from her stream,” whose task it is to “pour out instruction like prophecy (*didaskalian hōs prophēteian ekcheō*), and leave it to all future generations” (24:30–1); in the words of Ben Wright, “although Ben Sira stops short of stating outright that his teaching is the product of revelatory activity, the comparison ‘like prophecy’ comes about as close as one can.”¹⁶⁶ All this follows the pattern of the prophetic transmission of divine knowledge as we know it from the Near East, involving the divine council, the divine mediatrix, the prophet, and the audience. Even the aspect of erotic intimacy (sacred marriage, if we prefer) is not absent from Sirach 24, where Lady Wisdom describes herself with imagery inspired by love lyrics, most probably by the Song of Songs (24:13–22).¹⁶⁷

These texts demonstrate that there was a place for the female divine agency—prophetic agency in particular—even in the monotheistic theological model of early Judaism. The significant points of comparison with Mesopotamian patterns of divine–human communication suggest that the position of Lady Wisdom in early Judaism is rooted in a strong cultural pattern involving the concept of the divine council and the role of the goddess as the mediator.

The concept of “divine agency” presupposes the idea of divine beings as meaningful actors influencing everything that happens on the earth. Whether or not one thinks of divine beings as “really” existing, the idea of divine agency indeed exists in the texts discussed above. They were written in a world where nothing was perceived as coincidence, and the acquisition of superhuman knowledge by means of divination was considered an indispensable tool in coping with risk and uncertainty. Within this conceptual framework, prophetic agency, among others, fulfilled an important function in mediating the

¹⁶⁵ For the following, see Nissinen 2009b.

¹⁶⁶ B. G. Wright 2012: 236.

¹⁶⁷ I have argued in Nissinen 2009b that Ben Sira knew the Song of Songs and utilized its imagery as a part of his construct of Lady Wisdom; in spite of the criticism of Beentjes 2015, I still think that the links between the texts are too many and detailed to be purely coincidental.

divine knowledge indispensable for running any earthly business, a state or an empire in particular.

The divine world, like the human world, was conceived of as gendered, and so was the agency mediating between these two worlds—not in the form of an exact gender correspondence between the deities and their prophets, but structured in each case according to the prevailing cultural pattern. The remarkable feature of the prophetic agency is its non-gender specificity which, however, does not mean it was not gendered. Within the male-dominated, hierarchical society, the prophetic agency could be claimed and enacted by male and non-male persons alike, and the sources show no drastic differences between the prophetic agencies of male and non-male persons. Nevertheless, gender difference does not fade away completely. At Mari, for example, the words pronounced by a female prophet seem to have been confirmed by technical divination more often than those spoken by male prophets. In Assyria, again, the religio-political power of the temples of Ištar probably bolstered the position of non-male prophets and other devotees.

The prophetic activity of non-male persons, sometimes transgressing the boundaries of the standard patriarchal gender role structures, was socially sanctioned as an instrumental and transmissive agency in which the person and, consequently, the gender of the prophet were a matter of indifference. This, however, enabled the prophets, the non-male ones in particular, to raise their voices even in a way that was not purely instrumental. Under the aegis of the deity believed to act as the actual agent (and under the control of religious authorities, the earthly administrators of the divine agency), both male and non-male prophets could execute an independent and transforming actorship in their societies.

Keyholes for Comparative Reconstruction

SOURCES

Can anything be really *known* about ancient prophecy? Yes, certainly—we just have to be aware of *what* can be known and *how* it can be known. The first and last thing to be taken into account when attempting to reconstruct ancient divination is the nature of the source material. Every single text tells us something about the historical phenomenon. When put together, the texts provide a set of keyholes that indeed show parts of the historical prophetic landscape, but at the same time, hide even bigger parts of it. No complete picture of ancient prophecy is available; the texts give us disconnected views to haphazard details instead of showing a harmonious whole. This must be kept in mind when looking at ancient landscapes for the purpose of reconstruction and comparison. One keyhole may show nothing but mountains, while the other yields a view to a coastal plain, and yet another to a city. Why should anyone think that these three dramatically different views actually would belong to the same large landscape? Perhaps there are cues, like cables of a ski lift in the mountain view and a corner of cultivated field in the view to the coastal plain that make the researcher ask questions about the farmers' markets and winter sports shops to be seen in the city view.

As outlined in the introductory chapter of this book, the intention of this book is to draw a big picture of ancient Eastern Mediterranean prophecy, whereby comparisons between Near Eastern, Greek, and biblical material are not made by pondering whether differences weigh more than similarities for the purpose of finding out the existence and direction of influence of one thing on another. Rather, the diverse sources are placed next to each other in order to pay attention to family resemblances including similarities and differences, and to look for questions concerning one source material that would not emerge without the knowledge of the other. Similarity does not prove historical influence any more than difference disproves it, but differences are often more question-provoking and hence more useful than similarities.

It is important that each material is first studied in its own right. Greek prophecy cannot be reconstructed to conform to a biblical model and neither

should biblical texts be read as if they were written in Assyria. However, without the comparative perspective, the picture would never grow bigger, and the question of the larger landscape visible through different keyholes would not emerge. Why should it, then? Because the family resemblances recognized by the comparative perspective may reveal things akin to the “curious incident of the dog in the night-time” famous from Arthur Conan Doyle’s “Silver Blaze” included in *The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes*.¹ Things that fail to attract our attention in one source material may become noticeable only by way of comparison with another source material.

Texts were written and preserved for different purposes, and the types of textual transmission ultimately determine what kind of information is obtainable from each source. The textual genre, therefore, serves as the gateway to the historical phenomenon, but only as far as the gatekeepers let us go. The words that once came out of the prophets’ mouths were necessarily exposed to material restrictions, selection, and memory of the persons who wrote them down. The scribal process that produced the texts we have at our disposal is *always* a secondary development with regard to the spoken, “authentic” prophecies. Therefore, sources of prophecy are ultimately sources of the *reception* of prophecy; the texts often hide as much as they reveal, and our picture of ancient prophecy will always be incomplete and partially distorted.

The ancient Near Eastern, Greek, and biblical sources tell us different stories of the way of prophecy from oral communication to written record. Depending on the source, this route has side roads and shortcuts, and sometimes it covers up its tracks altogether. Nevertheless, seen from a distance, the different stories seem to provide variations of an essentially similar plot, involving the oral utterance, its eventual recording by means of writing, and the subsequent use of the written record, whether in the form of a letter, an inscription, an oracle collection, or a quotation in a literary context.

In all three textual corpora, doubtless reflecting the practices of the cultures they originate from, prophecy appears as both an oral and a written phenomenon. As a rule, it appears, prophecy was oral transmission of divine messages by the prophet to their recipients. The use of writing was not necessary if the addressee was present or the message could be transmitted to him or her orally. In some cases, however, prophetic oracles were written down, and this is the prerequisite of our knowledge of ancient prophecy. The written form enabled a continuation of the prophetic process of communication, involving the interpretive community of people not immediately connected with the oral performance and its first recording and, hence, constituting an expanded

¹ Conan Doyle 1993 [1892]: 23: (Gregory, Scotland Yard detective:) “Is there any other point to which you would wish to draw my attention?” (Holmes:) “To the curious incident of the dog in the night-time.” (Gregory:) “The dog did nothing in the night-time.” “That was the curious incident,” remarked Sherlock Holmes.

speech act (*zerdehnnte Sprechsituation*)² no longer dependent on the words spoken by the prophet in the oral performance situation. Theoretically, the written product could be prepared by the prophet him- or herself in order to guarantee the accuracy of the message, and there is some evidence of prophets actively involved in the communication of the prophetic message by written means.³ However, the prophets do not seem to have belonged to the class of literati anywhere in the ancient Eastern Mediterranean, and even if they were, the written products, once prepared and sent away, were no longer under their control but in the hands of their users.

The information on prophecy obtainable from ancient Eastern Mediterranean sources is genre-specific. Some texts, such as letters and written oracles, are indeed written for the purpose of informing their readers or users on prophecy, whereas in others, such as lexical lists and administrative documents, the evidence of prophecy comes as an unintended by-product in a text written for a different purpose. Literary texts and prophetic books, again, emulate and recontextualize prophetic speech in their own specific ways, typically with a considerable distance from the historical event they describe.

Ritual texts, administrative texts, and lexical lists are (quasi-)primary sources of prophecy only available from Mesopotamia. They yield a relatively coherent picture of the presence of prophets in Mesopotamian temples. Each of these genres has a distinct purpose. *Administrative texts* are written as records of what was actually done and delivered, serving the purpose of bureaucratic control. *Lexical texts* were used for training of scribes, dealing primarily with words and only secondarily with realities, while *ritual texts* either prescribe or describe ritual actions, creating expectations of ideal ritual performances. Since it would be nonsensical to mention people receiving food rations or performing in ritual descriptions if they did not actually exist, the sources representing these three genres can be taken as a proof of the presence of prophets in Mesopotamian temples and their participation in their worship, even though the nature of the prophets' ritual tasks and the frequency of their performances remains for the most part unknown.

Letters form the main type of transmission at Mari, and it is also known from Assyria and, to a very restricted extent, from Judah.⁴ The distance between the oral performance and the written record depends on whether it was witnessed by the letter-writer or whether he or she was informed about it by go-betweens. The letter-writer was probably free to paraphrase the wording of the prophecy, although the very words used by the prophet may sometimes have come through; the best example is the saying "beneath straw runs water"⁵ embedded by three different writers within an otherwise different wording of the same prophecy spoken at Mari.

² See Bauks 2013: 33; Lange 2009: 26. ³ **48, 139; cf. Jer. 36; Isa, 8:16; Hab. 2:2.

⁴ Mari: **1–50; Assyria: **105–17; Judah: **139–41. ⁵ **7, 9, 12.

Letters, in the absence of any audiovisual records, can be seen as the best available evidence of real-life communication in the ancient world. They provide authentic glimpses of ancient people's concerns and interpretations of what happened in their physical and social environment. Some restrictions are set by the very genre itself, however. Being personal communications written for a specific purpose, letters may also turn out to be precarious evidence which hides as many things as it reveals. The letter-writer's interpretation of the circumstances around the message and his/her description of people involved in them is dependent on the letter-writer's agenda and cannot be uncritically assumed to fully correspond to the historical reality, however many accurate descriptions the letter may contain. Prophetic quotations are often accompanied by interpretations and suggestions of the writer. Strategies of informing, convincing, warning, advising, persuading, encouraging, or reprimanding the addressee are dependent on the purpose of the letter, which always exceeds the mere recording of facts.

As sources of ancient prophecy, all caveats considered, the letters allow the most immediate access to the ancient prophetic phenomenon available to the modern scholar. Unlike lexical lists, administrative documents, or ritual texts, the prophetic performance often appears as the subject matter of the letter, thus making the historical information on prophecy more than just a fortunate by-product of a communication originally meant for other purposes. Letters also contain clues to the historical circumstances surrounding the message, and they can sometimes be dated rather precisely. All this makes letters important evidence of ancient prophecy and its use and appreciation in the societies from where correspondence on prophecy has been preserved to us. It goes without saying, however, that everything that can be known about ancient prophecy on the basis of letters must be reconstructed from the more or less distorted and in any case insufficient information mediated by persons other than prophets.⁶

Apart from the letters, the most immediate written record of a prophetic oracle is a *written oracle report* inscribed immediately after the oral performance. Such reports are known from Assyria,⁷ and one letter from Mari and another from Assyria fulfill the same function, since they are likely to refer directly to oral performances.⁸ In the normal case, as it seems, the Assyrian oracle reports were disposable documents, but in some cases, archival copies were prepared for later use. Oracles could even be re-edited as *oracle collections*. This practice is best known from Assyria, where a few collections have been preserved, and even the Transjordanian Deir Alla inscription constitutes

⁶ See S. B. Parker 1993 and cf. Charpin 2014: 33: "Cela montre une fois de plus que les textes qui nous sont parvenus, malgré leur nombre qui peut paraître impressionnant, ne nous donnent accès qu'à une fraction très réduite de la réalité antique."

⁷ **68–96.

⁸ Mari: *4; Assyria: *112.

a compilation of at least two separate prophecies.⁹ Furthermore, collecting prophetic oracles in Jerusalem is suggested by the Hebrew Bible,¹⁰ and such collections may have served as initial phases of the biblical prophetic literature. The significance of oracle collections in Greek divination and the activity of the chresmologues as their compilers and performers is acknowledged, and sometimes debated, by several Greek writers; however, no extant copies of these collections are available to us.¹¹

An oracle collection represents a more advanced stage in the process of communication, implying that in some cases a number of prophecies were considered significant enough to be recorded as an edited compilation. This practice implies that the selected prophecies enjoyed a high degree of authority and a transgenerational significance. The oracle collections transcended the prophecies from their primary historical contexts to a much greater extent than the reports and letters, enabling the use of the prophecies as sources of other written works. Assembling the oracle collections necessarily required editorial work; as a result of the process of selecting, copying, arranging, and eventually rewriting the material, the oracle collections are essentially the work of their editors.

Written oracles can be considered transcripts of a once-spoken prophetic oracle, but they cannot be straightforwardly identified with the wording of spoken oracles, and they are not likely to be written by the oral performers themselves; prophets, to all appearances, were not expected write their oracles down, whether in the Near East or in Greece. Nevertheless, the written oracles can be considered summaries of the spoken words attempting at an accurate transmission of the essential contents of the divine messages as perceived by their authors—especially if the act of writing was commissioned by the temple in which the prophet was active or even the prophet him/herself. The scribes may have intended to do their best to reiterate the verbal expressions used in the oral performance in so far as stylistic conventions (such as hexameter) and restrictions of space (such as a cuneiform tablet) permitted.

In the case of the Assyrian oracles, for example, the main criterion would have been the orthodox proclamation of the Assyrian royal ideology, while virtually all material contradicting this ideology remains invisible and inaccessible to us. The written oracles from Assyria and Ešnunna are the result of state-sponsored scribal activity, providing important evidence not only of the divine words uttered by prophets and the occasional use of written media in their communication, but also of the use and significance of such oracular utterances in the context of the royal ideology. The oracular process antedating the written product is difficult to reconstruct from the written oracles

⁹ Assyria: SAA 9 1–4 = **68–77; 78–83; 84–8; 89; Deir Alla: *138.

¹⁰ Jer. 36:27–32; Ezek. 3:1–3; Isa. 8:16.

¹¹ See “Literary Sources” in Chapter 3 in this volume.

from Mesopotamia, but the Assyrian texts give rare evidence of the scribal continuation of the prophetic process of communication in oracle collections which represent a second step of recording prophecies, that is, a combination of selected oracles reusing earlier pronounced divine words in a new historical situation. The Deir Alla inscription may be considered another specimen of such a combination, even though the purpose of its writing on the wall plaster escapes our knowledge.

Greek epigraphic evidence of prophecy consists of sources of a very different kind, both in comparison with the Mesopotamian sources and with each other. While the documents of the Mesopotamian oracles were filed away in royal archives which were accessible only to a very restricted number of people, those of the Greek oracles were designed for public display. The inscriptions recording the oracles of Apollo at Didyma¹² sometimes contain written versions of responses to oracular questions by visitors of the temples of Apollo, composed by professional scribes and secondarily inscribed on stone slabs. The inscriptions from Claros, again, do not quote oracles but memorize the visits of delegations sent by different cities to the sanctuary of Apollo in Claros;¹³ however, oracles of the Clarian Apollo can be found in inscriptions from a number of other places.¹⁴ While yielding some evidence of oracular practice in these oracle sites, these inscriptions inform first and foremost of the consultants of the oracles, who came from different parts of the Mediterranean and sponsored inscriptions to be erected either at the oracle sites themselves or in their own cities, publicly commemorating the visit to the sanctuary and/or the fulfillment of the divine orders expressed in the oracles received there. The case of the two stones containing four oracles found at the Phrygian Hierapolis presents a unique Greek case of a privately sponsored oracle collection.¹⁵

Compared to either the Mesopotamian or the Greek written oracles, the lead tablets from Dodona are a completely different kind of evidence of prophecy.¹⁶ They were found neither in archives nor in publicly displayed inscriptions but scattered all over the holy precinct of Dodona. These tablets typically contain only the oracular question of an individual consultant, while an answer can be found written on the tablet only in a few cases. The tablets do not reveal much of the oracular process at Dodona; it is far from clear what kind of divinatory method was used by the female diviners at Dodona, and who actually wrote the tablets.

In the case of the written oracles, the process of transmission from the oral to the written is probably at its shortest, and in this sense, they can be regarded as the easiest-to-pass gateway to ancient prophecy. This may be true in some

¹² Collected in Fontenrose 1988: 179–208; 232–43.

¹³ Published in Ferrary 2014a.

¹⁴ Collected in Merkelbach and Stauber 1996.

¹⁵ Merkelbach and Stauber 1996: 11–16 (nos. 3–7).

¹⁶ Published in Dakaris, Vokotopoulou, and Christidis 2013, vols I–II; cf. Lhôte 2006.

cases; however, we must not forget that the evidence in front of us is still *textual* evidence, that is, the product of scribal activity, which gives no access to the very words actually spoken in prophetic performances. The scribes are the primary authors of the written product and, hence, the ultimate gatekeepers of our information of the prophetic phenomenon. Meager and uneven the corpus of written oracles at our disposal is, it cannot be expected to yield a full picture of the prophetic phenomenon in the Near East or in Greece. Prophetic oracles ended up written on a surface—whether clay, stone, plaster, or lead—only if there was a reason for that. This is where the gatekeepers play the most decisive role in determining what kind of material was considered worth preserving in archives, inscriptions, or in secondary compositions.

The most advanced stage of the prophetic process of communication is constituted by the references and quotations of prophecy in secondary contexts. A substantial part of the evidence of the prophetic phenomenon in the ancient Eastern Mediterranean comes from secondary sources classified here under the rubric of *literary prophecy*. In fact, the best-known and most-researched sources of prophecy, such as the biblical prophetic books and the sources informing on the Delphic oracle, belong to this category, which is to be set apart from (quasi-)primary sources such as administrative texts, letters, and the “written prophecy” documented by written oracles. Quotations of prophecy or references to them can also be found in Assyrian and West Semitic inscriptions, and even the prophetic episode at Byblos recorded in the Egyptian report of Wenamun belongs to the category of literary prophecy.¹⁷

Narratives and other literary texts, whether written in Akkadian, Aramaic, Hebrew, or Greek, are prime examples of ideological fiction narrated to the implied audience with the purpose of constructing collective memory, an interpretation of the past the narrator wants to impose upon the audience.¹⁸ This does not mean that narrative as a genre has no historical value, but it is much harder to get through this gateway compared with letters or administrative documents. Prophetic characters featuring in narratives may or may not have real-life models, and prophecies quoted in narratives may or may not be based on records of real-life performances. Even if this could somehow be shown to be the case, the prophets and their activities are contextualized in the narrative and serve the purposes of the narrator in the first place. What the narratives let us know about ancient prophecy, then, is first and foremost how their authors appreciated this phenomenon; in other words, the narratives can be taken as only secondary evidence of the prophetic phenomenon *wie es eigentlich gewesen*, but as primary evidence of the use (and usefulness) of

¹⁷ Assyrian: **97–101; West Semitic: **136–7; Egyptian: *142.

¹⁸ Cf., e.g. Pongratz-Leisten 2015: 290–321.

prophecy and divination for the purposes of the construction and maintenance of collective memory by way of an ideological fiction.

The references to prophets and their words in the literary sources no longer belong to concrete contexts in time and place; instead, they have become part of textual contexts created by the craftsmen of the literary works and inscriptions. Even in cases that may indeed originate from actually spoken words in concrete situations, it is the historical and ideological paradigm of the textual world that serves as the interpretative framework for prophecy. Hence, the literary references to prophecy should first and foremost be taken as evidence for the use and interpretation of prophecy by contemporary or succeeding generations. To some extent this is true for all written documents of prophecy; however, the evidence for prophecy in literary works and inscriptions belongs to a more advanced phase in the process of communication, and thus is further away from the actual prophetic performance.

In the case of the Hebrew Bible, the gatekeepers were the scribes who took care of the prolongation of the prophetic process of communication by interpreting, selecting, and rewriting earlier texts for the concerns of their own communities, thus claiming the prophetic role for themselves and, in a way, closing the gate in front of the visitors. The Hebrew Bible represents a full textualization of the prophetic tradition. The Deuteronomistic History and the books of Chronicles display a significant interest in prophets and prophecy. A genre of its own, not to be found anywhere else, is constituted by the biblical prophetic books, in which the fragments of once spoken oracles are recontextualized, edited, and augmented through several centuries. The prophetic books are the result of a centuries-long process of redaction and *Fortschreibung*, which was initially triggered by the prophetic phenomenon and, eventually, collections of written prophecies, but grew gradually into an independent and canonized literary entity. This again served as the basis of interpretation in subsequent writings, such as the Dead Sea Scrolls and the New Testament.

The basic steps of prophetic process of communication can be found in Mesopotamian, West Semitic, Greek, and biblical texts. There are significant differences between the source materials, both when it comes to the material, genre, purpose, and transmission of written prophecy. To take just a few examples:

- Administrative documents, lexical and omen texts, and ritual texts mentioning prophets are only known from Mesopotamia.
- Preserving archival copies of written prophecy reports as well as compiling them into collections is only known from Assyria.
- Compilations of written oracles are available from Assyria and Deir Alla, and the practice is known from the Hebrew Bible and Greek literature; however, diviners comparable to the Greek chresmologues are not attested in the Near East.

- The Near Eastern written prophecies were hidden in archives, while in the Greek world (and also in the case of the Aramaic Zakkur inscription) they could be displayed in public inscriptions.
- The institutional role of mediating officials such as *prophētēs* or *grammateus* is only known from Greece.
- The process of emergence, growth, and canonization of biblical prophetic literature finds no counterpart elsewhere.
- Texts from significant parts of the ancient Near East (Egypt, Ugarit, Hittite kingdom) are virtually void of prophetic documentation.

These differences are partly due to the textual transmission that never reveals the full and authentic past, but they also go back to varying socio-religious contexts and practices and different uses of prophecy. What matters everywhere is the appreciation, authentication, and authorization of prophecy by the community, without which we would not have any sources of ancient prophecy at all at our disposal.

DIVINATION

Prophecy appears as a part of the divinatory apparatus used by rulers, communities, and individuals all over the ancient Eastern Mediterranean. The socio-political position of prophetic divination varies in the Mesopotamian, Greek, and biblical sources, but in all of them, prophecy is generally acknowledged as a legitimate method of divination and certain specialists are recognized as its accredited practitioners: the *āpilum/āpiltum*, the *muḥ-ḥûm/muḥḥûtum* and the *raggimu/raggintu* in Mesopotamia; the *nābî'/nēbî'â*, the *ḥōzê* and the *rō'ê* in the Bible; and the *prophētis/prophētēs* and the *promantis* in Greece. All three source materials also acknowledge the possibility of a non-specialized individual to prophecy under a divine possession, but the accredited background of prophecy is generally appreciated.

However, the position of prophetic intermediation among other methods of divination varies according to the source material. In Mesopotamia, the distinction between technical and intuitive divination was virtually absolute and the mandates of diviners of different kinds did not overlap. Haruspices did not prophesy, astrologers did not read sheep's livers, and prophets did not observe stars. The Mesopotamian divinatory system was highly differentiated as the result of the millennia-long institutional development, whereas in Greece, divination was much less institutionalized, it was not based on a long scholarly tradition, the diviners did not work under a centralized authority, and—perhaps for these reasons—the distinction between technical and intuitive divination was far from being an absolute one.

In the Hebrew Bible again, the most important distinction regarding divination is that between the forbidden and the acceptable: most, but not all, methods of technical divination are condemned, while prophecy is presented as the foremost of the acceptable modes of divine–human communication—however, ultimately, under strict scribal control. The divinatory role-casting is not so absolute in the Hebrew Bible as it is in Mesopotamian sources. Biblical prophets are primarily presented as intermediaries of the divine word, but people with prophetic titles can be found in other kinds of divinatory activities as well.

That the sources present the divinatory practices as being so differently organized in biblical, Greek, and Mesopotamian sources may partly go back to the purposes and preferences of the written sources themselves. Nevertheless, divination is always part of a socio-religious system, and it is quite probable that the historical scenes of divination in ancient Mesopotamia, Greece, and Israel were in many ways distinctive, due to their characteristic socio-political structures and the position of divination within them. The Assyrian empire functioned differently from a Greek city state, the community of Yehud in the fifth century BCE was not similar to that of the kingdom of Mari in the eighteenth century BCE, and so on. Divinatory practices were malleable enough to meet each community's expectations, taking the shape that best served the needs of the community or its leaders.

While the sources make it possible to reconstruct the oracular process to some degree in the cases of Delphi, Didyma, and Claros, the Near Eastern and biblical descriptions of prophetic performances (excluding the so-called “symbolic acts” of some biblical prophets and one reported case at Mari¹⁹) do not reveal much about how they actually took place. What matters more than the performative aspect is which deity speaks what to whom through whom—that is, the basic components of the prophetic process of communication presupposed by the Mesopotamian, Greek, and biblical sources alike. An important distinguishing feature between Greek and Near Eastern sources is that while Mesopotamian and biblical prophets are often presented as public performers, the prophets of Apollo at Delphi, Didyma, and Claros appear as prophesying only in *adyton* of the sanctuary. At Delphi, the consultants may have been able to see the Pythia prophesying,²⁰ while in the sanctuaries of Apollo at Didyma and Claros, the direct contact of the inspired speaker with the consultants is improbable.²¹

ECSTASY

All divination implies the idea of communication between human and divine agents, who are consulted as sources of information normally inaccessible to

¹⁹ i.e. *16.

²⁰ See Maurizio 1997: 313–14.

²¹ See Lampinen 2013: 80, 87.

humans. An overview of the ancient Eastern Mediterranean evidence has shown that, no matter if the sources come from Greece, the Hebrew Bible, or the ancient Near East, prophesying is in one way or another associated a patterned public behavior. This behavior is very often marked by an element of an altered state of consciousness enabling the alleged divine agent to use the prophet's mouth as her/his channel of communication. This is not only suggested by the "lunacy" language (Akkadian *maḥû*; Greek *mania*; Hebrew *nibbā'*/*hitnabbē'*; cf. *mēšugga'*) but also by the context of the references to the prophets' performances. The idea of divine possession, that is, that the prophet is possessed, or at least thoroughly inspired, by a divine agent, is not often mentioned explicitly, but is presupposed by the very idea of the prophets as mouthpieces of the divine.²²

Both ancient texts and anthropological evidence recognize the altered state of consciousness, a physio-psychological state called "ecstasy" or "trance," or, especially when believed to be caused by a superhuman agent, "possession" or "inspiration." This terminology pertains to different aspects of an altered state of consciousness: while the words "trance" and "ecstasy" denote the psycho-physiological state of the performer, "possession" and "inspiration" refer to the explanation of the state of mind as being believed to be caused by an external agent. The altered state of mind is a so-called "randomizing" aspect indicating the absence of human control, usually accompanied by a culturally patterned performance which makes the performer recognizable as an inspired speaker.

Even the scanty descriptions of prophetic performances in the ancient Eastern Mediterranean sources strongly suggest that the altered state of consciousness was an acknowledged element of the public behavior of the prophets, corresponding to the audiences' expectations. The Greek inspired speakers, the Pythia at Delphi, the prophets and prophetesses of Apollo at Didyma and Claros, as well as the female diviners at Dodona, were believed to experience divine possession when prophesying. A number of persons in the Hebrew Bible engage in prophetic ecstasy, make spirit journeys, and see heavenly things, and the Hebrew verb denoting prophetic behavior, *nibbā'* or *hitnabbē'*, has a distinctly ecstatic connotation. The Akkadian verb *maḥû* likewise implies frantic behavior, giving a name to Mesopotamian prophets called *muḥḥûm/maḥḥû*. An Assyrian prayer compares himself to a prophet, capturing in a nutshell what was thought to happen in a prophetic performance: "I have become affected like a prophet (*maḥḥû*): what I do not know, I bring forth."²³

²² The idea of the prophet as the mouthpiece of the divine is implied by the colophons of two Neo-Assyrian oracle collections, which regularly name the prophet by the "mouth" of whom (*ša pī*) the divine word had been pronounced: *68, line i 28; *69, line ii 9; *70, line 13; *71, line 40; *72, line iii 5; *74, line v 10; *75, line v 24; *77, line vi 31; *78, line i 14 (broken); *79, line 35 (broken); *80, line ii 28; *81, line iii 18.

²³ *118b, line 11.

The phenomenology of the prophetic performance as such is never a topic in its own right in ancient sources and has, therefore, to be reconstructed from fragmentary information provided by sources that mostly take its appearance for granted. Questions remain as to what extent the comparative evidence allows us to know “what really happened” in prophetic performances, whether they all imply a similar kind of prophetic behavior, and how much relevant information actually can be taken from the picture drawn from the great variety of textual and anthropological material. It is also difficult to know how significant some common features in the above discussed texts, such as the function of triggers like music and liquids in the oracular process, actually were, since they are reported to us only in scattered individual cases.

The sources are remarkably silent about the techniques of trance, and descriptions of how prophets achieved the altered state of consciousness are rare. In Greek sources, the possessed state of the prophet is sometimes explained to have been induced by vapors or water, but descriptions of the “raving Pythia” are neither common nor historically reliable. Letters from Mari sometimes use the verb *maḥû*, and the Assyrian verb for prophesying, *ragāmu*, may have an ecstatic connotation. In the Hebrew Bible, the prophetic state of mind is ascribed to the spirit or the “hand” of God, as in the case of Saul to whom Samuel says: “the spirit of the Lord will possess you, and you will be in a prophetic frenzy along with them and be turned into a different person” (1 Sam. 10:6). This expression is reminiscent of two Akkadian texts in which the expression *šanû tēmu* “change one’s consciousness” is used. One of these two texts is the latest known reference to prophecy in cuneiform literature from the Seleucid Uruk,²⁴ and the other is the newly discovered tablet containing the fifth tablet of the Epic of Gilgameš, where Enkidu says to Gilgameš: “Become wrathful, change your consciousness like a prophet! Let your shout boom loud like a kettledrum!”²⁵

As important as the divine inspiration or possession must have been thought of, neither Greek and Mesopotamian nor biblical authors seem to have felt the need for giving an explanation of how the prophetic state of mind was reached. Plutarch, for instance, may theorize about the source of the Delphic Pythia’s inspiration,²⁶ without, however, giving an account of how it concretely influenced her behavior. Therefore, we do not know exactly how it affected the behavior of the prophets, how long the altered state of consciousness was typically expected to last, or how wild and frantic the comportment of the prophets was.

What matters most is that in ancient Near Eastern, biblical, and Greek sources, it seems equally important that the prophetic figures assumed a

²⁴ *134, lines B r. 25–36: “In that month, a man belonging to the Boatman family became s[eiz]ed and went into frenzy.”

²⁵ *135p, lines 42–3.

²⁶ Plutarch, *Mor.* 5.404e–f; 5.414f–415c; 5.432d.

specific role in which they were acknowledged by their audience as capable of acting as mouthpieces of the divine. Following Morton Klass, we could conceptualize this as a patterned identity marked by the altered state of consciousness acknowledged by the prophet as well as by the audience.²⁷ There is no lack of anthropological parallels for such an identity and role-taking; as several footnotes of this volume have already shown, shamanistic activities in particular may provide useful analogies of how the ecstatic prophetic performance might have worked.²⁸ The most significant thing the prophets and shamans have in common is the role of an intermediary between the heavenly and earthly realms.²⁹ Further commonalities with the shamanic practice include the altered state of consciousness and its occasional triggers, such as liquids or drugs, and music or sounds, as well as the ambiguous gender role of some prophets and shamans.³⁰ Not all typically shamanistic roles are shared by the Near Eastern prophets, though. What is lacking in the documentation of ancient Near Eastern prophecy is, as Herbert Huffmon notes, “any indication of the traditional shamanistic characteristics of the mastery of spirits, spirit journeys, and the focus on healing, as well as the matters of heredity of role and the initiation process.”³¹ To be sure, as we have seen, one type of *mania* is beneficial in curing sicknesses according to Plato, and male and female prophets do feature once in the above-mentioned healing ritual together with “frenzied” men and women (*118);³² but in comparison with the wide-ranging social functions of shamanism, those of prophetic activity appear as rather more restricted and focused on the transmission of divine knowledge.

What seems like the common expectation in Greek, Mesopotamian, and biblical sources is that what came out of the prophets’ mouths was not incomprehensible gibberish but coherent speech that could even be written down. The Delphic Pythia probably expressed herself in an entirely comprehensible manner,³³ and the ancient Near Eastern texts do not even once give

²⁷ Note, however, that Klass 2003: 109–25 would talk about dissociation rather than an altered state of consciousness.

²⁸ For the role-taking of the shamans, see, e.g. Siikala 1978, 1992; I. M. Lewis 1989: 59–89; Honko 1969. For the applicability of shamanic examples in the study of ancient Near Eastern prophecy, see Grabbe 2000: 16–18, 2010: 128–9; Huffmon 2004; for the Pythia of Delphi in comparison with shamans, see M. A. Flower 2008: 231.

²⁹ According to Hultkrantz 1978: 30–1, the “central idea of shamanism is to establish means of contact with the supernatural world by the ecstatic experience of a professional and inspired intermediary, the shaman.”

³⁰ On the androgyny of the shamans, see Stutley 2003: 10–15.

³¹ Huffmon 2004: 246. The difference pointed out by Stutley 2003: 6 that the shaman does not bring about any social reform but is “a completely integrated part of the culture, whereas the prophet is a reformer-innovator,” can hardly be corroborated by the evidence discussed in this book.

³² *118, lines 31–2.

³³ Graf 2009: 592: “The Pythia could quietly and lucidly answer the questions of her clients and nevertheless be in that altered state of consciousness that her own culture associated with being possessed.”

the impression that the prophets' messages were not fully articulate and immediately understandable. When the prophets of Mari "went into trance (*immaḥḥu*) and said" something, there is nothing to suggest that what they said needed any interpreting by the informer or some other third party. The same is true for biblical prophecies (including early Christian ones, cf. 1 Cor. 14:5), which are never ambiguous in any way. This is not to say that the texts repeat verbatim what the prophets actually said; it only indicates that it was a common expectation that the prophets, however ecstatic, spoke in an intelligible manner. Indeed, there is enough historical and anthropological evidence to show that the altered state of consciousness, in whatever manifestation, does not necessarily result in an inarticulate speech. For instance, Kuden, the Chief State Oracle of Tibet, provides highly articulated utterances while in an altered state of consciousness.³⁴ Another example is provided by the female Finnish sleeping preachers who, while in an altered state of consciousness, gave lengthy sermons.³⁵

At first sight, the Greek literature seems to portray the prophetic performance very differently from the ancient Near Eastern and biblical texts; however, a closer look reveals that the basic elements of its representation do not differ dramatically. The most significant dissimilarity between the three sets of sources may be the very nature of the source material resulting in a difference of the type of presentation. Letters to the king are written for purposes quite different from those of ritual texts and lexical lists. Herodotus' historiography and biblical historical narrative serve other ends than a Late Babylonian astronomical diary, and the prophetic book is a genre unknown outside the biblical literature. Greek texts, Plato and Plutarch in particular, also discuss the prophetic performance within a philosophical framework not to be found in any Near Eastern source. To whatever extent the difference of presentation reflects actual phenomenological differences, it affects our image of the ancient prophetic performance, which in any case remains incomplete.

TEMPLES

The close affiliation between prophets and temples becomes evident whether one looks at Mesopotamian, Greek, or biblical sources, and prophecy is the type of divination that takes place in temples more often than other divinatory performances. However, the sources do not allow us to draw a full picture of prophets and temples in the ancient Eastern Mediterranean. The constructs of

³⁴ See M. A. Flower 2008: 227–8.

³⁵ For Karoliina Utriainen (1843–1929) and Helena Konttinen (1871–1916) and other sleeping preachers, see Stjerna 2001; Lindblom 1973: 13–18; Voipio 1951; Puukko 1935.

prophecy in the Hebrew Bible are made of elements similar to those in Near Eastern texts, although the comparison between these textual transmissions is like comparing the ruins of a Near Eastern temple with a cathedral that, rebuilt and renovated countless times, is still in active use. Either way, it is difficult to imagine a prophet without a temple.

In the Greek world, the temples of the “big three” sites of Apollonian prophecy at Delphi, Didyma, and Claros, were the typical (and famous!) venues of inspired prophecies, as was the sanctuary of Zeus in Dodona. The oracular process in these sites was designed and administered in a way that made the prophetic performance closely identified with the place where it took place. Even in Mesopotamia, there were temples where prophecies were delivered particularly often and which provided the institutional background for the prophets, especially the temple of Dagan in the city of Terqa in the kingdom of Mari and the temple of Ištar in the Assyrian city of Arbela.

Many prophets are identified by the name of a deity in cuneiform sources *à la* “Annu-tabni, prophetess of Annunitum,”³⁶ which can be taken as a reference to the prophet’s affiliation with a temple. In the letters from Mari it is reported many times how prophets “arise” in temples to deliver a divine message, and their participation in cultic activities is attested in the case of the ritual of Ištar, which includes an interplay between prophets and musicians. Neo-Assyrian letters, too, sometimes mention prophecies uttered in temples and the colophons of written oracles localize prophets by the name of a city. When the colophon indicates that a prophecy came “by the mouth of Aḥat-abiša, a woman of Arbela,”³⁷ this can be understood as a reference to a prophecy uttered in the temple of Ištar in Arbela by a prophet belonging to that temple, which was the principal source of Assyrian prophecy.

A temple can often be imagined as the implied setting of the prophetic oracle even where this is not explicitly mentioned, as in the Zakkur inscription where the word of Baalšamayin follows the prayers of the king of Hamat.³⁸ In the Hebrew Bible, the books of Samuel and Kings include narratives in which a place of worship is explicitly or implicitly presented as the venue of the prophetic performances. The prophetic books tend to juxtapose priests and prophets, and prophets such as Jeremiah are brought to the temple or to its precincts over and over again. Even in the Hebrew Bible, hence, there is a recurrent, even though sometimes disturbed, connection between the prophets and the temple.

The prophets of Apollo in Greece were strictly temple-based, while in the Near Eastern and biblical sources, belonging to the temple personnel does not appear to be the prerequisite of the prophetic role. Prophetic dreams and oracles could be received and communicated basically by anyone, even by

³⁶ *58, lines 8–10.

³⁷ *75, line v 24.

³⁸ *137, lines A 11–17.

persons whose agency and social status were otherwise limited in that community, such as slaves. It is often difficult to know whether a prophet who performed in a temple actually was employed by it, but Mesopotamian administrative documents from different times do mention prophets among the temple personnel, and the strong presence of prophets in the temple of Ištar in Arbela indicates their permanent function in the worship of the goddess. The temples provided the most likely setting for the activity of those persons who were permanently involved in prophetic intermediation.

Prophets are often to be found as advocates of temples and their worship. The king of Mari was reminded by prophets to perform sacrifices, sometimes receiving divine reproach for his negligence in this respect. Letters to Assyrian kings include prophecies concerning the temple property, reporting also on some clashes between prophets and temple administrators. Assurbanipal was prompted by dreams and prophetic oracles to renovate the temple of the Lady of Kidmuri in Calah, and the same happened later in the Greek world: the Didymean priests consulted the oracle in order to speed up the completion of the construction works of their temple. In Greek temples, dedications to gods were based on instructions pronounced by an oracle, for instance: "Hermias to Zeus Hysistos, a thank-offering in accordance with an oracle."³⁹ Oracular responses from Delphi and Didyma recorded in inscriptions are, for the most part, related to cult and religion, and many of the preserved oracles from Claros typically give cultic instructions to people tormented by plagues and other catastrophes.

The temple of Jerusalem is the principal site and symbol of the divine presence in the Hebrew Bible, and this is noted also in biblical prophetic texts. In the books of Haggai and Ezekiel, the temple of Jerusalem exceeds every other topic in importance, and even in Zechariah, its rebuilding is a prominent issue.⁴⁰ The so-called cultic criticism in biblical prophetic books, often interpreted as an expression of ideological anti-ritualism, should rather be regarded as a concern for, rather than as an antagonism to, the temple worship. That these texts present the religious order as failing to maintain the symbolic universe does not diminish the significance of the temple as its center.

Because of their long history of transmission, the prophetic books of the Hebrew Bible do not draw one single picture of the prophets and the temples but many pictures that are intertwined in the composition of the volume, merging together several, even contradictory, images. Many of these pictures are easily comparable with those drawn by Near Eastern texts, making the relationship of biblical prophets to the temple and worship well compatible with the evidence we have from Mari, Assyria, and Greek sources in many

³⁹ *DI* 129.

⁴⁰ For the difference between Zechariah and Ezekiel in this respect, see Petersen 1984: 115–20.

significant aspects. Prophets tend to speak in temples, sometimes participating in their worship, and this is more or less favorably recognized by the communities and their authorities; they appear as advocates of the temples, seldom as their opponents; their activity has been significant enough to have been recorded by contemporaries. The textual data discussed in this volume warrants the conviction that the socio-religious reality in what is called “ancient Israel” was not all that different from prevailing long-term cultural patterns of the ancient Eastern Mediterranean.

This is not to lump all evidence together as if there were no differences between and within different ancient sources and the cultures that produced them. The existence of differences, due to historical circumstances as well as the origin and nature of the textual sources, is something to be expected, hence “[d]ifferences of period and cultural values as well as ideological factors should be allowed for in any comparative study of the available data.”⁴¹

A comparison of the texts from Mari and Assyria does not reveal major discrepancies between the symbolic universes that legitimized the temples as contexts of prophetic activity; in fact, with regard to the chronological gap of eleven centuries between these textual corpora, the prophetic landscape looks surprisingly similar. It may be that the prophets at Mari were temple-based even to a greater extent than in Assyria,⁴² and the Assyrian prophecies known to us are clearly more focused on proclaiming the state ideology which certainly was more developed in Assyria than at Mari. At any rate, it must be borne in mind that the information concerning the prophets comes through different types of textual transmission. The Mari letters mostly relate individual events that were brought to the king’s attention, while the Assyrian oracles are concerned with royal succession and the king’s position between gods and the people. This inevitably makes even prophecy appear in a different light.

Greek sources concerning inspired prophecy represent, again, different types of textual transmission. The epigraphic sources are mostly written from the point of view of the clientele, which in the light of these sources suggest to have consisted primarily of private citizens and city states, and the issues consulted are related to private and communal matters. As especially the dedications demonstrate, visiting the oracle sites provided one way for members of the elite to foster the remembrance, performance, and guidance of

⁴¹ Carroll 1989: 210. Cf. T. J. Lewis 2002: 206–7: “Ancient Israelite society (like societies in general, including those of the ancient Near East) was probably more pluralistic than we tend to imagine. Thus our final reconstructions—be they archaeological or textual—need to avoid homogenizing the data and make room for the strong possibility that there were numerous viewpoints (many of which were at odds with each other) that may have differed from one locale to the next.”

⁴² Thus van der Toorn 1998: 58; 2000a: 80–4.

common tradition and identity.⁴³ The lead tablets from Dodona represent an entirely different type of divinatory writing than the inscriptions from Didyma or Claros. Secondary sources such as the works of Greek historians, again, deal with the role of the oracles (or their failure) in political and military issues, often involving kings and other leaders who appear as narrative figures whose actions are appraised from the narrator's point of view. What is common to both kinds of sources is the centrality of the oracular sanctuaries as the accredited source of divine knowledge.

When it comes to the Hebrew Bible, the most blatant characteristics that set it apart from other Near Eastern sources are, first, the irreconcilable dichotomy between the God of Israel and other gods, and second, the nature of the textual transmission concomitant to this ideological framework of the Hebrew canon. The result of this textual transmission is an unprecedented interplay of cultural values, belief systems, and ideological factors within one literary corpus. Unlike the Near Eastern texts available to us, this textual corpus gives voice to disturbances in the symbolic universes of the people who experienced the crises caused by the Assyrian invasion leading to the end of the kingdom of Israel, the destruction of the temple of Jerusalem—and even the re-establishment of the temple, which can also be characterized as a crisis that caused deep dissension about the position and maintenance of the temple. Such traumatic events caused the trust and security of those involved to be seriously disturbed, and this led to antagonisms that ultimately served the purpose of regaining the consistency of the symbolic universe.

This inevitably affects the way prophecy is constructed in the Hebrew Bible. The prophetic books of the Hebrew Bible seem to cope with the post-traumatic stress caused by disruptions and apparent inconsistencies in the shared experience and belief system that had traditionally legitimized the position of the temple as the point of convergence between human and superhuman worlds.⁴⁴ In the ancient Near Eastern and Greek documentation of prophecy, this position is never challenged, and even in the prophetic books of the Hebrew Bible, the temple mostly maintains its central position. But there are also (sub)constructions of prophecy that build upon an antagonism between prophets and representatives of the religious order, redefining the role of the temple in the universe-maintenance.

⁴³ For remembrance, performance, and guidance, see Chaniotis 2003: 189–90.

⁴⁴ Cf. Berger and Luckmann 1989: 110: “This explains the historically recurrent phenomenon of inconsistent mythological traditions continuing to exist side by side without theoretical integration. Typically, the inconsistency is felt only *after* the traditions have become problematic and some sort of integration has already taken place. The ‘discovery’ of such inconsistency (or, if one prefers, its *ex post facto* assumption) is usually made by the specialists in the tradition, who are also the most common integrators of the discrete traditional themes.”

KINGS

Prophecy, as divination in general, plays a role in political decision-making throughout our source materials. In the Near Eastern texts, the primary addressees of prophetic oracles are kings: Zimri-Lim of Mari, Ibalpiel of Ešnunna, Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal of Assyria, Zakkur of Hamath, even the Prince of Byblos. The Hebrew Bible likewise connects prophets with kings of Judah and Israel from the first (Saul) to the last (Zedekiah) and beyond (Zerubbabel, Nehemiah); both the rise and the fall of kingship in Jerusalem is accompanied by prophetic activity. Rulers of Greek city states can often be found consulting oracles, and even kings from afar keep visiting major oracle sites, especially Delphi.

It becomes abundantly clear that prophecy had a political function throughout the ancient Eastern Mediterranean as the source of divine knowledge necessary for the appropriate maintenance of the society. Kings turn to prophets to receive divine advice, and prophets provide the kings with the *Herrschaftswissen* they needed, either in response to a king's inquiry or on their own initiative. The communication, hence, is bidirectional. Prophecies may be solicited or unsolicited, the former being typical of the Greek sources and the latter of the Near Eastern ones; both options, however, exist both ways. The prophetic oracles may be supportive and favorable to the kings, as is usual in the Near Eastern sources, but they may also entail critical or otherwise negative messages to the king, as often happens in the Hebrew Bible but is not unheard of in the mouth of Mesopotamian and Greek prophets either.

The relationship of the prophets with kings and their courts varies according to the status of the prophets as members of the divinatory apparatus. In Mesopotamia, technical diviners belonged to the king's immediate entourage—especially the haruspices and, in the case of Assyria, astrologers and exorcists. Prophets were rather to be found in the outer circle. They, too, could be summoned by the king and receive royal assignments, but whereas the learned diviners maintained personal correspondence with the king in both Mari and Assyria, prophecies were typically conveyed to the king by go-betweens, unless the king was himself witnessing the prophetic performance; how often this happened, we do not know. Prophets, like other diviners, depended on the royal recognition of their divinatory skills. In both kingdoms, prophecy features as an important medium through which the king was informed and reminded of his position, both in terms of divine favors and responsibilities. Indeed, in the ancient Near Eastern sources the prophets appear predominantly prophesying for the king, whereas the non-royal functions of prophecy remain largely invisible. This is interesting with regard to the fact that the prophets do not seem to have been directly employed by the palace but rather by temples. The primary reason for the royal emphasis of the preserved oracles

may be that the texts derive from royal archives; but it may also be that the (fairly unusual) transmission of prophetic words by means of writing first and foremost served royal needs.

If private persons consulted prophets in the ancient Near East, it did not leave many traces in the documentation available to us; only scattered hints at private consultations can be found in Near Eastern or biblical texts. The Greek sources, by contrast, allow us to see the private dimension of prophetic divination. The typical inquirer of an oracle is not a king but a citizen of a city state consulting the oracle for private matters. Foreign kings, in fact, do not appear as consultants of Greek oracles in the epigraphic evidence, but only in literary texts.

The less dominant featuring of kings as consultants of Greek oracles probably goes back to different political structures. Divination in general was much less institutionalized in Greece than in Mesopotamia, and Greek diviners did not work for or under a central authority. As Jan Bremmer argues: “the weaker the kings, the stronger the seers”; tyrants attempted to monopolize access to the gods, but in democratic Athens, leading politicians were not in a position to command the diviners.⁴⁵

Inspired divination, in fact, was even more institutionalized in Greece than in the Near East since it was administrated by the temples where it exclusively took place. However, the principal Greek oracles were more independent of the rulers than the Near Eastern prophets and less dependent on the state ideology which characterizes the prophecies preserved from Mesopotamia, especially from Assyria. The major Greek oracle sites drew their authority from their independent tradition rather than from prevailing political structures. On the one hand, the oracles were in the service of the city states in their vicinity (Delphi, Miletos, Colophon), and on the other hand, they had an international character. The Delphic Pythia and her colleagues in Dodona, Didyma, and Claros delivered oracles not only to the citizens of neighboring city states but also to kings and delegations coming from different corners of the Mediterranean, while the Assyrian prophets would rather communicate with the Assyrian king only.

The Hebrew Bible gives a double-edged picture of the relationship between prophets and the kings of Judah and Israel. On the one hand, the image of biblical prophets is presented as relatively independent of kings and political leaders, but on the other hand, biblical prophets such as Isaiah seem to have a more immediate and personal access to the king than any of their Eastern Mediterranean colleagues, which would speak for a well-established position of the prophets in the royal court. Kingship and prophecy go hand in hand in the Hebrew Bible, but the relationship between kings and prophets is often

⁴⁵ Bremmer 1996: 109.

presented as a troubled one, especially when the prophets are presented as opponents of the royal policy, perhaps even of kingship as an institution. What is unique about the Hebrew Bible in comparison with the Near Eastern and Greek sources is its editorial history. The narratives about prophets and kings are always embedded in a secondary literary setting, either in prophetic books or in the Deuteronomistic or Chronistic historical narrative, which makes the reconstruction of historical institutions and their relationships much more difficult than is the case with Greek or Near Eastern sources. The oftentimes harsh ideological antagonism towards kings and kingship in the Hebrew Bible is unparalleled and may reflect post-monarchic rereading and interpretation of the circumstances before the destruction of Jerusalem.

GENDER

Prophecy is gendered agency everywhere in ancient Eastern Mediterranean sources. This is true for both the divine and human participants of the prophetic chain of communication. Deities speaking through prophets can be male and female alike, and both male and female persons appear as prophets—even persons beyond the conventional gender categories, such as the *assinnu* who sometimes acts as a prophet. The distribution of the prophetic agency between (or among) sexes is different depending on the source material and the socio-historical circumstances reflected by them.

In Greece, the gender distribution in the major oracle sites is the clearest: the inspired prophets at Delphi, Dodona, and Didyma were all women, while those at Claros were men. As far as the picture given by the sources is correct, there were more male than female prophets in the world of the documents from Mari; about two-thirds of the prophets appearing in them are men. The Assyrian texts, again, present a statistical mirror-image: two-thirds of the Assyrian prophets are women. This can be explained by the prominence of Ištar, the foremost divine speaker of Assyrian prophecies, whose temples played an important political role in the Neo-Assyrian era, employing a significant number of female functionaries, including prophets. In the Levantine/West Semitic sources, every known prophet is of male gender, and male prophets hold sway also in the Hebrew Bible, which mentions some fifty male prophets and only half a dozen prophetesses. Whether this is the historical fact of the gender distribution of prophets in Judah and Israel is difficult to know, but the presence of female prophets such as Huldah, whose prophecy has a huge political importance (2 Kgs 22:14–20; 2 Chr. 34:22–8); the anonymous female prophet who gives birth to Isaiah's child (Isa. 8:3); and Noadiah who opposes Nehemiah with "the rest of the prophets" (Neh. 6:14) give reason to believe that female prophecy existed in Jerusalem.

As to the divine speakers of oracles, the most uniform case is the Hebrew Bible with only one deity, Yahweh, from whom any true oracle could ever come from. Other sources documenting prophecy in the Levant also present male gods as speakers of prophecies, although their small number makes it difficult to draw many consequences concerning the gendering of the prophetic agency, whether divine or human. Even in Greek sources, the picture is not very complicated, since the deity behind inspired prophecy is usually Apollo, whose oracles the prophets of Delphi, Didyma, and Claros delivered; at Dodona, however, the oracular deity was Zeus himself. There were, of course, oracles of many other deities in Greece, but these typically did not involve inspired prophecy. Mesopotamia with its many deities presents a more complex picture.⁴⁶ At Mari, the two gods who most often speak through prophets are Dagan, the state god, and Annunitum, an Ištar-like goddess of war. In addition, a number of male and female deities speak or appear as the patron deity of a prophet: Adad, Ikrub-El, Itur-Mer, Nergal and Šamaš (male), Belet-ekallim, Diritum, Hišamitum and Ninhursag (female). Ištar in one of her manifestations is by far the foremost deity of prophecy in other Mesopotamian sources. The two oracles from Ešnunna are spoken by Kititum, and in Assyrian prophecies, Ištar of Arbela is the prophetic deity par excellence, sometimes together with Mullissu, that is, Ištar of Nineveh. Only a few Assyrian prophecies are introduced as words of male deities such as Assur, Bel (Marduk), Nabû, and Nusku.

The correspondence between the gender of the prophets and that of the deities follows more or less strict rules: the Levantine/West Semitic sources including the Hebrew Bible seem to favor the male god/male prophet pattern, while in Greece, the male god/female prophet model prevails. In Mesopotamia there is no strict correspondence; at Mari, the prophets, of whom the majority are male, speak words of male deities more often than of female ones, while in Assyria, female prophets outnumber the male ones, and the deity speaking through a prophet is usually female.

The very idea of prophetic intermediation implies the “notion of penetration of a human by a divine agent, and casts the prophet into the role of the passive, penetrated, god-possessed female, even when the prophet is, as is usually the case, male.”⁴⁷ Perhaps this is why the prophetic agency could be claimed and enacted by men and women alike: in the divine–human gender matrix, humans play the passive role anyway,⁴⁸ hence even women or other non-male persons could act as mouthpieces of the divine. This notwithstanding, the agency of the prophets was not purely instrumental but enabled especially non-male individuals to make their own voice heard as well. In Greece it seems that the political agency at the oracle sites was shared between

⁴⁶ See Appendix 1 and cf. Lion 2012: 157–62.

⁴⁷ Kraemer 2013: 291.

⁴⁸ See Carr and Conway 2008.

the prophets themselves and the administrators of the temples, the latter ones perhaps being more influential in this respect. The Mesopotamian and biblical sources indicate that prophets, both male and female, executed an independent agency, some of them having even some political influence. It is worth noting, however, that there are signs of suspicion of the male-dominated environment towards prophecies spoken by non-male persons. This may be one of the reasons why female prophets are so few in the Hebrew Bible; why at Mari, prophecies spoken by a woman or by an *assinu* were more frequently verified by another method of divination than those transmitted by male prophets; and why the prophecies of Cassandra and the Delphic Pythia are sometimes downplayed by Greek writers.

THE SCRIBAL TURN

One of the “curious incidents” that only attract attention by their absence is the virtual disappearance of documentation of prophetic divination in the Near East in the Persian period. Unlike some other methods of divination, prophecy did not rely on written tradition in the Near East, and this may explain the paucity of primary documents of prophetic divination. Prophetic oracles were not routinely written down, and the tradition of prophetic divination was not a matter of scribal education and transmission. Therefore, the written documentation that we are fortunate to have at our disposal may represent the exception rather than the rule.⁴⁹ On the other hand, scribalization of prophecy did emerge in Jerusalem in the course of the Second Temple period as a new practice of divination that overshadowed and turned against the traditional non-scholarly type of prophetic divination by which it was initially inspired.

There is a marked difference between the documents of prophecy from the eighth to seventh centuries BCE and those coming from later periods. The Neo-Assyrian period provides the second-largest set of sources consisting of not only prophetic oracles proclaimed to kings Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal, but also letters reporting on prophecies and administrative texts documenting their presence in certain Assyrian temples. The Neo-Assyrian texts belong roughly to the same historical period as the few West Semitic documents of prophecy: almost all of them derive from the first half of the seventh century BCE, postdating the Zakkur inscription and the Deir Alla inscription, and predating the letters from Lachish. In addition, we may note that the period

⁴⁹ See Pongratz-Leisten 2015: 359 on Assyrian oracle collections.

conventionally regarded as the golden age of Israelite prophecy coincides with the Assyrian evidence which postdates Isaiah but predates Jeremiah.

The last document of Assyrian prophecy before it vanishes from our sources altogether dates to the year following the downfall of Nineveh. In a document from the northern city of Tušhan, a prophet is awarded for his divinatory services in 611 BCE, when Nineveh was already destroyed, and the Babylonian army was moving forward.⁵⁰ The Babylonians do not seem to have documented prophecy the way the Assyrians did; at least the number of Neo-Babylonian documents of prophecy is minimal. No oracles have been preserved; what we have is only a couple of temple-related texts, one lexical list, and a few legal documents not concerning prophets, but their descendants: some persons bear the rather untypical patronym “son of prophet” (*mār mahḥê*).⁵¹ The word-list coming from Nippur mentions the word “prophet” (*mahḥû*) in the vicinity of exorcists, diviners, musicians, and men-women, and in so doing belongs firmly to the lexical tradition deriving from Old Babylonian times.⁵² That the Babylonian temples actually accommodated prophets can be seen from the Neo-Babylonian list of temple offerings, where certain parts of the sacrificial animals are distributed among the temple personnel: the high priest, the prophet, the *kurgarrû* (man-woman), and the butcher.⁵³ The Neo-Babylonian ritual text from Uruk presents a prophet (*mahḥû*) participating a ritual of the Lady of Uruk together with a musician, going around the statue of the goddess and carrying a water basin; nothing is mentioned about his actual prophesying here.⁵⁴

The Neo-Babylonian documentation is enough to demonstrate that there were prophets in Neo-Babylonian temples; otherwise, their role in the society remains unknown. After the collapse of the Neo-Babylonian empire, the cuneiform documents of prophets and prophecy exhaust almost altogether. No single document from the Persian period mentions prophets; interestingly, however, a few texts from the Late Babylonian, that is, Hellenistic period are worth mentioning. A lexical text lists both *mahḥû* and *raggimu* (this is the only non-Neo-Assyrian occurrence of the word *raggimu*),⁵⁵ and two versions of an astronomical diary refer to an incident that happened in Babylon and Borsippa in the year 133 BCE. A certain person called Boatman presents himself as the messenger of the goddess Nanaya, goes into frenzy, wins huge popularity among people and arouses the anger of local religious authorities, eventually leading to a public riot.⁵⁶ While these texts doubtless report an actual prophetic performance, a ritual text from Hellenistic Uruk includes what sounds exactly like a prophetic oracle to the king, except that it is not spoken by a prophet but by the high priest.⁵⁷

⁵⁰ *118c.

⁵⁴ *135o.

⁵¹ **131, 132.

⁵⁵ *135q.

⁵² *135n.

⁵⁶ **134, 135.

⁵³ *130.

⁵⁷ *133.

Turning to the Hebrew Bible, it is interesting to compare the Babylonian evidence—or the lack thereof—with the biblical evidence, which barely recognizes any prophets after Haggai and Zechariah. The most notable prophetic figure set in the early Persian period is the female prophet Noadiah, whom Nehemiah presents in a most negative light as having “intimidated” him together with “the rest of the prophets” (*yeter han-nēbī’im*), as if Noadiah was leading a prophetic group that opposed Nehemiah’s reforms in Jerusalem (Neh. 6:14). Otherwise, prophecy seems to turn into a literary phenomenon in the Hebrew Bible. The book of Malachi is hardly even thought to be based on oral prophetic performances, and even though texts like Second Isaiah may have been performed orally, the question must be asked how exactly “prophetic” the performance was thought to have been, and in what sense. Second temple texts such as Deuteronomy 13 and 18; Zechariah 13; and even Hosea 9:7–9 tend to present actual prophesying in a dubious light, if not condemning the prophetic performances altogether.

What happened? Did the prophetic practice come to an end in the Near East, and if so, why? Did the rabbis get it right anyway with their theory of the cessation of prophecy in Israel after the last “writing” prophets?⁵⁸ The sources presented above, however few and far between, speak against the total absence of oral prophetic performances in the Near East in Persian and Hellenistic periods.

I would like to return to the sources of prophecy as secondary evidence, as written reception of prophecy. Since oral performances do not leave traces in written records unless there is an interest among the audience to create such records, the amount of evidence correlates with the literate circles’ appreciation of such performances. This interest seems to have decreased dramatically after the Neo-Assyrian period in Mesopotamia as well as in Judah/Yehud. The prophets did not disappear, but their socio-religious status was changed. Once a significant part of the divinatory apparatus of the king, the prophetic divination seems to have lost its viability as a relevant source of divine knowledge. Interestingly in Greece, the Delphic oracle only started flourishing at the time prophetic records disappear from the Near East. I am not suggesting any kind of causal connection between these phenomena, but I would like to pay attention to the different socio-political position of prophets in Greece and in the Near East. It seems evident that in the Near East, the change of the status of prophetic divination has to do with changes in political structures that did not take place in Greece.

⁵⁸ e.g. *y. Sot.* 9.13,24b: “When the latter prophets died, that is, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, then the holy spirit came to an end in Israel. But even so, they caused them to hear through an echo.” For the sources and the scholarly discussion on the cessation of prophecy, see Cook 2011.

To understand the change of prophecy requires the perception of prophecy as one method of divination: the change of prophecy is due to changes in divinatory agency and the use and appreciation of different divinatory methods. Prophets were not the only diviners whose status was reduced in the Neo-Babylonian and Persian period. While astrology and exorcism were well alive in the Babylonian culture, the collapse of the Neo-Assyrian empire seems to have left most haruspices unemployed. Interpretation of omens did not cease, but the set of accredited divinatory specialists changed. Seth Sanders has recently pointed out that the collapse of native kingship, whether in Babylon or in Jerusalem, had effects on the scribal culture: the art of magic (*āšipūtu*) replaced the art of extispicy (*bārūtu*), and this development can be traced down all the way to early Judaism, that is, to the Dead Sea Scrolls and Enoch. Scribes assumed a new kind of intellectual leadership not dependent on the institution of kingship and less dependent of the royal court.⁵⁹

Sanders does not discuss prophecy here, but I would contend that the loss of native kingship, together with the divinatory reorientation, had effects on prophetic divination, too. One of the foremost societal roles of prophecy was to provide the king with the *Herrschaftswissen* he needed to know his rights and responsibilities as a ruler. As I have argued in this book, prophecy was not a royal institution par excellence, because the primary context of prophets and prophecy is usually to be found in the temple context; however, kings appear as the foremost addressees of prophetic speech, whether we read texts from Mari, Assyria, or the Hebrew Bible. The strong emphasis on kings is partly due to the fact that the best Near Eastern source materials come from royal archives, but this fact does not explain everything. Even in the Hebrew Bible, the golden age of prophecy is the monarchical period, and only few (though important) prophets are mentioned outside this time frame. Therefore, one can expect that the disappearance of native monarchy caused drastic changes in prophetic agency.

Prophecy did not die out altogether but it lost much, if not most of its socio-religious significance. When there was no longer a king using prophetic or other divinatory services, the prophets were deprived of an important part of the function of their activity. The political function of prophecy was lost, while its cultic functions were still ongoing, as we can see from the ritual text from Hellenistic Uruk as well as from 1 Chronicles 25, where the ones who prophesy (*han-nibbē'im*) are temple musicians. Whatever role the prophets played in temples, whether in Mesopotamia or in Jerusalem, is difficult to discern on the basis of the very few sources at our disposal.

⁵⁹ Sanders 2017.

What is abundantly clear from the sources is that the scribes took over the role of leading diviners. The scribes perceived themselves as belonging to a prophetic succession beginning with Moses.⁶⁰ In Deuteronomy in particular, “Moses becomes the mediator, who is alone granted access to the divine presence, and who conveys the word of God to Israel.”⁶¹ The “scribal turn” can be seen in the increasing focus on the written text as a sign and a carrier of revelation, together with the rise of appreciation of ancient sages with whom the prophets of old (including Moses!) were likened. That the scribes’ takeover—perhaps somewhat paradoxically—happened by way of the scribal production of prophetic texts has been noted long ago by scholars who have observed the marginalization of the traditional type of oral prophecy in favor of the scholarly type of divination and the scribalization of prophecy, actually a scribal prolongation of the prophetic process of communication. When prophecy became literature, literature became prophecy; the oral proclamation was no longer appreciated by the scribal circles who claimed the agency of transmission of divine knowledge for themselves. Prophetic literature started flourishing, but the prophets were best appreciated as dead.

Before its biblical scribalization, ancient Near Eastern prophecy was not a scribal enterprise at all. Even in the Hebrew Bible prophets do not write, with the notable exception of the books of Chronicles. It is, therefore, quite understandable that when the continuation of tradition—whether in Mesopotamia or in Judea—was more than ever before in the hands of the scribes, they adopted ancient scribes as their role models, such as Adapa, and also Moses who appears as a semi-divinized figure with his “radiance,” even if only reflecting the light of God. Only the scribes were in the position of transforming the tradition at the same time as they kept it up, only they could produce ominous knowledge by interpreting the signs given to them, now in written form. The prophetic phenomenon could hardly compete with this new culture of writing and rewriting revelations; it was destined to marginalization.⁶²

This does not mean that prophecy was not appreciated as an idea and a concept—quite the contrary. Transmission of divine knowledge was as important as ever, and the prophets of old became highly respected figures.

⁶⁰ Veijola 2000: 217: “Die Essenz der Prophetie wird nun mittels des nomistisch verstandenen Mose definiert, der wegen seiner Gottunmittelbarkeit zwar als Prophet ohnegleichen (Dtn 34, 10–12), aber doch zugleich als Ahnherr und Vorbild aller späteren Propheten erscheint (Dtn 18, 15–22).” According to Veijola, the idea of prophetic succession was created by the nomistic Deuteronomists.

⁶¹ Najman 2003: 39.

⁶² Cf. Jeremias 2013: 116 on the takeover of scribal prophecy: “Gegenüber solchen schriftgelehrten Prophetie, deren Hochschätzung mit jedem Vorgang der Neuauslegung stieg, hatte die weiterhin auftretende mündliche Prophetie auf Dauer keine Lebensberechtigung mehr. In Sach 13, 2–6 wird sie nur noch als Gefahr gesehen, dass sie im Namen Gottes mehr und Anderes aussagen wolle als die überlieferte schriftliche Prophetie, und wird daher in einem Atem mit dem Götzendienst verurteilt.”

Prophetic texts were interpreted over and over again, becoming signs for the scholars to interpret, as is evidently the case with the Qumran Pesharim.⁶³ However, while prophetic words were transmitted and recontextualized by textual means, the textual sources are remarkably silent about the transmission of the tradition of oral prophetic performance. The question is rather what counted as divine knowledge and who were the flesh-and-blood persons accredited to receive and interpret it, and this—like most important questions—is an issue of power and authority.

FAMILY RESEMBLANCES

The ancient Near Eastern, Greek, and biblical texts make available a manifold, if fragmentary, documentation of prophetic intermediation. The image of the prophetic phenomenon varies according to the function and purpose of each source, probably reflecting different historical circumstances. Perhaps the most useful aspect of differences for the comparison can be seen in the questions arising from their manipulation. The frequency of consultations of individual persons in Greek sources makes one ask why such consultations are so much rarer in Near Eastern sources. The critical stance on kingship in biblical texts raises the question of its sparseness in Mesopotamian sources. The meager number of female prophets in biblical and West Semitic texts compared with the strong contribution of women in Greek and Mesopotamian prophecy requires explanation, and so on. One source usually cannot be used for a historical explanation of the other, but the sources can illuminate each other by highlighting the presence or absence of features that would be difficult to see without the comparative perspective.

Of course, there is also the question of influence and cultural transmission I promised not to delve into in this book. Let me just by way of conclusion present some preliminary thoughts on this important issue. The nature of the source material discussed in this book, as I believe, prevents any definitive conclusions regarding interdependencies between Near Eastern, Greek, and biblical texts; the evidence, in the words of Erik van Dongen, “is too fragmentary on both the Greek and the Near Eastern side and neither now nor in the foreseeable future will the available source material allow us to be as detailed as we would like to be.”⁶⁴ At best we can pay attention to features that may point towards a common stream of tradition, which can indeed be found behind biblical and Near Eastern texts, sometimes even including Greek sources.⁶⁵

⁶³ Cf. my arguments in Nissinen 2010a.

⁶⁴ van Dongen 2008: 235.

⁶⁵ I have recently argued for a common stream of tradition for the Song of Songs and the Akkadian love poems (Nissinen 2016).

The Mesopotamian tradition of prophetic divination persisted from Old Babylonian through Neo-Assyrian times without undergoing dramatic changes that, however, were to come after the collapse of the Assyrian rule. What can be known about prophetic divination in the kingdoms of Israel and Judah on the basis of the Hebrew Bible can be mirrored not only against the Assyrian evidence but also against the few contemporary documents from neighboring countries, that is, the inscriptions from Hamat, Deir Alla, and Amman (**136–138). Direct influence of Assyrian prophetic divination on either Aramaic or Israelite/Judahite prophecy is impossible to demonstrate, but there are enough structural and literary elements to indicate a common stream of tradition. An interesting case is Second Isaiah (Isa. 40–55), which has more affinities with Neo-Assyrian prophecy than any other part of the Hebrew Bible, even though it cannot possibly be directly dependent on Assyrian texts. The explanation can only be looked for in a common tradition of royal prophecy with which the scribes responsible for Second Isaiah were familiar.⁶⁶

While there is, thus, every reason to assume a historical continuity between prophetic phenomena in different parts of the ancient Near East, the question arises whether even Greek prophecy belongs to the same stream of tradition. Greek sources, to be sure, do not trace the traditions of the primary Greek oracle site to the East; if any “foreign” influences are admitted to have taken place, they are rather derived from Egypt, as in the case of the oracle at Dodona. This, of course, tells primarily about the identity construction of the authors of Greek literature rather than historical circumstances. Given the long-term political tensions between the Greek city states and the East, Persia in particular, it is natural that the origins of important religious institutions are not derived from that direction.⁶⁷ It is indeed probable that the foremost oracle sites grew from different local traditions such as the Molossian ones at Dodona and the early oracle of Gaia at Delphi, without any influence from the Near East. However, the sanctuaries did not live in isolation, and especially the “big three” sanctuaries of Apollo were seen as designed after the Delphic model—at least in retrospect.

When it comes to the stream of tradition of divination flowing from the east, it is fairly certain that the distribution of the practice of extispicy around the

⁶⁶ Weippert 2014: 243, relying on his earlier analysis (Weippert 2001): “Es ergab sich, daß Deuterocesaja nicht, wie z.B. Harner [1969: 432] vermutet hatte, die vorexilische jüdische Unheilsprophetie fortsetzt, sondern voll und ganz in der Tradition der gemeinorientalischen (Heils-)Prophetie steht. Man könnte also—ein bisschen zugespitzt—sagen, dass *das Deuterocesaja-Buch das einzige altorientalische Prophetenbuch im Alten Testament ist*” (emphasis original). Cf. Merlo 2002: 152: “negli oracoli di salvezza del Deutero-Isaia si è in presenza di una reinterpretazione di un genere letterario (l’oracolo di salvezza regale) caratteristico della profezia di corte vicino orientale che applica al popolo d’Israele residente in Babilonia quando precedentemente era predicato al re.”

⁶⁷ Cf. Rosenberger 2003: 44: “Die Situation an der kleinasiatischen Küste ist von häufigen Spannungen geprägt. . . . Es ist also verständlich, wenn nicht nur die Städte, sondern auch die religiösen Zentren nach griechischem Verständnis auf griechischen Ursprung zurückgehen.”

Mediterranean has its origin in Mesopotamia.⁶⁸ Prophecy is a much more problematic case, because the dissemination of the tradition of prophetic divination is largely invisible. Moreover, the Near Eastern documentation of prophecy starts disappearing at the same time as the star of Delphi begins rising. The virtual lack of contemporary source materials makes the identification of the routes and carriers of possible transmission of the prophetic tradition very difficult; the sources produced by potential intermediaries in Anatolia or Phoenicia do not help us any further. This is not to say that such transmission never took place—it just cannot be demonstrated with extant sources. Prophetic tradition was not a matter of transcultural textual transmission, hence the stream of tradition may be longer and deeper than the sources at our disposal are able to reveal, and the cultural connection between Greek and Near Eastern divinatory traditions may be found flowing in its deep undercurrents.

There is no need to look for an “authentic” source of prophecy asking “who was first?” or “first from where?” The local and the general should not be pitted against each other. Our sources come from an area geographically restricted enough to increase the probability of historical connection and cultural interaction, which demonstrably took place in the Eastern Mediterranean sphere. Even though it is impossible to reconstruct any direct dependencies between the source materials, there is no reason to consider Greek, Mesopotamian, and biblical prophecy as three distinct and disconnected, and as such incomparable socio-religious phenomena. Instead, the study can focus on family resemblances, whereby the “family” metaphor should not be understood in a generic rather than genetic sense.

Regardless of the existence and direction of textual and cultural influence, enough resemblances can be found between Greek, Near Eastern, and biblical texts to warrant the use of the scholarly category of ancient Eastern Mediterranean prophetic phenomenon. The recognition of the common category is first and foremost a tool for interpretation, and it does not imply any more historical connectivity than can be distracted from the sources. The search for the common category has revealed large-scale resemblances including the social function of prophecy as a distinct type of divination; the socio-religious context of the prophets in temples and sanctuaries; the political significance of prophetic divination for the institution of kingship; the altered state of consciousness as the typical precondition of prophesying; and the gender matrix allowing the prophetic agency of both male and non-male persons. All these aspects appear both in terms of similarity and difference, demonstrating how the structures and ideologies of prophetic divination have been adapted to different socio-religious and political circumstances—whether the prophets are appreciated by each society as preachers, healers, martyrs, shamans, or tricksters.

⁶⁸ See Furley and Gysembergh 2015: 77–95.

APPENDIX 1

Gender of Prophets and Deities in Ancient
Near Eastern Sources

A = Assyria (**68–118, 118c)

M = Mari (**1–50, 50a–b, 51–65, 65a)

O = other (**66–7, 67a, 119–35, 135a–b, 135j, 143)

W = West Semitic (**136–42, 141a)

Not included **102–3, 116–17, 118a–b, 118h, 120, 124–9, 131–3, 135, 135l–n,
135p–q, 140

NN = anonymous or unknown • = clear case ◦ = probable case

Prophet	m	f	oth.	Deity	m	f	coll.	unkn.
*1 Coll.	•	•		Adad of Kallassu	•			M
*1 NN1	•			Adad of Kallassu	•			M
*1 NN2	•			Adad of Kallassu	•			M
*2 Abiya	•			Adad of Aleppo	•			M
*3 NN	•			Dagan	•			M
*4 NN (=Atamrum?)	•			Šamaš	•			M
*5 Iši-ahu	•			Hišamitum		•		M
*6 NN							•	M
*7 NN <i>qammatum</i>		•		Dagan of Terqa	•			M
*7 Šelebum			•			◦		M
*8 Šelebum			•	Annunitum		•		M
*9 Lupahum	•			Dagan	•			M
*9 NN <i>qammatum</i>		•		Dagan of Terqa	•			M
*10 Hubatum		•		Annunitum		◦		M
*11 NN		•					•	M
*12 NN (=qammatum?)		◦			◦			M
*13 NN <i>qammatum</i>		•					•	M
*14 Innibana		•					•	M
*15 NN				Dagan	•			M
*16 NN	•			Dagan	•			M
*17 Coll.	•	•					•	M
*18 Qišti-diritim	•			Diritum		•		M
*19 NN1	•			Dagan of Tuttul	•			M
*19 NN2	•			Belet-ekallim		•		M
*20 NN		•		Dagan	•			M
*21 NN				Belet-ekallim		◦		M
*22 Ili-haznaya			•	Annunitum		•		M
*23 Šelebum			•	Annunitum		•		M
*24 Ahatum	•			Annunitum	•			M

(continued)

Prophet	m	f	oth.	Deity	m	f	coll.	unkn.
*25 NN	•			Dagan	•			M
*26 Coll.							•	M
*27 NN		•					•	M
*28 NN							•	M
*29 NN	•			Ninhursag		•		M
*30 NN	•			Dagan	•			M
*31 NN	•			Dagan	•			M
*32 NN	•						•	M
*33 Irra-gamil	•						•	M
*34 NN	•			Dagan	•			M
*35 Hadnu-El	•						•	M
*35 Iddin-kubi	•						•	M
*36 Ayala		•					•	M
*37 Zunana		•		Dagan	•			M
*38 NN	•			Dagan of Terqa	•			M
*39 NN	•			Dagan of Terqa	◦			M
*40 NN	•						•	M
*41 Kakka-lidi		•		Itur-Mer	◦			M
*42 NN		•		Annunitum		•		M
*43 Iddin-ili	•			Belet-biri		•		M
*44 Šimatum		•					•	M
*45 Timlû	•			Belet-ekallim		•		M
*46 Coll.				Dagan	•			M
*47 NN	•			Marduk	•			M
*48 Atamrum	•			Šamaš	•			M
*49 Coll.				Amu of Hubšalum	•			M
*50 Coll.				Adad	•			M
*50a NN				NN, I. Ninet, Šamaš	•	•		M
*50b NN		•		Ištar of Bišra		•		M
*51 NN	•			Ištar		◦		M
*52 Coll.		•		Ištar		◦		M
*53 Lupahum	•			Dagan	•			M
*54 Ili-andulli	•						•	M
*55/59 Ea-maši	•			Itur-Mer	•			M
*55/59 Irra-gamil	•			Nergal	•			M
*56/57 Ea-mudammiq	•			Ninhursag		•		M
*58 Annu-tabni		•		Annunitum		•		M
*60 Qišatum	•			Dagan	•			M
*61 NN	•			Adad	•			M
*62 Lupahum	•			Dagan	•			M
*63 Išhi-Dagan	•			Dagan of Šubatam	•			M
*64 NN	•						•	M
*65 Irra-gamil	•						•	M
*65a NN	•			Dagan	•			M
*66 NN				Kititum		•		O
*67 NN				Kititum		•		O
*67a Coll.				Kititum		•		O
*68 Issar-la-tašiyat			•	Ištar of Arbela		•		A
*69 Sinqiša-amur		•		Ištar of Arbela		•		A
*70 Remut-Allati		•		Ištar of Arbela		◦		A
*71 Bayâ			•	Bel & Ištar & Nabû	•	•	•	A

(continued)

Prophet	m	f	oth.	Deity	m	f	coll.	unkn.
*72 Ilussa-amur			•	Mullissu		•		A
*73 NN				Ištar of Arbela		•		A
*74 Issar-beli-da”ini		•				◦		A
*75 Aḥat-abiša		•		Ištar of Arbela		•		A
*76 NN				Ištar of Arbela		•		A
*77 La-dagil-ili	•			Ištar of Arbela		•		A
*78 Nabû-hussanni	•			Banitu & co.		•		A
*79 Bayâ			•			◦		A
*80 La-dagil-ili	•			Ištar of Arbela		•		A
*81 Urkittu-šarrat		•		Mullissu & Ištar A.		•		A
*82 Sinqiša-amur		•				◦		A
*83 NN				Urkittu		•		A
*84 NN				Aššur	•			A
*85 NN				Aššur	•			A
*86 NN				Aššur	•			A
*87 NN				Ištar of Arbela		•		A
*88 La-dagil-ili	•			Ištar of Arbela		•		A
*89 NN							•	A
*90 NN				Ištar of Arbela		•		A
*91 Tašmetu-ereš	•			Ištar of Arbela		•		A
*92 Mullissu-kabtat		•		Mullissu		•		A
*93 Coll.							•	A
*94 Dunnaša-amur		•		Mullissu & Ištar A.		•		A
*95 Dunnaša-amur		•				◦		A
*96 NN							•	A
*97 Coll.				Gods & Ištar		•	•	A
*98 Coll.							•	A
*99 Coll.				Lady of Kidmuri		•		A
*100 NN				Ištar of Arbela		•		A
*101 NN				Ištar of Arbela		•		A
*104 Quqî	•						•	A
*105 NN	•	•					•	A
*106 NN				Bel	•			A
*107 NN				Ištars of A & N		•		A
*108 NN	•						•	A
*109 NN		•					•	A
*110 Coll.		•		Aššur (?)		◦		A
*111 Mullissu-abu-ušri		•					•	A
*112 NN				Bel	•			A
*113 NN		•		Ištar of Arbela		◦		A
*114 NN		•		Ištar of Arbela		•		A
*115 NN		•		Nusku	•			A
*118 Coll.	•	•		Ištar		◦		A
*118c NN	•			Ištar?		◦		A
*118d NN				Nabû, Marduk	•			A
*118e Nergal-šallim	•			Bel, Zarpanitu	•	•		A
*118f NN				Sin, Nusku?		◦		A
*118g NN				Marduk	•			A
*119 NN	•			Inanna of Girsu		•		O
*121 NN				Šauška of Nineveh		•		O
*122 Coll.							•	O

(continued)

Prophet	m	f	oth.	Deity	m	f	coll.	unkn.
*123 Coll.	•	•	•	Ištar		•		O
*130 NN	•							• O
*134 "Boatman"	•			Nanaya		•		O
*135a NN	•			Nanaya/Inanna		•		O
*135b NN				Zababa & Inanna		•		O
*135c NN	•						•	O
*135d Aḥu-waqar	•							• O
*135e Sin-muballit	•							• O
*135f Sin-iqišam	•							• O
*135g NN		•		Inanna of Zabala		•		O
*135h NN	•							• O
*135i Eḥlip-Adad	•			Adad of Aleppo	•			O
*135j NN	•			Dagan?	°			O
*135k NN	•							• O
*135o NN	•			Lady of Uruk		•		O
*136 NN				Milcom	•			W
*137 Coll.				Baalshamayn	•			W
*138 Balaam	•			the gods			•	W
*139 NN	•			Yahweh	°			W
*141 NN	•			Yahweh	°			W
*141a Qên	•							• W
*142 NN	•			Amon	•			W
*143 NN	•			Tarhunza	•			O

APPENDIX 2

Catalogue of Ancient Near Eastern Documents of Prophecy

Throughout the text and notes in this volume, reference is made to these original sources by the use of its number shown below, preceded by * (e.g. *26; **51-3; *118f).

Mari Letters

1. Nur-Sin to Zimri-Lim (FM 7 39)
2. Nur-Sin to Zimri-Lim (FM 7 38)
3. La'ûm to Yasmaḥ-Addu (A. 3760)
4. An *āpilum* of Šamaš to Zimri-Lim (ARM 26 194)
5. Addu-duri to Zimri-Lim (ARM 26 195)
6. Šamaš-našir to Zimri-Lim (ARM 26 196)
7. Inib-šina to Zimri-Lim (ARM 26 197)
8. NN to Zimri-Lim (ARM 26 198)
9. Sammetar to Zimri-Lim (ARM 26 199)
10. Aḥum to Zimri-Lim (ARM 26 200)
11. Baḥdi-Lim to Zimri-Lim (ARM 26 201)
12. Kanisan to Zimri-Lim (ARM 26 202)
13. NN to Zimri-Lim (ARM 26 203)
14. Inib-šina to Zimri-Lim (ARM 26 204)
15. NN to Zimri-Lim (ARM 26 205)
16. [Yaqqim-Addu?] to Zimri-Lim (ARM 26 206)
17. Šibtu to Zimri-Lim (ARM 26 207)
18. Šibtu to Zimri-Lim (ARM 26 208)
19. Mukannišum to Zimri-Lim (ARM 26 209)
20. Kibri-Dagan to Zimri-Lim (ARM 26 210)
21. Šibtu to Zimri-Lim (ARM 26 211)
22. Šibtu to Zimri-Lim (ARM 26 212)
23. Šibtu to Zimri-Lim (ARM 26 213)
24. Šibtu to Zimri-Lim (ARM 26 214)
25. Lanasûm to Zimri-Lim (ARM 26 215)
26. Tebi-gerišu to Zimri-Lim (ARM 26 216)
27. Itur-Asdu to Zimri-Lim (ARM 26 217)
28. NN to Zimri-Lim (ARM 26 218)
29. NN to Zimri-Lim (ARM 26 219)
30. Kibri-Dagan to Zimri-Lim (ARM 26 220)
31. Kibri-Dagan to Zimri-Lim (ARM 26 221)

32. Kibri-Dagan to Zimri-Lim (ARM 26 221bis)
33. Ušareš-ḫetil to Dariš-libur (ARM 26 222)
34. La'ūm (?) to Yasmaḫ-Addu (ARM 26 223)
35. Addu-duri to Zimri-Lim (ARM 26 227)
36. The Report of Ayala (ARM 26 229)
37. Zunana to Zimri-Lim (ARM 26 232)
38. Itur-Asdu to Zimri-Lim (ARM 26 233)
39. Kibri-Dagan to Zimri-Lim (ARM 26 234)
40. Kibri-Dagan to Zimri-Lim (ARM 26 235)
41. Šibtu to Zimri-Lim (ARM 26 236)
42. Addu-duri to Zimri-Lim (ARM 26 237)
43. Addu-duri to Zimri-Lim (ARM 26 238)
44. Šimatum to Zimri-Lim (ARM 26 239)
45. Timlû to Addu-duri (ARM 26 240)
46. NN to Zimri-Lim (ARM 26 243)
47. Yarim-Addu to Zimri-Lim (ARM 26 371)
48. Yasim-El to Zimri-Lim (ARM 26 414)
49. Zakira-Ḥammû to Zimri-Lim (ARM 27 32)
50. Manatan to Zimri-Lim (M. 9451)
- 50a. Three Deities to Zimri-Lim (ARM 26 192)
- 50b. Ḥammi-šagiš to Šu-nuḫra-Ḥalu (M. 7160)

Other Documents from Mari

51. Ritual of Ištar, Text 2 (FM 3 2)
52. Ritual of Ištar, Text 3 (FM 3 3)
53. Assignment of a Donkey (A. 3896)
54. Outlay of Garment (ARM 9 22)
55. Outlay of Garment (ARM 21 333)
56. Outlay of Garment (ARM 22 167)
57. Extract from a Degree of Expenditures (A. 4676)
58. Outlay of Garment (ARM 22 326)
59. Outlay of Garment (ARM 23 446)
60. Donation of Lances (ARM 25 15)
61. Donation of Silver Rings (ARM 25 142)
62. Outlay of Silver (M. 11436)
63. Deed of Donation (T. 82)
64. Epic of Zimri-Lim (FM 14)
65. Report of Criminal Acts (M. 9717)
- 65a. Outlay of Garment (M. 18192)

Sources from Ešnunna

66. Oracle of Kititum to Ibalpiel (FLP 1674)
67. Oracle of Kititum to Ibalpiel (FLP 2064)
- 67a. Food Rations List from Nerebtum (OECT 13 263)

Neo-Assyrian Oracles

68–77 *First Collection of Prophecies*

68. Issar-la-tašiyat to Esarhaddon (SAA 9 1.1)
69. Sinqiša-amur to Esarhaddon (SAA 9 1.2)
70. Remut-Allati to Esarhaddon (SAA 9 1.3)
71. Bayâ to Esarhaddon (SAA 9 1.4)
72. Ilussa-amur to Esarhaddon (SAA 9 1.5)
73. NN to Esarhaddon (SAA 9 1.6)
74. Issar-bel-daʾini to Esarhaddon (SAA 9 1.7)
75. Aḥat-abiša to Esarhaddon (SAA 9 1.8)
76. NN to Esarhaddon (SAA 9 1.9)
77. La-dagil-ili to Esarhaddon (SAA 9 1.10)

78–83 *Second Collection of Prophecies*

78. [Nabû]-ḥussanni to Esarhaddon (SAA 9 2.1)
79. Bayâ to Esarhaddon (SAA 9 2.2)
80. La-dagil-ili to Esarhaddon (SAA 9 2.3)
81. Urkittu-šarrat to Esarhaddon (SAA 9 2.4)
82. [Sinqiša-amur] to Esarhaddon (SAA 9 2.5)
83. NN to Esarhaddon (SAA 9 2.6)

84–89 *Third Collection of Prophecies*

84. Introduction (SAA 9 3.1)
85. Oracle to Esarhaddon (SAA 9 3.2)
86. Oracle to Esarhaddon (SAA 9 3.3)
87. Meal of the Covenant (SAA 9 3.4)
88. Oracle to Esarhaddon (SAA 9 3.5)
89. Fragment of a Collection of Prophecies (SAA 9 4)

Prophecy Reports

90. NN to the Queen Mother (SAA 9 5)
91. Tašmetu-ereš to Esarhaddon (SAA 9 6)
92. Mullissu-kabtat to Assurbanipal (SAA 9 7)
93. Report of Prophecies to Assurbanipal (SAA 9 8)
94. Dunnaša-amur to Assurbanipal (SAA 9 9)
95. Dunnaša-amur to Assurbanipal (?) (SAA 9 10)
96. NN to Assurbanipal (SAA 9 11)

Other Neo-Assyrian Documents

97. Esarhaddon's Rise to Power (RINAP 4 1)
98. Esarhaddon's Ascending the Throne (RINAP 4 57)
99. Assurbanipal's Establishment of the Cult of the Lady of Kidmuri (Prism T)

100. Assurbanipal's Mannean War (Prism A)
101. Assurbanipal's War against Teumman, King of Elam (Prism B)
102. Succession Treaty of Esarhaddon (SAA 2 6)
103. Marduk Ordeal (SAA 3 34/35)
104. List of Lodgings for Officials (SAA 7 9)
105. Bel-ušeziḫ to Esarhaddon (SAA 10 109)
106. Bel-ušeziḫ to Esarhaddon (SAA 10 111)
107. Nabû-nadin-šumi to Esarhaddon (SAA 10 284)
108. Urad-Gula to Assurbanipal (SAA 10 294)
109. Mar-Issar to Esarhaddon (SAA 10 352)
110. Decree of Expenditure for Ceremonies in Ešarra (SAA 12 69)
111. Adad-aḫu-iddina to Esarhaddon (SAA 13 37)
112. Aššur-ḫamatu'a to Assurbanipal (SAA 13 139)
113. Nabû-reši-išši to Esarhaddon (SAA 13 144)
114. NN to Esarhaddon (?) (SAA 13 148)
115. Nabû-reḫtu-ušur to Esarhaddon (SAA 16 59)
116. Nabû-reḫtu-ušur to Esarhaddon (SAA 16 60)
117. Nabû-reḫtu-ušur to Esarhaddon (SAA 16 61)
118. Ritual of Ištar and Tammuz (K 2001+)
- 118a. Dialogue between Assurbanipal and Nabû (SAA 3 13)
- 118b. Prayer to Nabû (PSBA 17 138)
- 118c. Outlay of Copper from Tušḫan (ZTT 25)
- 118d. Nabû-bel-šumati to Assurbanipal (ABL 839)
- 118e. Three Astrologers to Assurbanipal (SAA 10 24)
- 118f. Marduk-šumu-ušur to Esarhaddon (SAA 10 174)
- 118g. Votive Inscription of Assurbanipal (K 120B+)
- 118h. Lament over a King (SAA 3 23)
- 118i. Extispicy Report Concerning Assurbanipal's Illness (SAA 4 317)
- 118j. Extispicy Report Concerning a Written Plan (SAA 4 320)

Miscellaneous Cuneiform Sources

119. King of Ur to Ur-Lisi (TCS 1 369)
120. Old Babylonian Lexical List (MSL 12 5.22)
121. Tušratta of Mitanni to Amenophis III (EA 23)
122. The Righteous Sufferer from Ugarit (Ugaritica 5 162)
123. Middle-Assyrian Food Rations List from Kar-Tukulti-Ninurta (VS 19 1)
124. Neo-Assyrian Lexical List (MSL 12 4.212)
125. Neo-Assyrian Lexical List (MSL 12 4.222)
126. Neo-Assyrian Lexical List (MSL 12 6.2)
127. Birth Omens (*Šumma izbu xi*)
128. Commentary on the Birth Omens (K 1913)
129. City Omens (*Šumma ālu i*)
130. Neo-Babylonian List of Temple Offerings (OECT 1 20–1)
131. Neo-Babylonian Decree of Redemption of an Estate (YOS 6 18)
132. Neo-Babylonian Decree of Delivery of Dates (YOS 7 135)
133. Late Babylonian *akītu*-Ritual
134. Late Babylonian Chronographic Text (AD 3 132 B)
135. Late Babylonian Chronographic Text (AD 3 132 C)

- 135a. Old Babylonian Prophecy from Uruk (W19900, 1)
- 135b. Old Babylonian Prophecy from Kiš (RIME 4.3.7.7.)
- 135c. Decree of Expenditures for Ceremonies at Larsa (CM 33 1)
- 135d. Legal Document from Dilbat (TCL 1 57)
- 135e. Legal Document from Larsa (TCL 10 34)
- 135f. Legal Document from Ur (TS 1)
- 135g. Decree of Delivery of Silver from Larsa (TCL 10 39)
- 135h. Decree of Delivery of Oil from Sippar (IM 50.852)
- 135i. Decree of Delivery of Beer from Chagar Bazar (Chagar Bazar 3 176)
- 135j. Decree of Delivery of Sesame from Tuttul (KTT 306)
- 135k. Fragment of a Letter from Tuttul (KTT 359)
- 135l. Middle Assyrian Lexical List (Erimhuš III)
- 135m. Neo-Assyrian Lexical List (LTBA 2 1 iii 19–31, vi 41–8)
- 135n. Neo-Babylonian Lexical List from Nippur (OIP 114 122)
- 135o. Neo-Babylonian Ritual from Uruk (LKU 51)
- 135p. Epic of Gilgameš, Tablet V (SB Gilg. V MS ff)
- 135q. Late Babylonian Lexical List (SpTU 3 116)

West Semitic Sources

- 136. Amman Citadel Inscription
- 137. Zakkur Stela
- 138. Deir Alla Plaster Texts
- 139. Lachish Ostrakon 3
- 140. Lachish Ostrakon 6
- 141. Lachish Ostrakon 16
- 141a. Deir Rifa Seal (UC 51354)

Egyptian Source

- 142. Report of Wenamon

Luwian Source

- 143. Til Barsib Stela (Tell Ahmar 6)

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