Prophecy and Its Cultic Dimensions
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Foreword

This volume rose out of two consecutive meetings of the Prophetic Texts in their Ancient Contexts section of the Society of Biblical Literature in Atlanta (2015) and San Antonio (2016). Over the course of these two years, this section explored the intersection between the realms of prophecy and cult. All contributors were asked to reflect on whether there is a strict division between these two types of religious expressions and between the various religious specialists involved in them.

The eight essays in the present volume constitute the result of this investigation. All the essays have the available textual evidence as their basis and they explore how the interaction between cult and prophecy is described in these texts. In parallel, the essays also carefully seek ways to use these texts with the aim of reconstructing the reality of the societies of the ancient Near East, Egypt, and Greece.

The essays deal with a wide range of historical, literary, and methodological issues. First, what were the links between the cultic and the prophetic personnel? Did prophets have ritual / cultic functions in temples? Did prophetic actions and/or utterances play a role in the performance of the cult? What were the ritual aspects of divinations? Second, how do literary texts describe the interaction between prophecy and the cult? Third, how can various theories (e.g. religious theory, performance theory) enable us to reach a better understanding of the interplay between divination and cultic ritual in ancient Israel and the wider ancient Near East?

In her article on ritualization of prophetic intercession, Marian Broida explores the ritual elements present in the biblical accounts. She begins her study by defining intercession and outlining its two goals: to solve “real-world problems” like lack of potable water, and to persuade YHWH to reverse his planned acts of punishment (here called apotropaic intercession). She differentiates between “naturalistic” efficacy (conforming to cultural understandings of ordinary physical or persuasive cause-and-effect) and “occult efficacy” (mysterious ways that religious ritual was understood to alter reality). Turning to the biblical texts, Broida distinguishes between two groups of prophets: “atypical prophets,” i.e. characters such as Moses, Elijah, and Elisha, and “typical prophets,” i.e. characters such as Isaiah, Amos, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. She argues that the former group displays a much higher degree of ritualization than the latter group, especially when interceding to resolve real-world problems, and notes a pattern where location, formalization, performance, and divine prescription are significant factors. She concludes that such ritual strategies probably played a role in this kind of intercession. In apotropaic intercession, however, individual intercessors appeared to have had more freedom to shape their communication to suit the occasion.
short, the prophets were able to present their arguments to the deity in their own words with fewer ritualizing strategies.

Two essays revisit the important question of whether cultic prophecy existed in the Jerusalem temple in ancient Israel. Lester Grabbe answers this question in the affirmative. He defines cult prophets as men and women who were members of the temple personnel and who, at times, acted as prophets in the temple. Grabbe begins by assessing the evidence supporting cultic prophecy and argues that there were prophetic guilds in ancient Israel. There is, however, much that we do not know about them, such as where the prophets who belonged to them lived and whether their dwelling place constituted a cult location. Turning to the prophets at the Jerusalem court, Grabbe highlights the possibility that prophets were not an unusual feature of court-life. He further questions whether we should make a germane distinction between court and temple. Also, we should be careful not to dismiss a certain prophet because s/he does not fit the stereotypical profile of a cult prophet: we do not know whether such a stereotype actually existed in the first place. In parallel, Grabbe points out that many of the “false” prophets, i.e. prophets of Yhwh that other prophets deemed to be false, appear in contexts associated with the temple. Finally, the references to the temple singers in 1–2 Chronicles may point to a situation where cultic prophecy had assimilated into a role related to cultic worship. Grabbe ends by offering some cross-cultural comparisons from other parts of the ancient Near East in support of the existence of cult prophets in ancient Israel.

Anja Klein's essay sheds light on the question of cultic prophecy from a different angle, focusing on Pss 81 and 95. In particular, Klein asks to what extent these two psalms can be understood as examples of cultic prophecy, inasmuch as they draw on forms of divine speech. Klein begins by discussing each of the psalms in detail. In the case of Ps 81, she argues that it can be characterized by a mixture of psalmody and prophecy. Several features, such as the use of “hearing” as a leitmotif, suggest a prophetic setting. Turning to Ps 95, Klein acknowledges that the statement in verse 7 to “hear the divine voice” may be understood as a reference to prophetic speech. Even so, Klein ultimately casts doubt upon our ability to use Pss 81 and 95 as arguments in favour of the existence of cultic prophecy in ancient Israel. Rather, these two psalms are scribal products from post-exilic times that blend history and prophecy with cultic elements. They may indeed testify to a form of cultic prophecy in an indirect manner; they do not themselves constitute cultic prophecy.

Continuing with the biblical material, Jonathan Stökl explores the notion of “triggering” prophecy. Contrary to what is often assumed, select material in the Hebrew Bible suggests that prophets used ritual behaviour in order to elicit a divine response. Stökl begins with a brief discussion of “technical” versus “intuitive” divination. While the former constitutes divine communication that needs to be “translated” (such as signs in the entrails of a sheep or in the stars), the
latter constitutes divine communication in a language easily understood by humans (such as an oracle). The main body of the essay explores whether the use of triggers should be equated with ritual behaviour. To answer this question, he looks at a wide range of texts. Stökl argues that the narrative about Elijah in 2 Kgs 3 and the narrative about King Saul in 1 Sam 10 both support the notion that music might have been used to trigger prophecy. Likewise, he postulates that the narrative about Balaam in Num 22–24 may reflect the use of ritual slaughter as a possible trigger. In all these cases, though, God is at liberty to choose to deliver an oracle or not. Stökl also discusses the use of sleep and intoxicating liquids, as well as the possibility, hinted at in the narrative about Huldah in 1 Kgs 22, of controlled inquiry. He concludes that enquiring of YHWH may likely have included some form of action and that this action should in itself be understood as a kind of ritualized behaviour.

Moving beyond the Hebrew Bible, John Hilber builds upon his previous work on Egyptian prophetic texts as he explores the rituals that accompany prophetic affirmation of victory in the Egyptian cult. Presupposing an oral setting of many of these oracles, Hilber investigates the performance of their delivery. He proceeds systematically through a wide range of texts and notes the ways in which they were delivered. Concerning the Pyramid Texts, for example, Hilber wonders whether the depictions of priests wearing a mask reflect a ritual whereby the masks sought to establish a link between the performer and the divine persona. Likewise, the depictions of offerings, dancers, and musicians alongside the Coronation Texts may at least in part portray ritual elements that accompanied the oral delivery of the divine words. In greater detail, Hilber discusses the Triumph Hymns and the ritual violence that was performed together with the declaration of divine words during victory celebrations. In particular, Hilber cites Amun’s Triumphant Welcome for Shoshenq I and postulates that the encouragement to the king to accept a sword is best understood as part of a performed ritual. Hilber emphasises the symbiosis between oracle and actions, and argues that rituals enacted visually the divine word. He concludes by discussing the affinity in terms of language between some of these Triumph Hymns and select Psalms. Although it cannot be proven, it is possible that ritual actions accompanied the recitation of some of these psalms.

Martti Nissinen looks more broadly at the question whether prophetic divination took place in a ritual setting and whether prophets in the ancient world functioned as ritual performers. He further asks whether the very act of prophecy, as a sub-category of divination, was conceived of as a ritual act. On the one hand, Mesopotamian extispicy, for instance, was a ritual act with the aim of obtaining a verdict. Likewise, the Greek acts of sacrificial divinations can easily be labelled rituals. Against this background, Nissinen explores the prophetic performances at the temples of Apollo at Didyma, Delphi, and Claros, and highlights how the reception of the divine oracles took place within a ritual procedure. Turning to
Mesopotamian sources, Nissinen likewise shows that many of the prophetic oracles were delivered in ritual settings. On the other hand, the prophetic performances are seldom presented as rituals in their own right. Rather, the prophets, alongside other cultic functionaries, were part of a larger performance. Nissinen shows that prophetic performances often took place in ritual contexts but it does not follow that prophecy itself was perceived of as a ritual. Furthermore, prophecy is agent-based (rather than action-based or object-based) in the sense that the prophet functions as the facilitator of the divine-human communication, with the result that the significance of ritual actions and objects are reduced to a minimum.

The final two essays turn the perspective around and look at the prophetic aspects of the priestly role. Beginning in the Hebrew Bible, Lena-Sofia Tiemeyer explores the priests’ mediating and predictive functions as depicted in the Deuteronomistic History, with focus on the use of the so-called “linen ephod” (דַעַת תַּלְדֵי) in 1 Sam 2:18; 1 Sam 22:18; and 2 Sam 6:14. She begins by exploring the use and outer appearance of the ephod elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible. She notes, among other things, that the ephod could denote a garment that one might wear, a smaller item that one might pin on a garment, or even a free-standing larger object. Furthermore, it clearly was used as part of the ritual of divination and played a role within the cult of ancient Israel. Turning to the above-mentioned three passages, Tiemeyer rejects the customary translation “linen ephod” and instead, in dialogue with Isa 44:25; Jer 50:36; and Hos 11:6, as well as with the Ancient Versions, suggests a new translation that emphasizes the divinatory aspects of this priestly tool, namely “the diviners’ ephod.”

Alex Jassen takes the question further afield and discusses how Jews in the Second Temple Period perceived the priests and the temple to be a new locus of prophetic activity. In particular, he notes how a wide range of texts conflate prophets and priests and how they locate prophetic activity within the temple. Jassen highlights how the writings of Hecataeus of Abdera portrays the priests as God’s messengers and as mediators. Likewise, turning to the Testament of Levi, Jassen emphasizes the High Priests’ divinatory role. The Apocryphon of Moses (4Q375–376) stands in the same tradition insofar as it elaborates on the High Priestly divinatory use of the Urim and Thummim. A similar impression is also given by the Lives of the Prophets where prophecy is portrayed as a priestly endeavour, as well as by John 11:49–51 where Caiaphas’ prophecy regarding the significance of Jesus’ death is presented as something unremarkable: priests prophesy. Finally, looking at Philo’s Special Laws and at Josephus’ writings, the same impression perseveres: priests are given the gift of prophecy.

Looking at all the essays together we can draw several conclusions. First of all, as hinted earlier, any strict division between the cultic and the prophetic realms is not supported by the available textual material. Rather, priests and prophets shared the task of facilitating the communication between humans and
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the divine. Priests often performed tasks that were more closely associated with prophecy and prophets often dealt with matters that were more closely associated with the cult. Furthermore, it is likely that prophecy took place in ritual settings, such as temples, and was accompanied by ritual actions. Secondly, however, we should not conflate cult and prophecy, as there are also salient differences between the activities of the two types of cultic personnel. Overall, prophets had more freedom than priests to shape their approach to the deity. Also, although there is evidence to suggest that some forms of prophetic inquiry were perceived to be a kind of ritualized behaviour, this is not true for all prophetic performances. Furthermore, even though many prophets probably served in a cultic setting, this does not mean that prophecy in itself was seen as a ritual. It is my hope that this volume will stimulate a deeper discussion of the intersection between cult and prophecy and inspire more studies on the topic.

This volume could not have been done without the help of a number of people. First of all, I wish to thank the leaders and the steering committee of the Prophetic Texts in their Ancient Contexts section of the Society of Biblical Literature. Your feedback and encouragement supported me throughout the process of turning a set of orally delivered papers into a coherent collection of written articles. Secondly, I would like to express my gratitude to the peer-reviewers who volunteered and gracefully read the contributions and offered constructive feedback. Although you must remain anonymous, you know who you are. Thank you! Last but not least, I am, as always, indebted to my husband Andreas who never grumbles when I spend week-ends reading proofs and who always supports me by cooking delicious and nourishing meals.

Lena-Sofia Tiemeyer

Aberdeen, September 2018
Abbreviations

ÄAT  Ägypten und Altes Testament
AB  Anchor Bible
ABD  Anchor Bible Dictionary
AGAJU  Arbeiten zur Geschichte des antiken Judentums und des Urchristentums
AIL  Ancient Israel and Its Literature
AIRF  Acta Instituti Romani Finlandiae
Ä&L  Ägypten und Levante
AMD  Ancient Magic and Divination
ANEM  Ancient Near Eastern Monographs
AOAT  Alter Orient und Altes Testament
AOS  American Oriental Series
Arch  Archaeology
BaF  Baghdader Forschungen
BBB  Bonner biblische Beiträge
BBET  Beiträge zur bibliischen Exegese und Theologie
BBRS  Bulletin for Biblical Research Supplement
BCSMS  The Canadian Society for Mesopotamian Studies
BEATAJ  Beiträge zur Erforschung des Alten Testaments und des antiken Judentums
Bib  Biblica
BibOr  Biblica et orientalia
BKAT / BK  Biblischer Kommentar Altes Testament
BThS  Biblisch-theologische Studien
BWANT  Beiträge zur Wissenschaft vom Alten und Neuen Testament
BZAW  Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
CAD  The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago. Ignace Gelb et al. (eds.). Chicago, IL: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 1956
CBET  Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology
CBQ  Catholic Biblical Quarterly
CHANE  Culture and History of the Ancient Near East
CJAS  Christianity and Judaism in Antiquity Series

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Abbreviations

CM Cuneiform Monographs
CSHJ Chicago Studies in the History of Judaism
DJD Discoveries in the Judean Desert
EHAT Exegetisches Handbuch zum Alten Testament
EI *Eretz Israel*
FAOS Freiburger altorientalische Studien
FAT Forschungen zum Alten Testament
FRLANT Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments
FzB Forschung zur Bibel
GMTR Guides to the Mesopotamian Textual Record
HAT Handkommentar zum Alten Testament
HBM Hebrew Bible Monographs
HBS Herders biblische Studien
*HeBAI* Hebrew Bible and Ancient Israel
HOD Handbuch der Orientalistik
HR History of Religions
HSM Harvard Semitic Monographs
HThK.AT. Herders theologischer Kommentar zum Alten Testament
HTR Harvard Theological Review
HTS Harvard Theological Studies
*HUCA* Hebrew Union College Annual
ICC International Critical Commentary
JAOS Journal of the American Oriental Society
JBL Journal of Biblical Literature
JEOL Jaarbericht van het Vooraziatisch-Egyptisch Gezelschap (Genootschap) Ex oriente lux
JHS Journal of Hebrew Scripture
JJS Journal of Jewish Studies
JNSL Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages
JPOS Journal of the Palestine Oriental Society
JPS Jewish Publication Society
JQR Jewish Quarterly Review
JSJS Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism
JSOT Journal for the Study of the Old Testament
JSOTS Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement
JSPS Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha. Supplement Series
JSS Journal of Semitic Studies
KTU Keilschrift Texte aus Ugarit
LCL Loeb Classical library
LHBO T Library of the Hebrew Bible / Old Testament Studies
Abbreviations

MARI  Mari: Annales de recherches interdisciplinaires
NEA   Near Eastern Archaeology
NovTest Novum Testamentum
OBO   Orbis biblicus et orientalis
OIP   Oriental Institute Publications
OIS   University of Chicago Oriental Institute Seminars
OLA   Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta
OTL   Old Testament Library
OTM   Oxford Theological Monographs
OtSt  Oudtestamentische studiën
PAE   Probleme der Ägyptologie
RA    Revue d’assyriologie et d’archéologie orientale
RB    Revue Biblique
RGRW  Religions in the Graeco-Roman World
SAA   State Archives of Assyria
SAAS  State Archives of Assyria Studies
SBB   Stuttgarter biblische Beiträge
SBLDS Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBLEJ Society of Biblical Literature Early Judaism and its Literature
SBLMS Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series
SBLSymS Society of Biblical Literature Symposium Series
SBLWGRW Society of Biblical Literature Writings from the Greco-Roman World
SJLA  Studies in Judaism in Late Antiquity
SJOT  Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament
SNT   Supplements to Novum Testamentum
STDJ  Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah
SVTP  Studia in Veteris Testamenti Pseudepigrapha
TAPS  Transactions of the American Philosophical Society
TBN   Themes in Biblical Narrative
TCS   Texts from Cuneiform Sources
TDNT  Theological Dictionary of the New Testament
TDOT  Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament
TSAJ  Texte und Studien zum antiken Judentum
TUAT  Texte aus der Umwelt des Alten Testaments
TynBul Tyndale Bulletin
VT    Vetus Testamentum
VTS   Vetus Testamentum Supplement
WAW   Writings from the Ancient World
WBC   Word Biblical Commentary
WMANT Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament
Abbreviations

WO  Die Welt des Orients
ZA  Zeitschrift für Assyriologie und vorderasiatische Archäologie
ZAR  Zeitschrift für Altorientalische und biblische Rechtsgeschichte
ZAW  Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
Ritual draws attention to specific human activities, signalling that they have a special meaning, power, or purpose. As a historical phenomenon, then, prophetic intercession in ancient Israel and Judah was almost certainly ritualized. Not only did prophets communicate with YHWH—surely an event of major importance—but, if biblical portrayals are to be believed, they interceded on occasions of grave danger. Yet ritualization of Israelite prophetic intercession is understudied, perhaps because biblical portrayals of prophetic intercession contain little evidence of prescribed or stereotyped behaviour—attributes often viewed as intrinsic to ritual. Nowhere do we see detailed instructions like those in Lev 4:27–31, prescribing priestly interventions on behalf of unwitting sinners. Rarely do we see repeated verbal or behavioural formulae in depictions of prophetic intercession itself. Instead we see diverse prophetic conversations with YHWH, sometimes linked to visions, props, or gestures, and occasionally, requests for prophetic intercession with the intercession itself offstage. Yet when we begin by assuming ritualization, several discrete patterns emerge from the biblical material. One pattern in particular may correspond to actual Israelite prophetic behaviour: intercession while soliciting an oracle from YHWH.

In this essay I use a performance theory of ritual to examine portrayals of the prophetic intercession in the HB, in hopes of shedding light on the behaviour of actual Israelite prophets. I begin by discussing prophetic intercession, the challenges of historical reconstruction, and the approach to ritual. After categorizing the biblical accounts by the goal of intercession and the type of prophet, I examine them for specific ritualizing strategies. Finally, I discuss the implications of these patterns for shaping our understanding of the Israelite prophet and the role of the prophet's voice in divine-human relations.

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1. Prophetic Intercession

I define intercession, in general, as a voluntary appeal to an authority figure on behalf of another individual or group. Since the Hebrew Bible lacks a consistent term for intercession, I identify it by examining interactions among these three entities: intercessor, authority, and the beneficiary of the intercession. Intercession may be solicited by another, or may occur at the intercessor’s own initiative. In the Bible, the description may be limited to a verbal appeal, or may include other words, gestures, objects, or acts, some of which may be commanded by YHWH after the initial intercessory appeal (e.g., Num 21:7–9). Rare examples lack reference to a verbal appeal, but contain actions that may serve as metonyms for prayer.

The HB portrays many cases of people interceding with human authorities. Elisha offered to intercede with officials on behalf of a Shunammite woman (2 Kgs 4:13). This essay, however, focuses solely on prophetic intercession with YHWH. Because intercession, as I define it, is voluntary, legislated priestly interventions on behalf of sinners (e.g., the sacrificial rituals in Leviticus 4–5) fall outside of this domain, although they fulfil an analogous function at times by restoring a proper relationship between sinner and deity.

Evidence from Mari and Neo-Assyria indicates that prophets spoke for the gods in societies beyond the borders of Israel. Their role in intercession, if any, is less clear. In contrast, biblical texts suggest that both prophetic proclamation and intercession were important, at least in some traditions. True, relatively few biblical texts depict explicit prophetic intercession, compared to the multitude of texts portraying prophetic proclamations. Yet quite a few of these depictions of intercession show it as critical to Israel’s survival. These include Moses’s crucial acts of intercession in Exod 32:11–13, Num 14:13–19, and Deut 9:25–29; the emphasis on Samuel’s ongoing intercession in 1 Sam 6:8 and 12:23; Jeremiah’s receipt of multiple divine prohibitions of intercession, suggesting that YHWH was

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2 Some of the more common terms used are התפלל, פנמי, עתר. All these terms have ranges of meaning beyond that of “intercede.” See Samuel E. Balentine, “The Prophet as Intercessor: A Reassessment,” JBL 103 (1984): 161–173, and Rannfrid I. Thelle, Ask God: Divine Consultation in the Literature of the Hebrew Bible (BBET 30; Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 2002).

3 Almost always, this appeal contains an explicit verbal component; in a few cases, specific gestures such as stretching out the palms (Exod 9:29, 33) or prostration (Num 17:10) can be understood as metonyms or stand-ins for this verbal appeal. Cf. Franz Hesse, Die Fürbitte im Alten Testament (Erlangen: Freidrich Alexander Universität, 1951), 41.

taking pains to avoid it (Jer 7:16; 11:14; 14:11; cf. 15:1); and the intriguing suggestion that an effective intercessor would have prevented YHWH’s destruction of Judah (Ezek 22:30). According to Rannfrid I. Thelle, scholars have neglected many more likely cases of prophetic intercession. She points to the multiple biblical texts in which prophets are asked to consult God and concludes that intercession was an expected element.5 I discuss her points further below.

Apart from blessings—not considered here—biblical prophetic intercession generally has one of two goals. (1) The first is to enlist YHWH’s help in protecting a group or individual from a real-world threat or problem, such as illness, drought, or war. For example, Moses asks YHWH to heal Miriam after YHWH strikes her with skin disease (Num 12:13); and Hezekiah’s delegation requests Isaiah’s intercession with YHWH in the face of the Assyrian Rabshakeh’s threats (2 Kgs 19:1–4). I call intercession with this goal “real-world problem-solving,” or “problem-solving” for short. (2) The second goal is to persuade YHWH to reverse his own stated decree of disaster, one that has not yet been enacted, as when Amos pleads that YHWH not send the plague of locusts that Amos envisioned (Amos 7:1–2). I call intercession with this goal “apotropaic.”6 Unopposed, such a decree is understood to lead to real-world problems. Yochanan Muffs has described the prophetic task of protesting overly harsh decrees as crucial to God’s dealings with his people.7

Although these two goals are distinct, they are animated by the same underlying beliefs: that YHWH controls the cosmos and its inhabitants and is inclined to exact judgment on those who offend against him, and that various human activities, including intercession, may sway him toward mercy. The two goals of intercession are also causally related, at least in theory, since a divine decree of doom will inevitably lead to real-world problems unless intercession or another factor causes the deity to change his mind.8

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5 Thelle, God, discusses a pattern throughout the HB in which multiple religious specialists consult YHWH on behalf of others during times of distress. Here I concentrate on the prophet’s role.

6 Elsewhere I use this term to highlight the similarities between biblical intercession against a divine decree of doom and ANE rituals designed to offset the evil effects of bad omens. See Marian Broida, Forestalling Doom: ‘Apotropaic Intercession’ in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East (AOAT 417; Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2014).


8 This logic resembles that of the Neo-Assyrian rituals known as namkurba, intended to ward off the harm foretold by bad omens. Francesca Rochberg, The Heavenly Writing: Divination, Horoscopy, and Astronomy in Mesopotamian Culture (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 202.