The Prevailing Eloquence of Isaiah 1:2-20*

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A striking example of prophetic poetry, Isa 1:2-20, is the object of study of this essay. Features of rhetoric and composition and indicia of author, audience, original setting, and communicative intent are examined first. Prosody receives attention next, along with text-critical questions, semantic, syntactic, morphological, and sonic parallelisms. The conclusions of the analysis are twofold. First of all, Isa 1:2-20 is a complex unity on the rhetorical and prosodic levels. The various facets of Isa 1:2-20 as rhetoric and as poetry cooperate to convey a message and compel a response. Secondly, Isa 1:2-20 conforms to a text model of ancient Hebrew verse worked out over a large portion of the extant poetic corpus. In a final excursus, an overview of the history of interpretation shows how Isa 1:2-20 has been read as a subunity of a larger complex, a unity of its own, and as a mine from which to quarry materials for overarching metanarratives.

A text model is a desired outcome of formal analysis. A model for a genus of texts may be compared to a sieve. Species of the genus should pass through it. Species of other genera should not.

The intuitive form literary analysis most often takes requires the check a text model provides. The model to be tested here may be summarized as follows. Ancient Hebrew poetry is characterized by a series of continuously repeated forms. The central form we call a line. It consists of two to three parts. A part we call a verset. A set of lines, two to three, we call a strophe. A verset ends in a pause, however minor; a line in a stronger pause, or a full stop; a strophe most often in a full stop. Semantic, prosodic, syntactic, morphological, and sonic parallelisms recur across versets, lines, and strophes. Prosodic parallelisms alone are obligatory: a verset of two to three stress units is unfailingly followed by another verset of two to three stress units, until a poem’s conclusion.

A prosodic hierarchy of “twos and threes” structures a poem. Two to three stress units form a verset, two to three versets a line, two to three lines a strophe, two to three strophes a stanza, and two to three stanzas a poem or section thereof. A poem, if it contains more than 10 lines, typically consists of 12, 18, 22, or 28 lines, or combinations thereof. Among the Psalms, 14 lines is also a common length.1

According to the text model test run here, that is how ancient Hebrew poetry works. The analysis of Isa 1:2-20, it will be seen, bears this out. It is not enough, of course, to offer a discussion of a single presumed example of Hebrew poetry in order to substantiate a text model that seeks to describe regularities characteristic of the entire poetic corpus. But one has to start somewhere. Isa 1:2-20 illustrates the challenges one faces in the analysis of ancient Hebrew verse.

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Methodological Preliminaries

It is possible to approach a text without recourse to an analysis of its finer details. Students of ancient Hebrew literature are wont to uncritically follow the more obvious aspects of the received tradition, such as the consonantal text, vocalization, and division into verses found in MT, and the division into chapters found in Bibles since the Middle Ages, and overlook other aspects of the same tradition, such as the syntactic parse implied by MT’s neumic accents, and its macrodivision into closed and open sections. A road less traveled by is taken here. All aspects of the tradition receive consideration. At the same time, alternatives to the received tradition are proposed if compelling arguments may be cited in their favor. Examples include a consonantal text or vocalization more likely than MT to be original, a construal of the text’s syntax more consistent with context, or a division of the textual continuum into line constituents, lines, or groups of lines more coherent than MT with the logic of the whole composition. Ignorance of received reading traditions is unacceptable. So is uncritical acceptance of them.

Appendices available online at www.ancienthebrewpoetry.typepad.com supplement this essay. An overview of the text model is provided in Appendix A. Constraints at work in the formation of prosodic words are presented in Appendix B. The poetic line expressed as a metrical grid is offered in Appendix C. Definitions of terms are offered in Appendix D. The corpus of reference is given in Appendix E. A history of research on meter in ancient Hebrew poetry and a bibliography for ongoing research are offered in Appendices F and G. Scansions in alternative formats are offered in Appendices H and I, translations in Appendix J.

I. A Historical Critical Approach to the Book of Isaiah

In a 1972 preface to his commentary on Isa 13-39, Otto Kaiser outlined a methodology for the interpretation of the book of Isaiah’s contents: “Given the fact that the scroll of Isaiah underwent revision into and as late as the Hellenistic Period, the challenge to take up is that of denying to the prophet any word on principle that is also explicable in terms of a subsequent age.”² Kaiser himself concluded that not one verse of Isaiah is to be attributed to a prophet of the 8th cent. BCE.³ If one proceeds by a different path, such that, if a text seems explicable in terms of its “declared” or prima facie historical context, the attempt is made to make sense of it in terms of that context, one reaches conclusions of a different order. Much of Isa 1-39 is explicable in terms of the historical frame referred to in the book’s superscription (Isa 1:1).

Scholars who concur on this point tend to reach broadly similar results. Attribution of components of Isa 1-5 to Isaiah or another exemplifies this. Of Isaiah according to Duhm, Clements, Wildberger, Sweeney, and Blenkinsopp: 1:2-3, 4-9, 10-17, 18, 21-26; 2:12-17;

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³ Kaiser attributed Is 1-12 to 5th cent. BCE authors with a small collection of prophetic sayings at their disposal (1:2-3, 4-9, 18-20) he ascribed in turn to an early 6th cent. BCE author (Jesaja 1-12, 4). He later backed away from these conclusions (idem, Grundriß der Einleitung in die kanonischen und deuterokanonischen Schriften des Alten Testaments [3 vols.; Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1992-94] 2:42.
A number of interpreters do not rule out the possibility that a particular textual unit located within the scroll of Isaiah might have been composed by an 8th cent. BCE prophet, but they eschew engagement with the unit’s prima facie historical context and original audience out of interest for its collocation within the book of Isaiah as a whole and the readership it would have had in post-exilic Judah of the Persian period. John Watts, Edgar Conrad, and Kathryn Darr fall into this category. A hermeneutic that focuses on a reconstruction of the Isaiah scroll’s reception during the Persian period tends to replace the implied settings in the Assyrian and Babylonian periods of much of Isa 1-39 with a generic setting in the Persian period. Differentiation of author, audience, and historical background from one text unit to another becomes impossible.

But if one seeks to understand the reception a text might have had if and when a prophet delivered it before an audience, or when first read as part of a larger collection, the case for a hermeneutic that focuses on the problem of the original author, audience, and readership remains cogent. The historical contexts in which a text was first deployed retain hermeneutical value. The methodologies of Erhard Blum and Christof Hardmeier, each in its own way, are exemplary in this sense.

The difficulties attendant upon reconstruction of author, audience, and communicative intent within the timeframe indicated by the book’s superscription (Isa 1:1) are of course undeniable. But they are lighter than those attendant upon a reconstruction of author, audience, and communicative intent of the entire Isa 1-66 in the Persian period or later. The bulk of Isa 1-39 is directly relevant to situations that obtained in late monarchic Judah. Occasionally, a text deriving from one period of the late monarchy was expanded so as to be directly relevant to another. For example, an anti-Assyrian oracle was reworked so as to do double duty as an anti-Babylonian oracle (Isa 14:1-27). Other texts in the form we have received them date to the exilic period (Isa 34-35). But with few

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exceptions, the contents of Isa 1-39 are relevant to the Persian and Hellenistic periods of Judean history by way of historical transposition only.

In light of the above, I throw my hat into the hermeneutical ring traced by Ewald, Giesebrecht, Duhm, and scholarship thereafter intent on distinguishing the words of Isaiah from additions by subsequent writers.\(^7\) The interpretive challenge I take up is the opposite of the one pursued by Kaiser: to ascribe to the prophet any word on principle that is explicable in terms of the age and circumstances in which he lived and to which he might have responded.\(^8\)

II. Rhetoric and Composition

It cannot be doubted that a prophetic speech begins in Isa 1:2. The question is where the unit that begins with 1:2 comes to an end. A conclusion is reached in 1:3, 1:9, 1:20, 1:31, and at the terminus of still larger literary units. The question I will pursue here concerns the delimitation of a rhetorical unit that might have been delivered on a single occasion by the prophet Isaiah. It is possible that there are no units in this sense preserved in Isaiah, but an analysis of the textual data, as Yehoshua Gitay has shown, seems to lead to the discovery of a sequence of speeches each of which possesses rhetorical integrity.\(^9\)

The beginning and end of a prophetic speech are most easily inferred from the location of discourse markers intrinsic to the genre in the textual continuum, from the “plot” created by transitions in the text, and from patterns of language and referentiality that crisscross the continuum and delimit, by the finitude of their reach, one speech from another. The conventions that governed the length of a composition in ancient Hebrew verse, if such there were and if they were known, might clarify matters immensely. They will never be known and forever misunderstood if the units to which they applied are misidentified. It makes sense to address the question of discourse unit delimitation from a multiplicity of directions. Delimitations suggested by a hypothesis about continuously operating principles of organization in ancient Hebrew verse ought to be compared on a

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case by case basis with what might be proposed on the basis of other data, with an eye for a convergence of results or a lack thereof.

If we assume for the sake of argument that the length rule of the text model is valid, where the unit beginning with Isa 1:2 concludes is still not a foregone conclusion. If it is a unit of more than 10 lines, we would expect it to consist of 12, 18, 22, or 28 lines, or combinations thereof. We would also expect the prosodic hierarchy and the general rule to be attested in its every part.

Isa 1:2-9, 10-20, and 21-31 work out to be 18, 22, and 18 line units, respectively. Each unit conforms to the text model as a whole. Whether the unit of speech beginning with Isa 1:2 ends at 1:9, 1:20, 1:31, or at some other juncture, has to be decided on the basis of extra-prosodic criteria. To these we now turn.

According to Hans Wildberger, Isa 1 consists of six originally self-contained prophetic speeches: 1:2-3, 4-9, 10-17, 18-20, 21-26 [to which 27-28 were added], and 29-31, now fitted together to form a higher unity. I argue below that 1:2-20 is a self-contained prophetic speech composed as such from the beginning. Yehoshua Gitay, J. J. M. Roberts, and John Willis have argued likewise. On this analysis, 1:21 begins another prophetic speech on a par with 1:2-20. 1:2-20 in a form close to MT and in a form thought to be nearer to the text as intended from the first are laid out in Appendices H-J. For the following, the reader is advised to have the appendices in hand.

Aside from Gitay, Roberts, and Willis, the majority of recent interpreters of Isa 1:2-20 subdivide it into a number of smaller units whose fusion into a greater unity is attributed to any number of factors, original authorial intent, however, excluded. The delimitation of a large unit of discourse and the assignment of it to a prophet who might have delivered it before an audience goes against the consensus of contemporary scholarship. The tendency has been to discern terse prophetic sayings, sometimes no more than a biblical verse or two in length, behind the compositional unities that the text as it stands presents to us, and to assign the former to the prophet and the latter to a subsequent redactor. This is certainly so with respect to the contents of Isa 1:2-20.

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10 Hans Wildberger, Jesaja 1, 8. Wildberger ascribes the redactional unity of 1:2-20 to Isaiah and the unity of the whole to a disciple who lived in exilic or post-exilic times (67, 74).
12 The various attempts of Hermann Barth, Frank Crüsemann, Jacques Vermeylen, Otto Kaiser, and Wolfgang Werner to discern a history of redaction behind Isaiah 1:4-9 are exemplary in this respect. For an overview, see Rudolf Kilian (Jesaja 1-39 [EdF 200; Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1983]) 32-35. The shortcomings of these attempts have been highlighted by John A. Emerton, “The Historical Background of Isaiah 1:4-9,” ErIs 24 (1993) [= Avraham Malamat Volume (ed. Shmuel Ahituv and Baruch A. Levine; Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society)] 34-40. An unexamined assumption of much redaction critical work is that of extreme brevity of original prophetic speeches. For an exposé of the assumption and the now forgotten reasons originally advanced on its behalf, see Jack R. Lundbom (Jeremiah: A Study in Ancient Hebrew Rhetoric [2d ed.; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1997]) 10-27; esp. 13-15. Marvin Sweeney’s redaction critical study of Isaiah 1:2-20 stands out for its attentiveness to continuities observable across the components of the unit (idem, Isaiah 1-4, 21-24; 101-33). He imagines
That compositional unities are sometimes best attributed to a later redactor is undeniable. Isa 1:2-20 is part of a larger unity stretching to 1:31. In my view, this unity is the product of a Persian period author who added 1:27-31 to 1:21-26 and severed the latter from its original continuation preserved in 2:2-5. The collocation of 2-20 within a compositional unity of the Persian period implies that it was read with profit in that age, but it does not follow that 2-20 is itself a composition of the Persian period. The existence of compositional unities attributable to a later redactor should not deter us from seeking to identify compositional unities attributable to the prophet himself.

The task of delimiting the words of an 8th century prophet and interpreting them against the background of the historical events to which they seem to refer is set aside by some. In this approach, the focus is on reconstructing how a particular text, irregardless of its possible origins, may have come across to rereaders of it in Judah or the diaspora of 1:2-3 to have been composed by the prophet to introduce 1:4-9 (ibid., 126). This is analogous to suggesting that 1:4-9 was composed as a continuation of 1:2-3, as did Karl Budde (“Zu Jesaja 1-5,” ZAW 49 [1931] 16-40; 21). As for 1:19-20, Sweeney considers it, as do others, a late addition with a deuteronomistic orientation (ibid., 128-129). For a rejection of this hypothesis, see Christiaan H. W. Brekelmans, “Deuteronomistic Influence in Isaiah 1-12,” in The Book of Isaiah/Le livre d’Isaïe. Les oracles et leurs relectures. Unité et complexité de l’ouvrage (ed. Jacques Vermeylen; BETL 81; Leuven: Peeters, 1989) 167-76, 172-74. For more discussion of Sweeney’s reconstruction of the compositional history of Isa 1-20, see n. 18.


On 1:21-31 as a complex unity on a par with 1:2-20, see Sweeney, Isaiah 1-4, 114-123; idem, Isaiah 1-39, 63-65. On 2:2-5 as the continuation of 1:21-31, see Gitay, Isaiah and His Audience, 35-49. On 1:27-31 as an addition by a Persian period author who hears 1:2-26 against the background of the situation reflected in Isaiah 56-66 and shapes the whole into a new speech announcing salvation to those who put behind them the religious and moral transgressions referred to in Isaiah 56-66, and perdition to those who do not, see Blenkinsopp, Isaiah 1-39, 187-88. The earlier 1:21-26 + 2:2-5 works out to be a 22 line unit. The later 1:21-31 works out to be an 18 line unit. 2:1 may have been added at the same time as 1:27-31.
the Persian or Hellenistic periods. The evidence that suggests that the book of Isaiah as we have it is the product of a Persian period author who reworked existing materials

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15 An example of this approach is provided by Ehud Ben Zvi, *Micah* (FOTL 21B; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000). Ben Zvi argues that the rhetorical units in prophetic books tend not to be anchored in any particular circumstance, time, or place, but to have a decontextualized cast (ibid., 80-82, 110-11, 122-23, 139-41, 151-52, 162-64, 181-82). The argument fails on several grounds. On the level of discrete rhetorical units, it forgets the paradox of occasional speeches preserved from one generation to the next: texts with embedded interpretive cues sufficient for the audience and the occasion they originally addressed are decontextualized by definition as times and circumstances change. For example, the Gettysburg Address may appear to us to have an epic quality, but to say so is true even as it is false. The interpretive cues embedded within the Address anchoring it to a particular occasion are opaque to us without retrospective historical and cultural reconstruction. In the same way, the apparently deracinated quality of prophetic literature is not in contradiction to its being a collection of texts originally meant for discrete occasions and circumstances. Secondly, there are in fact indications that constituent parts of a book like Micah or Isaiah were not decontextualized but reparticularized by subsequent redactional activity. As soon as one admits that Fortschreibung contributed to the growth of the text, recognition of a process of recontextualization at work necessarily follows. Finally, the argument overlooks the function of the superscriptions to prophetic books, which is to anchor interpretation of a book’s contents to a particular time and place. The superscriptions coexist in unresolved tension with the reparticularization of the text through subsequent expansions. The legitimacy of Ben Zvi’s focus on how prophetic literature might have been understood by readers in Persian period Judah, a project requiring historical and cultural reconstruction of Persian period Judah and of that period’s understanding of Assyrian and Babylonian period Judah, is not, of course, thereby placed in doubt.

One might also compare the approach of Edgar Conrad, *Reading Isaiah*; idem, “Reading Isaiah and the Twelve as Prophetic Books,” in *Writing and Reading the Scroll of Isaiah: Studies of an Interpretive Tradition* (ed. Craig C. Broyles and Craig A. Evans; 2 vols.; VTSup 79; FIOTL 1; Leiden: Brill, 1997) 1:3-18; idem, *Reading the Latter Prophets: Towards a New Canonical Criticism* (JSOTSup 376; London: T & T Clark, 2003) 182-242. In his last work, Conrad takes to task historical-critical scholars for their attempts to “return to the past” and understand the contents of the prophetic books in terms of reconstructed original settings (ibid., 25). But that, I submit, is precisely what the superscriptions to the prophetic books invite us to do. The difficulties inherent in accepting the invitation, and the consequences of the fact that neither narratives about the past nor narratives from the past provide us with unmediated access to the past, should not of course be underestimated.

Conrad interprets Is 1-6, 7-35, and 36-66 in terms of three “timeframes,” the vision Isaiah had in the year that King Uzziah died, the vision he had at the time of the Syro-Ephraimite crisis in the reign of King Ahaz, and the vision he had at the time of Sennacherib’s invasion in the reign of King Hezekiah, respectively (ibid., 196). Not only does this reconstruction lack historical plausibility, a point Conrad would not deny, it also lacks literary plausibility, in the sense that it consistently misreads the cues the text itself provides. To read Is 1-5 and not just 6 as if it represented a vision from the year that King Uzziah died, or anything beyond Is 7-8 as representative of a vision received during the Syro-Ephraimite crisis, or anything beyond the oracles contained in Is 36-39 as representative of a vision received at the time of Sennacherib’s invasion of Judah, is unfounded conjecture precisely from the literary point of view.

The traditional goal of interpretation is to produce a reconstruction of a text’s meaning against the background of the codes the text’s author used to communicate to an intended audience. The code to which our first attention must be given is that embedded in the text itself. The embedded code remands to realities beyond the text that are reconstrucatable on the basis of extra-textual cultural and historical data. A reconstruction is considered successful if it appears to assign a historically plausible intention, author, and audience to the text, and if it appears to respect the text from the point of view of structure and content. A return to the past, a consideration of implied original settings, and reconstruction of author, audience, and textual intention are of the essence of retrospective interpretation. We will fail to understand the editorial page of a year old newspaper, much less a text written down thousands of years ago, if we do not perform these retrospective tasks. The scholarship of Hermann Gunkel, James Muilenburg, and Umberto Eco, three from whom Conrad would rightly have us learn (ibid., 7-30), is characterized by retrospective interpretation in this sense. Conrad’s work pursues a different course.
validates this approach. In the context of this study, to what extent the Persian period author(s) of the book of Isaiah preserved the poetic integrity of the materials reelaborated becomes the logical question. Research covering the entire book of Isaiah, not presented here, would suggest that the Persian period redactor(s) of the book of Isaiah understood and respected the prosodic conventions of the texts that lay before them, even as they reworked and expanded them for their own purposes.

The atomization of 1:2-20 in any case creates more problems than it solves. 1:2-9 by itself lacks an ending and fails to exhibit a fully developed rhetorical intent. It is not a prophecy of doom, as Michael Fishbane has it, but is chiefly retrospective in nature. More than anything else, it raises a question: where will you be hit the next time, given your continued defiance. This is the sense of 1:5, the rhetorical peak of 1:2-9. The way out of the dilemma posed by 1:5 is found in 1:10-20. False solutions are dismissed first of all: a surfeit of offerings and prayer (1:11-15) will not make things right. Only the succor of society’s most vulnerable members will avert a further catastrophe. This is the sense of 1:16-20, the rhetorical conclusion to the entire piece.

Similarly, if 1:10-20 is an independent unit, it is not clear why the expressions “notables of Sodom” and “people of Gomorrah” are used at its onset (1:10). As a follow up to 1:2-9, however, the sense is clear: because they just paid the price for disregard of God’s expectations of them, as Sodom and Gomorrah of yore once did. There is a break between 1:2-9 and 10-20, but 1:9 provides semantic context for 1:10.

The framing function of 1:2-3 and 18-20, insofar as the former calls upon heaven and earth to serve as witnesses and states the charge against the people, and the latter calls for a settlement of the case, are naturally accounted for on the hypothesis that they are design elements of a rhetorical whole so intended from the start. The repeated structure at the core of the composition, whereby the people are twice called to attention by means of vocatives and accusatory epithets, twice posed an importunate question, and twice treated to a countering reply, first by the prophet, then by Yahweh himself (1:4-9 10-15), not to mention the other elements that tie 1:2-3, 4-9, 10-17, and 18-20 together, are most easily accounted for in the same way. Finally, 18-20 by itself is obscure, but 16-20 construed

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18 Features that bind 1:2-3, 4-9, 10-17, and 18-20 together are noted by Marvin Sweeney (*Isaiah 1-39*, 64-65). On the other hand, the inconsistencies Sweeney identifies (ibid., 67-68, 80, 82-83) vanish once one allows for the possibility that 1:2-20 derives from a time of relative peace following a devastating war to which the prophet retrospectively refers, and that the prophet composed 2-3 and 18-20 as the unit’s frame. The “either-or” conclusion in 1:19-20 is not so close to that of the speeches of the Deuteronomistic history as to require dependence on them. The rhetoric and language of 1:19-20 recall more closely 1sa 7:9; 30:9, 15. Elsewhere (*Isaiah 1-4*, 120-121, 123-124) Sweeney argues, following Jacob Milgrom (“Did Isaiah Prophecy During the Reign of Uzziah?” *VT* 14 [1964] 164-182; 174), that the threat of being devoured by the sword in 1:20 is pointless when read together with 1:4-9. On the contrary, 1:5 “Where shall you be struck the next time? You continue to turn away!” prepares the way for 1:20 “If you refuse and rebel, you
as a whole makes acceptable sense. A context-sensitive paraphrase might go like this: get your sorry offerings out of my face, cease harsh treatment of others, restrain the violent, defend orphan and widow; let’s get things right; though your sins be like scarlet robes, they will become, upon fulfillment of the above demands, as white as snow. If you acquiesce and obey, you will eat of the good of the land. If not, the sword will eat you.

**Rhetorical Traditions and Textual Interrelationships**

Controversy surrounds the question of genre or genres represented by 1:2-20. In my view, the greatest stumbling block to understanding is created by the false expectation that prophetic speech will adhere to any conventions beyond its own in a sustained and predictable fashion. To the contrary, prophetic discourse exploits whatever genres and topoi serve its purposes without reproducing them in full or slavishly following them. In 1:2-20, notions of a deity calling on heaven and earth to witness a grievance against a client nation; of a relationship of privilege and obligation established by a deity on a nation’s behalf, whereby he is understood as father and they as sons; of procedures to follow by a parent faced with a wayward and defiant son, of priestly instruction regarding ritual slaughter; of a quarrel between two parties; and of prophetic speech itself, are all exploited for rhetorical ends. In terms of deployment of topoi and cluster of themes, Isa 1:2-20 compares well, if not in every detail, with Deut 32, Hos 4:1-19, Mic 6:1-16, and Jer 2:1-37. In all cases, Israel’s relationship with Yahweh is the issue at hand. The consequences that derive from a breach of the relationship, along with in your face accusation and admonition, occupy center stage.

A rhetorical tradition to which all were tributary is a plausible explanation for many of the affinities the texts share. Direct influence of Deut 32 on Isa 1:2-20 is also probable, as I show below. Other texts now in the Torah seem to be echoed in Isa 1:2-20.19 On the other hand, Deut 32, Hos 4:1-19, Isa 1:2-20, Mic 6:1-16, and Jer 2:1-37 differ among themselves in how they deploy conventions and topoi they share.20

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19 Kirsten Nielsen notes parallels with Lv 26 (“Das Bild des Gerichts (Rîb Pattern) in Jes i-xii,” *VT* 29 [1979] 309-24; 322, n. 26). Compare Is 1:5, 18-20 with Lv 26:21; 1:7 with 26:16; and 1:20 with 26:25-26. As do others, Jacob Milgrom dates a core of Lv 26 to the 8th cent. BCE following the northern kingdom’s end (Leviticus 23-27: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary [AB 3B; New York: Doubleday, 2000] 2363-65). Following Judah’s decimation in 701 BCE, Isaiah may have redeployed language and themes from the parenesis in Lv 26. Lv 26:33b, on other hand, is probably part of an exilic interpolation (ibid., 2322-23). It seems to lift phraseology from Is 1:5. Parallels to threats contained in Dt 28, a 7th cent. BCE composition on most accounts, also deserve note. Compare Is 1:16 with Dt 28:20; 1:5-6 with 28:22, 27, 28, 35; and 1:7 with 28:33. As Jeffrey Tigay points out, Dt 28 seems to be a revised and updated collection of older collections of threats whose origins lie beyond native Israelite tradition (Deuteronomy: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation [and] Commentary [JPSTC; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1996] 490). Groups of threats contained in Dt 28 and echoed in Is may have circulated in some other form in the 8th cent. BCE. Isaiah deploys the language of these threats on three separate occasions (see above; compare OG Is 9:7 with Dt 28:20-21; and 5:26 with 28:49).

20 For a similar understanding of Mi 6:1-8 in relation to the genres it exploits, see Francis I. Andersen and David Noel Freedman, Micah: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary (AB 24E; New York: Doubleday) 507-511.
Deut 32, with its indictment of Israel for violation of the father-son relationship Yahweh established on Israel’s behalf, appears to have determined the structure and choice of themes of the first half of Isaiah 1:2-20.\(^\text{21}\) Isa 1:2-9 echoes Deut 32 measure for measure. First comes the call to heaven and earth to witness the indictment of Israel on charges of disloyalty; then, the playing off of Yahweh’s love for the people, the love of a father for his children, against the people’s insensate disobedience (Isa 1:2-4; cf. Deut 32:1, 4-20); then, the identification of an enemy attack as punishment for defection (Isa 1:5-7; cf. Deut 32:21-25); and finally, emphasis on Yahweh’s decision, nevertheless, not to blot the people out entirely (Isa 1:8-9; cf. Deut 32:26-35). Thereafter the texts go their separate ways in accord with divergent rhetorical ends. Deut 32 continues with a description of Yahweh’s plan to defeat Israel’s enemies, capped by a call for all the gods to acclaim Yahweh for deeds on behalf of his people (32:36-43). Isa 1:2-20 proceeds with a speech by Yahweh rejecting the people’s worship and demanding instead cessation of harsh treatment and defense of orphan and widow, capped by a statement of alternatives before them (1:10-20). Parenetic speech in ancient Hebrew literature often concludes with an “either-or” as in Isa 1:19-20 (cf. Ps 2:12, after 2:10-11; Ps 37:37-38, after 37:1-36; Ps 50:22-23, after 50:7-21; Prov 2:20-22, after 2:1-19; Prov 3:32-35, after 3:27-31; Prov 4:18-19, after 10-17; Deut 11:26-28, after 5:1-11:25; Deut 30:15-20, after 29:1-30:14; and 1 Sam 12:24-25, after 12:1-23).

Hos 4:1-19, Mic 6:1-16, and Jer 2:1-37 deploy a set of rhetorical strategies and themes that recur in Isa 1:2-20. In all four texts, in your face accusation of unbefitting behavior, emphasis on Yahweh’s displeasure with acts of obeisance from those who ignore his counsel, and a warning or prediction of dire consequences to come, co-occur.\(^\text{22}\)

The rhetorical strategies of Isa 1:2-20 and Mic 1:2-3:12 correspond. In Mic 1:2-16, the nation is accused indirectly, before the world (cf. Isa 1:2-3); then, in 2:1-11, directly, by means of a hôy-cry initiated unit (cf. Isa 1:4-9); and in 3:1-12, more directly still, by means of a ‘hear!’ initiated unit addressed in primis to the ruling class (cf. Isa 1:10-20).

Another text with affinities to Isa 1:2-20 is Amos 5:18-27. Like Isa 1:4-9, Amos 5:18-20 contains a hôy-cry, followed by a question which challenges those whom the hôy-cry addresses, followed by a countering reply by the prophet that draws out implications hidden within the question itself.\(^\text{23}\) Yahweh goes on to declare his hatred of their

\(^{21}\) Tigay makes a case for the priority of Dt 32:1-43 relative to its literary context and to texts from the prophets and the psalms with which it shares phraseology and themes (Deuteronomy, 510-13). Disloyalty is described as covenant-breaking in Dt 32’s frame (31:19-21, 24-30) but not in Dt 32 (ibid., 295, 299, 509-10). The difference turns on construing the elective bond Yahweh establishes with Israel in terms of a relationship between a father and the sons he acquires (per Dt 32; cf. Dt 14:1-2) rather than in terms of a covenant established by a superior on behalf an inferior (per Dt 31:19-21, 24-30). Heaven and earth function as witnesses to a warning per Dt 4:26 and as witnesses to an indictment per Dt 32:1-6. In both cases, to be sure, they are called as witnesses because they are interested parties, with a stake in any breakup that might take place between Yahweh and his client nation. For a discussion of linguistic elements and themes shared by Dt 32 and Is 1, 5, 28, and 30, see Ronald Bergey, “The Song of Moses (Deuteronomy 32:1-43) and Isaianic Prophecies: A Case of Early Intertextuality?” JSOT 28 (2003) 33-54.

\(^{22}\) Ho 4, Mi 6, and Jr 2, insofar as they represent compositional units, have received scant attention. Ho 4 is textually uncertain. Mi 6 appears to be a 28 line unit; Jr 2, an 80 line unit (18+22+12+28).

worship, demands its cessation, and pursuit of justice (5:21-25; cf. Isa 1:10-17). Predictions of a dire end conclude the unit: 5:26-27. An equally dire end is predicted at the conclusion of Isa 1:2-20, should disobedience continue (1:20).

Ps 50 has multiple affinities with Isa 1:2-20. Assuming a change in vocalization ('wickedness' for 'the wicked one' in 50:16), the addressee throughout is 'my people,' 'Israel;' (50:7; cf. Isa 1:3). God summons heaven and earth to the trial of his people (50:4), arraigns the latter for breach of covenant (50:5, 7-8, 16-21), and threatens dire consequences (50:3, 22). The people are reproved, not for sacrifices per se (50:8) but for wickedness (50:16). The text concludes, as does Isa 1:2-20, with alternatives from the deity in person: ‘Mark this, you who forget God, lest I tear you apart, with none to deliver! He who sacrifices a thank-offering honors me, and he who is blameless of way [reading תומ for ולא] – him I will show the salvation of God’ (50:22-23). In the context of the cult, Ps 50 arraigns the people and calls on them to be blameless if they are to experience God’s salvation. They will suffer dismemberment at Yahweh’s hand if they are not. Isa 1:2-20 is not directly modeled on Ps 50, but may owe its basic outline to the cultic genre of which the latter is our only exemplar.

It might be objected that Isa 1:2-3 and 11-20, minus the quotation formulae in 1:2, 11, and 20, are self-contained divine speeches with a rhetorical integrity all their own. This is true, but does not change the fact that prophetic discourse as handed down to us deploys divine oracles within a matrix of argumentation that extends beyond the limits of the directly quoted divine speech it contains. The assumption that such does not represent an original state of affairs, that instead, a prophet stood up, recited a two or three line divine oracle, and sat down, is, so far as I can tell, entirely without foundation.

In short, Isa 1:2-20 shares a set of themes and rhetorical strategies with several other prophetic discourses (Hos 4:1-19, Mic 6:1-16, Jer 2:1-37; and Amos 5:18-27) and echoes language, themes, and rhetorical strategies attested elsewhere (Deut 32, Lev 26, Deut 28, and Ps 50). These facts lack an explanation on the view that Isa 1:2-20 is a pieced together collection of originally independent units.

**Emotional Logic**

If Isa 1:2-20 is broken up into pieces, its emotional logic is also shattered. 1:2-3 is plaintive and accusatory in tone, from the standpoint of an abandoned father. 1:4 brings the accusation to a climax with an apostrophe from the standpoint of a “third” party, the prophet, followed by, a direct address with a leading question and exclamation (1:5a) that recall by way of context (1:2) and choice of terminology, the status of the addressees as punished and disobedient children (cf. Deut 21:18; Prov 13:24; 23:13-14). The tone is one of exasperation. 1:5b-6 describes the nation’s malaise as though the nation were an injured and uncared for body, with the implication that, if not for estrangement, it would be cared for by the one able to do so. The tone is accusatory and plaintive at the same

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time, a return to the text’s emotional point of departure. 1:7-8 dwells on the desolation of land and city, first by staccato description, then by complex simile. Zion is described as a solitary hut in a vineyard destroyed by a flood, left over but surrounded by devastation. The accusatory tone is abandoned, displaced if only briefly by pure plaint. 1:9 brings the emotional sequence to closure. The prophet no longer presents himself as a third party, but aligns himself with the people whom Yahweh has spared. The tone is one of gratitude for not quite comparing to Sodom and Gomorrah in terms of degree of desolation.

As do a number of psalms, the intense emotions of which are like waves thrown ad seriatim upon the sand, Isa 1:2-20 repeats itself emotionally. In 1:10, as in, e.g., Ps 9:14 and 35:11, the text makes a pivot, and roughly the same emotional ground is covered a second time (Isa 1:10-20; Ps 9:14-10:18; 35:11-28). A tone of accusation returns with the onset of pærenchia (10). An accusatory peak follows (11-15), then a pærenetic peak (16-17). Finally, there is a fusion of perspective. Yahweh forms a “we” with the ones he has accused, and holds out promise and threat (18-20). In the poem’s conclusion, the accusatory tone is abandoned, replaced by an air that is first conciliatory and then threatening. The terminology chosen joins the end of the poem to the language and themes of the poem’s preceding parts. For documentation, see Appendix H Isa 1:18-20.

Historical Context

The implied historical setting of 1:2-20 is provided by indicia in the text. At a point in time in which the desolation of town and country and the deliverance of Jerusalem in extremis was still fresh in all minds (7-9), at a location, perhaps, not far from the entrance to the temple courts (12), the prophet accuses the people of unrelenting defiance of their God (2-4) even as they heap a multitude of sacrifices upon the altar and redouble their dedication to the requirements of the religious calendar (10-15). In the relative calm following a cessation of hostilities, with destruction all around, awareness of having suffered and survived a terrible loss triggered an outpouring of attention upon the deity among those who were spared. But a revival of piety did not translate into cessation of harsh treatment of others, or pursuit of justice, or defense of orphan and widow (16-17), whose numbers would have burgeoned following the loss of life and taking of captives in war. A malaise afflicted the nation (5-6). The devastation of town and country and ongoing usufruct of native agricultural land by foreigners (7) had failed to chasten the nation into a mending of ways.

Failure to turn post-destruction is the implied occasion of the text before us. The implied occasion corresponds to one historical situation in particular: the aftermath of Sennacherib’s invasion of Judah in 701, perhaps a year or so hence. To be sure, the implied occasion of a text is a rhetorical construct which may or may not correspond to the actual occasion for which it was composed. Nevertheless, the hypothesis that the actual occasion of Isa 1:2-20 is identical to the implied one involves the least unproven premises. 24

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III. Text, Prosody, and Tropes

A prosodic analysis of Isa 1:2-20 yields results that are compatible with the view that it represents a rhetorical unit. Prosodic analysis is highly sensitive to textual difference. Textual criticism and prosodic analysis thus go hand in hand.

The consonantal text of MT Isa 1:2-20 makes use of medial *matres lectionis* and orthographic conventions for the indication of pronominal suffixes which are unattested in pre-exilic epigraphic Hebrew. A reconstruction of the text’s original orthography, propaedeutic to the task of textual criticism, is provided in Appendix I. The disambiguation of forms represented by the received orthography and vocalization seems generally but not universally correct. I argue below that a *yodh* was mistakenly added to an original זָרַם in 1:7.

The tetragrammaton יְהוָה (1:2,4,9,10,11,18,20 [7x total]) was most likely pronounced in the 8th cent. BCE, not replaced by ‘Adonai.’ פָּנָי ‘to show oneself [before] my face’ (1:12) should probably be read as פָּנָי ‘to see my face.’ זָרַם ‘you will be devoured’(1:20) is best understood as a G passive reparsed as a D passive after G passives fell out of use. זָרַם ‘you will be eaten’ is a possible reconstruction of its original vocalization. A systematic reconstruction of 8th cent. BCE Hebrew phonology lies beyond the scope of this essay. Here and there I offer a piecemeal reconstruction.

Joseph Blenkinsopp regards זָרַם כְּחַפְסָךְ ‘they turned back’ in 1:4 and זָרַם ‘and a devastation like the overthrow of strangers’ in 1:7 as glosses. If removed, 1:2-9 conforms to the length rule just the same. But זָרַם ‘turned back’ ties in nicely with זָרַם ‘you continue to turn away’ in 1:5. Emended per Ibn Ezra, זָרַם ‘like the destruction-site of a storm’ in 1:7 also suits the context. זָרַם consume the land, and leave devastation like that caused by a torrential rain זָרַם. Zion is left like a watchman’s hut left standing, its purpose come to naught, in the midst of a vineyard picked clean by intruders (1:8).

Text Critical Methodology

The securest point of departure for prosodic analysis of ancient Hebrew poetry is the MT. A comparison with manuscripts from Qumran suggests a Second Temple period date for the orthography, grammatical parse, syntactic parse, and paragraph divisions MT transmits in almost all instances. 1QIsa and other QIsa mss. in near universal agreement with MT nevertheless differ from it in matters of sense division, addition/omission of a

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25 Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1-39*, 177. זָרַם is not represented in OG. The translator may have found the phrase difficult or redundant, and left it untranslated, or it may have been absent from his Vorlage.


27 See Eugene Ulrich, “Impressions and Intuition: Sense Divisions in Ancient Manuscripts of Isaiah,” in *Unit Delimitation in Biblical Hebrew and Northwest Semitic Literature* (ed. Marjo C. A. Korpel and Josef M. Oesch; Pericope 4; Assen: Van Gorcum, 2003) 279-307. The data Ulrich collects suggests that “some scribes intentionally or unintentionally introduced changes in the pattern of sense divisions in the source scroll, so that the new scroll would not look identical to the old one” (304). But the collected data also suggests that conservation of the sense divisions of the source scroll was the norm to which scribes aspired.
waw, article, or mater lectionis, change in number, pronominal reference, grammatical form, or one preposition for another. Sometimes the differences reflect a more primitive text than that found in MT. In 1:20, without the waw as attested in 4QIsa, and not as found in MT, seems to represent the more original reading. On this hypothesis, a more difficult asyndetic construction was made more readable by the addition of a waw. The contrast between 1:19 and 1:20 would originally have been expressed intonationally, not syntactically.

Many interpreters are not inclined to suggest an alternative to a reading of MT as a matter of principle, even if the alternative is plausible in theory, or the text as it stands is difficult to defend. Methodological humility of this kind protects the interpreter from much error, but also from the possibility of restoring a text that has been revised or corrupted in the course of transmission. Emendations to MT are sometimes warranted. It is striking, nonetheless, that if the consonantal text and vocalization preserved in MT are retained, conformity of Isa 1:2-20 to the general rule and length rule still obtains.

A scansion that sticks to MT as far as possible is of heuristic value even when there are arguments in favor of reading a text that differs from or construes a text otherwise than MT in specific instances. A scansion of Isa 1:2-20 that equals MT except for the few changes in prosodic phrasing necessary to avoid a violation of the general rule is offered first of all. It appears as version 1 in Appendices H, I, and J.

The reading traditions preserved in ancient Hebrew mss., the most famous of which is 1QIsa, and in ancient translations, the most important of which is the LXX or Old Greek (OG), are another point of departure. A Second Temple period date for the consonantal text and sense divisions reflected in the Qumran Isa mss., and for the consonantal text and grammatical and syntactic parse reflected in OG, is assured.

The Hebrew which an ancient translator presupposed must be reconstructed, with a greater or smaller expected margin of error depending on the technique of the translator. It is beyond dispute that in numerous instances, OG Isaiah seems to reflect a Hebrew text at variance with MT, or construes what might be an identical consonantal text otherwise than MT. It is not always obvious which text and which construal of it – that of MT, that of a Qumran ms., or that presupposed by OG – is likely to be more original.

A reconstruction of the Hebrew and the construal of it presupposed by OG is useful even when there are grounds for preferring MT or a reconstructed common ancestor of MT and OG to the text OG presupposes. Unfortunately for text criticism, the translation technique employed in OG Isaiah is relatively free. The reconstruction of its Vorlage is fraught with difficulty. The reconstruction of the underlying Hebrew and construal of it reflected in the Vulgate, Peshitta, Targum, and Saadiah’s translation is somewhat easier. Occasionally a text at variance with MT is attested. Strong tendencies towards the standardization of the text notwithstanding, medieval Hebrew mss. also preserve variant readings in rare instances.

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28 See Emanuel Tov, Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible (2d ed.; Minneapolis/Assen: Fortress/Van Gorcum, 2001) 31 (Table 2); Dominique Barthélémy, “Comparaison de 1QIs-b avec 1QIs-a,” in idem, ed., Critique textuelle de l’Ancien Testament 3: Ézéchiel, Daniel et le 12 Prophètes (OBO 50/3; Fribourg / Göttingen: Éditiones Universitaires / Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1992) cii-cxiv. Ms. and versional variants are not reported in this essay unless deemed to reflect a text or a construal of it more primitive than MT.
The traditional goal of textual criticism is a reconstruction of the text from which all known texts are likely to have arisen. Sometimes, of course, two or more alternatives seem equally possible. Or it may seem likely that an attested reading is not original but seem impossible to point to a single alternative as the more likely original reading.

Because we have no texts in hand that date before the late Second Temple period, what a particular text looked like before then is a matter of critical investigation. The work of textual reconstruction is ineluctable. Historical and literary-critical questions are unavoidable. I offer a scansion of Isa 1:2-20 based on a reconstruction of the text and the grammatical, syntactic, and prosodic parse it might have been meant to have by the one who composed it. It appears as version 2 in Appendices H, I, and J.

Prosodic Analysis

According to my analysis, 1:2-9 consists of 18 lines and 40 versets, and 1:10-20 consists of 22 lines and 50 versets. Scansion is uncertain in a few instances. A key issue in prosodic analysis concerns patterns of stress retention and deletion.

In 1:5 version 2, against MT, I stress the twice occurring כֹּל, on the assumption that rhetorical emphasis would be appropriate there. In 1:11 version 2, against MT, זִבְחֵיכֶם is not cliticized. The result is a stress and sound “rhyme” with a cognate phrase in 1:16 בּוֹרַע-מַעַלְלֵיכֶם. 1:15 version 2, against MT, contains a double cliticization גַּם-כִּי-תַרְבּוּ. The result is a stress “rhyme” with the first stress unit of the preceding aligned verset בּוֹרַע-מַעַלְלֵיכֶם.

If MT were retained in the above cases, the general rule would not be violated. It is possible to respect MT’s stress retention and deletion patterns, syntactic parsing, and division into pesuqim, irregardless of possible arguments to the contrary, and accommodate the text model in all but a few instances. But the prosodic phrasings and traditions of sense division preserved in MT do not necessarily accord with those originally intended in every instance. Attested patterns and tendencies in MT’s retention and deletion of stress are a function of neumic requirements. They do more than represent traditional sense divisions. Mixed readings are also attested. One cannot assume that the prosody entailed by the sung recitation of the text in the first millennium of this era coincides in every detail with the prosodic regularities of Hebrew poetry of the First and Second Temple periods. Stress retention and deletion patterns seem about constant throughout MT. Patterns unique to poetry, if such there were, are not preserved.

The fact is, MT inconsistently retains and deletes stress in a variety of circumstances. The prosodic parse implied by the phonological data and that implied by the use of the maqgeph do not always agree, as Israel Yeivin points out (Introduction to the Tiberian Masorah (tr. and ed. Ernest John Revell; Masoretic Studies 5; Missoula: Scholars Press, 1980) 228-36; 234-35. The freedom to retain stress produces four stress verses (לְפָנָיִים וּתָבֹא כִּי 1:12, דִּבְרֵי יְהוָה פִּי 1:20). The freedom to delete stress results in single stress

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versets (זֹרוּ לֹא 1:6, אָוֶל לֹא 1:13) or rather, from the point of view of the prosody entailed by the sung recitation of the text, in the collapsing of two complex verbal clauses (זֹרוּ לֹא 1:6) or of a complex object and complex verbal clause (זֹרוּ 1:13) into a single prosodic unity equivalent to a verset as otherwise attested in ancient Hebrew verse.

Given this state of affairs, it seems appropriate to explore the possibility that constraints governing stress retention and deletion were operative in ancient Hebrew poetry such that permissible variation occurred in a more limited range of contexts than obtains in MT. A working hypothesis in this sense is set out in Appendix B. On this hypothesis, function words like מִי (1:12) and כִּי (1:2, 12, 20) and prepositions like עַל (1:5) are regularly cliticized. Negatives like לֹא (1:6, 13) and אֵין (1:6) retain stress except in medial prosodic position. These and like differences vis-à-vis MT, miniscule though they are, give rise on occasion to a division of a line into versets or of a verset into stress ma ma units at variance with MT.

In order to avoid a violation of the general rule, stress deletion is necessary in 1:4 (אֶת - 2nd case), 5 (מֶה - עַל), 11 (לִּי - לָמָּה or - רֹב), 12 (- כִּי and - מִי), and 20 (- כִּי). In three out of six cases (1:4 (- אֶת), 11 (לִּי - לָמָּה - רֹב), and 12 (- מִי)), the necessary deletion occurs in MT.

Assuming the sense divisions and text adopted here, and in accordance with patterns observed elsewhere, stress deletion is called for in 1:2 (- כִּי), 4 (- כָּל 2x), 5 (- כָּל), 6 (- מִכַּף and - וְעַד), 8 (- הבָּר), 12 (- כִּי - מִי and - מִי), 15 (- מִי - מִי - מִי - מִי), 18 (- 2x), 19 (- אָוֶל and - כִּי), 20 (- כִּי). Stress retention is called for in 1:6 (אֵין and לֹא), 10 (דָּבָר), and 13 (לֹא). Stress retention or deletion are possible in 1:5 (- כָּל 2x), 11 (לֶחֶם -技术和 - רֹב), and 15 (- כָּל).

16 cases of stress deletion found in MT are ruled in by my hypothesis: 1:4 (- כָּל 2x), 5 (- לֶחֶם 2x), 6 (- מִכַּף - וְעַד), 8 (- הבָּר), 11 (לֶחֶם -技术和 - רֹב), 12 (- מִי), 13 (מִנְחַת - שָׁוְא), 15 (- מִי - מִי - מִי - מִי), 18 (- 2x), 19 (- אָוֶל), 20 (- כִּי). 9 cases of stress deletion or retention found in MT are ruled out: 1:2 (כִּי), 5 (- שָׁוְא), 6 (- מִי and - לֹא), 10 (- דָּבָר), 12 (- כִּי), 13 (- מִי - מִי - מִי - מִי), 20 (- אָוֶל and - כִּי).

Aggregate numbers of versets and stress units, not just lines, may have been stylized in ancient Hebrew poetry. For example, it is conceivable that verset and stress unit totals were always even in number. Totals that consist of multiples and combinations of 12, 18, 22, and 28 seem to occur more often than chance would account for. Isa 1:2-20 version 2 has a line total of 18+22=40; a verset total of 40+50=90 (3×(12+18)), and a stress unit total of 100+116=216 (12×18). To be sure, verset and especially stress unit totals are difficult to be sure about. The matter requires further investigation.

Hierarchical Divisions

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Isa 1:2-20 divides into two parts: 1:2-9 and 10-20. Text breaks found in 1QIs, OG, Peshitta, and Masoretic mss. back up this two-part division insofar as they indicate a break after 1:9 and 1:20. Codex Aleppo has major breaks after 1:9 and 1:20 and a lesser break after 1:17. Codex Leningradensis has minor breaks after 1:9, 1:17, and 1:20, and a greater break after 1:23. A threefold division with lesser breaks after 1:9 and 1:17 preponderates among Masoretic mss.

As the example of Isa 1:2-20 shows, traditions of unit delimitation in ancient mss. are not without internal inconsistencies and thus are not a completely reliable guide to the subdivisions of the text they transmit. At a lower level of the text hierarchy, an obvious case in point involves the widowed last words of 1:16 והָרֵעַ חִדְלוּ ‘cease dealing harshly.’ They are rather to be grouped with the first words of 1:17 והֵיטֵב לִמְדוּ ‘practice dealing kindly,’ as in most modern translations. Nevertheless, traditional sense divisions form a baseline against which subdivisions proposed on other grounds ought to be compared.

In 1:2-9, the division into stanzas exhibits a 1:(1:1) structure in which the strongest caesura, between 1:3 and 1:4, coincides with a change in addressee. The division into strophes is for the most part self-evident and coincides with MT’s division of the unit into pesuqim. The methodological point that needs to be made was just touched upon: MT’s division into pesuqim form a baseline against which subdivisions proposed on other grounds ought to be compared.

A case might be made for putting 1:6a with 1:5. A 1:(1:1) three line strophe would thus be created. MT’s division is supported inasmuch as 1:6 as it stands constitutes a single complex enjambed structure. If we follow MT, a 1:1 strophe (1:5) is followed by a 1:(1:1) strophe (1:6), the whole of which is introduced by 1:4, itself a strophe.

1:4-6 constitutes a 1:(1:1) three strophe stanza. Isa 1:5a introduces 5b at the strophe level, but also, 5b-6b at the stanza level. 1:5a exemplifies the way a line may introduce more than the strophe of which it is a part. Prosodic hierarchy elucidates semantic structure only partially.

Word Pairs

Word pairs in ancient Hebrew poetry have received wide attention. To illustrate the research that might yet be done, I offer a brief analysis of the first word pair to appear in Isa 1:2-20: (a) שָׁמַע ‘hear,’ (b) הָאזִינִי ‘give ear’ (1:2).

A review of co-occurrences of שָׁמַע and הָאזִינִי in parallelism demonstrates that the order in which they co-occur is relatively fixed. The parallelism is one of specification.

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is the holonym, and the meronym, in the sense that the latter describes a constituent activity of the former. Or again, is a hypernym, a troponym, in the sense that the latter specifies a manner of doing of the former. The G-H (Qal-Hiphil) sequence is characteristic. A similar pair: and incline (the ear).

Rhythmic Configurations

Language in verse is regularized according to obligatory conventions that belong to the realm of “meter.” Non-obligatory stylizations of language also characterize verse. Among these are stylizations that belong to the realm of “rhythm.” Rhythmic configurations of lines and strophes are a case in point. Isa 1:4 offers an example. I repoint the text according to a reconstruction of ancient Hebrew phonology.

Progressive lengthening occurs across foots and versets (terms explained in Appendix A):

\[(\text{mon + mon + iamb}) : (\text{mon + iamb + iamb})\]
\[(\text{mon + anapest}) : (\text{iamb + anapest})\]
\[(\text{amphibrach + anapest}) : (\text{amphibrach + anapest + anapest}) : (\text{amphibrach + iamb}).\]

The last verset alone, pointing as it does beyond the strophe in which it occurs, does not participate in the sequence.

Rhythmic patterns like the above are possible in virtue of a frequent phenomenon in ancient Hebrew poetry: the progressive lengthening and/or heightening of items in parallelism. Lengthening of concurrent items in parallelism occasionally occurs in tandem with progressive shortening; more often, asymmetry remains. Examples include G-D, G-H, and G-D-H (simple-intensive-causative) verbal and nominal sequences (1:2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 10, 11, 13, 15, 16, 19-20); and biliteral-triliteral, masculine-feminine, simple-affirmative, singular-plural, and simplex-construct chain nominal sequences (1:3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14, 17).

Lengthening, heightening, assonance, and consonance cooperate to splendid effect in Isa 1:4. Internal rhymes lend coherence at the verset level (7x). Initial, medial, and end rhymes bind versets together at the line and strophe levels (10x). Alternation of end rhyme and lack of it from one pair of versets to the next keeps the sound orchestration

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33 and co-occur in parallelism in that order 20x: Gn 4:23; Ex 15:26; Nm 23:18; Dt 1:45; Jg 5:3; Is 1:2; 1:10; 32:9; 42:23; 64:3; Jr 13:15; Ho 5:1; Ji 1:2; Pss 49:2; 54:4; 84:9; 143:1; Jb 33:1; 34:2, 16; in reverse order, 2x: Dt 32:1; Is 28:23. and co-occur in that order 4x: Is 34:2; Ho 5:1; Mi 1:2; Ps 17:1; in reverse order, never. Is 28:23 and Dt 32:1 are examples of parallelism of consecution, with “giving ear” and “hearing” occurring in that order because they are consecutive actions.

from becoming monotonous. Complex end rhymes involving the first and last lines frame the middle line. The rhymemes rarely involve complete syllables. The effect is subtle. The opposite would be the case if full syllables were involved.

The rhythmic configuration of 5b+6aα is worthy of note:

\[ \text{monic+anapest: (iamb + iamb + iamb)} \]

If, in accordance with a working hypothesis regarding the phonology of ancient Hebrew, we vocalize לִלָחֳ as לְחֹלִי (a third weak monosyllabic proto-segholate with incipient anaptyxis), רֶגֶל as רָגֶל, and אֵין as אָיִן, the rhythm would be:

(monic+anapest: (iamb + iamb + iamb))

A rhythmic inclusio (monic+anapest) frames and participates in a progressive lengthening of items (monic→iamb→anapest) in parallelism.

**Enjambment**

In ancient Hebrew verse, a variety of types of enjambment are attested. Weak enjambment is frequent. Clauses and phrases are often divided across the versets of a line, and less commonly, across the lines of a strophe or stanza, in accordance with natural syntactic breaks.35

The stanza that fills 1:4-6 illustrates the latter. 1:4-5α is a vocative address consisting of asyndetically concatenated phrases and unmarked relative clauses which occupy a whole strophe (1:4). The core of the clause of which 1:4 is the subject takes up a single verset at the onset of the next strophe (1:5α). 1:6 consists of enjambed phrases and unmarked relative clauses which concatenate asyndetically at the major caesurae within the enjambed structure, and conjunctively across the members of verset and line.

1:4-6 is dominated by the two enjambed structures just described, but it is a single two beat clause, 1:5α, the one post-initial verset in the line structure of the stanza to not constitute a parallel unit vis-à-vis the initial verset with which it is paired, that constitutes the entire section’s (1:2-9) rhetorical peak: ‘You continue to turn away!’ The “odd man out” in a context of semantic, syntactic, and sonic parallelisms at a determinate level of the textual hierarchy tends to have a function that goes beyond that level.

**Stanza Level Semantics**

In the case of semantic structures that encompass more than one strophe, sonic parallelisms across strophes help create a sense of cohesion. Isa 1:7-8 is a case in point:

\[ \text{monic+anapest: (iamb + iamb + iamb)} \]

Zion survives, like a flimsy structure might survive a storm, and not by its own doing. Within the strophe constituted by 1:7, repeated שְׁמָמָה 'devastation' forms an inclusio. The wordplay זָרִים 'outsiders/storm' is contained within a single line, enhancing its punch. A new strophe begins with זָרֶם 'left over, lovely Zion' (1:8). The end alignment of זָרֶם 'storm' and כָרֶם 'vineyard' in successive lines is poetically satisfying. Rhyming of וְנוֹתְרָה 'and left over' with שְׁמָמָה 'and devastation' obtains across lines and strophes. The syntax of 1:7 is open to more than one interpretation. I construe the first two versets as a complex subject, and the last verset as a complex predicate introduced by an emphatic waw (compare the waw in Amos 4:10; Isa 10:15).

In 1:8, the parallelism of the ø … ב comparison of 8a with the ב … כ comparison of 8b, a heightened form of a ø … ב comparison, defines the 2 x 2 structure of the strophe. But semantic parallelisms and chiasmus cooperate to create a framing effect that counterpoints the syntactic and prosodic 2 x 2 structure:

2:2 a₁b¹c₁d¹  נוֹתְרָה-בַת-צִיּוֹן כְּסֻכָּה בָכֵרָמ
2:2 x₂c²d₂j₁b²a²  נְצוּרָה כְּעִיר בֵּמְיָאָה

Zion was נוֹתְרָה ‘left over’ insofar as it was נְצוּרָה ‘watched over.’ Yahweh is the unnamed agent of the leaving over and watching over. This is left for the hearers of the speech to supply, until the information is made explicit in the first line of the following strophe: If Yahweh of Armies had not left us a remnant’ (1:9).

Read through the lens of the general rule, 1:9 as syntactically parsed in MT appears to be a doubly enjambed tripartite line. One stress might be eliminated by recourse to a “no two stresses in a row rule” (לָנוּ-הוֹתִיר). The result would be an enjambed bipartite line. But I suggest elsewhere that the “no two stresses in a row” is an overgeneralization.

Irregardless, one expects כְּקֵם in 1:9 to be phrase-initial. כְּקֵם is best read with 1:9b. 1:9a is thus an enjambed bipartite line, and כְּקֵם in 1:9b becomes part of an initial rhyme scheme. A temporal connotation for כְּקֵם fits the context.

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36 The ב … כ comparison here means “like A, so B.” Cf. Jo 14:11; Is 24:2; Ho 4:9. I take נוֹתְרָה to be a participle forming a grammatical rhyme with נְצוּרָה. Otherwise נוֹתְרָה becomes a so-called waw-conversive + perfect, referring to the future, as in fact OG construes it.

37 “Regularities,” 10.

38 For a defense of this construal, and an argument on rhetorical grounds for 1:9 as the original conclusion of 1:2-8, see Nico A. van Uchelen, “Isaiah 1,9 – Text and Context,” OTS 21 (1981) 155-63. For
More Hierarchical Divisions

The divisions of MT across 1:11-12 and 1:13-14 are not the most cogent imaginable. Alternatives are discussed below. It is usual to separate 1:16-17 from 18-20. MT’s 
setuma between 1:17 and 18 backs up this division. In my view, 1:16 and 17 read best with 1:18-20, as successive parts of the composition’s concluding parenesis. 16 contains the first three, 17 the next six, and 18 the last of ten imperatives which tie the parenesis together. Just as the imperatives of 1:10 precede a subunit marked by an introductory question and quotation formula in 1:11, the imperatives of 1:16 and 17 precede a subunit marked by an introductory invitation and quotation formula in 1:18:

The two stanzas of 10-15 together with the stanza of 16-20 form a (1:1):1 section. First sing. perfect verb forms, as I divide the text, lead off units of the section’s first stanza: לא כל ונה, respectively. Five kinds of quadrupeds are listed in the second strophe and a reference to the “trampling of my courts” concludes the third strophe, forming a kind of inclusio. Across stanza boundaries, the first and last versets of 11-13a form an inclusio: ‘What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices? . . . It is to me an abomination.

A Syntactic Crux

MT 1:12 is problematic. A preposed kî clause does not introduce subordinate clauses, as one would expect (e.g., Exod 23:4, 5, 23-24). Two loosely joined versets follow which must be treated as a parenthesis before לא כל ונה in 1:13. In addition, MT 1:12 exhibits little internal parallelism and only awkward parallelism with its context. But if 1:12 is connected with ולא כל ונה of 1:11 per syntactic structures attested elsewhere (Isa 14:29; Joel 2:21; Zech 2:14; Ps 58:11; Ps 107:30), internal and external parallelisms of the same density as the immediate context reappear. See Isa 1:12 version 2.

More Stanza Level Semantics

1:13a, the opening strophe of 13-15, consists of a motivated negative command that forms a logical conclusion to the preceding and anticipates the string of imperatives in 16. A new strophe begins in 13b. A triad of terms referring to the religious calendar shifts the focus from animal sacrifice to religious observance more generally. 13b-14 prepare the way for the stanza’s concluding strophe (15), introduced by a conjunction. The accusatory peak towards which 11-15 climb is the “odd man out,” and last verset, in the stanza’s final line: ‘your hands are full of blood’ (15).

It might be countered that ‘your hands are full of blood’ with which the stanza concludes concatenates with ‘wash and be clean’ in the first line of the next stanza (1:16). On the other hand, concatenation is no respecter of boundaries. The second verset of l:5 concatenates with the last verset of 1:4, the first four versets of 1:10 with the last two versets of 1:9, in both instances across clear semantic and form-critical divisions.

A 1:(1:1) stanza concludes the entire speech (16-20). Yahweh has brought charges against his client nation (2-3). Judgment, one assumes, will follow. Instead, language associated with the cult is used to demand an ethical about-face to be marked by a cessation of cultic activity (13, 16). Proscribed actions are: animal sacrifice, observance of religious holidays, and prayer (11-15). Prescribed actions are: cessation of harsh treatment of others, the reining in of the violent, and the protection of the weak (17). Yahweh concludes with an offer and an ultimatum: your past sins will be overlooked should you take heed (18-19). If not, you will face more of the same (5, 20).

Yahweh’s offer involves overlooking past sins of omission while requiring proaction from now on. The offer is time-sensitive and one day will no longer apply.

1:10-20 as I divide it disregards a cluster of MT’s subdivisions that seem motivated by offense at the poem’s sharp rhetorical edge (4x in 1:11-13). את הָעֵצִים of 1:11, as already argued, is to be construed with 1:12. In 1:11-13a, A B’ follows AB and so on:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>B=topic</th>
<th>A=comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>לָמָּה - (1)</td>
<td>שָׂבַעְתִּי</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>רֹב זִבְחֵיכֶם</td>
<td>כִּי לִרְאוֹת</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>עֹלוֹת מְרִיאִים</td>
<td>מִי בִּקֵּשׁ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>וְחֵלֶב וְעַתּוּדִים</td>
<td>זוּמַרְכַּבֶּת</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>וְכְבָשִׂים</td>
<td>כַּפְרָהָה</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(1)-(4) communicate the deity’s rejection of the plethora of animal sacrifices offered in the wake of the events alluded to in 1:7-9. The rhetorical question (4) is in fact a denial with the implication that God requires something other than this. It concludes the section’s first stanza. A negative command (5) opens a new stanza and anticipates the demands of 1:16. Along with (6) and (7), it brings the expression of displeasure that characterizes the deity’s address to a head. The “no!” pronounced over אב ‘coming’ (3) is particularized by the prohibition of הביא ‘bringing’ something in hand (5). קְטֹרֶת in (6) refers to ‘smoke’ from animal offerings as in Pss 66:15 and 141:2. I follow Duhm’s syntactic parse of 1:13a. It accords with the trenchant style of the poem as a whole.

MT’s construal of 1:12-13a appears intent on avoiding a text that might appear to reject cultic activity per se. The resultant collocation of versets and lines into pesuqim is problematic. Against MT, 12-13a seems to make a strophe, and 13b-14 another.

A variant construal of 12-13a is reflected in OG Isaiah and adopted by NJPSV:

\[ \text{OG:} \quad \text{כִּי-תָּבֹאוּ} \quad \text{לֵרָאוֹת} \quad \text{מִי-בִּקֵּשׁ} \quad \text{מִיֶּדְכֶם} \]  
\[ \text{3:3} \]  
\[ \text{b-c}: \quad a_2^2 \quad \text{ld (OG)} \]  

The vertically aligned parallelisms deserve note: \[a_2^a \text{ and } b_1^c b_1^c b_1^b \text{.} \] The tone is harsh: ‘That you come . . . who asked this from your hand?’ But the semantics are awkward, with ‘coming’ described as something not asked “from your hand.” Alternatively, the text may be understood as signaling rejection of excessive animal sacrifice (so OG and NJPSV): ‘When you come . . . who asked this (your many sacrifices) from your hand.’ Either way, on this prosodic parse, the vertical parallelism of the versets per my reconstruction is lost. Foregrounding of the prohibition also disappears. On OG and NJPSV’s construal, a blanket rejection of visits to God’s house is replaced by a rejection of excessive sacrifice. On balance, 1:11-13a as I construe it is more defensible.

Further pronouncements of displeasure follow, encompassing piety in general. The problem is not sacrifice or an excess of it. All acts of piety meet Yahweh’s rejection:

\[ \text{כָּפֵיכֶם} \quad \text{וּבְפָרְשָׂכֶם} \quad \text{מִכֶּם} \quad \text{עֵינַי} \quad \text{אַעְלִים} \]  
\[ \text{[15]} \]  
\[ \text{כַּפֵּיכֶם} \quad \text{וּבְפָרְשָׂכֶם} \quad \text{מִכֶּם} \quad \text{עֵינַי} \quad \text{אַעְלִים} \quad \text{גַּם-כִּי-תַּפִּלָּה} \]  
\[ \text{[3]} \]  

MT 1:13b contains a nominative absolute construction unattested elsewhere:\textsuperscript{40}  

\[ \text{כָּפֵיכֶם} \quad \text{וּבְפָרְשָׂכֶם} \quad \text{מִכֶּם} \quad \text{עֵינַי} \quad \text{אַעְלִים} \]  
\[ \text{[5]} \]  

The same text divided as above, (1) and (2), is more defensible.

Rejection of human piety is motivated with three words that cap the speech up to this point: ‘כָּפֵיכֶם וּבְפָרְשָׂכֶם (1:15). In context, יְדֵיכֶם ‘your-hands are-full-of blood’ (1:15). In context, יְדֵיכֶם ‘your hands’ echoes יְדֵיכֶם ‘your palms’ spread in prayer. ‘Your hands’ also echo 1:12:

\[ \text{מִי-בּוּקֵשׂ} \quad \text{אֲחָא} \]  
\[ \text{כָּפֵיכֶם} \]  

‘Your-hands are-full-of shed-blood!’

\[ \text{מִי-בּוּקֵשׂ} \quad \text{אֲחָא} \]  
\[ \text{כָּפֵיכֶם} \]  

‘Who-asked this from-your-hand?’

\textsuperscript{40} That is, a construction with resumption unmarked by a pronoun, definite article, or other deictic element. Analogous examples are not provided in Paul Joüion and Takamitsu Muraoka, A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew (SubBi 14; Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1991) 586-588; Bruce K. Waltke and Michael Patrick O’Connor, An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1990) 76-77. Walter Gross describes a type of casus pendens he calls “lexematische Aufnahme des nicht-markierten Pendens” (Die Pendenskonstruktion im biblischen Hebräisch [St. Ottilien: EOS, 1987] 28-29); normally, this involves resumption by repetition of a lexical item. He notes a single case where it does not (Nm 35:30); not even this example bears much resemblance to the part of MT Is 1:13 in question.
The `םדָּה' (1:11) of animal sacrifice and the `דָּמִים' (1:15) of orphan and widow whom they have not stooped to succor are equivalent in God’s eyes.\footnote{41}

The poem continues with a set of 10 demands, the last of which opens 1:18. If met, blood red though your sins are, you will eat the land’s bounty (a reversal of 1:7). If not, the sword will eat you (threatened already in 1:5).

A 3 x 3 Strophe

1:16-17 as scanned in version 2 was previously suggested by Jan Fokkelman on grounds of prosody and semantics, though his reinterpretation of חָמוֹץ as “the oppressed” is unnecessary.\footnote{42} MT takes מִשְׁפָּט דִּרְשׁוּ as parallel to the following חָמוֹץ in 1:17, but a construal of הלְּמָּה יָשָׁב דְּרֵשׁ מַעְשֶׁה (interlocking generic exhortations) and שֶׁפֶשׁ יָהָוֵה רְבֹּר אֲנָלֶּה (interlocking concrete exhortations each with an object specifying a class of people) seems more natural. The resulting 3 x 3 strophe as Fokkelman calls it has a 1:(1:1) structure at both the strophe and line levels.

Coextensive Semantic and Prosodic Unities

Within a context of overall coincidence of semantic and prosodic unities, such that each set of unities reinforces the intelligibility of the other, the division of higher level semantic unities sometimes runs counterpoint to the organization of lower level prosodic unities. 1:10-12, 13-15, and 16-20 form stanzas. Each stanza opens with parenesis. At the same time, however, one strophe (1:10) introduces everything that follows. The prosodic system unfolds in roughly equal “packets” of “twos and threes.” The semantic macrostructure fitted within it unfolds in unequal parts. An analogy in English verse is the use of enjambment, without regard for syntactic breaks, across line boundaries in counterpoint to the prosodic units the lines themselves represent.

More Rhythmic Configurations

It is worth keeping an eye out for rhythmic parallelisms at the line and strophe levels. For example, it is tempting to read 1:11bγ-12 as follows:

\[
3+2 \quad a^1b^1c^1:d^1e^1
\]

לא תפשׂמי יִהְבֹּא לָרָאָה מִי

\[
3+2 \quad a^2b^2c^2:d^2e^2
\]

רְמֹס וְהָרֵעַ מִכֶּם מִי-קֵשׁ אוֹאָ מְדָּמָּה

Another example is 1:15:

\[
2^3 \quad a^3b^3c^3:d^3e^3
\]

ם-כ-תְּרָבָּה מְפַרְשֵׁכְּם מָלֵאו יְדֵיכֶם אַעְלִים עֵינַי

אֵינֶנִּי שֹּׁמֵעַ רְמֹס שֹׁמֵר אַשְּׁרֵי מְדָּמָּה

The “a” versets of each line are exact parallels (4th class paeon + anapest).

Parallelisms

\footnote{41} A point made also by Ambrogio Spreafico, “Nahum I 10 and Isaiah I 12-13: Double-duty Modifier,” \textit{VT} 48 (1998) 104-10; 109-10. However, he proposes a counter-intuitive dichotomization of Is 1:11-15 between 13a8 and 13aγ. He also posits examples of “double-duty” modifiers where less forced explanations of the textual data seem closer at hand.

Prosodic parallelisms are a constant feature of Isa 1:2-20. 2:2, 3:3, 3:2, and 2:3 lines all occur relatively frequently and in no predictable order. Where they occur, twice and thrice repeated configurations such as (3:3) (3:3), (3:2) (3:2), and (2:2) (2:2) (2:2) create an unusually symmetrical rhythm and cooperate in the creation of tightly cohering structures (1:3, 8, 10, 11bγ-12 [as suggested above], and 17).

Semantic, syntactic, and morphological parallelisms are ubiquitous in Isa 1:2-20. They are the warp and woof of the text the poet spun on the framework provided by the general rule and length rule. Unlike the prosodic framework, the supports of which are evenly spaced in all directions, the parallelisms of the textual weave are sometimes bunched together and sometimes spread more thinly. A description of what seem to be the more important near and distant semantic-syntactic parallelisms is represented by the system of notation to the side of each line in Appendix H.

Sonic parallelisms are a common feature of Isa 1:2-20. While not evenly distributed throughout the poem, they are nevertheless conspicuous for brief intervals and never completely absent. A thorough analysis of the poem’s sound orchestration makes sense only in conjunction with a whole-scale reconstruction of the text’s original phonetic structure. Even without such a reconstruction, it is clear that sonic parallelisms frequently occur but not at fixed intervals. Stress congruent medial and end rhymes are particularly striking and occur both within and across versets. Examples within versets (reconstructed phonology*): 1:2* (2x), 4 (3x), 5* (2x), 6 (2x), 7 (2x), 8, 9*, 10, 11, 15, 16*, 20*. Across versets: 1:3 (2x), 4 (2x), 6 (2x), 8, 9, 11 (2x), 12, 13, 15, 16*, 17* (3x), 18, 19-20*. Word-final end-rhymes occur in 1:2b, 3, 4b, 4c, 6 (3x), 7 (2x), 8 (2x), 9 (2x), 11, 12, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, and 19+20. Consonance, assonance, and internal rhyme find expression in 1:2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 16-17, 17, 18b, 19-20, and 20.

Some examples of sonic rhyming are a function of rhetorical macrostructures. The ten occurrences of nouns with a 2d pl. suffix in 1:10-20 are remarkable, as are the six occurrences of nouns with a 1st sg. suffix in the same subunit. Like buoys on a sea of 2d person plural and 1st person sing. forms, 1st person pl. forms mark rhetorically significant junctures. Four cases join the people to the prophet (1:9 [3x], 10). One joins the people to God (1:18). The distribution of all these forms is a function of rhetoric.

In short, sonic parallelisms in Isa 1:2-20 suffuse the text but do not occur at fixed intervals. Sonic rhymes reinforce syntactic and semantic unities at the verset and line levels and rhetorical unities at higher levels.

Asymmetries

Asymmetries are a correlate textual feature alongside the more frequent symmetries. They break up what would otherwise be predictable, monotonous sequences. Isa 1:2-20

contains 40 lines and 90 versets. One out of four lines is tripartite (10 out of 40). Often
the verset without an equivalent at the line level serves a function of concatenation or
inclusio beyond the line level (1:2, 4, 7, 13, 15, 16, and 20).

Two out of five versets are tripartite (36 out of 90). Foregrounded “odd man out”
elements seem especially highlighted (1:2b, 3b, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11, 15, and 16). In lines
and strophes with repeated tripartite versets, foregrounded elements, whether 1 or (1:1),
express equivalences (1:2b, 3b, 5b, 10, and 11). Patterned asymmetric parallelisms within
and across versets, such as G-D-H sequences, were briefly discussed above.

Elements with Binding Force

Symmetric and asymmetric parallelisms characterize Isa 1:2-20 and bind its
component parts together. More than 160 cases are noted in Appendix H and the
comments above. Devices with binding force other than parallelism occur less often.
Waw conjoins complexes of clauses 2x (1:8, 15), clauses 10x, and phrases 12x. In
accordance with typologies peculiar to each one, other function words bind discourse
units of various dimensions together. כי functions 2x at the macrolevel of discourse (1:2,
20) and 1x as an object complementizer within a clause (1:12). לי conjoins the clause
it introduces with the immediately preceding waw introduced clause 1x (1:15). Clause
initial function words have binding force because they create the expectation that further
clauses may follow that will logically depend on them. Examples: והי (1:4); על (1:5);
ל palavra (1:9); כי (1:11); ו (1:12); and_CON (1:18-20 [4x]). Prepositions have binding force
within clauses (32x). Enjambment across versets, lines, and strophes has binding force
with considerable frequency (25x). Chiasmus occurs 6x, reinforcing the web of
parallelisms where it occurs (1:3, 8, 14, 18 [2x]). Anaphoric pronouns occur 3x (1:2, 7,
and 13). Subject ellipsis occurs 2x (1:14 and 18); verb ellipsis 1x (1:3); object ellipsis 1x
(1:3); and adjunct ellipsis 1x (1:9). Counts vary slightly depending on the text and
construal presupposed.

Compositional Building Blocks

With the length rule in mind, the building blocks that went into the composition of 1:2-
20 seem discernible. A 12 line unit (1:2-6) forms the foundation of 1:2-9. A 6 line unit
(1:7-9) completes it. A 12 line unit (1:11-15) forms the core of 1:10-20, to which a 2 line
introductory strophe (1:10) and an 8 line parenetic conclusion (1:16-20) were added.

IV. Summary

Isa 1:2-20 as construed above displays a panoply of parallelisms in its every part. No
single line type (2:2, 3:2 or 3:3) dominates the unit. The prosodic coherence of Isa 1:2-20
is a function of its adherence to the general rule and length rule.

The sense divisions of MT are consistent with the text model in all cases but two: in
1:12-13 one change is necessary, and the last clause of 1:16 must be read with 1:17. But
MT’s sense divisions, even when consistent with the model, are not always as cogent as
conceivable alternatives. It seemed best to depart from the semantic and syntactic parse
preserved in MT in five discrete locations (1:9, 11-12, 13, 13-14, 16-17, 17). At the
verset level, it seemed best to transfer a word from one implied verset to another in four
cases; at the line level, a verset from one implied line to another in four cases; at the
strophe level, a line from one implied strophe to another in one case; and at the stanza
level, a strophe from one implied stanza to another in one case. It is unusual for there to be occasion to challenge MT’s divisions as often as proposed here. The 10 proposed transfers, nonetheless, represent but a tiny percentage of the more than 500 instances in which a transfer is hypothetically a possibility.

The text model appears to be instantiated by Isa 1:2-20. But for the model to be judged valid, it has to describe how ancient Hebrew poetry works throughout the extant corpus.
V. Reading Isa 1:2-20 as Poetry

If, as argued above, Isa 1:2-20 reproduces a speech delivered by the prophet Isaiah, the speech was performed as poetry and heard as poetry before it was committed to writing. As a written work, Isa 1:2-20 has been read as a record of a prophet’s evocation of a deity standing in judgment of his own people. The depiction is textured and poignant. Respect for the text as poetry adds suppleness and precision to a reading of it, regardless of whether the goal of interpretation is to reconstruct the meaning the text had at an earlier point in time or actualize it for a present day context to which the reader is now attached.

Isa 1:2-20 has also come to be understood as a text to recite in public assembly on religious occasions. If the text is to be understood in accordance with its intrinsic literary qualities, it is logical for the text to be read and heard as poetry in that context. Isa 1:2-20 is formatted as poetry in Appendices H, I, and J.

Isa 1:2-20, precisely qua poetry, evokes countless frames of semantic reference through its use of culturally pregnant language and its deployment of traditional topoi. Insofar as it is a speech with rhetorical goals related to a specific occasion, the capacity of poetic language to evoke entire worlds is harnessed in order to bear witness to the particular, saturate it with significance, and call for its transformation. Precisely because the text is poetry, its content sublime, and the one (poetry) commensurate to the other (divine-human conversation), the text offers what Harshav calls “double-decker reference” in cardinal richness. The telos of the text qua poetry is to reveal things for what they are; qua rhetoric, to persuade its listeners to effect a change of course.

Isa 1:2-20 stands over against its implied audience with promise and threat. The threat of a coming disaster has to be taken seriously because a nearly fatal disaster is a reality with which the audience already coexists. The threat serves as a source of consternation and a prod to action. An offer of forgiveness and a promise of prosperity are also extended, and provide grounds for hope. But the promise is conditional upon the hearers placing acts of justice before acts of piety, and accepting forgiveness for past failure to do so. Why then are the promise and threat of Isa 1:2-20 in poetry? Because, as Ben Jonson once remarked, poetry is the “most prevailing eloquence.”

44 Prophetic literature may consist of orally composed texts taken down by dictation, texts composed using writing, or something neither one nor the other – “orally-derived texts that conserve oral style,” or “transitional text[s] . . . composed with the aid of writing yet still in an oral traditional style” (Robert C. Culley, “Orality and Writtenness in the Prophetic Texts,” in Writings and Speech in Israelite and Ancient Near Eastern Prophecy [ed. Ehud Ben-Zvi and Michael H. Floyd; SBLSS 10; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000] 45-64; 56, 47; the quotations are culled from a review of Writings and Speech by Keith L. Eades (RBL 07/17/2001; online www.bookreviews.org). In all the above cases, and even if a prophetic text is a historical fiction composed by an author of a later age, if the text portrays prophetic speech, the conventions of prophetic oratory will have served as a norm. Furthermore, whether Isa 1:2-20 was originally a written composition or an oral proclamation which came to be written down, “in the ancient period even written material was designed to be heard and to be read in public” (Yehoshua Gitay, “Deutero-Isaiah: Oral or Written?” JBL 99 (1980) 185-97; 197. In the composition of the text, the requirements of oral performance will have been accommodated. The first full scale attempt to explore the relevant issues with respect to prophetic literature is that of William Doan and Terry Giles, Prophets, Performance, and Power: Performance Criticism of the Hebrew Bible (New York: T & T Clark, 2005).
Biblical interpretation is a preoccupation of the religious traditions of Judaism on the one hand and Christianity on the other. The history of a text’s interpretation is most often desummed from translations of the text and quotations, allusions, and comment on it in other authoritative texts. A road less traveled by is followed here. The primary locus of biblical interpretation, I would argue, is in the context of religious assembly. The reading and hearing of excerpts from the Bible characterizes Jewish worship and Christian worship. Recontextualization of the Bible through appropriation of its contents within a specific narrative provides the categories through which religious readers and hearers of it seek to understand the world around them and give meaning to their place in it.

Isa 1:2-20 is a case in point. Part of the haftarah reading (Isa 1:1-27) to Devarim (Deut 1:1-3:22), the text is recited on the Sabbath preceding the fast of Tisha b’Av, a Sabbath of the “Three of Rebuke” that anticipate the mourning over the destruction of Jerusalem associated with the fast. In that context Isa 1:2-20 is heard as a prophecy of doom from the point of view of Jerusalem’s latter ends. It is read not on its own but in the context of an expectation that the final outcome of judgment, as 1:21-26 makes clear, will be salvation. 1:27 concludes the reading: “Zion will be saved by [God’s] judgment, her repentant ones, by [God’s] justice.” In the “Seven [Sabbaths] of Consolation” following Tisha b’Av, passages that promise Zion’s restoration figure prominently (Isa 40:1-26; 49:14-51:3; 54:11-55:5; 51:12-52:12; 54:1-10; 60:1-22; 61:10-63:9).

The sense of loss upon Jerusalem’s destruction and adhesion to the promise of Zion becoming once again the point of origin of God’s saving work and locus of presence upon earth are evident in the New Testament (Luke 13:34-35; 19:41-44; Rom 11:25-29; and Rev 21:1-2, 22-24). After Judaism and Christianity parted ways, the sense of loss and adhesion to the promise were not always maintained in the latter.

In the tradition of the Greek Orthodox Church, Isa 1:16-20 is read twice on the eve of the Theophany, at the Third Hour, and during Vespers. Along with other passages from the Torah and the Prophets that describe gifts of water and plenty, Isa 1:16-20 is understood as a promise to which Jesus becomes heir by acceptance of the divine call. Note Isa 49:8-15 with which Vespers concludes. The washing of 1:16 is simultaneously literalized and remythologized in the baptism to which Jesus submits. The liturgy of the church of Jerusalem preserved in Georgian tradition for the same day deserves note. The sequence of readings: 4 Ezra 5:22-30; Ps 51:9; Ps 51:3; Luke 3:1-18; Ps 141:1-2; Ps 29:3-4; Isa 1:16-20; 1 Cor 10:1-4; Mark 1:1-11; Ps 77:17; Ps 51:9; Ps 51:3; Isa 12:4-6; Ps 114:3; Mark 1:9-11. In the 5th cent. Jerusalem Church, Isa 1:16-20 was the first of 19 readings by which baptismal candidates were to be instructed. In the Armenian Church, Isa 1:16-20 is read on the First Day of the Great Lent. As admonition and offer of

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forgiveness, Isa 1:16-19 is read together with Jas 1:2-12 and John 1:1-14 during the First Week of Lent in the Hispano-Mozarabic tradition.


As a call to works of humble service, Isa 1:10, 16-20 is read together with Matt 23:1-2 on Tuesday of the Second Week of Lent in Catholic tradition. Isa 1:10-17 is read with Exod 1:8-14, 22 and Matt 10:34-11:1 on Monday of Week Fifteen in the Weekday Lectionary. As admonition and offer of forgiveness, Isa 1:10-20 is read with Ps 32:1-8, 2 Thes 1:1-5, (6-10), 11-12, and Luke 19:1-10 on the Twenty-Second Sunday after Pentecost once every three years by Anglicans. Isa 1:10-18 is read with Ps 32:1-7; 2 Thes 1:1-4, 11-12, and Luke 19:1-10 on the same Sunday after Pentecost once every three years by Lutherans. Isa 1:1, 10-20 is read with Ps 50:1-8, 22-23; Hab 11:1-3, 8-16, and Luke 12:32-40 on the Tenth Sunday after Pentecost once every three years by those who follow the Revised Common Lectionary. The deployment of excerpts from Isa 1:2-20 in traditions which do not adhere to a cycle of readings also deserves note. For example, sermons #2 and #3 by the Puritan John Dod in Ten Sermons on the Worthy Receiving of the Lord’s Supper are based on Isa 1:16-19 and 1:17-19, respectively.


For the lectionary of the Indian Orthodox Church, see www.stgregorioschurchdc.org. For the lectionary of the Greek Orthodox Church, see The Orthodox Study Bible, 771-80.


For the First Readings of the Roman Catholic, Episcopal, and Revised Common lectionaries, see www.bombaxo.com/rclcomp1.html. For the Weekday Lectionary of the Catholic Church, see Donald

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46 For a first look at a variety of lectionaries, see Kevin P. Edgecomb, “Lectionaries Old and New,” at www.bombaxo.com/lectionaries.html. For the lectionary of the Greek Orthodox Church, see The Orthodox Study Bible (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1993) 771-80. For the lectionary tradition preserved in Georgian, see Michel Tarchnischvili, ed., Le grand lectionnaire de l’Église de Jérusalem (Ve-VIIIe siècle) (CSCO 188-89, 204-205; Scriptores Iberici 9-10, 13-14; Louvain: Secrétariat du Corpus SCO, 1959-60) 188:9-10; 204:13-14. For further bibliography, see Michael Fraser, “The Georgian Sources: A Select Bibliography,” at http://users.ox.ac.uk/~mikef/durham/geobib.html.

47 For the lectionary of the Indian Orthodox Church, see www.stgregorioschurchdc.org. For the lectionary of the Greek Orthodox Church, see The Orthodox Study Bible, 771-80.


49 For the First Readings of the Roman Catholic, Episcopal, and Revised Common lectionaries, see www.bombaxo.com/rclcomp1.html. For the Weekday Lectionary of the Catholic Church, see Donald
The task of avoiding the damage done by one-sided supersessionist thinking is a work to be undertaken by every generation of interpreters. In the Christian tradition, if Isa 1:2-20 were read together with Ps 137, Luke 13:34-35, and Rom 11:25-29 on a given Sunday, an occasion for mourning the destruction of Jerusalem and affirming God’s promise of its restoration would be created. On another Sunday, Isa 2:1-5, Ps 87, Luke 19:41-44, and Rev 21:1-2, 22-24 might be read together.

This brief overview lays bare a recurrent weakness of the Christian reading tradition. Isa 1:2-20 is rarely read as a unit. More often, it is merely excerpted. If the arguments for the poetic and rhetorical integrity of Isa 1:2-20 are valid, the case for a reading it as a unit in the liturgy is strong.

Although the Torah reading in Jewish tradition and the Gospel lesson in Christian tradition are normally the center of exegetical attention in public assembly, a text like Isa 1:2-20 is ill-suited to an ancillary role. The topicality of Isa 1:2-27 to the ninth of Av season to a degree that the corresponding Torah reading is not guarantees that the impact of the former will outweigh the latter even without reinforcing comment. Conjoint readings of Isa 1:2-20 with gospel and other texts such as those suggested above might achieve a similar effect.

The recitation of a text other than MT is not conceivable in the synagogal liturgy. Even so, in the translation and interpretation of the text, as the Targumim, the homiletic tradition, and traditional commentators sometimes do, it is possible to depart from MT in matters of detail. The door is thus open to the interpretation of Isa 1:2-20 as restored above in the moment of explication. Isa 1:2-20 as restored in Appendices H and I and translated in Appendix J is also conceivable as a point of departure in the moment of explication during ecclesial worship.