# Prophecy and Hellenism

# Edited by HANNES BEZZEL and STEFAN PFEIFFER

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# Prophecy and Hellenism

Edited by Hannes Bezzel and Stefan Pfeiffer Hannes Bezzel, born 1975; 2007 Dr. theol.; 2010 Juniorprofessor of Old Testament at Friedrich Schiller University Jena; 2014 Habilitation; since 2015 Professor of Old Testament at Friedrich Schiller University Jena. orcid.org/0000-0002-2117-4005

Stefan Pfeiffer, born 1974; 2004 Dr. phil.; 2007 Habilitation; 2010 Professor of Antiquity and Europe at Chemnitz University of Technology; since 2013 Professor of Ancient History at Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg. orcid.org/0000-0003-3739-5184

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#### **Preface**

This volume contains some of the papers read at the 6th meeting of the Aberdeen Prophecy Network. The meeting was held as an interdisciplinary symposium from 18th to 19th June 2018 at the Friedrich-Schiller-Universität Jena in cooperation with the Chair for Ancient History at the Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg and under the auspices of the network "Forum for the Study of the Global Condition".

We look gratefully back on those two days of intense scholarly discussion in a collegial and amicable atmosphere – and we look hopefully forward to the days when it will be possible to meet again not only digitally but in real life.

Unfortunately, the book has become less voluminous than we had planned it. Not all participants of the symposium were able to hand in their paper for publication, and therefore important aspects of our topic, such as prophecy in the Dead Sea Scrolls, which were a significant part of our discussion are not represented. Hence one might argue that the book cannot keep what its ambitious title "Prophecy and Hellenism" promises. But, in any case, a volume presenting collected essays would never claim to exhaust a subject. Its purpose is rather to address certain aspects of it and to stimulate further discussion and research – in our case across the borders of some of the disciplines dealing with the Eastern Mediterranean cultural sphere.

At the same time, the contributions to this volume illustrate how important it is for scholarly exchange – between the relevant disciplines and beyond – to know and to meet each other not only in writing or digitally but also physically, in the context of an 8th prophecy network meeting or at other occasions, whenever this will be possible again.

Our gratitude goes to the publishers of Mohr Siebeck, especially Tobias Stäbler and Tobias Weiß, for their patience, and the editors of the series FAT for accepting our manuscript, to Dr. Sarah Köhler for the perfect preparation and coordination of the Jena meeting, to Simon Büchner and Dr. André Zempelburg for their editorial work with this book, and to Martina-Britta Boltres and Julius Sperling for preparing the indices. Our dear friend and esteemed colleague Prof. Dr. Paul Keim (Goshen/IN) made every effort to make the English articles written by non-native speakers understandable and readable. Of course, all remaining mistakes and linguistic oddities, especially in this Preface and in the Introduction, remain within the responsibility of the respective author and of the editors.

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The meeting in Jena, and hence this publication, would not have been possible without the generous funding by the Forum for the Study of the Global Condition, the Ernst-Abbe-Foundation, and the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG).

Erfurt/Halle, September 2020

Hannes Bezzel/Stefan Pfeiffer

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## Hannes Bezzel/Stefan Pfeiffer

When the Persian Empire was taken over by Alexander the Great, this meant in many respects a caesura for the societies and cultures in the Near and Middle East. Even though the Great Empire fell apart immediately after Alexander's premature death, his successors reigned as Macedonian kings over the Levant and Egypt (reflected in Dan 7). With this, a development took place which has been compared with modern-day globalisation: It was a time of accelerated change and cultural exchange within the entire then known world between Gibraltar and the river Indus. It is with good reason that some ancient historians speak of this epoch as the age of modernity of the ancient world.<sup>2</sup>

With the Macedonian kings and the Greeks who had immigrated with them to the Levant constituting the upper class, Greek language and culture were a means and symbol of domination. As they were not exclusive but inclusive, both elements had a certain appeal to the ruled ethnicities. Becoming Greek meant social advancement, as Greekness had no ethnical implications any longer. At the same time the "Greeks" adapted themselves to the peoples they ruled. In the subjected peoples, the entire spectrum from resilience to acceptance, from aversion to adaptation of the Greek culture can be observed in the manifold cultural contacts. Without any doubt, some population groups perceived the Hellenistic dominance as suppression, especially when it was accompanied by economic pressure. The books of Maccabees are the best example for a stylisation of this resistance: Not everyone wanted to become "Greek". And yet: Although the Maccabees were completely antagonistic to Greek culture at the beginning, the books of Maccabees were written in Greek, and a sage like Philo in Roman times could call Greek "our language"  $(\tau \dot{\eta} \nu \dot{\eta} \mu \epsilon \tau \dot{\rho} \alpha \nu \delta i \dot{\alpha} \lambda \epsilon \kappa \tau \nu \nu)$ .

In addition, in the perception of at least some scribal elites in Yehud, Alexander's campaign and the Wars of the Diadochi must have meant the return of war after a relatively long period of peace. The Achaemenid Empire had been interpreted as a kind of "end of history", having brought about a kind of autonomy combined with small-scaled wealth and peace in the Levant. With the

 $<sup>^1</sup>$  Cf. Pitts/Versluys, Globalisation, 141–174; Nederveen Pieterse, Globalization; Nederveen Pieterse, Periodizing Globalization.

 $<sup>^2\,</sup>$  Cf. e.g., Meister, Hellenismus, 7; see already Droysen, Geschichte III, xxi. See for a critical view on the concept: Gehrke, Alexander.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Congr. 44.

return of destruction and chaos, new history-theological interpretations of the presence were needed.

In this context, a look at "prophecy" is interesting in several respects. Regarding the religio-historical phenomenon of divination, one may ask whether the deepened cultural contact led to a modification of the respective traditional concepts in the "Western" and "Eastern" societies alike: When an Egyptian, a Macedonian, and a Jewish citizen of Alexandria were speaking of  $\pi po\phi \eta \tau \epsilon (\alpha,$  did they mean the same thing? Can it be stated that under the conditions of the Hellenistic period, especially prophecy served as a catalyst for the development of ideas which – like "preadaptive advances" – much later became formative concepts within the narrative of a European history?

In concrete, the leading questions of our Jena symposium were the following four:

- 1) Regarding the growing corpora of prophetic literature and literature concerning prophets in the scriptures later to be known as the Hebrew Bible: which pieces were written in Hellenistic times and why? Is there a change palpable in the conceptualisation of what a prophet or his ministry were supposed to be?
- 2) During the Persian period, a history-theological concept had been developed in Yehud which regarded the Persian kings as the divinely legitimated successors of the Davidic dynasty. This conceptualisation happened in direct reaction to those prophetic writings which had interpreted the Babylonian conquest and the destruction of Jerusalem as God's punishment of Israel's sins. Accordingly, Cyrus' II takeover of Babylon and, whenever exactly this happened, the building of the second temple, were seen as a proof that the days of punishment were over and a time of salvation had come. With the return of massive war and destruction at the end of the 4th century, a reevaluation of this history-theological narrative was needed. How did prophetic circles cope with this challenge and how did this coping change "prophecy" itself?
- 3) What was the result regarding prophecy when Near Eastern wisdom tradition and Greek philosophy would meet, for example in the work of Ben Sira?
- 4) Finally, what can be said about prophetic hermeneutics in Hellenistic times? Probably in the 2nd century BCE, the prophetic books of the later Bible were translated into Greek, most likely in the context of the Alexandrinian Jewish community. What happened to the "prophetic" books when their respective assumed author is understood as a  $\pi\rho o\phi \eta \tau \eta \varsigma$ ? At the same time, in Palestine, the community which is commonly associated with the site of Khirbet Qumran,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> As far as we know, the term "preadaptive advance" was minted in social science by Adams, Evolution, in 1966 and has been widely used in the context of *Systemtheorie*. The application to our subject was stimulated by Hartmut Leppin's lecture on the XVI. Europäischer Kongress für Theologie, Wien 2017, who used it in order to describe aspects of "modernity" to be recognised in pre-Constantinean Christianity, cf. Leppin, Christentum, 55 f.

develops – in Hebrew – a new way of reading scriptures that are regarded as authoritative, among them the later prophetic books. Their actualising interpretation no longer takes place in marginal or interlinear glosses alone but is manifested by means of a new literary genre: the commentary on scripture, called *pesher*. One might ask in which way this invention of a group which with some right may be called anti-hellenistic, in itself is a child of Hellenism, and compare its techniques with, for example, the Alexandrinian hermeneutics.<sup>5</sup>

According to the interdisciplinary approach, the conceptions of "prophecy" underlying the respective papers appeared to be slightly but not completely different.

From the point of view of Ancient History or Classic Philology, the term "prophecy", used in a general sense, is a cover term for various kinds of future prediction, be it based on material signs or visions. This prediction can be made with the help of professional interpreters of signs and visions as well as on the basis of one's own knowledge and estimation. The first two contributions to this volume do not deal with biblical prophecy but with predictions of the future – *Zukunftsvorhersagen* in German – in the Graeco-Roman world, taking Alexandria and Rome as starting points.

Stefan Pfeiffer uses the example of the Hellenistic world metropolis Alexandria to investigate how the Greeks, Egyptians and Jews/Judeans living in Egypt dealt with the fact of the power of the Ptolemaic dynasty and its capital, which was incredibly rich by ancient standards. The predictions about Alexandria are both positive and negative visions about its future, each of which can be explained by its historical context and the relationship of the ethnic group in question to its social environment.

The Greek visions about Alexandria all concern its foundation and predict the wealth of the city. They are *vaticinia ex eventu*. This is also true with regard to a positive Egyptian vision. However, this positive Egyptian view on Alexandria is countered by an Egyptian prophecy about the decline of Alexandria: the "oracle of the potter". A prophecy that is to be explained by the dealing with a situation of oppression of the Egyptian population in Hellenistic time. It articulates the hope for a new "messianic" pharaoh. Just as there are two views of Alexandria among the Egyptians that are expressed in prophecies, so it is the case with Jews. In their case, too, the positive and negative prophecy can both be explained by the political and social situation in which Jews found themselves. The positive view

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> As noted above, the topic of "Prophecy at Qumran", though discussed at our meeting on the basis of an excellent paper by Shani Tzoref, unfortunately is absent to this book. But see Kratz, Text and Commentary, with the thesis that "the *pesharim* of Qumran [...] should be considered further evidence of the fact that the 'Hellenization' of Judaism did not exclude even the harshest opponents of the Greek spirit" (229). About the lines connecting the *pesharim* with Ancient Near Eastern divinatory practice, see also Nissinen, Pesharim as Divination; Nissinen, Oracles at Qumran.

arose under the good conditions for Jews under Ptolemaic rule, the negative view in the context of the very considerable conflicts between Jews and Greek citizens of Alexandria in the first century CE.

In sum, the common denominator of the Greek, Egyptian and Jewish predictions is above all that they all deal with the city's population, wealth, and prosperity. On a formal level, the visions also have in common that they are re-interpreted texts with different layers and adapted to new historical situations. The predictions can either represent *vaticinia ex eventu*, or, in the Egyptian and Jewish case, they can give hope for a change of circumstances in the near future out of a present need. However, both the Egyptian and Jewish prophecies of Alexandria's downfall are not texts calling for political action but rather texts of hope.

As far as Rome is concerned, it can be said that in the Hellenistic period there was a lively and varied exchange with Greek philosophy and religion, and thus also with the tradition of interpreting omens. In Cicero's works the Stoic philosopher Chrysipp defines divination as follows: "The power to see, understand, and explain premonitory signs given to men by the gods" (*Div.* 2.130). One may state that this definition includes both the Greek and the Roman view. The interpretation of the future itself played a decisive role in Roman politics, for no state action could be taken without consulting the gods by asking for omens. For this reason, the interpretation of *prodigia* and *omina* was in the hands of specialised priesthoods.

From a classical-philological point of view, Meinolf Vielberg deals with the relationship between prophecy and religion in the work "concerning divination" (*De Divinatione*), which Cicero wrote between 45 and 44 BCE, i. e., at a time when he may have been influenced by the murder of Caesar and his neglect of the omens foretelling his death. At this time, Cicero was already a member of the priesthood of diviners, so that he was formally involved in interpreting the future on behalf of the Roman state. His word on diviniation consists of two books and is structured as a dialogue between Marcus, who is to be considered as Cicero's alter ego, and his brother Quintus. Both protagonists are concerned with the question of whether divination works or not. Marcus appears as a representative of the philosophical school of academic scepticism and opposes divination, whereas Quintus defends it.

The special thing about this dialogue is that Cicero, although himself part of a prophesying and thus state-bearing priesthood, lets his alter ego speak against the art of divination. However, in Marcus' eyes, the ancient Roman art of fortune-telling is at least justified, for the sake of the state and of piety in general. It is therefore part of the *religio*, even if it does not really lead to "perceivings".

Using four examples from the dialogue of both protagonists, Vielberg first shows that the philosophical dispute is balanced and that both sides make good arguments for and against divination. The philosophical dialogue thus has an

open outcome, so that in the end, it does not show a clear view on the subject of divination: it is an open-ended discussion, which in itself was a new kind of dialogue in philosophy of these times, as Vielberg furthermore shows in a review of the history of ancient philosophy up to Cicero's time. In this way, the author makes it clear that Cicero himself deals with the new Greek currents that came to Rome (doctrines of the Epicureans, Stoics and Peripatetics) and how he wants to offer his readers a free choice between them.

From an Old Testament/Hebrew Bible point of view, at first glance, the combination "prophecy and Hellenism" seems to be a *contradictio in adiecto*: The tradition of the Tosefta and the Talmud has it that the prophetic spirit ceased with Malachi who used to be dated to the days of Ezra and Nehemiah, i. e., in the 5th century BCE (*t. Soṭah* 13:4; *b. Yoma* 9b; *b. Sanh.* 11a).<sup>6</sup> Following this train of thought, there would have been no active prophecy at all in Israel in Hellenistic times. However, this theological judgment, from Roman times, itself gives witness of the reflection about the nature of prophecy, regarding it as one phase in the history of the transmission of Torah (cf. *m.'Abot 1:1*). Similarly, the disputed canonical status of the book of Daniel, which is counted among the "Writings" (כתובים) in the later MT and is seen as a prophetic book in LXX and in the Christian tradition, illustrates that there was some discussion going on what prophecy might be. And contrary to the later theological dogma, Josephus informs us about charismatic people in his own time who claimed prophetic authority and gained a hearing by at least some people.<sup>7</sup>

In addition, critical scholarship in the past two centuries has not confined itself to the traditional dating but sometimes extended the formation process of the prophetic books far into the 2nd century BCE. Of course, as is the case with nearly all parts of the Hebrew Bible, any absolute dating of the scriptures has been a matter of dispute and has become more so within the last two decades. Accordingly, the question of whether a certain biblical book or pieces of it could be clearly dated to Hellenistic times and which criteria could be applied in order to substantiate such a decision, was one of the main points of discussion during the Jena meeting. This fruitful and constructive discussion is mirrored by the several question marks at the end of a number of titles and subtitles, and, of course, by the articles themselves which, in all their variety, can be seen as being in critical dialogue with each other.

The next two contributions are, however, not concerned with the issue of dating prophetic books. A. Graeme Auld starts with a short glimpse at the different kinds of religious specialists occupied with divination in the Greek context. From there, he proceeds to the lists of mantic practitioners in the Hebrew Bible,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Cf. t. Soṭah 13:4: משמתו נביאים מישראל) מרוז וכריה ומלאכי פסקה ("after the death of the latter prophets Haggai, Zecharaiah, and Malachi, the holy spirit [i. e., of prophecy] ceased from Israel").

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Cf. MEYER, Jüdische Charismatiker und Propheten, 129–134.

with an emphasis on Deut 18:9–14. He compares the Greek equivalents for the different abominated practices as they are provided by LXX in this pericope with the other instances where they are mentioned. In so doing, Auld draws a line of a continuing "nebiisation", or, in a manner of speech, a line from divination and manticism towards prophecy. He detects the earliest traces of this development in the reconstructed common source of both Chr and Sam–Ki, the "Book of Two Houses" (BoTH).

Pancratius C. Beentjes turns to a book whose Hellenistic origin hardly can be doubted since its author, Simeon, son of Jeshua, son of Elazar, son of Sira, reveals not only his proper name but also provides the reader with rather unambiguous clues as to his lifetime. In addition, his "grandson" documents precisely when he had translated his grandfather's book into Greek – either 132 or 117 BCE. Thus, being written at the beginning of the 2nd century BCE in Hebrew, most probably in Jerusalem, and being translated into Greek two generations later in Alexandria, Sir is a most interesting document for our case – even more since it is the only Biblical book of wisdom literature which mentions prophecy at all. In a careful comparison of the Hebrew and the Greek version, Beentjes illustrates how Ben Sira's grandson introduces the verb προφητεύειν into the book which had had no verbal representation of the Hebrew root κυία before. A wide range of Hebrew expressions were rendered with "prophesying" by the Greek Sir, hardly without purpose, and, as Beentjes states, creating intratextual parallel structures which had not yet existed in the source text.

With Uwe Becker's paper, the books of the latter prophets come into focus. Becker emphasises the Hellenistic interest in books written by known authors and regards this as an important motive for the final formation of the prophetic books – and therewith for the creation of this unique literary genre. From this point of view, the final chapters 65 and 66 of the Book of Isaiah, with their many back-references to the beginning of the book, are very likely to be the product of scribes being active in Hellenistic times. Similarly, the oracle concerning Egypt in Isa 19:16–25, often interpreted against the backdrop of Onias IV temple as recorded by Josephus, most probably does represent one of the latest additions to the Isaiah scroll. However, contrary to the theory of Odil Hannes Steck,<sup>8</sup> any exact dating to certain political events from the 4th to the 2nd century appears to be not possible, neither in the case of the so-called Third Isaiah nor in the case of Isa 19.

On this critique of Steck's method, Andreas Schüle agrees with Becker. On the consequences for the interpretation of the trito-Isaianic material, however, he does not. He investigates the attitudes towards "foreign nations" argued for as well as the hints to the existence of rivalling Jewish groups which are perceptible in Isa 56–66. He points out similarities to other Biblical texts, especially to the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> Cf. Steck, Abschluß, 26–30.

book of Ezr-Neh. As a consequence, he favours a dating of the respective layers in Third Isaiah to a similar period, i. e., the 5th century. In this way, his argumentation comes close to the Rabbis' in the dating of Malachi and the ceasing of the prophetic spirit. However, the general problem of dating one Biblical passage absolutely by means of comparing it with another one, is, of course, that one has to be on firm ground in case of the latter. While it is hardly disputable that the origins of Ezr-Neh lie in the Persian period, the exact determination of what should be reckoned as this book's core(s) and when the different Fort-schreibungen were made to it, are a matter of intense debate themselves.

Lena-Sofie Tiemeyer elegantly avoids the "vexed issue of dating" (p. 115) by consequently speaking of "late Persian/early Hellenistic" prophecy. She defines texts from this era as literary prophecy – in other words: Fortschreibungen – with the purpose of interpreting and actualising older oracles or literary corpora. Tiemeyer takes a comparative look at Isa 24–27, Ezek 38–39 and Zech 9–14 and identifies common features. Most of all, the three text sections are characterised by being intertextually linked not only to their immediate literary context but to the books of the Torah as well as to the wider contexts of the Former and Latter Prophets. Furthermore, they seem to interrupt the coherence of their immediate context, which means that Tiemeyer reckons with an earlier continuation of Mal after Zech 1–8, Ezek 40–48 after Ezek 37, and Isa 28–23 after Isa 13–23. The literary unity of the later inserted pieces themselves is not questioned by Tiemeyer in this article.

This is what is done by Hannes Bezzel. Addressing the topic of the so-called "oracles concerning foreign nations" and their correlation with the Hellenistic "globalisation", he presents another diachronic study on Zech 9. Within this chapter, he identifies four to five different attitudes against "foreign nations" which he attributes to different scribal hands: A basic layer in Zech 9:1–5\*, 9–10\*, a small-scaled addition in V. 6b–7, a third hand adding V. 8, (10aα), 11–13, and a fourth one adding the final battle in V. 14–16. V. 17 may be seen as another scribal gloss on the catchword "soil" (ארמה). Bezzel compares the development of a theology of history as it becomes visible in the literary stratigraphy of the chapter with the redactional development of the Book of Daniel, turning the concept of *translatio imperii* more and more into an apocalyptic worldview.

The last two papers deal with the book of Malachi. The numerous intertextual links to Zech 1–8 and to further parts of the book of the Twelve notwithstanding, Corinna Körting wants Malachi to be seen not as a mere *Fortschreibung* but as a prophet in his own right. As such, he appears to be a prophet, in the words of Paul Tillich, "on the frontier," as Körting puts it, "from preaching to teaching" (p. 156), in a sphere inbetween: combining classical prophecy, wisdom literature, promulgation of Torah and apocalyptic thinking. Again, *m.'Abot* 

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> For this favourite expression of Tillich's, see, for example, TILLICH, Frontiers, 53.

1:1 comes to mind, according to which the prophets handed over the Torah "to the men of the great assembly" (לאנשי כנסת הגדלה).

Jutta Noetzel, too, regards Malachi as a prophetic book *sui generis*. Different to the other books of the Latter Prophets, Mal as a whole can be classified as scribal prophecy. According to Noetzel, the entire book should be read as an exegetical writing on the Jacob narrative in Gen. As an example, she presents Mal 2:10–16 as an interpretation based on Gen 31:43–51. Noetzel agrees with Körting in the aspect that Mal is a scribal text which is based on scripture through-and-through. However, while Körting stresses the prophetic nature of the book, Noetzel wants to read it after Zech 13, according to which prophecy had ended. To her, Malachi rather wants to be seen as a hermeneutical key to prophecy than as prophecy itself. "Prophecy" happens by interpreting the Torah.

Finally, Joachim Schaper emphasises the fact that texts and theological conceptions do not evolve from nothing but have their social and political contexts. As an example, he takes the imagery of violence and leadership in late prophetic texts. It can be observed that the motif of the righteous' eschatological prevailing over the wicked can be traced from later canonical prophetic books into wisdom literature and deuterocanonical and parabiblical texts. The remarkable fact that there is a strong line which proclaims the eschatological rule of a collective entity – the righteous – instead of the hope for a messianic king or the like can be interpreted as mirroring the disillusioning experiences with the actual monarchies of the age.

All in all, and the ongoing controversial discussions about the dating of certain Biblical passages notwithstanding, the papers collected in this book demonstrate that the takeover of the Persian Empire by Alexander probably did not imply a sudden and total change in the world-perception of the intellectuals in the Eastern Mediterranean World. However, it can be detected that within the following two or three centuries, perspectives concerning prophecy changed radically – and in diverse manners. On the one hand, manticism and divination continued, while, on the other hand, there was a strong tendency towards canonisation of the tradition. In this context, different hermeneutics were developed in order to actualise and interpret what was written down.

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