Conceptualizing Past, Present and Future

Proceedings of the Ninth Symposium
of the Melammu Project Held in Helsinki / Tartu
May 18–24, 2015

Edited by
Sebastian Fink and Robert Rollinger
Melammu Symposia 9

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Achaemenid Sources and the Problem of Genre

Jason M. Silverman

Introduction

Given the lack of native historiography, the historian of the Achaemenid Empire attempting to compose a narrative must utilize very disparate types of sources, from a variety of areas and time frames within and after the empire. Evaluation of genre is a fundamental step in attempting to assess the usability and usefulness of any piece of evidence available. This assertion is well known to all historians, but it is something which must be carefully and consciously considered before attempting other analyses. Since space here is limited and the potential issues for the entire empire too many to deal with, in this paper I will merely discuss a few well known examples, related to my own work, in which superficial or infelicitous genre decisions have played a role in discussions of the Persian Empire.

For the present purposes, I will refrain from discussing genre theory; ample work on this aspect already exists. It is worth recalling, however, that 1) a genre is never a static thing: it varies through time, sometimes developing into new genres along the way; 2) that it is non-exclusive (i.e., some genres utilize other ones and some may appear very similar depending on the criteria favored); 3) that it is culturally determined and often subconsciously understood; and 4) that any given genre can have more than one application and use – no singular “Sitz im Leben” can define a genre. Within my understanding of genre, I believe it is essential to include considerations of medium and function with the more typical, formal criteria. Thus, whether something is an inscription, an oral order, or a papyrus is an important consideration in addition to markers like verbal formulas or other textual indicators. This is to understand genre as a way of categorizing human communication. A genre is thus much more than just a literary artefact; it has important historical and sociological implications.

Cyrus Cylinder: A charter of human rights?

I will begin with an example no doubt well known to all readers, but which continues to plague both the popular reception of the text as well as a surprising number of scholarly reconstructions. The text I mean is the foundation deposit commonly known as the Cyrus Cylinder. The recent popular tour of the Cyrus

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1 This paper was written as part of the Academy of Finland Centre of Excellence in Changes in Sacred Texts and Traditions, P.I. Martti Nissinen.
Cylinder around the United States organized by the British Museum advertised the artefact as the first charter of human rights and as an example of religious toleration. A much viewed TED lecture by the president of the British Museum even saw this as the reason the text was important. Indeed, this is a function of the replica of the cylinder presented to the United Nations by the former Shah of Iran. That this understanding is tendentious and anachronistic needs no rehearsal. This narrative reads the text as if it were a different genre from what it is: a charter of human rights rather than a foundation deposit.

Of course, this reading is strongly informed by two other texts, the Hebrew Bible and the Verse Account of Nabonidus (also often called the Strophen-gedicht in scholarship). The Hebrew Bible (Ezra, 2Isa) provides the missing link to the Judeans and serves as an example of positive reception. The Verse Account provides a convenient foil for Cyrus in the form of Nabonidus. These two also provide an element of overt religious policy: the HB in terms of patronage of a “foreign” religion and the Verse Account in the form of “religious oppression” of Marduk. While these texts are important in their own right, they get in the way of reading the Cylinder’s text itself.

What sort of text is the Cylinder? Certainly, the royal provenance makes it on some level indicative of royal propaganda and thus is a valuable source for this. Its use for actual royal policy is less certain. But there is more to the genre of this document: to whom is the Cylinder directed? Although the find spot is technically unknown, the shape of the object means it is most likely a foundation deposit. Being buried in a foundation must mean the primary audience for the text itself must have been the gods and/or future kings. In this context, the idea of a declaration of rights or tolerance is completely nonsensical, as the discourse is one of proper rulership. The real, social message of the inscription was no doubt primarily in its existence as an object inscribed by the order of Cyrus and ceremonially placed into the foundations: an act which advertised Cyrus as a proper Mesopotamian king regardless of the content of the text itself. Apart from the scribes responsible for writing the text, the verbal message was only secondary, and likely did not receive wide dissemination, at least directly. Perhaps the genre of the text could best be compared to either prayers pushed into sacred places (like the Wailing Wall) or modern “time capsules.” Recent discoveries of an archival copy of the inscription, however, might mean the

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3 Complete with a letter from President George W. Bush!
6 On the lack of documentation, see Taylor, 2013.
contents did receive a slightly wider audience. However, it is important, in my opinion, to treat the cylinder itself and the archival tablet as separate genres, even though they have identical verbal content.

**Avesta and genre: sacred scripture?**

The next text I want to mention is the Avesta, the Zoroastrian collection often appealed to in discussions of Achaemenid religion. Apart from any questions on its dating and geographical origins, a major and underappreciated aspect is the question of what sort of text it actually is. Scholars often wish to treat the text like it is a Protestant Bible – the written basis for Zoroastrian religious belief and discourse. With such an understanding of the text, it then becomes the criterion for litmus tests for classifying religious ideas and practices of the person(s) being discussed. The classic debates in this vein are whether the Achaemenid kings were Zoroastrians or not and the issue of Iranian use of inhumation or exposure. But if this not the appropriate “genre” for the Avesta, then this is not a useful way to use the text at all. As A. de Jong has noted, there is very little evidence even in the Sasanian period of the Avesta functioning as a source of doctrine or for royal, legal, or cultic practice. The majority of the extant Avesta is in fact a ritual text or liturgy; the words were (and still are) recited by the priests during the *Yasna* ceremonies. Its relation to the community is thus a very different one from an “exegetical” one. It represents a codification of only one aspect of religious life. Moreover, for most of its history, it was recited in a language that was not the native language of the priests or their clients (so-called Avestan). Its relevance to the Achaemenid religion is thus equivalent to the Latin psalms for Medieval Christianity – important, for sure, but not in a direct or controlling manner. If one treats the Avesta’s genre as one of liturgical text instead of as “sacred scripture,” it can be treated more for what it tells about the religious and cultural imagination of Iran than as a criterion for the classification of groups or practices. This places the discussion of the text on an entirely separate footing.

**Behistun: historiographic narrative?**

Perhaps the best-known OP inscription, certainly within Biblical Studies, is Darius I’s first inscription, on the cliff face at Behistun (DB). Though widely acknowledged to present the story which Darius wanted told, much ink has been spilled in attempts to reconcile his narrative with the empirical demands of modern historiography. This is of course partly encouraged by the text being the only OP source which appears to contain a historical narrative at all. Its height

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7 See Finkel, 2013a: 18–23.
8 See Jong, 2009, 2010a. Jong 2010b. He also discussed this at his presentation at the symposium “Political Memory in and after the Persian Empire” at Leiden, in June 2014.
9 Most obvious is the existence of the Pahlavi translations of the Sasanian era. However, this feature was of course also true for speakers of Old Persian. For an overview of its ritual uses, see Hintze, 2009.
The inscription and its associated relief on the cliff has close parallels with the Sar-ī Pul relief nearby, as discussed by Root.\(^{11}\) It perhaps is also meant to be directed towards divine attention (being at “the place of the gods”).\(^{12}\) However, unlike the Cyrus Cylinder, there is evidence of the text’s deliberate dissemination in other media, on stele and on papyrus.\(^{13}\) While the stele medium would again imply a primarily extra-textual function for the inscription, the version at Elephantine has a distinctly propagandistic function. What is noteworthy about this context is that it is combined with text from another inscription (Darius’s tomb) and found in a garrison of imperial troops. Granted that this text is not identical to the Behistun inscription, this version nevertheless implies the text’s active use in royal propaganda. The military context also raises the question of whether it was functioning within a context of troop training, informing them of the proper way to understand their relationship with the Great King. The text’s emphases on both the Achaemenid nature of the right to the throne as well as of the king’s military leadership are thereby significant. This also raises serious doubts as to the historical veracity of the material, beyond the internal chronological difficulties commonly commented upon. If the genre of this inscription at Elephantine is thus read as a training manual in kingship of sorts for the king’s retainers and troops, then its value becomes one of extreme importance for Achaemenid self-understanding and only secondarily one for the history of Darius’s accession to the throne. However, the inscription on the cliff face and the text as disseminated among mercenaries ought to be treated as separate genres, despite the overlapping content. Neither, however, is a genre particularly historiographic.

**XPh: documentary reporting?**

Another much-discussed inscription is XPh, the so-called Daivā Inscription. This contains a mini-narrative couched in very vague terms about the destruction of a site where daivā were worshipped. Given the connection with a key Avestan term (daēuua) and the tantalizing hint of religious repression, this inscription has received a wide array of interpretations.\(^{14}\) These have identified the locale in question as perhaps anything from Babylon, Egypt, and Athens, and many have insisted that the text is ahistorical and simply meant as a general statement of the sorts of things the king did. A recent interpretation by Abdi has suggested that the removal and reuse in secondary contexts of all five known copies of the inscription makes it evidence of a reform by Xerxes that was reversed by Artaxerxes I.\(^{15}\)

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\(^{12}\) The OP toponym was Bagastāna, “Place of the gods.” See, e.g., Schmitt, 1991: 16; Boyce, 1982: 9, 94–5.

\(^{13}\) Stele: Seidl, 1999. Elephantine: Greenfield/ Porten/ Yardeni, 1982, cf. Sims-Williams, 1981. On analogue with the steles mentioned in Herod. 4.87, several scholars have entertained the idea of one in Anatolia as well, though none is currently extant, e.g., Greenfield, 1986: 293; Tuplin, 2005: 239.


\(^{15}\) Abdi, 2010.
It is difficult to interpret this text, because it is unique among the attested OP inscriptions, and genre is largely predicated on similarities. In this instance interpretation is largely only guided by the media on which it has been preserved: foundation deposits and monumental inscriptions. Certainly the palatial contexts of all the copies are significant. With the exception of DB, the OP inscriptions and their associated reliefs impart a timeless, ideal quality, though several inscriptions do describe particular building works. The important generic decision in this instance, then, is whether XPh should be understood as a commemorative text or a timeless, programmatic text. The vagueness of the descriptions and a subsequent king’s willingness to remove it suggest to me that the latter is more likely, though the commemoration of a particular event cannot at this point be excluded.

Herodotus and the genre of his sources?

In an interesting article, A. Kuhrt explored the similarities between Herodotus’s stories around Cyrus’s youth and the legends of Sargon of Agade.16 For present purposes, the question this raises for me is the genre of the sources which Herodotus used and what the implications are for the use of his material by historians. While almost no historian takes his stories of Cyrus’s rise as historical, they are potentially historical in the sense of transmitting some of the folklore which had circulated in the Persian Empire that has otherwise been lost.17 This does not mean one can try to recreate earlier versions, as was once popular in Biblical Studies in the early 20th century. Nevertheless, it does mean the stories have historical interest beyond the literary work of Herodotus himself. If at least some of the stories’ genre before their shaping into Herodotus’s literary work is thus considered to be folklore, then they are extremely interesting and potentially important for the cultural history of the empire. Moreover, such a genre might lay behind many of his narratives (e.g., his version of Pseudo-Smerdis). What this means to me is that a careful consideration of Herodotus’s sources could be a potentially useful step beyond just the analysis of his own literary shaping of them. Their historicity may be non-existent, but they could transmit very valuable cultural information nonetheless.

What is the genre of Second Isaiah?18

With the above very cursory mention of examples of Persian texts whose readings can be improved by including medium and context into the understanding of their genres, this paper will now move to a discussion of a source on which I have been working this past spring, the biblical text known as “Second Isaiah” (Isaiah 40–55; here 2Isa). The debates around this text are

17 Similar to Helm, 1981’s treatment of the Herodotus’s Median narrative. Similarly, Chiasson, 2012 notes the potential relevance for Persian culture, though the focus remains on Herodotus’s shaping.
18 This section is extracted and adapted from an earlier version of a chapter on Second Isaiah in a forthcoming monograph.
nearly endless, and a decision on its genre is one which has a significant impact on the way it can be read within an early Persian context.

The Jewish and Christian canons present Second Isaiah as an instance of prophecy, though the text itself gives no superscription specifying name, location, or situation, other than being included in the book of Isaiah. Understanding a long text as prophecy is something that itself requires consideration, and at present is not nearly as illuminating as some might think. In any case, identification as “prophecy” should not be taken for granted. Second Isaiah is usually considered to be poetry throughout. A more precise genre, and one which might imply a more specific setting or origin, has not received any real consensus, despite the interpretive import. A number of scholars have called 2Isa a “drama” of some sort. Tiemeyer argues it is a dialogic text which follows “logical procedure of argumentation.” Heffelfinger objects to seeing the text as argumentative and rather argues it is lyric poetry.

A key issue is whether the text was originally oral pronouncement(s) and subsequently written or originated as literature and later disseminated via oral or written means. This latter issue bears on both the genre and social contexts; the question will be taken up further below. As an initial starting point, 2Isa seems to be rhetorical poetry, in the senses of being a unit and of attempting to persuade an audience, but without “rhetoric” being limited either to classical forms or conceptualizations or to rational discourse. Indeed, “speak to the heart of Jerusalem” (40:2) can be rendered “persuade Jerusalem.”

A more precise understanding of medium and genre plays a decisive role in understanding this text and for what it can be used: its unity, its coherence, its textual history, its social location vary depending upon it. The importance goes beyond the implied author and audience – it fundamentally informs the appropriate interpretative import to be given to features (such as seams) observed within the text. Different genre imply that seams are more or less likely to be due to authorial or editorial work, thereby informing the discerning

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19 On the social phenomenon of prophecy in the ANE in general, see, e.g., Carroll, 1979; Wilson, 1980; Overholt, 1989; Nissinen, 2003; Doan/ Giles, 2005; Stökl, 2012.
20 E.g., Korpel / Moor, 1998; Baltzer, 2001: 7; Heffelfinger, 2011: 1. Blenkinsopp, 2002: 66–9 prefers “oratory” to poetry, despite the fact that the two are not opposites. I have unfortunately not yet had access to Dobbs-Allsopp, 2015.
21 Including Eaton, 1979; Baltzer, 2001: 7–15; Goulder, 2004, days and sections present pp. 4–7, cycle pp. 10–12; Tiemeyer, 2011: 13, 47–50, cf. ch6; Berges, 2008: 64–73 also defines 40–48 as a “reading drama.” van der Woude, 2005: 151–161 gives a helpful overview of these views. Nevertheless, her own conclusion that it is a not a drama but a “reading drama” is perplexing as it is unjustified, ignoring the poetry of 2Isa and the potential for oral performance beyond theatre per se.
22 Heffelfinger, 2011: 17, 91 n. 36. She defines lyric poetry on pp. 37–42. She specifically notes that calling it prophetic is not sufficient to determine message or style (p. 14).
23 An important social and communicative question despite Gitay’s claim that makes no difference (1980).
of the number of discrete historical units that are in play. There are at least four basic options for understanding 2Isa, each carrying with it implications for social setting, types of expected coherence, and manner of transmission and growth: 1) oral performance; 2) compiled and redacted oracles; 3) “drama” or “liturgy”; 4) scribal composition, whether for school-text, literature, or oral performance.

**Oral Performance**

By the medium of oral performance I mean the sort of communication as described by Albert Lord: the extemporaneous performance of traditional material that had been continually performed by oral poets, one performance of which, for whatever reason, was dictated and fossilized in writing. This would imply 1) material which had been performed many times to a community; 2) a community which appreciated the content and the skills of the orator; as well as 3) some impetus for a performance to be recorded. This would mean that 2Isa would be merely a singular manifestation of a performance, fossilized as a text. Previous versions would be completely irrecoverable and largely irrelevant, but the present text would itself be a unity beyond secondary editing to fit into the Isaianic context; its relations to the formation of the book of Isaiah would then be secondary. Comparable texts in this understanding would be the epics of Homer.

A major obstacle to a comparison with Homer is the lack of narrative in 2Isa. In itself this need not obviate an origin in oral performance, if one alters the category from epic to lyric. Both epic and lyric poetry are linked with music in elite and non-elite oral performances, thus the basic media context would likely be similar for epic and lyric poetry. The links with the psalms may suggest that such a musical context is appropriate. There is widespread evidence for musicians in the royal courts and major temples of Mesopotamia. Though it appears that Mesopotamian scholars already had an advanced form of musicology, the actual praxis and transmission of music and songs appears to belong largely in a milieu similar to that adduced by Lord for Homer on the basis of Yugoslav fieldwork. The accomplished poetry of 2Isa would imply a skilled poet/musician, but present knowledge of lyric poet in the ANE is likely insufficient to determine whether this would imply a context in the court of the Judaean king in exile in Babylon, the Judaean elite in the administration of Yehud in Mizpah, or the more rural communities in either Yehud or Babylonia. Modern anthropological studies of Middle Eastern tribal societies demonstrate

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26 The preferred designation of Heffelfinger, 2011, discussed in terms of lack of narrative in pp. 45–53.
27 On music in Mesopotamia – and its link to some attested forms of poetry such as hymns and laments – see Ziegler, 2011. For evidence of musical instruments, see Kolyada, 2009.
28 On this oral aspect in the Mesopotamian context, see Ziegler, 2011: 307–8.
the continued importance of oral poetry in a variety of genres and social settings, but this provides no more than a strong probability that the same had been true in the period of 2Isa.29

To fit the (Parry-)Lord model of an oral poem 2Isa would need to display features consonant with that: formulas, patterns, themes, ornamentation.30 Watson argues that the equivalent of formulas in Hebrew poetry was rather the word pair, used for constructing parallelism.31 There is no doubt that word-pairs are a significant feature of 2Isa.32 However, the corpus of comparable material is much too small to assess the significance in terms of the originating poet.33 Second Isaiah adequately fulfills Lord’s conception of thematic repetitions.34 Given the length at which many of these themes are elaborated, it fulfills an oral criterion for unity, rather than a textual one. Korpel and de Moor have found a high degree of regularity in structures up to what they call “cantos” and “sub-cantos,” but they deny overall coherence beyond catchphrases.35 One could understand this as either conforming to the nature of oral poetry, or a secondary feature as in the next medium.

Compiled or Redacted Oracles

The medium of oracle compilation would imply one or more instances of oral proclamation which were recorded and compiled. As above, the origins would remain oral to some sort of audience, but the expected unity and time frame would be different. The unity would be more combinational than “authorial,” deriving from the reasons for compilation. Though analysis could treat it as a unity, there would be more scope for growth over time in the sense of a series of oracles given at various intervals, gradual collection, and/or supplementation. Moreover, one might suspect a greater scope for editorial activities than in the former option. The necessary appreciative audience for the oracles would also only need to be the one(s) responsible for the collection. Since the text would inherently be a combination of discrete sections, distinguishing between the first compilation and any additions would be nigh impossible without manuscript evidence, but the likelihood of additions would seem to increase.

This understanding of 2Isa would require two contexts: the one in which the prophet(s) operated, and the one in which the collector(s) operated. In what context and for whom did the initial oracles belong, and how and why were they

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29 For examples of some studies showing a variety of contexts and forms, see e.g., Caton, 2009, Abu-Lughod, 2009.
32 E.g., Korpel / Moor, 1998, who give an extensive index of parallel words (pp. 666–745).
33 Lord insists that proper comparison must be within the work of a single poet and of a significant corpus; his was based on years of collection. See Lord, 2000. In a similar vein, Niditch also thinks the corpus is too small for the Psalms or the Hebrew Bible in general, Niditch, 1996: 9.
35 Korpel / Moor, 1998: see especially the summary tables in 656–7 and 659–62.
transcribed and collated? Perhaps biblical scholars are most inclined to answer this with recourse to an “Isaianic prophetic school” (thus one that conflates the prophets with the scribes), but I am unaware of there being any comparable evidence in the ANE for such a context. For this scenario to be plausible one would need to assume that 1) the oracles were uttered or reported in some semi-official location, such as a temple or administrative center; and 2) someone literate at that location thought they were worth preserving. This would likely mean either in Babylon, perhaps around the “court” of the exiled king’s sons, or in Mizpah, around the governor of Yehud.

The best comparative material for such collected oracles remains the Neo-Assyrian compilations. The majority of the oracles within the collections end with the name and location of the prophet. The exception is the third collection, which seems to have been redacted for use within court ritual. The Assyrian parallels show a lag in time from the individual oracles to their collection, and the handwriting appears to indicate the collections were the work of individual scribes. They derive from a central institution (the royal archive) and seem to have been produced due to extenuating circumstances (the problematic accession of Esarhaddon). The value of these two points for a genre decision on 2Isa is debatable. Perhaps the biggest objection to this medium is the complete lack of headings or colophons within 2Isa indicating the prophet, date, or location of the oracles. Biblical scholars might be inclined to attribute such a lack to the editors responsible for the Book of Isaiah, but as an argument from silence this is not particularly strong – depending as it does on this genre specification to begin with (i.e., it is a circular argument) – nor is it presently verifiable.

**Drama or Liturgy**

Assigning the medium of 2Isa as either drama or liturgy likely inverts its relationship between oral and written media: presumably written in order to be performed. Both forms would require a specific and regular performance for the

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37 A lack of evidence is also the opinion of Nissinen, 2008. More broadly, Nissinen, 2014 notes the lack of comparisons for writing prophets. Rösel, 2003:118 attempts to claim the Balaam inscription as evidence for schools of prophets, but this seems to be wholly predicated on biblical scholarship’s predilection for such rather than any real evidence for it.

38 The standard edition of these is Parpola, 1997; they are also available in Nissinen, 2003: 97–124. For a useful overview of the comparable ANE material, see Huffmon, 2000. For an analysis discussing some implications of oracle collection, see van der Toorn, 2000.


41 Parpola, 1997: lxviii.

42 As in oracle reports, e.g., K 1292 Rev. 6’–7’ (Parpola, 1997: 41; Nissinen, 2003: 131).
text with some sort of “official” communal backing, either by “religious authorities” or community elders. Positing either drama or liturgy as the medium for 2Isa is distinct from positing its later re-use in either; anything can be re-used as part of a performance or ritual, but the relations between composition and audience are rather divergent. Accepting either liturgy or drama as the medium, however, would lead to the conclusion that while previous materials, perhaps even discrete texts, may have been used, the entire text would have been composed for a singular usage, and would thus would be best understood as a reflecting a single point in time, albeit one with continued resonance due to repeated performance and perhaps containing older materials.

The main objection to this understanding is the complete lack of either “stage directions” or ritual instructions in any extant manuscript. The first extant Greek tragedy, Aeschylus’s *The Persians*, might have included markings separating speakers, albeit almost no stage directions *per se*.\(^\text{43}\) However, the genre of this performance (as well as its date!) is known, a tradition of scholarship (*scholia*) has preserved some stage directions,\(^\text{44}\) and the format of the text indicates changes in speakers and in action through the use of different verse-styles and direct indications in dialogue, enabling reconstruction.\(^\text{45}\) The first (partially) extant example of a Judaean play is Ezekiel’s *Exagoge*, and the available fragments suggest it belonged to the Hellenistic tragic tradition.\(^\text{46}\) Though this text is several centuries later, the differences with 2Isa are significant. The best known exemplar of an ANE liturgy is the *Akītu* festival, known in a number of local variations over an extended geographic and time period.\(^\text{47}\) The available material includes not only ritual texts, but specific indications of the activities, offerings, and processions to accompany said texts. At best such a comparison would allow 2Isa to have been a text composed to be used within a greater liturgy, rather than the liturgy itself.

**Scribal Composition**

This last medium is perhaps the one most likely favored by biblical scholars, one which eliminates the oral altogether and treats the text *qua* text, written to be read. This medium would allow for any number of compositional models: “monograph,” collation, collection growing through time – in itself not necessarily solving any issues related to the unity or plurality of 2Isa. The written nature, however, would raise expectations for coherence and logical structure, allow for a broader array of written amendments and additions, and reduce the expected audience size to minimal numbers. The social context for such a text could include other Judaean “scholars” or use in scribal training as a school text. One might also posit that the text was also meant to be read out to

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\(^\text{43}\) Rosenmeyer, 1982: 20–21, 64.

\(^\text{44}\) Rosenmeyer, 1982: 46–9.

\(^\text{45}\) E.g., Michelini, 1982: 6–19.


\(^\text{47}\) For some studies, see Cohen, 1993: 400–53; Pongratz-Leisten, 1994; Bidmead, 2002; Zgoll, 2006; cf. Ambos, 2013. Of this, the most famous aspect is the *Enûma Eliš*, which was recited as part of the liturgy.
groups, implying some sort of religious or instructional setting. In this sort of model, the unity of the text could be considerably devalued in favor of gradual growth over time, although begging the question of the reasons and contexts for such. The rarified social context such an origin requires likely would imply the text originated within a milieu nigh to a center of administration, perhaps somewhere like Babylon, Mizpah, or Ramat Rahel.

Which Model Best Describes 2Isa?

On purely formal criteria, the media of drama or liturgy have little to commend them: 2Isa does not have any of the markers of speakers or action which attested ANE examples contain. If it were composed for a use within such a context, it was only as a single portion and has left no discernable trace in the received text. A similarly formal evaluation speaks against an oracle collection. Not only the lack of distinct headings or colophonic information, but the sheer length of the various coherent sections and the variety of thematic material makes it a poor match for the closest ANE parallels. This does not in of itself eliminate the possibility. 2Isa, however, would represent a uniquely uniform, coherent, and unmarked collection. Moreover, the consistent message, in the oracle collection model, would have required such an extensive redaction that the “final form” genre would no longer be usefully called an oracle collection.

The extant text has a very performative nature, thus it seems that there are two best options: oral performance which was recorded, or poetry written for oral performance. Though certainty is impossible, I am presently inclined to consider 2Isa to be an “oral dictated text” as defined by Albert Lord, and thus a fossilized performance, analogous to the Odyssey and the Iliad. Just as with these texts, the exact circumstances and reasons for the writing down of an oral performance are forever lost and unknowable. The social context and expectations for this medium and genre decision, nevertheless, have important ramifications for understanding what 2Isa represents. First, for the early Persian Period 2Isa should be treated as a single unit, without direct reference to the remainder of the book of Isaiah, into which it was later redacted for whatever reasons. Any redaction of the performance if such existed is largely untraceable, and probably mostly connected with the formation of the entire book of Isaiah, something beyond present space constraints. Second, its relations to previous Judaean traditions should be seen as primarily oral rather than scribal. It presumably represents performances that had been repeated over time. Third, there are key parallels to the importance of oral poetry for refugee and forced migrant groups. Moreover, oral poetry has been an important element of

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48 Wilks, 2003 rejects on slightly different grounds.
49 Contra Weippert, 2001. While his parallels with prophetic formulas are interesting as far as they go, they are insufficient to fit the genre of oracle collection.
50 As noted by Lord, 2000, and Niditch, 1996, amongst others, the writing down of an oral tradition does not affect the oral tradition itself: it is likely to continue as before, quite independently of the textual version. It is only for later and/or physically distant contexts for which the written reflex becomes primary.
51 E.g., Siddiq, 1995; Olden, 1999; MacPherson, 2001; Olszewska, 2007.
culture for both marginalized, illiterate groups as well as for elite circles, especially kings.\textsuperscript{52} These connections aid in reconstructing the earliest social location of 2Isa. The balance of probability means it was likely performed within an elite context among its immediate community of origin. Fourth, as oral poetry 2Isa would represent, if not the “opinion” or “worldview” of a group, then at least must have been considered an acceptable and important performance by a master poet by its original community.

For using Second Isaiah in a Persian context, therefore, the genre of oral poetry changes it from a source of prophecy to one of communal cultural repertoire. It means its view may not be idiosyncratic, but represent a broader community on a cultural level. It would also make inferences based on its redaction history invalid.

\textit{Synthesis and conclusions}

Time does not permit detailed consideration of any of the above particular texts or of the implications of any of the claims made concerning their genres. What I hope to have demonstrated, however, is that consideration of medium and a broader context adds to the generic considerations of a text which are just as important as the formal, textual features. These considerations aid understanding what the genre represents, and what it can therefore tell the historian of the Persian Empire.

\textbf{References}


Ambos, Claus. 2013. \textit{Der König im Gefängnis und das Neujahrsfest im Herbst}.

\textsuperscript{52} E.g., Zumthor, 1990; Finnegan, 1992; Foley, 2002.


