Lena-Sofia Tiemeyer (ed.)

Prophecy and Its Cultic Dimensions

V&R

Journal of Ancient Judaism Supplements

Edited by
Armin Lange, Bernard M. Levinson
and Vered Noam

Advisory Board

Volume 31

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Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht

Cover image: "Miriam". (Sister of Moses and Aaron;
singer of the "Song of the Sea", Exodus 15, 20f.).
Etching by Eichens after the painting by Hensel.
Berlin, Sammlung Archiv für Kunst und Geschichte @akg-images / Wilhelm Hensel.

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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. In

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 Triumphal 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

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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" (אפוד בד) 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 persevere: 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
AHw	Wolfram von Soden, Akkadisches Handwörterbuch: Unter Benutzung des lexikalischen Nachlasses von Bruno Meissner. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1868–1947
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 biblischen Exegese und Theologie
BBRS	Bulletin for Biblical Research Supplement
BCSMS	*The Canadian Society for Mesopotamian Studies*
BDB	A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament. Francis Brown, S.R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs (eds.). Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1907/1953.
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

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
LHBOTS	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*

Marian Broida

Ritualization in Prophetic Intercession

Introduction

Ritual draws attention to specific human activities, signalling that they have a special meaning, power, or purpose.[1] 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 Ronald L. Grimes, *Deeply into the Bone: Re-Inventing Rites of Passage* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000), 70–71; Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1992), 74.

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,[2] 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.[3]

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.[4] 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 עתר, פגע, התפלל. 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.

4 Lena-Sofia Tiemeyer, "Were the Neo-Assyrian Prophets Intercessors? A Comparative Study of Neo-Assyrian and Hebrew Texts," in Robert P. Gordon and Hans M. Barstad (eds.), *"Thus Speaks Ishtar of Arbela": Prophecy in Israel, Assyria, and Egypt in the Neo-Assyrian Period* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2013), 253–272, and Jonathan Stökl, *Prophecy in the Ancient Near East: A Philological and Sociological Comparison* (CHANE 56; Leiden: Brill, 2012), 215–216.

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).

7 Yochanan Muffs, "Who Will Stand in the Breach? A Study of Prophetic Intercession," in *Love & Joy: Law, Language and Religion in Ancient Israel* (New York, NY: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1992), 9–48.

8 This logic resembles that of the Neo-Assyrian rituals known as *namburbû*, 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.

2. The Bible and Historical Reconstruction

As many have pointed out, the Hebrew Bible is an imperfect witness to Israelite society. Considerable caution is needed in drawing conclusions about actual prophetic behaviour.

Confounding factors include accidents of transmission, idealization, the possible minority positions held by its writers, and redaction by later scribes with different views. We do not know, for example, how closely the ritual texts in Leviticus 4–5 corresponded to actual practice,[9] or what accounts of prophetic behaviour may have been omitted because they did not accord with the views of later redactors.[10]

Moreover, scribes may have radically altered prophetic texts to promote their messages to new audiences. Doan and Giles argue that the book of Amos shows the scribal intent to present a unified, dramatic work that would convey the prophet's message effectively.[11] Apparent invariance (stereotypy) in Amos' two intercessory speeches (7:2, 5) may appear ritual-like, but more likely represents literary shaping, as described below. Ultimately, all claims of ritual invariance must be tentative because of the impossibility of distinguishing it from intertextual influence.

Finally, ANE evidence shows that even ritual texts meant to provide explicit instructions to religious practitioners sometimes omit steps or prescribed utterances, presumably because their audiences were expected to fill in the gaps.[12] The same may be true of the Bible. In particular, narrative summaries of ritual may omit certain steps that were assumed by ancient audiences.

For these reasons, our conclusions about actual prophetic behaviour will be speculative. For example, we cannot conclude with certainty that prophetic intercession usually lacked sacrifice. Nonetheless, the texts rather consistently reveal different patterns of ritualization, depending on the type of prophet and the goal of intercession (problem-solving or apotropaic). At least two such patterns may be rooted in actual prophetic behaviour.

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9 James W. Watt, "The Torah as the Rhetoric of Priesthood," in Gary Knoppers and Bernard M. Levinson (eds.), *The Reception of the Torah in the Second Temple Period* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2007), 319–332, writes that Leviticus 1–16 was most likely put together for read-aloud purposes rather than as a priestly manual.

10 For example, Matthijs J. de Jong, *Isaiah among the Ancient Near Eastern Prophets: A Comparative Study of the Earliest Stages of the Isaiah Tradition and the Neo-Assyrian Prophecies* (VTS 117; Leiden: Brill, 2007), 285, writes that the prophecies of first Isaiah "were preserved, probably, because his political assessment proved to be right."

11 William Doan and Terry Giles, *Prophets, Performance, and Power: Performance Criticism of the Hebrew Bible* (New York, NY: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2005), 155.

12 For example, Stefan M. Maul, *Zukunftsbewältigung: Eine Untersuchung Altorientalischen Denkens Anhand Der Babylonisch-Assyrischen Löserituale (Namburbi)* (BaF 18; Mainz am Rhein: von Zabern, 1994), 321 n. 56, notes that *namburbi* texts frequently omit instructions.

3. Ritual and Ritualization

In order to capture a wide variety of rituals, I define ritual minimally in this essay: as a framed performance of a culturally constructed sequence of behaviours intended to enact some change or transformation. This definition falls under the general rubric of "performance theories of ritual." I follow Ryan Davis in considering rituals to constitute "social domains"—that is, arenas of conventional activity.[13] Other social domains include drama, specific sports, or, in Davis's terminology, "'everyday' life." Within each domain, participants' behaviour is "constrained and channelled" according to social and cultural criteria.[14] Social domains are culturally specific and incorporate social roles. In the U.S. today, the same person might act as a mother in one domain, a dentist in another, and a participant in a Passover Seder in a third, with specific routines of behaviour expected in each domain.[15]

In my definition of ritual, "framing" refers to the ways in which a ritual performance signals that it constitutes a particular social domain, with specific roles for participants, established behaviours, and expected outcomes. In practical terms a frame corresponds to the adherence to a set of accepted "constitutive rules."[16] In the example of a prophetic ritual involving intercession, those rules define the ritual being enacted, just as the constitutive rules of chess define it as chess and not some other game. The frame is not external to the ritual itself. Rather, it incorporates the sequence of behaviours as well as other defining details, such as the relationships among the participants and (if relevant) ritual characteristics such as special time and location, the degree of formalization, the vividness of the performance, and so on.[17]

Ritual as I define it here is understood, within its cultural context, as efficacious: it is intended to transform some aspect of reality. I do not count as "ritual" sequences of behaviours that celebrate, commemorate, or maintain the status quo.[18] For this reason I exclude blessings from my discussion of intercession, since blessings are often meant to maintain a set of circumstances rather than transform them. The acts of intercession I study are intended to either resolve (or

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13 Ryan C. Davis, "Relating with Gods: Investigating Human-Divine Relationships in the Prayers of Israel and Mesopotamia Using a Performance Approach to Ritual," PhD diss., University of Texas at Austin, 2016), 17. Davis's use of the term "social domain" is unrelated to "Social Domain Theory" as developed in the work of Elliot Turiel and Larry P. Nucci.

14 Davis, "Relating with Gods," 15.

15 See Davis, "Relating with Gods," 21, for similar examples.

16 John R. Searle, *Speech Acts: An Essay on the Philosophy of Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 33–35. See also Davis, "Relating with Gods," 20.

17 Davis, "Relating with Gods," 20.

18 Victor Witter Turner, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1970), 95, distinguishes "ritual" from "celebration" in this way.

at least improve) current suffering of the beneficiary, or to change a divine decree so that the beneficiary's punishment is prevented (or at least decreased). Efficacy can be of two general types. One I term "naturalistic"—that is, conforming to cultural understandings of ordinary physical or persuasive cause-and-effect. The other type I term "occult efficacy," based on Roy A. Rappaport's use of the term to indicate the more mysterious ways that religious rituals can be understood to alter reality.[19] Changing a deity's mind through persuasive prayer would indicate naturalistic efficacy, while preventing death from snakebite by erecting a copper serpent would manifest occult efficacy. "Occult efficacy" can be viewed as a ritual-izing strategy (or characteristic) in itself.

Finally, I have left the term "sequences of behaviours" purposefully vague. Some theorists build into their definitions of ritual specific attributes of these behaviours, such as invariance and formalization.[20] Instead, I view these as strategies of ritualization, which I define as the process whereby certain behaviours are demarcated as "special." The presence, absence, or degree of specific strategies can tell us much about the values and relationships, including human-divine relations, that the ritual both expresses and constructs. Some strategies, for example, constrain the behaviour of ritual participants more than others.

In the following I will point out the presence of several specific ritualizing strategies in biblical depictions of prophetic intercession, adapted from lists by Catherine Bell, Ronald L. Grimes, and Jan A. M. Snoek.[21] Generally, scholars term these strategies "ritual characteristics" or (in Bell's case) "characteristics of ritual-like activities." Unlike Grimes, I have not attempted to be all-inclusive. I have adopted, and in some cases combined, adapted, or renamed, a subset of these lists of ritualizing strategies.[22] I will discuss them as they come up in my analyses.

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19 Roy A. Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity* (Cambridge Studies in Social and Cultural Anthropology; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 23. Elsewhere I distinguish "magical efficacy" from "ritual efficacy," with the former a subset of the latter (Broida, *Forestalling Doom*, 46–47).

20 E.g., Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion*, 24.

21 Catherine Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 138–169; Ronald L. Grimes, *The Craft of Ritual Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 194; Jan A. M. Snoek, "Defining 'Rituals,'" in Jens Kreinath, Jan A. M. Snoek, and Michael Stausberg (eds.), *Theorizing Rituals: Issues, Topics, Approaches, Concepts* (Studies in the History of Religions 114; Leiden: Brill, 2006), 11.

22 An example of a strategy I adapted is "divine prescription." Lists of possible ritual characteristics commonly include "prescription" or "rule governance"—that is, the requirement that actions be performed properly, according to a set of implicit or explicit rules. In the HB, most ritual prescriptions are explicitly attributed to Yhwh.

4. Categorizing the Prophets

Not all biblical prophets engage in intercession. I divide those portrayed as interceding into two groups: typical and atypical. I consider a prophet "atypical" for one of three reasons. 1) The prophet is portrayed as serving in multiple roles (e.g., priest, lawgiver, or military leader). 2) The prophet is portrayed as having special powers beyond the ability to communicate with Yhwh—for example, the ability to resuscitate a child or command the weather by channelling Yhwh's power. 3) In Moses' case, another reason to consider him atypical is that his mode of communication with Yhwh is explicitly distinguished from that of later prophets (Exod 33:11; Num 12:6–8). Besides Moses, atypical prophets include Aaron (who intercedes alongside Moses in Num 17:11–13, but normally functions as priest); Samuel, who combines multiple roles—priest, prophet, and military leader—and has the power to call on Yhwh to produce rain in midsummer (1 Sam 12:17–18); and the miracle-working men of God, primarily Elijah and Elisha. Just as these atypical prophets differ, so do the various patterns of intercession they deploy in the HB.

"Typical prophets" involved in intercession include Ezekiel and Jeremiah (though of priestly background, they do not act as priests in the HB), Amos, and Isaiah (in 2 Kings and Isa 37).[23]

5. Analyzing the Texts

In the following, I look first at depictions of problem-solving intercession by atypical and typical prophets, then at apotropaic intercession by atypical and typical prophets. Finally, I examine one more group of texts in which delegations solicit intercession from typical prophets. Although in this last group of texts the intercession (if any) occurs off-stage, these texts suggest a likely social context for apotropaic intercession with implications for its ritualization.

5.1 Problem-solving Intercession

In these accounts, the beneficiary is already in danger because of illness, the threat of snakebite, lack of potable water, or war. All these difficulties are presented as manifestations of divine judgment.

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23 Some consider the Temple vision scene in Isa 6 sufficient evidence to consider Isaiah as both priest and prophet. If so, his priestly role is not otherwise obvious.

5.1.1 *Problem-solving Intercession by Atypical Prophets*

Moses (once with Aaron), Elijah, Elisha, and an anonymous man of God are all shown interceding to solve existing problems: cure physical ailments, provide potable water, or otherwise help their beneficiaries in dangerous situations. Accounts range from a simple statement that Moses "prayed to Yhwh" (Num 11:2) to blow-by-blow descriptions of resuscitations by Elijah and Elisha (1 Kgs 17:17–24; 2 Kgs 4:18–37).

Within this category, Moses intercedes the most. His intercessions relieve suffering caused by divine punishment of the Egyptians (Exod 8:5–8, 26; 9:33; 10:18), the Israelites (Exod 5:22–23; 15:22–25, 17:1–7; Num 11:2; 20:6–11; 21:7–9), and Miriam (Num 12:13). Aaron intercedes once, on Moses' instructions, in Num 17:11–13, using incense to protect Israelites from plague. Samuel intercedes at Mizpah (1 Sam 7:6, 9) to prevent Philistine victory. Men of God intercede three times: Elijah in 1 Kgs 17:19–24 and Elisha in 2 Kgs 4:32–37, both to resuscitate boys; and an anonymous Man of God in 1 Kgs 13:4–6, on behalf of Jeroboam.[24] Below I analyse the ritual characteristics found in accounts of problem-solving intercession by different atypical prophets, beginning with Moses.

Moses' intercessions on behalf of Pharaoh (Exod 8:5–8, 26; 9:33; 10:18) form the first pattern. Their brief descriptions lack direct discourse. Verb roots include צעק (Exod 8:8) and עתר (8:26; 10:18, with a reference in 8:5), and the expression פרש כפיו in 9:33, a gesture that serves as a metonym for prayer. **Location** is significant (Exod 8:8, 26; 9:33; 10:18). Moses leaves Pharaoh's presence (and in 9:33, the city) prior to interceding. This reported consistency could reflect literary patterning or ritual characteristics, perhaps related to the notion of worshipping Yhwh in the wilderness (e.g., Exod 7:16).

A second pattern is evident in four of Moses's five problem-solving intercessions on behalf of the Israelites (Exod 5:22–23; 15:22–25, 17:1–7; Num 20:6–11; 21:7–9).[25] In each of these, Yhwh follows Moses' verbal appeal with a specific instruction (**divine prescription**). Three times Yhwh instructs Moses to use different non-ordinary techniques to obtain potable water (Exod 15:22–25, 17:1–7; Num 20:6–11), once by throwing a stick into bitter water, a second time by striking a rock with his rod, and a third time by speaking to the rock.[26] Yhwh also

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24 Another possible act of intercession by Elisha appears in 2 Kgs 3:13–19 (to alleviate water shortage). There, three kings approach Elisha, who agrees reluctantly to help them. After demanding a musician, he responds to their need with an oracle promising both water and victory. Nowhere, however, do we see an explicit request for or offer of intercession.

25 The sole remaining intercession by Moses in this group, Num 11:2, merely states that he prayed to Yhwh (התפלל).

26 In Num 20:6–11, a doublet of Exod 17:1–7, a frustrated Moses famously rebukes the people and strikes the rock instead of speaking to the rock itself. I count this episode as intercession because Moses and Aaron prostrate themselves before the Tent of Meeting v. 6, in response to the people's complaint, and they are answered with Yhwh's appearance and instructions.

instructs Moses to erect a copper serpent on a pole to prevent deaths from snake-bite (Num 21:7–9). None of these acts are naturalistic—in other words, none would ordinarily lead to resolution of the problem without magic or miracle. Yhwh's command alone could account for the ritual's efficacy in the minds of observers. Alternatively, audiences could attribute magical agency to Moses, his gestures, or the objects themselves.[27] Regardless, we can describe the prescribed parts of these rituals as manifesting "occult (or non-physical) efficacy."[28]

Given that most of the intercessions in this group occur during the wilderness wanderings, locations vary. Two intercessions in this group (Exod 5:22–23 and 17:1–7), however, occur at a **special location:** Horeb.[29]

Moses' intervention on behalf of Miriam (Num 12:13) is unique in containing an incantation-like utterance: אל נא רפא נא לה ("Please, God, heal her"). This speech act shows heavy **formalization**, a term referring, in part, to use of a "more limited and rigidly organized set of expressions and gestures."[30] The utterance's features appear in incantations in numerous cultures: concision, alliteration, rhyme, rhythm, and chiasmus, suggesting that these words were understood to carry **occult efficacy**, although they also make sense as a prayer.[31] We also see a **special location:** the Tent of Meeting, site of divine encounters.

The next atypical prophet, Aaron, intercedes only once with a goal of problem-solving. His intercession is also unique, and fits his primary identity as priest. Yhwh announces his intent to destroy the Israelites and immediately sends a plague (Num 17:12). Following Moses' instructions, Aaron silently protects many Israelites from death by exposing them to incense in a pan filled with fire from the altar (Num 17:11–13). The intercessory nature of this act is evident from the story's introduction, in which Moses and Aaron respond to Yhwh's

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27 For a discussion on magical agency attributed to people, acts, or objects, see Jesper Sørensen, *A Cognitive Theory of Magic* (Lanham, MD: AltaMira, 2007).

28 Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion*, 48–50. Although one can view "occult efficacy" as resulting from other ritualizing strategies, it is (or a belief in it is) a way that a set of behaviors is ritualized. Snoek lists "not instrumental" (with similar meaning) as one of his ritual characteristics ("Defining 'Rituals,'" 11).

29 In Exod 5:22–23, Moses "returns to Yhwh" (presumably the site of the burning bush) to protest his failure to save the Hebrews expeditiously.

30 Bell, *Perspectives*, 139.

31 For discussions of these features in ANE magical texts as well as others, see for example Henk S. Versnel, ""The Poetics of the Magical Charm: An Essay on the Power of Words," in Paul A. Mirecki and Marvin Meyer (eds.), *Magic and Ritual in the Ancient World* (RGRW 141; Leiden: Brill, 2002), 105–158, Niek Veldhuis, "The Poetry of Magic," in I. Tzvi Abusch and Karel van der Toorn (eds.), *Mesopotamian Magic: Textual, Historical, and Interpretative Perspectives* (AMD 1; Groningen: Styx, 1999), 35–48, Nathan Wasserman, *Style and Form in Old-Babylonian Literary Texts* (CM 27; Leiden: Brill, 2003); Christopher Faraone, "The Agonistic Context of Early Greek Binding Spells," in Christopher A Faraone and Dirk Obbink (eds.), *Magika Hiera: Ancient Greek Magic and Religion* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1991), 3–32.