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ISAIAH 40-55 AS ANTI-BABYLONIAN POLEMIC

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Isaiah 40-55 is essentially a polemic against the theology and worldview of the Assyro-Babylonian culture of the Jewish exile foreseen by and already at least partially contemporary to Isaiah of Jerusalem. This is seen in the prophet's pervasive use of polemical rhetorical devices borrowed largely from cuneiform language and literature itself. These devices include rhetorical questions and self-predications in participial form. The peculiar effectiveness of the prophet's polemic lies in his defense of his own God and religious tradition by using ancient Near Eastern genres to demolish the claims of the gods of Israel's Babylonian captors.

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INTRODUCTION

THOUGH there can be no doubt that the most important, overriding theme of Isaiah 40-55 is that of salvation,[1] a major adjunct to that theme is the prophet's assault upon the religio-cultural structure of the Babylonian society from which the Jewish exiles were to be delivered. It was necessary for them to see both the bankruptcy of pagan life and institutions—especially as manifest in the gods and cult—and, by contrast, the incomparability of their God and his historical and eschatological purposes for them.

Isaiah's unremitting rhetorical attack is called "polemic." Westermann sees polemic as an aggressive element of the prophet's preaching conscripted in service of the message of salvation.[2] It is a shifting of the contest from the battlefield to the law court for the purpose of demonstrating forensically that Yahweh is the Lord of history, the one who is able to link the past with the present and the future.

[1]This point was made years ago by E. J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, Vol. 3 (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972) 17.

[2]C. Westermann, *Isaiah 40-66, A Commentary* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1969) 15.

THE DEFINITION AND EARLY USE OF POLEMIC

Polemic is "a controversial discussion or argument: an aggressive attack on or the refutation of the opinions or principles of another." It is also "the art or practice of disputation or controversy."[3] The only nonbiblical examples of such a literary type surviving from the ancient Near East are a dozen or so Sumerian and Akkadian disputations of a fabulous nature.[4] To date no others of a more judicial or formally forensic nature have been attested. The OT, then, is exceptional, and within the OT the disputation sections of Isaiah 40–55 are the more fully developed. One may say, then, that the use of polemic in Isaiah 40–55 originated in Israelite soil, or, at least, not in Mesopotamia.

There are, however, instructive insights to be gained by considering briefly the salient features of the classical rhetoricians. This is not to suggest, of course, that Isaiah was influenced by them, because he long antedated any of them.[5] But the psychological structures that produced the different traditions obviously had much in common.[6]

Classical Greek rhetoric was defined by Aristotle as the counterpart of dialectic.[7] It is a subject, he said, that can be treated systematically. He saw the essence of the art of rhetoric to be the argumentative modes of persuasion. Any appeals to the emotion "warp the judgment." This suggests that rhetoric, in the classical sense, is another way of describing what is here meant by polemic, or perhaps polemic is a major form of rhetoric, a point to be made shortly.

Kennedy,[8] describing classical rhetoric synthetically, finds the following elements: (1) invention—the subject and the arguments to be used in proof or refutation, these arguments consisting of: (a) direct evidence (witnesses, contracts, oaths), (b) evidence from history,[9] and

[3]P. B. Gove, ed., *Webster's Third New International Dictionary* (Springfield: 1971) 1753. The etymon is Gr. πολεμέω, "make war, fight"; cf. W. F. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1979) 685.

[4]S. N. Kramer, *The Sumerians* (Chicago: The University of Chicago, 1963) 217–23; W. G. Lambert, *Babylonian Wisdom Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1960) 150–51.

[5]According to Greek tradition the art of rhetoric was invented by either Tisias or Corax in Syracuse between 475 and 450 B.C. See George Kennedy, *The Art of Persuasion in Greece* (Princeton University, 1963) 26.

[6]For this "structuralist" understanding of the relationship of form to common human psychology, see R. Knierim, "Old Testament Form Criticism Reconsidered," *Int* 27 (1963) 439–46.

[7]Aristotle, "Rhetoric," I, 1, in R. M. Hutchins, ed., *Aristotle: II*, vol. 9 of *Great Books of the Western World* (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1952) 587.

[8]Kennedy, *Persuasion*, 10–12.

[9]The appeals to history are interesting in light of the frequent use of history as evidence in Isaiah 40–55; cf. 40:21; 41:8–9; 42:5–9; 43:8–13; 44:6–11; etc.

(c) emotion, gestures, etc.; (2) arrangement, consisting of prooemium (introduction), narration (historical background), proof, and epilogue; (3) style; (4) memory; and (5) delivery. Formally or stylistically, rhetoric consisted of trope and scheme.[10] The former, having to do with detailed figures of speech, usually includes metaphor, simile, personification, irony, hyperbole, and metonymy. Scheme, which refers to structure, suggests the use of allegory, parallelism, antithesis, congeries, apostrophe, enthymeme, and the rhetorical question. One can see that these can and do overlap in places.

Aristotle, whose discussion of rhetoric was the point of departure thenceforth, identified three functional aspects of rhetoric: political, forensic, and epideictic.[11] Forensic, which has to do with the court room, was, to him, the most important of the three. He maintained that such a form must have (1) accusation and defense, (2) a rehearsal of the past, and (3) an appeal to justice and injustice. Central in the argument of forensic is the enthymeme, a loose type of syllogism, which may take two forms: (1) demonstrative, that which is created by the juxtaposition of compatible propositions; and (2) refutative, that which is formed by the conjunction of incompatible propositions. The latter, he says, is better because the proof is clearer to the audience.[12]

Aristotle also held that there were two general modes of persuasion—example and enthymeme. His kinds of enthymeme have just been described. Examples could consist of historical parallels or invented parallels, such as illustrations or fables.[13] The appeal to the past was a favorite device of Isaiah, as will become apparent.

The refutation element of forensic, which Aristotle viewed as being so important, could be advanced by counter-syllogism or by the bringing of an objection. There are four main kinds of these: (1) directly attacking the opponent's own statement; (2) putting forward another statement like it; (3) putting forward a statement contrary to it; and (4) quoting previous decision.[14] It is striking that Isaiah employed some or perhaps all of these refutation techniques.[15]

Classical rhetoric continued to find expression in the Hellenistic world and in Rome. Most important for this study, it was taken over and adapted by Jewish scholars in their apologetic against polytheism

[10]T. O. Sloan, *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica*, ed. Philip W. Goetz (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1982) 15. 700.

[11]Aristotle, "Rhetoric," I, 3 (p. 587).

[12]Ibid., II, 22 and 23 (p. 559).

[13]Ibid., II, 20 (p. 589). Perhaps the fables of Sumerian disputation constitute just such examples.

[14]Ibid., II, 25 (p. 589).

[15]Numbers 2 and 3 were particularly favored by the prophet who often used the very language of his opponents against them.

and other deviations from post-exilic Judaism. The principal genre used was diatribe[16] (similar to polemic). This genre found frequent expression in the Haggadah where Marmorstein has suggested that it occurs in four types: (1) dialogues between two parties (e.g., God and Israel); (2) dialogues between God and individuals; (3) personification; and (4) response to a real or imagined objection by an opponent, usually introduced by "if a man say to you . . ." or "anyone who says. . . ."[17]

L. Wallach, in his study of a dispute between R. Gamaliel II and a pagan philosopher found in *Mekilta, Massaket Baḥodesh*, points out that it represents an old sediment of the older Jewish polemic against idolatry. He shows that "its argumentation is the same as the one used since the days of the prophets and its topoi are the same as those employed by Hellenistic Judaism in its defense of monotheism against the aggressions of polytheism."[18] Hellenistic Judaism, of course, drew heavily upon classical rhetorical models.

POLEMIC IN ISAIAH 40–55

In order for one's polemic to be effective one must understand the nature of his antagonist. Specifically, Isaiah needed to be intimately acquainted with both the *Welt* and the *Weltanschauung* of the sixth century Mesopotamian civilization.[19] It is my purpose here to demonstrate that by the revelation of God, Isaiah possessed such knowledge and to indicate the special ramifications of that fact for the prophet's legitimate use of polemic.

At the outset, however, it must be stressed that caution should be used in establishing connections between biblical and nonbiblical phenomena whether literary or otherwise. For example, much of what is characteristic of Isaiah may find its prototypes in earlier Hebrew literature or may not require a Babylonian setting to explain its use. The very object of concern, the disputation or polemic, illustrates this well. Peterson reminds us that, "it is surely a vain enterprise to propose that Deutero-Isaiah was directly influenced by

[16]From διατριβή, "occasion for dwelling on a subject" (Aristotle, "Rhetoric," III, 17 [p. 672]).

[17]A. Marmorstein, "The Background of the Haggadah," *HUCA* 6 (1929) 185–204.

[18]L. Wallach, "A Palestinian Polemic Against Idolatry," *HUCA* 19 (1946) 391. For another study that recognizes both the biblical and classical roots of rabbinic polemic see H. A. Fischel, "Story and History: Observations on Greco-Roman Rhetoric and Pharisaism," in AOS Middle West Branch Semi-Centennial Volume, ed. Denis Sinor (Oriental Series 3; Bloomington: Indiana University, 1969) 59–88.

[19]It is impossible here to enter into the question of the unity of Isaiah and/or the predictive character of chaps. 40–55. For the standard arguments *pro* and *con*, cf. E. J. Young, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958) 215–25; O. T. Allis, *The Unity of Isaiah* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1950) 39–50.

Babylonian texts in those cases where he uses characteristically Babylonian terminology which was already common in pre-exilic Israelite literary and cultic traditions."[20] Any cosmopolitan Palestinian man of letters would surely have been familiar with Akkadian literary works and their Sumerian prototypes.[21]

At the same time, there are refinements and evidences of precision in the observations and descriptions of Isaiah 40–55 that require a familiarity, however gained, which transcends general knowledge of the Neo-Babylonian cultural and religious milieu. Koenig correctly chides those who fail to see this provenience when he says that the tendency to minimize or ignore the possibility of a Babylonian influence is frequently observed, and this marks a regression of historical reflection with regard to the way in which authors of the preceding generation state the problem.[22] He refers to the extremes to which Kittel went in making these direct connections but says that the general historical probability appears to be that indicated by Kittel.

The exilic community, while never losing its sense of identity with and longing for the Palestinian homeland, nevertheless certainly came more and more to adapt to its new surroundings. There was bound to be an effect on language[23] and in such areas as technology, arts, and crafts that were indigenous to Mesopotamia.[24] Many years ago, Cassuto supported the then recent views of Kittel, Sellin, and Gressmann that "Deutero-Isaiah" was often influenced by Babylonian literary style generally and, more particularly, by the diction of the hymns and prayers. He concluded by suggesting that "even if all the particulars of these studies are not to be accepted, the fact of the resemblance must be regarded as completely proven in its general outline."[25]

[20]Stephen L. Peterson, "Babylonian Literary Influence in Deutero-Isaiah" (Ph. D. diss., Vanderbilt University, 1975) 2.

[21]Kramer, *The Sumerians*, 292.

[22]J. Koenig, "Tradition iaviste et influence babylonienne à l'aurore du judaïsme," *RHR* 173 (1968) 140, n. 2.

[23]Y. Kaufmann, *The Babylonian Captivity and Deutero-Isaiah*, vol. 3 in *History of the Religion of Israel* (New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1970) 14.

[24]Cf. David Weisberg, *Guild Structure and Political Allegiance in Early Achaemenid Mesopotamia* (New Haven: Yale University, 1967) 49. Weisberg speaks of the detailed descriptions of craftsmen and craft techniques in Isaiah 40–55, facts which he says "lead us to support the conclusion that Isaiah chapters 40–55 were written by a man who lived in Babylon in the time of Nabonidus." Of course, the same could be said of one who lived in Jerusalem in 700 B.C. and saw these things by revelation or knew of them through cross-cultural contacts.

[25]U. Cassuto, "On the Formal and Stylistic Relationship Between Deutero-Isaiah and Other Biblical Writers," in *Biblical and Oriental Studies*, Vol. 1 (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1973) 165. See also D. W. Thomas, "The Sixth Century B.C.: A Creative Epoch in the History of Israel," *JSS* 6 (1961) 37; and A. Schoors, *I Am God Your Saviour* (Leiden: Brill, 1973) 219.

From a more negative standpoint, it is necessary to understand that the prophet viewed this exposure, on the whole, as a deleterious experience for the Jews, one that must be interpreted within the framework of the all-encompassing sovereignty of Yahweh. His city would be captured, its temple leveled, and its citizens carried off to a distant and hostile land. The pragmatist would certainly construe this not only as a defeat for Judah but for Judah's God. Apparently, Marduk was supreme after all, as one could see from the might and extent of the Babylonian hegemony. The message of Isaiah must confront these political and historical realities with the hope of salvation and restoration. And that hope must rest on a recognition of the superiority of Yahweh and, conversely, the impotence and even nonexistence of the gods of Babylon. Isaiah's polemic is the vehicle through which this issue could be clarified and then laid to rest.

The message then is all relative to one event. All that the prophet sees and describes—nations, beasts, plants, mountains, hills, depths, and even heaven and earth—is tied into the experiences of the exiles. The whole universe is under the control of Yahweh who will deliver and renew his people.[26] This is expressed in protests against the alien religion of their milieu and in apologetical statements about the oneness and absoluteness of Yahweh. This is not the first statement of OT monotheism,[27] but in the context of Isaiah it represents a claim for Yahweh in opposition to the Babylonian deities. Without that claim, the exiles might be prone to accept those deities along with Yahweh or instead of him.[28]

One can well imagine how attractive the pomp and pageantry of the Babylonian cult must have been to the defeated and theologically troubled Jews. As Muilenburg puts it so well, "The great processions like those on New Year's Day, the display of the idols, the drama of the cult, the ancient myths, the impressive rituals, and the elaborate pantheon may easily have tempted not a few to abandon the ways of their fathers and to seek the help of such powerful gods as Marduk."[29] The urgency of the prophet's appeal would indicate that the Jews' interest is more than academic. There was obviously a trend already under way to forsake their heritage and become assimilated to the new religious culture.[30]

[26]P. A. H. de Boer, *Second Isaiah's Message* (*OTS* 11; Leiden: Brill, 1956) 100.

[27]See T. C. Vriezen, *An Outline of Old Testament Theology* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1958) 178–79.

[28]P. R. Ackroyd, *Exile and Restoration: A Study of Hebrew Thought in the Sixth Century* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1968) 42.

[29]James Muilenburg, "The Book of Isaiah. Chapters 40–66," *IDB*, 5. 397.

[30]J. M. Wilkie, "Nabonidus and the Later Jewish Exiles," *JTS* 2 (1951) 42. Wilkie suggests that this is evidence of persecution but there is nothing in Isaiah 40–55 to bear this out.

The religious crisis that the prophet faced had to be addressed in a way that would be totally convincing. As Mihelic says, "In order to overcome the attraction of the Babylonian ritual and the natural tendency of a conquered people slavishly to ape their victors, our poet-prophet had to present the concept of Yahweh in categories which would dwarf the gods of the nations from every possible angle of vision."[31] As we have seen, from the standpoint of classical Aristotelian forensic rhetoric, the strategy of comparing and contrasting opposing propositions is effective and persuasive. And this is all the more true when the protagonist uses forms and formulations drawn from the very inventory of his opponent!

Gressmann was one of the first scholars to recognize that this is precisely what Isaiah did.[32] He understood that such borrowing poses a problem to modern readers who are accustomed to regard the prophet as a highly original and imaginative thinker not likely to have imitated others. But Gressmann understood correctly that the prophet is employing the method of contrast. Isaiah wishes to show that Yahweh is infinitely superior to the Babylonian gods and proceeds to do so by using the terminology of their mythological literature to deny the very gods celebrated in that literature.

As Whybray has noted, Isaiah is particularly dependent upon the language and literature of the Babylonian hymns, prayers, and royal inscriptions.[33] This is because these genres are filled with devices such as self-praise, self-predication, and rhetorical questions, all of which are admirably suited to the forensic, disputational style that Isaiah apparently found to be most effective in asserting the claims of Yahweh in opposition to those of the Babylonian deities. These devices appear throughout his composition, but are particularly frequent in the disputation and hymnic sections, precisely where one would expect them to be (see below).

CHARACTERISTICS OF POLEMIC IN ISAIAH 40–55

As just indicated, polemic underlies all that Isaiah 40–55 has to say about salvation and restoration. In the broader sense, that polemic assumes the structure of the trial or disputation speeches, but more particularly it is expressed (whether in disputation sections or elsewhere) by the techniques of rhetorical question and self-predication.

[31]Joseph L. Mihelic, "The Conquest of God in Deutero-Isaiah," *BR* 11 (1966) 35.

[32]H. Gressmann, *Der Messias* (*FRLANT* 26; Göttingen: Vanderhoeck und Ruprecht, 1929) 61.

[33]R. N. Whybray, *The Heavenly Counsellor in Is. 40, 13–14* (SOTS, Monograph Series 1; Cambridge, 1971) 2. Those who have made such comparisons restrict themselves almost entirely to these genres.

These appear and reappear over and over, but here we can only define them and give some examples.[34]

Rhetorical Questions

Whybray suggests there are a minimum of 72 examples of rhetorical questions in the 333 verses in Isaiah 40–55, 33 of which employ the personal pronoun מי.[35] And of these Yahweh refers to himself in 40:26; 41:2, 4; 42:24; 45:21.[36] When followed by a noun and the relative אשר or in expressions such as "who is God but . . . ," there is the clear implication of uniqueness.

The most striking example, perhaps, is 45:21:

> Speak up, compare testimony—Let them even take counsel together!
> Who announced this aforetime, Foretold it of old?
> Was it not I the Lord? Then there is no god beside me,
> No God exists beside Me who foretells truly and grants success.[37]

With this, compare a hymn of Ištar:[38]

> Who is equal to me, me?
> Who is comparable to me, me?

Far more common is the application of rhetorical questions to the gods by the poets themselves. And, of course, this is true of Isaiah as well, where the question is not so much "who is like me?" as it is "who is like you (or him)?"

In the famous interrogation of 40:12–26 the rhetorical מי is used no fewer than six times in order to establish the incomparability of Yahweh as omniscient and omnipotent creator. By skillful comparison

[34]All the examples that follow are of rhetorical questions with a divine subject or self-predication. That is, they have the "I-form" in common. These are by no means the only polemical devices the prophet uses (second and third person uses also are employed effectively), but they are the most direct and perhaps most devastating in their forensic appeal.

[35]The rhetorical with מי is frequently used by the worshipers of Yahweh elsewhere in the OT (Exod 15:11; Deut 3:24; 4:7; Mic 7:18; Psa 35:10; 71:19; 77:14; 89:9; 113:5; Job 26:22) but in only one other place by Yahweh of himself (Jer 49:19 = 50:44). M. Smith, *JAOS* 83 (1963) 419, attributes "Second Isaiah's" use of the interrogative to Persian influences, especially the Gathas, Yasna 44, where a series of questions is asked of Ahura Mazda about creation.

[36]Whybray, *Counsellor*, p. 22; cf. Exod 15:11; Deut 3:24; 4:7, 8; 5:26; 1 Sam 26:15; 2 Sam 22:32; Jer 49:19; Isa 42:19; Psa 35:10.

[37]The translation here and throughout (unless otherwise noted) is that of *The Prophets: Nevi'im* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1978).

[38]G. A. Reisner, *Sumerisch-babylonisch Hymnen* (*MOS* 10; Berlin, 1896) n. 56, obv. 1–3; cf. *CT* 15, 7–9, obv. 1–2, trans. now in *ANET*^{2}, 576.

of the work of Yahweh to that of the foreign gods, whose idols, in fact, must be themselves created by their worshipers, the prophet lays to rest the pompous claims to incomparability made by these gods throughout the hymnic literature. The following Akkadian hymns to Šamaš, Ninlil, and a personal god must suffice for purposes of comparison:

> Mighty, glorious son, light of the lands,
> Creator of all the totality of heaven and earth are you, Šamaš[39]
>
> O lady of mankind, creator of
> All things, who guides
> The whole of creation.[40]
>
> My god, holy one, creator of all peoples are you.[41]

These passages are not couched in the rhetorical question form, though examples can certainly be adduced,[42] but they are sufficient to show that the incomparability of Yahweh in creation is expressed in this form in Isaiah as a response to claims made by or on behalf of various Mesopotamian deities.

Self-predication

This rhetorical device, common in the Sumerian and Akkadian literature, especially in the hymns of self-praise and royal inscriptions, consists, according to Dion, of nominal phrases in the participial predicate, where the subject is sometimes the divine name and sometimes the divine "I"; or else of brief propositions in which the imperfect translates a permanent truth alternating or not alternating with the participles.[43]

In the earliest period of cuneiform literature the formula was used with the gods only, mixed at times with narration in the third

[39]P. A. Schollmeyer, *Sumerisch-babylonische Hymnen und Gebete an Šamaš* (Paderborn, 1912) n. 18, obv. 8–9.

[40]S. Langdon, *Sumerian and Babylonian Psalms* (Paris: Libraire Paul Guethner, 1909) n. 23, obv. 7–10 (Hymn to Ninlil).

[41]Lambert, *JNES* 33 (1974) 277, I, 55 (*dingir.šà.dib.ba* to a personal god). The prayer, however, is based on a well-known prayer to Sin (p. 270).

[42]See, e.g., IV R, 9 (Hymn to Sin), translated by A. Falkenstein in A. Falkenstein and W. von Soden, *Sumerische und Akkadische. Hymnen und Gebete* (Zurich/Stuttgart; Artemis-Verlag, 1953) n. 44, obv. 24–25; J. Böllenrücher, *Gebete und Hymnen an Nergal*, *LSS* 1/VI (Leipzig, 1904) n. 6; G. Perry, *Hymnen und Gebete an Sin*, *LSS* 2/IV (Leipzig, 1907) n. 3, ll. 54–56.

[43]H.-M. Dion, "Le genre littéraire sumérien de l' 'hymne à soi-même' et quelques passages du Deutéro-Isaïe," *RB* 74 (1967) 218.

person.[44] In the Old Babylonian period it was appropriated by kings with the "I am" followed by participial predications.[45] This continued to be the practice in Akkadian texts down to the Neo-Babylonian period.[46] Gressmann observed that "Second Isaiah" took this basic and abbreviated form and greatly expanded it into hymnic compositions making it a major part of his literary production.[47] And, Gressmann said, only "Second Isaiah," of all the biblical writers, uses the formula.[48]

Dion lists four passages which he finds to be especially characteristic of this genre: 44:24*b*–25, 26; 45:6*b*–7; 48:12*b*–13; 50:2*b*–3. Others, more imbedded in their contexts, are 43:10*bβ*–13; 44:6*b*–7; 45:12, 18*b*, 19, 21*b*; 46:9*b*–10. Finally, two others, much more brief, and one of dubious authenticity, are 41:4*b*; 42:8; and 51:13*aa*, 15, 16*ba*. He also suggests, with hesitation, the possibility of this element outside of "Second Isaiah," namely, in Deut 32:29; 66:1a; Jer 32:27; Hosea 13:4; Joel 3:17; Psa 46:10; 50:10–12 (= 108:8–10).[49]

Stephen Peterson, along with other scholars, has noted that the "I am" form with full predications is found primarily in the trial speeches and the Cyrus oracle.[50] In one of these trial speeches, 43:22–28, Yahweh contends with Israel while in the others (43:8–15; 44:6–8; 44:21–22; 45:20–25) the dispute is with the foreign nations and/or their gods. It is unusual to find the hymn of self-praise in a trial speech form but, as Peterson points out, "this prophet has intentionally adapted a Babylonian hymn to function as the verdict in the trial speech. The appropriateness of this adaptation is apparent from the perspective that the trial speeches in question are between Yahweh and foreign nations and gods."[51]

This is not to say that every "I am" form is a self-predication in the Babylonian form. Westermann shows that "Second Isaiah" combines two different types of the form, which have two different

[44]For an important study of the "I am" formula, see W. Zimmerli, "Ich bin Jahwe," *Gottes Offenbarung* (München: Kaiser, 1963) 11–40.

[45]Sumerian royal inscriptions, such as votive or dedicatory texts, contained royal names with many titles and epithets, but the predication took the form of finite transitive verbs. See W. W. Hallo, "The Royal Inscriptions of Ur: A Typology," *HUCA* 33 (1962) 15–22.

[46]See Eduard Norden, *Agnostos Theos: Untersuchungen zur Formengeschichte religiöser Rede* (1913; reprint, Stuttgart: Teubner, 1956) 92.

[47]H. Gressmann, "Die literarische Analyse Deuterojesajas," *ZAW* 34 (1914) 285–95. The passages he identified as hymnic self-predication are 41:44ff.; 42:8ff.; 43:11ff.; 44:5ff.; 45:3ff., 18ff.; 46:9ff.; 48:11ff., 17ff.; 49:26; 50:2; and 51:5.

[48]Ibid., 290.

[49]*Dion*, "Le genre littéraire sumérien," 217.

[50]Peterson, "Babylonian Literary Influence," 124.

[51]Ibid., 124–25.

origins.[52] One always is connected to a word of salvation which, in Isaiah 40–55, usually occurs in the oracles of salvation genre (41:10, 13, 14*b*; 43:3) or in other words of salvation (41:17*b*; 43:25; 46:4; 48:17; 49:23; 51:12). This type finds its roots in Israel itself as can be seen in Gen 15:1, 7; 26:24; 28:13; 46:3; 17:1ff; 35:11ff.; Exod 3:6ff; etc.[53] The other type is the true self-predication or self-glorification and as such is a type of praise. As Westermann suggests, "Deutero-Isaiah" was the first in Israel to show God glorifying himself in this way. "He took over this non-Israelite, and obviously Babylonian, form with the deliberate polemical purpose of contrasting Israel's God as the one God with the foreign gods who vaunted their power and might against each other."[54]

In these respective types of the "I am" formula the self-predications serve different functions. The indigenous Israelite style serves in the salvation oracle as the basis for the announcement of salvation. Hymnic expansions of the formula in this type express Yahweh's saving relationship to Israel. In the trial and disputation speeches, however, the self-predication distinguishes Yahweh from other gods in polemic fashion. Often it makes the assertion that there is no other God but Yahweh (43:11, 12–13; 45:18, 21; 46:9).[55] Usually the native form is much more brief, but that which is adapted from the Babylonian style is greatly expanded with relative clauses and participial phrases as predicates, a formula characteristic of Isaiah 40–55.

The assumption is, then, that the expanded form of self-predication characteristic of Isaiah is an adaptation of the Sumerian-Akkadian style with which the prophet would have been familiar. This seems almost certain given the virtual absence of this hymn type in other Hebrew literature and its prevalence throughout cuneiform hymnic and other genres of literature.[56]

[52]Westermann, *Isaiah*, 26.

[53]See P.-E. Dion. "The Patriarchal Traditions and the Literary Form of the 'Oracle of Salvation'" *CBQ* 29 (1967) 198–206. Cf. also C. Westermann, *Basic Forms of Prophetic Speech*, trans. H. C. White (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1967) 125. He points out that self-predication occurs already at Mari so that self-predication as a prophetic device goes back to an early, if non-Israelite, setting.

[54]Westermann, *Isaiah*, 26. A good example of a self-predication of Marduk, which Meier says, "appeared to have carried no little weight in the wisdom schools of Sargonic times" (my translation from the German), has been published by G. Meier, "Ein Kommentar zu einer Selbstprädikation des Marduk aus Assur," *ZA* 47 (1942) 241–46.

[55]R. F. Melugin, "The Structure of Deutero-Isaiah" (Ph.D. diss., New Haven: Yale University, 1968) 41.

[56]Westermann, *Isaiah*, 156. Not all scholars accept this, of course. M. L. Phillips, "Divine Self-Predication in Deutero-Isaiah," *BR* 16 (1971) 35, argues that the source of

Dion, in a study previously cited, picked up on ideas developed by Norden and Gressmann, and attempted to show that the use of self-predication in the typical Isaianic form must be traced back ultimately to the Sumerian "hymns to oneself."[57] He lists eleven examples of these and concludes after studying them that all the pieces he had examined take the form of hymns in the first person, the divine "I" being repeated in them with almost wearisome persistence.[58] He then outlines the following characteristic structure: proclamation of names and epithets; the position of the god in the pantheon, especially his relationship with the great gods; his beneficial and destructive powers over men and the universe, including enemy lands; and usually a reference to the number and importance of the sanctuaries over which he rules.

Two examples each from Isaiah and the Sumerian sources will suffice for now. The first is the short form found in the oracle of salvation in Isa 43:1–7.

> But now thus said the Lord
> Who created you, O Jacob,
> Who formed you, O Israel:
> Fear not, for I will redeem you;
> I have singled you out by name,
> You are mine.
>
> When you pass through water,
> I will be with you;
> Through streams
> They shall not overwhelm you.
> When you walk through fire,
> You shall not be scorched;
> Through flame,
> It shall not burn you.
>
> For I the Lord am your God,
> The Holy One of Israel, your Savior,
> I give Egypt as a ransom for you,
> Ethiopia and Saba in exchange for you.
>
> Because you are precious to me,
> And honored, and I love you,
> I give men in exchange for you
> And peoples in your stead.

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the expanded self-predication, which he admits is unique to "Second Isaiah," must be sought not in Babylonian inspiration but in the covenant tradition of Israel.

[57]Dion, "Le genre littéraire sumérien," (1967).

[58]Ibid., 223; the examples he gives are on p. 222, n. 36.

Fear not, for I am with you:
I will bring your folk from the East,
Will gather you out of the West;

I will say to the North, "Give back!"
And to the South, "Do not withhold!"
Bring My sons from afar,
And my daughters from the end of the earth—

All who are linked to My name,
Whom I have created,
Formed, and made for My glory.

Most scholars see this oracle of salvation as a piece made up of two shorter ones (1–4, 5–7) but combined by the prophet into one unit. It may be analyzed as follows:

Introduction	1*a*
Assurance of salvation	1*bα*, 5*aα*
Nominal substantiation	1*bδ*, 5*aβ*
Verbal substantiation	1*bβγα*
Outcome	2–4, 5*b*–7

The self-predications appear in the introduction in the participial forms בארך and יצרך and in v 3 where Yahweh describes himself as קדוש ישראל מושיעך and אלהיך. These brief ascriptions are, of course, not unique to Isaiah and can hardly be said to be dependent on Babylonian analogues.[59]

In the disputation texts, however, there appears the expanded self-predication, an example of which is 44:24–28:

Thus said the Lord, your Redeemer,
Who formed you in the womb:
It is I, the Lord, who made everything,
Who alone stretched out the heavens
And unaided spread out the earth;

Who annul the omens of diviners,
And make fools of the augurs:
Who turn sages back
And make nonsense of their knowledge;

But confirm the word of My servant
And fulfill the prediction of my messengers.
It is I who say of Jerusalem, "It shall be inhabited,"
And of the towns of Judah, "They shall be rebuilt";

[59]Note, for example, the frequent uses of participial ברא outside Isaiah as cited by Paul Humbert, "Emploi et portée du verbe bârâ (créer) dans l'Ancien Testament," *TZ* 3 (1947) 401–22.

(I,) who said to the deep, "Be dry;
I will dry up your floods,"

Am the same who says of Cyrus, "He is my Shepherd;
He shall fulfill all my purposes!
He shall say of Jerusalem, 'She shall be rebuilt,'
And to the Temple: 'You shall be founded again.'"

Though this pericope forms the introduction to what is commonly called the "Cyrus Oracle," it is by itself cast in the form of a hymnic self-predication.[60] But its intent is clearly that of disputation as Schoors has demonstrated.[61] In other words, it is an excellent example of the use of expanded self-predication as the basis for establishing the credentials of the accuser, in this case Yahweh.

Gressmann recognized only the hymnic quality of the section and pointed out the fact that it consists almost entirely of a series of participles following the divine name in the messenger formula, "Thus said the LORD."[62] It is in its entirety, he said, a *Selbsprädikation*. Within this relatively brief poem of about 20 lines there are at least eleven participial ascriptions to Yahweh involving nine different verbs.[63] These demonstrate the awesome power and wisdom of God as creator (24), predictor (25–26), and redeemer (27–28).

Turning now to the cuneiform literature, there is a Sumerian hymn of self-praise, a genre far more common in Sumerian than Akkadian.[64] The following is the translation of an Inanna Hymn[65] by W. H. P. Römer:[66]

8 Mein Vater hat mir den Himmel gegeben,
hat mir die Erde gegeben,
9 ich—die Himmelsherrin bin ich,
10 misst sich einer, ein Gott mit mir?

[60]Westermann, *Isaiah*, 154–55, refers to the passage as a descriptive hymn of praise in the first person of self-glorification.

[61]Schoors, *Saviour*, 267–73. He bases his argument on the presence of the messenger formula (24*a*) and the similarity of the passage to the disputation of 45:9–13.

[62]H. Gressmann, "Die literarische Analyse Deuterojesajas," 289–90.

[63]The following verbs appear: אמר (44:26, 27, 28); גאל (24); יצר (24); נטה (24); עשה (24); רקע (24); פרד (25); קום (26); שוב (25). Five of these occur in v 24 alone!

[64]So E. Reiner, "A Sumero-Akkadian Hymn of Nanâ," *JNES* 33 (1974) 221. She cites as Akkadian examples an Old Babylonian self-praise of Ištar (*VAS* 10, 213 = *SAHG*, 381, n. 3), "Marduk's address to the Demons" (Lambert, *AfO* 17 [1957–58] 310ff.; 19 [1959–60] 114–19), and the Gula Hymn of Bulluṭsa-rabi, discussed below.

[65]*VAS* 10, n. 199, III 8–31; published by H. Zimmern, *Sumerischen Kultlieder aus altbabylonischer Zeit* (Leipzig, 1913).

[66]W. H. P. Römer, "Eine sumerische Hymne mit Selbstlob Inannas," *Or*, n.s. 38 (1969) 97–114.

11 Mullil hat mir den Himmel gegeben
<hat mir> die Erde <gegeben>
12 ich—<die Himmelsherrin bin ich>.
13 Die Herrenschaft hat er mir gegeben,
14 die Herrinnenschaft hat er mir gegeben
15 den Kampf hat er mir gegeben, die [Schla]cht?
<hat er> mir <gegeben>,
16 die Flut hat er mir gegeben, den [wi]r belwind (?)
<hat er> mir <gegeben>,
17 Den Himmel hat er als Kappe auf mein
Haupt gesetzt,
18 die Erde als Sandale an meinen Fuss gebunden,
19 den reinen Göttermantel an meinen Leib gebunden,
20 das reine Szepter in meine Hand gelegt.

Though the style of these lines is not participial, it is certainly self-predicative. One might well assume that the traditional self-introduction ("I am") with a following string of names and epithets made up the lacunae. And probably these took the form of appositional nominatives or participles.[67] The "I am" does survive in lines 9 and 12.

An Akkadian example is the Gula hymn of Bulluṭsa-rabi, a composition that probably dates from the Persian period.[68] In the first 187 of a total of 200 lines the goddess Gula speaks. In the opening section the deity introduces herself with participles, nominal clauses, and several statives. The passage reads as follows:

1 The goddess, the most powerful of all deities that reside in shrines—
2 I am an aristocrat, I am a lady, I am resplendent, I am exalted,
3 My location is lofty, I am feminine, I have dignity,
4 I excel among the goddesses.
5 In heaven my star is great, my name in the underworld,
6 Mention of me is sweet—men discourse on
7 Sound health and the healing touch,
8 My great name is Nintinugga.

The remainder of the hymn consists of alternating sections in which the goddess praises herself and then her spouse. Bulluṭsa-rabi is

[67]This is the form taken by other Sumerian hymns of this type. See Falkenstein, *SAHG*, n. 24 ("A Šulgi Hymn") in which ll. 1–19 are the "I am" section, following which are statements with finite verbs; and so throughout the Šulgi hymns (Castellino, *Two Šulgi Hymns [BC] Studi Semitici* 42 [Roma: Universitá di Roma, 1972] B, 11–12, 82, 119–21; C, 1–6). For the structure of this form, see von Soden, "Hymne," *RLA* 4 (1972–1975) 539–40.

[68]W. G. Lambert, "The Gula Hymn of Bulluṭsa-rabi," *Or* 36 (1967) 105–32. Lambert suggests a date for its original composition between 1400 and 700 B.C. (p. 109).

an individual on whose behalf prayer is made in the last section (ll. 188–200) to the two deities. As we indicated above, the Akkadian exemplars of the self-praise are limited to only three or four, though, of course, the hymns and prayers in the second and third person are very common.

CONCLUSION

The preceding, on which little comment has been made, are sufficient to show that the self-predication formula is attested in both Sumerian and Akkadian hymnic literature as well as in Isaiah. And since it is lacking elsewhere in Hebrew literature (with the exceptions already noted) one must allow the possibility at least that Isaiah appropriated and adapted this particular literary vehicle as a heuristic and polemical device with which to exalt and praise Yahweh in opposition to the gods of Babylon. It seems that one must agree with Dion's assessment when he says that the concrete example of this borrowing by the prophet may help us to appreciate better the marvelous power of assimilation by which the Word of the living God always utilizes to its own ends the ancient religious heritage of humanity. Indeed, the prophet of Yahweh does not hesitate to benefit from authentic resources of the pagan milieu in which he finds himself. A master himself of ancient eloquence, he seizes well the majesty and power of persuasion of discourse by which gods and kings generally reveal their splendor in the Orient. He adopts therefore this method, up to that time unused in Israel, and uses it in the service of the good news concerning the Creator and Savior.[69] Without doubt, the most effective polemic is that in which the protagonist (mis)uses the arguments of his adversary and does so by a sarcastic, mocking use of the very language of his opponent. Much more of this could, without question, be communicated by the special nuances that are possible to oral discourse. But no one of the exilic community could fail to be impressed by the subtleties as well as the overt expression of the prophet as he attempted to demonstrate to them the incomparability of their God.

[69]Dion, "Le genre littéraire sumérien," 233–34.