

Two Cases of Akkadian Influence in Isaiah 50

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ABSTRACT

This article investigates two probable cases of Akkadian linguistic influence in Isa 50 and asks why the prophet employs Akkadian attested phraseology where standard biblical alternatives were available. Using the comparative Semitic philological approach associated with Moshe Held—prioritising semantic correspondences in context over etymology alone—the study compares the Hebrew expressions in Isa 50:8 (בעל משפט, “holder/master of judgment”) and Isa 50:10 (הלך חשכים, “to walk in darkness”) with their Akkadian parallels (*ekliš/iklētu alāku* and *bēl dīni*, alongside related legal formulas). The analysis argues that both expressions fit Akkadian prophetic and legal settings and are best explained as borrowings (direct or mediated) from the Babylonian linguistic environment, subsequently refunctionalised within Isaiah.

KEYWORDS: Babylon literary influence; Comparative Method of Moshe Held (Comparative Semitic Philology); Aramaic; Hebrew; Akkadian

A INTRODUCTION

When examining the Second Isaiah (40–66), especially chapters 49–66, the prevalence of Akkadian expressions diminishes considerably in comparison to the frequent employment of Akkadian motifs and linguistic forms in chapters 40–48, whereas in chapters 60–66, there are no Akkadian expressions. Therefore, it is highly likely that Isaiah 60–66 was composed outside of the Babylonian environment, considering the lack of Akkadian influence.¹ In this paper, the aim

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¹ Lena-Sofia Tiemeyer, *For the Comfort of Zion: The Geographical and Theological Location of Isaiah 40–55* (Vetus Testamentum Supplements 139; Leiden: Brill, 2011), 95. The lack of Akkadian expressions in chapters 60–66 supports the idea of a distinct Third Isaiah (chapters 56–66). This article centres on Second Isaiah (chapters 40–55), particularly Isaiah 50, without delving into the broader scholarly debate over bipartite or tripartite divisions. Aleksander Rofé argues for Third Isaiah, citing not just linguistic differences but also contrasting worldviews: Second Isaiah portrays Cyrus as saviour and redemption as historical, while Third Isaiah sees God as saviour and vengeance-bringer, focusing on eschatological themes. Second Isaiah describes Israel as unified,

is to investigate two possible instances of Akkadian influence in Isa 50:8 and 50:10. Therefore, we will interrogate why the Second Isaiah or the prophet² employs Akkadian phraseology where standard biblical phraseology or terms were available.³ For analysis, I adopt Moshe Held's comparative semitic philological approach, which prioritises semantic correspondence over etymology.

B COMPARATIVE METHOD OF MOSHE HELD (COMPARATIVE SEMITIC PHILOLOGY)

For this study, I adopt Moshe Held's comparative semitic philological approach. The approach has four main tents, which I outline below:

a) Comparative Semitic analysis

Comparative Semitic analysis entails comparing forms, meanings, and grammatical structures in Biblical Hebrew, Akkadian, Ugaritic, Aramaic, and other Semitic languages.

a) Semantic philology

Careful attention to the nuances of word meanings in context, especially with regard to synonyms, etymology and semantic shifts, is the task of semantic philology. In contrast to the older school, which placed greater emphasis on etymology, this approach prioritises contextual semantics.

b) Contextual-historical approach

This approach aims to understand the biblical text within the broader framework of the ancient Near East by drawing on cultural and linguistic parallels.

c) Inductive method

whereas Third Isaiah splits it into God's servants and those who have forsaken Him. Third Isaiah emphasizes current societal issues like idolatry, while Second Isaiah addresses past transgressions. Rofé places Third Isaiah in the fifth century BCE, later than the time of Cyrus. See Aleksander Rofé, עיונים בשאלת חיבורם של ספרי תורה ונביאים . (Jerusalem: Magnus/Hebrew University, 1985), 118–119. And also, Aleksander. Rofé, "The Extent of Trito-Isaiah according to Kuenen and Elliger: Chapters 54–66," *Henoch* 26 (2004): 128–135.)

² These terms are used interchangeably in this article. Therefore, in some instances, I will speak of Second Isaiah, whereas in other instances, I will speak of Isaiah or the prophet.

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The inductive method proceeds from the observation of specific lexical and syntactic phenomena toward the formulation of theoretical conclusions. When comparing words or expressions in Semitic languages, it is essential to consider three categories of parallelism that may exist between them:

Type One: Etymological parallelism and semantic parallelism occur when words or phrases share a common root. They are employed similarly, suggesting a direct linguistic and conceptual link between Hebrew and other Semitic languages. However, such instances are relatively rare.

Type Two: Etymological parallelism without semantic parallelism. While words may share a common root, their usage and contextual meanings differ between Biblical Hebrew and other Semitic languages such as Akkadian.

Type Three: Semantic parallelism without etymological parallelism. In this case, words or phrases in Biblical Hebrew and other Semitic languages exhibit similar meanings and usage despite lacking a common etymological origin. This parallelism implies conceptual similarity or influence between the two linguistic traditions. Professor Moshe Held considered this type of parallelism the most important parameter in comparative Semitic philology, unlike the previous school, which emphasised word etymology.⁴

In the field of the Comparative Method of Semitic languages, our comparative analysis of words between the Bible and Mesopotamian texts (written in Akkadian, an East Semitic Language) involves examining four distinct categories.

The first category is high-frequency words. The aim in this case is to find the most frequent terms. In such instances, it is imperative to pinpoint the exact expression as it appears in Akkadian literature.

The second category relates to the rarest words and expressions. When encountering fewer common terms or phrases, our approach may involve highlighting one or two words to draw parallels.

The third category uses less widespread words, excluding the rarest terms. In this case, we aim to identify words with moderate usage that share exact semantic parallels in the same context.

The fourth category is about the comparison of motifs and ideas. In contrast to word-to-word comparisons, this category analyses thematic similarities between texts. For example, we may explore common religious motifs or motives, as well as those that originate from sources beyond the Bible.

⁴ For the seven principles of the Held Method of Comparative Semitic Philology, see Chaim Cohen, "The 'Held Method' for Comparative Semitic Philology," *Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society* 19 (1989): 9–23.

With this methodological framework, in the sections below, we will apply it to two cases in Isaiah 50, beginning with verse 50:8 and then 50:10 to highlight the Akkadian linguistic influence in Isaiah.

C FIRST CASE

1 Isaiah 50:8

מִי-בַעַל מִשְׁפָּטִי יִגַּשׁ אֵלַי (ana dīni alāku / qarābu)
 קָרוֹב מִצְדִּיקִי מִי-יָרִיב אִתִּי נִעְמְדָה יָחַד מִי-בַעַל מִשְׁפָּטִי יִגַּשׁ אֵלַי

Biblical context of the phrase: This verse contains the phrase, “בעל משפט,” a combination unique to Isaiah. Even though the phrase is singular in the Bible, there is no difficulty in explaining it, as Itzhak Avishur observed in his discussion of this verse.⁵ After all, at the beginning of the verse, there is a parallel element described as “one who contends with me.” Therefore, the verb used here should be understood in a legal context.⁶ In Ps 33:23, the words “judgment” and “quarrel” are synonymous and in Mal 2:17, “the God of judgment” is the Lord. Here, too, the prophet, in my opinion, turns to his opponents and tells them that God is on his side and that he is actually behind the judgment. For Itzhak Avishur, the use of the phrase “בעל משפט” is puzzling, given that the prophet could have used “legal man,” which refers to a person rather than to God.⁷ In his opinion, two options could account for the formation of the combination:

a) A biblical linguistic phenomenon involving personal terminology: the exchange of synonyms (e.g., replacing אישׁ with בעל) or the borrowing and modification of a scriptural phrase.⁸

b) Non-biblical language phenomenon: The Hebrew phrase “Baal Mishpat” is a translation of the Akkadian phrase *bēl dīni*. To prove his point, Avishur presents three linguistic tests that corroborate his hypothesis and explain the matter in this language:⁹

- I. The Akkadian value *dīnu* is equal to the Hebrew value, “שפט,” as indicated by the acceptance of several combinations in both languages.

⁵ Itzhak Avishur, “‘Whoever Has the Law Shall Approach Me’ (Isa 55:8): Between Biblical Style Patterns and Akkadian Translation,” *Leshonenu* 52 (1988): 18–25, 19 (in Hebrew).

⁶ This verb is also found in a legal context in Mic 7:9.

⁷ Avishur, “‘Whoever Has the Law Shall Approach Me’ (Isa 55:8).”

⁸ Avishur, “‘Whoever Has the Law Shall Approach Me,’” 18–25 (19). The words “אישׁ” and “בעל” are parallel words often used in the Hebrew Bible – for example in Prov 22:24 and elsewhere in the book of Proverbs. See Avishur, “‘Whoever Has the Law Shall Approach Me,’” 20–21.

⁹ Avishur, “‘Whoever Has the Law Shall Approach Me,’” 23–24.

- II. The phrase “Baal Din” is found in the language of the Sages in its Akkadian meaning. This attests to its penetration from Akkadian into Hebrew through Aramaic.
- III. The Aramaic translation of the phrase “holder of judgment” confirms the substitution.

It should be noted that the word “*din*” is equal to the Akkadian word *dīnu* (דִּין) both etymologically and semantically. It is a poetic word, whereas the typical word in Hebrew is “משפט.” In discussing the phrase “בעל משפטי” that appears in the verse mentioned above, Avishur does not rule out the possibility that it is indeed a translation of the prophecy in Isaiah, which is perhaps one indication of Akkadian linguistic influence in Isaiah 40–66.¹⁰ It should be added that Isa 50:8 is intertextually related to Isa 41:1, which states:

Keep silence before me, the islands and nations will exchange power,
they will come and then will speak together for judgment, let us come
near together for judgment. (Isa 41:1)

In this verse, the verb “גשר” appears in a legal context, as is the case in Isa 50:8. Moreover, in both Isa 41:1 and 50:8, the prophet uses the adverb “together” in legal contexts.

2 Akkadian context of the phrase

It is interesting that in Akkadian literature, there is a semantically parallel expression to the Hebrew phrase that appears in Isa 41:1 (“He shall unite to judgment close”): *itti aḥāmeš alāku*. This phrase also appears in Akkadian legal literature.¹¹ The following are the Akkadian sources corresponding to this biblical source, which is also mentioned by Holtz:¹²

[^mPN1 u ^mP]N2 ana TIN. TIR^{ki} illakūma dibbīšunu šá ibaššū itti
aḥāmeš idabbub¹³

“The first man and the second man to Babylon will go and their
legal argument together will be sued (talk).”

[^mPN1 u ^mP]N2 ana... itti aḥāmeš illakūma dīnu [šá] [^mPN1 ana
^mP]N2 iqbū ummu māru'a tандаҗаs... idabbub¹⁴

¹⁰ Avishur, “Whoever Has the Law Shall Approach Me’ 25, n. 16.

¹¹ Shalom Holtz, “The Case for Adversarial Yaḥad,” *Vetus Testamentum* 59/2 (2009): 211–221.

¹² Holtz, “The Case for Adversarial Yaḥad,” 211–221.

¹³ Babylonian Expedition of the University of Pennsylvania, Series A: Cuneiform Texts (BE) 8/1, 48:1–5.

¹⁴ British Museum (tablet sigla) 46660 (81–8–30,126), For commentary, see Cornelia Wunsch, “Du hast meinen Sohn geschlagen!,” in *Mining the Archives* (ed. C. Wunsch, BA 1; Dresden: ISLET, 2002), 357, lines 1–7 (text) and 355–364.

“The first man and the second man to... Together, they will go, and the judgment of the first man to the second man will say as follows: ‘You beat my son.’”

These two Akkadian sources arguably connect with Isa 41:1 and 50:8. The connection between the Akkadian expression *itti aḥaḥmeš illakūma* from the Neo-Babylonian text is also evident in the other texts (Isa 43:26 and Job 9:32).¹⁵ Holtz examines the words יָהָדוּ/יָהָדוּ, which are parallel to the Akkadian word *aḥaḥmeš* (also used in two Akkadian examples above), and points out that the two words (Hebrew and Akkadian) appear in the same juridical context. For Holtz, the “togetherness” they describe does not imply “joint status” or “equality”, but rather the adversarial relationship between opponents in a case.

3 Why did the prophet choose the phrase?

In my opinion, Second Isaiah was likely familiar with the Akkadian version, *itti aḥāmeš alāku/qarābu*, which follows in legal contexts in Akkadian literature – either directly or indirectly¹⁶. After all, he used it earlier in Isa 41:1, whereas in Isa 50:8, he changes it slightly. Indeed, instead of the verb “speak” in “they shall speak” (Isa 41:1), he uses the verb “rib” (Isa 50:8), but the general semantic meaning of these sentences remains the same. There are also some parallels between the Akkadian source and Isa 41:1, which contains words such as “Together, they will speak, we will approach judgment.” The prophet seems to use the phrases as polemics against the pagan world of Babylon. Therefore, the use of the phrase “legal husband” in Isaiah corresponds to the Akkadian expression *bēl dīni* (a common expression in Akkadian literature regarding the god sun Shamash). Otherwise, the prophet could have used the common biblical

¹⁵ Holtz, “The Case for Adversarial Yaḥad,” 220. Interestingly, even in a legal document from the city of Erech, which dates to the time of Cyrus and Camybus II, there is a similar expression: *dīni... itti aḥāmeš iddabbub*= for trial (they went out) together to speak against each other. See Arch Tremayne, *Records from Erech: Time of Cyrus and Cambyses (538–521 B.C.)* (Yale Oriental Series 7; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1925), 159:15.

¹⁶ By logical reasoning, one may conclude that the prophet was not directly acquainted with this Akkadian expression. Such familiarity would have required the ability to read the original cuneiform sources, which demanded mastery of the complex Akkadian script. Instead, the prophet likely learned of the expression indirectly—for example, by hearing it from members of the Jewish diaspora who had lived in the Babylonian exile for a considerable period and had encountered such phrases during their sojourn in Babylon. A close examination of the chapters of Isaiah—particularly chapters 40–48, which abound in Akkadian parallels—allows one to arrive at a clear conclusion. The prophet known as Second Isaiah, that is, the author of at least chapters 40–55, was present in Babylon while composing chapters 40–48. In these chapters, he directly addresses the Jewish diaspora residing in Babylon. He warns them against falling into Babylonian idolatry. At the same time, he uses Akkadian parallels—expressions and motifs—familiar to his audience.

parallel phrase, "בעל דין." In Second Isaiah's view, the God of Israel is the true litigant, standing behind him in judgment against his enemies. Babylonian idols are the works of human beings only, and anyone who trusts in them will lose this judgment. Therefore, he is not afraid of all those who come against him during the argument; after all, the true God is on His side.

4 Examination of the expression according to the Held method

Semantically, the Akkadian expression *itti aḥāmeš alāku* corresponds to the Hebrew expression יחד מִי-בְעַל מְשֻׁפְטֵי יִגַּשׁ אֵלַי ("together to approach/to approach (to court).") In Held's method, semantic parallelism is what counts; therefore, the Akkadian phrase *itti aḥāmeš* is semantically equivalent to Isaiah's word יחד "together," and both occur in a legal context. Moreover, in the second example above, the Akkadian verb, *dabābu*, which is semantically equivalent to the Hebrew verb "לדבר," appears (Isa 41:1).

C THE SECOND CASE

1 Isaiah 50:10

הֲלֹךְ חֹשְׁכִים (ekliš/iklētu alāku)
 מִי בְכֶם יִרְאֵה יְהוָה שְׁמַע בְּקוֹל עֲבָדָיו אֲשֶׁר הֲלֹךְ חֹשְׁכִים וְאֵין נֹגֵה לוֹ יִבְטַח בְּשֵׁם יְהוָה וְיִשְׁעוּן בְּאֵלֵהֶיוּ.

Biblical context of the phrase: This expression is unique in that it occurs with notable frequency only in this verse. The immediate and broader contexts suggest that it is about trusting in the God of Israel. According to the prophet, a man who trusts in the God of Israel will never be ashamed (v.7). Based on his own experience with God, the prophet highlights that trust in God does not disappoint. In the previous verses, the prophet states that the God of Israel opened his ears and gave him a clear tongue suited for teaching obedience to the word of the Lord (vv. 4–5).

The Akkadian context of the phrase: The expression *ekliš/iklētu alāku* appears in Akkadian literature in prophetic contexts. This phrase is semantically and etymologically similar to the biblical expression because the word "darkness" is used frequently in Akkadian. The Akkadian sources are shown below:

Akkadian source	Biblical source
<i>Alu</i> , p. 100, 55:30 ¹⁷ ; CT 28, 28:17 ¹⁸ (<i>Physiognomonica Apodosis</i>) ¹⁹ , Izbu	Isaiah 50:10
<i>ekliš/iklētu alāku</i>	הָלַךְ בְּחֹשֶׁךְ

*šumma [...] mimma ša laptu āmir (IGI) niširtašu šanūma ikkal ikliš ittanalak.*²⁰

If we see something that has been “touched” by a stranger eating the treasure of (the owner), he will walk again and again in the darkness.

šumma šinama uznašu īnašu ša šumeli paḥrā šina ekliš ittanalak.

If, unusually, his two ears and his left eyes are closed, he will walk again and again in the darkness.²¹

The Akkadian expression appears in two series belonging to a prophetic genre in Babylonian literature. The first example appears in the series *Šumma Alu ina mele šakin*. In this Akkadian corpus, more than ten thousand signs were collected, predicting misfortune and negative occurrences.²² The prediction is made by examining the innards of sacrificial animals and by signs relating to astrological phenomena. The second example appears²³ in a series called Izbu in Akkadian. This series predicts the future according to the pathology of embryos—both human and animal. From the sentence in this example, we can

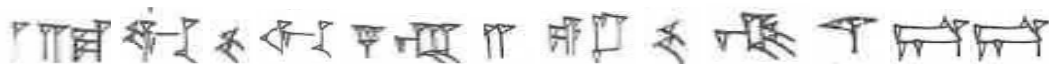
¹⁷ Sally M. Freedman, *If a City Is Set on a Height: The Akkadian Omen Series Šumma Ālu ina Mēle Šakin* (Vol. 3: Tablets 41–63), p.100, tablet 55, line 30, 2017.

¹⁸ British Museum, *Cuneiform Texts from Babylonian Tablets in the British Museum*, vol. 28 (London: British Museum, 1910), 1–50: Plate 28, line 17 (CT 28, 28:17).

¹⁹ *Physiognomica* is a Greek treatise on physiognomy. The term *apodosis* (ἀπόδοσις), Greek for “explanation” or “result,” may refer to a section or part of a treatise that provides interpretations (e.g., in divinatory texts or descriptions of character).

²⁰ Sally M. Freedman, *If a City Is Set on a Height: The Akkadian Omen Series Šumma Ālu ina Mēle Šakin* (Vol. 3: Tablets 41–63; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 100, Tablet 55, line 30 (based on the author's English translation).

²¹ The phrase “הָלַךְ בְּחֹשֶׁךְ” (*ekliš alāku*) does not appear in Erich Leichty’s 1970 edition of the *Šumma Izbu* series. However, CAD, that is, *The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago* (Chicago, 1956-2010), provides another example of this expression from the same series (CAD E, 50). Most of the tablets published in *Cuneiform Texts from Babylonian Tablets in the British Museum* (CT) 28 belong to the *Šumma Izbu* corpus. It is likely that the second occurrence of this phrase also derives from this series, even though the CAD does not explicitly state this. CT 28 28:17



²² The first example mentioned above.

²³ The second example also illustrates this idiom.

conclude that the expression “walk in the dark” refers to physical blindness. Interestingly, Isaiah mentions sight and hearing in connection with this phrase, as in the Akkadian expression, where ears and eyes are paired. However, the Bible reference is more about spiritual blindness and spiritual deafness. In my opinion, this example should not be ruled out, as it is another instance of a similar expression used in Akkadian literature. As for the first sacrifice mentioned above, the expression “will walk in the darkness again and again” can be understood to symbolise the impoverishment of man, who loses his treasure and, as a result, his world darkens.²⁴

Since “walking in darkness” is a rare phrase in the Bible, appearing only in Isa 50:10 and in Ps 82:5 (בחשכה יתהלכו), there is a fairly high probability that the prophet borrowed it from Akkadian literature. Besides, the above expression does not occur frequently in the Aramaic language. This suggests that Second Isaiah was aware of the phrase's existence in Akkadian literature and even borrowed it directly or indirectly.

2 Why did the prophet choose to use the phrase?

In my view, the prophet likely knew this Akkadian expression, which is frequent in the Babylonian prophetic genre. The prophet takes the Akkadian expression and turns it on the people of Israel in his prophecy. We can see that it was typical of the prophet to take expressions or motifs from Akkadian literature and turn them on the people of Israel or the God of Israel when he wanted to sharpen his polemic against Babylonian idolatry.²⁵ The prophet's purpose is to show that

²⁴ Erica Reiner and A. Leo Oppenheim, *The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago* (vol. E; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 70.

²⁵ For example, in Isa 48:1, we encounter an expression which, according to the context, refers not merely to the mention of God's name but to an oath. It should be noted that the verse itself contains an internal parallel וּבְאֵלֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל // וְהָיָה // הַנְּשָׁבְעִים בְּשֵׁם יְהוָה (להזכיר) (להישבע). According to this parallel, the verb *to mention* (להזכיר) is parallel to the verb *to swear* (להישבע). In this verse, the prophet addresses the people of Israel, beginning with a triadic parallelism of names (בֵּית-יַעֲקֹב / יִשְׂרָאֵל / יְהוָה). In Akkadian literature, we frequently find a formula parallel to the one used by the prophet Isaiah, with a minor difference—in the Akkadian formula, alongside the phrase “to mention the god,” the noun *nīšu* (“life”) is typically added. This Akkadian oath formula (*niš ilu/ilāni zakāru*—to swear by life of the god/gods) is attested not only in legal texts such as the Laws of Hammurabi, but also in the annalistic inscriptions of Assyrian monarchs, notably in the records of Esarhaddon; *nīš ilānišunu itti aḥāmeš izkurū*—They swore by the life of their gods among themselves. See Erlich Lichty, *The Royal Inscriptions of Esarhaddon, King of Assyria (680–669 BC)* (RINAP 4; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2011), 17, col. iii, line 26. In the book of Isaiah, we observe a series of contrasts: the God of Israel is set in opposition to the gods of Mesopotamia, and the people of Israel are contrasted with the inhabitants of Mesopotamia. Here, the prophet engages in a polemic against Babylonian idolatry. In his view, the act of swearing by false gods (idols) practiced by the

those who trust in the God of Israel need not fear walking in the dark.²⁶ As is well known, the people of Babylon trusted their idols and even approached them and fortune tellers in magical ways to know the future. According to the teachings of Second Isaiah, this act is foolish and even despicable. Those who trust in the God of Israel need not know or fear the future, for if they walk in darkness, God will be by their side, and they will never be ashamed.

3 Testing the expression according to the Held method

Semantically, the Akkadian expression *ekliš/iklētu alāku* corresponds to the biblical expression. In line with Held’s method that semantic parallelism is preferable to etymological parallelism, we have two elements in the Akkadian expression. The first (*alāku*) matches the Hebrew verb, הלך, both semantically and etymologically, and the other *ekliš/iklētu* corresponds to the Hebrew noun, חושך, used by the prophet.

D CONCLUSION

The expression “הלך בחשכים,” which occurs once (in this form) in the Old Testament (Isa 50:10) and once in Ps 82:5 (בחשכה יתהלכו), has parallels in Akkadian literature. It should be emphasised that in the psalm, the verb הלך appears in the Hitpa’el stem third person plural instead of the Pa’al stem third person, singular, masculine, used by Isaiah and that the associated noun appears in the singular in the psalm instead of the plural form used by Isaiah. Therefore, we can conclude that the prophet may have borrowed it from Akkadian literature, like other Hebrew expressions with Akkadian parallels found in Isa 48-50. It is worth emphasising that in chapter 50, unlike chapters 40-48, only two expressions have Akkadian parallels. The reason the prophet used a few Akkadian parallels is that this chapter was written in Israel. In chapter 50, we do not see such a polemic against Babylonian idolatry as in chapters 40-48, which abound with Akkadian parallels. This observation may suggest that at least Isa 40–48 was composed in Babylon.

Nonetheless, some scholars reject the notion that individual chapters were written by the prophet during his time in exile (Second Isaiah), maintaining instead that the entire book of Isaiah (First and Second Isaiah) was composed

Mesopotamians is absurd, since these deities are merely the work of human hands. In contrast, the people of Israel swear by the true God—the God of Israel. It is worth noting that the invocation of God in oaths can also be found in the Pentateuch and in the First Prophets (Exod 23:13; Josh 23:7).

²⁶ A similar saying can be found in Ps 23:4: גם כִּי־אֶלֶךְ בְּגִיּוֹת צִלְמוֹת לֹא־אֵרָא רֵעַ כִּי־אֶתָּה עֵמְדִי שְׁבֻטָּה וּמִשְׁעַנְיֹתֶיךָ הִמָּה יִנְחַמְנִי. The word “darkness” is not found in this biblical source but instead appears in the word “shadow.” Its origin is in the Akkadian word, the “darkness,” derived from the word *šalmu* (“black”). See Jeremy Black, Andrew George, and Nicholas Postgate, *A Concise Dictionary of Akkadian* (2nd corrected printing; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2000), 332.

exclusively in the land of Israel. While I find this view partially convincing, I propose that only Isa 40–48 was authored in the Babylonian environment. The abundance of Akkadian parallel expressions and motifs in these chapters provides indirect support for this theory. When examining the subsequent chapters, beginning with chapter 49, we observe a sharp decline in such parallels, culminating in their complete absence in the final seven chapters (60–66). We may observe that in these nine chapters (Isa 40–48), Babylon is mentioned four times, whereas in the first thirty-nine chapters of the book, commonly referred to as First Isaiah, Babylon is mentioned only nine times. This fact further supports my proposal that at least Isa 40–48 was composed in Babylon.²⁷ The strongest indication of this is the content, which contains a pronounced and sustained polemic against Babylonian idolatry.

Additional support for the view that Isa 40–48 was composed in Babylon may be found in chapter 45, where we encounter striking parallels with the Akkadian document known as the Cyrus Cylinder. The prophet engages in polemics with what is written in that document—namely, that it is the God of Israel who leads King Cyrus to Babylon, not Marduk, as asserted in the Cylinder. According to Isa 45, the divine purpose was to liberate the people of Israel and to grant them the opportunity to rebuild the temple. In the Cylinder, by contrast, Marduk is said to have sent Cyrus to grant freedom to the Babylonian people (liberation from the oppressive rule of Nabonidus). Moreover, a comparison between the Cyrus Cylinder and Isa 45 reveals several parallel expressions. From this, we may conclude that the prophet was familiar with the content of the Cyrus Cylinder, written in Akkadian, a language known to the Jewish diaspora in Babylonian exile, to whom the prophet addresses himself in Isa 40–48. It is reasonable to assume that the prophet is addressing the Judean community residing in Babylon and warning them against falling into Babylonian idolatry. Moreover, the speech itself is replete with Akkadian parallel expressions and motifs drawn from Akkadian literature—literature to which this community would have been exposed only during the Babylonian exile.

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²⁷ For references to Babylon in First Isaiah (chaps. 1–39), see Isa 13:1, 19; 14:4, 22; 21:9; 39:1, 3, 6–7. In the first nine chapters of Second Isaiah (chaps. 40–48), see Isa 43:14; 47:1; 48:14, 20.

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