[*JSOT* 57 (1993) 39-60]

NO PROPHETS? RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN BIBLICAL PROPHETIC RESEARCH AND ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN PROPHECY*

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'Es ist gleich tödlich für den Geist, ein System zu haben, und keins zu haben. Er wird sich also wohl entschliessen müssen, beides zu verbinden'[1]

I

Despite the vast amount of scholarly interest in the prophetic literature of the Hebrew Bible during the last hundred years or so, surprisingly little consensus has been reached in this field. Evidently, most of the questions that were raised when the scientific study of biblical prophecy was first introduced upon the scholarly scene appear to remain as unanswered today as they were then. However, notwithstanding the lack of any consensus, at least one tendency appears to be characteristic of recent developments in prophetic research. A few examples may serve to illustrate this particular trend.

O. Kaiser has claimed that the nucleus of Isaiah 1–39 consisted of a handful of prophetic sayings from the beginning of the fifth century, the purpose of which was to come to terms with the collapse of the kingdom of Judah. The so-called 'Isaiah of Jerusalem', supposed to have been active in the middle of the 8th century, thus disappears into

* This article is dedicated to Professor Eduard Nielsen on his seventieth birthday, May 8th, 1993.

1. 'It is equally fatal for the mind to have a system as it is to have no system. Consequently, it [the mind] should rather decide to combine the two'. *Charakteristiken und Kritiken I (1796–1801)* (Kritische Friedrich-Schlegel Ausgabe; ed. E. Behler, II/1; München, 1967), p. 173.

legend.[2] Likewise, J.M. Vincent has argued that there is no such thing as a 'Second Isaiah'. All of Isaiah 40–55, for the most part originating from cultic prophecy in the temple in Jerusalem, consists of material handed down during several generations and subsequently made into one composite work by several authors and redactors in postexilic times.[3] A similar view has been proposed by J.H. Eaton, who, in accordance with his earlier work on the Psalms and the autumnal New Year Festival, attempted to demonstrate that the text of Isaiah 40–55, ultimately stemming from this very festival, is the work of an 'Isaian circle' of 'festal prophets'.[4] Apparently, these different approaches cohere well with another recent development in Isaian research, where a growing (and in the present writer's view justified) dissatisfaction concerning the classical Duhmian tripartite division of the Book of Isaiah, and its failure to do justice to the theology of the final editorial framework, has already produced a sizable amount of secondary literature.[5]

Moreover, in his excellent commentary on Jeremiah, R.P. Carroll shows that the Book of Jeremiah has rather little to do with any pre-exilic prophet Jeremiah, and that what we find in this book is an anthology produced by Deuteronomistic redactors in the exilic and postexilic eras, and a 'prophetical book' of the kind that these redactors

2. O. Kaiser, *Das Buch des Propheten Jesaja: Kapitel 1–12* (ATD, 17; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 5th edn, 1981).

3. J.M. Vincent, *Studien zur literarischen Eigenart und zur geistigen Heimat von Jesaja, Kap. 40–55* (Beiträge zur biblischen Exegese und Theologie, 5; Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1977). I am grateful to Dr Vincent for providing me with a copy of his important work.

4. J.H. Eaton, *Festal Drama in Deutero-Isaiah* (London: SPCK, 1979).

5. The literature in this field is growing rapidly. See, for instance, M.A. Sweeney, *Isaiah 1–4 and the Post-Exilic Understanding of the Isaianic Tradition* (BZAW, 171; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1988). To Sweeney, the whole of the book of Isaiah has been conceived as an answer to the problems of the Jewish community in the second half of the fifth century. See also J. Vermeylen, 'L'unité du livre d'Isaïe', in J. Vermeylen (ed.), *The Book of Isaiah: Le Livre d'Isaïe: Les oracles et leurs relectures: Unité et complexité de l'ouvrage* (BETL, 81; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1989), pp. 11-53. Apparently, this particular development should not be viewed in isolation from another recent trend, commonly referred to as 'inner-biblical exegesis'. See, for instance, M. Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), and J. Koenig, *Oracles et liturgies de l'exil babylonien* (Etudes d'histoire et de philosophie religieuses, 69; Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1988).

believed, or wished, that a prophetic book should look like.[6] Finally, in a recent work on the book of Micah, K. Jeppesen has put forward the thesis that the book of Micah should be read as a coherent composition from the time of the exile, its purpose being to explain to its readers why Jerusalem was destroyed and the people taken into exile, as well as to show that there is now good reason for future hope. The purpose of the Micah work, then, is rather similar to what we may find with regard to Isaiah 40–55. Jeppesen even suggests that the editor of Micah and the editor of Isaiah 40–55 may be the same person. As a postexilic literary creation, the work has little to do with any pre-exilic prophet Micah.[7]

In addition to these, and similar works, mention should here be made also of A.G. Auld, who, in a series of studies, has attempted to demonstrate that the designation 'prophets' for the biblical 'prophets' is very late ('it was only after the exile that such figures became termed "prophet"'),[8] and that 'both parts of the "prophetic canon" of the Hebrew Bible received much of their distinctive and positively intended "prophetic" vocabulary over a briefer and in a later period of the biblical tradition than is regularly supposed',[9] leaving it, however, to 'another study to clarify what about these writings let them become prophetic...'[10] Auld bases his thesis primarily on a statistical and terminological study, attempting to show that the term נביא in the so-called 'prophetic books' was editorially attached to the 'prophets' only in late, postexilic times.[11] Jeremiah, Isaiah, Ezekiel and 'the minor prophets' were not 'prophets' but 'poets'. Thus, the prophet Amos 'only became a good prophet when he was a dead one'.[12] In fact, they

6. R.P. Carroll, *Jeremiah: A Commentary* (OTL; London: SCM Press, 1986). For the view that the book of Jeremiah in its final form is basically the work of a redactor writing under the influence of 'Ezekiel traditions', see C.R. Seitz, *Theology in Conflict: Reactions to the Exile in the Book of Jeremiah* (BZAW, 176; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1989).

7. K. Jeppesen, *Græder ikke saa saare: Studier i Mikabogens sigte* (2 vols.; Aarhus: Aarhus Universitetsforlag, 1987).

8. A.G. Auld, 'Prophets through the Looking Glass: Between Writings and Moses', *JSOT* 27 (1983), pp. 3-23 (7).

9. Auld, 'Prophets through the Looking Glass', p. 16.

10. Auld, 'Prophets through the Looking Glass', p. 20.

11. A.G Auld, 'Prophets and Prophecy in Jeremiah and Kings', *ZAW* 96 (1984), pp. 66-82.

12. A.G. Auld, 'Word of God and Words of Man: Prophets and Canon', in

all 'denounced' and 'abhorred' prophets, and 'would hardly have been seen dead in their company'.[13] Likewise, such prophetic 'paraphernalia' as the phrase 'the word of YHWH' was inserted editorially into the texts at a late stage.[14] Unlike Carroll, however,[15] Auld is concerned with the *persons* Jeremiah, Isaiah, *et al.* He believes that we should attempt to find out more about these historical poets from the texts.[16] Thus, even though he would warmly support the views put forward by Auld, Carroll clearly also radicalizes them.[17]

Even if the different views referred to above remain far from

L. Eslinger and G. Taylor (eds.), *Ascribe to the Lord: Biblical and Other Studies in Memory of Peter C. Craigie* (JSOTSup, 67; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1988), pp. 237-251 (247).

13. Auld, 'Word of God and Words of Man', p. 245.

14. Auld, 'Word of God and Words of Man', p. 246. This, in my view, is the weakest part of Auld's argument. Ever since L. Köhler in his work (strongly influenced by Gunkel), *Deuterojesaja (Jesaja 40–55) stilkritisch untersucht* (BZAW, 37; Giessen: Töpelmann, 1923), pp. 102-109, made the discovery that the formula used by the Hebrew prophets, כה אמר יהוה, originated from the profane messenger formula, studies on the prophets as 'divine messengers' have belonged to one of the more established accomplishments of prophetic research, and it certainly takes more than mere allegations to disintegrate this and related vocabulary from the 'prophetical' books. On the messenger, see most recently S.A. Meier, *The Messenger in the Ancient Semitic World* (HSM, 45; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), and, less good, but with a large section on 'the prophet as messenger' (pp. 137-266), J.T. Greene, *The Role of the Messenger and Message in the Ancient Near East: Oral and Written Communication in the Ancient Near East and in the Hebrew Scriptures: Communicators and Communiques in Context* (BJS, 169; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989). Again, Mari provides us with some interesting evidence (see J.-M. Durand, *Archives épistolaires de Mari*, I/1 [ARM, 26; Paris: Editions Recherche sur les Civilisations, 1988], pp. 377-81). Compare also the following prophetic declaration from Mari: 'Dagan has sent me' (*ibid.*, p. 449 = no. 220, l. 19). Below, the work by Durand is abbreviated *AEM*, I/1.

15. In addition to the works by Carroll mentioned elsewhere in this article, one should also note his important paper on the superscripts of the prophetical books, 'Inventing the Prophets', *IBS* 10 (1988), pp. 24-36, where Carroll claims that whoever wrote these colophons containing the different names actually 'invented' the prophets.

16. Auld, 'Word of God and Words of Man', p. 240 n. 3. Cf. also his 'Poetry, Prophecy, Hermeneutic: Recent Studies in Isaiah', *SJT* 33 (1980), pp. 567-581 (567).

17. Cf. R.P. Carroll, 'Poets not Prophets. A Response to "Prophets through the Looking Glass"', *JSOT* 27 (1983), pp. 25-31.

presenting any uniform appearance, they apparently do share the common belief that there is little or nothing to be learnt about pre-exilic prophecy on the basis, for example, of the books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and the minor prophets. Despite some critical voices (among them notably Williamson,[18] Ringgren[19] and Overholt[20]), and judging also from the fast growing tendency to date more and more of the biblical material to very 'late' periods, as well as from the ever increasing interest in 'redactional layers' and 'inner-biblical exegesis', there are good reasons to suspect that the trend described above in the rather sketchy survey of recent developments may soon turn into more than a general tendency, and eventually change completely the very nature of prophetic research.[21]

Apparently, the trend in recent scholarship to which I have been referring does not deny that that there were such things as prophets in ancient Israel. However, by reducing what we find in the 'prophetic writings' of the Hebrew Bible to postexilic literary creations with little or no connection at all back into the history that went before, it may seem that recent scholarship has postulated an impassable tradition gap, and made whatever pre-exilic prophetic activity there was quite unavailable to us.

Are then the prospects for future prophetical studies so bleak? Are the prophets of ancient Israel really completely lost to us? Is it not at all possible, on the basis of the texts found in the Hebrew Bible, to gain access to the phenomenon of ancient Israelite prophecy in the period prior to the exilic era?

In spite of the obvious value of much recent scholarship on the prophets, and despite the perhaps even greater meritoriousness of the works of scholars like Auld and Carroll, I find it difficult to see that

18. H.G.M. Williamson, 'A Response to A.G. Auld', *JSOT* 27 (1983), pp. 33-39.

19. H. Ringgren, 'Israelite Prophecy: Fact or Fiction', in *Congress Volume, Jerusalem 1986* (VTSup, 40; Leiden: Brill, 1988), pp. 204-10.

20. T.W. Overholt, 'Prophecy in History: The Social Reality of Intermediation', *JSOT* 48 (1990), pp. 3-29.

21. Cf. also J.M. Ward, 'The Eclipse of the Prophet in Contemporary Prophetic Studies', *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 42 (1988), pp. 97-104, and in particular F.E. Deist, 'The Prophets: Are we Heading for a Paradigm Switch?' in V. Fritz, K.-F. Pohlmann and H.-C. Schmitt (eds.), *Prophet und Prophetenbuch: Festschrift für Otto Kaiser zum 65. Geburtstag* (BZAW, 185; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1989), pp. 1-18.

all of their views can be easily accepted. Since the field involved is a fairly large one, however, and the space limited, I shall, in the present context, have to refrain from treating the problems involved in any great detail, but will have to restrict myself to but a few provisional remarks.[22]

Tentatively speaking, Carroll may well be correct in his claim that the book of Jeremiah is a postexilic creation based on what its author believed pre-exilic prophecy looked like, and that we cannot really know anything about whether there ever existed a prophet Jeremiah. Also, his stand against certain trends is basically sound and certainly necessary, forcing biblical scholarship to reconsider its historical positivism and naive empiricism, and it should, consequently, be warmly welcomed in a branch of the humanities where positivism, if far advanced in decrepitude, is nevertheless still with us.

Following this eulogy of Carroll's healthy methodological approach, however, I should also mention some of the weaknesses in his approach. Here, I am not referring primarily to such 'minor matters' as, for instance, the fact that his epistemological scepticism appears sometimes to be arbitrary and selective,[23] nor to his occasionally troubled notion of 'history',[24] where it occasionally may be a problem

22. I would like to add here that I am far more in sympathy with the works of Auld and Carroll than one might perhaps come to suspect from the following remarks. For my own part, I do not hesitate to say that I have probably learnt more from the reading of Carroll's stimulating works than from any other scholar in his generation. It is a delight to read Carroll because he is knowledgeable also about the intellectual debate in the humanities in general, a capacity rarely to be found in exegetes on a level beyond the customary dilettantism, which is perhaps motivated by a chronic inferiority complex. This same inferiority complex tends to make biblical scholars look up to somewhat outmoded trend-setting theoreticians (more often than not of the French persuasion) who take a very little scholarship a very long way in order to make biblical research look more 'philosophical'.

23. Carroll's 'epistemological scepticism', strangely enough, appears to be less impassioned vis-à-vis the works of Dumézil, or Ong, for example (cf. below notes 38 and 53).

24. Occasionally, Carroll's view of 'historical' even appears to be of a good old-fashioned positivistic variant. See, for instance, his attempt to make a distinction between 'historical' on one side and 'literary, ideological and fictional' on the other ('Whose Prophet?', p. 44.) For someone who is apparently well aware that the 'historical fact' debate is methodologically *passé*, Carroll remains rather obsessionally concerned with the 'fact' that the book of Jeremiah is not historical: 'As I read Jeremiah I am struck by its ahistoricality and its intertextuality. Poem after poem

to the reader of Carroll's always stimulating writings that he sometimes appears to take sides with the anti-empiricists.

Far more open to criticism is, for instance, his claim that we are facing serious difficulties evaluating the biblical prophets because there are two different perceptions of prophecy in the Bible: one very positive and one equally negative.[25] In a similar manner, Carroll holds the opinion that the prophets cannot be mediators because the priests were, thus severely complicating 'the combination of the roles of priest and prophet in the representation of various figures in the Bible (e.g. Abraham, Moses, Samuel, Elijah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel)'.[26] Such strange, self-inflicted problems reveal a curious cognitive aporia, inconsistent with Carroll's otherwise sound theoretical principles.

Without denying that there were such personages as 'prophets' in ancient Israel, Carroll shows himself unwilling to grant the biblical writers much interest in the phenomenon. It is not surprising, then, that Auld and Carroll are both rather vague and reticent over what terms like 'prophet' and 'prophecy' can or should mean.

Since any discussion of the term 'prophecy' is bound to spark off

has little reference outside the book itself and much of the prose is commentary on the Deuteronomistic History' ('Whose Prophet?', p. 40). However, it is *not* possible to claim that the texts of the Hebrew Bible are 'ahistorical'. No text coming out of the past can be. No one, I suppose, would refer to the works of Jane Austen or Thomas Hardy as 'historical' books. But this does not at all mean that we cannot learn a lot about the societies in which these writers lived from the reading of their books. Even if the ancient Israelite society is long gone, and thus definitely a thing of the past (not available to our senses), this does not mean that the written remains from this society do not yield 'historical' information. In my attempt to choose *my* version of the biblical past, I should in fact be far more worried about to what extent *we* share a common intellectual universe with the authors of the book of Jeremiah than the 'tradition gap' between the view on prophecy in the book of Jeremiah and pre-exilic notions of prophecy. The best treatment I have seen on some of the problems involved here is found in the recent book by H.B. Brichto, *Toward a Grammar of Biblical Poetics: Tales of the Prophets* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

25. 'Poets not Prophets. A Response to "Prophets through the Looking-Glass"', *JSOT* 27 (1983), pp. 25-26. For some of the issues of prophecy involved here, see J.J.M. Roberts, 'Does God Lie? Divine Deceit as a Theological Problem in Israelite Prophetic Literature', in *Congress Volume, Jerusalem 1986* (VTSup, 40; Leiden: Brill, 1988), pp. 211-20, with references to the ancient Near Eastern material.

26. 'Whose Prophet? Whose History? Whose Social Reality? Troubling the Interpretative Community again. Notes towards a Response to T.W. Overholt's Critique', *JSOT* 48 (1990), p. 37.

endless new discussions, I shall here be content to introduce a definition proposed by a third, 'neutral' party. M. Weippert has described a 'prophet' in the following manner: 'A prophet(ess) is a person, male or female, who (1) through a cognitive experience, a vision, an audition, a dream or the like, becomes the subject of the revelation of a deity, or several deities, and (2) is conscious of being commissioned by the deity/ deities in question to convey the revelation in speech, or through metalinguistic behaviour, to a third party who constitutes the actual recipient of the message'.[27] I am aware that several objections, including a few of my own, could be raised against this definition,[28] but since it is introduced here purely for heuristic reasons, where any 'reasonable' definition would be helpful, Weippert's contribution will have to do.

The major problem, in my view, with recent trends in prophetic research, including such weighty contributions as those of Auld and Carroll, is that they tend to be too theoretical and take little or no heed of what is actually *to be found* in the biblical texts,[29] above all lacking any serious attempt to relate the *contents* of the prophetical books to the phenomenon of biblical and ancient Near Eastern prophecy in general. It is possible to steer clear of Carroll's anti-historicism by approaching the problem of biblical prophecy from a purely phenomenological angle. By doing so, I believe in fact that we can really learn a good deal about ancient Israelite prophecy from the so-called prophetical books of the Bible, even if the phenomenon found here is *not identical* with the phenomenon of prophecy in ancient Israel, which will have to be reconstructed. What I want to plead in the present context is a positive rather than a negative scepticism.

27. M. Weippert, 'Aspekte israelitischer Prophetie im Lichte verwandter Erscheinungen des Alten Orients', in G. Mauer and U. Magen (eds.), *Ad bene et fideliter seminandum: Festgabe für Karlheinz Deller zum 21. Februar 1987* (AOAT, 220; Neukirchen–Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1988), pp. 287-319 (289-90).

28. Thus, in his definition of 'prophet', Weippert makes a distinction between 'intuitive' prophecy and different forms of 'inductive' divination by the means of signs, omen, prodigies, and the like.

29. Interestingly enough, this is the same kind of criticism Carroll would raise towards Overholt, for example (see 'Whose Prophet?', p. 35).

II

The corpus of ancient Near Eastern 'prophetical' texts is growing fast, and we now have at our disposal materials that enable us to understand fairly well the important role played by the phenomenon of divination in the ancient Semitic world, and the prevalent need to consult deities concerning the future fate of the various undertakings of day to day life, above all in times of crisis. Typically, one may refer to the kings of Mesopotamia, who apparently hardly ever went to battle without prior consultation with higher powers.[30] In a similar manner, prophecies from Mari and from the time of Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal also are not meant for the distant future, but concern some contemporary national crisis.[31]

Traditionally, scholars have made a clear distinction in the literature between 'prophecy' and 'divination', the former supposedly of a 'free' and 'inspired' kind, whereas the latter has been regarded as purely technical. This distinction, having its background in, among other things, a wish to place biblical prophecy on a 'higher level' than the divination of Israel's more 'primitive' surroundings, ought not to be stressed too much.[32] A sharp differentiation between the role of 'priests' and that of 'prophets', accordingly, is not always practical or feasible, neither in ancient Israel nor in the surrounding cultures. Divination in the ancient Near East should be studied as a whole. Whenever attempts have been made in the literature to distinguish between 'intuitive' and 'provoked' prophecy, this has been done under the influence of biblical studies, where scholars have wanted to place

30. How heavily, for instance, the later Sargonids depended upon consulting the gods in connection with their warfare activities, can now most conveniently be seen from the recently published *Queries to the Sungod: Divination and Politics in Sargonid Assyria* (ed. I. Starr, with contributions by J. Aro and S. Parpola; State Archives of Assyria, 4; Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1990), *passim.*

31. *AEM* I/1 (1988), p. 399; M. Weippert, 'Assyrische Prophetien der Zeit Asarhaddons und Assurbanipals', in F.M. Fales (ed.), *Assyrian Royal Inscriptions: New Horizons in Literary, Ideological, and Historical Analysis: Papers of a Symposium Held in Cetona (Siena) June 26–28, 1980* (Orientis antiqui collectio, 17; Roma: Istituto per l'Oriente, 1981), pp. 71-116 (71-72).

32. In the same manner, the former, often sharply made, distinction between the 'earlier prophets' (mentioned in the 'historical' parts of the Hebrew Bible) and the 'later prophets' (whose surviving writings we supposedly have at our disposal) is quite artifical and cannot any longer be upheld.

the prophets of ancient Israel 'higher up' on the evolutionary ladder. The difference between what is commonly referred to as 'prophecy' and what is called 'divination' is therefore often an unnatural and ideological one, and bears not so much on the phenomenon as such as upon the different techniques applied.[33] However, the problem of Mesopotamian divination in general can only marginally concern us here.[34]

Perhaps the most important single new insight concerning a comparison of the ancient Near Eastern prophetic material with the biblical is that the earlier claim, that the Mesopotamian world only knew of inductive divination through technical interpretations of different kinds, and not oracles spoken directly to a person of groups of persons, is no longer tenable. Even if this point, of course, was apparent after the publication of the Mari texts, it remains important to realize that it is now further attested also by other texts.[35] In the

33. Even if divination of a more technical kind apparently was not popular among those responsible for the final form of the Hebrew Bible, there is enough evidence left to suggest that the phenomenon must have been known in ancient Israel. Among the more conspicuous traits we find the references to 'Urim' and 'Thummim' (see Num. 27.21; 1 Sam. 14.36-42; 23.9-13; 28.5-6; 30.7-10). Of great interest is also the story of Elisha and the arrows in 2 Kgs 13 (cf. Ezek. 21.21-22). All of these references, moreover, concern warlike situations. The harsh words in Mic. 3.6-7 are not directed against divination as such, but must be viewed in the light of the words against 'false' prophets in general. Following the discovery of clay liver models at Hazor, we must now also consider the possibility that hepatoscopy was in use in ancient Israel (cf. B.O. Long, 'Divination', *IDBSup*, pp. 241-43 (242).

34. An excellent introduction to ancient Mespotamian divination as such is found in J. Bottéro, 'Symptômes, signes, écritures en Mésopotamie ancienne', in J. Vernant *et al.* (eds.), *Divination et rationalité* (Recherches anthropologiques; Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1974), pp. 70-197. The most recent review of Akkadian prophetic texts, rich in bibliographic references, is M. deJong Ellis, 'Observations on Mesopotamian Oracles and Prophetic Texts', *JCS* 41 (1989), pp. 127-96.

35. M. Weippert has pointed to similarites between several Assyrian prophecies from the seventh century BCE and the prophecies of the Hebrew Bible (M. Weippert, 'Assyrische Prophetien', in Fales [ed.], *Assyrian Royal Inscriptions*, pp. 71-116). About half of these very interesting prophecies (14) concern the goddess Ishtar of Arbela (*ibid.*, p. 75). Mention should here be made also of the recently published texts fom Emar, containing several references to 'prophetesses', which will have to be studied more closely in the future with regard to the topic here discussed (see D. Arnaud, *Recherches au pays d'Ashtata. Emar VI:1-4* [Paris: Editions Recherche sur les Civilisations, 1985], *passim*).

present context, however, I shall restrict myself to making a few remarks with regard to Mari.

There already exists a literature of rather considerable extent, both of the primary and the secondary kind, on the relationship of 'Mari prophecy' to the 'prophets of the Hebrew Bible'.[36] In recent years, however, many new texts have been published, and today we have access to three times as many prophetic texts from Mari as when the

36. For a very complete survey of the literature on Mari, see J.-G. Heintz, *Bibliographie de Mari—Archéologie et Textes (1933–1988)* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1990), with 'Supplement I (1989–1990)', *Akkadica* 77 (1992), pp. 1-37. A balanced survey of 'Mari and the Bible' is provided by A. Lemaire, 'Mari, la Bible et le monde nord-ouest sémitique', *MARI* 4 (1985), pp. 549-58. In the literature we find large variations over how to relate Mari prophecy to that of Israel. The pioneering work of F. Ellermeier, for instance, claims direct influence: 'Durch kanaanäische, phönizische und philistäische Vermittlung kann jeder uns von der Mari-Prophetie her bekannte Zug der Prophetie auf das Sehertum der israelitischen Stämme übertragen worden sein' (*Prophetie in Mari und Israel* [Theologische und Orientalistische Arbeiten, 1; Herzberg: Verlag Erwin Jungfer, 1968], p. 167). Another representative of this kind of old-fashioned 'comparativism' is the author of the most recent monograph on the subject, A. Schmitt. Schmitt seems to assume that we may find in Mari the 'Vorgeschichte der atl. Prophetie', subscribing to the somewhat obsolete myth of the 'unchangeable orient': 'Aber bei der bekannten Zähigkeit und Stetigkeit bestimmter Traditionen im Alten Orient wäre es nicht verwunderlich, wenn auf einem so bedeutenden Sektor wie dem der Prophetie ein verwandter Form- und Strukturkern sich über einen sehr langen Zeitraum erhalten und seine Ausstrahlungskraft in Nachbarregionen bewiesen hätte' (*Prophetischer Gottesbescheid in Mari und Israel: Eine Strukturuntersuchung* [BWANT, 114; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1982], pp. 13-14). Much sound judgment is found in, for example, E. Noort, *Untersuchungen zum Gottesbescheid in Mari: Die 'Mariprophetie' in der alttestamentlichen Forschung* (AOAT, 202; Neukirchen–Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1977). Noort, however, is too sceptical when he claims that 'Phänomene, die Ähnlichkeiten zwischen Mari und Israel aufweisen, sind auf dem Hintergrund des ganzen Textmaterials zu wenig spezifisch, als dass sie eine historische Rekonstruktion ermöglichen' (p. 109). Also, Noort has a very narrow view on prophecy as such, and his presupposition, based on his views on ancient Israelite prophecy, that 'Einen Oberbegriff "Prophetie" als systematische Zusammenfassung dieser Gottesbescheide kennt Mari nicht' (*ibid.*, see also pp. 18ff.), fails to make the necessary distinction between prophecy as depicted ideologically by the biblical writers and the historical phenomenon 'prophecy in ancient Israel' (which has to be reconstructed on the basis of what sources we have available). Close to Noort is also A. Malamat (despite the title of his article), 'A Forerunner of Biblical Prophecy: The Mari Documents', in P.D. Miller, D. Hanson and S.D. McBride (eds.), *Ancient Israelite Religion: Essays in Honor of Frank Moore Cross* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), pp. 33-52 (37).

major monographs on Mari prophecy were written. Thus, in his recent, excellent edition of the Mari 'letters', J.M. Durand lists as many as 30 texts, both new and formerly published, under the heading of 'prophetic texts'.[37] In addition, there is a large quantity of other texts of a divinatory and oracular kind, including dreams, which are, in accordance with the above claim, also of relevance. Undoubtedly, the time has now come for a larger study of Mari prophetic texts, and the immediate future will hopefully see more and more works within this interesting and important area, both with regard to Mari prophecy as a phenomenon worthy of study in its own right, as well as in relation to biblical studies.

Here, however, we shall have to be wary. There was a time in biblical scholarship when comparative studies were quite common, and rather uncritical. These times, hopefully, are long past. Notwithstanding this development, the former—sometimes uncritical—historical diachronic approach appears to have been replaced by a 'structuralist' one, and I am not so sure that this form of 'neo-comparativism' is always sounder than its somewhat less elegant predecessor.[38] Comparative studies, it appears, still have some way to go before their value to biblical studies can be fully appreciated.[39]

37. *AEM*, I/1 (1988).

38. It is somewhat curious to read how Carroll, criticizing the use of models taken from 'outside' biblical studies ('Whose Prophet?', pp. 40-41), introduces the name of G. Dumézil. Even if Dumézil most certainly has his followers (especially in North America), it is probably difficult to find a more controversial theoretician in the comparative field today (for some samples of the negative Dumézil critique, see the evaluation of the linguistic basis of Dumézil's thesis in J. Haudry, 'Linguistique et mythologie comparée', *L'Information Grammaticale* 34 (1987), pp. 3-8. For a critique of his attempt to impose his theorizing for Indo-European cultures on the study of Roman society, see A. Momigliano, 'Premesse per una discussione su Georges Dumézil', *Rivista Storica Italiana* 95 (1983), pp. 245-61 (another version: 'Georges Dumézil and the Trifunctional Approach to Roman Civilization', *History and Theory: Studies in the Philosophy of History* 23 (1984), pp. 312-30). And for a solid critique of Dumézil's Indo-European theory in general, see J.-P. Demoule, 'Réalité des indo-européens: Les diverses apories du modèle arborescent', *RHR* 208 (1991), pp. 169-202). I am aware that it may seem strange to refer only to negative reviews of Dumézil's theories, but my point here is not to claim that Dumézil in any way is wrong, but only that he is too controversial to serve the study of biblical prophetical texts well.

39. The recent book by M. Malul, *The Comparative Method in Ancient Near Eastern and Biblical Legal Studies* (AOAT, 227; Neukirchen–Vluyn: Neukirchener

For instance, despite such apparently self-evident knowledge that every culture has to be assessed for its own value, there still is no lack in Mari studies of scholars who complacently regard the Mari 'prophets' as the 'forerunners' of the Hebrew prophets. We should realize, once and for all, that what we are dealing with are manifestations of similar phenomena within a much greater cultural context. Obviously, there is no *direct* connection between Mari and ancient Israelite prophecy. Also there is a considerable gap in time. Nevertheless, the obvious phenomenological similarities, witnessed by contemporary documents from Mari, *are* very important for the assessment of 'historical' prophecy in ancient Israel. Even if Carroll's scepticism concerning 'models' is basically sound, we cannot, and should not, close our eyes to what have the appearance of being strongly related phenomena within cognate cultures.

In sum, comparing Mari prophecy with ancient Israelite prophecy is not as unproblematic as some scholars may seem to believe, not least because there exists no scholarly consensus about ancient Israelite prophecy in the first place. Then, of course, there is the matter of a considerable distance both in time and culture. Yet, the parallels are so many and so striking that we simply cannot disregard them. From a methodological point of view, it is also of considerable importance that what information we may find concerning prophecy at Mari is supported not only by the Hebrew Bible, but also by other ancient Near Eastern 'prophetical' texts. Altogether, this makes it in fact possible to see a 'pattern' or to make a 'model', or whatever one choses to call it. I am, of course, not claiming that we here have 'identical' phenomena. What we find in these different contexts are strongly related phenomena within connected cultures, showing us that 'prophecy' was a widespread phenomenon in the different ancient Near Eastern cultures.

III

The theses of Auld and Carroll are, in my view, established on a basic misunderstanding of what prophecy 'is'. Thus, the prophetic writings are not prophetic because 'it was onto these books and not to others that 'prophetic' or 'visionary' terminology was grafted',[40] but because

Verlag, 1990), has some interesting observations.

40. Auld, 'Prophets through the Looking Glass', p. 16.

the *contents* of these books are to be regarded as prophetic when viewed within the broader context of (biblical and) ancient Near Eastern prophecy in general. The different phenomena described in Jeremiah and the other prophets reflect the phenomenon of prophecy in the ancient Near East as such. It is really not possible to reject biblical prophecy, for example, on the grounds of statistical use of terminology. Such an approach *may* establish whether or not the later editors regarded these books as 'prophetic', but it does not necessarily follow from this that the materials found in these books were not 'prophetic' in the first place. For the present purpose it is only of secondary interest what the 'prophets' are called; it is their function, their role in society, that is of interest to us here. Carroll is quite right in pointing out to us that this society (similar to all historical societies) is long lost to us,[41] and he is possibly justified in his claim that the superscriptions may be late additions to the prophetical books, and, following Auld, even that נביא (and related terminology) may be editorially inserted in the prophetic books; I may even grant him the point that the book of Jeremiah has fairly little to do with any historical pre-exilic prophet Jeremiah, and so on, but none of this is really very important compared to the fact that what we find described phenomenologically in the book of Jeremiah largely corresponds to what we find elsewhere in the Bible *and* in the ancient Near East. The fact that the biblical prophets are not identical with the historical prophets of ancient Israel (in the same way as the religion of the Hebrew Bible is not identical with the religion of ancient Israel), which entails that the latter have to be reconstructed, does not mean that we cannot know *anything* about ancient Israelite prophecy (or religion).

For a moment feigning ignorance concerning the vast amount of scholarship invested in the so-called 'basic forms of prophetic speech',

41. That this complicates very much the use of sociological and social-anthropological models for the relationship between the prophets and their contemporary society has been correctly seen by Carroll in his article 'Prophecy and Society', in R.E. Clements (ed.), *The World of Ancient Israel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), pp. 203-25. In my view, this article represents one of the most important contributions to the study of biblical prophecy in recent years. Nevertheless, I cannot share several of the viewpoints found in this article. A statement such as the following, 'Ancient Israelite writers had no clear image of what a prophet is or should be' ('Prophecy and Society', p. 209; cf. also 'Whose Prophet?', p. 35), is, in my opinion, in itself a very strange claim.

we may classify, very roughly and very superficially, but not without good cause (and not taking the prose sections into consideration), most of what we find in the books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and the minor prophets as words proclaiming prosperity ('salvation'), or calamity ('doom'), as well as words of accusations and words of consolation, addressed to the nations of Israel or Judah, or to some foreign nation, or to individuals of Israel or Judah, or of some foreign nation. When we read the 'historical' books of the Bible, we will further find that similar functions are richly attested whenever prophecy is being referred to. One very striking feature in prophetic poetry is its preoccupation with warlike situations.

Wars in the ancient Near East were so-called 'holy wars'.[42] It was commonly believed that the gods conducted war affairs, and that they also played an active role on the battlefield. Since priests and prophets had access to the will of the deity, they played an important role in time of war (as well as during other communal crises such as drought and the like). This situation is demonstrated throughout the whole of the Hebrew Bible, and I can here only give some examples. In Judges 6 we read how YHWH sent a prophet to help the Israelites when they were in danger of losing the war against the Midianites. Illustrative is also the story in 1 Samuel 15, where Samuel intervenes in the war against the Amalekites. In 1 Samuel 7 there is an interesting description of Samuel, prophet and judge, acting as intercessor and mediator between YHWH and the people before the battle with the Philistines. Yet another illustrative story is found in Judges 20, where the priest Phinehas asks YHWH whether to go to war or not before the battle with the Benjaminites, and is given the following answer by YHWH: 'Go up! For tomorrow I will give them into your hand'.

Obviously, we cannot and should not regard these texts as 'historical' in the sense that they tell us 'what actually took place'. On the other hand, it is wrong to classify these stories as 'ahistorical'. Sprung from historical environments long lost to us, all of these stories *reflect* the historical and social surroundings that created them, and illustrate to us the significance of war in ancient Near Eastern societies, and of the

42. Again, the literature on this subject is overwhelming. One of the most important contributions is still M. Weippert, '"Heiliger Krieg" in Israel und Assyrien. Kritische Bemerkungen zu Gerhard von Rads Konzept des "Heiligen Krieges im Alten Israel"', *ZAW* 84 (1972), pp. 460-93.

role of 'prophets' in times of crisis.[43] This should not surprise us, for we may find the same phenomenon richly attested also outside of the Hebrew Bible, for instance in the Mari texts. The distance from mediator to counsellor, apparently, is not a very great one, and this seems to have given the prophets a high position in society. For instance, in the story of the war between Ben-hadad and King Ahab in 1 Kings 20 we are introduced to a prophet as military advisor. In this rather fascinating story we may also learn not a little about the role of the gods in war activities. Following the overwhelming victory of the Israelites, Ben-hadad's men can inform the king that the reason for their being defeated is that the gods of the Israelites are mountain gods, and had the battle only taken place on the plain, the Aramaeans would no doubt have been the victors! The act of defeating the enemy is at the same time a demonstration of power by the gods.

The interesting thing, now, is that the phenomena that I have just referred to concerning biblical prophecy are reflected also in the so-called prophetical books of the Bible (not least in the book of Jeremiah) as well as in other ancient Near Eastern 'prophetical' texts[44] (in particular in prophetical texts from Mari). This can hardly be a coincidence.

When, for instance, in the prologue to the Book of Jeremiah (Jer. 1.5) Jeremiah is made a נביא לגוים, 'a prophet to the nations', rather than to Judah, this is typical. In his excellent commentary Carroll relates this passage to the words against the nations in the book of Jeremiah, but feels that the 'force of the term' is less clear.[45] The passage, however, should be viewed in the context of the general role of prophetic activity, and should also be connected with Jer. 28.8, where we may learn something about the role of prophets as such: 'The prophets who were before me and before you [Hananiah] from the old days

43. The immense significance of war, the most important single threat to human existence in the ancient Near East, can hardly be exaggerated, and is reflected on 'almost every page' of the Hebrew Bible. This, of course, does not mean that there were not other threats to ancient society (crop failure, epidemic disease, drought), where prophets also played a role. We find numerous examples of 'war language' in prophetic poetic texts (for a few examples, see Isa. 9.3; 14.5; 14.29; Jer. 48.17; 49.35; 51.56; Ezek. 39.3; Hos. 1.5; 5.8, Joel 2.1-11; Amos 5.3; Mic. 5.8; Zeph. 1.13; Zech. 9.10; 10.11).

44. See most conveniently the two articles on ancient Near Eastern prophecy by Weippert referred to above, notes 27 and 35.

45. *Jeremiah*, p. 95.

prophesied against many countries and great kingdoms war, famine and pestilence'.

In a class of their own we find the so-called 'oracles against the nations' in the prophetical books. Unfortunately, these have not attracted the interest they deserve in recent research. Whereas earlier scholarship regarded these oracles as important, and even as the basic form of prophetic activity (e.g. H. Gunkel), recent scholars have paid little or no attention to them (e.g. C. Westermann). However, we can hardly disregard the simple fact that oracles against the nations do occupy very large parts of *all* (with the exception of the book of Hosea) the prophetical books (cf. for instance Isa. 13–23, Jer. 46–51, Ezek. 25–32, Amos 1.1–2.3). In fact, three of the 'minor prophets', Obadiah, Jonah and Nahum, consist almost *solely* of oracles against foreign nations. Apparently, these oracles are there for some reason, and I have earlier suggested that we have in these texts reminiscences of a historical context of holy war and of 'divine cursing' of the enemy before going to battle, or possibly even in the midst of battle.[46] Why should not the same apply for the book of Jeremiah? Prophets were heavily depended upon in times of war and crisis,[47] so why should this have been any different in the greatest war of all, Nebuchadnezzar's siege of Jerusalem? It is my conviction that what we find in the book of Jeremiah, strongly edited and worked over as it may appear, nevertheless reflects prophetic activity in the period prior

46. See H.M. Barstad, *The Religious Polemics of Amos: Studies in the Preaching of Am 2:7b-8, 4:1-13, 5:1-27, 6:4-7, 8:14* (VTSup, 34; Leiden: Brill, 1984), pp. 103-108. Obviously, we must here also reckon with the possibility of a non-cultic, but nevertheless religiously founded, conventional 'boosting of morale', something which is bound to have been a side effect of this kind of prophetic oracles in any event. Nor can we, of course, completely disregard the possibility suggested by Auld and Carroll that the 'prophets' of the biblical texts *in their present form* actually do represent mere poets, reusing older genres in a 'decontextualized' manner for their own rhetorical and poetical purposes, and writing a kind of religious 'national literature'. This, however, we shall never be able to find out. Also, this is not so important. As long as the genres used reflect the well-known phenomenology of ancient Near Eastern prophecy, these texts may nevertheless be used for the reconstruction of pre-exilic prophetic activity, no matter what their present character and nature are.

47. Cf. the typical statement in Ps. 74.9, a text lamenting the destruction of Jerusalem: 'Our signs we do not see. There is no longer any prophet, or anyone among us who knows for how long (it will last).'

to the fall of Jerusalem.[48] After all, as Weippert has most convincingly demonstrated, holy war continued to exist as long as wars existed in ancient Israel, and, moreover, there are no reasons whatsoever to assume that Israel should behave in any way differently from the rest of the ancient Near Eastern nations in this particular respect. It is interesting to note that the genre 'words against the foreign nation', so typical of prophetic activity, is also well attested at Mari.[49]

It is in the very nature of prophetic behaviour, then, to encompass not only the role of intermediator, but also that of intercessor.[50] Again, this is demonstrated in the book of Jeremiah. In Jer. 21.2 we may read how Zedekiah sends two of his priests to Jeremiah with the following message: 'Ask (דרש) YHWH for us, for Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon is making war against us. Maybe YHWH will do with us according to all his wonderful deeds, and make him go away from us'. This text quite clearly reflects the intercessory role of the prophets in times of crisis,[51] a feature characteristic of ancient Near Eastern and of biblical prophecy in general.

IV

If the so-called prophetical texts are not postexilic 'fiction' or 'pure poetry', but, as the parallels from ancient Near Eastern prophetical texts seem to indicate, in fact represent edited and worked over collections of prophetical sayings the way most scholars believe, we should also have to ask, to what circumstances do we owe the very existence of such texts?

Again, the mere fact that we do have in our possession a large quantity of ancient Near Eastern divinatory texts suggests that the

48. Cf. also my article, 'Lachish Ostracon III and Ancient Israelite Prophecy', forthcoming in *Eretz-Israel* (1993).

49. For several prophetic words from Mari against foreign nations (including Babylon and Elam), as well as words of disaster addressed to the foreign king, followed by words of prosperity to the local king, see *AEM* I/1 (1988), pp. 435-43.

50. Thus, I am not at all convinced by the otherwise solid study by S.E. Balantine, 'The Prophet as Intercessor: A Reassessment', *JBL* 103 (1984), pp. 161-73.

51. Other texts in the book of Jeremiah reflecting prophets as intercessors are the description of the drought in Jer. 14 (see Carroll, *Jeremiah*, pp. 306-10), and the reference in Jer. 15 to Moses and Samuel as the greatest of intercessors (cf. Carroll, *Jeremiah*, pp. 319-21).

taking down in writing of 'prophetic' texts must have been a rather widespread phenomenon. We may wonder why this was done to such a large degree, as we may today witness from the Akkadian sources—especially since most of the 'prophetic' texts were not meant to be reused—but the fact remains that such texts *were* written down. Also, we should here remind ourselves that, despite the fairly large quantity of texts that have been brought to light, the proportion of such texts compared to the total amount of texts that were once in existence is very modest indeed.

I am not so sure that the taking down in writing did change very much *the nature* of the original prophecies, as some scholars of today seem to believe. The unmistakable parallels between the biblical and the ancient Near Eastern prophetic material clearly attest the contrary. Apparently, because some importance was attached to these words, it became important to secure the message from the deity in the most accurate way possible, or the message had to be taken down in order that it might be delivered to the correct addressee. It is hardly likely that the writing down took place in order to secure the words for posterity.

The same, we should assume, would apply also for ancient Israelite prophetical texts. There is little cause to believe that the ancient Israelites behaved in any way differently from their neighbours in this respect, and, again, there are indications in the biblical material itself suggesting that prophetical texts were written down after they had been delivered.[52]

Since by nature oral poetry involves the possession of a certain vocabulary combined with certain compositional techniques, two oracles of the same prophet are not likely to have been completely identical. For this reason, it is probable that prophecies were written down at a very early stage and later collected. Because prophetic oracles were given in the form of oral poetry, their genuine form most certainly would very soon have been lost to posterity, had they

52. That the ancient scribes took great care to write down prophetic words has been noted also by A.R. Millard ('La prophétie et l'écriture. Israël, Aram, Assyrie', *RHR* 202 (1985), pp. 125-45), who claims the prophetic texts of the Bible were written down straight away and were not changed at all. Because such an extreme view does not take into consideration even the simple fact that we may often find material from different periods and of different kinds put together in the books ascribed to single prophets, it cannot be taken too seriously.

not been written down. The scholarly myth, earlier favoured in Scandinavia in particular, that oral material could be handed down through several generations without this process leaving its mark on the tradition, is totally unfounded.[53]

We know that literacy, if not a widespread phenomenon, was certainly extant in ancient Israel.[54] Clearly, reflections of this may be

53. The futile Scandinavian discussion on the reliability of oral tradition has been replaced by the more acceptable theory that this mode is not really very reliable unless supported by written documents.

It was the great merit of Hermann Gunkel and Gustav Hölscher to realize that the prophets were not writers, but *speakers*. In the meantime, however, it seems to have been forgotten that the words of these speakers ultimately *were* taken down in writing, and present day prophetic research is remarkably little concerned with any discussion of that process from oral to written which must have taken place, or the relationship between written and oral prophetic activity in general (among the exceptions in recent scholarship we find H. Utzschneider, *Künder oder Schreiber: Eine These zum Problem der 'Schriftprophetie' auf Grund von Maleachi 1,6–2,9* (Beiträge zur Erforschung des Alten Testaments und des antiken Judentums, 19; Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1989), which, however, appears not to break any new ground.

When it comes to the problem of oral literature in general, both inside and outside the Hebrew Bible, the secondary literature, of course, is enormous. It is worth noticing that Carroll ('Whose Prophet?', p. 37) subscribes to the views of W. Ong and others concerning a qualitative difference between the spoken and the written word. There is, apparently, no need to underestimate the changes in societies passing from orality to literacy, but it is important to be aware of the fact that in the ancient Near East both modes existed side by side for centuries. Also, I do not at all believe that literacy in itself causes such dramatic cognitive changes in the way that it has until recently become fashionable to believe. For a recent critique of the positions of scholars like E.A. Havelock, J. Goody, I. Watt, W.J. Ong or D.R. Olson, see now, among others, R. Thomas, *Oral Tradition and Written Records in Classical Athens* (Cambridge Studies in Oral and Literate Culture, 18; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 24-34; R. Narasimhan, 'Literacy: Its Characterization and Implications', in ed. D.R. Olson and N. Torrance (eds.), *Literacy and Orality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 177-97: R. Finnegan, *Oral Traditions and the Verbal Arts: A Guide to Research Practices* (ASA Research Methods; London: Routledge, 1992), p. 6. Valuable observations are also to be found in G. Mazzoleni, 'Oralità "mitica", oralità "storica"', *Studi e materiali di storia delle religioni* 49 (1983), pp. 303-307 and 50 (1984), pp. 293-318.

54. This, of course, does not mean that writing and reading belonged to the 'common man' (cf. M. Haran, 'On the Diffusion of Literacy and Schools in Ancient Israel', in J.A. Emerton [ed.], *Congress Volume, Jerusalem 1986* [VTSup, 40; Leiden: Brill, 1988], pp. 81-95, and the similar conclusions reached by E. Puech,

found also in the prophetic books. One may here compare such texts as Isa. 8.1; 30.8; Jer. 36; Ezek. 2.10; 37.16-17; Hab. 2.2. Again, even if we are not dealing with 'historical' texts, there is, on the basis of the ancient Near Eastern analogies, little reason to doubt that these texts reflect historical reality.

As an example, we may here single out Jeremiah 36. This well-known story, where Jeremiah the prophet dictates his message to Baruch the scribe, *may* actually reflect the way the words of prophets sometimes were taken down in writing. This, however, is not the same as saying that what we find in Jeremiah 36 is a 'historical' account of what really happened, or that the book of Jeremiah as we have it today is largely the result of the writing down of Baruch the scribe as attested by Jeremiah 36! But then again, this is not so important. Thus, it is doubtful that this story of the turning of the spoken word into writing should be regarded as 'only' a symbolic act.[55] The event would not have been used to portrait a symbolic act in the first place if it had not been meaningful to the readers of the story, who would be able to relate the episode to some known phenomenon. Carroll has put forward the thesis that what we find in the book of Jeremiah is what a postexilic writer believed or wanted his readers to believe that prophetical behaviour looked like, and that there is no connection whatsoever between this literature and what pre-exilic Israelite prophecy there was. Apparently a more correct way of viewing the whole matter is found in a phenomenological approach to the problem where 'the truth' is to be found somewhere in the middle of the line between Carroll's cognitive reticence and other scholars' historical positivism. What is important is that the *phenomenon* is 'historically' correct.

Some attention should here also be directed towards the Lachish shards. Stemming from the 'same' historical setting as the book of Jeremiah, these materials also present interesting evidence concerning the writing down of prophetic words.[56]

Finally, even if what we find in Jeremiah 36 may reflect how the postexilic author thought, or wanted his readers to think, prophets behaved, once more we have here an interesting 'parallel' from Mari. Again, I do not believe that it is a coincidence. With the story of

'Les écoles dans l'Israël préexilique: Données épigraphiques', *ibid.* , pp. 189-203).

55. Carroll, *Jeremiah*, p. 665.

56. See my article, 'Lachish Ostracon III and Ancient Israelite Prophecy', forthcoming in *Eretz-Israel* (1993).

Jeremiah and Baruch in mind, we may read the join A.431 with the earlier published ARM II, 108: 'Another matter: Atamrum, the *âpilum* of Shamash came to find me, and he said: Send me a very competent scribe in order that I can make him write down the message that Shamash has sent me for the king...'[57]

ABSTRACT

Recently, scholars like Auld and Carroll have advocated the view that we can learn little or nothing about ancient Israelite prophecy from the so-called prophetic books of the Hebrew Bible, and that the biblical prophets are not really 'prophets', but 'poets'. Taking its starting point from the recent discussion of biblical prophecy, the present article argues for the necessity of a phenomenological, rather than a narrowly historical, approach, and for the necessity of taking other ancient Near Eastern prophetic texts into consideration. Following this approach, the author seeks to demonstrate that we can actually learn a great deal about ancient Israelite prophecy from the biblical books.

57. D. Charpin, F. Joannès, S. Lackenbacher and B. Lafont, *AEM* I/2 no. 414 [A. 431 + A. 4883], pp. 294-295.